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Cross-Linguistic Influence in the Use of *Be* in L3 English by L1-Chinese and L1-Russian Children in Korea

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Errors with *be*, whether omission (e.g., *John happy*) or overuse (i.e., *be*-insertion; e.g., *John is love Mary*), have received particular attention in L2 acquisition studies exploring L1 transfer. This study investigates such errors in the context of L3 acquisition, focusing on L1 transfer. L1-Chinese (n = 34) and L1-Russian (n = 34) children with L2 Korean completed an elicitation production task designed to explore their use of English *be*. The study resulted in two main findings. First, L1-Russian children showed more omission errors than proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children, possibly due to an L1 transfer given that copula in Russian are dropped in the present tense. Second, L1-Chinese learners used *be*-insertion more frequently than proficiency-matching L1-Russian children, possibly due to using *be* for more functions (as a topic marker and an inflectional morpheme), as other research has shown for L2-English learners with topic-prominent L1s. Based on the findings, the study discusses some pedagogical implications.

Key words: *be*-insertion, *be*-omission, L1 transfer, L3 English acquisition

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1. INTRODUCTION

Morphemes can be categorized in two ways: as either free (*Kim*, *is*) or bound (-*s*, -*ly*) and as either lexical (*Kim*, *speak*) or grammatical (*is*, -*s*). Free morphemes generally belong to the class of lexical morphemes, and bound morphemes to the class of grammatical morphemes. Copula *be*, however, is unique: It is a free morpheme and a grammatical morpheme. It can stand alone but lacks lexical meaning. As one of the first grammatical morphemes to be acquired by English learners, copula *be* has received particular attention in L2 research (e.g., Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974). Many studies have reported erroneous L2 usage of *be* by beginners of L2 English, especially omission (e.g., *John happy*) and overuse (e.g., *John is love Mary*), interpreting these errors as an effect of L1 transfer (Ahn, 2003, 2006; Hahn, 2000; Odlin, 1989; Shin, 2000). For example, Hahn (2000) discussed the overuse of *be* in the interlanguage English of L1-Korean learners as a reflection of the topic-marking property of Korean, a topic-prominent language.

Despite the prolific research on the effects of L1 transfer in the use of copula *be* in the early stage of L2 acquisition, no study to date has examined such transfer effects in L3 acquisition. To this end, we examined two populations of L3-English children's use of copula *be*. The children were learning English in Korea, with their L1 being either Chinese or Russian, and their L2 being Korean. As discussed in detail in the next section, the study's predictions for the effects of language transfer on the two groups' use of English *be* are based on typological differences between the two L1s, Chinese and Russian.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Linguistic Transfer in L3 Acquisition

Linguistic transfer is a widely investigated issue in L2 acquisition. While there are studies claiming a lack of L1 transfer in the initial state of L2 acquisition (e.g., Epstein, Flynn, & Martohardjono, 1996), the dominant view is that a full or partial L1 grammar constitutes the initial state of L2 grammar, leading to L1 transfer in the use of the L2 (e.g., Eubank, 1994; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994).

Language transfer research has recently extended to the context of L3 acquisition. Several models have been proposed to explain which language, between L1 and L2, affects L3 acquisition. For example, Hermas (2010, 2014) claimed that L1—not L2—is the only possible source of transfer in L3 acquisition, placing L1 a special status in acquisition of subsequent languages. In contrast, Bardel and Falk (2007) proposed the L2 Status Factor Model, which argued for the transfer of L2—not L1—in L3 acquisition. Based on the ideas

of a declarative and procedural memory system (Ullman, 2001) and the distinction between implicit competence and explicit knowledge (Paradis, 2009), Bardel and Falk assumed that an L2 grammar learned after puberty corresponds to explicit metalinguistic knowledge, thus being placed in the declarative memory, while the L1 grammar, as implicit competence, is placed in the procedural memory. Bardel and Falk argued that if L3 learners learn their L3 after puberty, the L3 knowledge must be stored in the declarative memory alongside the L2 grammar, which in turn leads to the transfer of the L2 grammar in L3 acquisition (Bardel & Sánchez, 2017; Falk & Bardel, 2010, 2011). Taking a different approach, Rothman (2010, 2011, 2013, 2015) proposed the Typological Primacy Model, which claimed the typological proximity among L1, L2, and L3 determines the source of language transfer. The underlying mechanism of the model is that the language parser unconsciously identifies typological similarities between languages based on a hierarchy of linguistic cues in the following order: (i) lexicon, (ii) phonology/phonotactics, (iii) functional morphology, and (iv) syntactic structure. Once the parser determines which language is structurally and typologically closer to the L3, depending on the hierarchy, transfer occurs from the selected language.[1]

