

**The Influence of Culture on the Development of Bilingualism:
A Comparison of Error Correction in Early Writing in Japanese and Australian Schools**

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This study investigates the experience of a bilingual child in early writing education in Japanese and Australian classrooms, focussing on differences in error correction practices in the two school systems. In Australia, the subject's compositions demonstrated experimentation in the production of written forms and routine usage of invented spellings. In contrast, her Japanese compositions featured fewer errors and more frequent self-corrections. These differences may be attributed to the distinct linguistic purposes and varying goals of the two education systems. Whereas a primary goal of early writing education in the Australian system is self-expression, the Japanese system emphasizes accuracy of form. It is unclear whether the practices of one education system can be beneficial in the other education system. In this case, the child inadvertently applied pedagogical practices from one system to her compositions in the other system. Such instances of transfer may impede writing progress, but should be recognized as part of the general complexity associated with the development of bilinguality and biliteracy.

幼少期バイリンガル教育におけるライティング訂正指導に関する日英比較研究

本稿は、定期的に日本とオーストラリアを往来して日本語と英語を学ぶバイリンガルの児童一名を観察対象者とし、彼女の作文に見られる両言語の習得状況の違いを比較研究したものである。誤りに対する指導方針の違いは、二国間で異なる言語習得目標と一般的な教育目標の違いによるものと考えられる。自己表現を第一に考えるオーストラリアでは、スペリングの創作など対象者自身の様々な実験的試みがおこなわれていた。それに対して、文法的正確さを重視する日本で書かれた作文には誤り自体少なく、自己修正をより頻繁におこなっていることが判明した。このことから、一方の学習環境で受けた指導が他方のそれにおいてどの程度有効であるか、断定は難しい。また対象者には時折、一方の学習環境で身につけた習慣を他方の環境でも当てはめようとする時期があることも観察された。このような転移行動はライティングの習得を妨げる要因ともなり得るが、複雑なバイリンガルの言語習得にはつきものと言えよう。

INTRODUCTION

Enrolment in overseas programs and schools was one of the factors identified by Kamada (1995) as contributing to the development of active bilingualism. In practice, however, this type of arrangement poses many potential difficulties for both parents and children. There are firstly the major expenses of travelling, the disruption of normal lifestyles, and the necessity to obtain the support of school administrators in each country. A range of different cultural expectations may also be encountered which are inherently associated with the schooling systems in each country. Conflicting demands can be placed on children and parents in areas of educational and linguistic standards. Parents attempting such a strategy therefore need to consider ways in which educational practices differ in the two schooling systems, and how such differences may ultimately affect their children's bilingual development.

As parents of a seven year-old child undertaking schooling in Japan and Australia, we decided to investigate the differences between the two schooling systems and the likely consequences to our daughter's bilingual development. Our research involved classroom observations in primary schools in Australia and Japan, as well as personal involvement with our daughter's schooling and informal discussions with parents and teachers in both countries. We observed a number of major areas of cultural difference between the two education systems, including different methods of instruction, different pedagogical approaches, and different expectations pertaining to parental responsibilities. In particular, we found the

teaching of early writing at the junior primary level to be an example of a complex pedagogical area which reflected a range of values and practices. In this paper, we consequently focus on how differences in the school systems affected our daughter's development of writing skills. Her compositions in both languages are creative processes which are concerned with relating topics of personal significance to the reader. We also examine error correction practices in the two schools, since a number of important differences were apparent in relation to the context of our daughter's learning experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been no previous research which compared error correction practices in early writing in Japanese and Australian classrooms. This study is consequently informed by research in a number of closely related areas. Firstly, reports on national literacy levels in Japan and Australia provide an interesting comparison of the respective literacy systems. Next, since differences in educational practices may be directly attributable to differences in educational goals, research on the goals of early writing education in Japan and Australia is discussed. Finally, the findings of a comparative study of early literacy in Japanese and Australian classes by one of the authors of this paper are summarized.

National Literacy Attainment

Studies of literacy levels in different countries have consistently found that the Japanese system achieves a very high national literacy standard. Japan has even been described as "perhaps the most literate nation in the world" (Lewis, 1998, p. 398). A recent OECD study of 15 year-olds' reading performance ranks Japan closely with most English-speaking countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001). Canada is ranked third of the 31 countries studied; Japan, fourth; Ireland, fifth; New Zealand, sixth; Australia, seventh; the United Kingdom, eighth; and the United States, fifteenth (p. 45). Previous comparative literacy studies have generally involved Japan and the United States, and these have also reported on the higher literacy rate in Japan (White, 1987; Wray, 1999). While no studies to date have compared literacy achievements in Japan and Australia, a recent study on young adults' literacy in Australia reports results that are broadly equivalent to results from the United States on a similar survey (Sawyer, 1999, p. 27).

