

**SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING DEVELOPMENT IN
CHILDHOOD: A CASE STUDY***

*Raquel Serrano
Elizabeth R. Howard
Center for Applied Linguistics*

Whereas most research on child second language acquisition has focused on the oral production of children, studies are needed to show their initial writing development in a second language. This paper aims to shed some light on this process, focusing on the English writing development of a native Spanish speaker enrolled in a two-way immersion program in the United States. Data for this presentation come from a longitudinal, national study which involves 484 students in 11 programs across the country. In this paper, we will present a case study of one of the students in the project, from the beginning of third grade until the end of fifth grade.

The student's writing samples will be discussed using an analytic rubric developed for the project. This rubric addresses three major aspects of writing –composition, grammar and mechanics– and provides a clear framework for investigating changes in writing ability over time.

Key words: second language writing, writing development, ESL, Spanish L1, bilingual education, two-way immersion.

1. Introduction

Two-way immersion (TWI) is an increasingly popular educational approach in the United States. Two-way immersion programs integrate native English

speakers with native speakers of another language, usually Spanish, and teach all students through both languages. Furthermore, TWI programs are considered additive bilingual programs for both groups of students because they afford all students the opportunity to maintain and develop oral and written skills in their first language while simultaneously acquiring oral and written skills in a second language (Christian, 1994). Thus, these programs strive to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in addition to grade-level academic achievement. Another related goal is to promote cross-cultural understanding among the two main student groups. The following are the core characteristics of TWI programs (Christian, 1994; Howard and Sugarman, 2001; Howard and Christian, 2002):

- Language-minority (non-English language) and language-majority (English) students are integrated for at least 50% of the day at all grade levels.
- Content and literacy instruction in both languages are provided to all students.
- Language-minority and language-majority students are balanced, with each group making up one third or two thirds of the total population.

There are two main models of implementation of TWI programs. (Christian, 1994; Howard and Christian, 2002). The first is called 90/10, as 90% of instruction in the primary grades is in the minority language and 10% is in English. The ratios slowly shift over time, until a balance of 50% of instruction in each language is reached by about fourth grade. The other approach is called 50/50 since it offers 50% of instructional time in the minority language and the other 50% in English at all grade levels. Regardless of the program model, TWI has been shown to be an effective program model for both language minority students and native English speakers (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas and Collier, 2003). Both groups develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism in addition to the academic competence that comparable students in mainstream U.S. schools attain.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the English writing development of one native Spanish speaker (NSS) enrolled in a 90/10 TWI program. We will show his progress from the beginning of third grade through the end of fifth grade, using an analytic rubric developed for the study. This rubric addresses three major aspects of writing –composition, grammar and mechanics– and provides a clear framework for investigating changes in writing ability over time.

By limiting this analysis to a single subject, we are able to carry out a deeper, more thorough analysis of English writing development over time. This detailed case study can then serve as a pilot project for large-scale analyses in the future. In addition to the student’s writing samples, we have field notes detailing his behaviors while writing. As a result, we are able to provide a rich description of the development of second language writing processes and products in a parallel way.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Question

The main question that guides our study is the following: in what way does a NSS progress in his English writing skills in a 90/10 TWI program, in terms of composition, grammar and mechanics?

2.2. Participant

José was classified as a “native Spanish speaker” both according to school records and to information we obtained from the home language and literacy questionnaire that his parents completed (as well as the other parents of the students in our study). This parent questionnaire provided us with some important additional information about José. First of all, we learned that he was born in the U.S.; however, Spanish was his first language, the language of his pre-kindergarten daycare and instruction, as well as the language spoken by his babysitter. At the time of data collection, José spent a week or

less per year in a Spanish-speaking country. In addition, the questionnaire suggested that he watched more English language TV than Spanish language TV, and that he had a similar number of books in both languages. Finally, in fourth grade, the language used most often in the home was Spanish, although both languages were used.

José attended a 90/10 TWI program on the East Coast. In his program, native Spanish speakers and native English speakers were integrated all day for all instruction, and all students received initial literacy instruction in Spanish only. Formal English literacy instruction was added in at third grade, at the onset of data collection for this study.

