



Emerging Bilingual Children's Writing Development: Similarities and Differences



- Writing among emerging bilingual children involves the use of language knowledge in home language (L1) and English (L2), as well as cultural knowledge.
- Despite huge differences in written languages, children show universal and language-specific patterns in writing development.



What are in common?

★ You will see:

- (1) monolingual children and emerging bilingual children develop concept of writing by scribbling before writing letters or characters conventionally;
- (2) they understand that written language is different than pictures and it carries meaning;
- (3) they understand that scripts are organized linearly.



What are different?

Graphic form of written language

English, Arabic, and Amharic letters containing /b/ sound

B ب ن



Word spacing

No word space in Chinese

你吃饭了吗?
Did you eat?

Direction of text

Arabic: right to left

مرحباً!

English: left to right

Hello!



Mapping between oral language and written language

- English: one sound has multiple spellings
- Spanish: one sound typically has one possible spelling
- Hebrew: vowels are often omitted.



Emerging bilingual children may: ★

- use their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence in L1 to spelling English words. For example, Spanish-speaking children may spell “hug” as “jug” because “j” makes /h/ sound in Spanish.
- struggle to write their name in L1, due to the visual-orthographic complexity, such as Chinese characters.
- need explicit instruction on print concepts, such as the direction of text in English and the concept of word spacing.



How to support early writing? ★

- Value and appreciate students' linguistic resources in all of their languages.
- Adopt instructional practices that support children's early writing development across languages.



For example, create writing environments that:

- alleviate burden of handwriting and allow writers to focus on composing, such as providing stamps or plastic forms;
- include stationary with cultures and themes relevant to children's cultural experience
- display home language examples.