Regarding the current study, it is worthwhile to note that none of these models would predict an absence of L1 transfer in the context of L1-Russian children learning L3 English. While Bardel and Falk argued for L2 transfer in L3 acquisition, their model deals only with adults, not children. In addition, English is typologically closer to Russian than to Korean according to the hierarchy of typological proximity, which does not rule out transfer to L3 English from L1 Russian.

2.2. Copula in English, Chinese, and Russian

In English, copula *be* is a linking verb, representing a relation between the subject and its complement (Halliday, 2014; Stowell, 1981), which rarely carries content meaning. For example, in the sentence *I am a doctor*, it is hard to find content meaning in the word *am*.

The Chinese and Russian translation equivalents for the English sentence *I am a doctor* are illustrated in (1a) and (1b) respectively.

[1] It is also worthwhile to note that there are some models that do not specify a particular language for transfer. For example, Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya (2004) proposed the Cumulative Enhancement Model, claiming that linguistic transfer is language-selective and either facilitative or neutral. More recently, the Linguistic Proximity Model suggested by Wetergaard, Mitrofanova, Mykhaylyk, and Rodina (2017) and the Scalpel Model by Slabakova (2017) hold the view of property-by-property and selective transfer in L3 acquisition.

(1) a. 我 是 医生.
Wǒ shì yīshēng.
I am doctor
'I am a doctor.'

b. Я врач.
Ya vrach.
I doctor
'I am a doctor.'

In Chinese, the verb *shi* functions similarly to the copula *be* in English (Chan, 2004; Hsieh, 2009) in that *shi* links a subject and a predicative noun. However, *shi* differs from English *be* in that *shi* can only take NP as its complement while English *be* can take other phrase types (e.g., NP, AP, PP) as its complement. In addition, unlike English *be*, *shi* can be used as a focus/topic marker[2] in an emphatic sentence, in which case it does not carry any voice or tense-aspect features. *Shi* as a focus/topic marker represents the topic-prominent feature of Chinese as a topic-prominent language (Jin, 1994; Jung, 2004). In Russian, the copula is omitted in the present tense, as in (1b), while a copula (i.e., *byl* 'was', *budu* 'will') must be used in the past or future tense. That is, the zero copula indicates the present tense in Russian.[3]

2.3. L2 Acquisition Studies on English *Be*

Numerous studies have explored the L2 acquisition of copula *be* in English (e.g., Fuertes & Liceras, 2010; Hahn, 2000; Hsieh, 2009; Ionin & Wexler, 2002; Kim, 2011; Lee & Huang, 2004; Nam, 2019; Shin, 2000; Tode, 2003, 2007; Unlu & Hatipoglu, 2012; Yang, 2001, 2002). Because the current study investigates the acquisition of *be* by L1-Chinese and L1-Russian learners of L3 English, we focus on previous research with the L2 English learners -whose L1 is either Chinese or Russian.

For L1-Chinese learners of English, Lee and Huang (2004) examined the use of English *be* by 4th graders (n = 270) at a primary school in Hong Kong. They collected production data from a story-writing task and analyzed both the correct and incorrect uses of English

[2] Chinese *shi* can be used as a topic marker, as in (i) (Lee, 2003, p. 351).
(i) dinzi sanpin shi sanxing dinzi (de) zui hao
electronic goods TOP Sansung Electronics best
'As for electronic goods, Samsung Electronics is best'

[3] The copula in Russian can also carry number and person features in the future tense, and number and gender features in the past tense. The relevant morphemes can occur before or after a subject NP, which means they can come at the end of a sentence, reflecting the relatively free word order of Russian (Dragoy & Bastiaanse, 2010).