2.3. Data Collection

English and Spanish writing samples were collected three times a year (fall, winter, and spring) as the students progressed through grades 3, 4, and 5, yielding a total of nine samples per student in each language. For these written narratives, students picked a topic of their own choice, as long as it was a true story about themselves. During the scoring process, it became apparent that many children had not written personal narratives in a strict sense, but rather, had written about their personal experiences more broadly defined, such as descriptions of their families, their schools, their favorite sports, etc. In order to maximize the number of writing samples in our analyses, we decided not to exclude such samples. Only samples that were clearly non-narrative and/or clearly unrelated to personal topics (e.g. poems or expository texts about academic topics) were excluded from the analyses. Before starting to write the narratives, the students had a pre-writing activity (which lasted for about 10 minutes) where the teacher, together with the students, brainstormed about possible topics for “personal narratives”. The students were able to talk with one another and consult resources like dictionaries and word walls during the writing process, but the teachers were asked not to help them with translation or spelling. The writing activity lasted approximately one hour. Research assistants observed the students throughout the writing activity and took field-notes about the classroom behavior and the writing behaviors of target students, such as José.

3. Data Analysis

3.1. Rubric

In order to analyze the students' progress over time, we developed a rubric that examined three main areas of writing: composition, grammar, and mechanics, each of which included four sub-components, as described here. Possible scores for each sub-component ranged from 0 to 5.

1. Composition
 - Topic development
 - Sentence formation
 - Supporting details
 - Descriptive language
2. Grammar
 - Verbs
 - Agreement
 - Placement
 - Prepositions
3. Mechanics
 - Spelling
 - Punctuation
 - Capitalization
 - Paragraph formation

At the end of each year of data collection, the writing samples were scored by experienced two-way immersion teachers who were trained by CAL researchers to use this rubric. After a high degree of inter-rater reliability was achieved on the training samples, the teachers began to score the papers individually. Because of the high volume of writing samples collected each year (approximately 2,500), it was not possible to rate each sample more than once. Therefore, a group of common papers was scored each day, making it possible to determine inter-rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability as determined by the intra-class correlation was consistently high (.83), indicating that the writing outcome scores used in this study can be considered reasonably reliable indicators of students' writing ability over time.

In the following section we will describe José's writing samples according to the rubric. For efficiency, we only present writing samples that correspond to the beginning of each grade level (third, fourth, and fifth), plus the final narrative, collected at the end of fifth grade.

3.2. Analysis

3.2.1. Fall of third grade

My Family

My Name is Jose Barroso I like to play soccre. My sisters name is Lidia Barroso she like to play barbie. My Moms name is Lidia Barroso She likes to work. My brother name is Brian barroso he likes to play soccer. My dads name is Jose Barroso is favirit sport is soccer. My famliy liks to sy soccer gams in t.v. My famliy likes to stores. My Family like to sey sports.

José's first narrative partially developed a story about his family; but did not include any introduction, conclusion or topic sentence. He used very simple and short sentence structures, all of which had the same configuration: Subject-Verb-Attribute (with the verb *to be*): "My Name is Jose Barroso", and Subject-Verb-Object (with the verb *to like*): "I like to

play soccre”, “She likes to work”. The narrative did not have many supporting details or descriptive language that elaborated the topic.

Regarding grammar, this narrative had a limited use of verbs and verb constructions, yet, they were almost always correct, except for a couple of mistakes where the student omitted ‘s’ to form the third person singular conjugation (“she like”, “My Familiy like”). The student also used a variety of pronouns, all of which were in agreement with the noun they replaced (“My Mom...She”, “My brother...he”). In terms of placement, there are no mistakes: the possessor was in front of the possessed in instances of possessive case (“*sisters* name”, “*Moms* name”, etc.); the adjective, or modifying word appeared in front of the noun (“*favirit* sport”, “*soccer* gams”). This is important to note, given that Spanish has the opposite word-order in both cases, and formal English literacy instruction had just started at the time José produced this sample. Concerning prepositions, the student used a limited number of them (“to”, “in”). As was the case for composition, the grammar in this narrative was very simple, since it did not include a wide variety of verbs or many constructions where agreement and placement can be analyzed; still, the accuracy level is high.