Japanese Goals for Early Writing Education

Research has identified a number of general goals of Japanese primary education which are directly relevant to the teaching of early writing. Lewis considers *self-management* to be a fundamental goal of Year One education (1995, p. 44). Children are taught to manage their own learning rather than to simply respond to the teacher as an authority figure. A *self-critical attitude* is also encouraged in the daily practice of *hansei*, which involves *reflection* on a goal or experience (Lewis, 1995, p. 120; Benjamin, 1997, pp. 188-189). Significantly, the teacher "distances herself from the role of judge or arbitrator" through the practice of group reflection during *hansei* sessions (Rohlen and LeTendre, 1996, p. 155). The importance of developing a firm *foundation* of skills based on regular *practice* is also discussed in

numerous studies. Rohlen and LeTendre (1995) outline the emphasis Japanese education places on learning *form*, which requires repetitive practice (p. 372) and continued effort (p. 374). Similarly, Benjamin observes "a strong emphasis on standard form, not merely on intelligibility" (1997, p. 118). Likewise, Peak (1991) discusses the "repeated practice of precisely defined component routines until they become automatic" (p. 99), and argues that "Initial speed in task performance is actively de-emphasized in favor of extreme care and precision of execution" (p. 107).

Researchers have displayed a range of opinions on the value of the form of disciplined repetition often practised in Japan. Peak (1991) observes that, while freeing teachers from exercising control at later stages, the drills and routines appear "rigid and authoritarian" (p. 104). Rohlen and LeTendre (1995) contrast the Japanese practice to American values of "spontaneity, independence and creativity" (p. 372). However, another researcher takes a different standpoint, instead criticizing the Western view of creativity for its shallow nature: "Americans, in short, confuse self-expression with creativity, placing the greatest value on spontaneity rather than on taking pains" (White, 1987, p. 79). Furthermore, Lewis argues that *creativity* is valued and nurtured in Japanese primary schools (1995, p. 67) and is cited by the Japanese Ministry of Education as an objective of preschool education (p. 30).

Further perspectives on the Japanese elementary education system can be gleaned from personal accounts by mothers of native English-speaking children attending Japanese primary schools. Conduit discusses the promotion of *perfectionism* (Conduit and Conduit, 1996, p. 66), and argues that the emphasis on perfecting writing skills in the Japanese system occurs at the expense of attention to deducing textual meanings (p. 63). Benjamin (1997) reports on the complexity of the Japanese writing system and contrasts this with the learning of English in American primary schools. Furthermore, she notes that Japanese handwriting instruction involves repetitive practice of characters, and particular attention to the use of space within graph squares (p. 118).

Australian Goals for Early Writing Education

Writing education in Australia is commonly regarded in terms of a *Writing Developmental Continuum* (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). Pedagogy emphasizes an initial focus on encouraging *self-expression*, with increasing attention given to learning the *conventions* of punctuation, spelling, and specific text configurations (p. 68). Learners at initial stages of the continuum are expected to make frequent errors as they gain familiarity with the initially complex English spelling system (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1993). A sequence of educational priorities is evident in this framework: "We need to help children learn to proofread last – after they have attended to the meaning of the piece; otherwise we are only teaching them proofreading skills" (Rowe and Edwards, 2001, p. 17).

A different perspective on the production of errors is also evident. Non-standard English spellings are not simply dismissed as being erroneous, but are regarded as *invented spellings*, a term which refers to children's attempts to construct written forms from basic phonological knowledge (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997, p. 39). Learning to spell correctly is seen to involve *experimentation* in

relating combinations of letters to the sounds of words:

Invented spellings demonstrate that young children teaching themselves to write . . . are actively making hypotheses about the nature of language; what are often taken to be errors of spelling are in fact coherent responses to a problem. (Barton, 1994, p. 155)

In addition, the Australian system places a continuing emphasis on nurturing *creativity*. Hill (1997) argues that Australian early writing pedagogy

encourages engagement, experimentation and risk-taking. Invented spellings and approximations are accepted as part of the learner's on-going process of making sense and gaining control over literacy. (p. 268)

Comparative Study of Japanese and Australian Early Literacy Education

An earlier related study by one of the authors compared literacy education in Australian and Japanese Year One classes. The earlier study differs from the current study in its focus on classes in each education system, compared to the current focus on a single bilingual child enrolled in the two school systems. The study also did not extensively analyze writing samples, but was based on classroom observations and discussions with teachers and parents in each country. In one part of the study, Stephens discusses an apparent dichotomy between pedagogical goals of *accuracy* and *self-expression* (2002, p. 212). The production of errors in the Australian classroom appears to be regarded as a natural part of learning to express oneself in the written language, which is accepted and openly tolerated (p. 216). By contrast, corrections are not evident in the Japanese writing but there is more frequent usage of the eraser. There appears to be a lower degree of tolerance for errors in the Japanese system, and correspondingly more of an emphasis on perfecting written form (p. 216).

CASE STUDY

Subject

The subject of this study is the daughter of the authors, who both speak English as a native language. The mother also speaks Japanese as a second language. At the time of this study, the child was seven years old and had already achieved oral competence in both English and Japanese by living in Australia and Japan for extended periods. She had spent more of this time (approximately four years) in Japan, but regularly attended childcare centers and kindergartens while living in each country.

