



Why do older children learn second languages faster than younger children?



Wei Li, Heesu Yun, Joshua K. Hartshorne

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Boston College

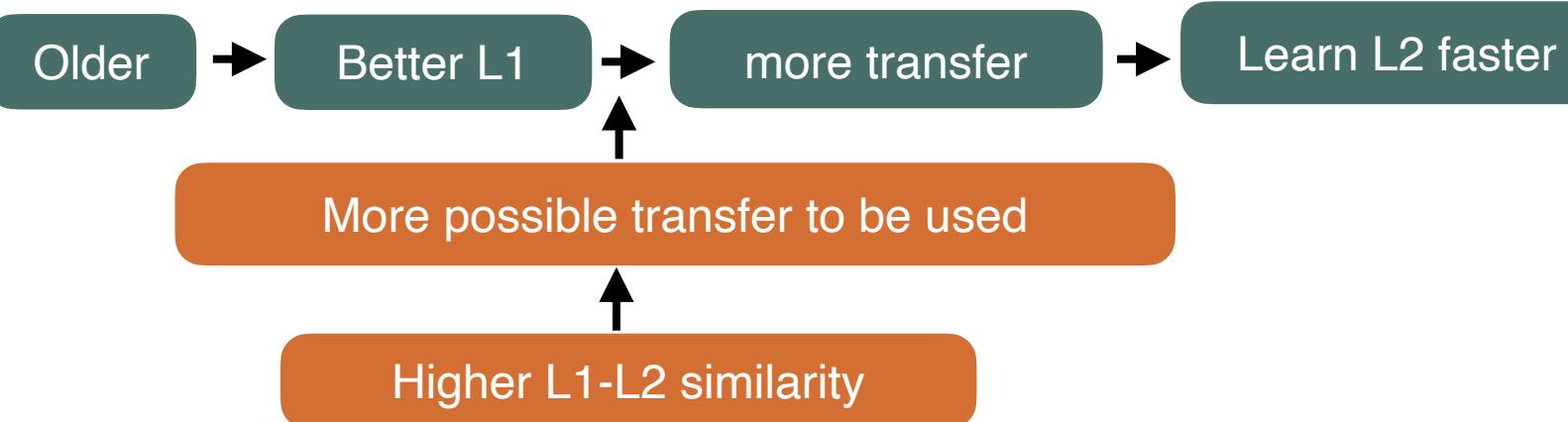
Introduction

Younger children don't learn language as fast as older children/adults

- Initial Dutch immersive learning speeds up with age (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978)
- In the context of instruction, no solid evidence for younger learner advantage, neither short-term nor long-term (Huang, 2016)

Why does second language learning speed up with age?

- Transfer from L1:** phonological transfer, morphological transfer, syntactic transfer, vocabulary



1. Older children learn faster than younger children.
2. The age effect is strengthened by L1-L2 similarity.

Learning Rate Analysis

- Must have age and at least two observations
- obs = 8,368; n = 3,255; sch= 43; lan = 45
- learning rate ~ age * score * phylogenetic similarity (PS) + (1lschool)

