Writing Behaviors of a 5th Grade Bilingual Student

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Abstract

Significant shifts in demographics across the United States continue to impact educational demands and decisions. This article is an initial investigation of the behaviors and understandings of a bilingual student participating in an academic literacy community. In order to begin exploring my topic, I posed the question: "What traits are evident in a bilingual student's writing at home and at school?" The participants included a 5th grade male and his mother; both speak English as a second language and are of South Korean heritage. I approached my research qualitatively; using discourse analysis of written text and oral conversation and ethnographic research to generate possible answers to my question. My findings include (a) writing traits are positively influenced by text-based responses, voice, and choice; (b) writing is negatively impacted by vocabulary and conventions; (c) understanding of reading and writing is cultivated through heritage language and second language. I concluded that (a) ESL students may exhibit progress towards proficiency in writing when presented with opportunities to write in genres related to their primary discourse; (b) text-based responses may require less orchestration, benefiting English Language Learners; (c) a teacher's professional knowledge and instructional expertise concerning English Language Learners might benefit from conducting ethnographic research while working with such students.

Keywords: writing, ELL, ESL, bilingual, discourse, elementary

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Section 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

   Bilingual students face difficult academic obstacles when it comes to literacy and gaps in language are created during childhood that influence their ability to express themselves when writing. Varied understandings of the language of the dominant culture surface in the writing of English Language Learners (ELLs) as a result of a limited vocabulary. Such limitations impact the academic and social existence of every bilingual learner.

Significance of the Problem

   Due to the rising population of students who are bilingual in American public schools, a number of different researchers have investigated the literacy experiences of bilingual students. I will briefly discuss research conducted by the following authorities in the field. Bakhtin (1986) and Gee (1990) study discourse in order to better understand how people act in their social worlds. Sze, Chapman, and Shi (2009) compare the functions of children's English writing at home and at school in order to view the differences. Similarly, Peregoy and Boyle (2005) assess second language acquisition, the process, and factors in school to gain deeper perspective in the literacy development of bilingual students. In addition, Almaguer and Esquierdo (2013) offer a framework to support bilingual learners in formal academic settings. Castillo and Gámez (2013) examine parental involvement and the associated effects on bilingual student achievement. Likewise, Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) study genres at home and at

school in order to explore and discover any academic implications. Bissex (1980)

analyzes years of her son's writing artifacts to hypothesize the effects of assignments on

student writing. Kung (2013) compares the Heritage Language Maintenance (HLM) and

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) of immigrant children in North America. Lastly,

Tuan (2011), Christie (1993), and Martin (1993) offer ideas concerning structured and

explicit instruction for effective literacy instruction.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the factors influencing the

varying literacy abilities of one fifth-grade student who is bilingual and attends a

suburban public school. In order to explore such phenomenon, I plan to answer the

following research question:

. What traits are evident in a bilingual student's writing at home and at

school?

I have observed that students who are bilingual may display academic strengths

and advanced understandings. However, certain aspects of ELLs' skills in literacy fall

behind their native speaking peers. This project is an initial investigation of the behaviors

and understandings of a bilingual student participating in an academic literacy

community. I think that there are a number of significant reasons to explore such a topic.

All students seemingly face a variety of obstacles when developing their skills in the

English Language Arts. I conducted my research under the premise that students who are

bilingual have different experiences while learning to read and write due to the second

language acquisition process.

Section 2: Literature Review

Currently, little research in the language acquisition and language learning of elementary bilingual learners exists in comparison to research conducted on secondary and higher education bilingual learners according to Sze, Chapman, and Shi (2009). My research is important in that it adds to the wealth of knowledge concerning the acquisition of written language by elementary bilingual learners. The subsections are as follows: (a) Seminal Research; (b) Supporting Bilingual Learners In School; (c) Writing at Home and Parental Involvement; (d) Alternate Points of View.

Seminal Research

Bakhtin's (1986) seminal research concerning literature, linguistics, philosophy, and social theory suggests that children learn genres through processing the words of others into their own speech or writing through a social dialogue. He makes a distinction between "primary genres" and "secondary genres." Bakhtin defines primary genres as the social discourse an individual learns at home or within an individual's inner circle and secondary genres as the discourses that exist outside of the primary. He asserts that under circumstances unnatural to an individual's primary genre, secondary genres breach and/or update the former.

Gee (1990) created similar conclusions through his exploration of Discourse Analysis. He suggests that primary discourses are learned initially at home with family and secondary discourses are learned through apprenticeship in social groups and institutions. Gee defines an individual's discourse as an "identity kit" in that it "is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting" (pg. 143). He notes the major conflict between

mainstream discourses found in schools and the discourses outside the dominant culture.

Likewise, Gee proposes that if learners of a second language stall in a stage of

development considerably below full proficiency during the language acquisition process,

then such learners cannot exist in the dominant discourse at all and the rationale to attain

full fluency in the second language vanishes as a result.

