Understanding changes in elementary Mandarin students’ L1 and L2 writing

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Abstract

The study focused on five elementary Mandarin-speaking students’ development as writers over a two-year period in US classrooms. Mandarin speakers who came to the US in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grades demonstrated some language loss in their Chinese writing. We found differences in terms of sentence complexity, character complexity, rhetorical features, and voice in students’ writing between Year 1 and Year 2. Students’ native language loss was mitigated by their initial writing competence, support at home, and opportunities to write in Chinese at school. Four of the five students’ English writing made dramatic improvements in grammar and punctuation, sentence complexity, rhetorical style and voice over the two years. The fifth student, whose writing did not improve, had few opportunities to write in his new school setting. Our findings suggest that the amount and quality of writing opportunities in each language affect students’ writing development.

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Research in L1 composing has demonstrated that the writing process is extremely complex (Flower & Hayes, 1981) and involves social as well as cognitive factors (Bizzell, 1992). Social and affective factors have also strongly influenced the writing development of second language writers who have to learn a new language within a variety of social contexts (Silva & Matsuda, 2001). Ehrman (1996) focused on the challenges such as cognitive learning styles, biographical backgrounds, and emotions faced by second language learners as they learned to acquire new linguistic forms. Many colleges and universities have created writing centers or ESL classes to assist students who are learning...
to write in English and are paying attention to social as well as cognitive factors in their instruction (Reid, 2001; Santos, 2001). However, less attention has been paid to the vast number of elementary students who are immigrating to the US from Asia and Latin America (National Center For Educational Statistics, 1998; Nieto, 2002). The focus of instruction for English language learners (ELL) in elementary schools has tended to be reading comprehension rather than writing development (García, 2000, 2003). Additionally, research has examined students’ English writing development (Valdés, 1999), but has not addressed students’ maintenance or acquisition of writing skills in their native language.

Thomas and Collier (2003) have found that cognitive and academic development in the first language is essential to the development of second language learning. Children may experience cognitive difficulties in their second language if they do not reach a certain threshold of literacy in their first language. They also suggested that literacy development, concept formation, and subject matter knowledge that were developed in the first language transferred to the second language. Cummins (1990), too, has supported the theory of a strong positive transfer from the first to the second language. These theories support the research on some bilinguals who have displayed consistent cognitive advantages over monolinguals, including advanced metalinguistic abilities (Bialystok, 1994).

We began our study with two guiding assumptions derived from research on L1 and L2 studies: (a) development of literacy skills in a first language influences the writing development in a second language, and (b) bilingualism/biliteracy holds many advantages for elementary students. In this study, we trace the writing development of Mandarin speakers in their native language and English. We highlight the role of both the instructional contexts and home contexts to understand the factors that affected students’ maintenance (or loss) of their native language and their development in English. Through our two-year project investigating elementary student writers we contribute to the understanding of cognitive and social factors that influence English language learners’ development.

1. Literature review

Studies revolving around L1/L2 writing processes can be roughly divided into three types. The first type of research has explored linguistic or rhetorical patterns between L1 and L2 writing processes and how these patterns or constituent elements differ from one another (Silva, 1993; Ting, 1996). The second type has focused on the role that culture plays in distinguishing L1 from L2 writing (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Zamel, 1997). The third group of studies, focused on the role of instruction on L1 writers (Dyson, 2003; McCarthey, 1994) and L2 writers (Gutiérrez, 1992; Valdés, 1999), has suggested that classroom contexts and the quality of teaching affect student writers. Additionally, research on L1 language loss is relevant to consideration of students’ development in their native language and English. We review these four areas because they bring different aspects to bear on English language learners’ writing development. For example, understanding how writers use both their L1 and L2 in...
the composing processes can shed light on the strategies that English language learners might use.

1.1. Linguistic and rhetorical patterns in L1 and L2

Several researchers have investigated the relationships between L1 and L2 composing processes. Ting (1996) analyzed his own writing processes to understand how his L1 (Chinese) affected his L2 (English) writing process. He found that many of his L1 writing strategies transferred into L2; however, he also concluded, “different strategies require different threshold levels of L2 proficiency in order for the transfer to happen” (p. 139). In an analysis of 72 reports of empirical research, Silva (1993) found that general composing processes were similar in L1 and L2. However, when students wrote in their L2, they elaborated less in the planning and reviewing stages, and their transcribing was more laborious and less fluent. Their L2 written texts were less fluent, accurate, and effective; their texts reflected distinct writing patterns across genres.

Studies also show that the transfer from students’ L1 to their L2 writing affects the quality of their L2 writing. Boroditsky (2001) found that abstract thoughts tend to be shaped by L1, thus affecting L2 use. Therefore, L1 is influential in one’s thinking even when writers are using their L2 for meaning construction. Wang and Wen (2002) examined how Chinese university students’ native language affected their writing and whether their reliance on Chinese was related to their English proficiency. The researchers found that students with higher English proficiency relied less on Chinese when they wrote in English than students with less English proficiency. They found that writers were more likely to rely on L1 when they were generating and organizing ideas, but more likely to rely on L2 when engaged in text-generation; in other words, “the more the cognitive processing is related to the textual output, the less L1 is used in it” (p. 240).

In a similar study, Wang (2003) examined the frequency of adult Chinese ESL learners’ language switching of L1 to L2 writing and the effects on the quality of their L2 writing. The study found that adult ESL learners’ development of L2 proficiency did not reduce the frequency of language switching from L1 to L2 writing. L2 writers were aware of applying L1 rhetorical and discourse patterns to their L2 writing. Kubota (1998) examined Japanese university students’ discourse patterns in Japanese and English writing, particularly looking at the location of main ideas and the macro-level rhetorical patterns. Although she found that about half of the students used different discourse patterns in their L1 and L2 writing, the other half used similar patterns in both languages. These studies have demonstrated that adult L2 writers’ proficiency level as well as the task influenced their use of L1 and L2. What remains unclear from these studies are the effects of L1 on children who are developing as writers in another language. How might English language learners, an increasingly larger proportion of the school population (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1995) use their L1 and L2 during the composing process? Additionally, the research that has been done on second language learners with students has focused on Spanish speakers (Reyes, 1992; Valdés, 1999). More research needs to uncover the writing development of students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, in particular language users from morphosyllabic systems such as Chinese (DeFrancis, 1989).
Several studies focused on children’s acquisition of reading skills in Chinese have some implications for examining students’ writing. For example, Ku and Anderson (2003) have found that morphological awareness was essential to read Chinese. Pine, Huang, and Huang (2003) explored word recognition and decoding strategies adopted by Chinese children. The researchers found that children most frequently adopted the following strategies: (a) dividing the character into parts or smaller units (e.g., radicals), (b) relating the parts or units of a character with known ones, and (c) scanning details of the character structure. Ho, Ng, and Ng (2003) investigated Chinese children’s acquisition of radical knowledge (both semantic and phonetic) and found that the radical is an important “orthographic unit” for children in recognizing Chinese characters. Children’s awareness of the positional regularity of semantic radicals assisted them in reading at the word level; the awareness of the functional regularity of phonetic radicals provided them with phonological cues to sound out new words. These studies demonstrate that Chinese requires different word recognition strategies than English. The differences in recognizing words for reading has implications for learning to write in two very different language systems. Because language is embedded in culture, it is also essential to consider the cultural influences in learning to write.

1.2. Cultural influences

Research from contrastive rhetoric suggests that cultural influences play a strong role in students’ writing (Kaplan, 1967). In her study of high school teachers from PRC and the US, Li (1996) found that native English and Chinese writers differed in what they valued as effective writing and employed different strategies. For example, the Chinese perspective of good writing consisted of having a moral message, whereas Americans tended to value exploration of self. Ho (1998) interviewed 20 EFL writers in Taiwan and reported that many Taiwanese writers preferred memorization and imitation as writing strategies, as opposed to Americans’ encouragement of developing the individual voice. While Americans see borrowing extensively from another text as plagiarism, “violations of honor and morals,” (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 62), Chinese writers see borrowing as flattering to the writer of the original text. Wu and Rubin’s (2000) study of Taiwanese and US college students found that their writing tended to reflect the relative values of collectivist versus individualistic societies. Features such as indirectness, use of proverbs, and consideration for the family and the society tended to show up in Taiwanese students’ writing. In contrast, personal disclosure and assertiveness were reflected in US students’ work. While the aforementioned studies have been helpful for providing insights into problems ESL students may have when adjusting to writing English, critics of the theory suggest that contrastive rhetoric may contribute to stereotyping (Panetta, 2001).

