

R

# The Emergent Writing Style of a 7 Year Old Bilingual

By:

Kuang Ching Hei.

(Paper presented at the *Conference "Language in the Realm of Dynamic"* held on 13-14 March 2008 in Bangkok, Thailand).

Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya



A513365175

**The Emergent Writing Style of a 7 year old Bilingual  
(Draft only)**

**Paper presented at Language in the Realm of Dynamic (LIROD)  
Bangkok, March 13-14, 2008**

**Kuang Ching Hei  
[kuangch@um.edu.my](mailto:kuangch@um.edu.my)**

**Faculty of Languages and Linguistics  
Universiti Malaya  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

**Abstract:**

As children develop from infancy to toddler and finally school-going age, they also acquire the ability to read and write whether through formal training or through exposure. This paper focuses on the writing products of a young Malaysian bilingual who is well versed in Mandarin and English. From the analysis of his writings, it was found that many of his spellings were mis-spelt words which were not only original but were also based on the way words were articulated in his presence and also, as he understands them to be presented through the English letters/alphabets. Further analysis of his writings indicate that where he was incapacitated by a lack of vocabulary the child applies the strategy of borrowing from another language, in that process, using the means of code switching to accomplish what he wants to say.

**Introduction:**

Language is a tool that one uses to accomplish various needs and of these many needs, the need to communicate with others is primary. Thus a child first learns about the sounds of the language before he is able to understand what these sounds mean. Gradually, he learns to speak these languages for his personal purposes and as the child grows, literacy and education becomes an important part of his growth. Literacy refers to one's skills to read and write. A child is only expected to know how to read and write after he has acquired the basic skill of speaking. Although we are aware that all children attempt to 'write' in early childhood by making lines and patterns which are then followed drooling, sketching and drawing, we are not specifically sure what are the influences behind their writing. In other words, what do their writing reflect about their thoughts or behaviour?

In the Malaysian context a child attends formal education when aged seven years old. If a child goes to government-type school, he is expected to learn how to write in Malay and English both of which use the Roman alphabets. If a child attends a vernacular school like Chinese schools, he not only has to learn how to write Chinese characters which are termed 'Han Yu Pin Yin', he also has to acquire basic skills of writing in Malay as well as in English. This means that the child has to acquire basic skills of writing Chinese

'ideograms' or strokes that enable them to form words. The Chinese language may be made up of single characters which may range from consisting of just one stroke to consisting of fifteen strokes. In addition, the same child is also expected to acquire Malay which is created by combining syllables together to form words. The most difficult of all is to learn how to form words in the Roman alphabets to create English words whose sounds may or may not be regular.

### **Background of study:**

This study focuses on the compilation of writing authored by one bilingual child of seven. The writing pieces compiled are those made in English and the nature of such writing are everyday events like what he did for the day or what happened on a particular day. They are short excerpts which the subject has written or scribbled into note books or exercise books. No instructions were given and when the child was unable to spell certain words, he was told to 'just go ahead and try to spell them on his own'. In other words, there was no prompting or assistance given.

### **Aim:**

The study only aims to look at three aspects:

- a. What are the usual contents of the child's writing excerpts?
- b. What format does the child use to organize his writing?
- c. What are the common 'errors' found in the child's writing excerpts?

### **Methodology/Data:**

For the purpose of compiling the child's writing excerpts, the researcher merely referred to the writing excerpts which the child has been producing for a period of time. The child was instructed by his mother to write on a daily basis and he was also instructed to focus on the daily events like what he did, what happened and how he felt that day.

### **Some peculiarities of the English language::**

Many students who learn the English language as a second language, particularly, after adolescence, often complain that it is difficult to learn because there are so many irregularities like its inconsistent tenses, irregular verbs, pronunciations which are not reflected by its spelling forms, its various constraints like direct and indirect verbs, active and passive voice, genre, registers and others. Perhaps that explains why so many Malaysian students have problems in saying words like [thigh], [stomach-ache], [head-ache], [washed], [couple], [cube], [queue] and [information]. Malaysian speakers of English also have a problem on where to put their stress on the syllables. There is the problem of irregular verbs like [eat – ate] and [drive- drove] while peculiarities referring to the use of prefixes and suffixes to display negative and positive meanings of a word can also be misleading. For instance, words that contain a prefix of [dis] as in [dissatisfied] can be understood to mean 'not satisfied' but others words that denote a negative meaning are manifested by the prefix [un] as in 'uncommon', [non] as in 'non-Chinese' and some can be identified by their prefixes like 'less' as in 'careless, penniless and homeless'.

