DUAL LANGUAGE WRITING ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS FOR UPPER ELEMENTARY SPANISH-SPEAKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

Karilena S. Yount

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Literacy Studies

Middle Tennessee State University

May 2022

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Mohammed Albakry, Chair

Dr. Jwa K. Kim

Dr. Stacy Fields

ABSTRACT

In public school classrooms across the United States, approximately one in ten students is learning English as a second language. These students, often referred to as English language learners (ELLs), comprise one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States, with approximately 5 million ELLs enrolled in public schools across the country. The majority of ELLs, however, do not exit high school with the proficiency they need to succeed, and standardized outcomes even at the elementary level show the beginnings of a discrepancy between ELLs and their native English-speaking counterparts. This troubling literacy achievement gap is particularly evident in the domain of writing and persists even after students have had several years of supplemental language support.

This study seeks to address the writing gap and assessment issues by administering a dual language writing assessment designed for ELLs. The assessment was selected to meet the need for a multifaceted writing assessment that was normed and validated specifically for upper elementary Spanish-speaking ELLs. The study seeks to analyze in detail the writing of intermediate ELL (grades 3-5) in order to determine how the features of their writing differ from those used by native English speakers and the writing features students display in their native languages that maybe overlooked by English-only writing assessments. The purpose of study, however, is not to identify perceived errors, but rather to add to the understanding of second language writing for native Spanish-speaking upper elementary school students. Results of the study have wide-ranging pedagogical and cultural implications that could help inform instruction,

educational policy, and teacher education as they relate to the writing assessment and instruction of multilingual learners in increasingly diverse classrooms.

Keywords: English language learners, writing analysis, writing instruction, IPT, dual language writing assessment, educational policy, bilingual education

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Recent decades have seen a sharp increase in the number of students enrolled in public schools in the United States who speak a native language other than English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Ballantyne et al., 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). This growing group of English language learners (ELLs) brings diverse experiences, background knowledge, and language abilities (August & Shanahan, 2006; Domínguez & Gutiérrez, 2019; Escamilla et al, 2018), and is already reshaping the landscape of public education to reflect an increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse nation. However, while the unique knowledge these students bring with them can be leveraged to further their learning, their native languages have often been seen by stakeholders as barriers to English language acquisition (Escamilla & Coady, 2000; Ruiz, 1988), and educators are often unequipped to provide them with the type of intensive instruction from which they would reap the greatest benefit (Escamilla, 2002; Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

ELLs in public schools in the U.S. are consistently outperformed by their native English-speaking counterparts on standardized achievement measures, particularly in the domains of literacy: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010; NCES, 2021). The literacy achievement gap between ELLs and native English-speaking students is significant, especially in the domain of writing. It becomes evident in elementary school and persists even after students have spent several years in the U.S. receiving supplemental language support (August et al., 2012; Escamilla et al., 2018; NCES, 2021). In order to fully address the writing achievement gap between ELLs and

their native English-speaking counterparts, more research is needed on elementary ELL writing (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010).

The issue of addressing ELL writing performance, however, is exacerbated by types of writing assessments administered to ELLs, which are not typically valid or reliable enough to inform instructional decisions for a number of reasons (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Barkaoui, 2010; Escamilla, 2002; Grosjean, 1998; Hedgcock, 2005; Panofsky et al., 2005). These reasons include, among others, the fact that writing is a complex, multifaceted process, and creating high-quality assessments that accurately measure each of its facets is challenging for educators, districts, departments of education, and testing companies alike (Baker et al., 2014; Panofsky et al., 2005). That ELLs are being tested in a non-native language adds an additional layer complexity to an already intricate assessment process. English-only assessments also place a limit on the writing proficiency students can demonstrate to the target language only, which can underestimate student ability (Escamilla at al., 2018). As Panofsky et al., (2005) point out, the ways in which these writing assessments are constructed, administered, and scored all pose widespread underlying threats to the validity and reliability of these assessments for ELLs. In other words, the assessments typically administered to ELLs to measure written language proficiency are not designed with second language development in mind, nor are they typically culturally or linguistically sensitive enough for the population to which they are administered, which can limit how well they truly measure what they claim to measure. Because second language development varies and ELLs themselves are such a diverse group, it is no wonder that most of these assessments

are unable to produce consistent and comparable results that could then be used to inform instruction or monitor progress.

Purpose of Dissertation

This dissertation seeks to investigate the English and Spanish writing of upper elementary ELLs and how it differs linguistically from that of the target language, which, for the purpose of this study, is standard academic English, and to compare writing proficiency between first and second languages. However, as an important caveat, the goal is not to determine what learners are doing "wrong" in order to "fix" it. Rather, this analytical project seeks to gain deeper insight into the second language writing process and development and to provide an analytical linguistic profile of elementary ELLs who are native Spanish speakers for the purpose of guiding assessment and instructional practices. The study seeks to compare writing proficiency in both students' first and second languages in order to investigate how the two writing profiles differ, what can be learned about second language writing, and what skills or knowledge students may show in their native language that are not captured by English-only assessments.

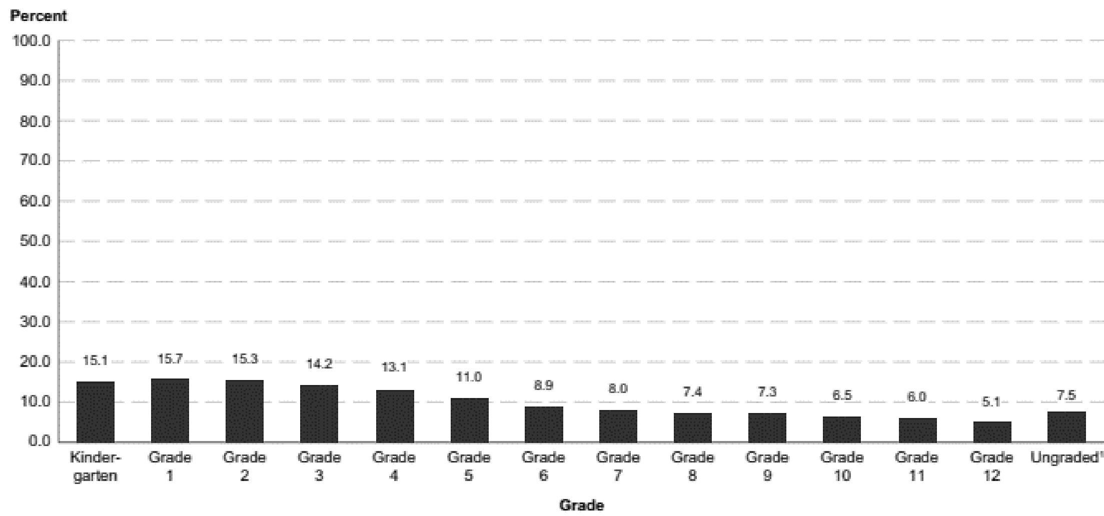
English Language Learners

As one of the fastest growing demographics in public schools in the U.S. (Calderón et al., 2011; Fry, 2007; Hoody et al., 2019; Misco et al., 2009; O'Brien, 2011; Zong & Batalova, 2015), ELLs are represented in school districts in every state in the country (NCES, 2021). One in five people in the United States speaks a language other than English within their home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), and according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), approximately 4.9 million students enrolled in K-12 public schools speak a native or first language (L1) other than English

(NCES, 2021). Nationally, ELLs comprise 10.1% of the student body, mostly elementary school students, and approximately three quarters of all ELLs are native Spanish speakers (Calderón et al., 2011; NCES, 2021; Zong & Batalova, 2015). The population of ELL students in U.S. public schools is expected to continue to rise over the coming decades (NCES, 2021). The figure below from the Report on the Condition of Education 2021 shows the distribution of ELLs by grade level (NCES, 2021).

