

A Study of Korean/Chinese Bilingual's Writing Competency*

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Kim, Kyung-Ryung. 2009. A study of Korean/Chinese Bilingual's Writing Competency. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 17(4). 79-97. This study descriptively investigates the relationship between first language and second language writing competence of ethnic Koreans in the Yonbian area of China. All participants have been educated as bilingual speakers who can handle both Korean and Chinese. Various analyses such as Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), usage of syntactic categories, lexical transferences, frequency of errors, scales of composition task were utilized to examine bilingual speaker's writing competency. This research found that participants were quite balanced bilingual writers. The analysis of both MLU and syntactic usage shows systematic consistency. Lexical transference from Chinese consisted of low percentages of the data and occurred limitedly. Errors were not found when writing Korean while a low percentage of errors were found when writing Korean using Chinese characters. Participants organized their ideas well in Korean and chose suitable vocabulary. They used accurate paragraphing in both Korean and Chinese writing constituent. Ethnic Koreans quite successfully maintained writing competency in Korean and also showed a balanced level of writing competency in Chinese.

Key Words: Bilingualism, Writing competency, Composition task. Error Rates,

1. Introduction

There exist 55 minority ethnic groups maintaining their language and culture

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in China. Among them, ethnic Koreans maintain traditional Korean culture, society and their own language. An ethnic Korean autonomous province was established in 1952 and about 2 million of them live in China; 0.8 million in Yonbian, 0.35 million in Kilim, 0.4 million at Heungyong, 0.2 million in Yoryeong (Heo et al, 2003). Yonbian is the biggest assembly area which consists of six cities and two districts where 80% of the people are ethnic Koreans.

For this reason, in the Yonbian area, communicating in two languages is a natural phenomena from birth. Official educational institutions - elementary, middle and high school- mainly teach subjects in Korean and also teach Chinese as a second language. They learn 1890 hours of Chinese and 2588 hours of Korean through twelve years of a required educational period (Lee, 2004).

Korean ethnic groups in Yonbian has maintained their own educational system successfully. They focused their efforts on bilingual education in order to keep Korean identity and also support Chinese language education.

The young generation of ethnic Koreans in Yonbian are raised to be generous to other cultures and to respect other languages. So for them, bilingual education is more than a mere language education. Through the education, they learn to preserve their own ethnic culture and, at the same time, learn to assimilate themselves into the main social mechanism of China (Choi et al, 2003). Ideally, they want to be balanced bilinguals who are positive toward two languages and cultures in the society. They not only want to develop high levels of Korean language and culture but they also want to actively participate in the main social activities in China. Without knowing the Chinese language, it's hard to find a good job or take higher positions in the society. So, ethnic Koreans have to be fluent in Chinese too.

Ethnic Koreans in Yonbian manage several publishing companies that publish newspapers, magazines and general books in Korean. But it's hard to translate all information from Chinese to Korean. In order to access advanced technical or scientific knowledge timely, Chinese literacy is necessary (Park, 1995).

Academically, a high level of Korean-Chinese bi-literacy is a must for ethnic Koreans in Yonbian. However, recently many fourth generation ethnic Koreans decided to send their children to Chinese schools rather than ethnic Korean schools (Ma, 2009) because they do not have confidence in ethnic Korean

schools' bilingual programs. They demand high levels of language competence in both languages but some of them fail to achieve satisfactory levels of Chinese competency or vice versa.

Specifically, writing competency is closely related to educational success or achievement of a higher social status. Writing competency continues to be a main part of the educational value by a society and serves as a primary gatekeeper of institutions. Compared to speaking, writing requires a conscious effort, a great deal of practice and high level of accuracy. It usually takes longer to accomplish high levels of sophisticated composing skills (Cummins, 1991; Mileidis, 2002; Choi, 2004, etc).

Even though writing competency is as important as the aforementioned, there are very few studies examining ethnic Korean's writing competency in a concrete setting (Kang, 2009; Lee, 1999; Jeong, 1990). This descriptive study examined Korean/Chinese bilingual's writing competency through composition prompted tasks. Research of bilingual writing has to be more specific in terms of investigating the writing skills relating to the success in both languages.