### **Developing writing skills:**

Bloom (2001:182) argues that “young children may produce drawings, but they are not skilled artists, suggesting that their ability to draw illustrates a development but not necessarily one that is perfect or ideal. Educators interested in children’s literacy suggest that children acquire the ability to write between the ages of 3 and 4 and these develop in stages. Children’s emergent writing skills tend to develop from the concept of drawing which is often depicted by scribbling instances and in some cases, these ‘random marks or scribbles’ may even contain ‘stories’ which the particular child can provide such as saying that those scribbles are ‘so and so’. There are apparently six stages leading to the children’s writing.

### **Stage 1 - Mock writing:**

The first few imitations of writing have been described as ‘mock handwriting and these are often depicted by wavy scribbles and such instances have been attributed to the child’s attempt to imitate ‘adult’s cursive writing’. These writing may also be accompanied by drawings. It has been suggested that ‘mock writing appears during dramatic play because children want to create ‘a great deal of print in a short period of time’. These may be the child’s attempt to ‘write a grocery list’, a ‘doctor’s prescription’. Children may also be observed to imitate adults where they cling on to their pencils and make lines by moving from left to right like adults.

### **Stage 2 - Mock Letters:**

Young children have been observed to imitate by attempting to form alphabetic representations which may also appear in their drawings. Their formation of alphabets appear to be more vertical than horizontal and this could probably be due to their desire to ‘make letter-like shapes that resemble conventional letters’. It has been suggested that children’s scribbles and emergent writing take on the characteristics of the printed language in their culture and this can be testified by comparison of scribble writings made in Arabic and Hebrew which appeared to be very different from the scribble writings of English (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Letters made by these children are their own creations for example, a circle with a line drawn down from the bottom (resembling a lollipop) is a common invented letter.

### **Stage 3 - Conventional Letters:**

When do young children first attempt to write? Research claims that children’s first attempt at writing can be traced to their ‘experimentations’ with writing their own names or their family names with real letters. While writing, these young writers are clearly unaware of their attempts at making conventional letters. However, with each attempt, the children’s mock letters tend to take on more resemblance and as a result, they acquire the ability to form conventional letters. There appears to be no patterns. Children may create first a ‘string of letters’ across a page but in their pretend-play, they may also ‘read them’ aloud as if these were sentences. Educators also claim that although children’s ability to write conventional letters may be restricted because of their young age, they tend to possess a mental image of a particular letter that they wish to imitate. As they become more conscious of the letter which they are attempting to write, they often use long strings to create the letters, usually at random.

#### **Stage 4 - Invented Spelling:**

When a child is fairly comfortable after acquiring the ability to create conventional letters singly, the child may group them together to make them look like words. Often, young children's writing may be a combination of one single letter or it may be a mixture of several letters which they have already learnt how to create. Trying to spell a word in English is not necessarily easy since there are many irregularities. For instance, many English words do not look like the sound of the words out together and this could be illustrated through the word [cucumber] which many Malaysian young children have mispronounced. Invented spelling takes many forms but is related to the sounds the child hears in each word. At the beginning of this stage, children may write one letter to represent one word. Later, words are represented by two letters, the initial and ending letter sounds. As the child's writing continues to mature, most sounds are represented in their invented spelling.

#### **Stage 5 - Approximated (Phonetic) Spelling:**

Some studies have mentioned that children make use of the sound of the words they hear by aligning them to the letters so as to be as approximate as possible to the spelling of the word. Thus a [cat] may be spelt as [kat]. Beginning sounds are used first and ending sounds are used second. Middle sounds follow and short vowel sounds come last. Children attempt to spell words based on their growing awareness of letter sounds and on their memory of words which they may have heard repeatedly. These beginning words are usually written in capital letters or in a combination of capital and lower case letters, whichever are easiest to draw and are most frequently seen in the environment. Children move from spelling words by writing the beginning consonant letter to writing both the beginning and final letters, to writing words with a beginning, middle, and final letter sound.

#### **Stage 6 - Conventional Spellings:**

Children's approximated spellings gradually become more and more conventional. The child's own name is usually written first, followed by words such as *mom*, *dad*, and *love*. Initially children may incorrectly copy words. Eventually words will be written correctly.

#### **Development of Literacy:**

The following are the outlined sequences leading to children's writing skills and abilities.