Figure 1

Distribution of ELLs by grade level (NCES, 2021)



Educational Policies and Academic Achievement for ELLs

As increasing numbers of nonnative English speakers enroll in public schools in the United States, federal and state education systems and school districts across the country have recognized the need to adjust their curricula to provide more targeted language support to these students (August et al., 2012; Ballantyne et al., 2008). While the number of students learning English as a second language has continued to grow

exponentially over the past half century, states' and school districts' capacity to serve them has not kept pace (Ewing, 2020). In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) established a mandate of high standards for content area achievement for ELLs, and the federal government requires states to provide ELLs with English language support, although it does not prescribe specific policies for how that should be accomplished (August et al., 2010; Calderón et al., 2011). The authorization of Title III of NCLB in 2002 and its reauthorization under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2012 established English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards for all ELLs in public schools, mandating that state departments of education and school districts provide ELLs with adequate supplemental language support and regularly assess them in order to demonstrate progress towards ELP (Bunch, 2011; Bybee et al., 2014; NCLB, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Wolf et al., 2008). These pieces of legislation also provide a means for interstate consortia to develop ELP resources, including detailed proficiency indicators and assessment instruments. Additionally, Title III provides educators of ELLs with professional development and support (Bunch, 2011) and provides ELL students with language support services under individualized language learning plans. Most research suggests that ELLs in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs benefit from supplemental language support and that these types of programs are effective in supporting L2 acquisition for ELLs (Genesee et al., 2005).

However, despite this additional language support, ELLs continue to lag behind peers in content area achievement (August et al., 2010; Feldman & Flores, 2017; Murphey et al., 2017), with "wide and persistent achievement disparities" (Calderón et

al., 2011, p. 106) still present between ELLs and their monolingual counterparts in most standardized assessment measures. Data from the 2019 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that ELLs are regularly outperformed by their monolingual peers across all subjects, particularly in writing (NCES, 2021). ELLs as a group still need to catch up with their native English-speaking peers in academic achievement, especially in literacy, often even after spending several years in the U.S. (August et al., 2012; Escamilla et al., 2018; NCES, 2021). Table 1 shows scale scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in writing for grade 12 from 2011 (the most recent data available for comparison). Table 2 shows the same data for grade 8, and Table 3 shows similar scores for grade 4 from the 2002 assessment (the most recent data available for comparison; NCES, 2021). More recent data for the reading assessment also reveals a persistent gap between ELLs and native English-speaking students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Table 1

2011 NAEP Writing Assessment – Grade 12

Year	Jurisdiction	Status as English Language Learner	Average scale score	below Basic	at Basic	at Proficient	at Advanced
2011	National public	ELL	96	80%	18%	1%	#
		Not ELL	150	20%	54%	23%	3%

Table 2

2011 NAEP Writing Assessment – Grade 8

Year	Jurisdiction	Status as English Language Learner	Average scale score	below Basic	at Basic	at Proficient	at Advanced
2011	National public	ELL	108	65%	34%	1%	#
		Not ELL	150	20%	54%	23%	3%

Table 3

2002 NAEP Writing Assessment – Grade 4

Year	Jurisdiction	Status as English Language Learner	Average scale score	below Basic	at Basic	at Proficient	at Advanced
2002	National public	ELL	127	36%	56%	8%	#
		Not ELL	155	13%	59%	26%	2%

rounds to zero

For each assessment, scores were statistically different for ELLs across all assessments and for each grade level ($p < .05$) (NCES, 2021), suggesting the gap between ELLs and native English-speaking students is a meaningful one. While NAEP should not be the only measure used to determine ELL writing proficiency, the data suggest a continued pattern of disparity in literacy achievement that is supported by the literature (August et al., 2012; Ballantyne et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). While this performance gap could be attributed to a number of factors, there is an agreement among many researchers that assessment policies and practices need to be reformed to reflect and support increasingly diverse classrooms (Bae & Lee, 2012; Ballantyne et al.,

2002; Brown, 2013; Escamilla et al., 2018; Grosjean, 1998; Schulz, 2009; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Seigel et al., 2014).

Central Concepts

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

1. The term *English language learners*, or *ELLs*, refers to students that are learning English as a second language (L2). ELLs are a diverse group and differ across a number of domains including race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, duration of time in the United States, native language (L1), access to education, cultural background, English Language Proficiency (ELP), and individual learner characteristics (see August & Shanahan, 2006; Domínguez & Gutiérrez, 2019). For the purposes of this dissertation, ELL participants are native Spanish speakers.
2. *Written expression* – refers to writing as both a process and a product; encompasses all skills related to expression through writing, including spelling, syntax, vocabulary, organization/structure, grammar, mechanics, focus, complexity, etc.
3. *Construct validity* – refers to the extent to which an assessments measures what it is constructed to measure. For the purposes of this dissertation, construct validity is particularly important. Questions to ask: does the assessment instrument accurately capture the skills and knowledge for which it is designed? Are the assessment items structured in a way that allows for the measurement of proficiency?

4. *Test reliability* – refers to the consistency which assessment scores reflect what they are said to measure. Question to ask: is this assessment a reliable, consistent, and trustworthy measure of this skill for this group of test takers?
5. *ESL/ESOL* – English as a Second Language/English to Speakers of Other Languages; These terms are often used interchangeably to refer to language support programs for ELLs.
6. *Standard English* – refers to widely accepted norms for using the English language; the "correct" form. Standard English is the form students are expected to use in academic contexts and the form taught in schools. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is considered the "target" language, or the form of English ELL students are expected to learn and for which they are progress monitored.

Scope and Delimitations

Because of the unique, transitional nature of ESOL programs, a shift typically occurs for upper elementary ELLs between grades three and five. ELLs that have received language support since kindergarten begin to attain English language proficiency at level that indicates they no longer require additional support in order to be academically successful. ELL students in upper grades (those that qualify for language support and receive those services) are more likely to be newcomers or have had little formal education in English. These two groups of ELL students differ in many key ways, but of particular importance is the difference between students enrolling in English-speaking schools from the beginning of their formal schooling and students that enroll later on in their language development. This dissertation focuses on this crucial shift in order to draw comparisons between typical ELL students across this grade band.

Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the significant differences in writing outcomes for upper elementary ELLs (as attested by their scores) between the following groups:
    a. Between English and Spanish (Within-Subjects Factor).
    b. Across the 3-5 grade level band (Between-Subjects Factor).
    c. And the interaction effects.
2. Within a corpus of student writing, what are the salient linguistic characteristics of English writing versus Spanish writing among upper elementary native Spanish-speaking ELLs?

Significance of the Study

This dissertation seeks to address the gap in the literature surrounding writing assessment for ELLs to advocate for better assessment practices for students learning English as a second language. The study will contribute to the literature on upper elementary ELL writing in such detail that recommendations can be made as to how to improve literacy instruction and policy, particularly writing instruction and policy, for upper elementary ELL students. Results of the study will have wide-ranging pedagogical and cultural implications that could help inform writing instruction, language policy, and teacher education as they relate to the writing assessment and instruction of multilingual learners in increasingly diverse classrooms.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

While research surrounding the academic success of ELLs has blossomed in recent decades, literature on writing, particularly for upper elementary ELLs, remains scant. This literature review of second language development and ELL writing assessment mainly draws on peer-reviewed journal articles in an attempt to include high-quality background information. Seminal works within the field of second language acquisition and ELL assessment were also included. Additionally, this literature review includes numerous government- or foundation-funded reports from organizational stakeholders within the field of ELL education.

Multiple searches were conducted to identify relevant studies. MTSU's EBSCO portal was used to perform initial searches, as were ERIC and SCOPUS. The first search was performed using the phrases "English language learners" and "writing assessment" with filters applied to limit results to studies published prior to 2000 in order to limit the scope to more recent research. Additional searches were conducted using the key words "elementary" and "written expression." Studies centered on writing of ELLs older than 8th grade were excluded as irrelevant, as were studies that focused more on reading than writing. Because the identifiers surrounding students learning English as a second language have shifted in recent years towards a more asset-based viewpoint, the same searches described above were then performed again using the terms "emer*gent* bilingual" and "emer*ging* bilingual" in place of "English language learners".

Second Language Development

One significant issue with current ELL writing assessments stems from misunderstandings of second language (L2) development on the part of assessment

administrators and those who interpret assessment data (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Brown, 2013; Escamilla, 2000; Grosjean, 1998; Montanari et al., 2016; Yoon, 2018). Second language development can differ significantly from L1 development (Ballantyne et al., 2018), which needs to be considered when designing and administering assessments and interpreting data from them. First language development and second language development do not follow the exact same sequence (although there are predicable developmental milestones), and are therefore not necessarily directly comparable to one another (Ballantyne et al., 2018; Brown, 2013; Escamilla, 2002; Grosjean, 1998; Montanari et al., 2016; Yoon, 2018). Multilingual learners often develop and use their first and second languages within different contexts, and while there may be considerable overlap, different pieces of L1 and L2 can develop at a different pace (Cummins, 2008). While there is considerable evidence that L2 development follows a predictable developmental sequence (VanPatten & Williams, 2007), multilingual students do not typically possess equal or congruent fluency in both their first and second languages (Grosjean, 1998). However, despite this incongruence, assessment data from second language assessments of ELLs is often compared to that of monolingual students (for whom these assessments function as first language assessments), even though it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between monolingual and bilingual writing performance (Bae & Lee, 2012; Ballantyne et al., 2018; Brown, 2013). Although monolingual and multilingual students are often given identical assessments such as state-wide standardized tests, their test performance and scores cannot be directly compared in a meaningful way (Ballantyne et al, 2008; Escamilla, 2002).

