

# LET'S GET WRITING: USING L<sub>1</sub> IN THE TRANSITIONAL STAGES OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH WRITING DEVELOPMENT

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# Writing in a Second Language

- Writing is *a multidimensional process*, which *involves higher-order concerns* such as focus, development, organization, and style. Writing *also includes lower-order concerns* such as word choice, grammar, and punctuation.
- Many L2 students **lack writing instruction or practice**, which is a major reason for frustration when they attempt to compose in English

# What is ACADEMIC LANGUAGE ?

- Dutro and Moran (2003) define **academic language** as

The language of texts, of academic discussion, and of formal writing. Academic language proficiency requires students to use linguistic skills to interpret and infer meaning from oral and written language, discern precise meaning and information from text, relate idea and information, recognize the conventions of various genres, and enlist a variety of linguistic strategies on behalf of a wide range of communicative purposes. (230)

# L1 as a Transitioning Tool

- Bilinguals *use their knowledge of concepts in the L1* to help them *understand those in the L2* (Cummins, 1979; Valdés, 2004).
- Bilingual students' L2 acquisition can be promoted by **using the strong foundations of their L1 skills, because they transfer to the L2** (Cummins, 2005).

- ELL writers **at the beginning and intermediate level** should be encouraged to use their L1.
- Cummings (1989) found that **if we allow students to use their native language to draft (think)**, we *reduce 50 % of the cognitive demand in their L2 composing.*

- Dangling Fu (2009) asserts that ELL's writing development starts NOT *with their English proficiency level* but with their first language literacy.
- She further proposes that we evaluate the learning of writing in a second language from a standpoint of 'transition'.
- Instead of starting at the beginning of English development, we need to acknowledge the writing abilities, as well as rhetorical abilities that ESL writers come with.

# L1 as the starting point

- The transitional model views *L1 as the starting point. It validates students' abilities as writers.*
- This model is grounded in the “**funds of knowledge**” theory, as defined by Moll and his Gonzalez (1994) and Martinez-Roldan and Franquiz (2009)

# Transitional Model by Danling Fu

- **Four Transitional stages** in the development of L2 writing:
  - **1. Native Language**
  - **2. Code-switching**
  - **3. Inter-language**
  - **4. Conventional English**

- **A bilingual person** does not have two separate sets of linguistic resources.
- Unlike a monolingual speaker, **a bilingual person** has *special linguistic resources*.
- Becoming bilingual, then, **requires the ability to employ language resources** from two codes strategically and with great sensitivity to contextual factors.

# Stage 1, First Language

A 4-th grade Chinese-speaking ELL, Xuhua, during his first year of schooling in the U.S.