Despite disagreements about the utility of contrastive rhetoric, there is much agreement that students from different cultural backgrounds encounter barriers when learning to write in a second language (Fox, 1994). Zamel (1997) proposed a transculturation model, suggesting that language teachers need to be open to the complexity that ESL students bring to the classrooms and validate students’ attempts to acquire new linguistic practices. In their study of six Mexican students studying in Britain, Ivanic and Camps (2001) found that students’ writing reflected different types of positioning, and that second language classrooms should help writers find ways to express their ideas that are “in harmony
culturally and personally” (p. 31). These studies suggest that culture plays an important role in students’ rhetorical styles; yet, instructional contexts also seem to affect how students position themselves in relation to their previous cultural contexts as well as their new settings in the US. We need more information about the role of context in supporting young English language learners’ development as writers.

1.3. Instructional contexts

Several studies focused on supporting L2 students’ learning have examined the role of home and school contexts. For example, Buckwalter and Lo (2002) studied a five-year-old Mandarin Chinese-speaking boy who was immersed in a biliterate home environment. After following the boy for 15 weeks, the researchers found he was able (a) to recognize Chinese and English as separate writing systems with separate characteristics, (b) to understand the relationship between the written and the spoken texts, and (c) to distinguish pretend, invented, and conventional writing in both languages. His writing in both English and Chinese appeared to follow similar developmental stages. The environment supported his literacy development in Chinese and English by providing him with meaningful reading and writing activities in both languages. In the classrooms Genishi, Stires, and Yuan-Chan (2001) studied, Chinese preschoolers were able to increase their knowledge of symbol systems and alphabetic knowledge when activities were embedded in meaningful social contexts. Townsend and Fu (1998) followed a first-grade Chinese immigrant student over the course of a school year; they found that he developed into a competent English writer because he was in a supportive classroom context. He received recognition from his teacher and peers while having opportunities to draw from both Chinese and American cultures in a writing process-oriented classroom.

Proponents of writing process classrooms have suggested that providing English language learners with opportunities to write for an audience, to share their work with the teacher and peers, and to collaborate on texts can help them develop writing skills (Au, 1993; Edelsky, 1986). However, other researchers have found that process-writing classrooms differ from one another in terms of the nature of the tasks and the quality of instruction (Gutiérrez, 1992). Valdés (1999) found that the quality of instruction as well as teachers’ views of the students as writers affected students’ performance, while Reyes (1992) has recommended that more explicit writing instruction in the conventions may benefit Spanish-speaking English language learners. As teachers have attempted to implement process-oriented programs, they have also been confronted with political pressure to teach specific competencies to pass statewide writing tests (Hillocks, 2002). While standards movements have focused on helping students develop “writerly habits and processes” (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999, p. 31), identify purposes and genres, and learn to use language conventions accurately, statewide tests have focused on the five-paragraph theme and language conventions (Hillocks, 2002). The result has often been confusion for teachers or the adoption of specific writing programs that are aligned to the tests. For example, Hillocks found that the use of commercial materials developed to help teachers assist their students in passing the tests has resulted in the “ultimate homogenization of narrative, persuasive, and expository tasks” (p. 119) in which the prompts and use of specific transition words contribute to stilted student writing.
The studies focused on instructional contexts suggest that the nature of instruction as well as the larger political contexts shape students’ opportunities to learn to write in English. Yet, more data on how specific instructional contexts shape the development of English language learners’ writing is important for helping these students succeed in US schools. Further, as students gain skills in English, there may be consequences for retaining or losing their native language.

1.4. Language loss

Several studies have focused on the consequences of immigrant students moving to English-speaking countries and losing their native language as they acquired English. Kouritzin (1999) suggested that lack of proficiency in a native language as well as incomplete learning of a language spoken in childhood constituted language loss. In her interviews with 21 immigrants to English-speaking Canada, Kouritzin identified loss of extended family and negative self-image as the consequences of heritage language loss. Most immigrants felt so much pressure to fit in with their peer groups that they focused more on acquiring English rather than maintaining their heritage language. Wong Fillmore (1991) documented the pattern of Asian immigrants losing their heritage language as their English increased. She found that in the US where minority languages are not highly valued and a strong emphasis on assimilation exists, children’s loss of the first language had profound effects on the child’s relationship with parents and the community. Hinton (1999) studied Asian American college students in her class at the University of California at Berkeley and found that many of the students had only a passive knowledge of their heritage language. First language attrition created problems for them in communicating not only with relatives, but often with their own parents. Students who were able to maintain their first language were required to speak their native languages at home and had opportunities to interact with relatives, neighbors, and peers in their native language. Hinton suggests that using language in multiple contexts, attending heritage language schools, making return trips to the homeland, and learning their native language from television and interaction with peers can help maintain students’ heritage languages. These studies provide information about the advantages and challenges that English language learners might face. For example, what kinds of opportunities do English language learners have to communicate in their native language and English? How might home and school factors affect their development as writers in their native language and English?

Our study of English language learners’ writing was motivated by questions such as the aforementioned ones. In reviewing the literature, we found that previous studies have focused on adult ESL writers (Silva & Matsuda, 2001), on children’s L1 writing (Dahl & Farnan, 1998; Dyson, 2003), on English language learners’ reading comprehension (García, 2003), on home literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Li, 2002) and on instructional contexts (Gutiérrez, 1992). However, little research has focused on English language learners’ writing development in home and school contexts. In particular, few studies have investigated the writing development of students in a morphosyllabic language such as Chinese, yet an increasing number of school-aged children are arriving from Asia (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1995). In response to the paucity of literature on English language learners’ writing development, we investigated the following questions:
(a) How did Mandarin-speaking 4th and 5th graders develop as writers in Chinese?
(b) How did Mandarin-speaking 4th and 5th graders develop as writers in English?
(c) What factors in students’ home and school environments influenced their development as writers?

2. Methods

The following analysis of Chinese students’ writing development was part of a larger study in which we examined the writing practices, attitudes, and instructional contexts of Mandarin-speaking and Spanish-speaking English language learners. As part of the larger study, we conducted classroom observations and interviews with teachers, the focal students, and their parents (McCarthey & Garcia, 2005; McCarthey, García, López-Velásquez, Lin, & Guo, 2004).

2.1. Context and participants

The study began at an elementary school (grades K-5) located in the Midwest in the spring of 2002 (Year 1). The school was designated a multilingual school within the district and received support for its native language classes, ESL, and foreign language classes. English language learners, approximately 35% of the school population, received 45 min of native-language instruction, 30–160 min of ESL instruction, and 125–225 min of instruction in the all-English classroom. The amount of ESL instruction that students received depended on their English proficiency, with newcomers receiving more ESL instruction.

We used purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) to recruit 4th and 5th grade Mandarin speakers. We chose 4th and 5th graders because previous research has shown that students in intermediate grades are aware of the strategies they use to construct meaning during the composing process (Langer, 1986). Additionally, 4th and 5th grade ESL students received instruction together in the school setting we selected. At that time, there were eight Mandarin-speaking 4th and 5th graders enrolled in the program. Of these students, parents of six Mandarin speakers (four 5th graders and two 4th graders) agreed to have their children participate in the study. Three students came to the US at the beginning of the school year in which we began data collection, having completed at least the equivalent of grade 3 in China; one student came in November of Year 1, but had started the school year in English-speaking Canada. Two students arrived in the US from Taiwan in the previous school year: Susie came in the middle of second grade (although the school reports third grade entry), having completed 2\(\frac{1}{2}\) years of schooling in Taiwan, and Paul came as a 4th grader, having completed 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) years of schooling in Taiwan. We then followed five of the six students (one student returned to China) into their new settings over the next school year (Year 2). Two students (Chun Ming and Susie) remained at the elementary school for grade 5, two students (Hui Tzu and Yi Lin) moved to the middle school for grade 6, and one student (Paul) moved to a private Christian school for grade 6. Table 1 displays an overview of the five students we followed over the two years.

Three of the five students who remained in the US were Mandarin speakers from China and two were Mandarin speakers from Taiwan. The three Chinese students’ parents were
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Language spoken at home</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Parents’ occupations</th>
<th>US school entry date/grade level</th>
<th>Year 1 (Karl School) ESL placement</th>
<th>Year 2 placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chun Ming</td>
<td>Mandarin (Taiwanese)</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F: visiting scholar (material science)</td>
<td>September 2001 Full-time</td>
<td>Karl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: studied computers in US</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>Mrs. Almasi</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5th grade (part-time ESL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui Tzu</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F: visiting scholar (physics)</td>
<td>November 2001 Full-time</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: Ph.D. in China, studied English in US</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>6th grade (part-time ESL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Lin</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F: Ph.D. student (material science)</td>
<td>September 2001 Full-time</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: university professor China (physics)</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>6th grade (part-time ESL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Mandarin (Taiwanese)</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>F: owns company and lives in Taiwan</td>
<td>December 2000 Part-time</td>
<td>Private Christian School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: accountant</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>6th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>F: fast food restaurant</td>
<td>April 2000^a Full-time</td>
<td>Karl elementary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: stays home</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td></td>
<td>5th grade (part-time ESL)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a Family reported that she came to US in second grade, but the school reports third grade.
affiliated with the nearby university as doctoral students or visiting professors. The Taiwanese students’ parents planned on staying in the US, and at least one parent worked in the US. We provided the students with pseudonyms that are consistent with the names they chose to use in the US.