In addition to the complexities of measuring language and literacy in general, there are also myriad ways in which measuring L2 proficiency can pose a challenge. To begin with, there is a wide degree of variation of English language learners themselves as a group (Panofsky et al., 2005); students can come from many different language and cultural backgrounds, each with their own features, patterns, expectations, values, etc. with differing levels of English language exposure and proficiency. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that these students will each learn English slightly differently (Gillanders et al., 2017), which further complicates both instruction and assessment in classroom in which multiple multilingual students are present. This issue becomes particularly complex when considering written language assessments.

Issues with Current Writing Assessments for ELLs

The most pressing issue surrounding the types of assessments currently used to measure the written language proficiency of ELLs is that these assessments often function more as measure of English Language Proficiency (ELP) rather than writing proficiency (Escamilla et al., 2018), indicating a lack of internal reliability due to how these assessments are constructed (Gall et al., 2007). Writing assessments typically include stimulus components that require some measure of language proficiency and background knowledge, which introduces ELP as a confounding factor to measuring ELLs' writing ability. Because ELL students may be limited in how much of the prompt or stimulus they can understand, they are hindered in responding fully. Despite some assertions that writing proficiency and ELP are so closely related that it is unnecessary to measure them separately, these two target skills are not equivalent. The distinction between ELP and writing proficiency is fundamental, because while ELLs may enter

language arts or writing classrooms with little to no English proficiency, many of them likely possess writing skills in their native languages that will be transferable to their compositions in English (Brown, 2013; Montanari et al., 2016). In fact, the most effective language instruction for ELLs considers and leverages their native language skills rather than disregarding them (August, 2018; August et al., 2018; Murphey et al., 2017). Educators teaching ELLs to write should seek to identify L1 skills in order to capitalize on them, even if they only teach English writing. However, the typical ways in which the writing of ELLs is currently assessed, such as long form essay responses used by high stakes assessments, do not accurately capture these existing and transferable skills, and, as a result, these assessments do not provide educators with an accurate measurement of students' abilities, nor do they allow educators to clearly identify areas in which ELL students need additional support (Escamilla et al., 2018). The types of writing assessments given to ELLs and the context in which they are administered also present threats to validity and reliability (Panofsky et al., 2005). The greatest barriers to validity for writing assessments for ELLs stem from problems with how they are designed. Assessment design issues are not unique to assessments of ELLs, but their unique language profiles are more complex than that of a typical monolingual student, and are therefore more difficult to measure in valid and reliable ways. These problems are intricate and can manifest differently depending on the context in which assessments are used and to whom they are being administered, but the following issues with written assessments seem to be relatively consistent.

According to Abedi and Linquanti (2012), high-stakes assessments, such as statewide accountability measures, are particularly problematic in terms of how well they

assess ELLs for number of reasons. Writing requires the synthesis of multiple discrete skills, which can be difficult to observe with any singular assessment. When considered within the context of English language curriculum, it is prudent to assess writing by examining its various components according to each skill. For instance, many educators assess orthographic understandings by administering spelling tests or choose to focus on how students have organized information within a longer written piece by assessing each facet of a composition using a rubric before or in lieu of scoring it as a whole. Ideal writing assessments for ELLs should include multiple components that are more sensitive to the discrete skills involved in written expression. However, because most standardized assessments measure writing holistically and typically generate a composite score, it is difficult to ensure that the ways in which compositions are scored measure each of these individual components as separate pieces of written expression and assign each of them appropriate weight while also considering features of L2 writing development (Brown, 2013; Montanari et al., 2016).

Due to the complex and intrinsically subjective nature of written expression, assessing writing products for ELLs on a large scale in a valid and reliable way poses several challenges (Hedgcock, 2005). Threats to validity or reliability can manifest in any stage of the assessment process. There may be flaws in how the task is designed, what passages or stimuli are selected, the rating process, or the rater themselves. The ways assessments are scored and interpreted can also be problematic. Because essay raters are not typically trained on L2 or receive training in how to assess specifically the writing of ELLs, they do not understand the characteristic differences of developing English language writing (Barkaoui, 2010). Moreover, stimulus materials or tasks may be

culturally inappropriate when considered within the context of ELL background knowledge, (Escamilla et al., 2018; Grosjean, 1998). As Dunn (2011) points out, assessments currently administered to ELLs are frequently culturally biased due to the fact that they are, on the whole, created by English-speaking American testing companies for English-speaking American students; the rhetorical expectations of assessment creators may reflect bias in favor of the linguistic patterns of the dominant culture. In addition, multilingual students are more likely to possess different world and cultural knowledge compared to their monolingual counterparts, and the assessments that they are asked to complete are often not sensitive to this reality.

Furthermore, linguistic complexity poses another threat to the internal validity of these assessments because it impedes the ability of the measure to assess what it was designed to assess. Assessment items themselves may be unnecessarily linguistically complex compared to what they are designed to measure, meaning that while students may possess the knowledge or skill required to answer the assessment item correctly, they may lack the language proficiency required to understand and to answer the question, and, thus, are likely to underperform (Abedi & Linquanti, 2012).

Finally, the greatest threat in terms of reliability of ELL assessments, aside from issues that could stem from poor construction, lies in the fact that typical writing assessments are not normed for ELL students, meaning that the data generated by the assessments are not particularly meaningful on its own, since it functions differently for ELLs than it would for a native English-speaking student, and that comparisons between native speaker and ELL data are effectively meaningless within the context data interpretation. The ability to make direct comparisons between these scores is

confounded by the fact that ELLs are taking the assessment in a language other than their L1. Additionally, typical timed essay tests, the format of most standardized writing assessments, may be likely to under-predict writing abilities of ELL students (Panofsky et al., 2005). Most large-scale, norm-referenced standardized assessments are developed and normed for native English speakers and therefore do not produce valid and reliable outcomes for ELLs. They can yield unjustifiable conclusions for ELLs and impede the reliability with which educators can compare and interpret scores.

The pedagogical and social implications of the use of invalid and unreliable assessments can be dire for ELL students. If a student is regularly underestimated by the assessments they are given, they are more likely to be placed in remedial courses they do not need and are not perceived to be as academically capable as they truly are, which lowers self-efficacy of those students (Adoniou, 2013). Failing or underperforming on high-stakes assessments does have real world consequences for ELLs and poses later sociocultural and academic barriers for those students, many of whom are already marginalized (Panofsky et al., 2005).

Summary

To summarize, the nature of ELL writing assessment based on the relevant literature, the growing number of students learning English as a second language combined with a persistent academic achievement gap have created inequities that must be addressed at the school, district, state, and federal level. While many language education policies in recent years have sought to address these inequities, current practices fall short of meeting the unique and complex needs of ELL students. Valid and reliable assessments play a large role in determining where to focus our efforts, but ELLs

typically are not assessed in ways that provide educators and stakeholders with a clear or holistic picture of what students know. Typical writing assessments, the kind ELLs across the country are expected to participate in regularly, are rarely constructed with second language development in mind, and their scoring procedures are usually not normed for ELL populations or aligned with their language goals. Additionally, data collected from these assessments are used to inform instructional decisions for these students despite the fact that their scores cannot be interpreted as if they were generated by monolingual students. While inappropriate assessments should not serve as a barrier to academic success for multilingual students, they often do because of the issue mentioned above (Escamilla, 2002). The unfortunate outcome is that ELLs are still at risk of being underestimated academically, which can yield real-world consequences. Implementing bilingual assessments for ELLs, especially when assessing literacy skills, could provide educators and other stakeholders with a more accurate measure of the linguistic abilities of their multilingual students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter offers a review of the methods of this study, beginning with a detailed description of study participants and the data collection process. It also offers a brief explanation of the underpinnings of holistic bilingualism and how the framework informs the construct of this study. Finally, this chapter gives an in-depth look at the assessment instrument and process, including assessment items, scoring criteria and procedures, and data interpretation.