With regard to mechanics, there were a few spelling mistakes, some of which showed Spanish influence (e.g. *sy* for *see*), and others which showed a limited knowledge of English spelling conventions, such as the ‘silent e’ rule (e.g. *gams*, *liks*). In relation to punctuation, there seems to be some evidence that José had a limited understanding of sentence boundaries at this point, as he only used periods when he changed subjects. That is, he wrote two statements about himself using only one period, then two statements about his sister using a single period as well, and so on. Capital letters were used appropriately for the most part; however, in a few occasions he capitalized words that did not need capitals (“My **F**amily”), or used lower-case when capitals were needed (“Brian **b**arroso”). Finally, there was no evidence of paragraph formation, as all of the writing fell within a single, undistinguished paragraph.

In summary, this fall of third grade writing sample from José was fairly limited and simple. The topic development was not very organized,

sentences usually had the same structure, and there were not many descriptive or supporting details that elaborated on the topic. The use of verbs, agreement, placement and prepositions was generally correct but limited, and there were a lot of errors in mechanics.

3.2.2. Fall of fourth grade

My Favorite sports

I am going to tell you about my two favorite sports. My two favorite sports are soccer and basketball. I am going to start talking about basketball and then soccer.

Basketball is one of my favorite sports because I am a good rebounder. and, and a little bit at shooting. I like playing basketball with my freinds, but not by my self. I am a good rebaunders because I jump when I have to not jump befor the ball comes down.

Soccer is my favorite sport because I am a good kicker. I like to play foword because I like to make gools. I am a good pleyer because I pass the ball and if by acciden I drop someone I help him up.

At the beginning of fourth grade, José developed an organized story, with a clear introduction and a relevant title; however, there was no conclusion. There was clearly improvement from the third grade sample in terms of organization and extension. Additionally, José wrote longer sentences in fourth grade, with varying sentence structures. This sample did not include many supporting details or much descriptive language.

Grammatically, José included a variety of verbs and verb constructions. These verbs all agreed with their subjects, as did the pronouns with their referents (“I am going”, “someone...him”). Additionally, adjectives and pronouns were placed correctly, although there were not too many instances of these constructions (“two favorite sports”, “but not by my self”). Finally, José used a number of different prepositions accurately in this sample (“one of my favorite sports”, “playing basketball with my freinds”).

With regard to mechanics, the spelling in this narrative was generally accurate, with a few errors, some of which still may indicate influence from Spanish (e.g. *pleyer*, *acciden*). José clearly showed improvement in his knowledge of sentence boundaries, as periods and capital letters were generally used correctly. Finally, this sample was accurately segmented into different paragraphs. José used the first paragraph as an introduction, and used the following two paragraphs to focus on one sport each.

In summary, José's fourth grade fall narrative was organized and clear, with a lot of improvement from the writing sample produced a year earlier. This sample was more extended, and included a wider variety of sentence structures. The grammar was also more sophisticated, as there were a broader range of constructions, and they were quite accurate. The clearest and most dramatic improvement could be seen in the area of mechanics, especially in the areas of paragraph formation and sentence segmentation.

3.2.3. Fall of fifth grade

My Family

My mom is really nice because when I ask her if I can go outside she usually lets me go outside. If I ask her to go to a freind's house she sayes yes. I love what she cooks all the time. She works in the night in a part time.

My dad love to play sports especially soccer and basketball. His favorite team in soccer is Brazil. In basketball his favorite team is Los Angeles Lakers. In football he loves Jacksonville Jaguars and San Francisco 49^{ers}. He works in the day and comes back at 4:00 pm. When he comes back from work we go play soccer. My dad loves to play soccer. He is on 2 soccer team. He playes defence like I do.

My sister loves to play Barbies. She loves school. She in Mrs. Vermudes and Ms. Yones's class. She loves her two excellent teacher. Her favorite food is pupusa and pizza. She dosn't like sports or Pokémon.

My brother loves sports and Pokémon. His favorite pokemon is Charizard that his a lizard pokemon. He loves to play Barbies. He loves to play with my cosins. He has 15 pokemon cards.

