



The Emergent Writing Forms of a Bilingual

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the writing product of one 7-year-old Malaysian bilingual who speaks and writes in Mandarin and English. The aim of this paper is to understand the writing development of a bilingual child. Data were sourced from the child's free writing compositions which had been documented into a note book. A linguistic framework was then used to analyse data by giving focus to the writing format, spelling and strategies used to accomplish the writing. Analysis shows that writing development moves from being novice-like to being more refined/matured. The ability to spell words in English was clearly inadequate but the child was able to overcome this through creative means. Evidence is traced to the narrations seen in the writing and how activities were described. The findings of this study suggest that the bilingual child has his own strategies in writing and that his cultural background can influence the way he writes.

Key terms: bilingual, code switching, spelling, strategies

Introduction

Writing is a form of communication which many of us perform so as to accomplish certain needs. Writing skills are required in schools, colleges, universities, laboratories, research units and in many other institutions. In fact, writing is often associated with adults who write for a number of purposes. Among children, writing is seldom a hobby because most children do not enjoy writing. Writing has been described as one of the most difficult skills to master and probably because of that, most children need to acquire writing skills through formal setting. Hence, schools play important roles. Before children can master writing, they need to learn about language. All children are exposed to the various sounds of language before they are able to understand what these sounds mean. Subsequently, they learn to associate certain sounds with certain meanings and eventually, they acquire some sense of understanding. As children develop, literacy and education become an important aspect of their growth. Literacy refers to the skills of reading and writing. Most children are only expected to know how to read and write after they have acquired the basic skill of speaking. Parents accompany young children in their growth and most children learn to imitate what their parents do including writing. In early childhood, young children attempt to imitate their parents in writing by making lines and patterns. These are then followed by drooling, sketching and drawing which will later develop into forms of writing.

Aim

This study looks at the writing pieces of a 7 year old Malaysian bilingual. Based on the written texts, this paper aims to highlight a bilingual child's writing development by showing how early writings were formatted and developed on a gradual basis. It also discusses the strategies used by the child writer in overcoming his inadequate vocabulary in English. Analysis of data will thus discuss the findings in terms of: a) the writing format and b) the spelling.

Background of study

Data were sourced from the writing texts composed by a 7 year old Malaysian bilingual who spoke and wrote in Mandarin and English simultaneously. Mandarin was used more predominantly in school while both English and Mandarin were used at home within the family. The child watched English television programmes and movies. For the purpose of this study, writing tasks were assigned by his mother in the home setting and the child was allowed to write in the language he preferred thus both Mandarin and English could be used. In the process of this study, the child had been writing for about four months on a weekly basis. Only the first few pieces and last few pieces of his writing compositions were selected for analysis. These were confined to those written in English only as most texts were in English. The texts comprise short excerpts which had been written into note books. No specific topic was dictated to the child and no linguistic help was provided when he was unable to spell certain words.

Methodology

For the purpose of analysing data, a linguistic framework which focuses on English writing skills is applied. The framework looks at how early writing is developed in terms of opening, body and closings and also how words were spelt. The

construction of words is traced from the writer's spelling and they were then compared to English words generally found in English dictionaries. For the purpose of looking at cultural influence, analysis relies on the Chinese background of the researcher who is of that descent.

Some irregular aspects of the English language

Since the writing pieces elicited from the subject were in English, this section will discuss some irregularities of the English language. Although English is an international language it is a language that carries grammar in various forms and tenses. The pronunciation of English words is also another challenge as they are often inconsistent with the spellings. Many learners of English have to grapple with knowing when to apply the correct tenses and how to pronounce words in their speaking and writing contexts. Non-native learners, in particular, tend to find English challenging as the language is compounded by the inclusion of linguistic features seldom found in other local languages like Malay or Mandarin. English contains direct/indirect verbs, transitive/intransitive verbs, active/passive voices, independent/subordinate clauses, phrases, complex/compound sentences and several more grammatical rules which need to be adhered to. Further, texts written in English need to be composed in various genres depending on the audience and different texts require different language registers or terms. All these linguistic elements required of a writing task can be overpowering and confusing to learners. Additionally, the pronunciation of English words can also be a setback. Unlike Malay, for example, which pronounces words the way they are written, English words are less consistent. Words like [thigh], [stomach-ache], [head-ache], [washed], [couple], [cube], [queue] and [information] tend to be mispronounced and this can be a serious matter for learners of English. Besides pronunciation problems, learners of English are also challenged by the use of prefixes and suffixes. In English, negations or opposites can be denoted by several prefixes. For example the prefix [dis] in [dissatisfied] means 'not satisfied' but the prefix [un] in [uncommon] means 'not common' whereas the prefix [non] in [non-Chinese] means 'not Chinese'. Other 'negative aspects' of a word can be identified by suffixes such as [less] as seen in [careless], [penniless] and [homeless] all of which mean 'without care', 'without a penny' and 'without a home' respectively. Thus, one can see how irregular the English language is.