- From ages 3 – 4 children show rapid growth in literacy
- They begin to “read” their favorite books by themselves – focusing mostly on reenacting the story from the pictures
- Eventually they progress from telling about each picture individually to weaving a story from picture to picture using language that sound like reading or writing language (IRA, NAEYC, Sulzby, 1991)
- They also experiment with writing by forming scribbles, letter-like forms, and random strings of letters (Barclay, 1991; Clay, 1991; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 1996)
- They also begin to use “mock handwriting” or “wavy scribbles” to imitate adult cursive writing
- These letter-like forms or “mock letters” are an attempt to form alphabetic letters;

these forms of writing will eventually develop into standard letters (Barclay, 1991)

- When using various forms of writing, children maintain their intentions to create meaning and will often “read” their printed messages using language that sound like reading (Clay, 1975; McGee & Richgels, 1996; Sulzby, 1985)
- Children’s literacy efforts can be supported by adults’ interactions through reading aloud, and conversation and by children’s social interactions with each other. (McGee & Richgels, 1996)
- For children whose primary language is other than English, studies have shown that a strong basis in a first language promotes school achievement in a second language (Cummins 1979). Children will be more ready to learn to read and write in English once they have become proficient in oral language.
- Children who are learning English as a second language are more likely to become readers and writer of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language.

#### Children's awareness of how language works:

1. The understanding of the specific sounds different letters make ("The letter 'd' makes the 'duh' sound.")
2. The understanding of that different sounds, known as phonemes, are heard within a word ("My name starts with an 's' sound, just like 'snake'.")
3. The ability to rhyme and an understanding of which words rhyme ("Listen, Daddy, 'Sam' and 'Pam' sound the same.")
4. The understanding that some large words are comprised of two smaller words ("The word cupcake is really made of two words—'cup' and 'cake'.");

#### Analysis of data:

Data was compiled for a period beginning September, 2006 when the child writer was around six to the end of the year 2007. Some writings were extracted from the child’s regular diary since he also has a book which he wrote about mundane things consistently although not every day. Occasional writings may be from his one-off writing pieces when he was asked to write just so he would occupy his time and not be a nuisance to his brother. Not all writing excerpts were used for analysis for it would have meant taking up more space for analysis. The researcher managed to use some of his earlier writing pieces and some of his subsequent ones. These were then taken at random rather than being specially selected.

Excerpt 1:

L1	Long chi siong is <i>Apolengge</i> .
L2	and I Do not like <i>longchisiong</i>
L3	I Love my <b>femely</b>

Excerpt 2:

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

A513365175

Excerpts 1 and 2 were the two of the initial pieces written by the subject. In that sense the analysis of the excerpts could be used as a yardstick to confirm how much the subject, LH, had developed in his writing skills by merely comparing his current writing pieces with these two excerpts. The two excerpts clearly display the writing style of an amateur writer who writes with no particular format other than to express his feelings.

Excerpt 1 enables LH to express his dislike of a friend whose name was recited in full. LH expressed this dislike in the form of a 'label' which was meant to display his displeasure of the friend and this displeasure was expressed via a name [*apolengge*] which is actually LH's way of saying 'Indian'. In the Chinese children's context, perhaps [*apolengge*] was not a positive word thus it enabled the writer to use it to 'label' his friend. This particular excerpt shows that the writer puts his friend as the focal point which is evidenced by mentioning the friend's name first in the writing. LH also expressed his emotion well by saying, [I Do not like *longchisiong*] which was probably unconsciously emphasized by the big letter 'D' in [Do..]. To make up for what he may have missed in the friendship, LH substitutes it with an expression for the family and this was expressed through [I Love my femely].

The excerpt further demonstrates that one aspect of the writer's culture was apparent and that was seen in the use of the word [*apolengge*], suggesting that the child borrowed a Chinese word which is more similar to the sound of the Tamil word, [*porengge*] which means [go where] and this was coded by the writer in roman alphabets. Thus we can say that the child writer possesses his own strategy of communicating.

Excerpt 2 allows us to see the simple mind of the 7 year old who talks about a period in the past which began with [Long time ago] suggesting that the writer may have been influenced by some reading format that is more apparent in stories and fairy tales. The event was narrated as if it was very long ago but this was then linked to a particular activity that the writer himself performed. The writer displays this activity in the present tense form, [I go to an arowplan] which was initiated by a particular objective, [to go to China]. Due to his age or probably lack of experience in writing in English, it could be seen why LH's 'past' was not reconciled with a 'past' verb' like 'I went' instead of [I go...]. The excerpt further indicates that the writer depended on his cognitive abilities to help him create the spelling for the words he needed in his writing. The words were created based on how he had heard them presumably and in return, they were spelt in the most simplistic way he knew. This illustrates the child's ability to distinguish the sounds of language and the quality of the English input he hears. Thus, we see that he could not use the article [an] before the word [arowplan].

Excerpts 3 and 4 below demonstrate the amateur writer's reliance on the input he gets which reflect the kind of words he hears. Inevitably it also had an impact on the way these were spelt as words.