Supporting Bilingual Learners in School

Sze, Chapman, and Shi (2009) studied the functions and genres of four second-

grade ESL (English as a Second Language) children's English writing at home and at

school from a sociocultural perspective. They conducted a qualitative study and analyzed

a total of 67 pieces of school writing and 54 pieces of home writing. The researchers

found that the children's writing in the school setting was limited by the writing

curriculum and instructional goals set out by the teachers and administrators. However,

the authors state how each child they studied incorporated and built their understandings

of the functions and genres of writing from both home experience and school learning.

They recommend that teachers embed home-based literacy experiences within classroom

instruction in order to utilize the strengths presented by the primary discourses of the

students.

Peregoy and Boyle (2005) provide a wealth of practical strategies for promoting

literacy and language development in English Language Learners (K-12). They explored

contemporary language acquisition theories related to instruction and offer methods for

motivating and involving ESL students in reading, writing, and learning. For example,

they suggest that ELLs who are actively involved in learning about themselves, their

classmates, and the world around them and have opportunities to pursue topics of their

own choosing, using oral and written English, will acquire the English language with greater success and understanding. Similarly, they recommend that teachers use process writing to support ELLs' writing in the classroom because it breaks the writing task into manageable phases.

Almaguer and Esquierdo (2013) present a framework for accomplishing both linguistic and content literacy instruction simultaneously. In order to support bilingual learners' language and academic development, their framework illustrates both the theory and practical applications that are needed for bilingual learners to achieve linguistic and cognitive success in and out of the classroom. They find that Ladson-Billings' (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and hands-on classroom environments in which bilingual learners are free to actively engage with each other and that reflect bilingual learners' culture leads to active learning of content and meaningful peer interactions.

Writing at Home and Parental Involvement

Castillo and Gámez (2013) studied parental involvement as a strategy to assist young learners in their efforts to learn a second language (L2). Their qualitative research examined three different cycles in order to observe, teach, and implement parental involvement teaching strategies. They find that training parents to learn an L2 and to tackle assignments not only facilitates children's L2 study but contributes to their literacy development as well. They also find that the quality of communication between children and parents, the organization of assignments, as well as the quality of written expression improves.

Using a qualitative research design, Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) analyzed the writing genres found at home and at school for two groups of young children from low

socioeconomic status backgrounds. They find that children learn about literacy at home and at school. As a result of their findings, they suggest that being aware of genres young children encounter in both environments offers opportunities to bridge the home and school literacies to enhance children's literacy development.

In her research, Bissex (1980) collected and analyzed years of her son's artifacts in literacy. She finds that real discourse for personal, cultural, and social development can hardly be represented within the classroom. In addition, Bissex suggests that writing assignments are typically constrained by instructional purposes and school policies.

Kung (2013) suggests that a lack of immigrants' English proficiency in North American schools exists. His research used both qualitative and quantitative designs of study. The author distributed questionnaires to quantitatively analyze the statistical significance. Kung also conducted two structured interviews with each participant and parent and collected field notes to qualitatively analyze. Kung's findings suggest that children's first language proficiency helps their second language acquisition. More specifically, that parental influence plays an indispensable role in children's language learning and maintenance. He asserts that successful HLM is closely related to parental attitudes and beliefs. In addition, Kung argues that parents' linguistic and cultural identities play an essential role in immigrant children's heritage language maintenance and cultural awareness.

Additional Views of Instruction

Tuan (2011) suggests that teachers, in an authoritativeness role, should introduce many well-written sample or mentor texts into the classroom and go through three phases of the teaching-learning cycle in order to implement the teaching of specific genres. Tuan

found that students' writing benefitted from having an "expert" in the classroom explaining and identifying key features of a genre and teaching how to model such features through writing in the teaching-learning cycle. Likewise, Christie (1993) and Martin (1993) each established that teachers should use the structural approach to genre learning by approximating the model or sample texts and its features.

Section 3: Context

Participants, Setting, and Positionality

The participants involved in my study are of the South Korean heritage. I researched one bilingual student in fifth grade and interviewed his mother, Julie. I intentionally selected the site and individual to learn about and understand my research topic. My observations and data collection occurred in the student participant's home environment, his suburban elementary school, and the local library. The student participant, Jack, reads above the 5th grade level, however, I did not investigate his reading skills or reasons for his above-grade-level abilities in reading comprehension. Julie is college professor and published researcher from South Korea living in The United States. I work as a long-term substitute teacher in the school and am in a strong position to connect with the participants and teachers as well as conduct proper and meaningful methods required to lead such an in-depth and accurate study. In addition, I am a student studying Childhood Literacy at the graduate level at The College at Brockport, State University of New York (SUNY). I grew up, attended school, and currently live and work within the region I conducted the research.

My stance towards language and literacy is sociolinguistic. I believe that students become literate through observing, imitating, and using language socially. My epistemological stance is that the way we come to understand ourselves in a literate world develops through a combination of complex interweaving social experiences as opposed to a set of scientific steps with specific outcomes.

