A Comparative Study of Narrative Ability in English-Chinese Bilingual Primary School Students

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Abstract
This study aims to compare Singapore primary students' English and Chinese narrative abilities from a developmental perspective. Little research has been done to characterize students' bilingual competence in Singapore. Thirty-six students from Primary One, Three and Five, from four neighborhood schools participated in the study. Each participant told a story while referring to the pictures in both Mandarin Chinese and English, with a counterbalanced order. Narrative ability was measured by temporality and evaluative expressions. The participants' performance was first compared across two languages, followed by a comparison on the performance across different age groups within one language. Then, the developmental patterns revealed by various age groups were compared across two languages. The results showed that as age increased, participants' narrative abilities developed in both Chinese and English. Older participants were able to narrate a story with information more thematically organized than the younger participants. Older participants' were better able to switch the perspective of narrating the story, describing the characters' mood, cognitive activities and language. In general, English narrative ability is more advanced developed than Chinese narrative ability. Implications for teaching are discussed.

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Introduction

This article concerns bilingual competence with aim of comparing Singapore learners' English and Chinese narrative abilities in a developmental perspective. Description of bilingual competence is always a concern for bilingual education. It can inform educators about learning needs, and provide basis for educators to facilitate balanced development of two languages. Furthermore, it can shed light on possible effects of the language policy and current curriculum on fostering bilingual competence.

Description of learners' bilingual competence is important especially in Singapore context because Singapore is characterized by "English-Knowing bilingualism" policy which broadened English proficiency and Chinese proficiency. Before independence, the majority of Singaporeans spoke Southern Chinese dialects, such as Hokkian, Cantonese, and Teochow etc. After independence, first, the government has promoted English for economic development. They made English as the medium of instruction for all the content subjects. Second, the government promoted mandarin for facilitating communication within Chinese ethnic. Southern Chinese dialects (Hokkian, Cantonese, and Teochow) have dramatic differences in terms of pronunciation, which hinders the communication. The government has promoted Mandarin because it is commonly used among Chinese communities around the world. Since then, it is hypothesized that English has become dominant language in Singapore.

It is difficult to argue whether English is the dominant language for adults after many years of English-as-medium-of-instruction education. However, it may not be the case for pre-adolescents. Little research explored pre-adolescents' bilingual competence, though much has been written on bilingual policy and education system in Singapore (Dixon, 2005, 2009; Li, Zhao, & Yeung, 2012; Shepherd, 2005). Some researchers compared secondary students' writing competence and strategies of Chinese and English in the 1980s (Cheng, 1992; Hsui, 1996; Wong, 1993), little has been conducted on comparing students' narrative abilities. Cheng (1992) compared secondary students' writing abilities of Chinese and English . One hundred and twenty participants wrote one expository essay and one narrative essay in both languages. The essays were rated from content, structure, grammar, language, and spelling. The results showed that English proficiency was higher than Chinese proficiency. It is difficult to draw conclusions about learners' bilingual status based on one or two measures because language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) may not develop at the same space. The results of comparing Singapore learners' English and Chinese writing abilities may not reflect differences between other language skills. Limited research fails to reveal a comprehensive picture on this issue.

Narrative ability is a basic communicative skill for exchanging and sharing personal experiences. To successfully narrate a story requires a speaker's cognitive and language skills. Comparing narrative abilities across languages can give us a comprehensive picture of bilingual competence. Since little has been done on this topic, this study aims to compare the development of primary students' narrative abilities in Chinese and English in the context of Singapore.

Literature review

The purpose of this session is to review: 1) methods of describing bilingual competence; 2) relationship between development of L1 and L2 proficiency; 3) on what aspects that children develop their narrative ability.