Definition of writing

Writing is a skill which one needs to acquire and practice consistently thus it is an art (Hedge, 1988). Huddleson (1988) defines writing as the creation of an original text which an individual produces based on his./her intellectual and linguistic resources. In other words, it is anything that has been produced from the writer's own mind as a result of what he/she had in mind at the moment of writing. Writing can be casual such as a shopping list, diary writing or a short message and it can also be formal such as a research report, minutes of a meeting or a formal letter of application. In their growing up process, young children need to learn how to write through stages. Literature suggests that there are various stages in learning how to write.

Stages of writing

At stage 1 young children develop mock writing where they make scribbles or wavy lines to resemble words in writing. At stage 2 young children attempt to 'draw' symbols which resemble letters, thus this stage is referred to as mock letters. At stage 3 young children attempt to develop conventional letters and at stage 4 they invent writings. By stage 5 they develop letters and string them together as approximate spellings and at stage 6 their writings would consist of conventional spellings (Barclay, 1991; Clay, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 1996).

Development of Literacy

Writing is a skill which most children acquire from schools and young children learn to write by first creating lines and patterns. Barclay (1991), Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) and McGee and Richgels (1996) claim that children are actually writing when they are doodling these patterns from a very young age. Bloom (2001:182), however, insists that "young children may produce drawings but they are not skilled artists". In other words, they need to develop this skill on a gradual basis.

Writing cannot occur in a vacuum. It can only happen when children have learnt language which is acquired through natural settings over a period of time. Psychological studies indicate that children need to go through particular phases of development (Kail, 1998). By the time they are born, children are surrounded by language. They then develop their speaking skills based on what they have been exposed to and when children reach the ages of about three or four, there is rapid growth in their development of literacy (Crystal, 2001). Most children begin to show signs of literacy by acting as if they are reading their favorite books (Barclay, 1991; Sulzy, 1991). Sometimes, they may also choose to reenact their reading of stories by acting them out (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 1996). Eventually, they will progress from telling a story about each picture to weaving a story from picture to picture by using language that sounds

like reading or writing language (Sulzby, 1991). Children have also been observed to experiment with writing by forming scribbles, letter-like forms, and also through random strings of letters (Barclay, 1991; Clay, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 1996).

Studies show that children maintain their intentions to create meaning when using various forms of writing (Kail, 1998). As they develop, they may also imitate adults by pretending to read printed messages in a way that sounds as if they were using language that is typical of reading (Clay, 1975; McGee & Richgels, 1996; Sulzby, 1985). To support children's development in writing, literature has suggested that parents learn to interact with their children by reading aloud for them as well as making and holding conversations with them as a way of supporting their literacy development (McGee & Richgels, 1996). Studies on second language acquisition have also mentioned that one way to encourage or ensure that second language learners become proficient in their target language is to make sure that they are well equipped in their first language. A strong basis in a first language helps to propel children's school achievements in the second language (Cummins, 1979). Talking about non-native children learning English, Cummins (1979) argues that these children will be more ready to learn to read and write in English once they have become proficient in their own language orally. He further states that children who are learning English as a second language are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they have become familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language.

Children's writing genre

Gillen (2003:12) mentions that "...children seek out ways to make use of symbolic systems as tools while engaged in the processes of improving their understanding". She also adds that "young children move freely between expressing themselves through spoken language, mark-making, making models, manipulating objects in role play and physical movement" (Gillen 2003:13). In analyzing some of the children's writing pieces in her book, "The Language of Children", Gillen (2003) mentions that children's writings are generated from their ability to produce meanings which have been drawn from a broad range of semiotic resources made available to them by society. In looking at one example of a child, Brian's writing, Gillen (2003) did not disclaim that the child's cultural background may have an influence in how he creates writing.