The study covers the period between ages six years, five months and seven years, seven months, when the subject was attempting to develop biliteracy by attending first year primary school in both countries. During this time, through a fortunate non-correspondence of school calendars and vacation periods, she was able to get three months of formal schooling in Australia and also attend the full year of Year One in Japan.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study are English and Japanese writing exercises produced by the child during regular school work. The exercises were written during a three-month period at Year One in the Australian school, and during a one-year period at Year One in the Japanese school. There are 36 English compositions in her Australian class "Story Writing" book. Two of the compositions were not corrected by the teacher and have consequently been excluded from this study. There are 17 Japanese compositions in her class *sakubun* ("Compositions") file. Two compositions from this collection have also been excluded since they are uncorrected. The English compositions were written in February, March, and August 2001 (age: 6 years, 5 months to 6 years, 11 months), while the Japanese compositions were written between September 2001 and March 2002 (age: 7 years, 0 months to 7 years, 7 months). The compositions were produced after the child had achieved basic competence in writing both the alphabet and the Japanese syllabaries. The English stories can be readily identified as being at the *Early Writing* stage of the Writing Developmental Continuum, which is described as follows:

Children write about topics which are personally significant. They are beginning to consider audience needs. They have a sense of sentence but may only be able to deal with one or two elements of writing at one time, e.g. spelling but not punctuation. (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997, p. 52)

The two sources of written data are complemented by the child's accounts of her personal experience of learning to write in each school system (as provided to her parents).

Methodology

Error correction in the data is considered from three perspectives. Firstly, three sample compositions from each collection are examined. The samples were selected as being representative works from the beginning, middle, and end of each collection. Secondly, a comparative analysis of the two complete collections (comprising 34 English compositions and 15 Japanese compositions) is provided. Differences in error correction practices are discussed, and a statistical analysis is provided. Since the data sources are both substantially large and of equivalent size (1,598 words vs. 1,608 characters), they can be compared in terms of relative frequency counts in similar areas. Thirdly, our personal reactions (as parents of the subject) to the various error correction practices are discussed.

Two forms of error correction are investigated in this study: *teacher correction* and *student self-correction*. The two forms are here defined as being mutually exclusive. Where teacher corrections occur in the Japanese data, and the child subsequently erases the original character and rewrites over the teacher's character, the initial teacher correction is counted while the child's subsequent erasure is not counted as a student self-correction. Student self-corrections are subdivided into two categories: items which were crossed out and those which were erased. Crossed-out items are defined as comprising either a line drawn directly through an item, an underlined item, or a boxed item, marked either as a form of error correction, or in order to identify probable errors. They are counted in terms of both full and partial words and characters, however basic items of punctuation (including full stops and commas) have

been excluded from the counts.

Limitations

Limitations to the findings of this study are acknowledged in two areas. Firstly, this project is a case study concerned with the experience of one individual in one class in each education system, and the extent to which the findings can be generalized to apply to the experience of other individuals within different contexts is unclear. Despite this limitation, case studies are generally regarded as a valuable research method (Burns, 1997, p. 380), and the findings of the current project may be directly relevant to the experience of other individuals in similar contexts.

Secondly, counting instances of eraser usage is problematic in that some erasures may not be detected during a standard visual inspection. In the case of the Japanese compositions, the erasures were relatively straightforward to identify since the child, according to her own account, had been taught to press firmly when writing with the pencil. The writing in the English compositions is, however, generally of a lighter quality, and the erasures are somewhat more difficult to identify. Furthermore, both sides of the paper have been used for the English compositions, and impressions from characters on the reverse side of the page are often visible through the paper. We became aware of these difficulties during the data analysis, and subsequently took considerable care in closely scrutinizing each composition for erasures. As a consequence, we believe that erasures in the two data sources have been correctly identified.

RESULTS

Sample Compositions

As mentioned in the Methodology section, three compositions were selected from each collection to illustrate the types of error correction made by the teachers and the child in the Australian and Japanese systems. Reproductions of the first, seventeenth and thirty-second English compositions are included here to represent the beginning, middle and end of the child's work during her three months of study in an Australian Year One class. These are followed by reproductions of the first, fifth and fifteenth Japanese compositions. Each composition is accompanied by a transcription with standard spelling (for English compositions) or an English translation (for Japanese works), as well as our analysis of teacher and student error corrections in the sample.