This study examined Korean-Chinese bilingual writing competency, its application, interference, code switching phenomena through various analyses to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Are the bilinguals of Korean and Chinese with higher education in the Yonbian area balanced in writing competency in respect of form and contents?
- 2) Is there a correlation between Korean and Chinese competency?
- 3) Code-switching frequently occurs in colloquial communication of bilinguals. Will it occur in literary style communication as well?

2. Literature Review

Researchers (Cummins,1991; Collier,1989,1992; Rashid & Hanizah, 2003 etc.) argued that the amount of time at acquiring academically high levels of writing competency needed to be 4-10 years in order to be fully proficient. It means that among the four language functions, writing seems to be the most difficult to handle in a balanced way, because writing requires broad skills of cognitive and

academic fluency and accuracy. In other words, balanced bilinguals have the ability to handle synonyms, antonyms and various levels of vocabulary usage of two languages.

Writing also contains complex processes because it requires time and effort to learn and teach. As mentioned, writing consists of various aspects and dimensions in terms of its process and product. Therefore, a bilingual program must consider multidimensional method of writing such as, following instructional practices, assessment procedures and language development. Writing cannot be seen as a separate subject. The major part of the literacy dilemma is attributed to the lack of adequate writing instruction. Writing is a basic skill necessary for cognitive, social and psychological growth.

The multidimensional nature of the writing process has to be understood and recognized as a fundamental basis for academic development. Writing contains complicated aspects of language. It contains an array of intervening elements and requires utilization of language tools ranging from mechanics to organization. The writing process has to involve two main aspects; content and form. The writer must understand a given topic and constitute an organization. In order to satisfy two main aspects, bilinguals also have to handle languages accurately with an abundance of knowledge about the topic.

Mahmoud (2000) proposed that writing includes complicated processes of pre-writing, developing, organizing and supporting. During this process, language transfer of writing skills also occur between languages. Researchers (Homza, 1995; Howard & Christian, 1997) examined that language similarities/differences and different degrees of language proficiency influence the nature or degree of code switching. It is defined as a mastery of two linguistic systems. During this process, interaction occurs naturally and simultaneously. Expecting transference patterns was complex.

There is a possibility to find weak patterns but most cases seems temporary and eventually develop into parallel mature writing processes (Routman,1994; Bader, 2007). Mature writing processes and skills are defined as once learned, acquired or maintained. Dominant language transfer patterns exhibit from L1 to L2. Transference is a continued process on developing bilinguals' relative strength in L1 and L2 writing and these can be referred to as biliterate development (Edelsky, 1989; Sipe, 1998; August & Hakuta, 1997).

Cummins (1991) argued that the level of L2 competence is influenced by L1 competence developed. This indicates that writing competency of first language naturally transfers to L2. Therefore L1 competence is a reasonable indicator of L2 competence development. Language transference can be treated as a main concern of linguistics and educators (Hornberger & Skilton, 1998). Balanced bilinguals transfer their knowledge simultaneously and fluently.

This research supports the position that language acquisition is not a process of overcoming differences between two languages. L1 can be a critical basis for learning L2, and various linguistic elements can be systematically code switched. This is a natural phenomenon to develop both language systems.

3. Method

Korean-Chinese college students in Yonbian area were chosen as research subjects because they have been educated in both languages since elementary school. Twenty five Korean/Chinese bilinguals who attended Yonbian University participated in this study. Yonbian University was established in 1949 and currently manages 7 divisions of economics, philosophy, law, education, history, engineering and science. There are currently 78 master's degree and 8 doctoral degree students enrolled, and the size of the university in terms of enrolled students is increasing. Yonbian University was established for ethnic Koreans with ages ranging from 19 to 25. All of them have been educated in the educational institutes for ethnic Koreans. Participants regarded themselves as bilinguals with ethnic Korean identity.