2.2. Data collection

We began our observations of students in their initial elementary school placements in the spring of Year 1. However, we collected writing samples from the beginning of that school year in each classroom context—ESL, all-English, and native language class (either Mandarin taught by a speaker from China or Mandarin taught by a speaker from Taiwan). We then followed the students into their new settings in Year 2 and collected samples from their new contexts. Table 2 displays the number of writing samples we collected from each student; numbers vary based on number of writing assignments required in each setting as well as whether the teacher and students saved their work.

2.2.1. Chinese

In Year 1 we collected writing samples from students’ Chinese/Taiwanese language classes. These were either school district required writing assessment tasks, in-class writing, or homework. The genres varied according to their grade levels and teachers’ instructional focus. According to the school district requirement, fourth-grade Chinese students needed to write a descriptive piece about the current season. Therefore, we have two pieces entitled “Autumn” and “Spring” from Chun Ming. Fifth graders needed to write a summary about a textbook story; we received summaries from Hui Tzu and Yi Lin about the story of the Matchbox Girl. In addition, Hui Tzu, wrote two more pieces—a story summary and a descriptive piece about a season. We have two drafts of a summary of a textbook article on the Egyptian pyramids from Paul. We received seven pieces that reflected different genres, including descriptive, narrative and book summary pieces from Susie.

In Year 2, two of the students moved to the middle school for 6th grade, and Paul moved to a private, Christian school. Their new schools did not provide any Chinese language instruction. In order to analyze their writing proficiency in Chinese, we conducted a final writing task by asking each of the five students to write a letter to a friend in their home country. Additionally, we collected pieces from Chun Ming and Susie’s native language classes, since they continued to receive instruction. Chun Ming wrote six pieces in Chinese class, including responses to the books he read, descriptive pieces about his participation in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chinese Y1</th>
<th>Chinese Y2</th>
<th>English Y1</th>
<th>English Y2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chun Ming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui Tzu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Lin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Easter Day activities and a fieldtrip, and a reflective piece about his Chinese language learning in the US. Susie wrote five pieces in Chinese class, including descriptions of herself, her dog, her favorite cookies, and Chinese holidays; she also wrote a storybook that she and her friend co-authored.

2.2.2. English

We collected English writing samples from students’ all-English classrooms and ESL classrooms. In Year 1, most of the samples were from students’ ESL classrooms. One ESL classroom required students to write personal entries in an open-ended journal—students drew a picture in the top part of the page and then wrote a narrative beneath it. The teacher did not correct the entry for grammar or spelling, but sometimes responded to students’ work by writing a sentence or asking a question. In the other ESL classroom, students wrote story summaries of books they had read, or in Chun Ming’s case, summaries of television shows he had watched. Additionally, they wrote in science journals, making notes about their observations of mealworms or cycles of the moon. The all-English classrooms required students to write to a prompt such as “W: What 3 wishes would you like to have come true?” (in this case the W stands for “wishes”) or structured responses to books they read. In Year 2, students who moved to the middle school wrote journal entries, most often in response to a prompt such as “Whom would you most like to meet?” They also wrote some fictional narratives. Students who stayed at the elementary school attended the advanced ESL writing class and wrote five paragraph essays (essays structured to include an introductory paragraph, three paragraphs elaborating their argument, and a closing paragraph) in preparation for the state test. Additionally, they were allowed to write first person or fictional narratives. We also collected samples students wrote at home when available. For example, Susie entered a writing contest and shared her writing with us.

2.3. Data analysis

To compare students’ Chinese and English writing, our research team (consisting of two native English speakers and one native Mandarin speaker) attempted to develop similar analytic categories. However, we also developed particular types of analyses to capture the complexities of each language.

2.3.1. Chinese

Data analysis began with the Mandarin research assistant reading over each piece written in the Chinese class and organizing the pieces chronologically, indicating the genre and topic. Next, she translated the Chinese characters into the phonetic symbols using Roman spelling—pinyin (used in China) or zhu-yin (used in Taiwan), and then translated the pinyin into English in both literal and literary versions. Literal translation was a word-for-word translation from Chinese into English, which assisted us in examining character accuracy and grammatical structure. Literary translation was closer in style to English grammar and assisted us in understanding the meaning of the students’ writing. We use both types of translations to illustrate particular points in our presentations of student writing.

The team assessed the Chinese writing both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis consisted of five, 5-point scales, examining the features of (a) length
[1 = very short to 5 = very long], (b) character complexity [1 = very simple to 5 = very complex], (c) sentence complexity [1 = very simple to 5 = very complex], (d) voice [1 = very little to 5 = very much], and (e) rhetorical style [1 = little coherence and no use of idioms or conventions to 5 = strong coherence and use of four-character phrase, metaphor]. Additionally, the team examined the features of invented characters, homophone use, and linguistic transfer, using a yes/no scale. (See Appendix A for the details of the rubric.) The team scored each piece for each of the features indicated, and then provided an overall score based on a combination of all of the features. Then we selected the first piece the student wrote in Year 1 and the last piece the student wrote in Year 2 and used those scores for comparative purposes.

The research team also contacted language arts teachers of 4th, 5th, and 6th grades in a public elementary school in central Taiwan to help assess the students’ writing with the 5-point scale. The research team selected one to two pieces of each participant’s Year 1 and Year 2 writing and sent them to the elementary school teachers. They read over each piece and compared these students’ writing proficiency with that of students in the same grade levels in Chinese speaking contexts. Taking into account all of the features of the rubric, they rated the students as: (5) advanced writer, (4) competent writer, (3) average writer, (2) below average writer, and (1) poor writer. We then compared the research team’s overall score with those of the Taiwanese teachers and found that there were consistent ratings of eight of ten pieces; there was a difference of only one point on Susie’s and Chun Ming’s overall scores. We averaged their overall scores to present in our findings section. Due to the small number of texts, we did not conduct a statistical analysis of inter-rater reliability.

For our qualitative analysis we used the rubric to consider each student’s language loss or maintenance. We identified patterns within our categories of linguistic transfer, character accuracy and complexity, sentence complexity, rhetorical style, and voice to characterize each student’s writing development across the two years of study. We then looked across the cases for points of convergence and divergence among the five students and noted patterns. We selected illustrative examples within each category to include in the findings.

2.3.2. English

Data analysis began with the two native English speakers organizing the pieces chronologically by classroom context (ESL or all-English). We read over each piece and developed a chart that included genre (descriptive, expository, personal narrative, fiction) and the topic choice; we also placed a checkmark in a column to indicate if the piece were a response to a prompt. We then developed rubrics derived from the New Standards Literacy Committee (New Standards Primary Literacy Committee, 1999). However, we added the categories of voice and rhetorical style to capture elements of writing we viewed as important. Our rubric then consisted of the categories of (a) grammar and punctuation, (b) sentence complexity, (c) rhetorical style, (d) voice, and (e) linguistic transfer from Chinese. (See Appendix B for definitions of the features of our rubric.) We conducted both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the texts using the rubrics.

Our quantitative analyses began with the selection of representative pieces from fall of Year 1 (almost always the first piece written), spring of Year 1, fall of Year 2, and spring
of Year 2 (usually the last piece the student had written) to analyze the development of students’ writing over time.\footnote{Sometimes the last text the student wrote was brief, while a text from the same time period was longer with more elaboration, providing a better picture of what students were capable of writing.} Using the rubric, the researchers independently scored on a scale of 1–5 each of the pieces for the five students. We also provided an overall rating for each student taking all the features into consideration. We then used the Pearson correlation to determine inter-rater reliability (0.778; \( p < 0.001 \)), indicating that the relationship between the raters’ judgments was significant and the reliability good. We report our findings as averages between the two raters.

For our qualitative analysis we selected 10–15 representative pieces from each student (except Paul for whom we only had two pieces in Year 2) written over the course of two years to assess. We analyzed each piece in relation to the categories of (a) grammar and punctuation, (b) sentence complexity, (c) rhetorical style, and (d) voice, using our rubric as a guide. We then characterized each student’s writing development across the two years of study. We looked across the cases for points of convergence and divergence among the five students and noted patterns. We selected representative examples of students’ writing to include under the headings within our findings.

3. Findings

First, we provide a brief summary of each of the five Mandarin speakers, indicating their home background and development as writers in Chinese and English. Next, we present our findings categorically, selecting representative examples for each section.

