

**The Role of Code-Switching in the Written Expression of Early Elementary
Simultaneous Bilinguals**

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Introduction

Most of the literature on cross-language transfer with regard to literacy has been focused on reading (Slavin & Cheung, 2003; Gersten & Baker, 2000). More recent syntheses of research in the field have added the importance of research on cross-language transfer in the area of writing as well as reading (August & Shanahan, 2006). While this research is critically important to our understanding of bilingual literacy development, particularly for simultaneous bilinguals, the research for the most part, has focused on cross language transfer of skills and strategies. It is important that we additionally study bilingual development vis a vis the contexts in which this development occurs.

This paper draws on previous research done by Kenner (2004), Gort (2006), Escamilla & Coady (2002) and Coady & Escamilla (2005) which posits that emerging bilingual students use multiple strategies in the process of cross language transfer. These include skills and strategies, but also students transfer themselves, their personas, their social realities, and their knowledge of the world. Too often what bilingual children know and have to share in their writing is devalued because of the undue emphasis placed on form and convention, without regard to the ideas and voice contained in children's writing. A central and often controversial aspect of cross-language transfer in the writing of bilingual children is code-switching. Historically, code-switching has been labeled as a deficit behavior, used only by children who were limited in both of their languages.

Code-switching has been negatively characterized as “an individual whim,” “merely stylistic and largely nonfunctional” “done out of lexical need” and “a pre-programmed community routine” (Zentella, 1997). While recent research (Blum-Martinez, 1996; Zentella, 1997, Gort, 2006) has questioned this deficit orientation, deficit views of code-switching are still pervasive in the field.

Theoretical Framework and Background

Early researchers in the field of bilingualism posited that children were born monolingual (Volterra & Taescher, 1978) and that bilingualism, if it developed, developed from a monolingual brain. They posited three stages of bilingual development. This included: 1) The child has two languages and 1 lexicon; 2) The child has two languages and one syntactical system; and finally different linguistic systems develop. These researchers reported that code-switching happens at all of these stages of bilingual development because the brain was wired for monolingualism and because children were randomly using two lexical and syntactical systems in acts of communication. Genesee (2002) challenged the work of Volterra & Taescher and carried out a series of studies with emerging bilinguals in Canada. These studies examined code-switching and other behaviors in early simultaneous bilinguals who were learning French/English. Genesee's studies concluded that children even at the 1-2 word stage of language acquisition are functionally bilingual, and that code-switching among emerging bilinguals is neither random nor done because children are confusing two language systems. He established that children's use of two languages simultaneously is generally done strategically. Genesee posits that human brains are hard wired not just for one language, but for two or more.

As a result of the early and pervasive view point that babies were hard wired to be monolingual, early researchers on bilingualism looked for evidence that children were able to separate out the languages that they were learning to link each of these experiences to a social world (Kenner, 2004). Ability to strictly separate two languages in oral and written language was and is considered a sign of linguistic competence and language mixing or code-switching was and is considered to be a sign of deficiencies in one or both languages or cross-language confusion. Bilingual competency is linked to language separation (Deuchar & Quay, 1999; Fantini, 1985). Other researchers have begun to argue that simultaneous bilinguals, those children who acquire and/or are exposed to two languages from the time they are born do not strictly separate two languages, rather they use two languages strategically in oral and written communication, and that code-switching is an important aspect of this bilingual development (Baker, 2001; Genesse, 2002; Kenner, 2004; Zentella, 1997).

This paper adds to the research that has postulated that bilingual children are constantly moving between two worlds or multiple worlds simultaneously, and that simultaneously living in two worlds is partially manifested in oral and written language through code-switching. Children in this study were learning to speak, read and write in Spanish and English at the same time and this experience of biliteracy meant that they always had more than one set of resources available when writing. As will be demonstrated, at some points in their writing children drew on both sets of linguistic resources at once, while at others they switched from using one set to using another. As with Kenner's (2004) and Gort's (2006) work the study presented herein suggests that that this mixing or switching should not be equated with 'confusion.' We argue that

code-switching in these children's writing represents strategic use of two languages to capture and detail their lives in multiple worlds.