Bilingual Children's writing

Bilingual children are different from monolingual children in that they have access to two linguistic repertoires. Due to that additional language, they also tend to have distinctive features when they write. Kato-Otani (1988), Ruan (2003) and Francis (2005), for instance, mention that bilingual children switch languages when they write, often in accordance with the cognitive demands of their tasks as well as the contextual demands such as participants and topics. This aspect of a bilingual child's writing was confirmed by Kato-Otani (1998) who found that the child writer transferred her language skills from one language to the other. .

Kato-Otani (1998) also found that as the child develops in age, the length of the writing also increases. For instance, she found that the number of words in the writing of a bilingual Japanese child increases with her age and time. She also mentions that the writings developed to become better as the child moves to a higher grade. In her examination of her subject's Japanese and English writings, Kato-Otani (ibid.) also found that grammar was affected. There were, however, no distinctive differences in the child's writing of both languages as it was found that the child writer committed similar mistakes. It also appears that the child writer would use certain strategies such as substitution in her spelling. As the child progresses in her writing, it was apparent that the child also made use of references and reasons in her writings in both languages, suggesting that the transference strategy was being applied.

Analysis of data

A writer needs to go through phases of practices before he/she becomes better at writing. Thus a novice writer is one who is just beginning to learn the skill (MacMillan English Dictionary, 2002) of writing. The child writer of this study is synonymous to a novice because he began writing with no knowledge of a specific format in writing. However, like Kato-Otani's (1998) subject, the child writer did show improvement but in this study it was confined to development in the writing format and not length of words. The following excerpts highlight the child's novice writing skills. Analysis is done excerpt by excerpt and two areas of writing were given focus: a) writing format and b) spelling. Data were confined to only 7 pieces of excerpts extracted. All the data presented for analysis adhere to the way they appear in the subject's note book. The column on the left indicates the number of lines shown in the actual writing.

Excerpt 1:

L1	<i>Long chi siong</i> (name of friend) is <i>Apolengge</i> .
L2	and I Do not like <i>longchisiong</i>

L3	I Love my <i>femely</i>
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Format of writing:

Excerpt 1 is a typical piece that shows amateurishness because it did not resemble a story. It was more a reflection of the writer's feeling about a friend. This was documented in the process of writing. The excerpt shows that the writer was able to produce words but the format he adopted was novice-like. This is evidenced by the way he labelled his friend's name in full which also began with a capital letter and was neatly separated into three syllables, a characteristic of Chinese names. This excerpt indicates that the child had some concept of beginning a word with capital letters, was aware at the moment of writing, that Chinese names are of three syllables and that a proper name like [*Apolengge*] should start with a capital letter even though it was written at the end of the line in L1. This occurrence implies that the writer had some concept about the conventions of writing words in English letters. However in L2 [*and I Do not like longchisiong*] the writer appeared to be slightly confused with the use of capital letters as [*and*] did not begin with a capital letter but [*Do*] did. The same occurred in L3 for [*I Love my femely*].

The writer's amateurishness also emerged when he combined his friend's name as one in L2 instead of three syllables as was earlier written in L1. The inconsistency of writing names as well as using capital letters suggests that the young writer was still experimenting and learning about the conventions of writing in English. Further, this excerpt suggests that the young writer was still inexperienced with social norms and rules of addressing a friend which should not be in the complete form as he had written in L1 and L2 unless it was for an official matter. The presence of these occurrences suggests that the writer was a novice writer at this stage. It is also clear that the excerpt is very short, 15 words in total.

Spelling

From the excerpt, it appears that the writer missed the friendship which he attempted to compensate by claiming that he loved the family which was emphasised through [*I Love my femely*] in L3, an odd connection at this point in writing. Further, the word [*femely*] was spelt wrongly. It is not surprising at this point as the writer was only 7 years old. From the word, [*femely*] it is clear that the child had created his own spelling for a word he was familiar with and this spelling was derived from the phonology, that is, the way the word sounded to him.

From the excerpt it can also be established that the child writer was able to express his dislike for a friend by using a metaphor [*Apolengge*]. Such a grammatical structure was probably stumbled upon by chance as it is unlikely that the child had reached this phase of language acquisition. Experience also shows that children tend to express their feelings by labeling their friends. From this excerpt, it seems that the writer's emotion had been clearly expressed through the use of a negative connotation, [*apolengge*] which could have been influenced by a Tamil word.

It also shows that the child writer had put his friend as the focal point of his life at the point in writing and this is evidenced by the name which appears first in L1 of his writing.