José's narrative from the beginning of fifth grade had an orderly structure; however, it was not as clearly organized as the sample he wrote at the beginning of fourth grade, where he presented a detailed account of the topic and sub-topics he would develop. Here José alternated between simple and short sentences and complex sentences (some of them including various subordinated clauses). There was still not much coordination; it seems that José preferred using periods and writing short sentences rather than creating compound sentences using *and*. On the other hand, there were several subordinated clauses. José sometimes used supporting details to elaborate on the topic as well as some descriptive language such as adjectives or adverbs.

In relation to grammar, all of the verbs (except for a few non-finite verbs) were in the present tense, yet, there was a variety of verb types: some of them were transitive ("ask", "cooks", "love", etc), some intransitive ("works"), and there was also the copula ("is"). The verbs that appeared in this narrative usually agreed with their subjects. Nevertheless, José seemed to have a problem with third person singular –s with verbs that end in "y" (instead of just adding an "-s", José added "-es": "sayes", "playes"). Concerning other types of agreement, pronouns agreed with their referents as did the possessive determiners ("My mom...She...", "My dad...He...His..."). Nevertheless, there were a couple of mistakes in agreement: "2 soccer team", and "She loves her two excellent teacher": in both cases, the plural –s was missing. Concerning placement, adverbs appeared in the right place within the sentence, as did adjectives and pronouns. José used a wide range of prepositions, for the most part correctly ("to go", "In basketball", "comes back", "with my cosins", etc.), but sometimes incorrectly ("She works in the night in a part time"). Overall, José's grammar may seem to include more mistakes than his early fourth grade sample; however, this may be in part because of the fact that this narrative is more extended.

In this sample, José did not make many spelling mistakes, and capitalization was likewise very accurate. Regarding punctuation, periods were properly used throughout the narrative. Nevertheless, a few commas would have been appropriate in certain contexts, as well as the use of quotation marks when reporting what his mom tells him when he asks her to

go to a friend's house. Paragraph formation was strong, with each paragraph focusing on a different member of José's family. Overall, the mechanics in this sample were solid, as there were very few spelling, capitalization or punctuation errors, and the paragraphs were segmented properly.

There was not as much development from the fall of fourth grade to the fall of fifth grade as was seen between the fall of third grade and the fall of fourth grade. This was also found to be the case in a larger study of English writing development in the upper elementary grades (Howard, 2003), where it was found that growth occurred more quickly from the beginning of third grade through the beginning of fourth grade, and more slowly through fourth grade and fifth grade. Still, we can claim that at the beginning of fifth grade, when this narrative was produced, José wrote a longer composition than at the beginning of fourth grade, and also used a wider variety of sentence types, including many subordinated, complex clauses. Additionally, José committed fewer errors in mechanics than in the past.

3.2.4. Spring of fifth grade

Family

It starts out with my mom. She is a nice mom because when I asker that I want to go out side she always say "Yes." My mom loves to cook. When I aske her a favor she always dose. I love my mom because with out her or my dad I wouldn't be alive wouldn't have food, clothes, pokémon card or a house. My mom is nice because she alway has a smile on her face. She dosn't have a job because my brother comes home at 12 pm, from school and in the evening my dad go out to play soccer every day.

My dad is also nice because he only lets me go out side after I do my home- work. When my dad goes out on the week days he takes me but on weekend he dosn't. My dad works only from 6:30 am to about 4:00 pm. My dad is really athletic.

My brothe is younger than me but he's really athletic. When he get out or looses at something he starts to whin. My brother loves school and loves to play with toys and play Nintendo. My brother loves to to play and hear music.

Now to my sister that is boring to be aroud. She love Briney Spears and other groups. She loves to hear there songs. She disgust sports. She loves to watch MTV.

Well now you know a little about my family members.

Although the topic of this final sample is the same as the previous one, it was slightly more advanced in composition. This narrative has a relevant title, is very well organized, and also has a concluding statement. José also varied sentence length and structures and used some transitions, which distinguishes this sample from earlier samples. Finally, he incorporated more details and descriptive language than in previous samples.

Grammatically, this sample included a variety of verbs and verb constructions. These verbs were conjugated accurately and, usually, though not always, agreed with their subjects. With respect to other forms of agreement, subject pronouns and possessive determiners agreed with their referents, as did object pronouns. Finally, there was a high degree of accuracy regarding both placement and use of prepositions.