3.1. Summaries of students’ development

3.1.1. Chun Ming

Chun Ming came to the US from China in 4th grade. His grandparents in China raised him during a period when his parents traveled to Germany and Japan. His father was a visiting scholar in material science at the nearby university, and his mother studied computers at a community college until she gave birth to a younger brother. His parents felt a strong need to maintain his Chinese identity; at the same time they hoped he would fit into American culture. He kept a home journal, alternating writing in Chinese and English. His father read over the journal and corrected the mistakes. He was a strong writer in Chinese, using the 4-character-phrase\footnote{Although Chinese phrases may contain more or less than four characters, 4-character-phrases are the ones that are most frequently used by the general public and play essential roles in the formation of Chinese vocabulary. Some phrases originated from classical literature, some from historical events, and others through oral communications. In Chinese-speaking countries it is believed that it is necessary for teachers to include the teaching of 4-character-phrases in the language arts curriculum (Huang, 2001).} and metaphors to create images. While his Chinese writing did not improve in Year 2, the support at home did help maintain his written Chinese. However, his writing still reflected some decrease in complexity, as he neglected to use Chinese punctuation marks, and did not employ the 4-character-phrase or include metaphors as frequently. Chun Ming’s English writing developed significantly in Year 1, and he continued
to make progress in Year 2. He used simple sentence structure to form lists in his initial narrative writing. By December of his first year, he was writing about one topic in paragraph form using complex sentence structure. His summaries of books and television shows reflect accurate sentence structure, excellent organization, and “book-like” language.

3.1.2. Hui Tzu

Hui Tzu was an only child of parents who had been university professors in China. Her father was a visiting scholar in physics at a nearby US university, and her mother took courses in English at a community college. Hui Tzu came to the US in grade 5 and moved to the middle school for grade 6. Her parents required her to write compositions in Chinese, read Chinese textbooks, and complete the exercises that her mother then corrected. We characterized her as a “realistic” Chinese writer (xie shi), drawing on factual description or straight reporting rather than a “romantic” writer (xie yi), drawing on literary expressions such as idioms, 4-character-phrases, or the articulation of certain images. In summary writing, Hui Tzu tended to copy from original texts rather than creating a new text of her own. Overall, Hui Tzu’s Chinese writing did not reveal much progress or loss across the two years; her sentence and character complexity stayed at the same level. She was able to follow Chinese writing conventions, such as using required complimentary expressions in letter writing. However, her mother believed there were problems with organization and that her writing increasingly reflected a more oral style. Hui Tzu increased the use of personal voice in Year 2, and her mother suggested that the content of her English reading was giving her ideas for her Chinese writing. Her English writing in the spring showed a development towards more complex sentence structure, focusing on one idea, and adding details. By the fall of Year 2, she was writing developed paragraphs in both narrative and expository writing.

3.1.3. Yi Lin

Yi Lin was an only child of parents who had been university professors in China. Her mother, a physics major who taught mechanical engineering in China, stayed at home in the US and took courses at a community college. Her father was pursuing a Ph.D. in material science in the US. Her parents hoped to preserve Chinese customs and traditions and wanted her to maintain Chinese proficiency while learning English. In Year 1 of the study, they required her to write Chinese compositions at home; however, in Year 2, they found that she was very tired from middle school and had a great deal of English homework, so they no longer required her to write in Chinese. We found language loss in her Chinese, related to her lack of vocabulary development. In Year 2, her writing reflected: (a) simpler sentence structure and vocabulary, (b) shorter sentences, (c) lack of appropriate conjunctions for sentence combining, and (d) the use of unclear or ambiguous terms or sentences. Despite these problems, she was gaining more voice in her writing, as reflected in her expressions of the problems she was encountering and her homesickness for China. Yi Lin began to write a few English words at the end of November of Year 1. She wrote long, run-on sentences initially and added descriptive details in her English writing immediately. During the course of the school year, she began to write longer sentences with correct punctuation. She began to introduce more voice, including emotion, dialogue, and explanation in her writing at the end of Year 1. Her texts in Year 2 show perspective, sensory details, and sophisticated vocabulary.
3.1.4. Paul

Paul lived with his mother, brother and sister, while his father remained in Taiwan. He was born in the US, but went to Taiwan at age 5, returning to the US in the middle of 4th grade. His mother worked long hours and found it difficult to provide her children with what she considered adequate discipline. She sent him to private school for grade 6 to avoid some of the problems his older brother had encountered. Paul was a reluctant Chinese writer, throwing away his Chinese journal. His writing reflected some organization and accuracy, but by Year 2, without any instruction or practice in Chinese, his writing reflected incorrect characters, misuse of particles, and linguistic transfer from English. His final letter to his grandmother showed that he had difficulty with the strokes and did not follow letter-writing conventions. Although he was an avid English reader, Paul was a reluctant English writer. In Year 1, he fulfilled assignments in his ESL and all-English classrooms and developed a distinctive voice in his writing. While his writing reflects errors in spelling and grammar, he took some risks with using distinctive vocabulary (including profanity), and punctuated his writing with quotations and questions. He had few opportunities to write in Year 2 and refused to turn in assignments; consequently, his English writing did not develop in the areas of grammar, sentence complexity, or rhetorical style.

3.1.5. Susie

Susie moved to the US in second grade from Taiwan (the school reports third grade entry). Although Mandarin was spoken at home, she felt more comfortable speaking English. Her parents believed she should assimilate to the US and did not provide opportunities outside of school for her to learn written Chinese. They wanted her to complete her Chinese homework, but felt it was an extra burden for her to write in Chinese. Susie was a reluctant Chinese writer who copied characters very carefully. She could only write simple characters at the 1st or 2nd grade levels by Taiwanese standards. Her writing reflected an oral language style as well as linguistic transfer from English. Although some of her sentences did not flow, and some paragraphs were not coherent, her adoption of personification made her Chinese compositions interesting to read. Susie was somewhat reluctant to write in English in Year 1 when her ESL teacher was Mrs. Almasi; however, in Year 2, when she had Mrs. Marsh for her ESL teacher, she became an avid English writer. She began to write in many genres, shared her work with others, added extensive drawings, and entered a writing contest with a friend. Her Year 2 pieces reflected improvement in grammar and rhetorical style and included dialogue, personal experiences, and emotions.

4. Thematic findings

4.1. Chinese writing development

Our findings suggest that each of the five Mandarin speakers represented different degrees of writing proficiency in Year 1. After two years of living in the US, their texts demonstrated different degrees of language loss or maintenance. Table 3 demonstrates students’ maintenance or loss of features of Chinese writing over time. Chun Ming was rated as an advanced writer in his 4th grade and competent writer in his 5th grade; Hui Tzu
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* a Taiwanese teachers rated her poor overall; research team rated her as below average.
was rated as average in her 5th grade and remained average in her 6th grade; Yi Lin was rated as average in her 5th grade and below average in her 6th grade; Paul was average in his 5th grade and poor in his 6th grade; and Susie was below average in her 4th grade and below average/poor in her 5th grade.

We present patterns of maintenance or loss and provide examples from one or more students within our categories of linguistic transfer, character accuracy and complexity, sentence complexity, rhetorical style, and voice.

4.1.1. Linguistic transfer

The three students from China did not demonstrate linguistic transfer from English into Chinese in their writing. However, students from Taiwan translated English into Chinese in their sentence construction. We found many examples of linguistic transfer of English grammar into Chinese pieces in Susie’s first and second year writing, resulting in grammatical mistakes that created coherence problems. For example, in the final writing task, where she wrote a letter to her friend Kelly, she wrote the sentence “Ní yào dài méige dōngxī wǒ gānggāng xiě de,” which literally meant “you should bring everything I just wrote.” Yet, this is incorrect sentence structure. The correct form should be “Wǒ gānggāng xiě de méige dōnxī, nǐ dà yào dài,” which literally translates “I just wrote everything, you should all bring.” Paul demonstrated similar problems, but less frequently than Susie. For example, in his first year piece, the sequence of his sentence “jiónzátà zhuò yì ge língmù” followed an English sentence structure which literally meant “the pyramid mainly is a grave for the king” instead of the Chinese structure “the pyramid mainly is for king of a grave” (Jiónzátà zhùyào shì yīge língmù).

4.1.2. Character accuracy and complexity

The students represented points on a continuum in terms of their character accuracy and complexity. Chun Ming and Hui Tzu wrote accurate Chinese characters and used appropriate vocabulary in their writing in both years. While their second year writing did not reflect development in the area of character complexity, they did not lose accuracy. In contrast, Yi Lin used simpler characters in Year 2 than in Year 1. She tended to create awkward terms that impeded the reader’s understanding of her sentences. For example, there is no term “zhī lái” in Chinese, yet Yi Lin created this term in the sentence, “zhícóng wǒ lái dào Měiguó zhī lái,” which means “since I came to America.” (Exact translation of child’s incorrect character use.)

Paul’s character accuracy and complexity reflected a great degree of regression. The characters Paul used in the second year were much simpler than those in his first year. Paul also created some awkward terms such as “shòurénhù” (守任護) and “tuōhé” (拖和) in his writing; these expressions do not exist in Chinese. Sometimes he wrote the wrong radical or confused words that looked similar (such as 村 for 村). His misuse of characters impeded readers from fully understanding the meaning of his sentences.