Research Questions and Methodology

This paper examines writing samples of 327 first, second and third grade children and examines their use of code-switching as they write in Spanish and English. Two research questions were posed for the study. They are: 1) How do early elementary emerging bilingual children use code-switching to express themselves in writing? and 2) How can the study of code-switching help us to better understand emerging bilingual children? It is important to note that the paper focuses on the content of children's writing when they code-switch, its focus is on what the children are writing about as well as how they are writing it.

Data were collected for this study as a part of a larger three-year longitudinal study looking at the development of literacy and biliteracy in children in 15 schools and 7 school districts in Colorado and Texas. In this study, writing sample data are collected one time per year, first in Spanish and then in English. Writing sample data were collected through the administration of a writing prompt to which children were expected to write a constructed response.

Data for this particular paper were collected during December/January of 2005-2006. Writing sample data were collected by classroom teachers who used a common protocol for collecting writing sample data. Children had a total of 30 minutes to complete their writing sample in Spanish. Two weeks later, using the same protocol, teachers collected a writing sample using a different prompt in English. Only children who wrote in both

Running Head: Code-Switching in Writing

Spanish and English were included in this analysis. Writing sample data were collected on 327 children: 127 first graders, 111 second graders, and 90 third graders.

The writing prompts varied by grade level. Within a grade level, writing prompts were similar in Spanish and English, but not the same. The within grade level similarity was created in order to elicit cross language transfer. The prompts were not simply translations; sameness was avoided so as to not encourage direct translation. The writing prompts were as follows:

Grade 1 Spanish: Escribe sobre tu animal favorito.

(Write about your favorite animal.)

Grade 1 English: Write about your favorite toy.

Grade 2 Spanish: ¿Qué es tu libro favorito? ¿Y por qué es tu favorito?

(What is your favorite book? Why is it your favorite?)

Grade 2 English: What is your favorite TV program? Why is it your favorite?

Grade 3 Spanish: ¿Qué es la mejor cosa que te ha pasado en la escuela este año?

(What is the best thing that has happened to you in school this year?)

Grade 3 English: What is the best thing that has happened to you in your life?

Researchers in this project understand that a student's writing is greatly influenced by purpose and content. Further, we understand that allowing students only a first-draft attempt at writing and evaluating that piece with a rubric might not capture what they actually know as writers. In short, we are well aware of the limitations of using writing prompts to assess proficiency and skill in the writing development of all children, particularly emerging bilinguals (Coady & Escamilla, 2005; Escamilla &

Coady, 2001). However, we decided to use them to gather data on students' writing for several reasons. First, the standards-based assessment system in both Texas and Colorado (Texas Assessments of Knowledge and Skills – TAKS and the Colorado Student Assessment Program – CSAP respectively) utilize writing prompts as the vehicle for assessing student writing proficiency in both English and Spanish. We felt that using the writing prompt would be a good way to give the students practice for the upcoming CSAP and TAKS and to provide the teachers with information about how the students performed on this type of writing assessment. We learned that writing prompts may also serve to invite children's code-switching particularly when children are asked to reflect on or summarize experiences that they have lived in one language, but are writing about in a different language. This issue will be explored in greater detail in the findings section of this paper.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included calculation of the frequency of code-switching, the types of code-switching, and the content of the code-switching. Code-switching was considered to include: 1) Phonics or use of phonetic principles or rules from one language to another (e.g. children writing 'yui' for 'we'; or 'ay' for 'I'); 2) Proper nouns; 3) Borrowed words and other lexical code-switches (tenemos 'desks' en la clase (*we have desks in our class*); 4) Syntax and conventions (e.g. the doll of my sister for my sister's doll); 5) Rhetorical structures; and 6) Conceptual code-switches (Celebramos mi cumpleaños y al fin me cantaron, "Happy Birthday to You"). Data were analyzed and compared within and across grade levels.