The researcher and research assistants visited Yonbian University to collect the necessary data. The faculty members of the Yonbian University helped to organize the experiment. Students were assembled together at a designated time and place. All of 25 students took the test in a designated classroom at once. Before the test began, students were well oriented and explained about the test procedure. The composition was done in Chinese first then Korean. Raised questions were answered by the test managers in the room. The test took 2 hours and 30 minutes, including the orientation of the test. After the test, they answered basic survey questions.

The composition prompt test¹⁾ was used to measure writing proficiency - contents and form. 10 continuous pictures are shown to test subjects and the test subjects describe the pictures, exerting their language accuracy and proficiency. A given topic and the situation the picture illustrate should be relevant to a participant's everyday social life. No jargons and abstract vocabularies need to be used. Based on these pictures, composition level test standard was applied as in Hughes et al (1997). In the content building, even when there were minor grammatical error, no points were taken off if the story flows. Only when the story is blocked with ambiguous or unnecessary sentence, points were taken off. Papers were scored using a scoring rubric that highlights four components: focus, organization, support and conventions. Scoring standards are described in the following table. The actual composition prompt test samples are presented in appendix A.

Score	Description	Level
5	Each components are logically well connected, including events, causes and effects.	Complete sequence
4	Contents include object-oriented activities.	Incomplete sequence
3	Events are connected by cause and effects.	Reactive sequence
2	Events are connected chronologically.	Action sequence
1	Events are not logically connected.	Descriptive sequence

Measuring Writing Proficiency of Form: Collected data was analyzed by Brown's Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) criteria. Following Brown's criteria, any new kinds of grammatical knowledge increases the length of utterance. Morpheme development can be expressed by calculating MLU (Brown,1973, P.54). MLU calculation procedure for Chinese and Korean is as follows.

1) Pilot study was activated before activating real test at Yonbian. 10 Korean and 10 Chinese students(bilingual) participated for the experiments in Korea. All of them were graduate or undergraduate students in Korea. The composition prompt test by using 10 continuous picture was more efficient instead of using closed-answer questions. Detailed description and explanation of cause and effect expressed more in a detailed way by illustrating various pictures.

- 1) Only fully transcribed utterances are used.
- 2) A sentence is completed by the full stop (or period).
- 3) Include all exact utterance repetitions
- 4) Do not count such fillers ah,mm, yah.
- 5) All compound words count as single words. For example, (boardwalk
인행도로=人行道路 =1 **morpheme**, Rules of the Road=交通規則=1
morpheme)
- 6) Catenative verbs in Korean or Chinese are counted as one verb. (Pass
[넘어(go over)+가다(go)] 넘어가다=走過去=1 morpheme)
- 7) Particles representing the tense such as 之, 了, 過 in Chinese are
counted separately(eaten[먹었다]=吃了=2). Korean verbs are analyzed by
component parts, the verb root and tense suffix. Each component count
as a separate morpheme (visited[갔었다]= 2 morphemes).
- 8) Chinese pronoun is assumed to have the same function with Korean
pronoun
- 9) Chinese preposition is induced to Korean particles.
- 10) Chinese conjunction is induced to Korean adverb.

All of the language data were categorized by syntactic category such as the percentage of occurrence in each category. The occurrence of syntactic categories - Noun, Pronoun, Number, Verb, Particle, Adverb, Adjective - were statistically measured. The syntactic categories were also used for measuring error rates.

4. Results

4.1 Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)

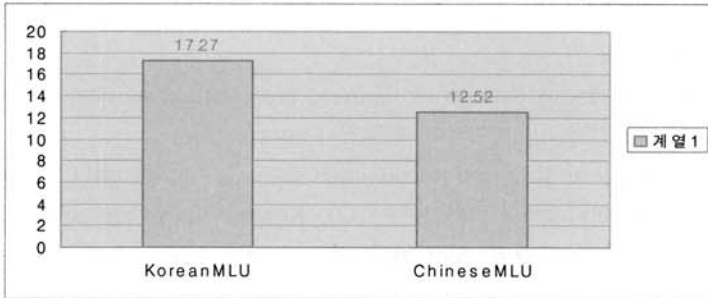
MLU is used as an indicator to describe written language proficiency. When comparing the MLU of two languages, Korean MLU is larger than Chinese MLU.