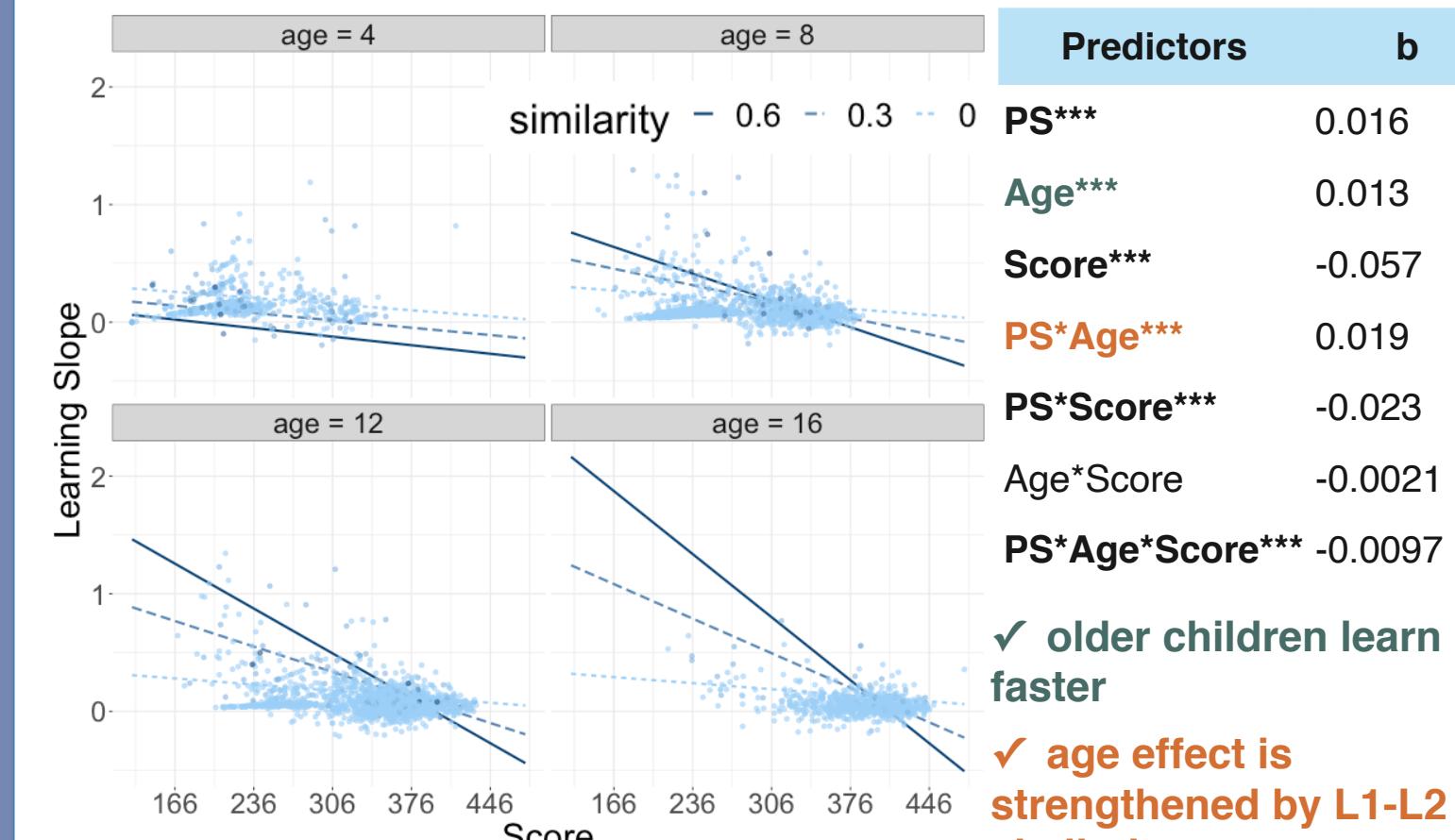


Figure 3: The Effect of Approximation Scores on Learning Rate by Age

Learning Growth Analysis

- Must have Age of Acquisition of English (AoA) and at least 1 observation
- obs = 5,301; n = 2,012; sch= 35; lan = 33
- score ~ Eng Exposure (EE) * AoA * phylogenetic similarity (PS) + (1lschool)