Findings

Findings support the view that code-switching is not done because children are deficient or confused by their two languages, rather that they are living their lives in bilingual environments where code-switching is an important and at times necessary element of communication. Further, as they learn and employ strategies to express themselves in writing in Spanish and English, they use these strategies across languages, and frequently employ multiple cross-language strategies in their writing.

Research Question #1 asked, “How do early elementary emerging bilingual children use code-switching to express themselves in writing?” Research Question #2 asked, “How can the study of code-switching help us to better understand emerging bilingual children?”

There are two major findings with regard to this question. The first is that children use multiple types of code-switching to express themselves in writing with regard to phonics, syntax, concepts, rhetorical structures and lexical items. Further, because of this use of multiple strategies, children may be viewed as lacking proficiency in writing (particularly in English). Moreover, children’s code-switching is evidence of the fact that they simultaneously live in and must negotiate two worlds which are represented by two different languages.

Multiple Strategies

With regard to the first finding, children’s writing samples were analyzed by grade level and by topic. Table 1 (below) provides an overview of the occurrence of code-switches as well as their direction. This table includes only the numbers of writing samples that included some type of code-switching. It is important to note that many

children had multiple code-switches within their writing, including samples where the prompt was given in one language (English) and the writing sample was written entirely in the other language (Spanish). This was only found at the first grade level. Most pertinent to the research question is that the majority of the code-switches were found in the English writing samples and were Spanish to English code-switches. An analysis of punctuation and other conventions was not included as a part of this particular study, however, it is interesting to note that one convention that children frequently used from Spanish to English was the inverted exclamation point – for example ¡Splash! ¡Wow!

**Incidence of Code-Switching
2005-2006**

Grade	Total (pairs)	English/Spanish	Spanish/English
First	126	2	33
Second	111	3	34
Third	90	8	30

A cross-grade level analysis indicated that children used Spanish phonics to write in English and that this accounted for many of the instances of code-switching. Much less frequently, children used English phonics to write in Spanish. A critical aspect of this finding, however, is that at all grade levels, children’s use of phonetic code-switching could be easily misinterpreted if their writing samples were read by teachers who are not bilingual. Common Spanish/English phonics code-switches included the following and were consistent across all grade levels:

Phonetic Code-switches	Standard English Orthography
Es	is
may	my
gi	he
chi	she
en	in
it	eat
ey	a

laiket	like it
ay	I
end	and
jor	her

Phonetic Code-switches	Standard Spanish Orthography
chiwawa	chihuahua
kavallero	caballero
agwa	agua
welan	huelan

It is interesting to note that the above samples of phonetic code-switching clearly indicate that the children are applying grapho-phonetic rules to their writing. When seen as lists of words, it is easy to see and assess that the children are using Spanish or English rules in their writing. However, most frequently, in the writing samples in this study, phonetic code-switching occurred multiple times, and was accompanied by other types of code-switching (e.g. syntax, lexical etc.) The following examples illustrate this issue.

The tree little piks

My story is about of tree piks and 1 lobo feroz. The lobo tiro dawn the house of paja. Den the little pik go roning to the huse of jis brotter a sai guat japen to he house. *(My story is about three pigs and one ferocious wolf. The wolf tore down the straw house. Then the pig went running to his brother's house and says, "What happened?"*

The sample above shows multiple examples of Spanish phonics applied to English (piks for pigs; jis for his; sai for say; guat for what). Further, the sample includes Spanish syntax applied to English (e.g. the house of paja for straw house). It also contains lexical code-switching (e.g. lobo for wolf; he for his). The use of multiple

types of code-switching characterized the writing of the majority of children who code-switching in their writing.

Estados Unidos

The firsh time I cam to Estados Unidos wit my family wi wer hapy. I want to do a lods thegs, want to play, lorn engles. I wa na si my coins and my ent. (*The first time I came to the United States with my family, we were happy. I wanted to do a lot of things, I wanted to play, to learn English. I want to see my cousins and my aunt*).