Participants and Data Collection

Participants for this study were recruited from within the PI's school, which is one of 16 ESOL sites within the school district. The study includes intermediate elementary students in grades 3-5 that are identified as ELLs through a home language survey and a language screener administered when they register within the district. The study included only ELL students with individual language plans, i.e. students who have demonstrated a need for additional language support and are currently receiving language supports, or students who are identified as transitional students, (i.e. their progress is monitored but they do not receive direct services). In order to limit confounding variables, students identified as having demonstrated special needs or learning disabilities were excluded from the study. Because Spanish is the most prevalent home language within the school district and the country, and for the purpose of drawing certain linguistic generalizations, this study only focuses on Spanish-speaking students. Participants were identified and recruited for this study in cooperation with ESOL teachers within the PI's school district, Hamilton County Schools. Parents of potential participants were contacted through our school messaging service (Class Dojo and Remind) following school policies regarding

the COVID-19 pandemic. Parent consent was obtained via video conferencing software (Zoom) or email, and parents signed consent forms electronically through PDF markup/document editing programs (Adobe or Kami). Student assent was obtained in person the day of data collection and assessment administration.

Of the 34 eligible students at the PI's base school, 29 students were selected as participants. Of these 29 ELL students, 8 were 3rd graders, 11 were 4th graders, and 10 were 5th graders. One student was 8 years old at the time of assessment administration, 13 were 9 years old, 10 were 10 years old, 4 students were 11 years old, and one student was 12 years old. Of the 29 participants, 15 were male and 14 were female.Four of the participants in this study were transitional students, meaning that they were being monitored for progress but were not currently receiving additional language support though the ESOL program. The rest of the participants were all receiving 30 minutes to one hour of additional language support per day. Sometimes, the ESOL teacher would "push in," or join their class to provide them with direct support during a lesson. "Pushing in" is optimal for students with intermediate levels of English language proficiency, because they are not missing whole group instruction and can access curriculum-appropriate support. Other times, students would be pulled out of class to work in small groups with the ESOL teacher in her classroom. ELLs with limited ELP typically benefit more from small group instruction where the ESOL teacher can provide a higher degree of language support and spend more time on linguistic concepts than in a general education classroom.

Data were collected in the Spring of 2021 at the PI's base school. Participants were administered the test in small groups by grade level, beginning with 5th grade and

ending with 3rd grade. Students took both the Spanish and English assessments in the same session. IPT testing standards recommend administering this assessment in different sessions if students are completing the entire Reading and Writing test, but because participants in this study were only given the writing component, it was deemed appropriate for them to complete both in one testing session. Test administration is estimated to take 45 minutes to an hour for each assessment form, so students spent between 1.5 and 2 hours completing these assessments. Participants responded to Part 1 of the assessment, multiple choice mechanics and grammar items, using a computer and completed the rest of the assessment by hand. Written responses were scored by three raters, all trained in IPT scoring procedures, to ensure interrater reliability, which was roughly 80%. The IPT assessment portal allows for only one score to be entered per writing assessment, so a consensus was reached among raters for essays for which ratings differed. The written responses were then compiled to form a Spanish/English corpus of upper elementary ELL writing samples.

Analytical Framework and Methods

This study adopts a holistic bilingualism framework (de Jong, 2011; Grosjean, 1998) and applies this theoretical perspective within an English-only learning environment. First conceptualized by Grosjean (1998), holistic bilingualism considers students' linguistic knowledge to include first and second languages. It acknowledges ELLs' first language knowledge as both a key foundation for learning and an important part of who students are (de Jong, 2011). This approach asserts the importance of considering student understandings in both native and target languages, looking at student knowledge as a complete unit with interrelated parts. Reyes (2008) describes holistic

bilingualism as holding "that the total of the two languages is greater than their sum because the two languages interact with each other to increase the functionality of each" (p. 1). The study applies this framework by implementing a dual language writing assessment, measuring what students know both in their native language of Spanish and in their target language of English. It is important to note, however, that participants in this study have received instruction only in English, as English is the mandated language of instruction in Tennessee "unless the nature of the course would require otherwise" (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2011). Even though most of these students speak Spanish in their homes, some of them may have had little to no formal education in Spanish.

To address the first research question: "What are the significant differences in writing outcomes for upper elementary ELLs (as attested by their scores) in both English and Spanish?", the assessments responses were scored using the standardized procedures described earlier in this chapter, and scores were entered into the IPT assessment portal. Scores were then analyzed to determine proficiency level of study participants and allow for the reporting of basic descriptive data and overall assessment performance. Next, assessment data were compared to determine if student scores in English were significantly different than scores in Spanish, and if so, how. A two-sample dependent t-test was conducted to determine if student writing outcomes are significantly different. Next, student writing outcomes were compared using a two-way ANOVA to determine if ELL students differ significantly within the 3-5 grade band, and in which language, and to test the interaction effect in addition to each main effect. The results of this analysis are reported in the next chapter. Once corpus samples were scored, writing samples were

analyzed using textual analysis procedures in order to compare the distinctive linguistic features to address the second research question: "Within a corpus of student writing, what are the salient linguistic characteristics of English writing versus Spanish writing among upper elementary native Spanish-speaking ELLs?" The analysis focuses in particular on the features that are hallmarks of second language writing for young native Spanish speakers in order to investigate whether students are using their knowledge of both languages in their use of vocabulary with close cognates, overt use of subject pronouns, use of invented or phonetic spellings, spacing by oral syllables rather than words, substitutions of close letter sounds (b/v, y/ll), and use of reflexive verb forms, among other features (Brown, 2013; Escamilla & Coady, 2000). Writing was also analyzed according to the complexity of the ideas expressed within the corpus samples including length, varied sentence patterns, and logical sequencing (Escamilla & Coady, 2000), using both readability metrics and by-hand analysis, in order to create an analytical profile of the second language writing of Spanish-speaking elementary ELL students and how it may differ from their writing performance in English, and vice versa. Additionally, the analysis also focused on creating an error analysis of student English writing in order to inform subsequent instruction. Results of these analyses are reported in the next chapter.

Assessment Instrument

Based on the goals of the proposed study, the research questions, and the reviewed literature, participants in this study were assessed using a dual language writing assessment designed and normed for ELLs that features corresponding forms in both Spanish and English. More specifically, participants were asked to complete the writing

component of the IPT (IDEA Proficiency Tests), a dual language Spanish-English assessment suite created by assessment developers Ballard and Tighe (2017) to measure ELL language proficiency in response to NCLB English Language Proficiency monitoring requirements. The IPT assessments selected for this study are designed to assess students' written language proficiency skills in both English and Spanish to meet the need for a multifaceted writing assessment that was normed and validated specifically for upper elementary Spanish-speaking ELLs.

The writing subtest of the IPT-1 and IPT-2, 3rd Edition (Ballard & Tighe, 2017), a multimodal (using words and pictures), norm-referenced test, was used to measure writing proficiency of ELL students in both English and Spanish. The IPT-1 is designed to measure basic literacy skills in English and Spanish for students in grades 2-3; the IPT 2 serves the same function for students in grades 4-6. In this study, a total of 5 forms of the IPT writing assessment were used. Students in grade 3 were assigned both the Spanish and English forms of the IPT-1 (using form 2C only), while students in grades 4 and 5 completed the corresponding forms of the IPT-2, with 4th graders assigned to Form C and 5th graders assigned to Form D. Form D of the IPT-1 was not used because it was not needed due to 3rd grade students all taking Form C. Table 4 below gives a brief overview of grade level assessment version and form assignments.

Table 4

Assessment version and form by grade level

Grade Level	Assessment Version	Assessment Forms
3rd	IPT-2	Form C & Spanish
4th	IPT-3	Form C & Spanish
5th	IPT-3	Form D & Spanish

Each form of this assessment contains three components: part one features several multiple-choice questions that measure students' knowledge of conventions and mechanics; part two features a stimulus of several pictures and asks students to write a narrative about them; and part three features story starter prompts from which students choose and then finish the story. Part one of the assessment is scored automatically; parts two and three of the writing assessment are scored according to a rubric. Each of three components generates its own score, and the three scores are combined to create a composite score. Table 5 below summarizes the above information for each assessment component.