Description of Bilingual Competence

Previous research described differences of L1 and L2 proficiency by exploring learners' dominant language. Dominant language is defined by language proficiency. If a learner is more proficient in one language than the other, then the former language is treated as the dominant language. Dominant language can be measured via objective and subjective methods. Objective tests include assessing language knowledge and skills, such as grammar (Yip & Matthews, 2006), vocabulary (Daller, Van Hout, & Treffers-Daller, 2003), and reading and speaking skills. One example of such a study was conducted by Yip and Matthews measuring mean length of utterances for syntactic competence of preschool children, and found that the participants were Cantonese-dominant (Yip & Matthews, 2006). Some researchers designed standard tests to measure reading and speaking skills such as C-test, and the Bilingual English-Spanish Oral Language Screening tests (Bedore et al., 2012). Subjective assessment refer to learners self-evaluation. These studies required the participants to evaluate their own competence in two languages according to a proficiency scale or consulting the guardians of children to judge learners' language proficiency (Gollan, Weissberger, Runnqvist, Montoya, & Cera, 2012; Sheng, Lu, & Gollan, 2013). They compared the results of objective tests and the results of self-assessment and found a strong correlation between the two. The researchers therefore stated that subjective assessment could also accurately describe bilingual competence.

However, the previous methods were criticised in that the measurements were carried out in a pen and pencil tradition, concerned with language knowledge, therefore may not reflect the communicative competence (Baker, 2011). Communicative competence resembles multiple use of language knowledge and skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, pragmatic skill, strategic skill, socio-linguistic skill, etc (Canale & Swain, 1980). There is a need for employment of communicative tasks to describe bilingual competence.

Relationships between L1 and L2 proficiency

The relationship between L1 and L2 development is another concern in bilingual education. The interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1991) stated that L1 and L2 proficiency were interdependent on each other. The theoretical underpinning of the hypothesis is the Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis (CUP) (Cummins, 1980). The hypothesis proposed two different components of language proficiency: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). The distinction was that the CALP was closely related to cognitive ability while BICS was acquired naturally regardless of IQ or academic achievement. CALP plays a

role in development of reading and writing abilities in languages. According to the CUP hypothesis, reading and writing abilities of two languages are interdependent on each other. Thus, the CUP hypothesis predicts a relationship between L1 and L2 reading and writing abilities but does not predict the relationship between development of L1 oral proficiency and L2 oral proficiency.

Empirical studies have proved the relationship between L1 development and L2 development by examining the more concrete components of language proficiency. They focused on the contribution of cognitive factors and L1 proficiency to L2 learning (Abu-Rabia, 2001; Park, 2013). Cognitive factors included metalinguistic awareness, working memory, and IQ tests ect. L1 proficiency included reading and writing abilities, as well as lexical knowledge and grammatical knowledge. Researchers found that the effect of L1 proficiency on L2 proficiency has been moderated by L2 language knowledge. It seems learners need certain L2 language knowledge to enable L1 proficiency to transfer. It was also pointed that the distance between L1 and L2 written systems would influence this effect. Other studies also have proved that there was a relationship between L1 and L2 oral proficiency which was not predicted by the CUP hypothesis. Lasagabaster (2001) found that metalinguistic awareness on L1 significantly correlates with speaking proficiency as much as reading and writing proficiency.

Development of Narrative Ability

Development of narration is of great interest for many researchers because narration can serve as a window for researchers to explore children's language and cognitive development. To successfully narrate a story requires complex language skills and cognitive skills to construct experience, organize information and express via extended discourse. Researchers made great efforts in discovering common features that characterize various age groups across different languages. By doing this, they are able to identify universal developmental patterns. The results revealed that children’s narrative ability developed in terms of temporality and evaluative expressions.

Temporality refers to relations between events. It reflects how learners conceptualize and organize information. There are three basic types of relations: temporal, adversative and casual. Temporal relation is the basic relation indicating time sequence among events. Adversative relation indicates a contradictory relation among events. Casual relation reflects a cause-effect relation among events. Among the three types, casual relations can better reveal the theme of a story. The linguistic devices to express these relations include conjunctions, adverbs, and tense. Researchers found that older children expressed more causal relations in their stories than younger children (Chang & McCabe, 2013).

Evaluative expressions refer to non-event description; include describing language, mood, and mental activities of story characters. If description of events moves plots vertically, evaluative expressions would move plots horizontally (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991). To express evaluative expression requires children to think from other people’s perspectives and infer mental activities according to contexts. Some researchers

explored linguistic and paralinguistic devices of evaluative expressions. Some researchers explored the types of evaluative expressions and others focus on the functions.