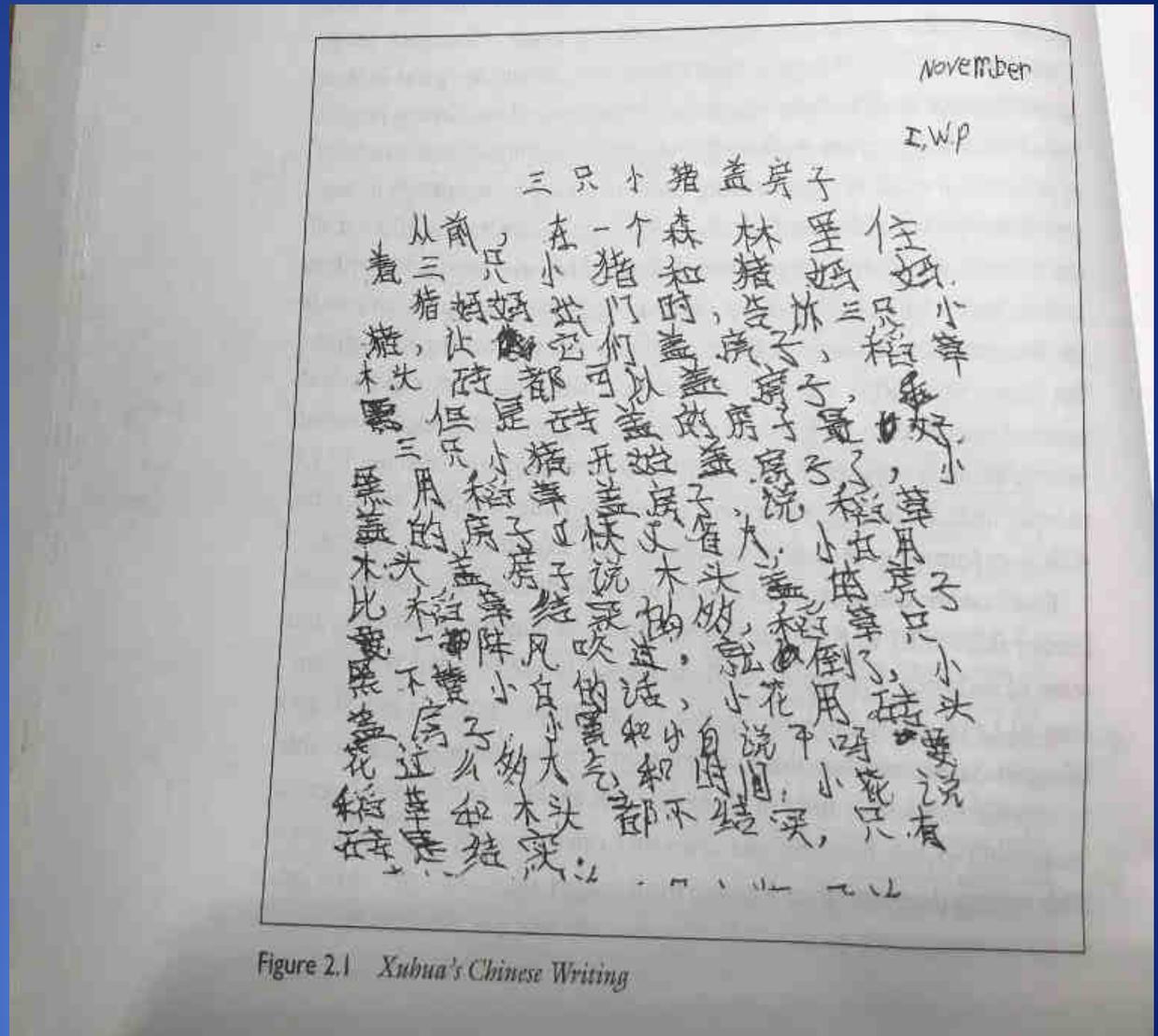


Figure 2.1 Xuhua's Chinese Writing

# Stage 2, Code-switching or mixed language

December 6  
Today is Firday; I in Home 来到  
School. 到了 school, I 坐 in chair 等  
teacher. Teacher 来了, I 就 go 排队.  
到了班上, teacher 叫 I and Lin Ge  
go computer 室 打 English, I and  
Lin Ge 就坐 in chair up 打.  
过了 one 会儿, teacher 叫 We go 排  
队. We 就 go 排队, teacher 就带 We  
go computer 室.  
到了 computer 室, We two + two  
个 the 进 go. Teacher 就走了, computer  
teacher 教 We 打 computer.

Figure 2.2 Xuhua's Mixed-Language Writing

# Stage 3: Inter-language (English writing in the native-language syntax)

Monday →

one day, I in school I with  
my friend Liang Jia play. then we go  
to write, Liang eat pencil case ~~from~~  
someone erased my name on the  
marker. then I go to write.

I don't remember what ~~day~~ day  
it was, I in book bag, I in  
包 Den, 发现, Den No in book bag  
ba. then ~~it~~ I 它在 in ~~包~~ 子  
I look to a boy, 拿走 my pen, I ask  
Liang Jia Si said, you with He said, Pen  
is me, a boy said is my pen, then  
Pen ~~is~~ have my name, ce ~~包~~ is just  
Den get me.

Figure 2.3 Xuhua's Inter-Language Writing

# Stage 4: Close to Standard English

## Book Review

I have the book. This it the place for me, by Jama Cole, it was funny story. Why it was a funny story because Morty the bear was always breaking things in his house, he was so big, he couldn't help it. He broke his chair, his table, his door and his anything, but he did not fix his anything. He found a new house, but it had a dragon, and it was too small, and it was too thin and it could sink sink, and it was scary. So he came back to his old house to fix the door, window, table and chair, now the old house was as good as new, and Morty say, "This is the place for me, it is much better than my old house, Morty was happy to come to his old house to fix his anything, and his house was new."