The first English composition

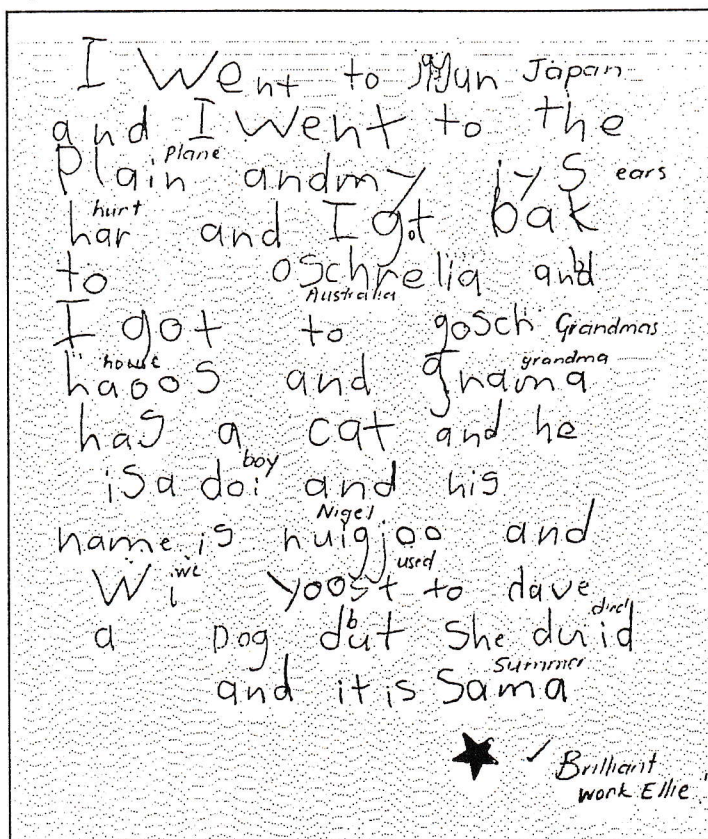


FIGURE 1: The First English Composition

Transcription with standard spelling: I went to Japan and I went to the plane and my ears hurt and I got back to Australia and I got to Grandma's house and Grandma has a cat and he is a boy and his name is Nigel and we used to have a dog but she died and it is summer.

As seen in Figure 1, the teacher has written corrections in pencil above sixteen words in the first English composition. There are neither crossed-out items nor erasures by the child, although markings from letters on the back of the page are partially visible through the paper. The child's invented spellings, together with the standard spelling of the intended word, are as follows: *jqagan* / Japan, *Plane* / plane, *iys* / ears, *har* / hurt, *oschrelia* / Australia, *haaos* / house, *grama* / Grandma, *doi* / boy, *nuigjoo* / Nigel, *Wi* / we, *yoost* / used, *duid* / died, *Sama* / summer. There are also a number of inverted letters which indicate the child has not yet mastered handwriting skills: *Jqa(g)an* / Japan, *(d)oi* / boy, *(d)ut* / but, *(n)ave* / have. The teacher mostly corrects the handwriting errors within the context of whole word corrections, rather than focusing on single letters.

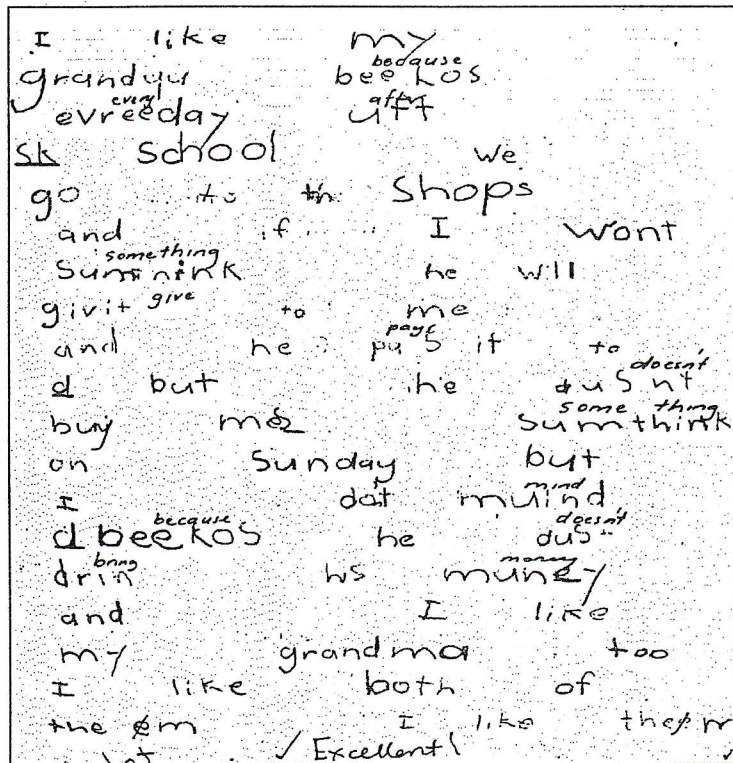


FIGURE 2: The Seventeenth English Composition

Transcription with standard spelling: *I like my Grandpa because everyday after school we go to the shops and if I want something he will give it to me and he pays [for] it too but he doesn't buy me something on Sunday but I don't mind because he doesn't bring his money and I like my Grandma too I like both of them I like them a lot.*

In the seventeenth English composition, which is shown in Figure 2, there are twenty-one corrections by the teacher, five items crossed out by the subject, and no signs of eraser use. Once again, some letters on the back of the page are partially visible through the paper. The child's invented spellings are as follows: *beekos* (x 2) / *because*, *evreeday* / *everyday*, *uft* / *after*, *sumthink* (x 2) / *something*, *givit* / *give*, *pais* / *pays*, *du sn't* / *doesn't*, *bui* / *buy*, *dot* / *don't*, *muind* / *mind*, *dust* / *doesn't*, *drin* / *bring*, *hs* / *his*, *muny* / *money*, *grandmu* / *Grandma*, *to* / *too*, *the_em them* / *them*. The following items were crossed out: *(sk)ool* / *school*, *(d)ut* / *but*, *me(s)* / *me*, *(d)ee kos* / *because*, *mun(e)y* / *money*. A number of letters have been inverted again: *grand(q)u* / *Grandpa*, *(d)ut* / *but*, *(d)ee kos* / *because*, *(d)rin* / *bring*. On one occasion, the child appears to have not recognized word boundaries and has joined two words into a single form: *givit* / *give it*.