Some researchers explored the linguistic devices for expressing evaluative expressions. In general, two types were found: linguistic and intonational devices. Linguistic devices include negation, adverbs of degree, adjectives, etc. Intonational devices include stress (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Other researchers explored the types of evaluative expressions based on the content. Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) identified five categories: mood, language, inference, negation and casual relation. They found 9-year-old children and adults produced more description of mood than 5-year-old children. Similar results were found by other researchers (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Chen & Yan, 2011). Among the five categories, description of mood was found to be more difficult than other types as children need to think from the perspective of characters in a story, inferring what the character was thinking and feeling. Thus, this type requires more cognitive processing.

In sum as age increases, children are able to tell a complete a story with information thematically organized and express evaluative expressions at appropriate time to show their understanding of stories.

L1 and L2 proficiency are multi-dimensional in nature. The components examined were limited in the literature. More research is needed to explore relationships of other language skills between two languages. Narrative ability is closely related to literacy development, and therefore should be predicted by the interdependence hypothesis. This study describes bilingual competence by measuring narrative ability and explore the relationship between Singapore learners' Chinese and English narrative abilities.

Research Questions

With the purpose of describing and comparing development of narrative abilities in Chinese and English, this study is going to answer the following research questions.

1) What is the developmental pattern of Chinese narrative ability?
2) What is the developmental pattern of English narrative ability?
3) Are there any similarities and differences?

Methods

Participants

This study recruited thirty-six participants from four neighbourhood schools. Neighbourhood schools are usually located in the heartland of public housing, constituting the majority of the primary school in Singapore. Research on participants from neighbourhood schools would give us a better understanding of the normal students. Thirty-six participants are from Primary One, Three and Five, with twelve from each grade. There were seventeen male participants and nineteen female participants.

Instruments

A series of six wordless pictures were used to elicit children's narration. The content of the pictures is about two boys fighting at the beginning. Then the teacher came and stopped them. After that they became friends again. The content is designed based on a storybook and retreated as close to students' school life.

Research procedure

All the participants performed the task in both Chinese and English. A counterbalance design was employed. At the beginning, the interviewer asked several questions to warm up the participants for the latter task, such as: "anything exciting happened recently? What animals do you like most?". Then, the researcher explained the task instruction. After that, two minutes were given for preparation, then the participants began to tell the story. The whole process was audio-recorded and transcribed for latter analysis.

Transcription

The transcription follows the rules of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) (Macwhinney, 2000). The audio-recorded data was transcribed by the researcher and one research assistant who is Singaporean.

Coding Schemes

Temporality

Temporality was measured by use of connectives. Connectives indicate relations between events. Although besides connectives there are other linguistic devices to indicate event relations, some linguistic devices are not common across English and Chinese. Therefore, this study analyzed connectives to investigate temporality. There are three basic relations: temporal, adversative and casual. Temporal connectives indicate time relations among events, such as "when, then, after that, at first" in English, and "ranhou, houlai, zhihou, gangkaishi" in Chinese. Adversative connectives indicate adversative relations among events which refer to what is happening latter is contradictory to what happened before. The adversative connectives include "but, although, though" in English, and "suiran, danshi, keshi " in Chinese. Causal connectives indicate casual relations among events, such as"because, so, if" in English, and "yinwei, suoyi" in Chinese. The examples are given in Table 2.

Table 1 Coding Scheme for analyzing temporality

Connectives	Examples
Temporal	They are going to fight again when the teacher ran towards them
Adversative	The two boys were still arguing but they did not use any violence
Casual	She walked away because she didn't want to see anyone get injured

Evaluative expression

This study developed framework for analysing evaluative expressions based on Bamberg and Damrad-Frye's study (1991). The categories of evaluative expressions include motivation, language, cognitive activities, and mood. The motivation category refers to description of story characters' intention. The linguistic features include "I try to, I want to". Language category refers to description of direct and indirect characters' speech. Cognitive activities refer to descriptions of characters mental activities, such as what the characters know or understand. The linguistic features include "I realize" and" I know". Mood category refers to description of the mood such as angry, happy etc.

