The Transition of Writing from Spanish to English in Young English Language Learners (ELLs)

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Focus of Presentation

1. Development of writing in ELLs
2. Strategies used by ELLs transitioning from Spanish to English writing
3. Strategies used by teachers for the transition of Spanish to English writing in ELLs
Research Questions

- What has research found about the writing development of bilingual students?

- What are some strategies used by ELLs when transitioning from Spanish to English writing?

- What are some strategies used by teachers of ELLs to help with the transition of writing from Spanish to English?
Currently Texas’ schools are serving a vast Hispanic population, therefore it is important to learn how these students begin to transfer their writing from their native language (Spanish) into the target language (English), (TEA, 2008).
Texas is currently home to 8.6 million Hispanics (US Census Bureau, 2008).

47.2% are students attending public schools.

15.5% of those students are enrolled in bilingual/ESL education (TEA, 2008).
  • Approximately 1,333,000 students
In 2008, 93% of fourth and seventh grade students in the state of Texas passed the writing TAKS.

3% Achievement gap still exists between Hispanic and White students.
  - 4th grade English writing TAKS
  - Hispanics improved by from 90% to 92% and
  - Whites improved from 94% to 95%

TEA, 2008
7th grade English writing TAKS did not show much if any improvement from the previous year.

- 93% passing rate of seventh graders in the Writing TAKS in 2007 and 2008.
- White students remained at 96% passing rate for 2007 and 2008.
- Hispanic students went down from 91% to 90%.
- Creating an achievement gap of 6%

TEA, 2008
The subject of writing has not received much attention (Cutler & Graham, 2008).

For example, in 2004, the National Commission on Writing stated that writing is the most neglected and shortchanged subject in classrooms for all students.

An area in writing that has also received very little attention: examining the transition of writing from Spanish to English (Gort, 2006).
Methods

- **Descriptors:**
  - writing development and young children, writing development and ELLs, writing development and bilingual students, writing instruction and bilingual children, writing development and ELL strategies, and emergent writing and bilingual children.

- **Search Parameter:**
  - studies conducted only in the United States, published in English, journals in the past five years with the exception of the journal articles from Cummins (1979, 1999), Rodriguez (2001) and Freeman and Freeman (2004), and published as peer-reviewed journals.
Four studies found

- McCarthy & Garcia, 2005; Rubin & Carlan, 2005; Serrano & Howard, 2007; and Shagoury, 2009

McCarthey and García (2005):
- This was a qualitative study involving ELLs from K–5th grade.
- The results consisted of ELLs attitude towards writing in English had to do with the parental educational levels, SES, plans for staying in the U.S., support for writing at home and cultural expectations.
Overall, more opportunities were needed for students to produce meaningful writing in their L1 and L2.

Teachers need to hold high expectations for ELLs and not water down material.
Second Study

- Rubin and Carlan (2005)
  - There are different stages of development.
  - Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979 and 1982)–monolingual Spanish children–Levels

- Children may be more advanced in one language than the other.
- “...becoming biliterate is not a linear process,” (p.735).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precommunicative stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds.</td>
<td>Levels 1 &amp; 2&lt;br&gt;Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds.</td>
<td>Generally the same as monolingual English and Spanish, except some children will write the same letters and symbols in both languages but read them differently in English and in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semiphonetic stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters are written to represent some of the sounds in words.</td>
<td>Level 3&lt;br&gt;Each syllable in a word is usually represented by a vowel.</td>
<td>Generally similar to monolingual English, except some children will write the same words in both languages but read them differently in English and Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonetic stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters are written to represent most sounds in words.</td>
<td>Level 4&lt;br&gt;Letters are written to represent most sounds in words.</td>
<td>Generally similar to monolingual English and Spanish. Some errors are made because of different letter-sound relationships in the two languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transitional stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters are written according to common spelling patterns and include silent letters.</td>
<td>No corresponding level.</td>
<td>Similar to English monolingual stage with some errors caused by different letter-sound relationships in the two languages. Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Writing is generally correct.</td>
<td>Level 5&lt;br&gt;Writing is generally correct.</td>
<td>Writing is generally correct Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different stages of writing development for bilingual Spanish–English speakers’

- Precommunicative Stage/Level 1 and 2:
  - Bilingual children believed that writing representation were the same in both languages (Spanish and English).
  - Ex. Children knew that the languages were spoken differently, but did not make that connection in writing.

- Semiphonetic Stage/Level 3:
  - Bilingual children realize letters are written to represent sounds in words. Although, some children will write the same words for both languages, but read them differently in English and Spanish.
  - Ex. Gat=gato and Gat= cat
  - Pre K, Kinder

Rubin & Carlan, 2005
Phonetic Stage/Level 4:
- Bilingual children realize that most words of Spanish and English are spelled differently and letters are written to represent sounds. Errors may occur due to language similarities in sounds and letters.
  - Ex. *Vriyando* for *brillando* – *v* in English sounds like the *b* in Spanish, (p. 733).