Table 5

IPT Writing assessment components

Assessment Part	Structure	Scoring
Part 1: Conventions	Students answer ten multiple choice questions online.	Automatic
Part 2: Write A Story	Students write two short-form responses creating a narrative about a series of three pictures.	By hand
Part 3: Write Your Own Story	Students choose one of two stimulus tasks about which to write a long-form response.	By hand

IPT scores are normed for ELLs, meaning that scores generated by participants can be compared to assessment norms in a valid and reliable way. Per Ballard and Tighe (2017, in-service training), "Large numbers of students from across the United States, representing a broad range of ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and language abilities, are included in norming studies that are conducted periodically. When administration procedures are followed exactly as prescribed, the IPT R&W Tests

provide a valid and reliable assessment of students' reading and writing abilities." Detailed information on scoring procedures can be found later in this chapter.

IPT-1 English Form C. This assessment form was created to assess the English writing skills of ELLs in grades 2-3. For this study, it was administered to 3rd grade participants only. All participants completed Part 1: *Conventions* on a computer, where they answered 10 questions about mechanics, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. No permission was given to reproduce items from Part 1 of the assessment, but they generally take the form of typical multiple-choice questions with four possible answer choices. Students were asked to choose which word correctly completed a sentence, which word was spelled correctly, which punctuation mark a postal address was missing, etc.

Part 2 of the assessment, Write A Story, includes these two stimulus response items. Students are asked to write a story about what they see taking place in the pictures. Students are given five lines on which to write a response, so they are intended to be short-form responses, and test-takers are encouraged to work at their own pace. Following Part 2, students move on to Part 3: Write Your Own Story. For the IPT-1, the stimulus again takes the form of a picture. Students are given an option between Picture A and Picture B and are asked to "write as much as you can to make a good story" (Ballard & Tighe, 2017, IPT-1 Form C, p. 4). Allowing students to choose which picture they would like to write about could limit the impact of cultural background knowledge, as students can choose the photo they find most familiar or the one to which they are most comfortable responding.

For long form responses, students are given a fully lined page in which to record their responses with additional lined paper available to them should they need it. Combined, these three assessment components are designed to give a holistic view of writing performance, considering the multifaceted nature of writing as a subject and giving relatively equal weight to conventional and compositional understandings. As a whole, this assessment potentially addresses spelling, capitalization, mechanics, punctuation, verb tense and aspect, noun number and case, productive vocabulary, syntax, lexical richness or detail, organization, and focus. Because this assessment is designed for ELLs, internal threats to construct validity, like culturally inappropriate stimulus items, are limited.

IPT-1 Spanish Form. This assessment form was administered to 3rd grade participants. The Spanish form of the IPT-1 follows the same progression as the English form of the test, and students are given corresponding directions, assessment items, and response times. First, students answer 10 items designed to address mechanics of Spanish writing. English and Spanish writing share many conventional features, but there are several differences between the two especially regarding capitalization. Similar to the English form of the assessment, students are given four lines on which to construct a short response. Following these short-form response items, students are given a longer form stimulus response task. Again, this part of the assessment mirrors the English form of the assessment; students choose between two pictures and are instructed to write a story about them.

IPT-2 English Form C. This assessment form was administered to 4th grade participants. It is nearly identical in form to the IPT-1 excepting a few key differences.

Unlike stimulus pictures included in the IPT-1, many pictures within the IPT-2 include words. In Story 1 below, a sign reads "bus stop" while we can see two people standing outside of a toy store. Stimulus pictures for the IPT-1 did not include words, and here we can infer that older students are expected to generate a more detailed story or explanation of what is taking place. Also, unlike the IPT-1, the IPT-2 test forms include a long-form response task that requires test-takers to read in order to respond. Students read and complete one of two passages. While these stimulus passages are short, they still require test-takers to possess a degree of reading and writing proficiency. The two English stimulus passages for this test are below. Both require students to respond in the first person. The student instructions for the IPT-2 prompt students even more than the IPT-1, reminding test-takers to use details and write as much as they can to *complete* the story. In theory, these directions would influence students to write a long-form response with a higher degree of detail and a clear conclusion to their story; how students responded to these more detailed directions would be difficult to measure on its own, but as will be discussed in chapter 4, participants in this study did write more in English than in Spanish in response to long-form stimulus tasks.

IPT-2 English Form D. This assessment form was administered to 5th grade participants. While Form D and Form C are nearly identical in form and function, students in 5th grade were given a different form from students in 4th grade to generate a more varied corpus and produce a wide range of student responses. As with other forms of the IPT-2 test, Form D adopts the structure of first addressing conventional understandings through multiple choice questions before giving students multiple opportunities to write about stimulus items. As with Form C of the IPT-2, one of these

stimulus items includes words within the pictures; Story 1 labels an ice shop and shows a menu of flavors. These stimuli can perhaps act as a word bank for student responses or give students details to include in their writing. How students incorporated words included within stimulus pictures is also discussed in chapter 4. Long-form stimulus passages are very similar to Form C.

IPT-2 Spanish Form. This assessment form was administered to 4th and 5th grade participants. There exists only one Spanish form of the IPT-2, so it was administered to both grades. This assessment adopts the same structure as the other IPT test forms: multiple choice questions about conventions, short-form responses to two sets of pictures, and a long-form response completing one of two story starters. Again, this stimulus item includes words, in this case *comidas corridas*, which translates to *fast food*. For the Spanish form of this assessment, one passage requires students to write in the third person, while the other requires a first-person response. Translations of both of these prompts are below.

STORY A

It was Sunday and my cousins and I had arranged to meet in the afternoon at my home.

An hour passed when we were to meet and then another half hour. I was already about to call them on the phone when they arrived.

They told me that a very strange thing had happened to them. They told me that…

STORY B

Behind a building window, Josefina watched the snowflakes fall as if they were pieces of bread. She was anxiously waiting for her dad to come home from work and bring the food he had promised for the Christmas party. But it was late and his papa did not arrive. Then, through the window, Josefina saw ...

Scoring

In order to score written IPT responses, raters must first complete training through Ballard & Tighe (2017). Training is administered online within the assessment portal through several modules, and would-be scorers can work through them at their own pace. The training for scorers is comprehensive and covers all facets of the test, with robust exemplars and checks for understanding embedded within each module. Training takes approximately 2 hours to complete, with an additional hour to practice scoring exemplars to bolster reliability.

Procedures for scoring responses from these writing assessments are straightforward. Part one of the writing assessment is worth ten points; answers to multiple-choice questions that comprise part one are scored automatically, and students are given a conventions score between zero and 10, one point for each question they answer correctly. The written responses to parts two and three are scored by hand. Part two of the assessment is worth a total of six points, three for each short-form response. Each story from part two is rated on a scale from zero to three according to criteria from scoring rubrics. Lastly, part three of the assessment is worth three points and has similar scoring criteria to part two. Scores for all parts of the assessment are combined to give a raw score out of 19 with corresponding scaled scores and percentiles. More about score reports and how to interpret them is discussed later in this chapter.

Scoring rubrics for all English writing assessments are identical; while they do lay out specific linguistic criteria, using the same assessment rubric across all grade levels and assessment forms requires essay raters to have some sense of grade-level writing expectations. Refer to the rubric contained within the scoring manuals in Appendix A for

detailed scoring criteria. Many of rubric items refer to "grade-level" standards and ideas, a rather vague term that can differ from state-to-state, as grade-level expectations can differ depending on which standards are being addressed. Also, it is up to interpretation as to whether "grade-level standards" refers to language standards for all students or proficiency standards set for ELL students. For the purpose of this dissertation, essays were scored based on the assumption that "grade-level" standards and ideas referred to those mandated by the state that set expectations for all students.

As a note, while official IPT scoring procedures allow for Spanish essays to be scored by native English speakers and do not require a high degree of Spanish proficiency, for this study, two of the three raters of Spanish essays were native speakers with experience teaching elementary ELLs; the third essay rater (PI) is an intermediate speaker of Spanish as a second language. Translating Spanish essays to English and then rating them impedes validity and reliability of scoring; student written expression in Spanish should be rated as Spanish writing.

Interpretation

Once all parts of the writing assessment are scored, points from each part are added together to give a raw score out of 19, with ten points representing the conventions score and nine points representing productive writing. Once raw scores are calculated, corresponding scaled scores, percentiles, and normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores are available, facilitating easier interpretation and comparison. The IPT portal provides multiple score reports that display student data in ways that could be helpful for teachers and other stakeholders. Below are different types of score reports generated by the IPT with accompanying explanation and interpretation.