Table 2 Coding Scheme for evaluative expressions

Types	Examples
Motivation	小明走到操場上想找朋友跟他玩打籃球 xiǎo míng zǒu dào cāo chǎng shàng xiǎng zhǎo péng yǒu gēn tā wán dǎ lán qiú Nobody want to make friends *Xiao ming walked to the playground, want to find a friend to play basketball with him*
Language	那一個小男孩去跟老師說(2.5)他們在吵架 nà yī gè xiǎo nán hái qù gēn lǎo shī shuō (2.5) tā men zài chǎo jià *That little boy went to tell teacher that (2.5) they were quarreling* He say (2.1) good (2) carry on fighting
Cognitive activities	小華覺得自己錯了 xiǎo huá jiào dé zì jǐ cuò liǎo *Xiao hua thought he was wrong* I thought it looks very interesting
Mood	還有一個男孩兒很開心 hái yǒu yī gè nán hái ér hěn kāi xīn *and there is another boy who is happy* The boy is very happy

Reliability of Coding

In order to test reliability, the researcher randomly selected twenty percent of the narrative transcripts, and hired a second coder to conduct analysis. This study used Nvivo software to calculate Cohen's Kappa Index that ranges from 0-1, with 1 meaning 100 percent agreement. The Cohen's Kappa index of the two coders' coding result was 0.9, indicating a 90 percent of agreement.

Findings

All learners' performance on temporality and evaluative expressions categories were first compared across the two languages in total. Then the results were compared across different age groups within one language. After that, the developmental patterns revealed by various age groups were compared across languages.

Temporality

A comparison of temporality in Chinese and English is shown in Table 3. Participants produced more connectives in English than in Chinese in each type. Thus, English stories

can be interpreted as more thematic than Chinese stories. One participant's English and Chinese stories were shown below.

F1EG

- 有一天，有两个(3.1)男孩在吵架(3.5)，那儿有一个小男孩(2.1)<看到>[/](13.3) {很好} (6.8) 看到 他们(12.7) 吵架(23.4)，那一个小男孩去跟老师说(2.5)他们在吵架 (10.4) <那那(nei)个>[//](3.3)那老师(1.6)去(2.8)罚他们。(1.5)那那(nei)个小男孩在笑(9.8)那他们就不要(4.5)吵架(32.1) 那[/](6)那他们就(2.1)哭 {raising tone} (9.3)那他们就要做朋友了。 (03:17.104)

  *One day, there were two (3.1) boys are arguing (3.5)，there was a boy (2.1)<saw>[/](13.3) {good} (6.8) saw them (12.7) fighting (23.4)，**that** one boy went to tell the teacher saying (2.5) they were arguing (10.4) <that that>[//](3.3) that teacher (1.6) go to (2.8) punish them。(1.5) **that** that little boy was smiling (9.8) that they did not want to (4.5) quarrel (32.1) that [/](6) **that** they already (2.1) cried {raising tone} (9.3) **that** they want to be friends.*

F1EG

- <one：>[/] (2.1) one day <there's one>[//] there's two little boy (1.4) fighting (2.0), and (2.5) one boy saw them fighting so[/] (1.7) **so** one boy went to tell teacher that both of them are fighting(2.7), **so** teacher ask them (1.2) to calm (1.1) and (1.3) teacher scold them (1.4) and **then** the (1.4) Lee [//] and teacher separate lee nicely (2.2), **after that** (1.6) no one ()1.2 wants to play with them and (1.2) they want to be friends already (01:00.319)

In the above examples, the P1 student was unable to utilise proper Chinese connectives to indicate temporal relations. Instead, she used “na” functioning as the connective. Also there were no other types of connectives. In the same participant’s English story, she was able to use proper English connectives, such as "then", and "after that". Besides, she utilized a causal connective “so”, although the clauses connected by “so” may not have a strong causal relationship.

When compared results across different grades, P5 participants produced more time and casual connectives than P3 participants while P3 participants produced more temporal connectives and casual connectives than P1 in Chinese. The frequency of temporal and casual connectives increase as the age of participants increased. In terms of adversative connectives, P3 participants produced the most adversative connectives among the three grades. The results indicate that P3 and P5 participants were telling stories in a more thematic manner than P1 participants, but P3 and P5 participants organized the information in a different way.

In English, P3 participants produced the most temporal, casual and adversative connectives than P5 participants. P1 produced the least in each type of connectives. The results indicate that P3 were more able than the other two grades to tell a story in a thematic manner.