As a white male of the dominant culture, I was raised in a suburban town rich in cultural diversity. I am aware of and sensitive to the privileges and opportunities given to me during my upbringing and formal education. Each member of my immediate family attended college in New York State. I developed a pluralistic understanding of culture as a result of growing up in a culturally diverse community. My collegiate studies have also influenced my respect for multicultural education.

Methods of Data Collection

My research is a qualitative study of the writing habits and behaviors of an eleven-year-old bilingual student and the influences behind such behaviors. Through an application of discourse analysis of written text and oral conversation, I analyzed one purposefully selected participant. I generated themes of writing behaviors that reflect the sociocultural theories driving my research.

In order to begin to explore the traits evident in a bilingual student's writing at home and at school, I conducted two separate formal interviews with one student participant and one parent participant.. I created the questions in Figures A1 and A2, and adapted the questions presented in Figure A3 from J.P. Spradley's work in *The Ethnographic Interview* in order to gain deeper insights into his perspectives concerning writing, literacy, and culture.

Figure A1

Student Participant Questionnaire

- ➢ What do you enjoy about writing?
- ➢ What is a genre? Also, what are some examples of genres you write in?
- ➢ What are text features? Do you use any? If so, what kinds?
- ➢ What do writers need to know when writing a paper in school?
- ➢ What kinds of things do you write at home? Why?
- ➢ Compare your writing process at school and at home.
- ➢ Why do you write at home? Why do you write at school?
- ➢ What factors make writing easy for you?
- ➢ Do you ever write or read with your parents? How often or how long ago?
- ➢ Do you prefer to choose what to write about or to have writing prompts or assignments? Why?
- ➢ Why is it important to write about what you read?
- ➢ Do you prefer to write narratives or informational pieces? Why?
- ➢ Describe one of your best writing pieces. What makes you feel that it is your best work?
- ➢ What makes writing difficult for you?
- ➢ Can you write more in your first language or in English?

Figure A2

Parent Participant Questionnaire

- ➢ With which types of writing do you feel most confident helping your child?
- ➢ How often is English spoken in your household?
- ➢ Describe the areas of strength your child has in writing.
- ➢ Describe the areas of need your child has in writing.
- ➢ Does your child write at home during any periods of free time for non-school related assignments? If so, please describe the types of pieces and purposes for your child's writing at home.
- ➢ How long have you been able to speak and write in English fluently?
- ➢ Do you ever write with your child? If so, what do you write and why?
- ➢ Do you think it is important for your child to feel confident when writing in English? If so, why?
- ➢ How could school writing assignments incorporate your child's cultural background to a greater degree?

Figure A3

Ethnographic Research Questions (Parent Participant Only)

- ➢ Could you describe a typical day at work?
- ➢ Could you describe a typical day with your family?
- ➢ Could you give me an example of some typical meals your family eats?
- ➢ Could you tell me how you made friends with people in the United States?
- ➢ Could you tell me about what holidays your family celebrates?
- ➢ Could you tell me about what your family does on weekends/free time?

       I analyzed the answers from the interviews of the participant and his parent as a way to enhance my exploration of my research question. Collecting and analyzing writing samples from home and archival samples from school enabled me to investigate my question as well. The archival writing samples from school include two creative writing pieces, and four response-based assessments. The writing samples from home include two creative writing pieces, three common-core reading responses, a research paper, and five short writing exercises focused on the 6+1 Traits of Writing.

Procedures

       Basing my conceptual framework on the research of seminal researchers Bakhtin (1986) and Gee (1990), I addressed this problem by using discourse analysis of written text, as described by Goldman and Wiley (2011), and ethnographic research methods, as described by Purcell-Gates (2011), to explore the different ways bilingual students participate in their literacy communities. Specifically, I interviewed one student participant and his mother. Additionally, I studied running records (Clay 2002) to confirm his above-grade-level abilities in reading comprehension. I also collected and analyzed written responses to the questionnaires and writing samples from home and archival samples from school.

       The duration of my research began in May 2014 and ended during the final weeks of June. First, I conducted one ethnographic interview with the parent participant that lasted ten minutes. Then, I distributed the questionnaires to the participant and the parent participant to complete in an estimated time of 15-20 minutes. They chose to make verbal responses with myself as the scribe. In addition, I made repeated visits to his tutoring sessions hosted at the local town library. To further my involvement in the participants'

community, I made several home visits to discuss and work as an editor for research

articles written by the parent participant. Next, I gathered written artifacts from home and

archival samples from school. I also performed two classroom observations during

English Language Arts (ELA) time and each observation lasted one hour. Lastly, I coded

and analyzed the data in order to generate themes. I color coded writing traits by

identifying word choice/vocabulary, conventions, voice, and evidence of genre

preference across all samples.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

I established credibility by triangulating my data and bringing together research

from observations in the home and school setting, interviewing the student participant

and parent participant, as well as reviewing questionnaires, home writing samples and

archival writing samples from school. In order to establish credibility, I reviewed the

research procedures with the participant. Specifically, how the participant would be asked

to explain his knowledge and attitude towards writing by (a) answering interview

questions; (b) sharing writing samples from home and archival samples from school; (c)

allowing me to observe him during classroom ELA blocks.