Korean is an agglutinative language but Chinese is an isolating language. Because of the characteristic of agglutinative language, complex chains of particles, suffixes or predicates consisted of Korean sentences so the number of

Korean MLU are seemingly larger than Chinese.

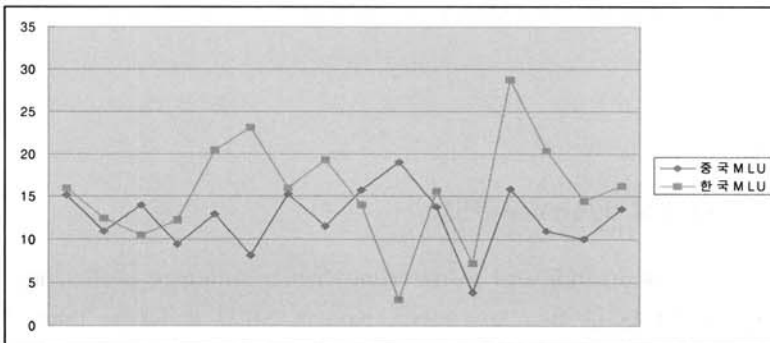
The discrepancy between Korean and Chinese MLU is not so significant when considering linguistic difference. Figure 1-1 indicates the result of this.

<Figure1-1.> Group mean of morpheme number in Korean/Chinese writing.



On average, the mean of morpheme numbers in writing was higher in Korean than Chinese. When Chinese MLU was high for a subject, Korean MLU was high. But the reverse was not the case; when Korean MLU was high, Chinese MLU was not necessarily high. As shown in Figure 1-2, Korean MLU was higher than Chinese MLU except in 3 subjects.

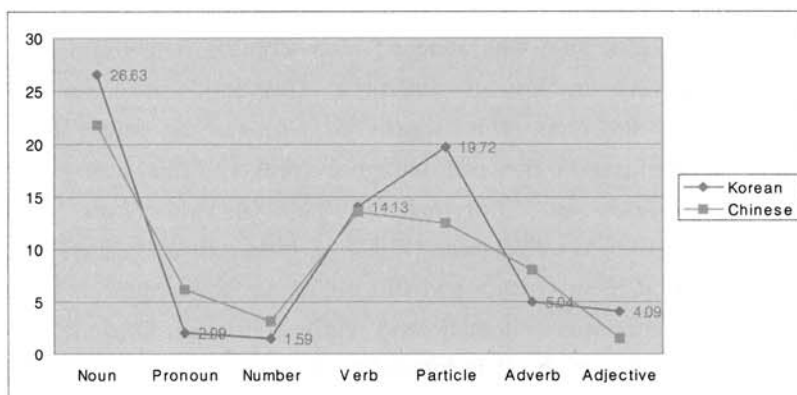
<Figure 1-2> Each participant’s morpheme number in Korean and Chinese



<Figure 2> presents the usage of syntactic categories in Korean and Chinese. Subjects showed similar tendency in using syntactic category in both Korean and Chinese.

In Korean, nouns were the most frequently used. Syntactic categories of particle, verb, adverb, adjective, number and pronoun followed in the order of usage frequency. In Chinese, nouns are also used most frequently. The frequency order of other categories are slightly different as follows: verb, particle, adverb, pronoun, number and adjective. However, the overall distributions of syntactic category usage in both languages are very similar, which implies that participants showed consistency in handling both languages. Despite the cross linguistic differences or similarities, the results suggested that they acquired both linguistic systems in a balanced way.

<Figure 2> The usage of syntactic categories in Korean and Chinese



In the same data, several case of code switching have occurred in Korean and Chinese composition. These code switching cases tend to occurred not in a random way but in a systematic way, showing competent bilinguals' characteristic. Code switching also occurred in a systematic way. Similar findings were obtained in other studies for other languages such as Spanish/English or Japanese/English (Noguchi, 1996; Mileidis, 2002).

Code switching occurred most at word level - Noun (61.7%). Chinese lexical items were code switched in Korean structure dominantly. This indicates they are Korean dominant writers.