Excerpt 3

L1	I love you you Love me
L2	We are happy <b>femely wet</b>

L3	A <b>Gred</b> big hag and a
L4	<b>Cise</b> from me to you
L5	<b>Woch</b> you Say you Love
L4	me too?

Excerpt 3 is also extracted from the writer's diary. The contents do not reflect very much activity and this is probably due to the child's lack of idea. It is obvious to those who watch the children's series on a purple dinosaur called 'barney' that LH, the writer was writing a rhyme of the song which goes – 'I love you, you love me, we are happy family with a great big hug and a kiss from me to you, won't you say you love me too?'

Clearly, spelling is not LH's forte at this stage best as they were created based on the sounds of the words. This seems to reflect what has been identified as the developing stage for young writers as was mentioned in the above section. However, what is pleasing to know is that the rhymes were attempted in a certain format that begins with capital letters as seen in the lines. This suggests that the writer has some idea about writing but to some extent.

#### Excerpt 4

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

As an extract of a diary, excerpt 4 illustrates what the young writer had done in the past. His story began in the capital letter with the word, 'Saturday'. There is a story that tells the readers what he did first and why he did what he did and the subsequent actions. This is nice to know as stories are told of everyday happenings. The young writer is obviously clear about what he had done. Despite his spelling and inconsistent use of the capital letters it is clear that the child's narration is organized. The spelling inadequacies can be attributed to his lack of exposure to writing and in a way, his strategy should be commended as he was able to rely on the sounds to achieve his aims. This particular excerpt does show that the young writer is not a fussy speller nor is he a formal writer since he also applied the word 'kid' to indicate a young buyer.

#### Excerpt 5

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

Excerpt 5 is not organized as a particular format even though it resembled a diary since it begins with 'today'. The writer seems to be watching 'tv' rather continuously and this was shown to the reader through the sequence in L2 'watch antil my mother scole me'. The continuous track was also shown through the subsequent punishment where in L3,



the writer shared that his mother scolded him and then beat him probably because to scare him and this was then followed by a new activity which was forced on by his mother who in L4 was written as 'mothe ask me to rite' followed by L5, 'My ddairy and I draw'. The writer's writing suggest that he was not in the mood to write and was generally narrating the events. His writing ability also depicted his inadequacy in the skill of spelling which was tainted by the influence of sounds and words,. However, note the usual mistake of 'dairy' which my writers also commit.

## Excerpt 6

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

Excerpt 6 also uses the word, 'antil' to denote a continuous activity which was to highlight the writer's reluctance to awaken and note too that he uses the present tense form to talk about 'sleeping'. The word, awake was obviously shortened to 'wake' in L1 and as if he was narrating it verbally to an audience, the writer uses the spoken expression, 'I mean' to correct himself. 'Ama's place was actually a reference to his grandmother whom he calls 'Ah Ma' and the young writer combined the two sounds together into one word. His cousin's name, Matthew' was misspelt with no capital letter but it is interesting to note that even the misspelt nam, 'matyou' clearly sounds 'matthew' and this is a good indication of the child's reliance on his own strategy t get a word which he hardly sees written. Other speeling errors can be traced to the word, 'plas' which was for place and the correctly spelt word of 'chinese' but inapproapriate because the writer meant 'chess'.

## Excerpt 7

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

Spelling errors is the norm for many young writers either due to oversight, carelessness or cognitive abilities and the lack of exposure. In this excerpt, it is interesting to note that the young writer was not in the mood to share although he applied a simple format for writing which began with the capital letter, a brief description of some relevant but general activities and then the writer provides a closure that most stories close, 'the end'.

Although it is clear that the writing is performed through the language of English, it is apparent that the writer relies on his cultural background to give him the missing lexical term and this is shown in L1 where the writer attempted to write the English term for his paternal aunt, whom he would have addressed as 'Ta Ku' in Mandarin, the writer's spelling error of '**da gog**' shows that he was clearly trying to apply Han Yu Pin Yin where the Mandarin word for 'ta' or big is written as '**da**'. However, the word '**gog**' was formed probably because he was not sure how the mandarin version would sound like. It is not clear why the writer resorted to a wrong spelling for 'bye-bye' because he had

shown in previous texts that he could spell the word. The instance may show signs of his lackadaisical attitude.

## Excerpt 8

L1	Today I go to Ama's place and
L2	I play with Mat Mat until my mom fetch me home and
L3	I draw and I watch my tv.