Comparing across two languages, the older participants were able to tell a story in a more thematic manner than younger participants in Chinese. In English, P3 participants produced the most thematic stories than the other two grades. This is consistent with some studies that investigated Children's L1 development (Chang, 2004). The frequency of connectives increased at first and then declined. However, each grade participants produced more temporal connectives in English than in Chinese. This indicates that English is more advanced developed than Chinese in terms of temporality. The similarity is that P3 participants produced the most adversative connectives in both Chinese and English. This relates to the specific information expressed by P3 participants. P3 participants usually described the boys' behavior after teacher stopping them as "they were still arguing with each" or "they were fighting non-stop". This behaviour was described as adversative to the teacher's behaviour. P5 participants either missed this information or did not interpret the relation as adversative. The following examples demonstrated P3 and P5 participants' description of these events. In the first example, the P5 participant only described the temporal relation between the two events. The second P5 participant missed the information but described the minor character instead. The two P3 participants both described that after teacher stopped the boys, they were still angry or continue fighting.

F5BG: after the teacher have left the [/] the two boys started fighting again
G5BT: the teacher went to them and stopped them for fighting each other. (1.7) Tommy was laughing at the side
X3EB: and also stop those (1) two friends fighting **but** they were still angry at each other
B3EI: she told them not to fight anymore, **but** they didn't listen

Table 3 A comparison of Connectives in Mandarin and English

	Mandarin		English	
Connectives	Frequency	No. of Participants	Frequency	No. of Participants
Temporal	106	26	185	36
Adversative	34	18	37	15
Casual	31	10	57	21
Total	171	30	269	36

Table 4 A comparison of three grades in Mandarin

		Mandarin (N=36)		English (N=36)	
Grade	Connectives	Median	No. of Participants	Median	No. of Participants
P1	Temporal	0.5	6	4	12
	Adversative	0	2	0	3
	Casual	0	2	0	5
P3	Temporal	2	9	7	12
	Adversative	1	10	1	7
	Casual	0	2	1.5	8
P5	Temporal	3.5	11	4	12
	Adversative	0.5	6	0	5
	Casual	0.5	6	1	8