On survey questions, participants prefer to code-switch when they cannot find proper corresponding Korean lexical items. Most of the frequently code

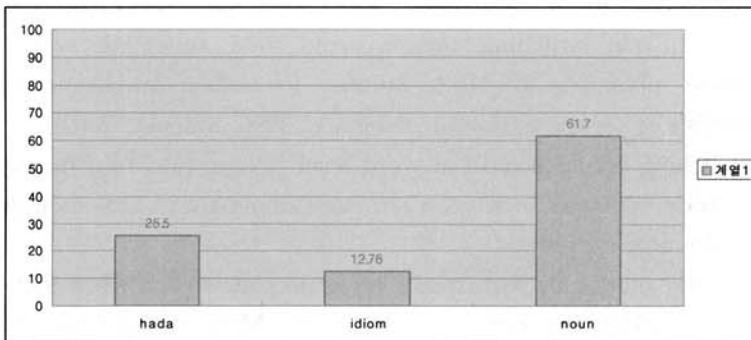
switched Chinese lexical items pertained to the highest frequency usage in daily life. Sipjageori (十字距離), jeonhwabang (電話防), juwonsil (廚院室), gugeupsil (救急室), inhaengdoro (人行道路), sinhopan (信號版), jagayongcha (自家用車), danhyangdoro (壇向道路), gingeupsil (緊急室), yeohaengin (旅行人) juwonbu (廚院部) were the illustrated examples.

Participants also intentionally code-switched when they wanted to express sentences in a simpler way instead of using complex Korean phrases. The occurrence of code switching for this reason occupied 12.76% of the data. This tendency tends to occur in oral communication (Ma, 2009) but it also appeared in written text. For example, jeongmyeongchungdol (正面衝突), honmisangtae (昏迷狀態), toewonsusok (退院收束), gyotongyuchik (交通規則), insabulseong (人事不省) and honsudantae (昏睡狀態).

The suffix *hada* (do; 하다) was attached after Chinese nouns and the suffix functioned as a verb in Korean sentences. This kind of code switching occupied 25.5% of the data. This occurrence also can be found frequently during oral communication between bilingual speakers. This was also found in written texts such as: Churwonhada (出院하다), hojeonhada (好轉하다), chungsanhada (清算하다), wankwaehada (完快하다), bichamhada (悲慘하다).

Code switching (CS) in written text did not occur dominantly in the whole data, but its occurrence was systematic and highly consistent. Other kinds of CS cannot be found in this study. It is interesting to observe that bilingual writers in this study handled code switching intentionally with a meta-linguistic awareness. Figure 3 indicates code switching percentage by category.

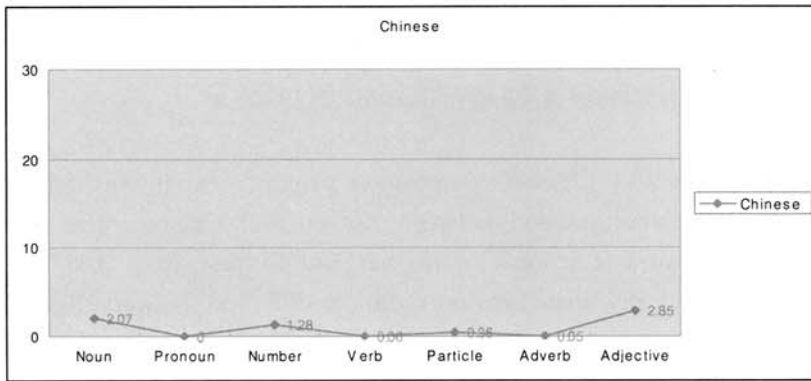
<Figure 3> Code switching appeared in written text



In the Korean composition test, errors did not occur, but in the Chinese composition test, some errors occurred. Even though the error rate was very low, it occurred throughout all the syntactic categories in Chinese composition.

The errors most frequently occurred in the category of adjective. Participants seemed to have difficulty finding proper adjectives in Chinese. Errors were also found in the category of noun, number and particle. There were no errors in the categories of pronoun and verb. Figure 4 shows the result.

