

IS THE NATURAL ORDER OF MORPHEME ACQUISITION BEING APPROPRIATELY PRESENTED IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING COURSE BOOKS?

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Abstract: This study sought to determine the sequence of L2 morpheme presentation, as well as to determine whether or not the sequence of morpheme presentations correspond with the recognized natural order of morpheme acquisition in English Language Teaching course books utilized with young adult learners at a public sector vocational education institution in Thailand. Qualitative analysis was employed in the scrutinizing of twelve beginner and elementary level ESL and EFL learners course books that have been utilized as the primary teaching material for over a decade by the general education department of the institute. This examination revealed that the morpheme presentation sequence within the selected ELT course books was not analogous with the conclusions in the supporting literature. The findings further indicated that the widely accepted viewpoint of natural order morpheme acquisition was likewise not substantially reflected within the analyzed texts. Albeit, earlier studies have found that an unnatural sequence of morpheme presentation in EFL course books may hamper communicative competence in English, further study is required to establish if this may be a contributing factor for the overall low English proficiency of adult L2 learners in Thailand.

Keywords: EFL course books; morpheme acquisition; natural order; target language.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the nature of English being acknowledged as a global language or Lingua Franca, and accordingly, an essential second

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language (L2) in Thailand and other developing countries, an upper-intermediate proficiency level in English has become a burden and a criterion for university graduates in Thailand (Perrodin & Thupatemee, 2018). Unfortunately, as reported in EF English Proficiency Index 2018 on the state of global English education (EF Thailand, 2018), despite many years and hundreds of hours of language education accompanied by archaic university governance, ignorant parents, mind-numbing lessons, and misinformed teachers, Thailand has continually remained for the past decade in the very-low to low English proficiency range.

The majority of Thai second language learners have been subjected to English education since the beginning of primary school, with some learners starting as young as four years old (Chumkamon, 2017; Clark, 2014). However, even after completing secondary school, they still fall into the beginner or basic language user level. Subsequently, numerous young Thai adult learners, filled with a sense of dread, are unable to meet the minimum English proficiency level set by many international companies once completing tertiary studies. Unfortunately, these same young Thai adults were repeatedly coached since earlier in secondary school on “how to pass” English exams rather than receiving exposure to the authentic use of English as the target language of study.

If the recent history of Thai education has taught anything, it would be a lesson filled with regret in that rote-learning full of tedious memorization tasks will not prepare a learner in attaining the requirement of acquiring English at an upper-intermediate proficiency level to contend with a rapidly-changing and technologically advanced globalized world.

The difficulty associated with the acquisition of morphemes in English has been found to considerably affect target language proficiency at both the true beginner and false beginner levels (Chumkamon, 2017; Rutherford, 1986; Sridhanyarat, 2013; Yook, 2013). Studies have shown that the sequence of morpheme presentation affects the true beginner and the false beginner alike

(Harmer, 2017; Šipošová, 2017). False beginners, as generally defined, are language learners who have acquired limited exposure or knowledge of the target language but who possess either a slight knowledge of or an insufficient command of the target language (Chumkamon, 2017; Harmer, 2017; Nakamura, 1997; Šipošová, 2017). Therefore, the exposure of adult L2 learners to English via movies, music, and the social media platform in Thailand is overwhelming; and so, according to the above referenced definition of False Beginner, the indication would be that a Thai adult L2 language learner would not be ordinarily classified as a true beginner (Christison, 1979; Chumkamon, 2017).

Morpheme acquisition has been for some time and continues to be one of the most challenging aspects of English education (Rutherford, 1986) in Thailand for numerous Thai learners (Chumkamon, 2017; Sridhanyarat, 2013). For that reason, attention to L2 morpheme acquisition should be viewed as a salient element for learners studying English as a foreign or second language in higher education institutions in Thailand (Chumkamon, 2017; Sridhanyarat, 2013; Zhang & Widyastuti, 2010). Widespread research over the past half-century into the order of second language (L2) morpheme acquisition (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1974a, 1974b; Krashen, 1985, 1977; Kwon, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 1975; Rosansky, 1976; Rutherford, 1986) has shown that English as a foreign or second language learners share, with slight variations, a universal (Smith, 2017) or “natural order” of L2 morpheme acquisition (Krashen, 1977, 1985; Pierce, 2009; Scheffler, 2008) of some functional and inflectional morphemes regardless of their first language (L1) background (Kwon, 2005; O’Grady, 2005; Schuwerk, 2004; Seog, 2015; Yule, 2013).