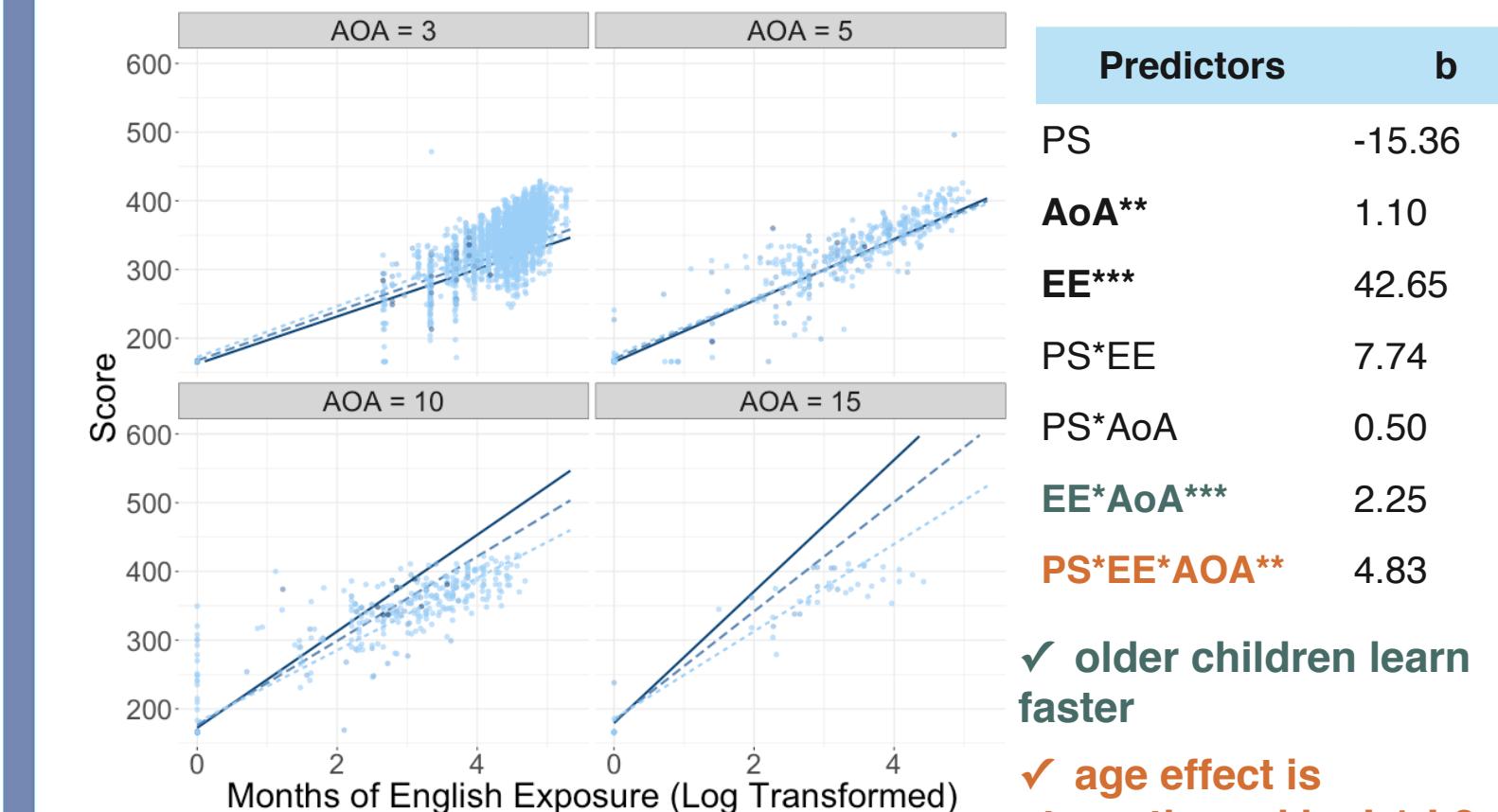


Figure 4: The Effect of Months of English Exposure on Scores by Age of Acquisition

Methods

Data Collection

- Collected secondary data of ELLs' English standardized test (WIDA test) scores and demographic information
- 53 international schools in 35 countries. (obs = 9542, age = 10.92 ± 3.0)
- Participants who were sequential bilinguals Linguistic.

Linguistic Similarity Measures

- Similarity measured as phylogenetic distance between English and the L1 (Littell et al., 2017).

nld: Dutch
deu: German
eng: English
ces: Czech
rus: Russian
spa: Spanish
fra: French
ita: Italian
heb: Hebrew
arb: Arabic
kor: Korean
zho: Chinese
jpn: Japanese
ind: Indonesian
fin: Finnish
hun: Hungarian

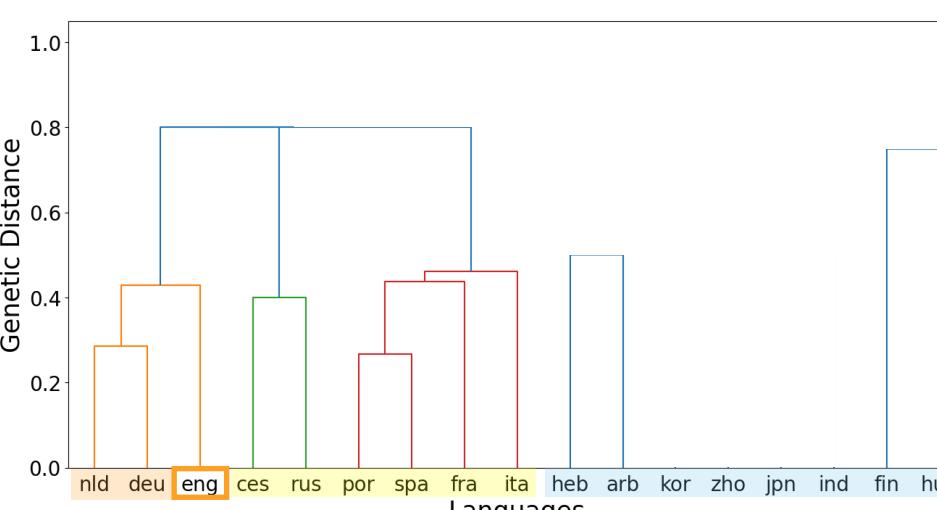


Figure 1: Glottolog hypothesized tree