As with the “Three Pigs,” the “Estados Unidos” sample is also illustrative of a child who is using multiple cross-language strategies to write in English. Starting with the title, the child uses the Spanish words “Estados Unidos” to title her story about the best thing that has happened to her. She then uses Spanish phonics (e.g. wi for we; ent for aunt; si for see). Her use of two words (wa na) for want to or wanna are interesting and represent spoken language in English she knows but does not yet know how to write. Finally, the word engles is interesting as she has use the English letter E to start writing this word, but she writes the remainder of the word in Spanish with a lower case e. Again, rather than showing an inability to write well in English, this sample illustrates the multiple cross-language strategies that children are using to express themselves in writing.

The day a go to Mexico

The day a go to Mexico was a day very hapy y was to nerves dicos y was can a si my grama y heve si her a log time ago the wiget ento the house end a si may

grama a was very happy to see her the was very espechol to me asey helow to my grama end tha was my happy ting ever happened to me. *(The day I went to Mexico was a very happy day. I was very nervous because I was going to see my Grandma and I have seen her a long time ago. Then we got into her house and I see my Grandma and I was very happy to see her. This was very especial to me. I say, "Hello," to my Grandma and that was the happiest thing that has ever happened to me).*

This writing sample illustrates once again the finding that children use multiple cross language strategies to express themselves in writing. Again, we see the use of Spanish phonics in English (e.g. end for and; y for I; a for I) as well as syntax (a day very happy for a very happy day). We also see the title of the story written as a title would be in Spanish with only the first word capitalized. Again, we see language that is most likely understood in oral language (asey helow for I say, "hello"; wiget for we get), and interestingly in this sample we see that she uses different strategies at different places in the sample. One time she uses the letter a for I and another time she uses y for I.

A most striking feature of this analysis was the fact that the older the child, the more cross-language strategies they employed in their writing, and the more complex the code-switching behaviors. We would argue that these findings are congruent with those in other studies (Escamilla, 2006; Kenner, 2004) that suggest that these writers are emerging in their biliteracy in ways that are not commonly valued in current school contexts that value monolingualism and/or strict separation of languages. As Kenner says, "The wider society tries to keep children's worlds separate, with different codes for

each context. Children, however, tend to integrate and synthesize their resources. Further, the availability of alternatives is a key aspect of growing up bilingual.” (p. 59).

Bilingual Living = Bilingual Writing

The second major finding from this research deals more directly with the simultaneous two worlds that emerging simultaneous bilingual children are growing up in and that are often expressed in cross-language code-switches. An interesting aspect of this finding was the fact that as the students advance in grades and experience more and more of their lives in English, the code switches happen more in the Spanish writing samples and are tied to places and concepts experienced only in English. As we were analyzing these writing samples, we discovered that perhaps the very writing prompts we used most likely invited and necessitated the code-switching that children used in their writing. For example, in the second grade, the writing prompt in Spanish asked the children to write about their favorite television show. We discovered that many of the children watch television in English. Therefore in order to write to the prompt, they had to write about an experience they had experienced in English (the television show) and write about it in Spanish (to answer the prompt). Similarly, the third grade writing prompt asked children in Spanish to write about the best thing that had happened to them in school this year. Since much of the school day, routines, structures and instruction is conducted in English, the children were once again asked to write about an experience that they lived in English, to write about it in Spanish.

Favorite second grade television programs include the following:

Program from Writing Sample	Standard English
EspongBob	Sponge Bob
Simsims	Simpsons
Dats so Raben	That’s So Raven

PowrReinjers	Power Rangers
Espider Man	Spider Man
Ckucky	Chucky
Tom and Gerry	Tom and Jerry
Toy Turi Tu	Toy Story 2
Swet laef of Zac and Cooooy	The Sweet Life of Zac and Codey

Aside from evidence that many of the children in the study watch television in English, we saw examples that illustrated to us that children were quite capable of using strategic code-switching to write about their bilingual lives. For example, one child when writing about his favorite TV show, “Sponge Bob Square Pants,” uses vocabulary words interchangeably (e.g. squirrel/ardilla). He writes:

Hay una estrella del mar, y un octopus y una ardilla (*There is a star fish and an octopus and a squirrel*).