Figure 1 A comparison of temporal connectives between Mandarin and English

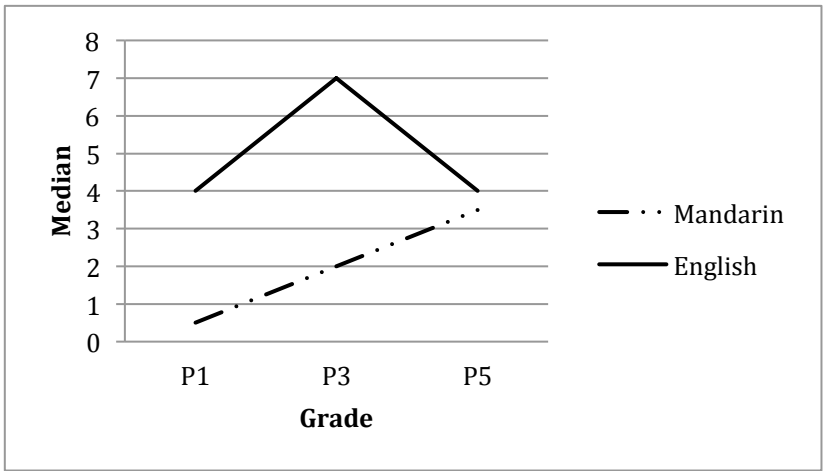


Figure 2 A comparison of adversative connectives between Mandarin and English

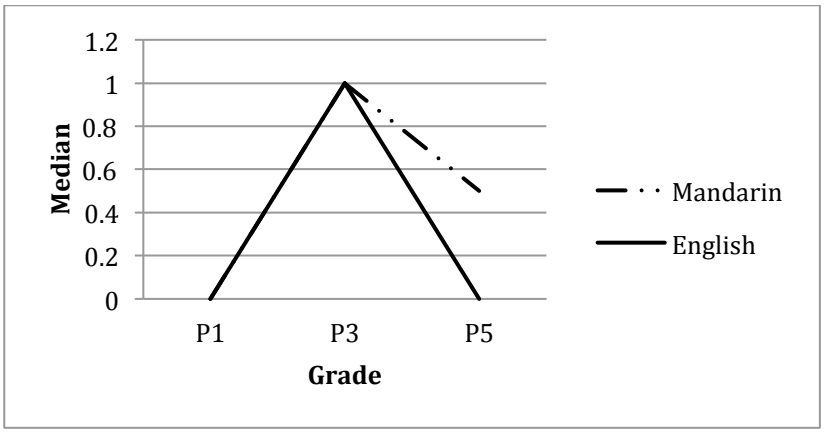
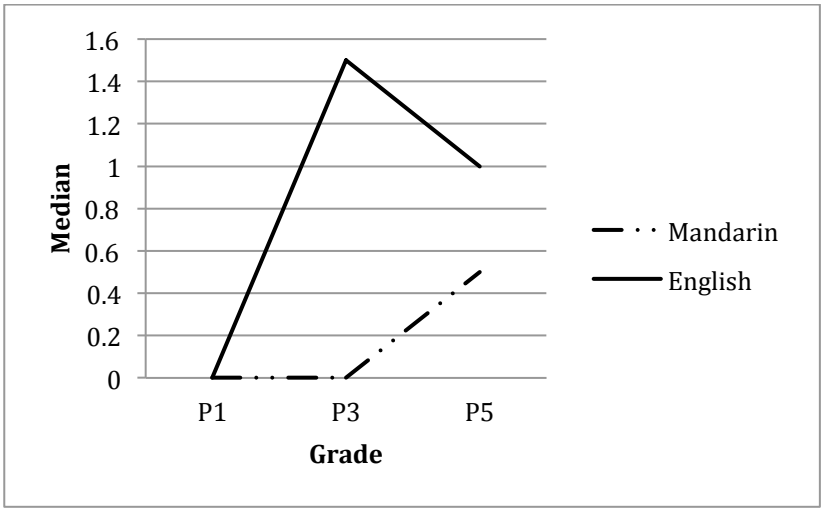


Figure 3 A comparison of causal connectives between Mandarin and English



Evaluative Expressions

A comparison of evaluative expressions in Chinese and English was shown in Table 5. In general, the largest category of evaluative expressions produced by participants in both languages is language. The second largest category is mood while the least is motivation. Participants produced more evaluative expressions in English than in Chinese in each category.

For development in Chinese, the largest category produced by P1 participants was language while the second largest category is mood. For P3 participants, again language is the largest category, but the second largest category was cognitive activities. For P5 participants, the largest category was mood while the second largest category is cognitive activities. Generally, the percent of cognitive activities and motivation categories increased as the age of participants increased while the other way round for language

category. Besides, only P3 and P5 participants produced motivation category. The percent of mood category decreased first then increased.

For development in English, the largest category produced by P1 was mood, while the second largest category is language. The largest category produced by P3 was language while the second largest category is mood. P5 participants produced the largest category was language while cognitive activities was the second largest category. In general, the percent of cognitive activities category increased as the age increased. The percent of motivation decreased as the age increased. All the three grades were able to describe motivation.

By comparing two languages, the percent of cognitive activities category increased as the age increased. The difference is that the developmental pattern is opposite in terms of motivation.

Table 5 A comparison of evaluative expressions in Mandarin and English

	Mandarin			English		
Type	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants
Motivation	16	6.7	12	33	11	18
Language	96	40.17	32	114	38	31
Cognitive	55	23.01	23	64	21.33	24
Mood	69	28.87	25	89	29.67	29
Total	239	100	35	300	100	36

Table 6 A comparison of grades in Mandarin

	Grade								
	P1			P3			P5		
Type	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants
Motivation	0	0	0	8	7.69	6	8	8.17	6
Language	16	47.06	10	52	50	10	28	28.57	12
Cognitive	4	11.76	2	25	24.04	11	28	28.57	11
Mood	14	41.17	5	19	18.27	9	34	34.69	10
Total	34	100	11	104	100	12	98	100	12

Table 7 A comparison of grades in English

	Grade								
	P1			P3			P5		
Type	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)	No. of Participants
Motivation	8	13.56	6	14	11.29	6	11	9.4	6
Language	16	27.12	9	60	48.39	11	38	32.48	11
Cognitive	8	13.56	6	19	15.32	8	37	31.62	10
Mood	27	45.76	7	31	25	10	31	26.50	12
Total	59	100	12	124	100	12	117	100	12