In order to ensure a diversity of interpretations were explored, I supported my

research with related research and recognized and interpreted opposing research.

Similarly, I collected and analyzed data from three different sources, including the ideas

and views of the student participant and parent participant. Terminology within the study

was drawn from participant language concepts as I used discourse analysis to analyze the

student participant's writing samples as well as the discourses drawn from the interviews

and questionnaires.

I followed the standards for quality outlined for ethnographic research as noted by Purcell-Gates (2011). I observed and interacted with the student in home and school settings, which allowed me to provide accurate descriptions. My research process included conducting interviews, analyzing writing samples from home and archival samples from school, and developing findings and conclusions as a result of the data collected.

Limitations

I identified potential limitations to my research. First of all, I researched one ESL student. Perhaps more reliable findings and patterns could be identified if more students' writing were researched. Second, the findings of my research reflect the literacy program of one district and influences from one ESL family. Lastly, as Bissex (1980) states, real discourse cannot be fully represented through school writing samples. Although I collected artifacts from beyond Jack's school, a larger portion of the data I analyzed came from school writing samples.

Section 4: Analysis

I created three subsections of my analysis to highlight my findings. First, I found that Jack's writing traits and confidence are positively influenced by text-based responses, voice, and choice. Secondly, I discovered that Jack's writing is negatively impacted by his limited knowledge of vocabulary and conventions. Lastly, I learned how Jack's understanding of reading and writing is cultivated through heritage language and second language.

Finding 1 – Writing Traits and Confidence are Positively Influenced by Text-Based Responses, Voice, and Choice

Text-Based

Text-based writing responses cause Jack to incorporate a wider variety of words and allow him to write with clearer conventions and structure. Jack's writing piece "Me and My Superpower", represented in Figure B1, reflects his preference for short and direct text-based responses. The unassisted assignment prompted Jack to write a fictional tale about a new superpower he just acquired. Each paragraph ranged from one to three sentences and addressed each bullet point. His fictional narrative looks as though a series of short responses were cut, glued, and photocopied under the prompt! Instead of expanding upon each prompt with dialogue or detailed scenarios, Jack elected to create concise statements in response to each prompt due to his preference for such writing. Jack's succinct formatting positively influenced his ability to address and answer the prompts in an organized manner.
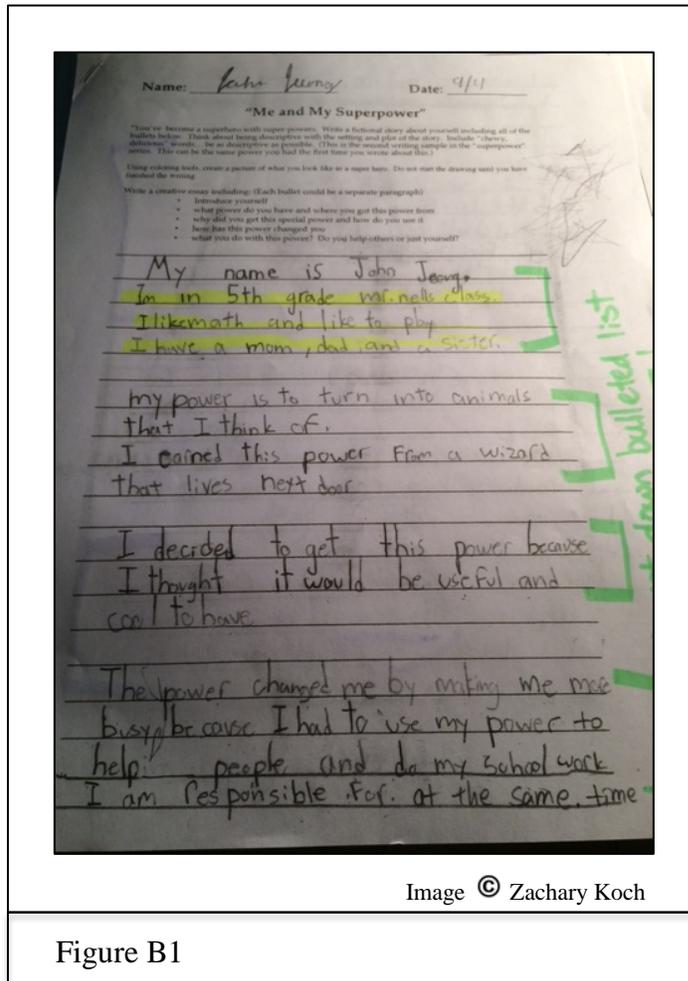
Image © Zachary Koch

Figure B1

In other samples, Jack expanded his writing because he used words directly from the text and question in his answer. I examined two *Storyworks* close-reading question packets completed by Jack. Along with Jack's verbal testimony, his writing within the *Storyworks* pieces show how he gains confidence and control over his writing in English when he can call upon words from the texts and questions presented to him. He skillfully restates questions and inserts content-specific Tier 3 words into his responses. Tier 3 words are low-frequency words within specific domains. Jack does not include Tier 3 words in his writing regularly. When he has opportunities to expand his understanding of text through writing, his preference for short text-based responses offers insight into why

he feels most confident in such situations. Jack provides more details and shows his understanding with greater clarity when he can combine his above-grade-level reading comprehension with the Tier 3 words from texts. He learns the unfamiliar words as he interacts with the text, which expands his vocabulary and contributes to his word choice.

