The Impact of Use of English Outside the Classroom by Mandarin and Tamil ESL Learners in Their Accuracy with the Simple Past Tense

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Keywords: simple past tense, Mandarin, Tamil, L1 influence, use of English

Abstract

This study examined whether the self-reported use of English outside school by Mandarin-speaking and Tamil-speaking ESL learners played a role in the accuracy of the oral use of the simple past tense. The participants were primarily in their thirties and were mostly students in an ESL class of a lower intermediate or intermediate level of proficiency. This study used an interview questions task which was designed to elicit the oral use of the simple past tense. The results indicate that there is an interaction between L1 and the use of English outside an ESL school environment. The Tamil-speaking ESL participants who reported using English outside their ESL school were more accurate than those Mandarin-speaking ESL participants who also reported such use of English. For those learners who reported no use of English beyond the classroom, there was no difference in accuracy between the two L1 groups. However, the fact that the data on English use outside the class was self-reported throws some doubt upon the reliability of the data.

Previous SLA research indicates that L1 appears to play a role with regard to the accuracy of use of the simple past tense by ESL learners who speak different Chinese dialects (Goad, White & Steele, 2003, p. 245; Yang & Huang, 2004, p. 49). Mandarin Chinese-speaking ESL learners tend to have a low rate of accuracy in using the simple past tense in obligatory grammatical environments when apparently drawing on their procedural knowledge (Witton-Davies, 2004, pp.14-16). Their accuracy issues with the simple past appear to be related to the fact that Mandarin does not have a grammatical past tense (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 713). Some research appears to indicate that ESL learners whose L1 has a grammatical past tense (e.g. Tamil) have a higher rate of accuracy with the simple past tense than Mandarin-speaking ESL learners on tasks intended to induce use of procedural knowledge (Tiittanen, 2013, p. 89).
Some SLA research indicates that L2 learners tend to benefit from greater exposure to the target language outside the classroom (Beebe, 1998). A number of studies within the interaction paradigm of SLA are consistent with the notion that such exposure to the target language outside school may promote L2 learning. For instance, Long’s (1996) interaction hypothesis asserts that conversational interaction facilitates L2 acquisition (pp. 451-452), including the development of L2 morphology (p.414), and possibly the English simple past tense. In addition, Swain’s output hypothesis (Swain, 1985; 1995) may also be relevant in this regard. Swain’s studies of Canadian French immersion students led her to conclude that these students’ limited opportunities to use the target language stifled their language growth. Swain (1995) asserts that output of the target language may promote more accurate production of, amongst other things, morphology (p. 128), including possibly the simple past tense. However, little research to date has investigated whether there is a relationship between use of the target language outside the classroom and learner first language (e.g. Mandarin and Tamil) with regard to the accuracy of oral use of the simple past tense. This research was conducted in order to derive preliminary results on whether such a relationship appears to exist.

**Literature review**

**L1 influence**

English is more similar to Tamil than to Mandarin in that both English and Tamil have a grammatical past tense (Lehmann, 1989, p. 59; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1972, p. 86). In English, the encoding of the simple past tense may either be regular suffixal morphology or take the form of irregular marking. The regular past tense suffix, written with an “-ed”, has three allomorphs:

\[-\text{ed}/ occurs if the verb ends in a /\text{t}/ or /\text{d}/ sound; /\text{d}/ is found if the last sound is voiced (but not /\text{d}/), and /\text{t}/ is used if the last sound is voiceless (but other than /\text{t}/) (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. 48).\]

If a past tense form does not follow the above allomorphy, it is said to be irregular (Pinker, 1999, pp. 16-17).
The structure of the past tense in Tamil is similar to English. In Tamil, as in English, one can morphologically encode past tense as a suffix to the immediate right of the verb stem as in the examples (1) a + (1) b below:

(1) a. (Tamil) ava·n·utaiya talai tirump·i·y·atu
   he-adjective head turn-past-3rd person singular (Lehmann, 1989, p. 50)
   b. (English translation of (1)a) “His head turned.” (Lehmann, 1989, p. 50)

In addition to regular verbs, which are encoded to the right of the stem as in English, Tamil also has some irregular verbs which are structurally similar to English. In Tamil, like English, some irregular verbs undergo a change in vowels (Bayley, 1994, p. 162; Lehmann, 1989, p. 59 & p. 65). In addition to structural similarities of past tense, the function of the past tense in Tamil is similar to that in English. The main use of the past tense in both languages is to indicate past temporal reference (Lehmann, 1989, p. 65; Quirk et al., 1972, p. 86).

By contrast, unlike English and Tamil, Mandarin has no formal tense opposition nor a grammatical past tense. In Mandarin past time interpretation is made via lexical means, aspectual markers or pragmatic principles or a combination thereof (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 713). Time reference may optionally be marked lexically using time adverbs (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 713). For example, (2) demonstrates the lack of a past tense morpheme within a sentence referring to a past event.

(2) ta zuotian you ke
   he yesterday have class (Tiee & Lance, 1986, p. 90)
   (English translation of (2)) “He had classes yesterday.” (Tiee & Lance, 1986, p. 90)

Pragmatic interpretation plays a large role in Mandarin as the pastness of an event is often understood through context rather than being coded linguistically (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 749) as in English and in Tamil.

The comparison of these languages is relevant to L2 acquisition. There is research indicating that cross-linguistic influence may play a role in the acquisition of L2 grammar, including L2

The Transfer to Somewhere principle postulated by Andersen (1983) may possibly account for some of the L1 influence in L2 verb tense acquisition. This principle asserts that L2 learners may notice some L2 input which corresponds to their L1 and then apply or misapply it in their production (Kellerman, 1995, p. 126). The Transfer to Nowhere Principle (Kellerman 1985) may also play a role in L2 verb tense acquisition. As conceived by Kellerman, the L1 transfer which exists “is not licensed by similarity to the L2, and the way in which the L2 works may very largely go unheeded” (1995, p. 137). In addition, it has been suggested that cross-linguistic influence may possibly be influenced by a conceptual transfer from one’s L1, in which L2 speakers, based on their L1 specific system, are predisposed to conceptualizing and verbalizing certain conceptual categories (Slobin, 1996, pp. 89-91) such as temporal pastness.

Studies of native speakers of Chinese have shown the apparent existence of L1 influence in their use of the English simple past tense (i.e. the non-marking of past tense or the influence of time adverbs in the use of the simple past tense). Witton-Davies (2004) conducted a study with 23 Taiwanese adult ESL learners who were first year university students. In the study, the participants were engaged with a partner in an oral narrative designed to elicit the simple past tense. In their oral narratives, the past tense was marked in just over half the linguistic environments in which use of the simple past tense was obligatory (p. 14 & p.16).

Yang and Huang’s (2004) research consisted of five groups of (Cantonese-speaking) Chinese learners from Grade 5 to first year university. The participants in the five groups produced written narratives within 50 to 60 minutes during class. The results indicated that the lower level students had a lower level of accuracy using the past tense in sentences with adverbials (p. 65), and higher level students had a higher level of accuracy using the past tense in
sentences with adverbials (p. 58). The researchers interpreted these results to mean that lower level students use adverbials as a tense substitute while higher level students use adverbials as a device to help them to remember to use past tense morphology (p. 65).

Tiittanen’s (2013) study involved the same participants as in the current study, but did not analyse the participants’ self-reported use of English outside the classroom and its relationship to the use of the simple past tense. The results of this study indicated that Tamil-speaking and Mandarin-speaking L1 learners’ use of the simple past tense may possibly have been influenced by the two groups’ respective L1s. The Tamil-speaking learners were more accurate in their use of the simple past tense than the Mandarin-speaking learners on the interview questions task (p. 100). However, use of English beyond the classroom “may also have played a role in the difference in the accuracy of use of the simple past tense between the L1 groups …” (p. 89).