be. While the children made some errors such as *be*-insertion, which was the most frequent error type (e.g., **He is open the door*), Lee and Huang reported generally good performance on the use of *be*. Notably, the children performed better on the use of *be* with a predicative noun (e.g., *I am a king*) than in the other conditions (e.g., *be*-adjectives, *be* in *wh*-questions). A similar finding was reported by Hsieh (2009). Hsieh collected spontaneous production data from oral interviews and a story-telling task conducted with 20 students in Taiwan aged between 11 and 14. The participants had studied English for 4–7 years, and they used copula *be* correctly 84% of the time. The highest level of correctness was found on the use of *be* with a predicative noun (e.g., *John is the boss*), as was the case in Lee and Huang's (2004) study. Hsieh considered these results to be due to the functional similarity and difference between *shi* in Chinese and *be* in English. The study investigated inflectional morphology as well, finding much lower levels of correctness with 3rd person singular (3SG) -*s* and regular past tense -*ed*. The learners erroneously omitted obligatory 3SG -*s* (78%) and past tense -*ed* (95%) at high rates. Hsieh attributed these results to the learners' difficulty in realizing surface inflections, following the account of the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (Haznedar & Schwartz, 1997; Prévost & White, 2000).

A distinctive characteristic of the Russian copula is its omission in the present tense. Previous L2 studies, however, have reported generally good performance on the use of English *be* by L1-Russian learners, albeit with prediction of omission errors based on the typological difference between Russian and English (e.g., **I very good fellow*, **I captain of Royal Cossack Guard in Moscow*; Odlin, 1989). For example, Ionin and Wexler (2002) analyzed spontaneous productions in English by 20 L1-Russian children (age range = 3;9–13;10) whose duration of residence in English-dominant contexts did not exceed three years. They found fairly low rates of obligatory *be*-omission errors with copula *be* (17%) and auxiliary *be* (34%). In comparison, they found much higher rates of omission errors with affixal morphemes such as 3SG -*s* (78%) and past tense -*ed* (58%). They also reported that some of the children overgenerated *be*[4] followed by uninflected stem forms (e.g., *they are help people*): 18 out of 28 transcripts showed at least one instance of *be*-insertion, and 108 utterances of the *be*-insertion accounted for nine percent of all inflected utterances across all transcripts.[5] Based on these results, Ionin and Wexler claimed that L2 learners

[4] As an anonymous reviewer correctly pointed out, the term 'overgenerated *be*' originated from Ionin and Wexler (2002) to refer to *be* that seems to function as an agreement morpheme; this term, however, may not cover *be* used as a topic marker. Thus, the current study uses *be*-insertion (Nam, 2019) instead of overgenerated *be* to cover different kinds of *be* with more diverse functions.

[5] The overgenerated *be* produced by the Russian learners of English occurred in generic/habitual or past tense contexts; it was not an output of incomplete progressive forms omitting the morpheme -*ing*.

may use *be* as a substitute for an affixal inflection on the verb, based on a theory of Universal Grammar that *be* raises to the functional category Agr, which is responsible for the use of suppletive agreement morphemes (i.e., copular *be*, auxiliary *be*) (Guasti & Rizzi, 2001). In a similar vein, Unlu and Hatipoglu (2012) reported good performance in the use of *be* by L1-Russian learners of L2 English. Their participants were 76 children in three age groups (30 at 8–10 years old; 30 at 11–12 years old; 16 at 14–15 years old) and of different English proficiency levels. They administered two diagnostic tests consisting of multiple-choice and completion items. Although the participants showed some errors, mainly at the lower proficiency levels, the omission errors predicted by the typological difference between Russian and English were not frequent.

Taken together, the previous studies with L1-Chinese and L1-Russian children show that (a) omission errors in the use of *be* are rarer than omission errors in the use of affixal morphemes (e.g., 3SG -*s*) and (b) the error of *be*-insertion is frequent in the use of *be*. Two issues arise as to L1 transfer and error type in the context of L3 acquisition. First, if L1 transfer occurs in the use of English *be*, L1-Russian learners might omit English *be* in the present tense, following the L1 grammar. As we have seen, the previous L2 studies with L1-Russian children reported good performance in the use of *be*, with less *be*-omission than inflectional affix omission (e.g., 3SG -*s*). These results, however, are irrelevant to the L1 effect, as they only show the relative ease of acquisition. Conversely, if L1-Russian learners make omission errors, we cannot conclude that these errors are due to L1 transfer; it has been widely observed that L2 learners often omit copula in the early stages of L2 development, regardless of their L1. One way to test whether omission errors are due to L1 transfer is by comparing two different groups whose primary difference is the L1. For example, if there is an L1 effect on English learners' use of *be*, L1-Russian learners would show more omission errors than proficiency-matching L1-Chinese learners.