In Susie’s case, she had not learned to write a wide range of characters and displayed a great deal of difficulty including (a) invented characters/incorrect formation, (b) homophones, (c) character misuse, and (d) the use of zhu-yin (traditional Taiwanese phonetic system). In terms of the invented characters, one example was found in her first year piece titled Holiday. She wrote a character 柚 instead of the correct form 柚 (pomelo,
a large citrus fruit). In another of her first year pieces, she also incorrectly wrote the character 病 for “disease.” In her final writing task, writing a letter to her friend, when she used the term “friendship,” she wrote 有善 instead of 友善, which was the correct vocabulary. Both characters, 有 (pronounced as yóu) and 友 (pronounced as yóu) share the same pronunciation but have different meanings. Susie also misused some characters. For example, in her Little Yellow piece Susie used 他 to describe her dog (which is used to refer to a human being) instead of 牠 (which is used to refer to an animal). Other problems included the misuse of characters for “salted,” “crispy,” “if,” and “every.”

4.1.3. Sentence complexity

Among the five students, Chun Ming’s sentence structure was the most sophisticated. Nevertheless, compared with his first year, some of his sentences in the second year reflected oral language use rather than written Chinese. His Chinese vocabulary stayed the same, but his sentence structure became simplified. For example, in describing America as a comfortable place, he wrote, “Zài Mèiguó kě shàífú le.” In describing many interesting things he did, he wrote, “Wǒ zài zhèr gǎn le būshāo yì?uqi de shì.” Both are sentences that native Chinese writers would use in oral conversation rather than in written communication.

Yi Lin’s sentence structure reflected the following problems: (a) simpler sentence structure resulting from limited vocabulary, (b) shorter sentences, (c) lack of appropriate conjunctions for sentence combining, and (d) the use of unclear or ambiguous terms or sentences. Instead of using appropriate conjunctions to combine two simple sentences into one compound sentence, Yi Lin tended to separate her ideas into two shorter sentences. She also used simpler or easier vocabulary in constructing sentences, contributing to a sense of awkwardness or ambiguity. For example, in her second year final writing task piece, she attempted to describe the challenges of learning English and Chinese at the same time. She wrote, “Liàngge yǔyíjiān yìbiān xué zhènde shì mǎnglái mángguī bù zhídào xuǎn zuò nàge cái hǎo.” (Literal translation is: Two languages learning at the same time are really busy, doesn’t know which one to choose is right.) In this example, instead of using the appropriate term to state that she felt it “nán” (difficult) to use two languages “tóngshí” (at the same time), she used the terms “mǎnglái mángguì” (busy) and “yī biān” (at the same time), which create awkwardness for the reader.

Paul’s sentence structure reflected different types of problems from other students. He made more mistakes in the use of particles, verbs, and terms in his writing. For example, in his summary of building the Egyptian pyramids, he added the particle “le” at the end of the sentence, “dúzhù tōngdào ràng yītǐ yǒngshìānngíng le” (blocked the way and let the corpse stay peacefully forever).³ His use of “le” in this sentence was redundant. Another example of his incorrect use of particles was “de.” There are three different characters of particles that share the same pronunciation, “得” “的” and “地”. The particle “得” is used as a modifier for the adverb, “的” for the noun, and “地” for the verb. However, in the sentence, “yīcéng yīcéng de diéchéng jīnzhì,” (adding the stones layer by layer to make the pyramid) where he was supposed to use “地” Paul used the wrong particle. His

³ These translations from Paul’s work are generally literary because he copied them (sometimes incorrectly) from the Chinese textbook into his summary writing. However, we occasionally use a literal translation to point out the errors.
inappropriate use of verbs appeared in the sentence, “gǔ àijírén yòng Níluóhé shàngzhāng shí bā shícái shùnhze shuǐlǔ sòngqù gōngdì qù” (old Egyptians shipped the stone materials to the construction site utilizing the opportunity of the Nile River being at high tide). In this sentence, his use of the verb “yòng” (utilize) was not precise; a younger student from Taiwan might use this term, but not a fifth-grader.

4.1.4. Rhetorical style

Most of the students’ competence in Chinese was not advanced enough to see large changes from Year 1 to Year 2; however, Chun Ming was a very proficient writer in Chinese when he came to the US as a 4th grader. Of particular note is his use of the 4-character-phrase in his first year. Chun Ming wrote two descriptive pieces required by his native language curriculum, Spring and Autumn. In these two pieces, Chun Ming used 4-character-phrases to describe the beauty of the season. In the piece Spring, when describing the various colors of balloons people hung on the table or chair, Chun Ming used several different phrases for the English word, “colorful,” including “wu yan liu se” (literally translating “five tints six colors”); in describing the beautiful colors of bubbles, he used “wu cai bin fen” (literally translating “five colors flourishing”). In the piece entitled Autumn, when describing the various colors of fallen leaves on the ground, he used “wu cai ban lan” (literally translating “five colors gorgeous”). In addition to the use of the 4-character-phrase, he also used metaphors to elaborate the image of a season. For example, in the piece Autumn, in describing the feeling that fallen leaves give to the people, Chun Ming compared the sound of fallen leaves to that of broken glass. He wrote:

Gezhòng yānsè de shùzhī jiānjīn di luò xià lái. Bā dì shàng dābàn de wūcāibānlán. Cái shàng qù gězhī gězhī dì xiāng. Hǎo xiàng cài pò le bōlǐ yìyàng xiāng. (Branches of all colors start to fall to the ground gradually. The ground is thus decorated with different colors. When you tread on them, you can hear the tittering sounds which is like the sound when you tread on the broken glass.4)

He further tried to employ the metaphorical meaning of autumn as a harvesting season, praising the beautiful colors of autumn:

Qiūtīān yě shì féēngshōu de jījīé. Rénmen kāi huāng zhòng dì. Xīnqín láodòng le duōshào nián. Tāmen wàng zhe zījī xīnqín láodòng de hànshù huànlái de liángshí wéixiào zhe. Jiùxiāng xiānzāi de xiǎoháizi, guò de nánme xìngfú. (Autumn is also a harvesting season. People plow the farm, working diligently for the harvest for years. After they reap, when they stare at what they’ve gained from the cost of their sweat, they smile as happy as children do.)

Chun Ming demonstrated a sophisticated sense of writing, making the whole piece more vivid by adding sensual expressions. His writing reflects a highly valued Chinese rhetorical feature—creating visual imagery.

At the end of his second year, the frequency of Chun Ming’s use of 4-character-phrases was reduced. When he tried to use 4-character-phrases in his writing, the phrases tended to

4 For the translations of larger segments of students’ writing we used literary translations to give readers a sense of the meaning and the richness of the language.
be simpler ones. For example, in the piece *Celebrating Easter Day*, the 4-character-phrases that Chun Ming tried to elaborate such as “xu xu duo duo” (many) or “huan sheng xiao yu” (laughing sound) are considered less sophisticated when compared to his earlier use of “wu cai ban lan” (colorful), “wu cai bin fen” (colorful) or “wu yan liu se” (colorful) in his earlier pieces of *Spring* and *Autumn*. The simplification of his vocabulary use can also be reflected in the piece *Celebrating Easter Day*, where he wrote “da da de dan” (very big egg) to describe the size of the egg he got as a prize from his participation in the egg hunting contest. The term “da da de” is considered too childish for a 5th grade Chinese writer.

4.1.5. Voice

Although the students’ writing reflected degrees of loss of grammatical features and character complexity in Chinese, their writing also reflected an increase in voice in their second year pieces. In examining the feature of voice, we looked at the ways in which students positioned themselves in relation to their audience. For example, we noticed features such as writing a first-person narrative rather than a third-person descriptive piece, the inclusion of more personal information, or the use of conventions such as questions to establish rapport with the reader. We saw these English language features of voice to varying degrees among the five students.

In Chun Ming’s first year pieces, he employed a third-person, neutral stance. In contrast, in his two book reports written in Year 2, responses to *XiaoShanDi* and *This Thing Made Me Feel Unfair*, Chun Ming initiated the pieces by giving readers a brief introduction to the story in the first paragraph. Then, he shifted the focus to personal experiences in subsequent paragraphs, connecting the lesson he learned from the story to his personal experience. In the *XiaoShanDi* piece, he described XiaoShanDi’s benevolent character in caring for others at first, but then compared it to his own generous behavior in giving a classmate his orange to eat for lunch. He expressed his thoughts on the importance of daily conduct, thus combining Chinese values with an American writing style.

