Boudledidge: A Contribution to Language Game Typology

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• Phonologists claim that language games are governed by grammatical principles


If language game processes correspond to natural language ones, can any natural language phonological process be used in a language game?
• The answer seems to be NO –

• Apparent restriction to segment deletion, insertion, reordering, substitution, and (rarely) stress/tone change.

• Boudledidge is a counterexample.

• Developed by Unity and Decca Mitford as children in mid-1920s.

• 50 forms attested in biographical materials.  
• **Decca’s description:** (Pryce-Jones 1977)
  We were starting it at about the age of 7, and went on perfecting it until about 10. The language had to go with the facial expression, which was one of great sorrow, and the noise was pressed out of the side of the mouth.

• **A nephew’s description:** (Guinness & Guinness 1984)
  It had to be uttered while making a miserable, frowning and rather costive-looking grimace with the mouth pulled sharply down to one side. Hopeless yearning was the keynote, together of course with deadly seriousness. The language was English with the *vowels distorted*, the *consonants softened* and *extra syllables* inserted.
**Segment Insertion**

- Insert [d] after stressed vowels.
- Applies to monosyllables with sonorant codas, and polysyllabic forms (2 voiced velarity exceptions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Orthography</th>
<th>Boudledidge Orthography</th>
<th>~IPA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Robin</td>
<td>rudbin</td>
<td>ˈrʌdbɪn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) still</td>
<td>dzdiddle</td>
<td>ˈdʒzdɪdl̩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) dear</td>
<td>deedr</td>
<td>ˈdiːdr̪</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) appeal</td>
<td>abbidle</td>
<td>ˈæbɪdl̩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) smoking</td>
<td>zdmudkung</td>
<td>ˈzdmʌdʌkʌŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) pal</td>
<td>boudle</td>
<td>ˈbaʊdl̩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) old</td>
<td>oudle(d)</td>
<td>ˈoʊdl̩(d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Tommy</td>
<td>Tuddemy</td>
<td>ˈtʌdəmɪj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) time</td>
<td>deedem</td>
<td>ˈdiːdəm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) from</td>
<td>vrudub</td>
<td>ˈvɹʌdʌb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) comm(unist)</td>
<td>cuddum</td>
<td>ˈkʌdʌm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Ann</td>
<td>Idden</td>
<td>ɪˈdɪn̪</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- No insertion before coda [t/d/dz].

| 13) enclosed         | engludzed               | ˈɛŋglʌdʌzd    |
| 14) commit           | gommid                  | ˈɡʌmɪd    |
o Insertion of [dl] before intervocalic [l], [d], (tapped) [r]
o Onset-filling with [d]/excrsence before [r].

15) pallish bouldedidge bawdldidʒ
16) jolly juddleddy jadldij
17) body buddldy badldij
18) Sarah Dzeedldra dzijdldrə
19) appear (on) abeedldr obijdldr

• **Consonant Voicing** (1 word-medial, 2 word-initial exceptions)

20) check jegg dʒeg
21) force vudz vʌdz
22) sex dzegs dzegz
23) each idge dʒ
24) stage dzdedge dzdedge
25) picture bigjure/bigjer bɪdʒʊɾ
26) chair jer dʒe(r)
27) it id id
28) objectionable objegzionable/ obdgjegjoinable
• Affrication

- Of [s/z/j] to [ts/dz/tʃ] (exception #22, #6 plural)

29) yes jaub Ḗ̄ab
30) your je Ḗ̄ajo
31) grows grads gradz

- Direction of affrication is opposite of expected.
- Only 5 fricative affricate processes in PBase.
- All involve stop excrescence after sonorants.
- Fricative affrication does occur in sound-symbolic processes of West North American languages (Nichols 1971).
- And also in early child language (Preisser et al. 1988).
• **Vowel Quality**

  o More idiosyncratic.
  o Tendency to laxing and diphthong simplification.

\[i, \epsilon, \Lambda, [uw] \rightarrow \text{no change} \quad ([e] > [a] \text{ exception in yes, } [i] > [\Lambda] \text{ in smoking})\]

\[[p] \rightarrow \Lambda \text{ (jolly, body, force, Robin, Tommy, cuddum)}\]
\[[aj] \rightarrow [ij] \text{ (I, I’m, my, time)}\]
\[[ej] \rightarrow [e] \text{ (stage)}\]

\[[ij] \rightarrow [i] \text{ (appeal, each)}\]
\[\rightarrow \text{no change (appear, dear, Tommy)}\]

\[[ae] \rightarrow [ij] \text{ (Sarah, barer)}\]
\[\rightarrow [i] \text{ (Ann)}\]
\[\rightarrow [aw] \text{ (pal(lish))}\]

\[[ou] \rightarrow \Lambda \text{ (smoking, enclosed)}\]
\[\rightarrow [a] \text{ (grows)}\]
\[\rightarrow [aw] \text{ (old)}\]
\[\rightarrow \text{no change (no)}\]
• Summary

  o **Segment Insertion**: typologically common in lg games
  o **Consonant Voicing**: typologically common in general
  o **Fricative Affrication**: typologically uncommon
    S but attested in sound symbolism/diminutivization and child language

    Language games and diminutivization both require unfaithfulness

    This differs from ‘normal’ language, where it only happens when forced

    So their similar behavior here is not surprising

  o **Vowel Quality**: inconsistent, but seems to minimize articulatory effort
• **Conclusion**

• Bouldedidge departs from previously described language games with its use of featural alternations as well as segmental operations.

• Yet it conforms to claims in the language game literature in that its alternations are grammatically governed, and also present in natural language phonology

Bouldedidge extends rather than contradicts phonological accounts of language games.
References

McCarthy, John and Alan Prince. 1986. Prosodic morphology. Ms, University of Massachusetts-Amherst and Brandeis University.