Second, the most frequently reported error type in the use of *be* in L2 English by both L1-Russian and L1-Chinese children is not omission but overuse. This finding is particularly striking in the case of L1-Russian children because the Russian language grammar has copula omission. No study to date has explored whether learners' *be*-insertion with uninflected thematic verbs also occurs in L3 English.

In sum, the current study addresses these two issues. First, it explores whether L1-Russian children show more omission errors in the use of *be* than proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children, addressing the question of L1 transfer in L3 acquisition. Second, it asks whether *be*-insertion with uninflected thematic verbs appears in the production of both L1-Chinese and L1-Russian learners of L3 English.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

This study's participants were 68 children: 34 L1-Chinese child learners of L3 English aged between 11;1 and 13;1, and 34 L1-Russian learners of L3 English aged between 11;2 and 14;1. They were all students at a local primary school in Gyeonggi Province, South Korea. All the participants were born in China or Russian-speaking countries such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, or Russia. They all took an intensive L2-Korean class at school for two hours a day after they immigrated to Korea with their parents. The children varied in the mean length of their residence in Korea (range = 10 to 60 months) as well as in their L2-Korean proficiency, as measured by a picture narration task (Kim & Schwartz, 2020; Song & Schwartz, 2009). As for learning L3 English, their primary English exposure was from an English class at the school; none of them had been to English-speaking countries. Their general English proficiency was low; an in-house diagnostic test indicated that they were at the beginner level. Using the results of the in-house diagnostic test for L3 English proficiency, we divided the children into three L3-English proficiency groups, which allows the study to compare proficiency-matching children whose primary difference is the L1 (i.e., Chinese vs. Russian). Table 1 illustrates the divisions of the participants by first language, L2 proficiency, and L3 proficiency.

TABLE 1

Division of the Participants

Group	*n*	Age (*M*)	L3-English Proficiency		
			Low	Mid	High
L1 Chinese	34	12;4	12	10	12
L1 Russian	34	12;9	12	12	10

Independent-samples *t*-tests on the raw scores of the L2-Korean proficiency and L3-English proficiency tests showed no significant difference between the proficiency-matching L1 groups (all *p*s > .05).[6]

[6] Overall, the L1-Chinese children were more proficient in L2 Korean than the L1-Russian children. Independent-samples *t*-tests on the raw scores of the L2-Korean proficiency test showed that the L1-Chinese group (n = 34) was significantly more proficient in L2-Korean than their L1-Russian counterparts (n = 34) ($t(66) = 4.425$, $p < .001$). As for their L3-English proficiency, there was no significant difference between the two groups ($t(66) = -0.42$, $p = .68$).

3.2. Materials and Procedure

An elicited production task (Crain & Thornton, 1998; Thornton, 1998) was employed to investigate the participants' use of *be*. The task was created with Microsoft PowerPoint, using child-friendly pictures and characters. To better understand the learners' knowledge on copula *be*, previous studies have compared it with their knowledge of 3SG -*s*, because both forms are constrained by the same syntactic category, INFL (Kim, 2017). The current study follows this trend. The participants were asked to individually answer 42 questions: six aimed at eliciting copula *be* in the present tense, six aimed at eliciting 3SG -*s*, and 30 fillers[7]. Table 2 shows the details of the task.

TABLE 2

Types of Questions in the Elicited Production Task

Condition	No. of Items	Sample Question	Correct Answer
Copula *be*	6	Can you tell me about them?	Harry *is* a bird; Crong *is* a dinosaur.
3SG -*s*	6	What do they like?	Harry like*s* juice; Crong like*s* apples.

Before being asked the questions, the children learned information (e.g., names; hobbies; favorite sports and fruits; friends' clothes) about the main character, Pororo, a very popular animated TV character in Korea. In the experiment, Tong-Tong, another popular animated character, appeared and asked questions about Pororo. The participant answered each question as if he/she were Pororo. Considering the participants' low English proficiency, the questions were asked in the participant's L1 and L2. In addition, to reduce the cognitive burden for the children, part of the target answer was provided, but never the target morpheme (e.g., *be*). See Figures 1 and 2 for an example.