Mediocre performance in the area of L2 morpheme acquisition for adult EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) learners across the globe has been associated with the organization of morphemes presented in English Language Teaching course books (Bruton, 1997; Christison, 1979; Khan, 2014;

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Nitta & Gardner, 2005; Scheffler, 2008). For that reason, this study specifically focuses on identifying the sequence of L2 single rank morpheme presentation in English Language Teaching course books utilized with adult learners (Bruton, 1997; Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2005; Khan, 2014; Nitta & Gardner, 2005) in Thailand (Chumkamon, 2017; Wei, 2000), and whether or not the sequence of single rank morpheme presentation is analogous with the natural order of morpheme acquisition indicated within the selected literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary literature applied for this analysis is previous groundbreaking studies in the mid 1970s into L2 morpheme acquisition by the pioneers of second language studies; Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974), Larsen-Freeman (1975), Rosansky (1976), and ultimately, in culmination, Krashen (1977). While the previously mentioned studies regarding adult L2 learners did not directly investigate the order of presentation of L2 grammatical morphemes in English Language Teaching course books, the valid interpretation of the conclusions of said studies as shown in Table 1 were necessary to facilitate the objectives of this study.

Table 1. Order of Acquisition of English Morphemes in Selected Major L2 Studies

Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974)	Larsen- Freeman (1975)	Rosansky (1976)
Adults (Spanish and non-Spanish)	Adults (Arabic, Japanese, Persian, and Spanish)	Children, Adolescents, Adults (Spanish)
1. Present Progressive [-ing]	1. Present Progressive [-ing]	1. Present Progressive [-ing]
2. Copula [be]	2. Copula [be]	2. Articles [a, an, the]
3. Plural [-s, -es]	3. Articles [a, an, the]	3. Copula [be]
4. Articles [a, an, the]	4. Auxiliary [be]	4. Auxiliary [be]
5. Auxiliary [be]	5. Short Plural [-s]	5. Possessives [-s', -'s]
6. Past Irregular [Ex: do - did]	6. Past Regular [-ed]	6. Past Irregular [Ex: do - did]
7. 3 rd Person Singular [-s]	7. 3 rd Person Singular [-s]	7. Long Plural [-es]
8. Possessives [-s', -'s]	8. Past Irregular [Ex: do - did]	8. Past Regular [-ed]
-	9. Long Plural [-es]	9. 3 rd Person Singular [-s]
-	10. Possessives [-s', -'s]	-

Initially, the earlier research of adult L2 learners by Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974) found that the relative pattern of L2 morpheme acquisition was similar between child and adult learners, and likewise similar between Spanish and non-Spanish speakers representing eleven various first languages (Greek, Persian, Italian, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Afghan, Hebrew, Arabic, and Vietnamese). They discovered that “despite the differences in adult learners in the amount of instruction, exposure to English, and mother tongue, there is a ‘high degree of agreement’ as to the relative difficulty of the set of grammatical morphemes” (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974, p. 240). However, since this revolutionary study, further research has shown that there is some influence from the first language on L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1997; Ellis, 2006). While the L2 morpheme acquisition may have been found to be similar in the study by Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974), it is practical to assume that the first language may exert some influence on the order of L2 morpheme acquisition.

In a subsequent study, Larsen-Freeman (1975) found a noteworthy correlation between the standard morpheme difficulty orders of adult learners across various L1 groups (Arabic, Japanese, Persian and Spanish) through the use of a cross-sectional study of adults exercising multiple tasks. A noteworthy criticism of this innovative study, as central to most morpheme studies, is their focus on the accuracy of morpheme use as a measure of L2 morpheme acquisition. While established in the text on studies of morpheme acquisition, utilizing the correlation method would indicate that a minor difference in accuracy between the uses of two morphemes would result in the same ranking as a more significant difference. Employing a logarithmic scale where each distance of accuracy of morpheme use is increased by a factor of the base of the logarithm rather than a linear scale based on the difference between the morphemes would be more constructive.