<Figure 4> Errors in Chinese Composition



Writing in Korean tended to be more sophisticated than in Chinese, especially with regard to vocabulary usage and certain grammatical features. Grammatical and lexical errors were not present in Korean composition tasks. Given that Korean is the dominant language, this is not a surprising finding. Example 1 presents the errors found in the category of noun, verb, particles, adverb and adjective in Chinese composition. Types of errors are illustrated in example 1.

Ex 1) Errors of Syntactic categories²⁾

a. Errors at Noun

Shen shen di hou hui zhe zi ji mei shou jiao tong gui ze suo zhao lai
de hou **huan**. (深深地后悔着自己没守交通规则所招来的后**换/患**)

2) Bold Letters written on the left side are incorrect and correct on the right side.

b. Errors at Verb

Xing qi liu ,jia fu le 5760\$ yuan yi yao fei chu yuan le . (甲負/付了5760\$元醫藥費出院了。)

c. Errors at Particle

Guo zi hui er(過子/了會兒)

e. Errors at Adverb

Ta liu zhe ling ren chi jing de xue ye tang zai le di shang(他流着另/令人吃驚的血液躺在地上)

f. Errors at Adjective

Bu yi hui er, ji jiu che dao le , hu song yun mi bu xing de nan ren dao le yi yuan.

(不一會兒，急救車到了，護送暈/昏迷不醒的男人到了醫院。)

In the Korean and Chinese composition prompt test, it was found that virtually no correlation existed between Korean and Chinese. The mean of composition prompt test scores³⁾ of Korean and Chinese were 3.88 and 3.78 respectively. Statistically, there was no significant difference between Korean and Chinese.

When analyzing mean length of utterance of Korean and Chinese, it was found that correlation existed between Korean and Chinese. The mean length of utterance⁴⁾ of Chinese and Korean were 12.52 and 17.27 respectively. It is found that the correlation coefficient was 0.30 (30% correlation) and the t-test result indicate the there was significant difference between Korean and Chinese.

<Table 1> Pearson Correlation Test Result for Chinese and Korean MCU

	Chinese MCU	Korean MCU
Chinese MCU	1	
Korean MCU	0.004	1

3) t-test also has been done. Null hypothesis was 'no difference between Korean and Chinese'. Result was $t=-0.4433$, $p=0.3305$. Thus, do not reject the null. Thus, no significant difference.

4) t-test also has been done. Result was $t=-1.7127$, $p=0.0498$. Thus, reject the null. Thus, significant difference.

<Table 2> Pearson Correlation Test Result for Chinese and Korean Sentences

	Chinese Sentence	Korean Sentence
Chinese Sentence	1	
Korean Sentence	0.305	1

5. Conclusion and Implications

The conclusion of this study are summarized as follows. First, the participants with good proficiency in L1 also had good L2 skills in Korean/Chinese test. Overall data supports the proposition that L1 (Korean) writing transference can occur only when L2 (Korean) reach certain levels of proficiency. Being fluent in one's native language increases the probability of becoming proficient in a second language.

Second, participants showed similar tendencies in using syntactic categories in both Korean and Chinese. This result indicates that participants generally show mature writing skills in handling two languages with consistency. Despite the cross linguistic differences or similarities, they acquire both linguistic systems and use them freely while writing.

Third, code switching occurred systematically with consistency. In this study, code switching occurred when lexical items did not exist in Korean or when attempting to make a simpler phrase. Balanced bilingual speakers freely control two languages and also freely code-switch even in writing.

Fourth, participants have received half of their academic instruction in Chinese but that did not seem to have negative influences on both language development. Moreover, Korean/Chinese language proficiency of all students is impressive and it is encouraging to see that the curriculum has successfully accomplished the difficult task of developing contents of writing. Participants sometimes relied on their L1 literacy skills to accomplish L2 writing tasks. Participants were aware of the importance of topical knowledge and its constituent.