The thirty-second English composition

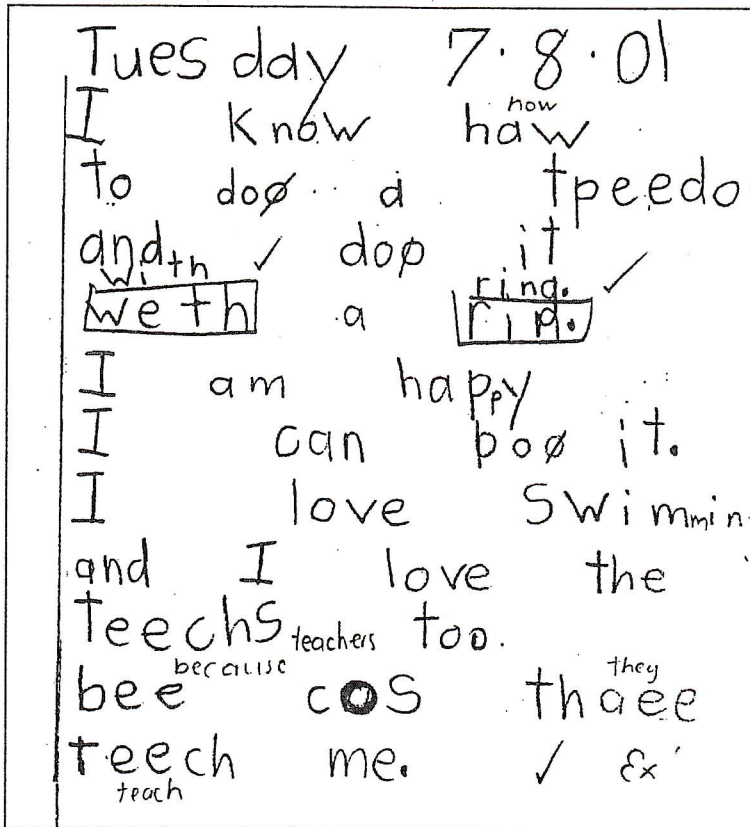


FIGURE 3: The Thirty-Second English Composition

Date: August 7th, 2001.

Transcription with standard spelling: I know how to do a torpedo and do it with a ring. I am happy I can do it. I love swimming and I love the teachers too because they teach me.

In the thirty-second English composition (shown in Figure 3), there are ten corrections by the teacher, three items crossed out by the subject, and two instances of erasure. The invented spellings are as follows: *haw* / *how*, *doo* (x 3) / *do*, *hapy* / *happy*, *swiming* / *swimming*, *teechs* / *teachers*, *bee_cos* / *because*, *thae* / *they*, *teech* / *teach*. The crossed-out items are as follows: *weth* / *with*, *rin* / *ring*, *bee_c(a)s* / *because*. The items which were erased and then rewritten are: *kn(w)* / *know*, *(h)eech* / *teech*. There is evidence of inconsistency in the handwriting, with the letter being written correctly initially ((d)oo / do) but subsequently inverted (boo / do). There is another error involving recognition of word boundaries, but rather than fusing words, the subject has divided a single word into two parts: *bee_cos* / *because*. The same item was represented correctly as a single word in the seventeenth composition, although it has been misspelled in both compositions.

The first Japanese composition



FIGURE 4: The First Japanese Composition

Date: October 1st, 2001. Title: *Playing with my sister.*

Translation: *In the morning I watched some television. I went outside to play. I came inside again. It's lunchtime. It was delicious. When we finished we played with our dolls. We went to buy donuts.*

Teacher's comment: *It's good that you had fun playing with your sister.*

As seen in Figure 4, the teacher has corrected the third character in the fourth column and inserted eight additional characters between squares (*masu*) in the first Japanese composition. Four of the insertions involve the small *tsu* character. It is likely that the child is unaware that these glottal stops must be represented orthographically. There is also an error in vowel length in the eighth column between the second and third squares (where the hiragana for *u* is needed to make the *o* sound in *donuts* long). A number of particles, which are often dropped in conversation, are also not represented in the text. This type of error appears to correspond to differences between the spoken and written forms of Japanese. The child made two erasures in the title and a third erasure in the fifth character of the first column. The teacher has drawn a *hanamaru* (a large spiral surrounded by a flower-shaped form) above the child's illustration to acknowledge good work.

The fifth Japanese composition



FIGURE 5: The Fifth Japanese Composition

Date: November 12th, 2001.

Title: I went to Hitomi's house.

Translation: I always go with Hitomi to her house on Fridays. It was interesting. I think I'll go (there) this Friday too. Anna said "wow".

Teacher's comment: You look forward to playing with Hitomi, don't you?