The task was conducted individually on a laptop computer in a quiet room. The task took about 15 minutes to complete, and the participants' answers were recorded. The participants were given some refreshments after completing the task.

The in-house diagnostic assessment to measure the participants' L3-English proficiency consisted of 12 listening, 4 reading, and 4 writing items, generally following the format that the Ministry of Education in Korea commonly uses for measuring the English proficiency of Korean children.

[7] Some of the fillers were actually test items for another study.

FIGURE 1

Example Stimulus to Elicit *Be* in English

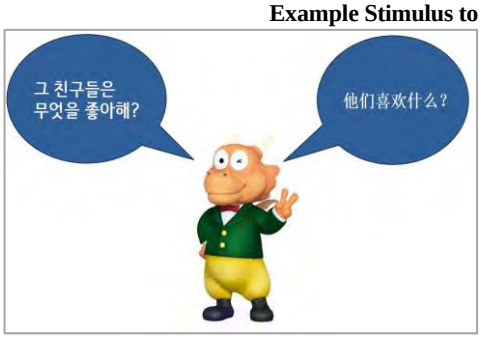
Tong-Tong asks, "Can you tell me about them?"

The participant, taking the role of Pororo, answers the question by using *be*: "Crong *is* a dinosaur."

Note. The questions ask about two entities at once in order to avoid eliciting pronouns as subjects, as some research has suggested that a pronoun followed by *be* can be a prefabricated form (e.g., *he is*) (Lee, 2002).

FIGURE 2

Example Stimulus to Elicit *3SG -s* in English



Tong-Tong asks, "What do they like?"

The participant, taking the role of Pororo, answers the question by using 3SG *-s*: "Harry *likes* juice."

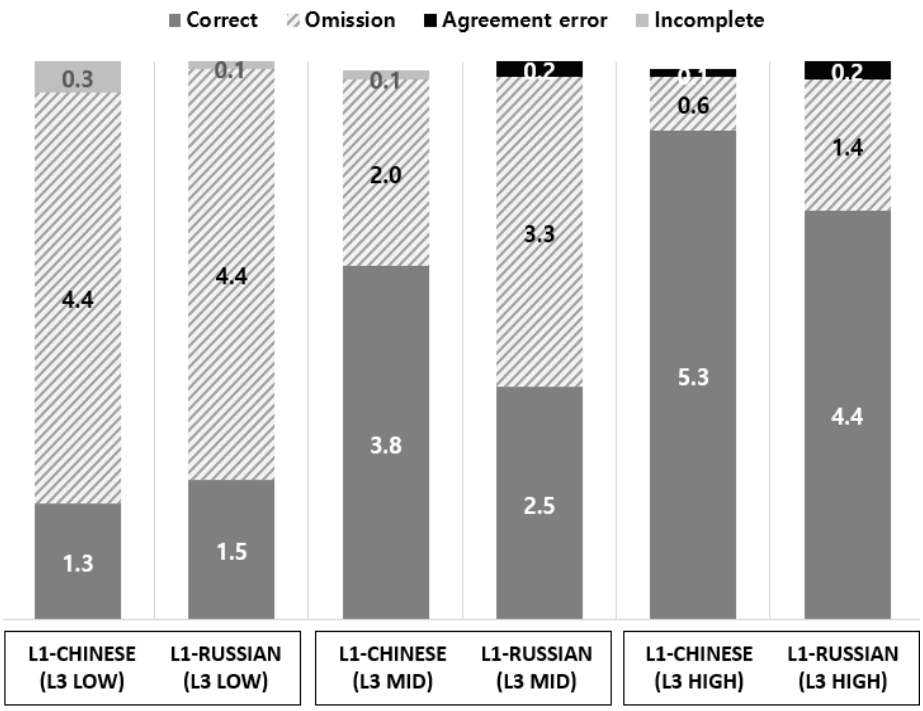
4. RESULTS

From the elicitation task, we collected a total of 2,856 utterances, of which 768 were analyzed as target answers, meaning they were utterances in which the copula *be* or 3SG *-s* were expected. Figure 3 shows the learners' production in the condition eliciting the copula *be*. As Figure 3 shows, the children's correct use of *be* increases with their English proficiency. Out of six utterances, the low-proficiency L1-Chinese group produced 1.3