Excerpt 2:

L1	Long time ago I go
L2	To an <i>arowplan</i> to
L3	Go to china.

Format of writing

Excerpt 2 begins with a particular format of writing a story. In this excerpt, it appears that the writer was able to use an expression like [*long time ago*] to indicate a narration that goes back in time. Depicting a very short narrative, the writer attempted to share a certain event by developing a time sequence from [*long time ago*] in L1 which was then followed by the object in L2 and this was summed up by a complement in L3. When this excerpt is compared to excerpt 1, it can be seen that the child writer had developed slightly in his writing skill as he was now able to use chronology to share a past event. Such a phenomenon suggests that his cognitive ability to relate and recall a past event had increased. The total number of words used in this excerpt was 12 words.

Spelling

The command of language shown in excerpt 2 suggests that the young writer had acquired the ability to use verbs such as [*go*] and he was also able to use the infinitive [*to*] with the verb [*go*]. In addition, he also had the ability to use articles like [*an*] before [*arowplan*] (aeroplane) and this indicates that the child writer had acquired some linguistic competence, in this

respect, the vocabulary and also the concept of flying to a distant place [China]. It is evident that the writer had developed cognitively.

From the excerpt above, it appears that the idea which the 7 year old writer attempted to present can be understood through his writing despite it being ungrammatical. Comprehension is possible because his command of the language (English) had increased to a level where he was able to express his thoughts cohesively despite being restrained by his grammatical competence. The ungrammatical structures illustrate the writer talking about a past event in the present tense form. Such an ungrammatical structure is attributed to his age and inexperience as a writer. Hence, instead of using a more appropriate verb like [I went] the writer used, [I go...].

Excerpt 2 also provides evidence which suggests that the writer depended on his cognitive abilities to help him create the spelling for the words he needed. In this excerpt, [aeroplane] was written as [*arowplan*] and the proper noun 'China' was written as a common noun, [*china*]. This occurrence indicates that the writer had some competence in narrating but lacked the competence in spelling and the use of mechanics like capital letters.

Excerpt 3

L1	I love you you Love me
L2	We are happy <i>femely wet</i>
L3	A <i>Gred</i> big hag and a
L4	<i>Cise</i> from me to you
L5	<i>Woch</i> you Say you Love
L6	me too?

Format of writing

Excerpt 3 seems longer in comparison. Compared to excerpts 1 and 2 above, this excerpt indicates that the writer was writing a rhyme from a song (The Purple Dinosaur-Barney). Hence even if there was a format, it was derived from the way the writer sang the rhyme. Excerpt 3 is an obvious replica of the 'Barney' song. From his ability to reproduce the songs, it is assumed that the child writer had watched the show frequently enough for him to memorise the song lyrics ('I love you, you love me, we are happy family, with a great big hug and a kiss from me to you, won't you say you love me too?') Analysis of this excerpt indicates that the writer began all the words from L1 to L5 with capital letters. This indicates that the writer had acquired some concept of writing conventions but the ability to use capital letters was still inconsistent at this stage as L6 was not in capital. This can be attributed to his inexperience and age. The total number of words in this excerpt was 29 words.

Spelling

From this excerpt, it is fair to say that the young writer was creative. First, he appeared to be productive as he was able to craft words out of his memory. The data illustrated in excerpt 3 indicates that the child writer was able to recall the lyrics of an English rhyme with near perfection, if we go by the sounds. However, when he needed to put these sounds into words, he had to rely on his own resourcefulness, memory. Consequently, he was able to produce the much needed words albeit with errors. Errors are not permanent mistakes. They are interim creations of words which are signs of the child's developmental process in language acquisition. These errors can be traced to words in excerpt 3 above and they are:

- [*wet*] for 'with'
- [*gred*] for 'great'
- [*cise*] for 'kiss'
- [*woch*] for 'won't'.

These examples imply that the writer was applying his cognitive skills in recalling from memory and trying to put a sound he had heard and was familiar with into words. Except for the word [*cise*] which may have been spelt due to the child assuming that [c] is the [k] sound as in [cat], the writer appeared to have a sense of knowing which letters those sounds begin with. As a result, [w], [g] and [w] were all appropriately and correctly used as the first letters. The middle sound of these words were also intact although less accurate. The ending sounds however, differed slightly. All these occurrences suggest that the child may not have been exposed to a more precise way of articulating these words yet as songs are often sung and not clearly enunciated.