Finally, Rosansky (1976) found similar correlations with the orders of L2 morpheme acquisition by utilizing both cross-sectional and longitudinal methodology in a study of Spanish-speaking adult learners of English. An apparent criticism of this analysis is that although this subsequent study further confirmed the existence of a universal order of acquisition in adult L2 learners, as well as the other

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referenced studies, it heavily relied on the accuracy of morpheme order of Spanish learners of English.

It was later established that the order of morpheme acquisition was shown to be relatively similar for both natural and instructed L2 learners regardless of L1 background and whether the data was collected by verbal or written form (Krashen, 1977). To address the befo-e mentioned criticisms, Krashen (1977), based on his analysis of the existing literature at that time, clustered rudimentary single rank morphemes with similar accuracy scores into what he proposed as the "natural order of morpheme acquisition". As shown in Figure 1, Krashen (1977) stated that within the natural order of morpheme acquisition the Present Progressive [-ing], Copula [be], and Plural [-s, -es] are acquired before the Auxiliary [be] and Articles [a, an, the], then on to the Irregular Past Tense, and followed by the Regular Past Tense [-ed], 3rd Person Singular [-s], and Possessives [-s', -'s].

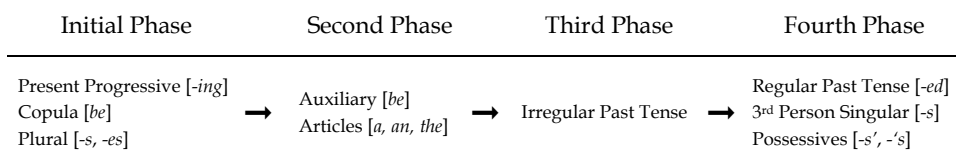


Figure 1. Krashen's (1977) proposed phases of the natural order of morpheme acquisition.

Although Krashen's view of the natural order has currently come under scrutiny, the acknowledgment of a universal or a fixed natural order of morpheme acquisition has been widely accepted among researchers of diverse theoretical perspectives and is continually presented as a necessary conclusion in many Second Language Acquisition texts.

Take note that the original terms from these principal studies, Copula and Present Progressive, have been used in Table 1 for the purpose of internal consistency and continuity. A copula (also called a complement verb, or a linking verb, or the more common term of "the verb to be") is comprised of the verb **be** (*is, am, are, was, were*) [e.g., *I am Paul, My name is Susan, She is a teacher*] and verbs of appearance or sense [e.g., *She feels hungry, That looks lovely, He fell sick*] that simply link the subject with the complement (what is being said about the subject). An easily identifiable attribute of the copula is that the verb typically allows the reversal of subject and complement without affecting the semantic relations within the clause [e.g., *My sister is*

Pam. - Pam is my sister. or John is my name. - My name is John.] The term Copula will continue to be used in this study.

Take note as well that modern grammar and ELT books, as well as most English teachers, generally prefer to use the term continuous instead of progressive as in Present Continuous Tense. The terms Present Progressive and Present Continuous are therefore interchangeable in this study.

METHOD

In this study, the qualitative method was adopted to facilitate the main objectives of this study. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the sequence of L2 morpheme presentation in English Language Teaching course books utilized with young adult learners in Thailand?
- 2) Does the sequence of morpheme presentations correspond with the recognized natural order of morpheme acquisition?

The following twelve beginner and elementary level ESL and EFL learners course books utilized for this analysis are shown in Table 2. A noteworthy aspect of this analysis is that the same course books have been employed as the primary teaching material for over a decade by the general education department of a public sector vocational education institution governed by the Vocational Education Commission (VEC) of the Ministry of Education Thailand.