The first score report provided by the IPT is the School Writing Score Summary report. For this study, there are two generated School Writing Score Summary reports, one in for English scores and one for Spanish scores. This type of report gives a snapshot of the proficiency levels and designations of all tested students; it shows how many students are within each proficiency level and designation and offers a breakdown of each grade level. It also gives score means for each subgroup listed on the report. Table 6 shows whole group scores for English, while Table 7 displays the same information for Spanish, taken from this report.

Table 6

School Writing Score Summary – English

Student Count	29	**Designation**			**Proficiency Level***					**Score Means***	
		N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**	**SS**	**NCE**
Number of students		2	20	7	2	5	6	9	7	133	43
Percent of students		7%	69%	24%	7%	17%	21%	31%	24%		
Classroom	**Student Count**	**Designation**			**Proficiency Level***					**Score Means***	
		N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**	**SS**	**NCE**
Grade 3	8	13%	50%	38%	13%	13%	25%	13%	38%	129.00	43.50
Grade 4	11	9%	73%	18%	9%	27%	0%	45%	18%	132.55	42.36
Grade 5	10	0%	80%	20%	0%	10%	30%	40%	20%	135.80	43.00

*Proficiency Level: B=Beginning, EI=Early Intermediate, I=Intermediate, EA=Early Advanced, A=Advanced, SS=Scaled Score, NCE=Normal Curve Equivalent

Table 7

School Writing Score Summary – Spanish

Student Count	29	**Designation**			**Proficiency Level***					**Score Means***	
		N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**	**SS**	**NCE**
Number of students		13	14	2	13	2	4	8	2	100	45
Percent of students		45%	48%	7%	45%	7%	14%	28%	7%		
Classroom	**Student Count**	**Designation**			**Proficiency Level***					**Score Means***	
		N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**	**SS**	**NCE**
Grade 3	8	63%	25%	13%	63%	13%	0%	13%	13%	97.13	46.63
Grade 4	11	27%	73%	0%	27%	9%	18%	45%	0%	102.82	47.55
Grade 5	10	50%	40%	10%	50%	0%	20%	20%	10%	100.50	40.90

*Proficiency Level: B=Beginning, EI=Early Intermediate, I=Intermediate, EA=Early Advanced, A=Advanced, SS=Scaled Score, NCE=Normal Curve Equivalent

This report works best for administrators or teachers of ELLs that work with multiple grade levels and want a clear picture of grade level proficiency. The report, however, does not offer a high degree of detail, so it would not be the most appropriate resource for a classroom teacher planning next steps of writing instruction, but it is an efficient way to identify how many students are at each proficiency level, which can help in planning instructional groups or give stakeholders information how many students need a higher or lower level of language support. From the reports above, we can see that most participants in this study have limited or competent English writing proficiency, while many students are non-expressive or limited in Spanish. Already, it becomes apparent that this group of students is more proficient in writing in English than in Spanish, even though this report does not provide much detailed information.

The next type of report generated by the IPT is the Classroom Writing Score Summary report. These reports are generated by language and grade level, so for this study, a total of six Classroom Writing Score Summary reports are available. Table 8

displays information from the first page of the English report for 4th grade as an example below.

Table 8

Classroom Writing Score Summary – 4th Grade English

Student Count	11	Designation			Proficiency Level*					Score Means*	
		N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**	**SS**	**NCE**
Number of students		1	8	2	1	3	0	5	2	133	42
Percent of students		9%	73%	18%	9%	27%	0%	45%	18%		

Student	Designation			Proficiency Level					Raw Score	Scaled Score	NCE	Percentile
	N	**L**	**C**	**B**	**EI**	**I**	**EA**	**A**				
Student A	✓			✓					11	116	15	5
Student B		✓			✓				13	124	24	11
Student C		✓			✓				10	124	24	11
Student D		✓			✓				11	122	22	9
Student E		✓					✓		15	136	49	49
Student F		✓					✓		16	139	55	59
Student G		✓					✓		14	134	45	41

*Proficiency Level: B=Beginning, EI=Early Intermediate, I=Intermediate, EA=Early Advanced, A=Advanced, SS=Scaled Score, NCE=Normal Curve Equivalent

This type of report could be most helpful for teachers because it allows them to identify which students are struggling and could enable them to make instructional groups for small group instruction or reteaching. Like the School report, it provides a breakdown of proficiency level. This type of report also gives individual information about each student, including designation, proficiency level, raw score, scaled scored, NCE, and percentile. While it does not provide details about with which specific skills students need instructional support, it does provide information on proficiency for each student in class so educators can make decisions about which students are more likely to need additional language support in writing.

The last two reports generated using IPT data are both individual student reports. Both of these reports provide a greater level of detail about student writing performance.

Because 29 participants completed this study in two languages, and because there are two different types of individual score reports, there are 116 individual score reports available based on data from this study. Overall, score reports generated by IPT data are generally user-friendly and simple to interpret. There are a variety of reports available depending on the type of information required and the role of the person using the report, whether district officials, administrators, or ESOL and classroom teachers.

The first type of individual report is the Writing Score Report. Example information from a 5th grade student's English report can be found in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Individual Writing Score Report – 5th Grade English

Student Information
Name: Student R
Student ID: XXXXX
Grade: 5
Age at testing: 10
Primary language: English

Writing Test Scores
Writing proficiency level: Intermediate
Writing designation: Limited English Writing
Raw score: 13
Scaled score: 132
Percentile: 27%
NCE: 37

School Information
School: Wolftever Creek Elementary
District: Hamilton County Schools

Test Information
Test form: IPT-2D English Writing (3rd Ed.)
Test mode: Printed booklet
Test date: 03/31/2021
Rater: Karilena Yount

Score Details

Part 1: Conventions	6 out of 10
Part 2 Write A Story (1)	2 out of 3
Part 2: Write A Story (2)	3 out of 3
Part 3: Write Your Own Story:	2 out of 3
Productive Writing Total:	7 out of 9

This report gives basic scoring information for one student only: basic demographics, testing information, and scores. While this report has limited efficacy in informing instructional decisions, it does provide hard numbers for individual students and give a breakdown of their raw score. For a better understanding of student scores and next steps,

teachers and other stakeholders can refer to the Reading & Writing Diagnostic Report, which combines results from both the Reading and Writing components of the assessment. Participants in this study did not complete the Reading component of this assessment, so those parts of the report are blank.

The first page of the Diagnostic Report is similar to the Writing Score report in that is provides a basic overview of one student's assessment data. It also includes a visual representation of student scores compared group norms, which allows report interpreters to easily identify how the student's performance compares to the average. This report is user-friendly and also provides a narrative explanation of scores listed. The second page of the report provides detailed information about the student's writing designation. Included in the report is a narrative explanation of this student's scores and a list describing the features of the designation level. The inclusion of a descriptive list of writing features is very helpful; teachers can use the list to better understand what writing should look like for students at this designation, and it allows them to "double check" the results of their assessment by comparing them to past student performance or other writing assignments. This report could also be potentially helpful for parents that are curious about what their child can do or compared to grade-level writing expectations. The third page of the report provides instructional implications for this student in the form of instructional recommendations. Note that recommendations are generated based on designation level rather than individual student performance. This type of report is highly valuable to teachers because it translates students writing performance into actionable instructional recommendations. While these are unlikely to *all* be appropriate next steps for each student, and some of these recommendations are vague, it gives

educators a starting place in addressing the needs of their ELL students, which could prove especially helpful for teachers lacking formal training in working with ELLs. Teachers are often given data reports that they are unsure how to interpret or apply, and this score report is not one of them. Such detailed score reports can decrease intimidation and help and empower teachers to make decisions based on these scores.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

Research question one asked, “What are the significant differences in writing outcomes for upper elementary ELLs (as attested by their scores) between ~~in both~~ English and Spanish groups, across the 3-5 grade level bands, and the interaction effect?” In order to answer this question, a 3 (between) x 2 (within) mixed factorial design ANOVA was conducted to compare the main effects of language and grade level, as well as their interaction effects. The results of this analysis are reported in the Tables 11, 12, and 13 below.