Excerpt 4

	22-12-07
L1	Saturday I <i>sole</i> my toy
L2	And my mama <i>but</i> the table
L3	out <i>sait</i> to <i>sale</i> the toy.
L4	my brother Put sale <i>sain</i> out door
L5	and my <i>neihber</i> buy card and cars
L6	to Play and a malay kid <i>com</i> and buy.

Format in writing

Excerpt 4 shows a more developed writing for instance, the young writer showed the ability to use a date and days of the week specifically to indicate the event he was writing about. This is seen as growth and development in acquiring writing skills. The writer also showed his awareness of time sequence through [*Saturday*] while also clearly indicating it as a past event which he attempted to illustrate as a past tense word of 'sold'. However, due to his inexperience as a writer, the word emerged as [*sole*]. From the format seen in excerpt 4, it appears as if the writing was done in a poetic form but it is possible that this was due to the constraints set by his note book where space may have been limited. Additionally, attempts to begin the story by starting with the main event can be seen in L1 which were further elaborated with details of the event. This was illustrated in L2, L3 and L4. From L5 and L6, it can be seen that the writer was highlighting the happenings of the day.

From this excerpt it seems clear that the child could write but his story did not have a proper stop at the relevant places. This lack of focus on mechanics suggests inexperience. It is also possible that the story was written based on the child's own thoughts as they flowed through his mind. Consequently, he was unable to apply any form of writing conventions which could have enabled him to organize his thoughts. Nonetheless, for some reason, the writing showed that the writer was able to use two full stops as pauses to his thoughts and this is manifested in L3 and L6. It is possible that the writer's thoughts were projected through the conjunction [and] as shown in L2, L5 and L6. It appears that the conjunction [and] allowed him to carry on without the need to refer to other mechanics like commas. Clearly, the writer used the conjunction [and] 5 times as a way of showing continuity. This excerpt is composed of a total of 40 words.

Spelling

It is pleasant to know that a child of 7 could narrate stories coherently enough through the conjunction [and]. Although it is clear that excerpt 4 contains many spelling errors which were attributed to the child's age and lack of writing experience, it appears that the writer was also creative. He appeared to be composing this narrative like a poem whilst also relying on his memory to recall the sounds of these words so that they could be made more tangible. This phenomenon suggests that the writer was resourceful, creative and original. The writer's creations were inevitably error-prone and they are listed below.

- [*sole*] was written for 'sold'
- [*but*] was written for 'put'
- [*out sait*] was written for 'outside'
- [*sain*] was written for 'sign'
- [*neihber*] was written for 'neighbour'
- [*com*] was written for 'come'

Clearly the spelling errors were very close versions of the correct words most of which also appeared began with the correct first letters except for [*but*] in L2. Such an occurrence implies that the writer may be experiencing some confusion with letters where he was unable to distinguish between [p] and [b] at this point of development.

Excerpt 5

L1	Today I watch tv and
L2	Watch <i>antil</i> my mother <i>scole</i>
L3	Me and bit me <i>antill</i> my
L4	<i>Mothe</i> ask me to <i>rite</i>
L5	My <i>dairy</i> and I draw.

Format in writing

Excerpt 5 appears to resemble the format of a diary and this is characterized by the way it began with [*Today*] in L1. It appears that the writer had developed a higher skill in writing as he was able to document his daily happenings in words.

The writer could have acquired the formula from somewhere as the word [*Today*] in L1 began with a capital letter and this was further enhanced with the activity he performed, [*I watch tv and*]. This diary seems to be crafted in a poem-like structure with all the first words from L1 to L5 being written in capital letters. This phenomenon suggests that the child writer is well versed with the format of beginning a word in a sentence.

The excerpt also indicates that the child's cognitive ability had increased as he was able to continue his story by using the conjunction [and] in L1 to show the activity of watching TV. In L2 he used [*antil*] to highlight the continuous process and the same intention was repeated in L3. A total of 26 words were used in this excerpt.

Spelling

The excerpt also indicates that the young writer was creative in the way he documented the words which he had heard and probably also know in his writing piece. For instance, he spelt [until] as [*antil*] and then as [*antill*] as shown in L1, L2 and L3. These three instances highlight the child's spelling inconsistency and it also indicates that the child writer was developing his skills as a writer of English. The two variations of [until] is not a permanent mistake for the writer was only 7 years old. Such inconsistencies may be due to his mood swings as well as age and inexperience. Excerpt 4 also illustrates other spelling errors which are listed below.