Additionally, for greater generalizability and to lessen bias, the selected ESL/EFL course books were published by four elite publishers in the field of English Language Teaching material namely Cambridge University Press, Heinle Cengage ELT, Macmillan ELT, and Oxford University Press.

Initially, in order to improve content validity, commonly recognized descriptions along with standard examples of the distinctive types of morphemes listed in Table, 1 were outlined. This study has adopted the definition of morphemes as “a minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function” of a language with relatively the same recognized meaning in different verbal, nounal, and

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adjectival forms (see Yule, 2013). These forms may consist of, but are not limited to, affix elements in English such as -s, -er, -ed, -ing, and pre-, and the units of grammatical function used to indicate verb tense (-ed) or noun plural (-s) (p.67). Any infrequently used or uncommon terms such as Copula and Present Progressive were clearly defined, and the more common terms were applied in this analysis. Moreover, to further enrich reliability, two additional expert English lecturers reviewed and accepted the descriptions and examples, in addition, verified the order of presentation of morphemes in the English course books used for this analysis.

The principal source of data collection in the previously mentioned English course books is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. English Course Books Used for Analysis

	Course book	Level	Author(s)	Publisher
1	Breakthrough 1	Beginner	Miles Craven	Macmillan ELT
2	English KnowHow 1	Beginner	Angela Blackwell; Therese Naber	Oxford University Press
3	face2face 1	Elementary	Chris Redston; Gillie Cunningham	Cambridge University Press
4	Four Corners 1	Beginner	Jack C. Richards; David Bohlke	Cambridge University Press
5	Get Real 1	Beginner	Angela Buckingham; Miles Craven	Macmillan ELT
6	Interchange Intro	Beginner	Jack C. Richards	Cambridge University Press
7	Join In 1	Beginner	Jack C. Richards; Kerry O'Sullivan	Oxford University Press
8	New English File	Elementary	Clive Oxenden; Christina Latham-Koenig; Paul Seligsone	Oxford University Press
9	New Headway Beginner	Beginner	John and Liz Soars	Oxford University Press
10	Stand Out 1	Beginner	Rob Jenkins; Staci Johnson	Heinle Cengage ELT
11	Touchstone 1	Elementary	Michael McCarthy; Jeanne McCarten; Helen Sandiford	Cambridge University Press
12	Ventures 1	Elementary	Gretchen Bitterlin; Dennis Johnson; Donna Price; Sylvia Ramirez; K. Lynn Savage	Cambridge University Press

In order to explore the sequence of presentation of L2 morphemes in the twelve English Language Teaching course books utilized in this study, each page in every English course book was

scrutinized according to the approved outlined list of morphemes. The order of morpheme presentation was determined based on where the morpheme was introduced within the course books. To be considered for the purpose of this analysis, a morpheme must be explicitly presented within the English course book (Ellis, 1997). The presentation must entail a task with a relatively direct link to the grammar points demonstrated by the rule of, use in, and linguistic properties of the target language in a manner that requires the learner to perform an operation with the purpose of arriving at an unambiguous understanding of the morpheme usage (Ellis, 1997).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section will explore findings related to the foundational literature pertaining to this analysis particularly Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974), Krashen (1977), Larsen-Freeman (1975), and Rosansky (1976).

Natural Order of L2 Morphemes Acquisition

Early studies of natural order morpheme acquisition supported the hypothesis that L2 learners of English acquire the target language through the formation of habits and pattern recognition (Ellis, 1997; Scheffler, 2008) in a fixed or natural order rather than acquiring the target language through developmental periods (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Krashen, 1977; Larsen-Freeman, 1975; Rosansky, 1976). Introducing the viewpoints that English as an L2 is taught contradictorily to how an L2 was traditionally or ordinarily acquired by adult learners was monumental. As a result, the findings of these pioneering studies formulated an innovative view within the world of EFL/EFL that L2 morpheme acquisition reflects natural sequences of second language development that still exists to this day (Ellis, 2006; Scheffler, 2008).