Similarly, Jack wrote about his belief that zoos cause more harm to animals than good. After reading multiple perspectives about the treatment of animals in zoos, Jack formed an opinion and detailed a direct and accurate response explaining his thoughts. The assignment prompted Jack to write a research-based argument essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Jacks response again reflects his penchant for short responses based on text. His essay included the content and clearly addressed the question without forming body paragraphs and expanding each section. Jack wrote a half page response paragraph with an introduction and conclusion sentence. He structured his writing this way to get to the point and allow his thinking to at least address and answer the prompts. Perhaps if he attempted to go beyond the short-response framework, he may have confused or repeated himself since he does not have an expansive vocabulary to call upon. When he responds directly to questions, he expends his writing energy on tying together new words with his accurate understandings, leaving little room to expand and organize his thinking into a full essay.

In an interview, Jack made several clear statements that provided evidence of his preference for short text-based writing responses. First of all, he noted that his favorite genres to write in are science fiction and non-fiction. He was able to cite a number of text features like bold print, captions, glossaries, subheadings, italics, and titles, which also indicates his interest and knowledge of non-fiction text-based writing. Jack's ability to

successfully discuss features of non-fiction provides insight into the reasons his writing

benefits from answering questions that refer to text. The combination of Jack's above-

grade-level reading comprehension along with his use of the text he reads allows Jack to

extend his writing clearly and purposefully. Secondly, Jack believes that writers need to

know that facts and organization are more important than opinions when writing in

school. Such a belief supports his preference as well. Jack views the importance of

organization and facts as key writing traits because they are the traits he feels most

comfortable with.

Voice

    Writing experiences that allowed Jack to use voice in his writing positively

affected his work. I selected three artifacts to share as evidence of the influence of Jack's

voice on his writing.

    After Jack addressed each bullet in the prompt required in "Me and My

Superpower", his writing exploded with imagination and voice due to an opportunity for

interest-based creative writing! Jack expanded his writing because he had fewer

processes to orchestrate. Orchestration involves a writer's ability to fluently apply the

necessary skills and strategies required to write; definition of orchestration (M&R, 2008).

Although Jack's writing benefited from short structured responses, I also observed the

positive impact of incorporating "voice" into his writing as shown in Figure B2. He

included the word "stampeded" in his writing without having a text to refer to. Jack even

added a drawing to further explain his story. Opportunities to showcase writer's voice

positively influenced Jack's writing.

Image © Zachary Koch

Figure B2
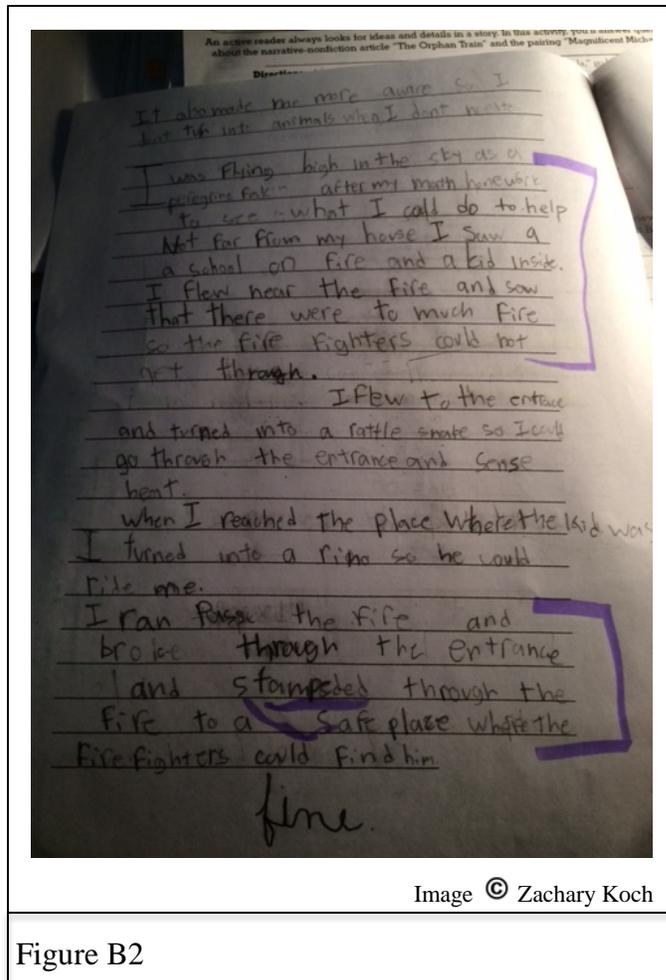
In a creative writing piece entitled, "Invention helps humans! Read all about it!" the opportunity for Jack to use voice added to his writing again. Jack demonstrated his passion for science and informational texts through a creative writing piece. Openly creative writing situations cause Jack to struggle to come up with words, as evidenced by his interview, but when the assignment brings his voice to the forefront, Jack makes gains! Jack was able to blend different elements of his strengths in writing, such as direct sequential responses, with humor and voice to create an exciting writing sample. Jack used words like "explodes" and "machine", and used transitional words like "first" and "next". Blending Jack's interests and strengths enabled his word choice to expand and

structure to take form. Opportunities for Jack to unleash his "voice" positively impacted his work.