Table 10

Descriptive Frequencies

	Grade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
English	3rd	8	129.00	14.60	5.16	116.79	141.21	102	148
	4th	11	132.27	9.17	2.76	126.11	138.43	116	143
	5th	10	135.80	6.48	2.05	131.17	140.43	128	150
	Total	29	132.59	10.21	1.90	128.70	136.47	102	150
Spanish	3rd	8	91.13	20.61	7.29	79.90	114.35	79	143
	4th	11	102.82	12.71	3.83	94.28	111.36	77	120
	5th	10	100.50	11.11	3.51	92.55	108.45	88	117
	Total	29	100.45	14.45	2.68	94.95	105.95	77	143

Table 11

Results of Factorial ANOVA showing the effect of grade level on English and Spanish scaled scores (between subjects)

Source	*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Grade Level	267.54	2	133.77	.584	.565	.043
Error	5957.94	26	229.15			

Table 12

Results of Factorial ANOVA showing the effect of grade level on English and Spanish scaled scores (within subjects)

Source	*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Language	14778.41	1	14778.41	156.78	.000	.858
Language*Grade	89.87	2	44.94	.477	.626	.035
Error (Language)	2450.85	26	94.26			

The Levene's test showed that variances of the groups were equal ($F(2, 26) = 3.039$, $p = .065$). For the condition scaled scores by grade level, sphericity was met as indicated by Mauchly's test. The results of the ANOVA showed that there was no significant main effect of grade level ($F(1, 26) = 0.58$, $p = .565$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$) on English and Spanish scaled scores, with 3rd (*M* = 129.00, 97.16), 4th (*M* = 132.27, 102.82), and 5th graders (*M* = 135.80, 100.50) performing similarly overall. In addition, there was also no significant interaction between grade level and scaled English and Spanish scores ($F(1, 26) = 0.48$, $p = .626$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$). Post hoc analyses revealed no significant mean differences. These findings do not support the notion that grade level has a significant effect on scaled writing scores in English or Spanish. Proficiency determinations can be found in Table 13 below.

Table 13

IPT Writing Proficiency Determinations

	Beginning	Early Intermediate	Intermediate	Early Advanced	Advanced
English	2	5	6	9	7
Spanish	13	2	4	8	2

In summary, the participating ELL students performed significantly better in English writing and slightly lower than average in Spanish writing when compared to IPT norms with a higher degree of variance attested in Spanish writing than in English writing performance. As for the different scores in the different grades, students in 3rd grade scored lower than students in higher grades, but, overall, students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade did not show significant differences in writing performance based on their grade level. The next analytical section looks more closely at the linguistic features of students' writing to offer a fuller picture of the linguistic and rhetorical patterns and salient features in their writing samples in both English and Spanish.

Linguistic Analysis

The student writing samples were analyzed according to the Error Analysis approach, which looks closely at systematic deviations from the target language (Anefnaf, 2016), which for the case of this assessment were both English and Spanish. Samples were analyzed and coded for variations from standard, late-elementary English and Spanish. Nearly all samples in the corpus were legible and generally comprehensible; however, there were a few instances of unintelligibility or participants leaving their assessment form blank (due to some 3rd graders lacking confidence in their ability to write in Spanish). In terms of composing a response to a prompt, students generally

understood what the writing prompt asked of them and were able compose an answer that at least somewhat addressed what they were asked in a way that indicated they understood what was being asked of them; however, again, there were a few instances of responses that did not address the prompt or were not fully intelligible. These examples are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

After analyzing each of the samples individually, results were compiled to investigate patterns of linguistic and rhetorical features in both English and Spanish. Based on the analysis, results were divided by language, and then salient features from each were investigated further. These features were selected based on two factors: how frequently they presented within the corpus and the severity with which they may impede ELL written expression. These selection criteria were chosen with future classroom teaching in mind; errors or deviations common among student writing samples are more likely to generalize to upper elementary ELLs as a group, and errors that impede a student's ability to be understood are the most crucial to address for student success. Less frequent errors or features that did not impede reader comprehension (including misuse of commas or accents, minor orthographic errors, reversed digraphs and blends, etc.) could still be addressed in a classroom setting.

Analysis of English Samples

Research question two asked, "Within a corpus of student writing, what are the salient linguistic characteristics of English writing versus Spanish writing among upper elementary native Spanish-speaking ELLs?" In order to answer this question, textual analysis procedures were first used to closely dissect the English writing samples within the corpus. As the quantitative data suggests, students generally performed better in

English than in Spanish. On average, English writing entries were 124 words long, compared to 72 words for Spanish entries. Table 14 below shows the breakdown of writing sample word counts by grade level.

Table 14

Word Count by Grade Level

	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
English	79	129	165
Spanish	40	83	93

It is to be expected that students in the higher grades wrote longer responses than students in lower grades, and data in Table 14 shows that natural progression by grade level. We can also observe that participants wrote nearly twice as much in English as they did in Spanish, they used more richer vocabulary words in their responses, and typically expressed a greater number of more complex ideas. These results support findings from the statistical analysis that students scored higher when writing in English than in Spanish. However, while student scores in English were higher than they were in Spanish, there were still evident hallmarks of second language writing acquisition issues and other common features within the corpus.

The collected samples of student English writing are comprised of 87 individual entries and 3504 words total. The mean length of entries was 40 words, and seventy-five percent of the corpus is comprised of repeated words. When considered as a whole, the corpus contains approximately 800 unique words (although this figure includes misspellings), and scores 6.3 on the Gunning-Fog readability index and 92.7 on the Flesch Reading Ease scale, indicating that the corpus is linguistically quite simple and is

comprised mostly of short, simple, common words. The average sentence length is approximately 12 words, although it should be considered that many corpus entries are lacking necessary punctuation, meaning that the true average sentence length is likely much shorter. The average grade level readability score for the English corpus entries was 3.8, indicating writing on a late 3rd grade to early 4th grade level.

Sentence complexity. While study participants were generally inclined to write more in English than in Spanish, one notable pattern across grade levels when writing in English is the simple syntactic structure of sentences that participants generated. Most sentences are short (<10 words), and many corpus entries include repeated words or phrases. These young writers tended, on the whole, to avoid complex sentence structures. Examples below show some authentic examples that serve as the focus for grammatical and syntactic analysis of students' writing. In this first example, a series of three pictures show a boy filling a bowl with dog food, holding his hand up to call for his dog, and then patting his dog on the head while it eats from the bowl. The transcritption of the student response reads as follows.

Transcription: *The boy is puting dog food in the dog bowl. Then, he calls the dog to come and eat. Last, the dog comes to go and eat.*

This first writing sample gives an example of a 3rd grade student that has responded to a prompt from Part 2 of the IPT-1 Form C. In this sample, the student has constructed mostly grammatically correct sentences that follow a logical sequence and accurately address the stimulus task. Evident in this sample is instruction in transition words (then, last), and the response follows a clear structure of beginning, middle, and end. However, the linguistic complexity of this sample is lacking. The words themselves are simple,

common words, and the sentences are short. The student repeats similar phrases such as "to come and eat" and "to go and eat." While this student is able to make himself understood through written expression, it is likely that he is able to express complex ideas more proficiently orally rather than in writing. The tone of this sample is hesitant, and the student clearly adheres to words and sentences structures with which he is familiar. The following example displays similar characteristics. In this series of pictures, a father is standing with his daughter next to a bike, then he is shown helping her as she rides, then she is riding independently. The transcription of the student response reads:

Transcription: *The Girl wanted to ride her bike. Her dad help her get up it the bike. The Girl rided her bike. She had fun.*

This second sample is another example from a 3rd grade student taking Part 2 of the IPT-1 Form C. The composition as a whole is choppy and includes minor errors that do not impede comprehension. As with the previous example, this student has used simple, repetitive sentence structures with, but has successfully conveyed basic ideas. In this sample, moreover, the student has overgeneralized adding -ed to the end of a verb to make it past tense (*rided*), indicating that irregular verb forms might be an area in which this student would benefit from direct instruction. Verb use within the corpus, however, is addressed later in this chapter.

Many participants used transition words within their writing to note different parts of a narrative, and a beginning/middle/end was an evident organizational pattern throughout the corpus. The following two examples from 5th grade students' responses to Part 2 of the IPT-2 Form D are illustrative. The first stimulus item is again a series of three illustrations show two children walking side-by-side with fishing poles and a tackle

box, then standing ankle-deep in water as they fish and talk, then again walking together but this time with several fish in hand. The transcriptions of the student responses read:

Transcription: *First two people went to go fishing. Middle they both caught alot of fish. Last They both left and went back home.*

Transcription: *In the Beginning two friends were walking with fishing gaer. next they were at a Lake. Last the got fish and walked.*

Both of the above examples address the same prompt, and, in both responses, use of basic narrative structure can be observed indicating that these students are familiar with how to organize their writing, at least on a basic level. The first example shows stronger logical flow, as the three events are clearly connected, where the second example does not necessarily connect the three events. Both samples represent an opportunity to support students in using their foundational understandings to develop their writing to create a richer, more detailed story.