Later in the story the child writes, “Y la squerl” (*and the squirrel*).

What is characteristic of the writing of children at the second grade level is that they engage in conceptual code-switching. That is, they code-switch where appropriate according to their simultaneous worlds. In this case, the lived the experience of watching a television show in English and writing about it in Spanish.

One child, for example wrote about her favorite show, “Dat’s so Raven.”

Mi favorito episodio fue cuando Cory no tiene Baby Siter y hase toda las cosas que quiere. Y el episodio de Cuntry Cosins cuando raven dise cuando es el midnite viene un scare crow.” (*Mi favorite episode is when Cory doesn’t have a baby sitter and she does anything she wants to. And the episode about Country Cousins when Raven says that when it is midnight a scare crow will come*).

It is important to note here, that the child's code-switching responds directly to the concepts of the program (baby sitter, country cousins, midnight, scare crow) that were lived and learned in English.

Children writing about their favorite books also demonstrate their abilities to do conceptual code-switching. For example:

I like Junie B. Jones because she's funnie on the books that I have in my house 2 on Spanish and 1 on English. And I like Junie B. Jones tiene un monstrito debajo de la cama and Junie B. Jones tiene un Pio Pio en el bolcillo.

The prompt that the child above is writing to asks the children to write about their favorite book (the prompt is given in English). In this case, the child writes that he/she likes the Junie B. Jones books and owns three books, one in English and two in Spanish. When the child describes the Spanish books, he/she code-switches into Spanish.

Many children simply began their writing by saying, "My favorite book in English is Clifford," or they signaled that they knew they were code-switching by putting quotation marks around the title of the books they were writing about. For example, "My favorite book is, "Los siete hermanos chinos."

The following examples illustrate this bilingual living from the third grade writing samples:

"Me llevan al *moll* a comprar cosas."

"La *principal* a veces te dice hola, cómo estás o *hi how are you*"

"Lo tercero que aprendí es *no bullying*."

"Luego fuimos a los *specials*."

"Salimos afuera y jugamos *tag*."

“También el sistema solar se llama *The Milky Way*.”

“Un *test* de matemáticas.”

“In the reises jugamos roc, peiper, siser” *At recess we play rock, paper, scissors*

In the third grade, bilingual living was illustrated with regard to games that were played at school (e.g. terebo – *tetherball*), school discipline (si no tienes tics (ticks) te dan un premio – *if you don't get any tics you get a prize*), annotations such as dates (12/6/06 for 6/12/06), ways to address teachers (e.g. en la clase de Mr. Hilsder; La Mis T es inteligente), and things that happened to them outside of school (me encontré un dolar; yo me subí al bos y me encontré un cased de game boy – *I got on the bus and found a Game Boy Cassette*).

Perhaps the most interesting finding about bilingual living was that children expressed their cultural experiences across languages and showed ways that they and their families are becoming bicultural. In the sample, the child indicates that on they celebrate the Day of the Dead by taking both flowers and food to the cemetery. The following illustrates this phenomenon:

Day of the dead

Mi and my dad wen tu the grav yard bycas my granpa dad so des way mi and my dad went to the grav yard wi bring fawes and the food my granmpa layc – empanadas and tamales.

(Me and my dad went to the grave yard because my Grandpa died. That's why me and my dad went to the grave yard. We bring flowers and the food my Grandpa liked –empanadas and tamales).