- [*antil*] and [*antill*] was written for [until]
- [*scole*] was written for [scold]
- [*mothe*] was written for [mother]
- [*rite*] was written for [write]
- [*dairy*] was written for [diary]

Excerpt 6

L1	Today I sleep * <i>Antil</i> I am wake
L2	I mean I go to <i>Amas</i> plas to Play
L3	With <i>matyou</i> and he com to my <i>Plas</i> to
L4	Play <i>Chinese</i>

Format of writing

Similar to excerpt 5 above, this excerpt also deals with a past event which likewise also began with [*Today*] as shown in L1. The narration was embedded with news that was meant to be shared with an audience. In excerpt 6, time sequence was highlighted with the adverb [*antil*] in L1. It also seems that the young writer was thinking aloud as he was writing and this is shown in L2 where he introduced an element of 'oral' language [I mean] in L2 to clarify what he was writing. The writer then continued with his narration as shown in L2 until he reached L4 where he talked about going to [*Ama's plas to play*] and [*with matyou and he com to my Plas to Play Chinese*]. This excerpt also seems to be written like a poem although it is also possible that the space in his note book led to this practice.

Data from excerpt 6 sheds some light about tenses. Excerpt 6 shows that the child writer used the word, [*wake*] in L1 as if he had just awakened from his sleep. Then as if referring to his conscious condition, the child writer also corrected himself verbally and this was documented simultaneously through a spoken expression, [*I mean*] in L2. Such an occurrence suggests that a 'think aloud' process was going on during the writing process. Further, from the expression, [*Amas plas*] in L2, it could be said that this construction was meant to show 'possession' but due to his inexperience, the writer omitted the apostrophe ['] in [*Amas*]. Further, it can be seen that in using the term of reference [*Amas*] in L2, the writer was also projecting his Chinese identity since the term [*Amas*] is a kinship term used by Hokkien speakers in addressing their grandmothers. In addition, the combined word of [*Amas*] instead of two words [Ah Ma] suggests that the child was still unable to divide the address form. This phenomenon suggests that the writer was not well able to transfer the knowledge onto English yet. Another aspect of the writer's ethnic background could be traced to the way the writer used the word, [*Chinese*] in L4 to indicate what he meant as [chess], an indoor game quite prevalent among Chinese households. Excerpt 6 shows that a total of 27 words were used.

Spelling

There seems to be a number of spelling errors in excerpt 6 and such a phenomenon indicates an inexperienced language user of English who is yet competent and resourceful. It seems clear that the child could write but was unable to spell words correctly as many of the words were spelt based on how they sounded to him. As mentioned earlier, this phase of creating words which appear to be wrong is considered as a developmental stage for the writer. Consequently, all the spelling errors

identified have been attributed to his young age and inexperience as a writer. Several creative spellings created by the writer are listed below.

- [Antil] was written for [until]
- [wake] was written for [awake]
- [Amas] was written for [grandmother] or [Ah Ma]
- [plas] was written for [place]
- [matyou] was written for [Matthew]
- [Chinese] was written for [chess]

One of the prominent aspects of the spelling errors identified in this excerpt is the writer's originality at producing the name [matyou] in substitution for [Matthew]. Such a creation is a very good replica of the original name of [Matthew] but how did the child writer concoct this? It is hypothesised that he had a good ear for sounds which led to his sensitivity in creating the word for his audience.

Excerpt 7

	23-12-07
L1	Today I go to <i>da gog</i> place
L2	To eat play and Play and Play
L3	<i>antil</i> the end we say <i>bey bey</i> and the end

Format of writing

This excerpt indicates that the writer used a date prior to writing. In addition, his writing was developed through the norm of using [today] to create a format that would demonstrate what the writer had done for the day, like a diary. Showing an awareness of writing convention at this point which was indicated by the date and the use of [today] as a beginning, it can be said that the child writer had developed both cognitively and as a writer of English. This development is evidenced in the way he chronicled the events in excerpt 7 which highlighted several aspects of the writing: the time he went, where he went, what he did there, and also a conclusion which was completed by the formulaic phrase [the end], a phrase most orally-told stories would engage in as a strategy of bringing a story to a close. This clue indicates that the child writer was wording his thoughts through the think aloud protocol, an occurrence which certain writers engage in while writing.