With Hui Tzu, we found a change in voice from a neutral reporter to a reader-based writer. In a letter to her grandmother in China written in Year 2, she compared the living conditions in the US and China and identified the challenges of adapting to a new environment. Her words about the significance of having a good command of English as the key to success in the US revealed her voice as a second language learner:

> Yingyù, zài zhēlǐ hěn zhòngyào. Wǒ zài Zhōngguó xué de Yingyù tài shāo le, gānglái zhēlǐ yídān dōu shuō bù liāo. Gāng kāishǐ xué Yīngyǔ shí, wǒ gǎn dào hǎo nán. Xué le hěnjiǔ yè méi xuédāo shénme. (English is very important here. The English I learned in China was too little, so I was unable to say anything at all in the beginning. While I started to learn English here, I felt it [was] so hard. Even though I’ve studied hard for a long time, I still didn’t feel like gaining something.)

Her voice was also evident via (a) her identification of the differences between the US and China and (b) her homesickness. The following sentences in the concluding paragraph clearly reflected these points:

(There are so many differences between here and China, no matter the living environment or learning. I miss my life in China so much. How much I want to go back to China!)

In summary, most students’ Chinese writing demonstrated some language loss, but they increased their use of personal voice in their second year pieces. The following section shows how their English writing reflected significant development.

5. English writing development

Table 4 displays the ratings of the five students in their English writing across Year 1 and Year 2. Four of the five students demonstrated clear development in all aspects of their English writing—overall ratings, use of correct grammar and punctuation, sentence
complexity, and rhetorical style. Chun Ming was rated as an average writer in fall of Year 1 and a competent/advanced writer in Year 2. Yi Lin was a poor writer in Year 1 and a competent/advanced writer in Year 2. Hui Tzu also reflected enormous progress from the beginning of Year 1 (poor writer) to the end of Year 2 (competent writer). Susie, who was considered an average English writer in Year 1, made progress in Year 2 and was rated as a competent writer. The exception was Paul who was rated as average in Year 1 and below average/average in Year 2.

5.1. Grammar and punctuation

The students developed their use of language conventions such as capitalization and punctuation over the two years. Further, they developed their abilities to use correct subject-verb agreement and appropriate tense. Most of the students used present tense in their initial writing in Year 1. However, by their second or third journal entries, students were attempting to use past tense. Most students showed the same type of errors with irregular past tense such as “win” for “won” and “eat” for “ate.” However, Chun Ming began to use the accurate form of the past tense consistently by the middle of the spring of Year 1. Both Hui Tzu and Yi Lin had difficulty with both irregular and regular past verb tenses, often mixing tenses within a paragraph. However, they increased in accuracy so that by the spring of Year 2, both girls were using accurate verb tenses. Paul often left out words, interfering with the reader’s comprehension of his narrative. Susie, having had more schooling in the US and greater facility with English than the others, was already using past tense in her writing early in Year 1. In her retellings of books she had read, she was not consistent in her use of tense, alternating between past and present tense. By Year 2, her fantasy stories consistently used past tense, and she used only a few irregular verb forms such as “tooked” instead of “took.”

5.2. Sentence complexity

Students attempted narratives as early as the fall of Year 1. For example, Hui Tzu’s first English writing described her airplane ride to the US, “I from China to the USA. I by airplane, ver happy. Airplane has eat food very much.” As students had more opportunities to write in English journals, their sentence structure became much more complex. Students used “because,” “and,” and “but” to connect their ideas. By the end of the year, Hui Tzu’s piece about going to Six Flags and a ride called the Boss reflected her developing sentence structure, “When we were playing the Boss, I almost cry and my glasses almost fell.” Susie’s growth in sentence structure was apparent from Year 1 to Year 2. In Year 1, she used many simple sentence structures, whereas in Year 2 her writing was filled with complex sentences, especially with the addition of dependent and independent clauses to her stories. For example, in Year 1 she retold a story, “Sarah moved to a new house. She had her own room. She has her best friend Lutie.” In Year 2, she wrote, “If it’s really cold, I know something that will help you! Cocoa! I never tried it before . . . but I think kids like it the best!” She used different forms of correct punctuation, used a variety of sentence structures, and she varied the number of words per sentence.
5.3. Rhetorical style

When analyzing rhetorical styles, we examined students’ writing for aspects of composition that are often valued by US elementary schools, such as focusing on one topic, organization, elaboration on an idea, metaphorical language, and word choice. For expository pieces, we looked at their focus and logic including introductions and conclusions. With narrative pieces, we examined story development focusing on beginnings, sequence of events, and endings.

We found that students showed a range of rhetorical styles in their English writing, but generally developed styles consistent with the local norms of the schools. For example, Chun Ming focused on one topic and developed it as early as December, when he wrote about computer games. His piece showed the beginnings of both organization and coherence as he focused on one topic and divided his work into two paragraphs.

**Computer Games (12/5/2001)**

I like to play computer games because at one time I didn’t know how to play, so I played many times. I am very good at playing games now. So I feel very funny and play and play, I love those games. Every day when I play I forget those games are bad for my study and my eyes.

A computer game is funny but you cannot play many times. Every day you should play 30 min. You have to fix this habit.

Interestingly, Chun Ming brought a kind of Chinese moral into the piece when he told his audience to “fix this habit,” apparently meaning to reduce the amount of playing time. By the end of Year 2, Chun Ming had adopted a style of rhetoric completely consistent with local norms—he wrote a five paragraph essay about electricity that reflected the type of instruction he received as teachers focused on preparing students for the state-wide writing test.

Yi Lin’s narrative about her grandfather’s playing cards showed an emphasis on telling a story about one topic in sequence. She wrote:

**My grandfather always like to play card. My grandmather said don’t always play card. but he didn’t lisen. That was his birthday. He play card! My grandmather said. Come back soon. But he forget so he didn’t come back. we all wait for him. but he didn’t come back. so we eat his cake when he come back my grand mather well say I am mad. so I want to help him to do not play card. I think now he well be better than that.**

She used dialogue, included different perspectives, and included an evaluative comment about helping him to quit his card-playing habit. By the fall of Year 2, Yi Lin had developed a sense of audience, provided many details to tell her story, and expressed her own feelings. In response to a prompt, she wrote:

**A Person I would like to meet**

If you ask who I would to meet, I would say I want to meet a singer, You must want to ask who is that singer what does she looks like, Is she pretty? So the story began, When I was three or four years old I live with my mom and my dad. My mom love...
music so she listened to it every day. But that’s not all esapasaltly my mom’s favorit
singer’s music, she is the singer I’m talking about her name is Yang Yi Ying. So I start to
like her she looks really cute and she sings like a bird so every time I hear she sing I felt
like I want to dance. I saw her on T.V She is so cute, so I want to meet her someday.

Yi Lin used the prompt to provide details about a Chinese singer. She also used a simile,
as well as using questions to pull in her reader. She added personal reflections such as “I
felt like I want to dance” to engage the reader.

5.4. Voice

While the students’ initial English writing tended to be list-like, and voiceless, they
began to express their emotions and opinions as early as the fall of Year 1. Students seemed
to understand immediately that in their Year 1 ESL journals they were to write about their
own experiences because their entries used first person and described an event in their lives.

Paul’s voice was apparent from the fall of Year 1. He wrote about his health, his dog, his
friend, and his own experiences in the all-English classroom journal that provided specific
prompts. He often expressed his opinion about topics such as the Olympics and his friends.
We get a sense of some of the personal struggles he was encountering in his response to the
letter prompt, M, for magician: “If you were a magician and could change yourself into
something else, what would it be and why?” He wrote:

If I am a magician. I would change my self into a rich person nobody would know I
could do things bad if he was rude to people. Try to make him go to jail could make
people happy. If he was nice I would be a nice person too.

Why do I want to do this is because so people are so mean I want to give them a
lesson. And if I want to feel what is it like to be a other person. The biggest reason is
that I want them to know how it feels like to be treat bad.

Paul often took the opportunity to insert his opinions and express some of his
unhappiness. Although he often stated that he did not like to write, his pieces were full of
opinions and beliefs. He retained his voice in Year 2 when he wrote the following piece to
comply with the requirement to write a persuasive letter to a real audience:

Dear Manger:

My family and I first went to your restaurant (China Town Buffet) when our friend took us
there it was pretty good too. However, upon our last few visit we have been getting bad
service, bad food, or dirty seats. Example the seat we’ve been seated at often have ants. Once
one of our family member went there and the food was cold and afterwards he got sick for a
couple of days. Please write and tell me if there has been some changes back because we like
the food of your place but if this keeps happening I will lose all will to come to your restaurant.
Sincerely,

Mr. Chou

While Paul’s writing showed some voice throughout his work, a shift occurred in Susie’s
voice from Year 1 to Year 2. In Year 1 the assignments in her ESL class consisted of story
retellings and observations of science phenomenon. She demonstrated her understanding of the book she read by providing detailed retellings such as the one show below:

11/8/01  
The story was about a poor family and one of the child was J.C. the tenth child. His dad and mom were afraid that J.C. might not live because when he was born he was sickly. J.C. was sick every winter. J.C. lungs were weak and his mom and dad can’t pay for a doctor. The childs didn’t have much time for school because they have to help there mom and dad. J.C.’s dad wanted his family a better life and he sold his mule in 1922. The family used the money to move to Cleveland, Ohio. The chids can go to school but his dad can’t find jods. (Susie wrote another whole page retelling the rest of book and closed with this—“Yes, I like the book because it is so . . . so . . .? . . . I don’t know how to say it.”)