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Table 3. Sequence of L2 Morpheme Presentation in English Language Teaching Course Books

Course book	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Breakthrough 1	Copula	3 rd Person Singular	Auxiliary	Plurals	Present Continuous	Simple Past	-	-
2 English KnowHow 1	Copula	Possessives	3 rd Person Singular	Present Continuous	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	Auxiliary	-
3 face2face 1	Copula	Plurals	Possessives	Simple Past	Article	Present Continuous	-	-
4 Four Corners 1	Copula	Article	Possessives	Present Continuous	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	-	-
5 Get Real 1	Copula	3 rd Person Singular	Auxiliary	Present Continuous	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	-	-
6 Interchange Intro	Copula	Plurals	Possessives	Present Continuous	3 rd Person Singular	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	-
7 Join In 1	Copula	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	-	-	-	-	-
8 New English File	Copula	Article	Plurals	Possessives	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	Present Continuous	Auxiliary
9 New Headway Beginner	Copula	Possessives	Plurals	3 rd Person Singular	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	Auxiliary	Present Continuous
10 Stand Out 1	Copula	3 rd Person Singular	Present Continuous	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	Auxiliary	-	-
11 Touchstone 1	Copula	3 rd Person Singular	Article	Plurals	Possessives	Present Continuous	Auxiliary	Simple Past Regular
12 Ventures 1	Copula	Plurals	Present Continuous	3 rd Person Singular	Auxiliary	Simple Past Regular	Simple Past Irregular	-

To adequately address the research questions, the inquiry examined the sequence of L2 morpheme presentation within the ELT course books utilized with young adult learners by the general education department of a public sector vocational education institution in Thailand, and whether or not the sequence of morpheme presentations correspond with the recognized natural order of morpheme acquisition presented in the literature.

Sequence of Grammatical Morphemes Presentation

Second language learners, regardless of their diverse L1 backgrounds and unique exposure to the target language, follow a similar universal order of L2 morpheme acquisition (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Khan, 2014; Krashen, 1977; Larsen-Freeman, 1975; Rosansky, 1976).

Initial Phase of Morpheme Presentation

Krashen (1977) concurred with Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974), Larsen-Freeman (1975), and Rosansky (1976) that the Present Progressive [-ing], Copula [be], and Plural [-s, -es] are presented in the initial phase of the natural order of morpheme acquisition. All twelve ELT course books presented the Copula (*the verb to be*) in the earlier sections of the course books, but this is where the agreement with the surveyed literature came to an end. Since the Copula is viewed as the most fundamental English morpheme it is generally initially presented within ELT material (Khan, 2014; Yule, 2013). The Present Progressive (Present Continuous) was predominately presented in the course books published by Cambridge University Press between the third and fifth positions following morphemes found in the second and third positions of Krashen's (1977) proposed phases of the natural order of morpheme acquisition. It was also noted that the course books published by Oxford University Press either did not explicitly present the Present Progressive or presented the morpheme in the last or near to last positions. The Plurals were

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predominately presented in the course books between the second and fourth positions, which are comparable to the natural order.

Second Phase of Morpheme Presentation

Krashen (1977) concurred that the Auxiliary [*be*] and Articles [*a, an, the*] are presented in the second phase of the natural order of morpheme acquisition. The Auxiliary was presented near the end, mostly the sixth to the eighth position, well out of natural order sequence in half of the scrutinized course books, and with four of the remaining course books not even explicitly presenting Auxiliary. The Articles fared slightly better being presented in the second or third position in a few books mainly published by Cambridge University Press.

Third Phase of Morpheme Presentation

Krashen (1977) concurred that the Irregular Past Tense is presented in the third phase of the natural order of morpheme acquisition. In Table 3, the Simple Past is a grouping of the Simple Past Regular and Simple Past Irregular where both morphemes were presented in the same section of the course book. Although the Simple Past Irregular was presented typically between the fifth to seventh positions in nine of the ELT course books, the position was close together with the Simple Past Regular, which appears in the fourth phase of the natural order.