Use of English outside class
Little research has been done on the usefulness of the use of English outside an ESL/EFL class. However, Beebe’s (1998) study sheds some light on this issue. Beebe conducted interviews with 11 Japanese EFL students who were assigned to a group of high oral proficiency and 5 Japanese EFL students who were assigned a group of low oral proficiency. Both groups of students were placed in their respective groups based on their performance on a prior interview and a story retell task.

Ellis (2000) interpreted Beebe’s results to indicate that for the high group, “engagement with English outside the classroom emerged as more important than what went on inside” (p. 44). The more successful EFL learners found English conversational partners and practiced their listening using a variety of sources. It is significant that the high learners persisted in such activities outside the classroom (Ellis, p. 44). Ellis (2000) interprets the results of Beebe’s study as indicating that successful English learners seek out opportunities for language input and interaction outside the classroom (p. 45).

However, conversational interaction outside the classroom may not necessarily result in accurate oral use of the simple past tense by ESL learners. Schmidt (2001) asserts that when a target language contains information that requires attention that is not attended to in the L1,
L2 learners must intentionally focus attention on this information (p. 29). However, if L2 learners do not pay attention to forms not present in their L1, such as the simple past tense, they may have problems with these forms partially because they are not sensitive enough to the relevant cues of the linguistic category in the L2 (Ellis, 2006, pp. 184-185).

Empirical research consistent with such assertions has been conducted by Sato (1990). Sato investigated the oral production of the past tense by two Vietnamese learners of English living in the United States with adoptive American parents. Despite using English outside the classroom on a daily basis, these participants’ oral use of the simple past was still very low (p. 67 & p. 69). One possible factor for this may well be L1 interference. Vietnamese, like Mandarin, does not have a past tense (Dahl & Velupillai, 2005).

Despite the participants’ low level of accuracy with the past tense, Sato found that in the majority of cases in which pastness was not encoded on her L1 Vietnamese participants’ verbs, past temporality was still understood from their utterances or from the context (Sato, 1990, p. 90). Sato’s (1990) study also found that even when there was a communication breakdown about temporal reference, many interlocutors’ temporal clarification requests elicited time adverbials or other expressions from the Vietnamese ESL learners “rather than verbs marked for pastness” (Sato, 1990, p. 90) from the Vietnamese learners. Thus, even learner mistakes with the simple past tense which cause confusion for interlocutors may not promote acquisition of the simple past tense by learners who do not have a grammatical past tense in their L1. This may be influenced by these learners’ “thinking for speaking” in which the L2 speakers are predisposed to conceptualizing and verbalizing grammatical categories, such as pastness, based on their L1 specific system (Slobin, 1996, pp. 89-91).

In summary, Tamil is much more similar to English than Mandarin is. Both Tamil and English have a past tense, which is structurally and functionally similar to each other. In contrast, Mandarin has no grammatical past tense. Previous studies indicate that ESL learners who speak Mandarin and other Chinese dialects (Yang & Huang, 2004) have problems using the English simple past tense accurately, such as in oral tasks designed to elicit their procedural knowledge of the simple past (Tiittanen, 2013; Witton-Davies, 2004). Such studies are consistent with other research which indicates that learner L1 may play a role in verb tense acquisition, including the use of the English simple past tense (Collins, 2002).
Other research (Beebe, 1998) appears to indicate that the use of the target language may be useful in acquiring greater proficiency in the language. This research is consistent with Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1985) and Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1996), which propose that output and interaction in the target language may increase accuracy of target language morphology, and this may be relevant for the simple past tense. Nevertheless, other research (Sato, 1990) seems to indicate that learner L1 may play a role in whether oral use of the simple past tense promotes increased accuracy with the simple past tense or not.

