The Transition of Writing from Spanish to English in Elementary Bilingual Students

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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
Much research on students’ second language acquisition has been focused on the oral transition from Spanish to English (Serrano & Howard, 2007), though not much research is available on how bilingual students transfer their skills in writing (Gort, 2006; Serrano & Howard, 2007).

Writing was not stressed in the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Act of 2001 (Cutler & Graham, 2008).
ELLs’ Writing Development

- Bilingual children develop their writing skills very similarly to monolingual English or monolingual Spanish children.

- 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).

  Rubin & Carlan, 2005
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<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><strong>Levels 1 &amp; 2</strong>&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>
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<td><strong>Semiphonetic stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters are written to represent some of the sounds in words.</td>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong>&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>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phonetic stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Letters are written to represent most sounds in words.</td>
<td><strong>Level 4</strong>&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>
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<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>
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<td><strong>Conventional stage</strong>&lt;br&gt;Writing is generally correct.</td>
<td><strong>Level 5</strong>&lt;br&gt;Writing is generally correct.</td>
<td>Writing is generally correct. Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex.</td>
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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

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
Explicit Instruction

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

Example:
- Steps for writing an experiment—see (Graves & Rueda, p. 221)

Why?
- Writing is a subject which should be taught explicitly in order for students to understand the difference between their primary and secondary language (Kucer & Silva, 1999).
- Explicit instruction may increase comfort of the students and increase learning potential (Graves & Rueda, 2009).
• Step 1: Write the purpose of the experiment and the expected outcomes.
• Step 2: Gather materials.
• Step 3: Write the procedures.
• Step 4: Carry out the experiment (observe and take notes).
• Step 5: Write the exact results.
• Step 6: Compare and contrast in writing expectations and actual results.
• Step 7: Write about what the results mean.
Strategies used by ELLs while transitioning to English writing

- Inventive Spelling
- Code-switching
- Cognates
Inventive Spelling

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
Cutler and Graham (2008) found 84% of the teachers participating in their study encouraged the use of inventive spelling.

- N=178

Kucer and Silva (1999) found students who used invented spelling produced longer texts while writing in class.
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.

Why?
Some students think this adds meaning to their writing or there was not a proper translation (Gort, 2006).
Code-switching Cont’

- 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
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).

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
Using Cognates to Develop Comprehension in English

By: Colorín 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 assistir, 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
Teacher demonstration
  ◦ Model on overhead, elmo, white board, smart board, small group, etc.
    • (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graves & Rueda, 2009; Schulz, 2009)

Conference with students
  ◦ Determine purpose of conference
    • (Schulz, 2009, Rubin & Carlan, 2005)

Have time for students to share writing
  ◦ Author’s chair
    • (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Kissel, 2008)
Techniques Cont’

- **Time spent writing:**
  - Allow plenty of time for students to write,
    - Pie chart of time allotment see *(Kissel, 2008, p.54).*
      - Approximately 30min a day if not more.
    - *(Cutler & Graham, 2008; & Rueda, 2009; Graves Rubin & Carlan, 2005)*

- **Include technology:**
  - Typing on the computer, showing final piece on elmo
  - Integrate technology as often as it is possible.
    - *(Cutler & Graham, 2008)*
FIGURE 1. Components of a preschool writers’ workshop.
Teacher expectations:

- High expectations, but work with student to reach them.

Balance of teaching

- Basic writing skills: spelling, handwriting, capitalization, etc.
- Written text: planning, organization, etc.
  - (Cutler & Graham, 2008)

Encourage students to read their own writing

- (Rubin & Carlan, 2005)
Helping students make connections in their writing, such as using inventive spelling, code-switching and/or using cognates will help students make sense out of what they want to convey in their writing (Gort, 2006; Kucer and Silva, 1999; Mora, 2001).
References


QUESTIONS?

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