correct utterances; the mid-proficiency L1-Chinese group produced 3.8 correct utterances; and the high-proficiency L1-Chinese group, 5.3 correct utterances. Similarly, the low-proficiency L1-Russian group produced 1.5 correct utterances; the mid-proficiency L1-Russian group produced 2.5 correct utterances; and the high-proficiency L1-Russian group, 4.4 correct utterances. Conversely, the children's *be*-omission decreases with increasing English proficiency. Again, out of six utterances, the low-proficiency L1-Chinese group showed 4.4 omissions, the mid-proficiency L1-Chinese group, 2.0 omissions, and the high-proficiency L1-Chinese group only 0.6 omissions. Similarly, the low-proficiency L1-Russian group showed 4.4 omissions; the mid-proficiency L1-Russian group, 3.3 omissions; and the high-proficiency L1-Russian group, 1.4 omissions. The children rarely produced subject-verb agreement errors (e.g., **Crong are dinosaur*) or incomplete sentences (e.g., *He*).

FIGURE 3

Performance on Elicited Copula *Be* by Proficiency-Matching L3 Learners with Different L1s

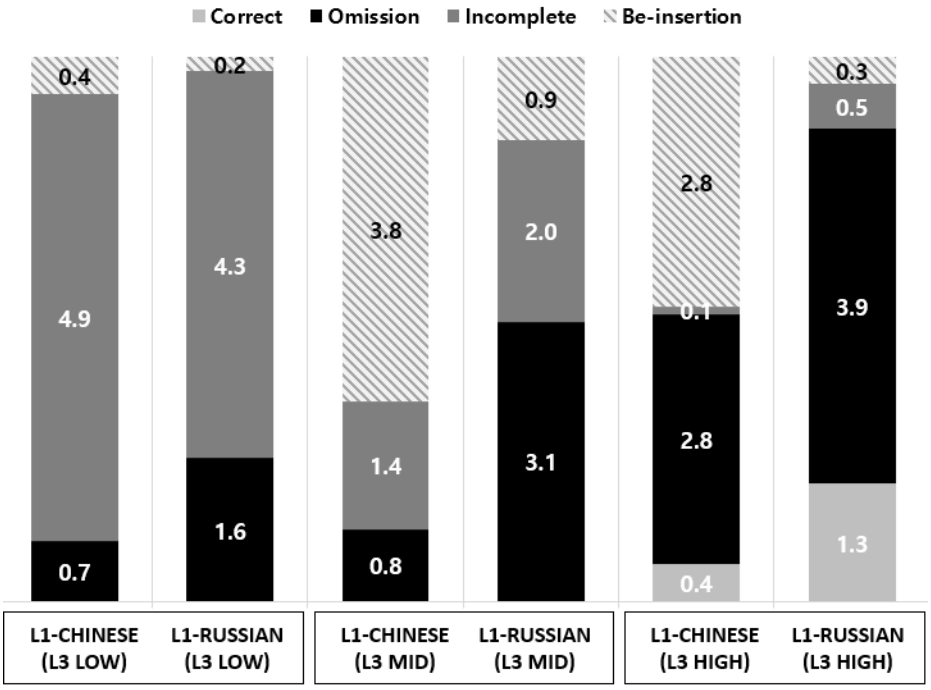


Note. Correct = correct use of copula *be* (e.g., *Crong is a dinosaur*); Omission = omission of *be* (e.g., **Crong a dinosaur*); Agreement error = subject-verb agreement error (e.g., **Crong are dinosaur*); Incomplete = incomplete sentence (e.g., producing only a subject)

Notably, the L1-Russian children, except the low-proficiency group, made more omission errors than the proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children. To examine differences in the number of omissions by the two L1 groups, a 2 (L1 group) × 3 (L3-English proficiency group) × 3 (L2-Korean proficiency group) ANOVA was conducted (between group factors = L1 group, L3-English proficiency group, and L2-Korean proficiency group). Alpha was set at .05 for all statistical tests. This analysis yielded main effects of L1 group ($F(1) = 8.907$, $p = .004$) and L3-English proficiency group ($F(2) = 33.684$, $p < .001$); there was neither a main effect of L2-Korean proficiency nor any interaction effect. Next, planned comparisons of the number of *be* omissions showed that the mid-proficiency L1-Russian children omitted copula *be* more than the mid-proficiency L1-Chinese children at a marginally significant level ($t(20) = 2.08$, $p = .05$). The high-proficiency L1-Russian children also showed more omission of copula *be* than the high-proficiency L1-Chinese children, again at a marginally significant level ($t(20) = 1.85$, $p = .08$). The results suggest an L1 effect on *be*-omission in that, in Russian, the copula is omitted in the present tense. It is possible that the L1-Russian children omitted copula *be* in the present tense more frequently than the proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children because a similar pattern exists in L1 Russian.