**Research questions**

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. Will there be a difference in accuracy of use with the simple past tense in an oral interview between Tamil and Mandarin ESL learners who self-report use of English outside the classroom?

2. Will there be a difference in accuracy of use with the simple past tense in an oral interview between Tamil and Mandarin ESL learners who do not self-report use of English outside the classroom?

**Methodology**

**Participants**

21 native speakers of Tamil and 21 native speakers of Mandarin participated in the study. Most of these participants were adults in their 30s who were studying at the researcher’s school and other schools where the researcher either worked or had access to students. Most of the participants were in ESL classes of a lower intermediate or intermediate level of English proficiency. As shown in Table 1, the Tamil and Mandarin groups were very similar in their mean Oxford Placement Test (OPT) scores, the gender make-up of their respective groups, their mean age at the time of the study, their mean age of arrival in an English-speaking country (AoA) and their mean length of residence in an English-speaking country (LoR). The Tamil participants had a mean OPT grammar score of 49.8% and the Mandarin participants had a mean OPT score of 53.1%. This difference was statistically non-significant according to an independent samples t-test, $t = (1, 40) = .708$, $p = .483$. In terms of gender composition, the Tamil group consisted of 16 females and 5 males while the Mandarin group consisted of 15 females and 6 males. The mean age of the Tamil group at the time of the study was 33.3 years and the mean age of the Mandarin group was 35.7 years. Independent
samples’ t-tests based on participants’ age yielded no significant difference between the two groups, \( t = (1, 40) = 0.821, p = .417 \). The mean AoA for the Tamil group was 31.1 years and the mean AoA of the Mandarin group was 34.2 years. This difference was also found to be statistically non-significant by an independent samples t-test, \( t = (1, 40) = -1.072, p = .290 \). The mean LoR of the Tamil group was 2.08 years and the mean LoR of the Mandarin group was 1.61 years. An independent samples t-test revealed that the difference in LoR was also statistically non-significant, \( t = (1, 40) = .799, p = .483 \). Thus, in terms of these variables, the two L2 groups were very similar.

In terms of how they stated that they learned English beyond their formal learning in school, there was a small difference in the number of Tamil and Mandarin participants who claimed use of English professionally, socially or at college/university in content-based courses. Twelve Tamil speakers reported such use of English and eight Mandarin speakers indicated such use.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collection was conducted personally by the researcher. The information below details the methods and order of data collection as well as the analysis of the interview data.

1. **Student language background form.** This questionnaire required the participants to answer questions about their age at the time of the test, age of arrival, length of residence and gender. In addition, in order to allow for the possible analysis of type of language exposure outside the classroom, the participants were asked to describe the type of language exposure they had had beyond school.

2. **Grammar section of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT).** This test was timed (50 minutes) according to the specifications of the test as described in Morell Moli (1999), which used the same version of the OPT as used in the present study to determine participant level. To help ensure that the students received no more than 50 minutes to do the test, a digital timer was used to time this test. In addition, an alarm clock alerted the researcher when the participant’s 50 minutes was about to expire. In the administration of the test, the participants were not allowed to use any aids such as dictionaries.
3. Interview questions. The interview questions measured the accuracy of oral use of the simple past tense in obligatory environments for the simple past tense. This data collection technique is similar to the way in which Sato (1990) used interview questions to elicit past time reference. This task was intended to tap primarily the participants’ procedural knowledge of the simple past tense. The researcher asked all of the questions on the interview questions schedule in the order shown in the appendix. However, when deemed appropriate, further questions were asked in an attempt to hopefully elicit more verb tokens in obligatory simple past tense environments and to add a greater natural coherence to the sequence of questions. Thus, the interview questions are best classified as being “semi-structured”. Each participant’s oral production was recorded by two tape recorders that were placed in front of the participant.