In the fifth Japanese composition (Figure 5), the teacher has crossed out the fifth character in the sixth column because it represents a sound (*n*) which is included in the preceding Chinese character (*kin*). The teacher has also corrected the form of the fifth character in the seventh column (*mo*), and inserted two additional characters: the small *tsu* needed in *issho* in the second column, and the *n* needed in *Anna* at the end of the seventh column. Although the subject has omitted one small *tsu*, she has correctly included two (in the fourth and fifth columns). The child has erased two characters in the title, as well as characters in the following (column-row) positions: 2-1, 3-1, 3-2, 3-3, 6-4. The teacher has drawn another *hanamaru* symbol beside the illustration to indicate good work.



FIGURE 6: The Fifteenth Japanese Composition

Translation: On Monday (my parents) bought me some roller skates. Because Hitomi has some too; I don't know if they are the same color. It was great. I'm always using them. At first it was a bit hard because I couldn't do it, but then I was able to do it.

In the fifteenth Japanese composition (Figure 6), the teacher has made only three corrections: changing the seventh character in the sixth column from *su* to *tsu*, and inserting small *tsu* characters after the sixth character in each of the next two columns. The subject, on the other hand, has made extensive erasures in the first, seventh, eighth, and ninth columns, and also used an eraser in the second and third columns. A significant amount of the eraser use appears to be associated with character spacing on the page. The first column has been entirely erased because the child originally commenced the story in the first square (*masu*), rather than following convention and beginning in the second square of the grid on the Japanese composition paper (*genko yoshi*). Similarly, the seventh, eighth, and ninth columns appear to have been erased because an error was made in one square and the correction apparently necessitated the rewriting of subsequent squares. Thus, correct usage of the squares (*masu*) on Japanese composition

paper appears to be of significant importance when writing Japanese compositions. The teacher provides substantial positive feedback on the page, comprising twenty-five circled characters (highlighting well done parts), and another *hanamaru* symbol.

Comparison of English and Japanese Collections

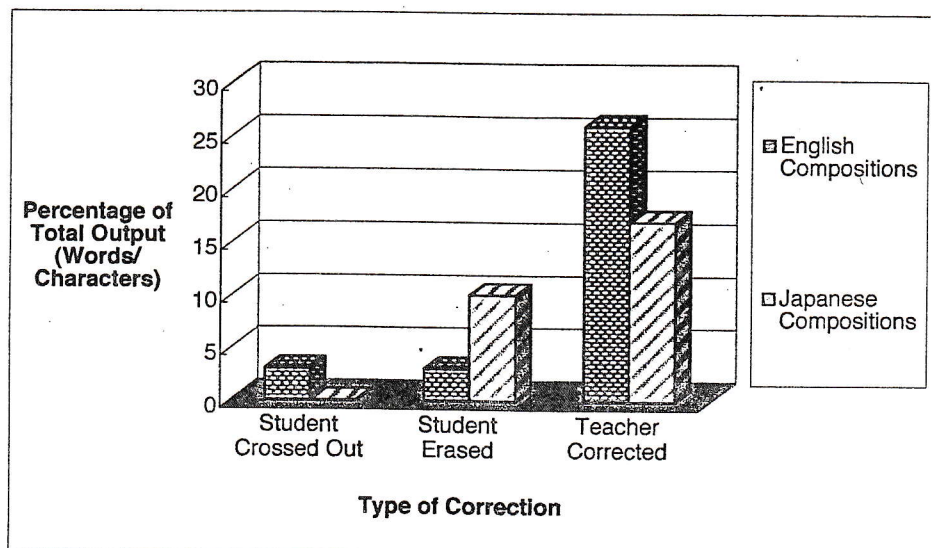
Having shown examples of the subject's compositions in both languages, we would like to summarize the types of errors she made in her early writing in each language, as well as the types of corrections that were provided by her teacher and made by the child herself.

The thirty-four English compositions feature several types of error. There are frequent invented spellings, some inverted letters, and some mistakes in word boundaries. Corrections are written unobtrusively by the teacher beside the errors. An informational notice which provides a basic guide to parents about early writing education is pasted inside the front cover of the child's writing book. Eight stages of development are described as typically occurring at the Year One level. The subject's compositions can be identified as being at the seventh stage, which is beyond simply utilizing key words, but does not yet correctly incorporate full stops and capital letters. There is some evidence of progression towards the eighth stage, since full stops start to appear in the final twelve compositions. Capital letters are, however, used somewhat randomly throughout the collection.

In the fifteen Japanese compositions, there are two main types of teacher-corrected errors: those involving mistakes in orthography, especially the absence of the small *tsu* to represent glottal stops, and those involving poorly formed characters. The teacher's corrections are written either in or between the squares on Japanese composition paper. The child has subsequently erased any errors and copied over the teacher's corrections. There was also extensive eraser use associated with character spacing, rather than with error production. It appears to be unacceptable to leave a square either erased or crossed out, or to insert additional characters between squares on the composition paper. In some cases, entire columns have been erased in order to correctly use each square. This finding confirms previous observations by Benjamin (1997) which identify correct usage of the squares on Japanese composition paper as an important aspect of Japanese early writing education.