Transitional Stage (no Level in Spanish):
- Bilingual children write letters according to spelling patterns, including silent letters. Errors may occur due to language similarities in sounds and letters.
  - Ex. Spelling *house* correctly using silent *e* in the end.

Conventional Stage/Level 5:
- Spelling is more or less correct.

Rubin & Carlan, 2005
Shagoury (2009)

- supports Rubin and Carlan’s (2005) idea about students being able to transfer knowledge from one language to another and not become confused

- students who learn literacy in one language do not have to relearn it in their L2

- children can write in English before they have mastered oral proficiency in English
Serrano and Howard (2007)

- longitudinal case study from 3rd–5th grade of one native Spanish–speaker and one native English–speaker in a two–way immersion program (TWI).

  - The focus was on how two bilingual students transitioned in their writing from their first language to their second language

  - Results showed both students improved in spelling and mechanics, but not so much in composition development
Two studies were found (Gort, 2006; Mora, 2001)

Gort (2006) was a six month case study consisting of four dominant English–speakers and four dominant Spanish–speakers during writers’ workshop (WW) in first grade.

Codeswitching
**Code-switching**

- **Definition:**
  - Code-switching is a change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992, p.58).

- **Example:**
  - Students keeping nouns (names of places they visited, cartoon characters’ names, etc.) in the original language (Gort, 2006).
    - I went to my tia Rita’s house yesterday.
    - I went to a *posada* in Mexico.

- **Why?**
  - Some students think this adds meaning to their writing or there was not a proper translation (Gort, 2006).
Other factors for applying code-switching

- Strength of students’ primary and/or secondary language
- Bilingual development
- Linguistic context
- To whom they were speaking

Gort, 2006
Mora (2001) conducted a case study with three fourth-grade bilingual students with the purpose of describing their process in learning to spell in two languages in a transitional bilingual program.

Mora (2001) learned from the study that students used “invented spelling” when they related the spelling rules and patterns from their native language.
Definition:
Students use “invented spelling” when they related the spelling rules and patterns from their native language.

Example:
- a student spells likes – laks

Why?
- In Spanish the long /I/ sound does not exist, therefore the student “invented” the word from how it would sound in Spanish.

Mora, 2001
Strategies used by Teachers for the Transition of Spanish to English Writing in ELLs

- Eight studies were found (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Dong, 2009; Foulger & Jimenez–Silva, 2007; Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Graves & Rueda, 2004; Kissel, 2008; McCartney & Garcia, 2005; Rodriguez, 2001; Schulz, 2009).
Cutler and Graham (2008)

- the only quantitative study involving a survey.
- sample of 178 1st–3rd grade teachers
- Using likert scales

Results
- Students need to spend more time writing expository writing,
- teachers need to focus on “promoting” students’ love and motivation for writing,
- there needs to be more involvement of writing between home and schools,
- computers need to be integrated with writing in schools as much as possible,
- there needs to be more professional development for teachers
found in the study that the use of cognates and prior knowledge will help teachers teach English to ELLs.

Teachers can help ELLs by teaching cognates to better understand reading passages and involved prior knowledge from students into the new material being taught.
Cognates

Definition:
- “a word in one language which is similar in form and meaning to a word in another language because both languages are related” (Richards, Platt & Platt, p. 59).

Example:
- “These adaptations (adaptaciones), and others (otros), help many animals (animales), survive the cold winter months when food is scarce” (Dong, p. 29).
  - Example was used in a reading passage, but one can adapt this strategy to writing.

Why?
- Drawing students’ attention to cognates and powerful use of language in both oral and written forms is helpful (Cummins, 1999).

More resources:
- [http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/background/cognates](http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/background/cognates)
Using Cognates to Develop Comprehension in English

By: Colorin Colorado (2007)

Cognates are words in two languages that share a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation. While English may share very few cognates with a language like Chinese, 30-40% of all words in English have a related word in Spanish. For Spanish-speaking ELLs, cognates are an obvious bridge to the English language.

Not surprisingly, researchers who study first and second language acquisition have found that students benefit from cognate awareness. Cognate awareness is the ability to use cognates in a primary language as a tool for understanding a second language. Children can be taught to use cognates as early as preschool. As students move up the grade levels, they can be introduced to more sophisticated cognates, and to cognates that have multiple meanings in both languages, although some of those meanings may not overlap. One example of a cognate with multiple meanings is ‘asistir’, which means to assist (same meaning) but also to attend (different meaning).

Here is a helpful list of cognates in Spanish and English.

Classroom strategies for teaching cognates

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Major support for Colorin Colorado is provided by the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.
also found in his study that teaching cognates to native Spanish-speakers helps them learn English.

Cognates help students realize what are some similarities that Spanish and English share and by explicitly teaching these similarities, students will succeed in learning English.
Foulger and Jimenez-Silva (2007)

- Technology would enhance ELLs writing motivation.