During my interview, Jack answered that he writes at home for fun and writes at school for work and to get better at writing. After viewing more samples of his writing at home, the "fun" began! In a letter to a pencil from the eraser, Jack's voice jumped from his thoughts and on to the paper. Jack's humor and voice enabled him to use proper formatting and conventions for letter writing with ease while he still focused most of his writing on creative ideas. Jack's conventions and vocabulary improve as he writes with voice. When he writes with interest and as if he is speaking, each aspect of his writing benefits. I observed positive evidence for conventions, word choice, ideas, organization, sentence fluency, and most fittingly...VOICE!

Choice

Jacks confidence and writing fluency are positively influenced by choice. Jack prefers to choose what he gets to write about as opposed to responding to prompts or assignments. He also prefers to write informational pieces instead of narratives. Having a choice in topic enables Jack to recall a greater amount of vocabulary to use in his writing. Similarly, writing about reading allows him to take more words from the texts he encounters to include in his responses. Jack believes that one of his best writing pieces is a research paper he wrote about peregrine falcons.

The factors that make writing easiest for Jack include writing about topics of interest, writing about reading, and "anything that is not poetry." Writing poetry forces writers to call upon an endless number of synonyms and uncommon structures. Jack does not feel that writing poetry is his strong suit. Again, he enjoys writing that he can

incorporate words and vocabulary from the texts he reads into his responses. When he writes about topics of interest, he can more readily use content specific words he has acquired as a result of his greater level of interest.

In addition, his mother Julie thinks that if Jack had more choice in topics to write about, then school writing could incorporate Jack's cultural background to a greater degree, ultimately adding to his skills in writing. I believe Julie's response developed from her understanding of Jack's preference for either scientific or short-answer text-based writing responses. She knew of the specific factors that positively influence her son's writing.

Bakhtin (1986) defines primary genres as the social discourse an individual learns at home or within an individual's inner circle and secondary genres as the discourses that exist outside of the primary. He suggests that children learn genres through processing the words of others into their own speech or writing through a social dialogue. I found that Jack's primary discourse at home directly influenced his secondary discourse, or writing in English. The informational text-based writing experiences Jack developed at home influenced his preference for short-answer writing based of reading. Like Bakhtin asserts, Jack learned writing genres through processing and using words from the texts he reads in his own writing. Jack's text-based writing includes words directly in the text. Jack struggles to write in genres where he cannot use text to expand his writing. His writing is positively influenced when he can use "voice" and humor from his primary discourse and knowledge from areas of interest.

Finding 2 – Writing Negatively Impacted by Vocabulary and Conventions

Interview

The most telling statement Jack described during my interview surfaced when I asked him what factors made writing difficult for him. He listed the factors below:

. Takes a lot of thinking

. Handwriting

. Coming up with correct words

. Proper grammar

. Trying to be descriptive

Jack's responses speak directly to how his writing is negatively impacted by vocabulary and conventions. As an ESL student, Jack's thinking while writing requires a heightened amount of orchestration in order to record his ideas. Important traits of writing, such as conventions and word choice, place stressful demands on Jack because he continues to develop and expand his vocabulary. According to my interview, he wants to use rich descriptive language, but finds difficulty in coming up with the correct words. The lack of descriptive language in Jack's writing causes his writing to suffer when compared to rubrics and the six traits of writing. Jack's responses suffer because he simply does not have a well-developed English vocabulary to incorporate. Unfortunately, his limited vocabulary negatively impacts his conventions as well since less writing leads to issues with clear developed structures. I did not note any observable differences in Jack's writing when comparing timed writing pieces to un-timed examples. In fact, Jack acts as his own clock in that he wants to finish writing his thoughts as quickly as possible.

School Writing Samples

Jack's writing samples show the factors Jack mentioned in his interview. In his piece, "Me and My Superpower", Jack repeated a number of high-frequency words when describing people or details. One excerpt from "Me and My Superpower" reflects how Jack's limited language affects his conventions as evidenced below.

"Im in 5th grade Mr. bells class. I like math and like to play."

Similarly, a number of Jack's responses are barely legible in his *Storyworks* samples. Jack forgets to use capital letters properly, splits compound words in two, omits the use of commas, and places the word "very" in front of a number of areas he describes an object or character. He often uses "very" or "very good" in his writing because of his limited vocabulary. The artifacts I examined where Jack had choice and different purposes for writing still show a lack of vocabulary and conventions. More importantly, I found examples, including the *Storyworks* artifacts, reflecting similar findings in his preferred short-response formatting.