In order to compare the type and frequency of error corrections in the two collections, instances of teacher corrections and the subject's own corrections (crossed-out items and erasures) were counted in the English and Japanese compositions (see Appendices A and B). A summary was then produced by calculating the total number of corrections for each category and the percentage of the total number of words (English) or characters (Japanese) that had been corrected in each way (see Appendix C). This summary is represented in graphical form in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7: Comparison of Types of Error Corrections in English and Japanese Compositions



In the English collection, self-corrections were equally likely to take the form of crossed-out items (3%) or erasures (3%). By contrast, in the Japanese collection there were no crossed-out items (0%), but many erasures (10%). It is noteworthy that not a single character (of a total of 1,608 characters) was crossed out in the Japanese compositions. When questioned about this pattern, the child responded that it was unacceptable to cross out Japanese writing. A similar attitude towards English errors was not evident. The high frequency of erasures in the Japanese compositions (10%) is also of considerable importance, since this substantially exceeds the combined total of self-corrections in the English compositions (6%). The subject may have been making more errors in Japanese, or alternatively, may have felt greater compulsion to correct the Japanese errors.

Teacher corrections occur much more frequently in the English data (26%) than in the Japanese data (7%). They also substantially exceed the self-corrections (6%), whereas in the Japanese data, self-corrections (10%) exceed teacher corrections (7%). The high frequency of teacher corrections in the English compositions is the major difference evident in the statistical analysis, and occurs somewhat in contradiction to the more frequent self-corrections occurring in the Japanese compositions. Since similar numbers of errors were left uncorrected by the teachers in the two data sources, it is evident that more errors occurred in the English compositions.

It is hence significant that the child is more concerned with detecting errors in the Japanese compositions. She appears to perceive the presence of errors in the Japanese work as unacceptable, and routinely uses the eraser to remove the errors from her work. By contrast, errors in the English compositions appear to occur without any associated discredit, since the child freely crosses out mistakes, and the teacher also makes abundant corrections. Error production in the English compositions appears

to be accepted as an integral part of learning to write, as reported in previous research (Barton, 1994; Hill, 1997; Stephens, 2002).

Personal Reactions to Error Correction Practices

As parents more familiar with the Australian education system, our personal reactions to the various error correction practices are also worth consideration. During the period of this study, we observed our daughter routinely interrupting her Japanese writing homework in order to check for possible errors. If not satisfied with her first effort, she would use the eraser and start again, sometimes even repeating this process several times in succession. This manner of constantly checking her work and immediately erasing errors was against our natural inclination, so we urged her (unsuccessfully) to be satisfied with her initial attempts and to focus instead on the story being written. The apparent requirement for her to correctly use each square of the Japanese composition paper further increased the (already high) frequency of erasures.

We have recently also observed our daughter extending her concern for high standards of accuracy from Japanese writing to English writing. She has become significantly more cautious in her English writing as a result, and frequently insists on checking the spelling of words before writing them down. She sometimes erases groups of words if she is not satisfied with their form. She ignores our advice not to focus exclusively on spelling, and her production of invented spellings has diminished considerably. We think that she may have become overly concerned with the consequences of making errors in her English writing. The creative flow of her ideas appears to have been disrupted, and her experience of writing has become more difficult and tedious. Her interest and motivation levels appear to have decreased. She now corrects her English during the initial writing process, in contradiction to the way she was taught in Australia. She originally also learned to write independently, but now requires constant support to complete a writing task.

While a range of additional factors may have contributed to these changes, the transfer of Japanese writing practices appears to have negatively impacted her English writing. Given the irregularities of the English writing system, and the relative difficulty of early writing in English, we are concerned about this because it appears that the Australian pedagogical emphasis on nurturing experimentation, risk-taking, and self-expression (Barton, 1994; Education Department of Western Australia, 1997; Hill, 1997) may count significantly towards writing development in the English language.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Differences Attributable to Linguistic Form

Given the significant differences between the target languages in the two writing classes, many of the differences in error correction practices evident in this study can be understood in terms of essential differences in linguistic form. The greater initial difficulty of English orthography largely explains why more errors and more teacher corrections occur in the English compositions. The immediate complexity of written English also initially necessitates lower standards of accuracy, since rigorous attention to

spelling and punctuation would have a seriously negative impact on the learning process as well as reduce creative output. Children would become frustrated at not being able to write what they could readily express in spoken language. The acceptance of invented spellings circumvents this difficulty. By contrast, the more regular correspondence between sound and symbol in early written Japanese (comprising *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries) partially accounts for the expectation that children should write with a higher degree of accuracy, as well as providing the opportunity for more disciplined attention to form.

However, while the English writing system is initially more complex, the Japanese writing system ultimately becomes substantially more difficult. The development of accurate writing in early Japanese may consequently be regarded as establishing a necessary foundation for the later learning of an immensely complex handwriting system. The higher complexity of written Japanese is due to the sheer number of Chinese characters (*kanji*) which need to be mastered, as well as to the high number of strokes per individual character. (For further discussion, see Bostwick, 2000). This linguistic difference also contributes to the importance of the eraser which is apparent in the Japanese compositions, since a more disciplined focus on accuracy in early learning stages is likely to promote writing dexterity in later years.