Excerpt 8 also begins with 'Today' and it is again a clear reflection of the young writer writing a diary. Being a mundane affair, the writer only provides simple events and the narration gives the idea of where, what and the end. In this excerpt although the writer had ended his description of the day's activity, for some reason, he chose to continue penning an additional activity even after he arrived home. Thus, he added in L3, 'I draw and I watch tv'. The writer's use of the present tense form to narrate a past event was not grammatically matched but this could be a gesture that many young writers are not aware since they may not have acquired the concept of past tense or there has been a lack of emphasis up this stage of development,

## Excerpt 9

	26-12-07
L1	Today i go to tushen center
L2	Never mind
L3	Dis night I go to eat diner
L4	I eat and drink so what so important
L5	Is kids and neiherhood becose
L6	Wend we are not there my mommy
L7	Will be sad.

星期三 26-12-07  
 Today i go to tushen center  
 never mind  
 dis night I go to eat diner  
 I eat and drink so what so important  
 is kids and neiherhood becose  
 wend we are not there my mommy  
 Will be sad.

Excerpt 9 shows two versions, the one on the left is the adapted one while the one on the right is the original version.

The data shown illustrates the writer's habit or tendency to write the 'day' in Mandarin as is shown on the top left hand corner of the original version. Like most bilinguals, it is probably committed due to habit or poor memory recall. Moreover, it is probably how the writer senses his own identity when Mandarin words are used.

In excerpt 9, the contents display an effort to write as a diary but in between the writer appear to be talking to himself or another person and this is evidenced by the phrase, never mind, and the writer must have recalled that the event occurred during a certain part of the day and the mistake 'day' was thus corrected to 'dis night I go to eat diner...'. The contents appear to be sharing a story but somewhere while writing, the writer's concentration was influenced by some thing that happened in his vicinity and this is evidenced in L 4 where by it was written, 'I eat and drink so what so important is kids

and neighborhood because when we are not there my mommy will be sad.' The writing also illustrates instances of spelling being influenced by speech.

#### Excerpt 10

L1	Today I go Auti's place to Dance
L2	and sing my mom ask me to Dairy
L3	and I rite it emediatly and I bring
L4	my DVD Player Here and we plade
L5	the CD in. and we sing.

The story line in excerpt 10 is clear and organized but the writer did not follow the convention of writing as can be seen in L2 where a new event starts with , 'my mom' which could have been shifted to a new line but in this excerpt the writer did not. The use of capital letters was also haphazard as there is a lack of consistency and the child writer seems to be inserting the big letter according to his fancy although at one point, he was correct as in 'DVD.' Spelling still seems to be the major obstacle but they were easily identified for their words and meanings.

#### Excerpt 11

	22-12-07
L1	Today I Play Play Play and Puy Hong make me cry cry
L2	cry I
L3	tell my mommy and I see
L4	my tv and my momy give me money
L5	me mommy bay me a toy.

Excerpt 11 also reflects a format that adheres to diary –writing and this is exemplified by the use of 'today'. The sequence of writing shown in this excerpt indicates that there was a long sequence of 'playing time' for LH who wrote '[Today I Play Play Play] in L1. Although it is not a universal trait of the Chinese, the duplicated expression of [Play Play Play] suggests that it is a typical Chinese trait often heard in speech. Many Chinese indicates a certain activity of 'rapid continuity' by duplicating the word as is used here. In the same excerpt, the young writer also tries to show the continuity of his 'crying' by duplicating the word [cry cry cry] in L1 and L2 after his elder brother [Puy Hong] did something to him. It was quite apparent that after the incident of crying, the child was compensated by his mother to whom the child must have 'complained to' as shown by [I tell my mommy] in L3. The compensation came in the form of [tv watching] shown in L4 and further reward was indicated in L4 and L5. The writing in excerpt 11 provides the evidence that shows the 7 year old using a conjunction [and] seen in L3 and L4 although his spelling is in the way. However, there is not problem in understanding what the child writes despite the spelling errors since the words were easily outlined from the first letters of the word as in [momy] in L4 and [me] in L5 which referred to ,mommy' and 'my' respectively. The word [bay] was also easily identified as 'buy' because the writer used the first and last letter correctly. The use of the conjunction [and] also manifested the child's ability to join similar thoughts although he had not acquired any formal organisation for writing yet.

## Excerpt 12

L1	Today I go to arport
L2	becos I want to go
L3	bei jing. sadden ley the
L4	tikent waf No More. it
L5	was the wrong day it
L6	was yesterday morning
L7	so my father ask vether
L8	my mother want to go
L9	or not and my mother
L10	sade no and den
L11	we go to KFC
L12	to selebrade.