Discussion

While much has been written about code-switching among emerging bilingual students, most of this research has been done with regard to spoken language rather than written representation (Kenner, 2004). Research on code-switching with regard to written language is beginning to emerge (Gort, 2006), but given the current emphasis on writing in early elementary grades for the purposes of preparing for high stakes testing, we would argue that there is a need for much more research in the code-switching behaviors of early elementary Spanish/English emerging bilinguals in the area of writing. When analyzing the code-switching writing behaviors of the 327 children included in this study, we examined code-switching from the following levels: phonics, syntax, rhetorical structures, and concepts. We also conducted the more traditional analysis related to lexical code-switches, borrowing, and inter and intra-sentential code-switches. We report on two findings that raise important implications for how we examine and interpret the code-switching behaviors of simultaneous Spanish/English bilinguals. For the purposes of this discussion, we propose that when looking at code-switching in children's writing, particularly around multiple strategies that children employ in their writing, findings from this study indicate that the most interesting findings relate to cross-language use of phonics rather than to the inter and intra sentential code-switching which is frequently employed when looking at code-switching in oral language. In fact, the incidence and frequency of code-switching with regard to phonics and multiple strategies was much higher than other types of code switching. For example, writing samples where the code-switching was multiple strategies related to the transfer of phonics were

much more prevalent than those that included inter or intra sentential code-switching.

The following are examples:

The best happened to me is when ie went to the park ie plied with my brodos and whent the suegs. *The best that happened to me is when I went to the park. I played with my brothers and went on the swings.*

May favorito story es Spider man its wen el llego tardo al trabajo and den Peter almost machuco el ombre. *(My favorite story is Spider man. Its when he got to work late and then Peter almost smashed the man).*

We would submit here that the analysis of code-switching in writing must also include cross-language transfer of phonics as well as other types of analysis.

Next, it is important to consider the code-switching writing behaviors of students in the context of their learning environments. In the case of the children in the study, many were being taught by teachers who had learned to teach children to write in Spanish in the same way that they were being taught to write in English. In our analysis, particularly at second and third grade, we saw numerous examples of children who were employing English rhetorical structures to their writing in Spanish. A particularly prevalent pattern was the pattern that teaches children to organize their writing by using the connectors first, next, and finally. While not an organizational device commonly used in Spanish, many children used this structure in their Spanish writing. An example of this device applied in Spanish is as follows:

Lo mejor que me a pasado en la escuela

Lo mejor que me paso es que nos ayuda las maestras. Primero porque nos dice que caminamos cayadido en el pasillo. Segundo, nos dice las reglas y si nos portamos bien y si tenemos 15 ticks nos dan algo como ir a la computadora. Tercero, porque nos ensena como escribir in ingles. *(The best thing that has happened is that our teachers help us. First, because they tell us to walk quietly in the hall. Second, they tell us the rules and if we behave and if we have 15 ticks they give us something like letting us go to the computer. Third, because they teach us to write in English.*

Examining the written code-switching has the advantage of allowing us to examine the how children are learning to write vis-à-vis the contexts in which they are learning.

Finally, a major finding of this study was that children do not simply transfer skills, and strategies across languages, they transfer themselves and their experiences living and growing up in simultaneous worlds. This type of code-switching was manifested in the conceptual code-switches where children aptly demonstrated that when they lived experiences in one language and were asked to tell about them in a second language, they needed to employ code-switching to accurately describe the event. We concur with others that this type of code-switching is strategic on the part of the writer. We further argue that tasks that children are asked to perform in school (e.g. writing to a particular prompt) may invite code-switching and that schools and teachers need to analyze the kinds of writing that children are asked to do as an additional way of examining code-switching in written expression. Analyzing the writing behaviors of

emerging bilinguals vis-a-vis conceptual code-switching may provide an additional and positive way of examining this writing development.

To conclude and reiterate, this paper adds additional evidence to the literature that proposes that young children who are growing up in bilingual and biliterate environments may at a fundamental level experience their worlds not as separate linguistic and cultural entities but as ‘simultaneous.’ Bilingual living does indeed require bilingual writing and should be valued and studied as such.

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