Differences Attributable to Educational Goals

The higher significance of errors in the Japanese compositions may also be explained in terms of differing goals of the respective education systems. In Japan, children closely correct their written work as a consequence of internalizing pedagogical values concerned with reflection and self-management, which have been identified as primary goals of early education in Japan (Benjamin, 1997; Lewis, 1995). In Australia, where self-expression is an important goal (Hill, 1997), it is regarded as disadvantageous to interrupt the initial flow of creative ideas. While children learn to identify errors and subsequently revise their writing in both cultures, a distinction is evident in early writing stages between editing undertaken as part of the initial writing process and editing undertaken as a separate task after the first draft has been completed. The different approaches to the editing process adopted by the two education systems are apparent in this study.

The different level of acceptability of errors in the two education systems can be further explained in terms of differences in a number of other pedagogical values. In Australia, children write creatively for a lengthy period before mastering the basics of spelling and punctuation. Standards of written form are imposed at a subsequent stage in the writing developmental continuum (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). Particularly in early writing stages, children are expected to learn through experimentation with various forms of invented spellings (Barton, 1994). By contrast, in Japan an immediate emphasis is maintained on mastering standard forms and establishing a solid skills foundation (Peak, 1991; Rohlen and LeTendre, 1995). Writing skills are learned through a disciplined process of self-correction which takes precedence over creative output. Errors are less acceptable in the Japanese system since they contravene this primary pedagogical value (Stephens, 2002), and the eraser is important since it provides a means for removing evidence of errors from a child's work.

CONCLUSIONS

Early writing education in Japan and Australia can be viewed as two distinct cultural systems which have each developed to meet the specific needs of fundamentally different languages. It is consequently difficult to make any form of direct comparison between the educational practices which have evolved in these countries. In the Australian classroom, our daughter wrote without undue concern for errors and with a fundamental purpose of self-expression. It was encouraging to observe the volume of stories she produced, although the stories contained frequent errors which were corrected by the teacher. In Japan, she checked her work and corrected errors during the initial writing stage, and fewer errors occurred in her compositions as a result of this approach. The different educational practices evident in this study appear to be consistent with the goals and purposes of each education system, and the extent to which the practices of one system would be beneficial to the other system remains unclear.

However, the contradictory demands of Japanese and Australian pedagogies make the successful development of biliteracy an enormously complex task. There is the significant possibility of a bilingual child inadvertently transferring pedagogical practices from one education system to the other. Where the practice is designed to meet the needs of a specific language, writing progress in the other language may be impeded as a result of this transfer process. In the current study, the attention to achieving high standards of written accuracy in the Japanese system was transferred to English writing. We subsequently observed routine disruptions to our daughter's English work, diminished fluency, and a higher level of dependence during writing activities. Japanese pedagogical values appear to have also encouraged perfectionist tendencies, which had previously gone undeveloped in Australia. In the longer term, however, such transfer effects may possibly produce positive results. English spelling is notoriously irregular, and while invented spellings are acceptable in early writing stages, they must be corrected later in the primary education system. It is apparent from this study that parents need to recognize the complexity of such issues in order to provide essential support towards their child's bilingual development.

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APPENDIX A

Error Correction Frequencies in English Compositions

Composition Number	Student Corrections		Teacher Corrections	Total Number of Words
	Crossed Out	Erasure		
01	0	0	16	55
02	0	4	5	34
03	0	0	15	45
04	0	3	21	44
05	1	2	10	37
06	5	0	25	48
07	0	1	13	75
08	1	0	9	28
09	1	0	12	26
10	2	2	17	50
11	1	0	11	40
12	1	0	10	75
13	1	0	19	37
14	5	0	22	80
15	1	0	22	70
16	0	2	26	64
17	5	0	21	63
18	1	0	13	62
19	0	2	6	56
20	0	0	5	54
21	0	6	7	42
22	0	2	17	46
23	0	1	2	59
24	13	0	7	44
25	0	3	7	39
26	0	2	11	32
27	0	9	8	36
28	0	1	15	35
29	0	2	7	30
30	3	4	3	29
31	0	1	7	35
32	3	2	10	33
33	2	0	13	54
34	2	0	6	41

APPENDIX B

Error Correction Frequencies in Japanese Compositions

Composition Number	Student Corrections		Teacher Corrections	Total Number of Characters
	Crossed Out	Erasure		
01	0	3	9	94
02	0	2	6	84
03	0	5	2	92
04	0	3	2	88
05	0	7	4	93
06	0	8	3	122
07	0	1	3	84
08	0	2	14	96
09	0	12	12	82
10	0	4	16	179
11	0	21	17	170
12	0	13	3	108
13	0	33	20	114
14	0	6	3	103
15	0	46	3	99

APPENDIX C

Comparison of Error Correction Types and Frequencies

	English Compositions		Japanese Compositions	
Total Output	1,598 words		1,608 characters	
Correction Type	Number	% of Total Output	Number	% of Total Output
Student Corrections				
Crossed Out	48	3%	0	0%
Erasure	49	3%	166	10%
Teacher Corrections	418	26%	117	7%
Total Corrections	515	32%	283	17%