In this piece, Susie provided many details about the story and indicated comprehension of the book. However, little of her voice emerged. In contrast, during Year 2 the classroom assignments allowed students to write personal narratives or descriptions of events, or fiction. In the fall of Year 2, she wrote an expository piece:

10/02 Winter  
Let it snow! And get ready to have fun! I really like winter! It’s fun! With the snow and other stuffs that’s fun. It’s cold too. Brrrrr!!!

One reason is because of vacations. You get gifts, and sometimes your gift can be really great! The winter break is a good reason too! You get to play in the snow and you get to sleep as long as you want too. The best thing is to have fun! Also, I like snow! You can make ice cream out of clean snow or you can just buy it, but I don’t think anybody wants to get colder. You can make snowmen and snowwomen. They can wear nice clothes. It’ll look sooooo cute!

Third of all, is because of the weather. The weather sure is cold! You can get snow very fast, so do what your mother or father tells you! If it’s really cold, I know something that will help you! Cocoa! I never tried it before . . . but I think kids like it the best! Maybe you can give them cocoa as gifts!

Now you know why I like winter. The snow, the weather, and the vacations. You know mine favorite season. What’s your’s?

(She added an elaborate drawing of “Fire Wolf/Dog” and “Mixed breed of fox and horse” and “Little Bear” with a note “Don’t mind it, I just wanted to draw something.”)

Within the constraints of writing a five-paragraph essay, Susie managed to insert her voice. She used many exclamation points and added features such as “Brrrrr!!!” and “sooooo” for emphasis. She also asked questions of the reader, attempting to establish rapport. In most of her work during Year 2, she added elaborate drawings in colored pens. In this particular piece, she wrote a note to the audience, “Don’t mind it, I just wanted to draw something.” She also experimented with many different genres such as notes, poems, and an advertisement for a “food shop.” She entered a writing contest with a peer and submitted a fictional story.
5.5. Linguistic transfer

Students demonstrated little transfer from Chinese into English in their writing. This is not surprising since the structural features of the language differ so widely. Chinese as a morphosyllabic language (Chao, 1968) relies on an understanding of radicals, whereas English is an alphabet language in which it is necessary for writers to make the sound-letter correspondence. However, Yi Lin and Hui Tzu, in their earliest entries in their ESL journals, wrote Chinese characters. They began writing some English in November of Year 1. At times in the fall they began in English and then used some Chinese characters to express ideas. None of the other students used both English and Chinese in their English assignments. However, there were a few isolated examples of transferring the Chinese rhetorical style into English. For example, Chun Ming incorporated the moral value of telling the audience not to do something, i.e., playing too much on the computer.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Mandarin speakers who came to the US in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade demonstrated some native language loss. They came to the US with differing levels of competence as writers, and made different types of errors from one another. For example, the three Mandarin speakers from China demonstrated less sophisticated sentence and character complexity in Year 2 than in Year 1; however, they maintained their accuracy in writing characters. Paul, a student from Taiwan, regressed in all aspects of his Chinese writing. Susie, who was a beginning Chinese writer, did not show significant improvement in most areas, but did show some improvement in her character accuracy.

It is not surprising that Mandarin-speaking students who came to the US experienced some written language loss. Without opportunities to write daily in a natural context, young English language learners tend to lose their native language (Kouritzer, 1999; Hinton, 1999). However, students’ loss was mitigated by several factors. First, students’ initial writing competence affected their maintenance. Chun Ming and Hui Tzu were competent/advanced writers in Year 1 and demonstrated only some loss in Year 2. Yi Lin and Paul were average writers in Year 1, but experienced overall loss in Year 2. Susie, who was a below average writer in Year 1, remained below average.

Second, support at home seemed to be an important factor in maintaining proficiency in writing as well. Chun Ming and Hui Tzu’s parents valued maintaining written Chinese, and in Year 1 they expected to return to China. Although Chun Ming’s family decided to stay in the US after Year 2, his parents still wanted him to maintain his ability to write Chinese, thus requiring him to write Chinese compositions at home. In contrast, Susie and Paul’s families planned to stay in the US and did not provide support at home for Chinese writing. Yi Lin’s family initially required Chinese compositions at home, but later abandoned this idea since they felt the workload was too much for her.

Support at home seemed to be connected to students’ economic and social backgrounds as well as parents’ future plans. The Taiwanese students came from working-class backgrounds, and their parents planned to stay in the US. Their parents
did not believe learning written Chinese was as important as maintaining oral Mandarin or as acquiring English. Like some of the families Wong Fillmore studied (1991), Susie and Paul spoke more English at home in Year 2, and their parents believed that learning English would be more advantageous than Chinese. In contrast, the students from China appeared to have a more temporary status in the US, at least in Year 1. The parents of the students from China were well-educated, pursuing advanced degrees in the US, and planned to return to China at the end of their studies. Their support of their children’s maintenance of written and oral Chinese appeared to reflect their desire that they not be at a disadvantage upon their return to China. Students’ economic and social circumstances, then, influenced the types of support that parents provided for maintenance of written Chinese at home.

While the role of the home environment was important in the maintenance of Chinese, the school writing opportunities played a role as well. Because native language instructors valued oral proficiency over written development and because of time constraints (45 min daily of native language instruction), the opportunities for writing in Chinese were limited to district assessments and homework (see McCarthey et al., 2004). While writing only a few times during the semester did not substantially help students to learn new vocabulary or conventions, the amount of writing they did allowed them to retain some knowledge of Chinese characters and conventions. This was most apparent when following Paul and Yi Lin, who had no writing opportunities at school in Year 2, and whose quality of Chinese writing declined.

The Chinese writing of students from China reflected some of the rhetorical features described by other researchers such as writing from a neutral position, memorizing text, using the 4-character-phrase, and emphasizing a moral message (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). For example, Hui Tzu and Yi Lin appeared to memorize and write from memory the Little Match Girl, while Chun Ming’s writing contained moral messages and 4-character-phrases. However, in Year 2, these cultural features were less apparent, replaced by values more associated with US texts. For example, students used first person or inserted their views into their Chinese compositions and took a more reader-based approach to writing. Hui Tzu’s shift is particularly noteworthy since she abandoned the Chinese norms of saving face—not expressing any problems publicly, and instead, wrote a sad, personal letter about her homesickness and struggles in the US.

Four of the five students’ English writing made dramatic improvements over the course of two years. Students made gains in language conventions, sentence complexity, rhetorical style, and voice. Students demonstrated that they learned the norms of the local schools and could incorporate those features into their writing. For example, students successfully wrote five-paragraph essays, as well as using the conventions of writing personal narratives. Our data support the findings of Katznelson, Perpignan and Rubin (2001) who found that when the students’ English proficiency improves, their growth in self-expression also improves. Students’ improvement in English supports the work of Gutiérrez (1992) and Valdés (1999) who suggest that the role of the teacher and classroom context are important in supporting English language learners’ development as writers. The four students who had many opportunities to write in a variety of formats in both years developed into strong English writers. By contrast, Paul, who had few opportunities to write in Year 2, did not progress. These findings suggest that multiple opportunities to write
in many genres throughout the school day can support English language learners’ development as writers.

Although there was little transfer of words or idioms from Chinese to English or vice versa, students tended to appropriate the US style of using personal narrative and expression of feelings in their Year 2 Chinese pieces. In Year 1, students may have been somewhat constrained by the tasks—writing summaries of textbooks or responding to a prompt about “Spring,” whereas in Year 2, we asked all students to engage in a more personal task, writing a letter to a friend. However, the changes in voice in their Chinese writing appeared to be most influenced by the type of instruction students received in English. Students learned that writing from first person, using details, and considering their audience were important aspects of the local schools. They adopted these features not only in their English writing, but they appeared to transfer them to their Chinese writing.5

Our data show that students’ writing styles were not totally consistent in L1 and L2. Chun Ming had quite different styles in Year 1; in Chinese, he used colorful language and adopted the 4-character-phrase. In contrast, his English writing was factual without many descriptors or use of metaphor. Susie’s Chinese writing was quite similar to her English writing because she questioned the audience in both languages and inserted herself into the pieces. However, in Year 2, the differences among the students’ writing between languages were lessened since most students adopted more US norms for both languages. Our findings support those of Kubota (1998), who noted that some students’ L1 and L2 writing styles are similar, while other students’ styles differ in the two languages.