Figure 4 A comparison of motivation category in Mandarin and English

Figure 5 A comparison of language in Mandarin and English

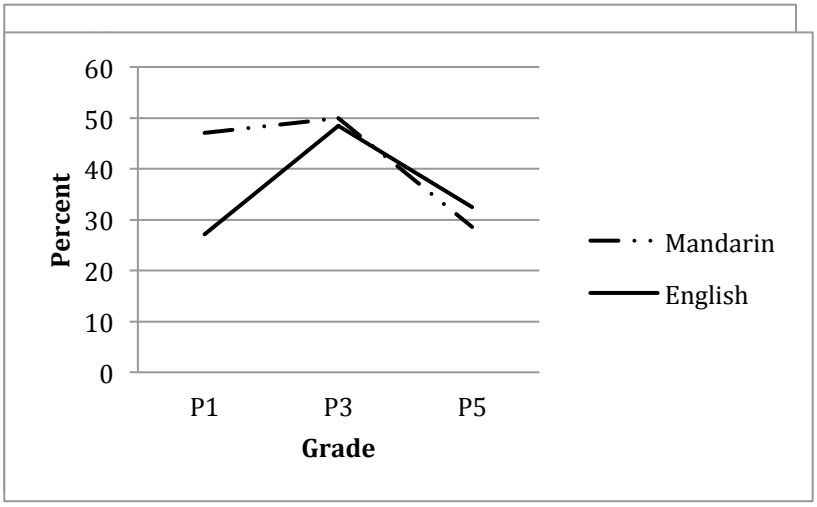


Figure 6 A comparison of cognitive in Mandarin and English

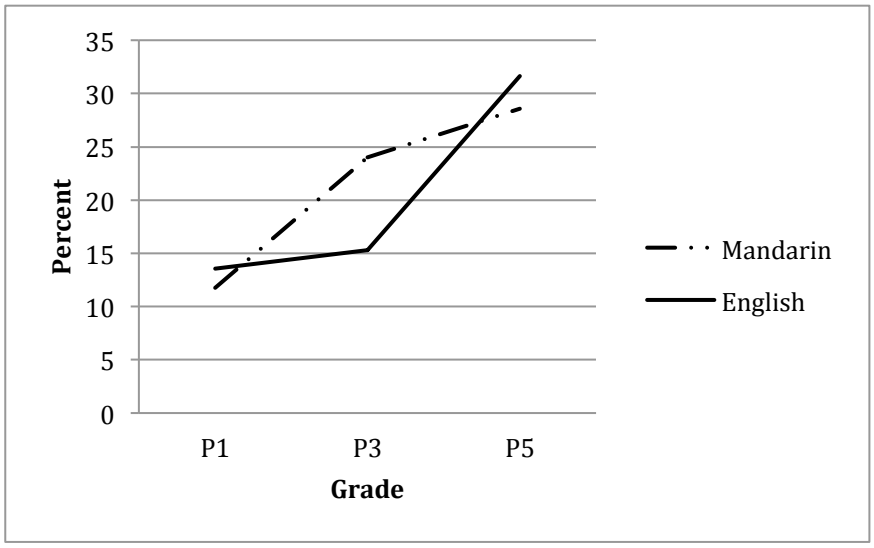
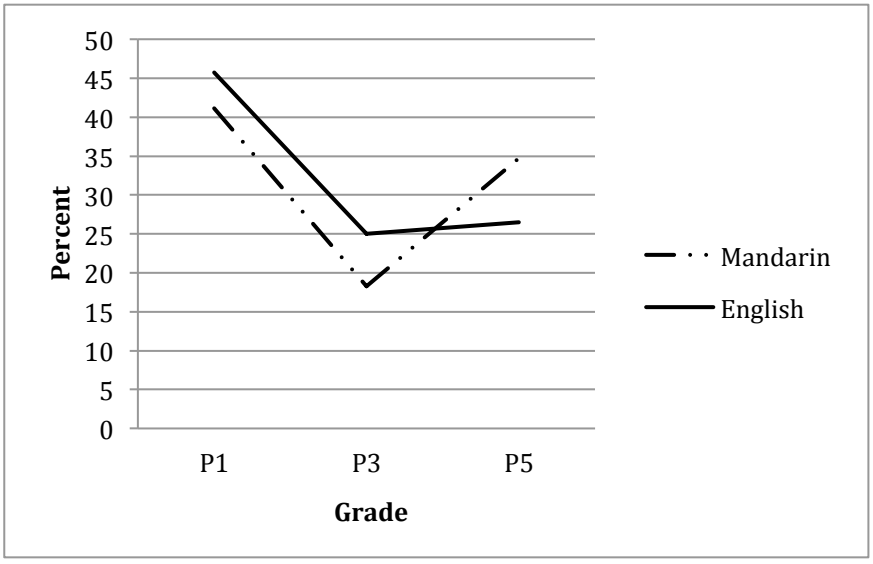