A token analysis (rather than a type analysis) was made of the participants’ use of verbs in obligatory contexts for the use of the simple past tense. In order to avoid inflating the number of verb tokens, the marking scheme below was adopted, which is similar to the marking scheme used by Bardovi-Harlig (2000, pp. 243-244). Verb tokens in obligatory simple past tense contexts were marked as being either correct, incorrect, or partially correct. Partially correct marks were given to verbs that were uttered both correctly and incorrectly in the same utterance as in self-corrections (e.g. I go, went to the store). In addition, repetitions of the same verb were counted only once (e.g. I go, go to the store). Thus, multiple tokens in contexts of self-corrections and repetitions were treated as single obligatory contexts for the use of the simple past rather than as multiple obligatory contexts for the simple past tense.

The following is an example of an extract of an interview with a participant as well as the coding used:
R: Mm-hmm. And do you remember your trip to Canada?
P: Yeah, I remember.
R: Can you tell me about it?
P: OK. Uhm when I first time **come, came I was** so excited.

\[\text{1/2c} \quad \text{c}\]

R: Mm-hmm.
P: I **think** uh he-, here should be have a high building. Uh sky building. Then (pause) 

\[\text{i}\]

when the air fff when plane **is** close to uh Toronto I **didn’t** uh see uh on the groun-, 

\[\text{i} \quad \text{c}\]

ground it **have** like a lot shiny light. And uh high, high building.

\[\text{i}\]

R: researcher P: participant c: correct i: incorrect 1/2c: half-correct

Results

As seen in Figure 1 and Table 2, for those participants who self-reported some social, academic or professional use of English outside of an ESL/EFL class, the Tamil-speaking participants were much more accurate in their use of the simple past tense (in obligatory environments) in the interview questions than the Mandarin-speaking participants, \(t (1, 20) p < .001, d = -1.809\). Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that the sample size was small. Thirteen L1 Tamil participants and nine L1 Mandarin participants reported using English outside class. The Tamil-speaking participants who fit into this category had a mean correct simple past tense use of 59.9% (SD = 27.6). This was somewhat higher than the total Tamil-speaking mean undifferentiated for use of English outside the classroom (52.1%). In contrast, the Mandarin-speaking participants in this category had a mean of 23.1% (SD = 8.1), which was slightly lower than the total L1 Mandarin group mean regardless of use of English outside school (26.8%).
In contrast to the learners who reported some use of English outside school, those learners who did not report any use of English outside an ESL/EFL class did not have any statistically significant L1-related differences in accuracy $t(1, 20), p = .184, d = -0.639$. The sample size was small, however. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to the wider population of L1 Mandarin and L1 Tamil ESL learners. Twelve L1 Mandarin learners and eight L1 Tamil learners did not self-report any use of English outside their ESL school. As seen in Figure 2 and Table 3, the mean rate of accuracy for this type of Tamil-speaking learners was higher than the mean of the Mandarin-speaking group, but only by 10 per cent. The Tamil L1 group’s mean was 39.3% (SD = 14.1) and the Mandarin L1 group’s mean was 29.6% (SD = 16.2).
In terms of inter-L1 differences, the mean for the two Mandarin-speaking groups was similar: 23.1% for those who reported use of English outside class and 29.6% who did not report such use. The Tamil-speaking learners who reported the extra practice had a mean of 59.9% while the corresponding mean for those who did not report the extra practice was 39.3%. Nevertheless, an independent samples t-test revealed that this difference was not statistically significant \( t(1, 19), p = .067, d = 0.940 \). The sample size was small, however. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to L1 Mandarin and L1 Tamil ESL learners in the wider population.

In summary, Tamil L1 learners who self-reported social, professional or academic use of English outside an ESL class had a statistically significant advantage over Mandarin L1 learners who also self-reported such use on the interview questions. However, the difference between Tamil and Mandarin-speaking learners who claimed not to use English outside an ESL learning context was not statistically significant.