Figure 4 shows the learners' performance on the items eliciting 3SG -*s*. As Figure 4 shows, the children performed very poorly on the use of 3SG -*s*. The low- and mid-proficiency learners in both L1 groups never produced 3SG -*s*. The rates of its production were only 0.4 (out of 6) by the L1-Chinese high-proficiency group and 1.3 by the proficiency-matching L1-Russian group. While the participants rarely produced incomplete sentences in response to the items eliciting copula *be*, as seen in Figure 3, they produced many incomplete sentences in response to the items eliciting 3SG -*s*, which used thematic verbs. For example, the low-proficiency L1-Chinese children produced incomplete sentences 4.9 (out of 6) times, and the low-proficiency L1-Russian children did so 4.3 (out of 6) times. However, the number of incomplete sentences drastically decreased in the higher English proficiency groups: 1.4 incomplete sentences from the mid-proficiency L1-Chinese group; 2.0 from the mid-proficiency L1-Russian group; 0.1 from the high-proficiency L1-Chinese group; and 0.5 from the high-proficiency L1-Russian group.

FIGURE 4
Performance on Elicited 3SG -*s* by Proficiency-Matching L3 Learners with Different L1s



Note. Correct = correct use of 3SG -*s* (e.g., *Crong likes apples*); Omission = omission of 3SG -*s* (e.g., **Crong like apples*); Incomplete = incomplete sentence (e.g., producing only a subject); *be*-insertion = the use of *be* along with or instead of a thematic verb (e.g., *Crong is like apples*; *Crong is apples*)

What is striking is that the learners erroneously overused *be* in 3SG -*s* condition quite often. As the following examples show, they used *be* either with an uninflected thematic verb (32 cases; e.g., *Crong is like apples*) or instead of a thematic verb (60 cases; e.g., *Crong is apples*).

Examples from children's production of *be* with an uninflected thematic verb:
Crong is like apple. (C4[8], L1-Chinese, L3 mid-proficiency)
Patty is like long dress. (C33, L1-Chinese, L3 high-proficiency)
Patty is want shirt. (C11, L1-Chinese, L3 high-proficiency)

Examples from children's production of *be* instead of a thematic verb:
Crong is apple. (C13, L1-Chinese, L3 mid-proficiency)

[8] C4 stands for the participant number 4 in the L1-Chinese group.

Rupi is long dress. (C24, L1-Chinese, L3 mid-proficiency)
Patty is shirt. (R25, L1-Russian, L3 mid-proficiency)

Notably, these erroneous patterns were produced more frequently by the L1-Chinese learners than the L1-Russian learners. To examine the differences in numbers of such erroneous use of *be* between the two L1 groups, a 2 (L1 group) × 3 (L3-English proficiency group) × 3 (L2-Korean proficiency group) ANOVA was conducted. This analysis yielded main effects of L1 group ($F(1) = 11.992$, $p = .001$) and L3-English proficiency group ($F(2) = 6.066$, $p = .004$); there was neither a main effect of L2-Korean proficiency nor any interaction effect. In addition, planned comparisons on the numbers of such *be* errors showed that the mid-proficiency L1-Chinese children overused *be* significantly more frequently than the mid-proficiency L1-Russian children ($t(20) = 2.77$, $p = .01$). Likewise, the high-proficiency L1-Chinese children produced such *be* errors significantly more frequently than the high-proficiency L1-Russian children ($t(20) = 2.58$, $p = .02$).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study addressed two questions. First, it asked whether proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children and L1-Russian children would differ in their omission of copula *be*. The results show more omission errors by L1-Russian children than proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children, which suggests the possibility of L1 transfer. As discussed, the copula is omitted in the present tense in Russian but not in Chinese; thus, it is possible that L1-Russian children who omitted copula *be* in the present tense were following the pattern in their L1 Russian.