Fourth Phase of Morpheme Presentation

Krashen (1977) concurred that the Regular Past Tense [*-ed*], 3rd Person Singular [*-s*], and Possessives [*-s* ' , - 's] are presented in the fourth phase of the natural order of morpheme acquisition. As with the Simple Past Irregular, the Simple Past Regular was presented in similar positions, between the fourth to sixth positions in the same nine ELT course books. It was noted that in *Interchange Intro*, *Touchstone, 1* and *Ventures 1*, published by Cambridge University Press, the Simple Past Regular was presented in the latter sections of

the course books. The 3rd Person Singular was presented, following the Copula, between the second and fifth positions in eight of the course books. Likewise, the Possessives were presented in the earlier positions of the course books between the second and fourth positions. Although both the 3rd Person Singular and the Possessives appear in the Fourth Phase of the natural order of morpheme acquisition, the publishers decided to include this morpheme out of natural order sequence.

In general, therefore, it seems that the findings of this study indicated that the widely accepted viewpoint of natural order morpheme acquisition, first concluded by Krashen (1977), was not substantially reflected within most of the analyzed texts. Grammar rules in real-life or authentic situations (Terrell, 1977) should be presented along with opportunities to use the morphological forms in likewise context that emphasizes the focused meaning (Cook, 2008). In order to achieve this objective of communicative competence among adult L2 learners in Thailand, grammar teaching should offer an additional implicit aspect (Chumkamon, 2017; Hymes, 1972; Richards, 2001; Sridhanyarat, 2013). Primary explicit grammar teaching, which emphasizes morphological forms (Smith, 2017; Terrell, 1977), might help adult L2 learners in Thailand improve their performance in examinations (Chumkamon, 2017; Clark, 2014; Kasuya, 1999), but independently, it is not sufficient to provide adult learners the desired communicative competence (Christison, 1979; Cook, 2008; Swain, 1985) in the target language. Unarguably, knowledge of grammar does contribute to identifying meaning of a language; therefore, grammar should be taught in a natural, meaningful context (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Bruton, 1997; Kasuya, 1999; Khan, 2014; Krashen, 1977; Larsen-Freeman, 1975; Rosansky, 1976; Sridhanyarat, 2013; Terrell, 1977; Thornbury, 2015).

Although recent studies have found that an unnatural sequence of morpheme presentation in EFL course books may hamper communicative competence (see Hymes, 1972) in English as a Second or Foreign Language learners (Christison, 1979), further study

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is required to establish if morpheme presentation can be unambiguously identified as a substantial contributing factor for the overall low English proficiency of adult L2 learners in Thailand (Chumkamon, 2017; Khan, 2014; Sridhanyarat, 2013).

It is likewise the recommendation of this author that greater involvement of the leaders of secondary and tertiary education in Thailand is needed to establish genuine international teacher training and holistically focused assessment instruction relevant to the needs of today's "global learner". Additionally, the education leaders, as mentioned earlier must propose and endorse honest education reform and adapt educational principles in Thailand that shift the focus of education of Thai learners from merely "passing English exams" towards sincerely educating successful highly proficient English users.

Of the many criticisms in the area of the natural order of morpheme acquisition, generalizing the findings of this study to other languages in addition to English may be impractical. It may be therefore necessary to limit the usefulness of this study to English as a foreign or second language. It is also fitting to mention at this time that although the principal literature applied for this study are the pioneering studies by the innovators of second language acquisition, Bailey, Madden & Krashen (1974), Krashen (1977), Larsen-Freeman (1975), and Rosansky (1976), further concentrated exploration has not been considered since this crucial turning point in our understanding of L2 morpheme acquisition.

CONCLUSION

This analysis revealed that the morpheme presentation sequence within the selected ELT course books was not analogous with the conclusions in the supporting literature. However, it was concluded by the researcher, and concurred upon by the reviewers, that Ventures 1, published by Cambridge University Press, most closely coincided with the natural order of morpheme acquisition mentioned in the literature.

It is at this point where we must ask ourselves as educators if there has not been any substantial research into L2 morpheme acquisition in over forty years, then could we presume that this area is not essential for natural second language acquisition, but if not, then why are English language teachers so adamantly focused on spending an inordinate amount of time on clustered rudimentary single rank morphemes as shown in Figure 1.

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