In excerpt 12 above, the child writer's text also indicated that he was writing about going to the airport to catch a plane to go to China but this time it was given a specific name. In excerpt 1, the child also wrote about taking an aeroplane and going to China but the difference between both excerpts is that the length of excerpt 12 is almost twice longer than excerpt 1. This indicates that he had acquired the cognitive ability of thinking and writing in detail about the events that had happened. For instance, he states very clearly in this excerpt that 'going to the airport' had a reason as is indicated by the use of 'becos' shown in L2 and he was also able to be more specific about the place that was given the name of 'beijing' in L3. The story was also narrated in the present tense [I go], [I want] seen in L1 and L2 which was then switched to the past tense form in L4 [tikent waf], L5 [it was], L6 [it was] and L10 [sade] and it then reverted to the present tense form again in L7 [my father ask], L8 [my mother want..] and L11 [we go]. The story also had a suspense as shown by the use of [sadden ly] in L3 which was related to [the tikent waf No More] in L4. The full stop was used to pause and the new story line begins with [it was the wrong day it was yesterday morning] in L5 and L6. It seems obvious that the child writer is trying to put everything that happened in the same order and in L7 [so my father ask vether] and the story continued until in L11 and L12, [we go to KFC -kentucky fried chicken to selebrade].

The story line is clear and one can follow. Of the spelling errors, the child relied on what he thinks are the sounds that these words make for him and this is evidenced in several words like [arport], [sadden ley], [tikent] and [sade] which contained the appropriate sound and was illustrated by the correct use of the initial and last letters. Other words like [waf] and [vether] is still recognizable from the sounds but it is still unclear how the writer ended up with using the letter [f] for [s] in 'was' and the letter [v] for [w] in the word 'whether'.

## Excerpt 13

L1	Today I goi Auti's place to Dance
L2	And sing my mom ask me to Dairy and I rite it emediatly and I bring
L3	My DVD player Here and we plade
L4	The CD in. and we sing

Tues day 18-12-07  
 Today I go Auti's place to Dance  
 and sing my mom ask me to Dairy  
 and I rite it emedetly and I bring  
 my DVD Player Here and we plade  
 the CD in. and we sing

There are two samples of excerpt 13. The second one is the original. The events narrated in excerpt 13 are not too outstanding ones because they only showed what the writer did at the baby sitter's place. Respect for the elder is clearly indicated when the writer used the word [Auti] to address the baby sitter. The activities he was involved in were to [Dance] and [sing] as shown in L1 and L2. There was also a long sentence written in L2 where the writer forgot to stop and continued by writing [my mom ask me to Dairy...] in L2 suggesting that the child uses the noun word 'diary' as a vverb. In L3, it is not clear where [Here] in L3 refers to, probably the 'Auti's place' and it is also unclear who [we] in L3 and L4 refers to and it may have meant the several people who gathered together to 'dance', 'plade' and 'sing'.

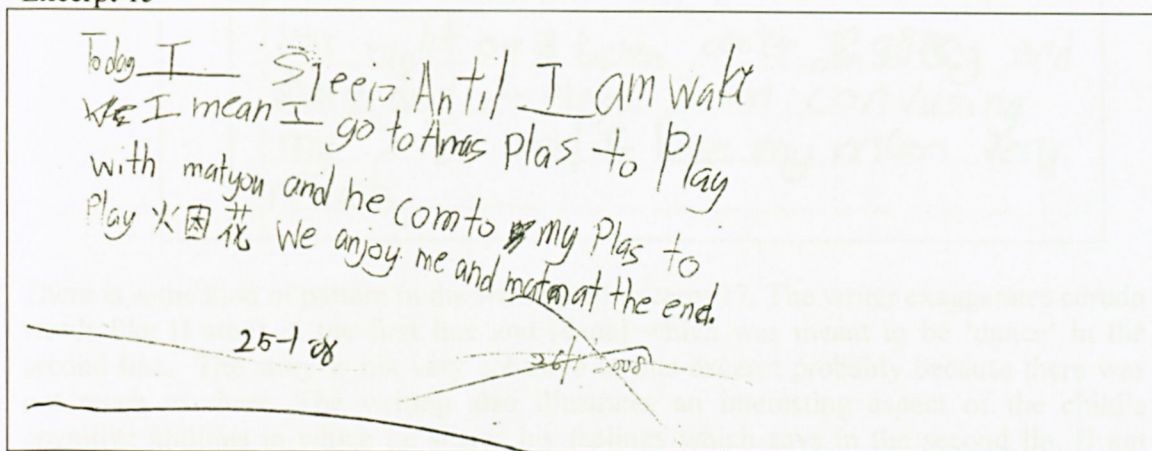
Spelling errors pointing to [plade] in L3 suggests an attempt to use the past tense form of the verb [played] whereas [rite] and [emedetly] must have been influenced by the way the words sound to him.