Figure 7 A comparison of mood in Mandarin and English



Above Chinese and English stories were analysed in terms of temporality and evaluative expressions and the performance compared across languages. In terms of temporality, older participants were better in telling the story in a thematic manner than the younger participants. While in English, P3 students were able to produce the most thematic stories. In terms of evaluative expressions, the description of cognitive activities increased as the age of participants increased. In Chinese, the percent of describing motivation also increased as the age of participants increased while the percent of language category decreased. In English, the percent of describing motivation decreased as the age of participants increased.

Discussion

Some of the findings were consistent with the results of previous studies. As age increased, participants' narrative ability developed in both Chinese and English in terms of temporality and evaluative expressions. Older participants were able to narrate a story with information more thematically organized than the younger participants. Older participants were better able to switch the perspectives of narrating the story, describing the characters' mood, cognitive activities and language. To express mental activities is more challenging than other categories because participants needs to make inferences about the characters' mental status according to the context.

The different findings from the previous studies lie in the development of evaluative expressions. In addition to the increase in description of mood, this study also found the increase in description of cognitive activities. This category includes describing the mental activities of the characters, or to say what the characters thought. This type of evaluative expression was usually started with phrases such as "I think...", "I understand...", or "I know... ". Previous studies did not find the increase in this category as the age increased. The reason may be the use of different elicited materials. The widely used picture book to elicit children's narration in the literature is *frog, where are you* (Mayer, Ormond, Murray, Templeton, & Osborn, 1969). This picture book consists of twenty four wordless pictures with the main plot being the little boy with his dog looking for the missing frog. The plot is more likely to elicit description of the action rather than the mental activities. In this research, the plot of the elicited materials is about two boys fighting, and the process of being angry with each to becoming friends. Thus, the story would trigger more descriptions of mental activities than the frog story would trigger.

By comparing Chinese and English narrative ability development, this research provided information on children's bilingual competence. The results indicated that participants' English narrative ability is more advanced developed than Chinese in terms of temporality and evaluative expressions. In terms of temporality, participants expressed more connectives of each type in English than in Chinese. Besides, each grade produced more connectives in English than in Chinese. In terms of evaluative expressions, participants expressed each category more frequently in English than in Chinese. Based on the three measures, participants' narrative ability is more advanced developed than English. However, some of the results should take typological differences of the two languages into consideration, for example, connectives. Chinese is a language where clauses are more likely connected semantically while in English, clauses are more likely connected syntactically. Therefore, it is expected that participants produce more connectives in English than in Chinese.

Similar patterns of development were also found in Chinese and English in terms of evaluative expression. The types of evaluative expressions and frequency increased as the age of participants increased in both languages. Within various types of evaluative expressions, the percent of description of cognitive activities increased as the age of participants increased. This finding is consistent with the Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis (Cummins, 1980; Cummins, 1979). As L1 and L2 proficiency

shared cognitive components, they should have similar developmental patterns. To express evaluation requires the cognitive ability of understanding other people's feelings. Young children are self-centred. As they grow older, they will begin to understand other people's minds as they understand themselves. This ability promotes the development of describing evaluative expressions in both languages.

Conclusion

This study compared Singapore primary students' narrative abilities in Chinese and English to describe their bilingual competence. The results indicated that their English narrative ability was more advanced developed than Chinese in terms of temporality and evaluative expression. The research has following implications. First, the results provide references for teachers to promote balanced bilingual development. For example, the teacher can raise students' awareness of narrating from other people's perspectives by emphasizing the features and functions of evaluative expressions. Second, the criteria for narrating a story should be consistent across two languages and should be explicitly taught to students. By doing this, L1 and L2 curriculum can be coordinated so that to facilitate the transfer of the knowledge and skills that are developed in L1 to L2. There are very few studies in the field to describe bilingual competence in terms of communicative competence. This research can enrich our understanding of development of bilingual competence in the context of Singapore. However, more research is needed in testing other communicative skills for revealing a full picture on this issue in the future.

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