Year-long study looking
  - Study used teaching practices in writing from Hadaway, Vardell and Young (2002) and added technology use which they believed made a better contribution for ELLs.

Results:
  - Teachers found that including student uses of technology will be more beneficial for writing skills in ELLs.
Graves and Rueda (2009)

- Study involved eight emergent bilingual children in a first grade two-way Spanish/English bilingual education, researchers observed and interviewed students about writing behaviors and understanding as writing samples were collected.

- Results:
  - a strong correlation between reading comprehension and writing expression.
    - What makes successful writers
Graves and Rueda (2009) Cont’

- What makes successful writers:
  - (1) cognitive needs (explicit strategy instruction, teaching writing as a process, and making effective use of students’ existing prior knowledge)
  - (2) varied cultural understandings and practices;
  - (3) language needs (scaffolding to make tasks and materials more comprehensible);
Graves and Rueda (2009) Cont’

- (4) motivational needs (authentic, personally relevant, and challenging writing tasks);

- (5) social interactions (strategic grouping practices, creating opportunities for student autonomy, and building a learning and writing community);

- (6) community and institutional needs (a supportive, safe, and welcoming learning environment for students) (p. 234).
Kissel (2008) added to what successful writers should do a writing framework with five components:

1. gathering (activating prior knowledge) this way students can make connections to the topic,
2. writing demonstration by teacher that way students know what is expected of them,
3. brainstorming ideas to generate students to think what they want to write about,
4. time for writing for students to gather their thoughts on paper, and
5. have students share their writing in the authors chair.

Kissel (2008) also offers an example on how teachers can use a conference log and manage their time while teaching writing to their students.
FIGURE 1. Components of a preschool writers’ workshop.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name &amp; Date</th>
<th>Explanation of Writing</th>
<th>Possible Social Influences</th>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Noticings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tremaine 3/22/06</td>
<td>&quot;I'm making a cat. A banana and a name. I'm making an ice cream.&quot;</td>
<td>✘ Read Aloud (cat)</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Tremaine, Pietrangio, &amp; Chance sit together and write about similar topics. They are influenced by each other. They also include their names on their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietrangio 3/22/06</td>
<td>&quot;This is ice cream. My mom teaches me how to make ice cream.&quot;</td>
<td>✘ Read Aloud (cat)</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance 3/22/06</td>
<td>&quot;Me and Malik go to get some ice cream.&quot;</td>
<td>✘ Read Aloud</td>
<td>FIRST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliyah 3/22/06</td>
<td>&quot;I'm making a bus and these squiggly lines for the bus.&quot;</td>
<td>✘ Read Aloud (bus)</td>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Taliyah shared this idea during the writing demonstration. Other girls around her are also writing about buses. They are influencing each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
McCarthy and Garcia (2005)

- found that Spanish-speaking students saw teachers’ as their main audience for their writing.

- teachers should hold high expectations of their ELLs writing even if they are not proficient English writers

- teachers need to learn how to provide constructive feedback to ELLs on their writing
focus on instructional writing strategies and assessments for ELLs in the elementary classroom

states that it is important for teachers to teach writing explicitly to better meet their students’ needs.

Defines explicit teaching as:
- It does not mean to “teach traditional grammar or meaningless skill and drills that lack meaning” (Schulz, 2009, p.60).
Schulz (2009) Cont’

- Emphasizes the advantages to use portfolios to assess ELLs writing
- mentions four approaches to build the writing process for ELLs, they are:
  1) language experience,
  2) shared writing,
  3) interactive writing, and
  4) independent writing.
Freeman and Freeman (2004)

- different types of ELLs such as
  - Long term ELL
  - recent arrivals with limited or interrupted formal schooling and
  - recent arrivals with adequate schooling.

- Effective strategies found were:
  - flexible lessons that meet all students’ needs,
  - draw on students’ background knowledge and
  - teachers scaffolding instruction.
Conclusion

Findings

- Teachers are in need of more preparation to meet the needs of ELLs in the classrooms (Schulz, 2009).

- Types of ELLs: Long term ELL, recent arrivals with limited or interrupted formal schooling and recent arrivals with adequate schooling (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

- The developmental stages of writing of bilingual children (Rubin & Carlan, 2005).
strategies used by ELLs when they are transitioning from L1 to L2: inventive spelling and code-switching

strategies to utilize when helping ELLs transition from their native language to English writing: cognates, teaching writing explicitly, using technology

Teachers of ELLs should be able to understand the specific needs of their ELLs and know how to scaffold them to the next level.
Conclusion Con’t

- Limitations
  - No experimental studies were found for the time period examined
  - Population sample: Hispanic, low SES

- Future research
  - There needs to be more studies validating the information provided by Rubin and Carlan (2005)
  - More studies identifying the weaknesses and strengths of ELLs as they begin their transition from Spanish to English writing
  - Research is also needed to better understand what are effective strategies utilized by teachers when helping ELLs transition from writing in Spanish to English.