Concerning mechanics, this narrative did not have many spelling errors, had accurate capitalization and paragraph formation, and relatively accurate use of punctuation. In general, these are the same improvements that were noticed earlier at the beginning of fifth grade.

Summarizing, by the end of fifth grade, José demonstrated that he was capable of writing an organized narrative, with a variety of sentence structures and verb constructions, and few mistakes in grammar or mechanics. The primary improvement in the final writing sample over the previous sample had to do with extension and complexity. Overall, although this narrative had few mistakes in grammar or mechanics, the composition was still not particularly strong, and there is clearly still room for development in this area. This mirrors findings from the Howard study cited earlier (Howard, 2003).

3.2.5. Summary

There was clear improvement in José's English writing skills over the three-year period from the beginning of third grade through the end of fifth grade. This improvement was especially obvious since José chose the same topic ("family") in three out of four of the samples presented here. As a result, it is possible to observe how he treats the same topic in different ways, at different points in time. As was mentioned earlier, the biggest developmental shift was found from the beginning of third grade to the beginning of fourth grade, as considerable improvements in mechanics, organization, and paragraph development were seen in that period. Another developmental shift was seen at the beginning of fifth grade, when the narrative became longer and included greater variety and sophistication. There was less development evident over the course of fifth grade, and this is likely to be due in part to the shorter time span between the last two writing samples, as well as the greater difficulty in showing gains in composition, as discussed by Howard (2003).

3.3. Classroom Observation

With the exception of the fall of fifth grade, classroom observation was conducted during the collection of all writing samples discussed in this paper. In general, José's writing behavior over the three years of the study was highly consistent, but not particularly informative. For the most part, José wrote by himself, occasionally stopping to have brief social conversations or conversations about writing topics with his peers, but not asking for their help with his writing, or engaging in any type of peer editing. His conversations with his peers were entirely in English, indicating a reasonably high level of oral English proficiency at all time points. He did not use dictionaries, and only rarely consulted a spelling reference book that all of the students in his class had available to them. He frequently appeared restless, and sometimes had difficulty thinking of a topic and getting started with his writing, which may be apparent given that three of the four samples discussed in this paper are about the same topic – his family.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In analyzing several narratives collected at different points in time, we have been able to observe a typical native Spanish-speaking student's progress in a Spanish dominant TWI program. Despite having had no formal literacy instruction in English when the first writing sample was collected, José was still able to write a brief but clear narrative about his family. Having had little English instruction at the time, it seems likely that he relied at least in part on his knowledge of writing in Spanish. A year later, there was tremendous growth in his English writing ability, with continuous albeit more subtle improvements continuing to be evident throughout the end of fifth grade.

José demonstrated improvement in all three areas of the rubric: composition, grammar, and mechanics. He learned to develop an organized story with a title, introduction, and conclusion. He also acquired the practice of using different types of sentence structures, as well as including supporting details and descriptive language. In relation to grammar, José improved his accuracy and variety of verbs and verb constructions, and showed a high level of accuracy with regard to agreement, placement, and use of prepositions. With respect to mechanics, José's spelling improved dramatically, even as his narratives became longer and longer. Furthermore, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph development became increasingly accurate over time.

On the other hand, when we examine José's narratives, we can observe that some language areas were better developed than others. Specifically, more development was evident in grammar and mechanics than in composition. This was a general trend for both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers in the CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education (Howard, 2003). Of the three areas included in the rubric, composition is the hardest and most subjective to teach, learn, and score, and we consider this to be one reason for the consistently lowest scores in that area.

The analysis of José's English writing samples in third, fourth, and fifth grade has provided some insights into the English writing development of a typical native Spanish-speaking student in a Spanish dominant TWI program in the United States. At this point, there are many other interesting questions that arise from this research, all of which will be left for future study. For example, what is the nature of this student's writing progress in Spanish? Does the introduction of formal English literacy instruction in third grade seem to interfere with José's Spanish writing skills, or, on the other hand, are literacy skills in Spanish enhanced by formal literacy instruction in both languages? This question and others will be addressed in future analyses.

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