Figure 2.4 Xuhua's Writing Approaching to Conventional English

**Transitioning does not mean moving from one place to another. Rather, students continue to develop their L1 writing skills while learning to write in L2.**

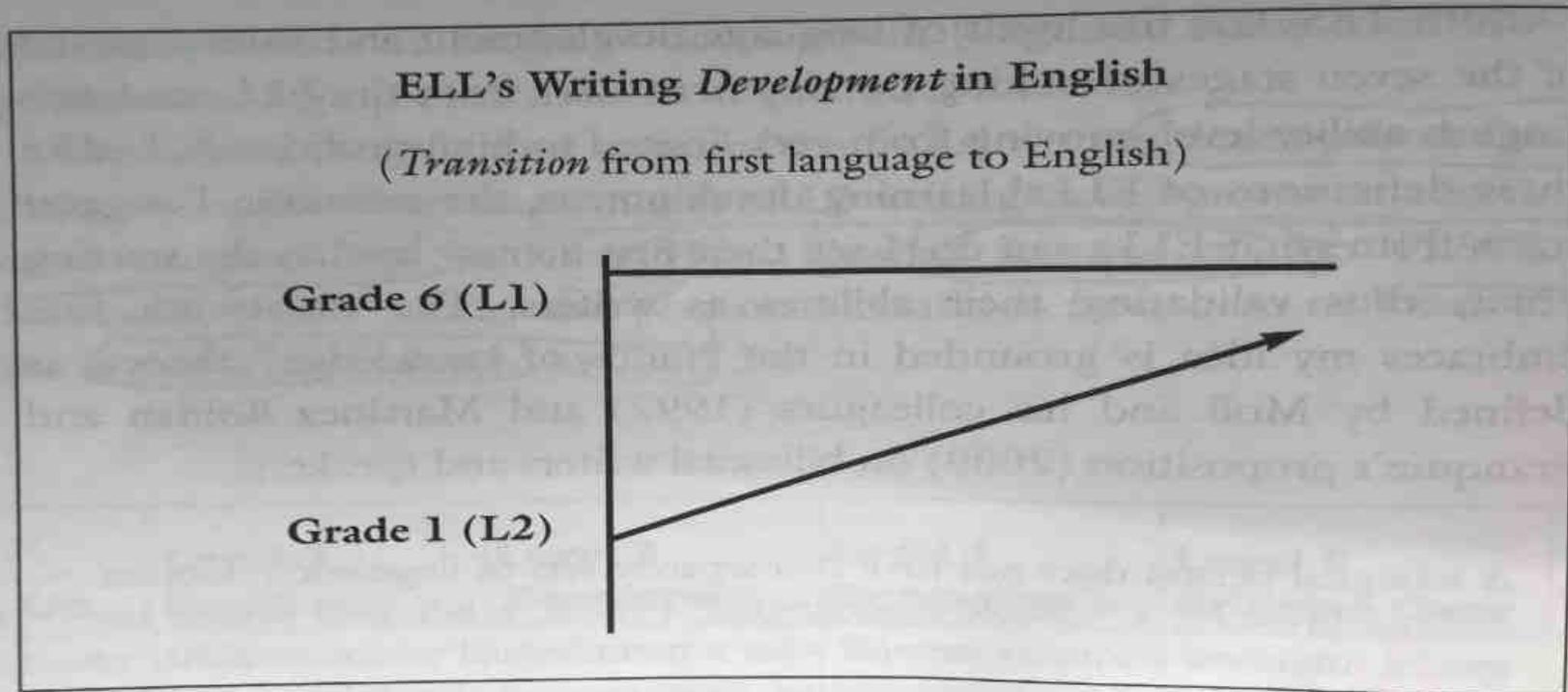


Chart 2.7 *ELL's Writing Development in English*

- When ELL students who are literate in their native language come to us, they are on their way to developing their competency.

- Certainly, it IS necessary to explain how to write essays in the Western styles,
- so teachers need to break down essays into parts (introduction, body paragraphs, supporting details, counterargument and rebuttal, a conclusion), to explain and provide a lot of examples (models).

# Strategies:L1 as a transitional tool

- Have your student write an essay *in their native language*
- If you *have a student who speaks the writer's language*, let that student translate the text.
- *Write down the translation* and have your student read it.
- This way teachers can *use students' writing to teach them English language skills* by *teaching them to read their own writing (rewritten in English)*

# *Other writing workshop ideas*

- ELLs may also participate in other writing workshop activities, such as **peer conferences, teacher conferences.**
- *During the **peer conference**, ELLs share their work with students who understand their L1. This practice makes students feel like writers. During this collaboration, students **read each other's writing and listen to each other's comments**, which *benefits ELLs as writers and thinkers and provides literacy practice.**

# Teacher Conference

- Ask ELL's peer for the translation of the text.
- Have the helper **write down the main ideas of the text** so that you could ask questions through them about ELLs' writing.
- If your ELL **can communicate some English**, you can ask them to draw pictures to show what they wrote about.
- **The conference is an English speaking and writing activity in the context of a student's writing.**

To conclude:

L1 support in academic settings creates a more nurturing classroom atmosphere, boosts self-esteem of L2 learners and empowers them for academic success , ‘institutionalizes’ bilingualism and multiculturalism, and celebrates languages.



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