6.1. Implications for practice

The findings from our study highlight the importance of both home and school writing opportunities. Our study suggests that if parents want their children to maintain and/or develop their children’s written native language, they may need to go beyond the resources of the school (Hinton, 1999). Few schools provide the kind of native language support that existed at the elementary school we studied, and even then, that support was not necessarily enough. If parents want to maintain biliteracy, they may need to seek out Saturday schools or other resources in the community in which native language support is offered. They may also consider providing writing assignments and feedback to their children in a similar way to some of the parents in our study.

In addition, providing native language support through the school system can benefit English language learners. Including writing as part of the native language support appears to be particularly beneficial. When native language support is not available, classroom and ESL teachers might allow students to write in their native languages to show that they value students’ diverse linguistic backgrounds (Nieto, 2002). As students are acquiring English

5 Little cross-cultural work has focused on voice as a feature of students’ writing. Thus, we cannot, with any certainty, attribute the change in voice in students’ Chinese writing to their English instruction; native English speakers may have shown this same development of voice. However, several of the teachers at the school sites did include features of voice such as holding the reader’s attention and personalizing the topic for the reader in their writing instruction. The English language learners’ writing appeared to reflect those values in both Chinese and English.
in ESL and classroom settings, our study has demonstrated the benefits of providing multiple, guided opportunities to write in English throughout the school day. Implications from our study suggest that classroom teachers as well as ESL teachers should incorporate writing into the curriculum, providing English language learners with continual support in many genres.

6.2. Limitations

Our study had several limitations in our data collection and analyses. First, our Chinese samples were limited by the amount of writing teachers assigned, by the number of examples we could collect (especially from 6th graders who had few opportunities to write in their new settings), and by the cultural norms in which students did not wish to share the writing that their parents had corrected with us. Thus, our interpretations were based on few Chinese samples, especially in Year 2. Second, students were at various levels of both Chinese and English proficiency when we started the study, contributing to the difficulty of making specific comparisons among them. Third, our Chinese analyses were conducted by a Taiwanese doctoral student, Guo, who was more familiar with cultural and school norms of Taiwan than China. Establishing inter-rater reliability with a native speaker from China might have strengthened our ratings of the Chinese pieces. Fourth, we tried to make our analytic categories comparable in Chinese and English. We found that the closest comparison to Chinese character accuracy in English would be correct spelling, but we found that the addition of spelling would focus too heavily on mechanics. We also could have made direct comparisons between grammar and punctuation in both languages, but found that students maintained their knowledge of grammar in Chinese and lost only a few minor punctuation marks such as how to make quotation marks in Chinese. Fifth, students wrote in many different genres depending on the classroom setting and types of tasks, making it difficult to make comparisons across genres. Future studies can build on our design by attempting to collect more comparable Chinese and English writing samples.

Despite our limitations, we believe the study contributes to the research on L1 and L2 writing by providing detailed, longitudinal data on elementary students’ development as writers in Chinese and English. By looking across home and school contexts, we have identified factors such as opportunities to write in their native language as well as English as a significant factor in students’ development. Further, we have shown that while students demonstrated some language loss in Chinese, the types of problems and errors they encountered differed among the five students. We have also demonstrated the significant gains students made in their acquisition of English writing conventions. However, more studies need to investigate the role of home support as well as the role of classroom instruction in facilitating students’ maintenance of their native language as they develop their English writing.

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### Appendix A. Chinese writing rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definitions and examples</th>
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| Character accuracy    | (1) Additions or omission of a stroke (strokes) in a character  
(2) Mixing up radicals (placing radicals in the wrong position, or replacing a radical with another, which may produce a non  
(3) Random combination of look |
| Homophones            | Writing a character that is pronounced the same as the intended character but has a different meaning, e.g., 功課 for 功課 |
| Linguistic transfer   | (1) Syntax: influence of English on Chinese sentence structure, e.g., 我可以去游泳跟我的朋友 (in which the literal meaning is “I can go swimming with my friend.” This sentence is wrong in Chinese.) 我可以跟我的朋友去游泳 (in which the literal meaning is “I can with my friend go swimming.” This sentence is correct in Chinese.)  
(2) Style: influence of English on Chinese, e.g., in Chinese letter writing, we do not use love as the complimentary expression at the end of the letter. The use of “love” reflects the influence of English on Chinese. |
| Sentence complexity   | Does the writer use simple or compound sentence structures? Is he or she able to use the appropriate conjunctions to link sentences into a more sophisticated one? |
| Character complexity  | The character use reflects the writer’s vocabulary knowledge base. Sometimes the writer may know how to speak in oral communication but fail to write it if he or she has not learned/memorized the strokes of certain target characters. In such cases, some writers may write it in zhu-yin, pin-yin or avoid using these terms by changing to simpler terms or words with similar meaning. (Zhu-yin is the phonetic symbols used in Taiwan.) |
| Rhetorical Style      | (1) The use of 4-character-phrases, idioms, or words of wisdom.  
(2) The use of any tropes such as metaphor, personification, or the creation of any sensory image, etc.  
(3) Organization: unity within and across paragraphs. |
| Voice                 | Voice reflects the influence of culture. An English writer writes for the expression and exploration of the self, yet a Chinese writer diminishes individual voice by establishing moral or ethical values through words of wisdom or the lessons taught by the teacher or the parents (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). |

### Appendix B. English writing rubric

#### B.1. Grammar/punctuation

*Score of 5—Advanced*

The student uses language conventions such as capitalization and punctuation appropriately. The student uses more than basic punctuation, including commas, semicolons, colons, question marks, and exclamation marks. The student capitalizes proper nouns as well as the first word in a sentence consistently. The student’s writing exhibits subject-verb agreement.
Score of 4—Competent
The student uses language conventions such as capitalization and punctuation appropriately. The student’s writing exhibits subject-verb agreement.

Score of 3—Average
The student uses basic language conventions appropriately and exhibits correct use of subject-verb agreement most of the time. Errors do not interfere with the reader’s comprehension of the text.

Score of 2—Below average
The student uses capitalization and punctuation inconsistently. Lack of subject-verb agreement may interfere with reader’s comprehension of the text.

Score of 1—Poor
The student does not use capitalization and punctuation. Lack of subject-verb agreement interferes with reader’s comprehension of the text.

B.2. Sentence complexity

Score of 5—Advanced
Student uses a variety of types of sentences including simple, compound, and complex (one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses) sentences.

Score of 4—Competent
Student frequently uses sentences of varying length and structure that may include simple, compound, and/or complex (one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses) sentences.

Score of 3—Average
Student uses simple sentences correctly. There is some attempt at varying length and structure.

Score of 2—Below average
The student uses run-on sentences or sentence fragments that may interfere with the reader’s comprehension.

Score of 1—Poor
The student’s lack of sentence structure interferes with the reader’s comprehension.
B.3. Rhetorical style

*Score of 5—Advanced*

The student demonstrates clear organization including a beginning, middle, and ending with an effective introduction and conclusion. Major points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There is a clear flow (coherence) and logic to the order of events (narrative) or the points given (expository). The student develops the points or main events in the paper thoroughly with relevant support and elaboration. This may include details, personal reactions, anecdotes, and/or quotes-dialogue. The writer also includes second order ideas—giving an explanation of the importance/value of the examples/evidence given.

*Score of 4—Competent*

The student has a clear organization with an effective introduction and conclusion. Major points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There is adequate flow and logic to the student’s writing. The student includes adequate support and elaboration, but there is not a rich use of different types of details, etc.

*Score of 3—Average*

The student has attempted organization with a beginning, middle, and ending with an introduction and conclusion. Most points or events are appropriately paragraphed. There may not be a perfect flow or logic to the text, but the reader is still able to understand the student’s meaning. The student includes basic information and some support and elaboration for points or events.

*Score of 2—Below average*

There is a general lack of focus. There are some difficulties with flow that interfere with the reader’s ability to understand the text. The student includes basic information with little or no support and elaboration.

*Score of 1—Poor*

There is no organization or focus. There is no support or elaboration.

B.4. Voice

*Score of 5—Advanced*
There is a distinctive, personal tone—a writer’s voice is present. The student uses a rich variety of descriptive and lively language (including figurative language—hyperbole, metaphor, personification, simile), precise verbs, and varied sentence structure to maintain the reader’s engagement.

Score of 4—Competent

There is a distinctive, personal tone—a writer’s voice is present. The student frequently uses descriptive and lively language (including figurative language—hyperbole, metaphor, personification, simile), precise verbs, and varied sentence structure to maintain the reader’s engagement.

Score of 3—Average

There is a personal tone—a writer’s voice is present. There is some evidence of descriptive and lively language (including figurative language—hyperbole, metaphor, personification, simile), precise verbs, and varied sentence structure to maintain the reader’s engagement.

Score of 2—Below average

There is little evidence of the writer’s voice. Student tends to summarize or retell without using descriptive or figurative language. There is a lack of variety in sentence structure.

Score of 1—Poor

There is no evidence of the writer’s voice.

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