#### Excerpt 14

L1	Today I go to ama's Place to go to
L2	Work shop to go and dibble (build) a nutcracker
L3	Than we eat and go to toyseres
L4	To by matmat's bionikle than we
L5	Go to the park.

The writer attempted to narrate his experiences by saying that he had to go to his grandmother's place first before he was taken to the workshop. In other words, someone at the grandmother's palce was responsible for sending him to the workshop which must be at another place. Thus, we see the writer putting the first place of intention first followed by the seond place of intention [today I go to ama's place to go to workshop]. The event after the workshop was also given and shown by [then we eat and got to toyseres] in L3 which also reflects how the toy shop 'TOYS R US' are pronounced to him. His cousin, Matthew was also abbreviated to [matmat] in L4 and the story ended with [than we go to the park]. The writer was then asked what the word [dibble] in L2 means and he explained that he had made a mistake. He had wanted to write 'build' but had instead wrote dibble. It may be possible that he was confused by the pattern of the alphabet 'b' which was difficult to distinguish from 'd' and 'p' or he was just making up his own spelling.

## Excerpt 15



Excerpt 15 is downloaded from the writer's original piece. It seems obvious that the child's writing consisted of letters and words that were not standard in size with some appearing small and getting big and then getting small again towards the end. The pattern also displays an upward slope which was then followed by a downward slope. This could be a typical sign of children's writing since they could not be expected to write in straight lines at age 7 when the paper is unlined. The excerpt shows that the child is aware between the difference of sleeping and waking which involves activities like [play] and 'enjoy' which was written as [anjoy].

The spelling errors indicate that his cousin's name was now lengthened to *matyou*. It is interesting to note how the writer managed to match the spelling he created, [matyou] to match the actual spelling of 'Matthew' so well. Both boys obviously played together with sparklers which gave them a lot of fun indicated by [anjoy] but as he did not have the English word for sparklers, the writer overcame that by reverting to Mandarin and thus, we see the phenomenon of code switching occurring in writings too.

## Excerpt 16

L1	Las niht I crid for
L2	a yoyo and my mother
L3	wont buy it for
L4	me so I crid and crid
L5	for it sadently my mom
L6	will buy for me and
L7	I'm happy again.

Excerpt 16 illustrates a sad story where the writer no longer referred to 'today' to start his story. He actually referred to the past by using the expression, [Las niht] shown in L1 which also helped to show us that he had cried and the activity of 'crying' lasted for a long time and this was shown in L4 which says [so I crid and crid]. And the storyb turned to have a happy ending as seen through L5, [sadently my mom] and in L6 [will buy for me] which indicates a promise for the future and it was this 'promise' that made the writer [happy again in L7] and all these narrations depict to us a child's voice.

## Excerpt 17

22/12/2007

last night on a tushen center I sing and  
 @ane and I played I am convusing  
 my self and I love my mom very  
 much

There is some kind of pattern in the writings of excerpt 17. The writer exaggerates certain words like [I sing] in the first line and [dane] which was meant to be 'dance' in the second line. The story is not very cohesive in this excerpt probably because there was not much to share. The writing also illustrates an interesting aspect of the child's cognitive abilities in which he shares his feelings which says in the second line, [I am convusing my self] over what, it is not clear and this was then quickly closed with [I Love my mom very much].

The spelling errors indicated here is almost the same as discussion although one can see here that the writer spelt [last night] correctly unlike excerpt 16 above which shows a missing letter in [las] and [niht]. It seems as though the word [tusen] used in excerpt 17 was a borrowed spelling from Malay whereas the word [centre] was not.

## Excerpt 18

26/1/2008

I  
 I do my ~~###~~ gege because he do  
 me first anden I starte to  
 booly him I punch, I box, I tuk, that's  
 All

Excerpt 18 is also an original downloaded from the writer's original book and it is interesting to note from this data again that the writer uses the capital letters in an inconsistent manner, suggesting that he is still unclear of the norms of writing. Although a mundane excerpt, the writing instigates the notion of sounds and words which the writer applied aptly in this instance. Excerpt 18 has the writer confessing to a 'crime' which is [I do my gege] and this was justified, in the eyes of the writer although he knew it was wrong. The justification came in the form of [because he do me first] and his confession then continued to say [anden I starte to booly him] showing remorse as [booly] means [something harsh] and the [harsh acts] were that the writer had [punched, boxed and pierced] his brother hard. The narration ended with [that's All].

This particular excerpt suggests that even young children can show remorse and qualify their action. The excerpt also illustrates the creation of words through the sounds of the actions like [punch] and [tuk tuk] which appeals to the sense of touch or piercing with the fingers. Some of these onomatopoeic sounds are acceptable like 'punch' but at this point of discussion, the onomatopoeic sound of 'tuk tuk tuk' has not which means that the child writer is rather creative.