Further analysis of this excerpt indicates that the child's linguistic competence was still at the early stages of development where using conjunctions like [and] to display a continuous activity was still prevalent as is shown in L2 and L3. In addition, to display a sense of repeated activity, the writer also used repetitions like [... play and Play and Play] in L2. Such an occurrence suggests that the writer was still learning about the format of writing since he was unable to use other linguistic devices to show the continuity of the activity of play. A total of 24 words were used in this excerpt.

Spelling

Of the data shown in excerpt 7, it appears that the child's amateurish ways of writing also manifested itself through the spelling of words. It is an expected phenomenon as the writer was still young and developing his skill. Young and inexperienced writers tend to be less skillful in many aspects (Flower and Hayes, 1980) and one sure way to gain that experience is through making errors. In this particular study, it seems quite obvious that the writer was prone to some degree of confusion which could be due to an oversight or carelessness. In excerpt 7, it is interesting to note that the young writer was not in the mood to share much through this written piece even though he allowed himself to adhere to the simple format of writing by using the capital letter, [t] in [Today] which was then followed by a brief description of some relevant but general activities. Finally, the writer brought the writing to an end by using [*bey-bey and the end*] in L3. This excerpt provides evidence to suggest that the writer's ethnic background was shown through the use of the term [*da gog*] in L1 which means 'paternal aunt' in Mandarin. The writer's spelling error of [*da gog*] indicates that he was trying to apply *Han Yu Pin Yin* where the Mandarin word for 'big' is written as [*da*]. However, the word [*gog*] which should have been [*gu*] was probably formed because he was not sure how the Mandarin version would sound like. In addition, it is not clear why the writer resorted to a wrong spelling for the expression, [bye-bye] which was written as [*bey-bey*] in L3. It could be due to a lazy attitude or it could simply be written out of boredom. The spelling errors identified are listed below:

- [*da gog*] was written for [*da ku*] which means paternal aunt
- [*antil*] was written for [until]
- [*bey bey*] was written for [bye-bye]

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted two aspects of a 7-year-old bilingual's writing pieces by focusing on the writing format and the spelling identified in the pieces. Although only 7 excerpts were used for analysis, they were filled with many clues which not only show evidence of maturation or development taking place but also that the writer, although young and prone to making errors in writing, was one who was very resourceful as he was able to rely on his memory to reproduce words as they sounded (in memory) to him. Due to that resourcefulness he was hence able to create words which do not exist in English dictionaries. Nonetheless, the writer managed to maintain some of the first letters of the words correctly and this indicates that he had good and strong listening skills. The other more interesting aspect of the writing and its analysis suggest that the novice writer was incapacitated most times by inefficient spelling. This has been attributed to his age and the lack of writing experience and possibly reinforcement in writing practices. It is interesting to note that most of the spelling errors were produced as a result of transferring what was heard into words based on recalls or memory. The consequence of using such a strategy to spell was that the words may sound 'right' but they were not correct in spelling.

Another aspect highlighted by this study is that most of the mis-spelt words had some common features such as using the first letters of the words correctly. In some instances, however, either the initial letter like [w] of [write] was left out or the last letter like [e] for [come] or [r] for [mother] may be omitted. Such occurrences were attributed to the child writer's oversight which could have been influenced by boredom or tiredness as well as his inexperience. Another feature that can be established from the writing pieces of this 7 year old child writer is that his cultural or ethnic background had some influence over the words he used and spelt in his writing.

Additionally, the cultural background of the writer also emerged in the words he used; for instance in the address form he used for his grandmother, [Ama] and in his attempt to say 'Chinese chess', the writer introduced the word [Chinese] instead. Further, his attempt to write English in *Han Yu Pin Yin* also emerged in the word [da gog] instead of 'da-gu'. It appears that the child writer was creative but it was not clear what had influenced him to create the name [matyou] instead of the original name of 'Matthew'. Overall, it can be said that the writing pieces analysed had shown that the writing skills of the child writer had developed to become better as he wrote more. However, from time to time, confusion may also emerge particularly in spelling conventions. As a result there were some inconsistencies pertaining to the use of capital letters, full stops and commas. It also appears that the think aloud protocol was applied as the child was writing.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the child's cognition had developed and that his writing skill had shown improvement, the length of his writing, however, did not increase on a consistent level. In some writing pieces there were many words used, the highest being 40 words but in others written subsequently, they were shorter. Hence the number of words was not used as a criteria to evaluate the child's writing.

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