Fifth, there were clear patterns regarding the types of language errors that are most common. Immature writing skills seemed a developmental and

temporary. The process seems complex since writing skills are either discarded or developed in a certain level. During this process, code switching or errors were contingent on developing a bilingual's relative strength in L1 and L2 writing competency. Bilingual participants in this study showed spontaneous writing competency that also revealed acquisition of literacy in Korean and Chinese.

Implications or suggestions are as follows. In the past, Korean-Chinese in Yonbian area were educated in both Korean and Chinese since elementary school. However, these days, increasing number of Korean-Chinese in Yonbian area send their children to Chinese-only school instead because they want their children to assimilate into the main stream Chinese society, which requires a fluent Chinese. The subjects in this study are found to have balanced Korean and Chinese language competence. This proves that Korean schools in Yonbian are capable of teaching Chinese well enough and disproves the need for transferring to Chinese schools. On the contrary, the results suggest that sending children to Korean school will pay-off since the children in Korean schools will grow up as competent bilinguals. However, the concerns for the errors in Chinese composition can not be easily dismissed. Even if the errors were not high in the data, the errors occurred throughout all syntactic categories in Chinese composition. Grammatical and lexical errors were still present in Chinese composition test. The difference in language accuracy is more explicit in writing. The educational institutes in Yonbian need to develop effective curriculum to decrease the error rate in writing in Chinese.

This finding was based on writing proficiency of bilingual participants' single writing assessments, which is the limitation of this study. Also the number of subjects were limited to 25 because of the time restriction. More abundant data will be needed for continued research.

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Appendix A

(Writing Composition Test Sample)

Subject A

Chinese

有一天，在十字路口上一名男士因没看到此出口禁止标志开车。被一位女士的车撞倒了，并及时的打了急救车进了医院，找回了命根。从星期二到星期四进了昏迷状态，直到星期五身体康复可以出院了。星期六交上5760美元退院，在退院回家的路上因没看到禁止步行的标志行走又被一辆小型车撞了。真是悲惨。

Korean

십자거리에서 남성분이 출구금지란 표시를 보지 못하고 계속 운전하다가 그만 차사고가 났습니다. 그리하여 길 건너는 손님이 전화방에서 구급차를 불렀습니다. 남성분은 차 사고로 혼미에 빠져 구급차에 실려 병원의 주원실에 입원을 했고 화요일부터 줄곧 금요일까지 혼미에 빠졌다가 금요일에 이 분의 신체 상태가 좋아졌고 퇴원을 할 수 있었습니다. 토요일 날 퇴원수속하여 5760달러 값을 치뤘죠. 퇴원하고 병원에서 나와 집으로 향하는 도중 시속거리에서 건지 말라는 표시를 보지 못하고 건다가 또 한번 차 사고를 당했죠. 이 날은 정말로 재수가 없는가 봅니다.

Subject B

Chinese

一个人正在马路上驾车行驶，突然从前面来了一辆车，这两个车撞在了一起，那个人伤的非常严重，不醒人事。路上行走的人看到了这一个情景，打电话给119。很快，医院车来了把这个人接走。这个人整整昏迷了一天。第二天，星期五，接受医生的险查，结果，没什么严重的伤，第三天，星期六他付了5760\$医疗费后出院了。走出医院的门，过马路时发现了，前面有个“不要走”的标记但他还是朝前走着。

这时突然来了一辆车，这个人又出一车祸。

Korean

한 사람이 자가용차를 몰고 가다가 마주오는 차와 정면 충돌을 하였다. 마주오던 차의 운전수는 크게 다치지 않았지만 이 사람은 크게 다쳐 정신을 잃었다. 길을 가던 사람들이 119에 전화걸어 상황을 알렸다. 병원차가 신속히 달려와서 이 사람을 구급하였다. 이 사람은 하루동안 혼미상태에 처해 있었다. 이튿날 금요일 의사의 검사를 받아보니 상태가 괜찮았다. 그 이튿날 토요일 치료비 5760달러는 내고 퇴원하였다. 병원에서 나와 길을 건다가 길건너'걸으면 안 됨'이라는 표식을 보았다. 하지만 이 사람은 패쪽을 아랑곳하지 않고 건다가 또 차사고가 났다.