The spelling errors indicated here also supports the notion that words were created based on the sounds these words appeared to the writer. In some instances, however, where the writer attempted to use past tense form like [started] the 'd' may have been inadvertently omitted. There was also the influence of Mandarin which manifested in the shape of [gege] which is the Han Yu Pin Yin form for [ker-ker] which is elder brother.

### Conclusion

This paper focuses on the emergent writing products of one bilingual Malaysian child who is seven years of age. The analysis of his writing shows that some of the notions discussed in the literature of children's writing are supported as seen in the spelling which may contain errors but are recognizable because of the writer's ability to use the first and last letter of the word correctly. Of the 18 samples located for analysis it was clear that the child writer of this study is creative such that he provided an alternative version for the name, 'Matthew' which was spelt as 'matyou'. The writer also developed his own spelling for sounds like 'tuk tuk tuk'.

Continuities of a particular action shown through the writings of this subject was indicated through the duplication of words like [play play play] or [crid crid crid]. The influence of his Chinese background was also a factor that helped him to come up with the right word for example, [gege] was an influence of his Han Yu Pin Yin background and when he was not able to have the English word for sparklers, the writer wrote the name in Mandarin seen in excerpt ....

The writer was further able to narrate his stories in a cohesive event using markers like 'and' because to perform what he sees as a continuation or a reason was required to justify a particular occurrence.

This paper has also highlighted the fact that as the child grows and develops cognitively, he also acquires the ability to be more specific in what he says for instance, he was able to say 'beijing' instead of 'china'.

In a nutshell, although the writer's excerpts used here for analysis were purely diary-like in format, it was therefore acceptable that the child writer uses the present tense form to narrate the day's events. However, there was also some indication to relate to the past when the writer also deployed the past tense forms to describe a past event but this was not very consistent. In looking at the speech of some adult speakers of Britain who was recorded, the analysis shows that there were similarities of this kind. The Welsh and Scottish adults in those recordings also used the present tense form to disclose a past event. Hence, one cannot deduce that this is a typical child-like characteristic in writing.



The analysis has also shown that the bilingual child is fairly straightforward in what he says in his writing with no qualms to hide although where his moods are affected, the child writer may not write in as many words as he preferred.

### **Recommendations from educators in developing writing among young children:**

The ways in which you respond to children's writing will play an important part in what they attempt next. The following points provide a framework for response which is designed to assist learning and help you to take on a supportive role.

- Respond to the content first.
- Show an interest in the writing.
- Ask the child about the subject matter.
- Ask the child what they think of the writing.
- Read the writing together.
- Praise the attempts at spellings before pointing out they are wrong.
- Do not overload the child with too many mistakes to think about. (i.e. which is most appropriate for them to learn next?)
- Ask if the child would like to change or check anything.
- Where possible it is useful to write a response to the child. This enables the writing and reading to interlink in a very meaningful way but also enables you to model the spellings which the child has not yet learned.
- Giving children encouragement is not just designed to keep them happy. It is a way of ensuring that they will want to try again rather than feeling they have failed or are not capable of the task in hand.

Encouragement can be given to young children to do different things:

- Use interesting words
- Changing and correct own writing
- Check a word
- Experiment with new ideas
- Take the initiative
- Reflecting on their own writing.
- Raise their self esteem as children's perceptions of themselves as writers play an important role in their motivation and confidence to learn.

### **References:**

Bloom, Paul (2001) Lond: MIT Press

Body, Wendy Improving Children's Writing at Key Stage 2. In

[http://www.longman.co.uk/tt\\_pri/curric\\_sup/wendy\\_1.htm](http://www.longman.co.uk/tt_pri/curric_sup/wendy_1.htm)

Accessed 26.02.2008

Chiam, Heng Keng (1995) Understanding Children Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.

Fromkin, CV. Rodman, R. and HYams, N (2007) An Introduction to Language, (8 th edition) Australia: Wardsworth

Lu, Mei-Yu Writing Development from ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication Digest #159 in

<http://www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/digests/d159.html>

Accessed 26.02.2008

Wasowicz, Jan (2007) What Do Spelling Errors Tell Us About Language Knowledge? In

[http://www.speechpathology.com/articles.article\\_setail.asp?article\\_id=316](http://www.speechpathology.com/articles.article_setail.asp?article_id=316)

Accessed 26.09.2007

White, James (1976) Talking with a Child. London: MacMillian Publishers.

Children's Development of Emergent Writing in

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li1lk69.htm>

Accessed 26.02.2008

(1981) Teaching Chinese Children A Teacher's Guide. London: Nuffield Foundation  
ISBN 0 904956229