Home Writing Samples

Jack met with a tutor once a week during the time period of my data collection. Jack wrote a fictional interest piece using a mentor text to guide his writing. Although Jack's writing incorporated some helpful writing conventions, like structure (beginning, middle, end) and dialogue, his word choice and use of conventions overall required me to read his work multiple times in order to understand his thoughts. Even with a mentor text

to view side-by-side, Jack's focus remained on his ideas and he neglected to use descriptive language or paragraphs. Without a text specifically related to his writing, his vocabulary became limited. Jack's ability to orchestrate more of the important traits of writing decreases as the demand for him to think of a more descriptive vocabulary increases. As Jack attends more to his ideas and attempts to think of the correct words he searches for, the vocabulary and structure of his writing suffers, as evidenced by his fictional writing piece.

Jack's tutor noted Jack's needs for word choice and conventions in a research paper written about the history of LEGO's. In Jack's draft, the tutor marked the paper with "x's" in order to guide Jack to skip lines, indent, and create clear paragraphs. Again, the tutor's markings and Jack's participation support the understanding that Jack's conventions negatively impact his writing. In addition, Jack's writing samples from home show that Jack worked on a number of exercises targeting sentence fluency, word choice, and vocabulary. Again, Jack's writing indicates that he needs to expand his English vocabulary in order to decrease the negative influence a limited knowledge of words has on his writing.

When I asked Jack what made writing most difficult for him, he answered with a list of reasons without hesitation. He knew that writing required him to do "a lot of thinking" when coming up with correct words and descriptive words. One reason Jack does not meet grade-level standards in writing is because of the greater amount of orchestration it takes him to find the words he would like to use. Writing a well-crafted and meaningful response requires deep thinking. When Jack spends his brain capacity on

trying to think of words to use, he then has a lesser amount to spend on expanding his writing.

Finding 3 – Understanding of Reading and Writing is Cultivated through Heritage Language and Second Language

Jack's understanding of reading and writing is cultivated through exercises in his heritage language as well as his second language. Jack's writing experiences at home, other than schoolwork, focus on comprehension workbooks in his native Korean language. The preservation of his heritage language through reading and writing based on comprehension questions serves as a meaningful example for his preference as well. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Jack finds success and confidence when writing short text-based answers in both English and Korean.

Jack's mother Julie feels that she can best assist her child when he is writing about topics concerning research, history, science, or non-fiction. Her role and experience in research influence Jack's preference for text-based writing. She noted how one of Jack's strengths in writing is writing short answers for Math. Again, Jack can quickly explain specific ideas of his without much detail when describing factual mathematical reasoning. Julie believes that her son should develop his ability to write with greater expression and detail, even when writing in Korean. Again, Jack's preference for short, text-based responses leave little room for expression and detail when writing. His writing reflects a simplistic direct approach where getting to the point or expressing main ideas hold greater importance to him than expression and detail. Jack comprehends texts above his 5th grade level and becomes frustrated when he cant call upon what he understands in

his mind for writing responses, therefore he takes a more direct approach to writing to highlight his overall comprehension.

One of the most interesting discoveries of my interview was when Jack revealed that he could write more in English than in Korean. His family speaks Korean in their household. When comparing the amount of time he spends in school to the time spent at home, my positionality as a native speaker of English led me to automatically assume Jack would still prefer to write in Korean or at very least feel more confident in it. However, the majority of Jack's formal education was spent writing in his second language, thus supporting his preference for writing in English.

Gee (1990) explores Discourse Analysis and asserts that primary discourses are learned initially at home with family and secondary discourses are learned through apprenticeship in social groups and institutions. Jack's parents encouraged Jack to write expository text-based responses at home. His mother, a researcher, offers the most effective help when Jack writes in the genre of research. As Jack acquires more knowledge of English, the support from his primary discourse at home impacts the development, or apprenticeship, of his secondary discourse in school and writing in English. Jack's background on writing short-answer responses and personal interest in expository texts influenced his preference for short response writing. Jack's primary discourse, or native language, also stalls his secondary apprenticeship as evidenced by his writing samples reflecting a lack of descriptive language and structure.

Section 5: Conclusions & Implications

Summary

Jack's writing at home and at school reveal a variety of traits and present the field of ESL learning with meaningful implications for education. My first finding shows how Jack's writing is positively influenced by short text-based responses, voice, and choice. Using humor and creativity allowed Jack to focus less of his energy on intentionally thinking of a variety of descriptive words and more of his energy on turning on his writing faucet! As a result, he expanded sentences, called upon content-specific words geared towards his interests, and maintained a greater number of conventions. The artifacts I examined support my first finding across subjects and genres of writing. My second finding reveals how Jack's lack of vocabulary and conventions negatively impact his writing. Jack has difficulty thinking of descriptive language and struggles with structuring his writing due to his developing needs concerning orchestration. My third finding demonstrates how the influence and background of his heritage language and second language affects his development as a writer. Jack comes from a family of researchers and practices responding to reading comprehension short-response workbooks written in his native Korean language. Likewise, one of Jack's greatest strengths, while reading and writing in English, is responding to texts.