**Discussion**
The L1 Tamil-speaking participants who used English outside the classroom had a higher rate of accuracy with the use of the simple past tense than the L1 Mandarin-speaking participants who used English outside school. One likely explanation for these results is that the extra English practice that the L1 Tamil-speaking group who reported use of English beyond the ESL/EFL classroom received made these learners more accurate in their use of the simple past tense than those learners who did not get such practice. In contrast to the Mandarin-speaking learners, the Tamil-speaking learners may possibly have been more predisposed to notice and apply L2 oral input with the simple past tense via application of the Transfer to Somewhere principle (Andersen, 1983) discussed earlier. The Tamil-speaking learners who used English outside the classroom may have received input in which they noticed the use of the simple past tense more readily than the Mandarin-speaking learners who used English outside the classroom. Such Tamil-speaking learners, unlike the Mandarin-speaking learners, may have been more predisposed to notice that in English regular verbs, like Tamil, the past tense marker appears to the right of the verb root (Lehmann, 1989, p. 50). They may also have noticed the phonemic changes to English irregular verbs, which are similar to some Tamil irregular past tense verbs (Bayley, 1994, p. 162; Lehmann, 1989, p. 65).

Why did the Mandarin-speaking ESL learners who self-reported some use of English outside school not appear to benefit from this in their accuracy with the simple past tense? It appears plausible to argue that Mandarin-speaking ESL learners may possibly not be as inclined as Tamil-speaking learners to benefit from the input and interaction in real world English in their oral production of the simple past tense. As suggested by Slobin’s (1996) “Thinking for Speaking” model, the Mandarin L1 learners may be predisposed to conceptualizing the past based on their L1 specific system. These learners may not be sensitive enough to the positive naturalistic input about the use of the simple tense available to them. Thus, Mandarin-speaking learners may possibly not readily notice these forms in naturalistic input.

Another possible reason is that some Mandarin-speaking ESL students may not feel a communicative need to develop simple past tense oral accuracy. Some Mandarin L1 learners may feel that the temporal past of certain events is already marked via context as it sometimes is in Mandarin (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 749) and is thus superfluous. Sato’s study found that even when the past tense was not marked, the intended past time reference was still understood in most cases (1990, p. 90). Thus, not using the simple past tense in
naturalistic discourse outside the classroom may not usually cause confusion for one’s interlocutors, and such mistakes may not induce interlocutors to seek clarification of the intended time reference. Therefore, most past tense mistakes may not promote noticing of such mistakes, particularly by Mandarin-speaking learners.

Even when interlocutors are confused about the intended time reference, their clarification requests about the temporal reference may not promote acquisition of the required simple past tense by Mandarin L1 learners. Mandarin-speaking ESL learners may, like the Vietnamese participants in Sato’s (1990) study, respond to clarification requests about the past temporality of an event using other means than past tense markings on verbs. This would correspond to their predisposition to mark the past via time adverbs and other means, given that this would correspond to how it could be expressed in Mandarin (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005, p. 713; Tiee & Lance, 1986, p. 90). Yang and Huang’s (2004) study appears to show that particularly lower level L1 Chinese students tend to use time adverbs as a substitute for the English simple past tense (p. 65). Thus, responses by Mandarin-speaking learners to clarification requests about their intended time reference may not lead them to notice that they have not used a simple past tense form.

Overall, these results appear to support the generalization that there was an interaction between use of English outside the classroom and learner L1. Consistent with the Output Hypothesis (1985) and Interaction Hypothesis (1996), accuracy in the use of the English simple past tense increased for Tamil learners who used English outside the classroom. These Tamil speakers may have been more predisposed to notice and use the simple past tense because of this similarity of their L1 to English. In contrast, native speakers of Mandarin exposed to English outside the classroom may not have been predisposed to notice or use the simple past tense due to the dissimilarity of their language in this respect to English.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent implications of this study, two important caveats must still be borne in mind. First, the sample size that was analysed was small. Therefore, the Tamil-speaking and Mandarin-speaking learners within this study may not be representative of other L1 Tamil and Mandarin ESL learners. Secondly, this data was self-reported and it is possible that there may have been inaccuracies in the reporting of this data by the participants as
previous research indicates that self-reports may sometimes be unreliable (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999, p. 171).