Second, the study asked whether both L1-Chinese and L1-Russian learners of L3 English overgenerate *be*. As had been the case in previous studies with L2 learners of English with L1 Chinese and L1 Russian, the L1-Chinese and L1-Russian children in this study also produced *be*-insertion in their L3 English. There were two types of *be*-insertion: *be* with an uninflected thematic verb (e.g., *Crong is like apples*; 32 cases) and *be* instead of a thematic verb (e.g., *Crong is apples*; 60 cases).

Between the two L1 groups, L1-Chinese children produced more *be*-insertion than L1-Russian children. Two explanations can be considered. First, a copula is omitted in the present tense in L1 Russian; if such an omission rule affects their production of L3 English, L1-Russian children would likely avoid using *be* in the present tense, resulting in their less frequent overgeneration of *be* (in the present tense) compared to proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children. The second explanation is related to whether or not the L1 is a topic prominent language. If it is, there are two possible uses for *be*-insertion: as a topic marker

or as an inflectional morpheme (Kim, 2011). If it is not, there can be a single possible use for *be*-insertion: as an inflectional morpheme (Ionin & Wexler, 2002). Given that Chinese—but not Russian—is a topic-prominent language, the L1-Chinese learners might use *be* more broadly (i.e., as both types of markers) than the L1-Russian learners, which would lead to the L1-Chinese children's more frequent *be*-insertion.[9]

In sum, the current study, as the first attempt to explore L1 transfer effects on the use of English *be* with L1-Chinese and L1-Russian children of L2 Korean who are learning English as an L3, found two L1 transfer effects in the use of *be* in L3 English. First, the L1-Russian children showed more omission errors than the proficiency-matching L1-Chinese children, which could be due to their L1 grammar, as the Russian copula is dropped in the present tense. Second, the L1-Chinese learners produced *be*-insertion more frequently than the proficiency-matching L1-Russian children, possibly due to an L1 effect supporting two functions of *be* (as a topic marker and an inflectional morpheme); this behavior has been shown in previous research on English learners with topic-prominent L1s, like Chinese.

The study has some limitations. First, the use of an elicitation task alone may not be sufficient to reveal learners' L3-English knowledge. To gain a clearer picture of L3 knowledge, we need further research that employs a battery of tasks to collect a greater variety of data, including grammaticality judgment, sentence interpretation, and on-line tasks (e.g., self-paced listening and eye-tracking). Second, while this study deals with L1 transfer, it did not look at how the participants use copula in their L1s. A comparative study on the use of copula in L3 learners' three languages would be worthwhile. Furthermore, to shed more light on the transfer of L1 Russian, the future research needs to investigate the patterns of *be*-insertion not only in the present tense, but also in the past and future tenses. Despite such limitations, however, we believe the current study, as one of the very few studies comparing proficiency-matching L3 learners with different L1s, offers a crucial stepping stone for future research on linguistic transfer in L3 acquisition.

The current study has some pedagogical implications. First, the learners' L1 should be carefully considered when English teachers decide how to provide English input to the learners. For example, the use of *be* in both present and past tenses can help L1-Russian leaners of English come to know that English *be*, unlike Russian copula, is not omitted in the present tense. Second, as discussed, *be*-insertion errors have been widely observed in a stage of Interlanguage English. To help learners move beyond the stage, English teachers should be cautious not to use *be* so heavily in class. In this regard, Yang (2009) discussed

[9] We do not claim that L1-Russian learners of L2 English *never* use *be* as a topic marker. Given that Universal Grammar constrains interlanguage grammars, L1-Russian learners of L3 English can use *be* as a topic marker, as discussed in Nam (2019). Nam reported that L1-Russian beginners of English used *be* as a topic marker. She discussed this phenomenon as reflecting a universal L2 strategy, indicating Universal Grammar being active in L2 acquisition.

that English textbooks for elementary school students in Korea use *be* verbs quite heavily, which can result in the constant *be*-insertion errors. Third, an intervention helping to draw learners' attention to the errors with *be* can be useful to prevent fossilization. No (2000) reported that Korean children learning L2 English showed frequent errors in the use of grammatical morphemes. She discussed that comprehensible input alone is not sufficient for successful child L2 acquisition in Korea, calling for the use of negative evidence and input enhancement through consciousness raising in classroom.

Applicable levels: Elementary

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