I describe my conclusions and implications in the next two subsections. I concluded that (a) ESL students may exhibit progress towards proficiency in writing when presented with opportunities to write in genres related to their primary discourse; (b) text-based responses may require less orchestration, benefiting English Language Learners; (c) a teacher's professional knowledge and instructional expertise concerning

English Language Learners might benefit from conducting ethnographic research while

working with such students. My implications include: (a) teachers need professional

development (PD) on how to use ESL students' backgrounds and primary discourses to

improve their writing in English; (b) Teachers need to provide ESL students with

frequent opportunities to engage, read, interact, discuss, and write about a variety of

appropriate texts; (c) administrators need to help their teachers understand the

educational advantages of conducting ethnographic research.

Conclusions

ESL students may exhibit progress towards proficiency in writing when presented

with opportunities to write in genres related to their primary discourse. Essentially, the

learner is enabled to build from his or her strengths and prior knowledge of language.

Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003) stress the importance of understanding the genres

students encounter at home to better facilitate bridging literacy development at home and

school. Similarly, Almaguer and Esquierdo (2013) explain how literacy instruction based

on content reflecting the culture of a bilingual student supports cognitive and academic

success in the classroom. Castillo and Gámez (2013) also note the significance of

parental involvement in improving the writing of bilingual students. They suggest that

training parents to learn an L2 facilitates quality academic growth in writing. In addition,

Kung (2013) asserts that parental influence plays a fundamental role in children's

language learning.

Text-based responses may require less orchestration, benefiting English Language

Learners. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) discuss the advantages of literacy scaffolds. They

argue that literacy scaffolds help students construct a written message. Students learning

English may use the vocabulary and structures from the texts they encounter to expand

upon and include in their own writing. Gee (1990) claims that an individual's secondary

discourse is learned through apprenticeship in social groups and institutions. ELLs can

use the words, structure, and language of L2 texts provided by their schools to continue

to progress through their secondary discourse apprenticeship.

Finally, a teacher's professional knowledge and instructional expertise concerning

English Language Learners might benefit from conducting ethnographic research while

working with such students. Purcell-Gates (2011) describes how entering and

participating in a bilingual student's community helps explain the student's success and

struggles in learning to read and write. Teachers can provide more effective instruction to

ESL students if they gain a deeper understanding of each individual's cultural

background. Bissex (1980) argues that writing assignments are constrained by

instructional purposes and school policies. If teachers investigate student knowledge

beyond classroom assessments and expectations by conducting ethnographic research,

they can avoid the limits of some instructional school-based purposes.

Implications

Learning to understand and use English proficiently as a second language presents

bilingual students with difficult academic and social obstacles to overcome. Teachers

need professional development on how to use ESL students' backgrounds and primary

discourses to improve their writing in English. If teachers are equipped to employ

research-based instruction concerning the use of ESL students' primary discourses,

teachers can better facilitate student progress towards becoming proficient writers.

Possible PD topics might include creating writing lessons/assignments that reflect primary discourses or reflecting primary discourses in the classroom.

Furthermore, teachers need to provide ESL students with frequent opportunities to engage, read, interact, discuss, and write about a variety of appropriate texts in order to create experiences demanding a smaller amount of orchestration. Appropriate text selection should stem from the teacher's knowledge of a student's interests and cultural background as a way to promote academic growth in writing. Rich texts across grade levels and genres linked to the common core can be found at https://www.engageny.org.

In schools with ESL programs, administrators need to help their teachers understand the educational advantages of conducting ethnographic research. My research enabled me to closely examine the unique factors that influence the strengths and weaknesses of a bilingual learner's writing, and understand the educational implications to inform possible instruction. District officials should provide training on how to conduct ethnographic research in the interest of supporting continual professional growth.

Suggestions for Future Research

Researchers and educators investigating the traits evident in a bilingual student's writing could benefit in the future by researching and collecting artifacts of a student's work for a longer period of time than the two months I conducted my research. Future researchers can also add to the body of knowledge of bilingual students' writing by exploring the methods for training teachers on how to use ethnographic research to help ESL students make gains in writing. Similarly, more research can examine the effectiveness of certain strategies that aim to incorporate ESL students' primary discourses in the classroom to benefit their English writing.

Overall Significance of the Study

        The information presented in my article offers a window to the knowledge, understanding, and behaviors of a bilingual student in the 5th grade. Through the implementation of the appropriate standards required to conduct a qualitative study, I was able to investigate and examine the different factors that influence the literacy development of a bilingual student. My findings are as listed: (a) writing traits are positively influenced by text-based responses, voice, and choice; (b) writing is negatively impacted by vocabulary and conventions; (c) understanding of reading and writing is cultivated through heritage language and second language. My research and findings provide stakeholders in the world of education with further evidence supporting the correlation between the primary and secondary discourses of a student and his or her development as a writer.

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