**Conclusion**

While acknowledging the qualifications about the small sample size and limited reliability of self-reports, it is possible that Tamil L1 learners benefitted from naturalistic exposure to English while the Mandarin L1 learners did not. Moreover, prior naturalistic exposure may have been necessary for the Tamil learners to develop their accuracy of use of the simple past tense. These results are merely suggestive of a possible interaction between use of English outside school and L1 influence in accuracy of use of the simple past tense. More research on this topic needs to be undertaken.

The results of this study may have some relevance for ESL pedagogy, but the nature of this relevance is not presently clear. One possible interpretation is that ESL learners whose L1 lacks a grammatical past tense, such as Mandarin, may need extra instruction and practice with the English simple past tense in the classroom that promotes noticing of this grammatical category by the students. Additional instruction may be helpful given the possibility that mere exposure to this grammatical structure in a naturalistic environment may not be enough to increase the accuracy in use of the past tense by ESL learners whose L1 lacks a past tense. If this is so, then the nature of this instruction and practice is itself an empirical question which needs to be investigated.

**References**


Table 1
Comparison of Participants by L1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>Mandarin</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>16 F, 5 M</td>
<td>15 F, 6 M</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT M (SD)</td>
<td>49.8 % (15.3)</td>
<td>53.1 % (15.3)</td>
<td>0.483</td>
<td>-0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age M (SD)</td>
<td>33.3 years (11.2)</td>
<td>35.7 years (7.1)</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>-0.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AoA M (SD)</td>
<td>31.1 years (11.1)</td>
<td>34.2 years (7.2)</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>-0.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LoR M (SD)</td>
<td>2.08 years (2.03)</td>
<td>1.61 years (1.81)</td>
<td>0.429</td>
<td>0.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to English</td>
<td>12 – English at work, university/college, socially 3 – TV, movies &amp; radio? 1 – reading books</td>
<td>8 – some use of English professionally, socially or at college/university 1 – self-study</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G = gender, OPT = grammar section of Oxford Placement Test, AoA = age of arrival in an English-speaking country, LoR = length of residence (in years), p = statistical significance of t-test, d = Cohen’s d for effect size

Table 2
Participants with Some Self-Reported Use of English Outside Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L1</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score (total L1 group mean)</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.1 % (26.8%)</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>- 4.528</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.9 % (52.1%)</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Participants with No Self-Reported Use of English Outside Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L1</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score (total L1 group mean)</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29.6 % (26.8%)</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>- 1.422</td>
<td>.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39.3 % (52.1%)</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What’s your (full) name?
2. a) What do you normally like to do on the weekend?
   b) What did you do you last weekend?
   c) What sort of hobbies do you have?
3. a) Let’s talk about school now. What was your favourite subject in high school? (Why?)
   b) i. Did you study English in your first country?
      ii. (If ‘yes’ to above question) Did you like studying English in (country)? Why/why not?
      (If ‘no’ to above question) When you first started studying English in Canada, did you like studying English? Why/why not?
4. a) Where were you born?
   b) When did you immigrate to Canada?
   c) Do you remember your trip to Canada? Can you tell me about it?
   d) Do you remember your first day in Canada? What happened?
   e) If you don’t mind my asking, why did you immigrate here?
5. Can you tell me about a trip you took to another country or city?
6. Are you married?
   i. (If yes) Can you tell me about your wedding day?
   ii. (If no) Can you tell me about another person’s wedding celebration you attended?
About the author

Mike Tiittanen has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Lancaster University (UK). His primary research interests are in first language influence on second language acquisition. He is the author of *Brain Waves* (Oxford University Press). He currently works as an adult ESL instructor and the coordinator of a TESL program.