Study participants overall preferred shorter syntax structures even in their long-form responses. Two long-form examples are given below, both from 3rd grade students taking Part 3 of the IPT-1 Form C. The first stimulus shows an illustration of a woman and two boys sitting on a sofa with bowls of popcorn in their laps. One boy holds the remote control, and all are looking at the television. The response reads:

Transcription: *The Boys wanted to watch a movie. They needed popcorn and drinks. They picked a bowl. The bowls were the same size. They found a drink, but they didn't have popcorn. They three couldn't find popcorn. They haved to buy popcorn. They maded in time. They started watching the movie. They were happy ever after. THE END*

The paragraph above contains 10 complete sentences but only 55 words; this sample gives a good level of detail for a 3rd grade response, but it relies on a very simple

syntactic structure repeated over and over, creating a choppy flow. The narrative is clear, the response addresses the prompt, there is tensions (no popcorn!) and resolution ("happy ever after"), but this student must still rely on linguistically simple ways of expressing what are evidently rich and interesting ideas. The next example differs from the one above but still depends on simple, repeated phrases. In this stimulus, two adults inside of an airport are waving through a window at three children with suitcases standing next to an airplane. The student response reads as follows:

Transcription: *Three kids are leaveing there mom and dad. The kids are going on the airaport and leaveing there mom and dads house. The kids are on the airport and have there lugige.*

In this example, also from a 3rd grader taking Part 3 of the IPT-1 Form C, this student repeats the phrase "leaving there mom and dads house" and repeats noun phrases multiple times. The repetitive structure of this sample does not necessarily impede meaning, but it does reveal that the writer was struggling to formulate what to write and how to combine ideas.

Lastly in terms of sentence complexity or lack thereof, there were numerous instances of writing in ways that met mechanical expectations that did not express much in terms of ideas. For examples of well-constructed sentences that lack compositional meaning, consider the following two examples. The following is another student response from the stimulus depicting two children on a fishing trip.

Transcription: *In the Beginning two friends were walking with fishing gaer. next they were at a Lake. Last the got fish and walked.*

This example of a short form 5th grade response was given early when addressing narrative structure, but it is also a good example of an understandable, grammatically-

well-formed response that lacks compositional complexity. Here, the student has told what she sees in each picture, but has not constructed a coherent narrative. This phenomenon was common within the corpus; students used grammatical, syntactic, and orthographic patterns with which they were familiar and were able to communicate clearly, but they were unable to write in a way that successfully addressed the task by telling a story. See an additional example below. In this stimulus, a girl is playing with her dog outside, then dark clouds gather in the sky, and lastly, we see her eating soup at a table inside with her dog beside her on a rug. The student response reads:

Transcription: *In the first picture the girl is going to give the dog a ball in the rain. In the second picture the girl and the dog are running in the rain going somewhere. In the third picture the girl is in her house with her dog eating soup.*

The above writing sample from a 4th grade student taking the IPT-2 Form C is a perfect example of grammatically competent writing that lacks depth. This student has written detailed sentences describing each picture, but the response in constructed in such a way that it reads as though each picture represents a separate event rather than a series of connected events; she has not drawn the intended inferences. These two examples, combined with those discussed above, draw attention to the need for ELL students to learn not only the “nuts and bolts” of writing but also the “guts”; participants in this study would benefit from instruction in how connect their ideas in a logical way, while continuing to apply the mechanical understandings they have shown here.

Predictably, younger students were more likely to generate simple responses, but this pattern was evident across all grade levels, particularly for those students whose writing did not meet grade level standards. However, simple sentences and repeated phrases are not necessarily a negative indicator in terms of writing development. In fact,

these simple sentences show capacity and potential for future learning. In each of these examples, students are communicating clearly, albeit a bit awkwardly, and basic sentences and phrases provide a solid foundation into which students can incorporate increasingly complex linguistic features as they progress. Many students used transition words like "first, middle, last" or "first, next, finally" to note a sequential narrative, which in this context made their writing rather choppy, but ensured at least three separate ideas. Also, many students were successful in making themselves understood, but did not express particularly strong ideas. These samples may be repeating themselves in a way that reveals their limited writing proficiency, but, on the whole, they still make sense and address the prompt. Responses that did not address the prompt still evinced other writing skills. Overall, this corpus shows that these participants possess a solid understanding of basic English syntax and mechanics.

Verb endings. Not surprisingly, many ELL students in this study struggled with verb endings. This finding was not surprising because English includes many irregular verb forms, and even ones that do not may require orthographic adjustments students cannot anticipate. The following writing samples give an idea of the range of ways in which students incorrectly constructed verb endings in English. The most common deviation within the English corpus when considering verbs was the exclusion of repeated consonants when adding -*ing* to the end of a verb. The example below is taken from a 3rd grade student's response to Part 2 of the IPT-1 Form C.

Transcription: *The boy is puting dog food in the dog bowl. Then, he calls the dog to come and eat. Last, the dog comes to go and eat.*

In this example, the student has written *puting* for *putting*, dropping the repeated consonant within this form of the verb. See additional examples of similar deviations below. The next sample was written in response to a stimulus depicting a boy and his mother outside of a toy store; as they stand at the bus stop and wait for the bus, they are splashed with water when the bus pulls into a puddle.

Transcription*: They are stoping so the bus pics them. Then they were tacking to eather. Then they werre puding there hand's up and I thing they were taring to say stop becaues I thing the bus was bireing so they porly sain stop.*

Corrected transcription*: They are stopping so the bus picks them up. Then they were talking to each other. Then they were putting their hands up and I think they were trying to say stop because I think the bus was driving so they are probably saying stop.*

This example from a 4th grade student includes numerous spelling errors, but those of particular note (circled in red) are additional deleted consonants, with the writing substituting *stoping* for *stopping* and *puding* for *putting*. The example below was written in response to the same stimulus item and includes an identical error.

Transcription*: A mother and her son were waiting at the bus stop. when the bus was stoping it wet the mother and the son.*

This response addresses the same prompt as the last example, and again a participant has dropped the additional *p* in *stopping* when adding *-ing* to the end of a verb. This error was common enough within the corpus that direct instruction in spellings of verb endings would be an appropriate instructional recommendation for this group of students. One more example of this orthographic pattern is included below. This sample was written in response to a stimulus describing children hesitantly exploring a house they believe to be haunted.

Transcription*: ...my frend cum out runing and scrimenig and say ther is a gost in ther! my frend was shacing of terro.*
Corrected Transcription: *...my friend came out running and screaming and said, "there is a ghost in there!" My friend was shaking of terror.*

Lastly, this last example from a 4th grade student gives additional evidence that this particular pattern was common across all levels of ELP and grade levels. Adding an additional consonant when changing verb endings is not intuitive or a linguistic rule in Spanish, so ELL students learning new verbs will need direct instruction on how and when to adjust verb spellings.

Linguistic unintelligibility. The corpus contains several writing samples that were hard to comprehend, even to a trained teacher eye accustomed to decoding developing written expression. These entries do not offer much insight into how students would respond to the prompt orally, but they do allow for the identification of these students' more urgent needs in writing. A case in point is the example below, written in response to the stimulus pictures of a dad teaching his daughter to ride a bike.

Transcription*: The gir dadt the on dag in*

Here, we can tell that this student is expressing an idea about a girl and her dad, but the sentence is not complete. However, it begins with a capital letter and includes a subject, so there is evidence of budding writing proficiency. Consider another example below, from a student responding to a stimulus illustration depicting people at a cookout in a park, with adults talking and grilling while children play soccer.

Transcription*: le amrn a the hon a fod in d and gtr z saq suar d pen le guc*

These two examples reveal participants with ideas they wish to express that are not coming across clearly. Presumably, each of these groups of letters represents a word, but

when considered as a whole, these responses do not make sense or express the intended idea. In this situation, the writers may have ideas they wish to express through writing, but there is also a clear evidence of the need for scaffolding, perhaps sentence stems or a word bank, in order to help them clarify and organize their ideas.

Analysis of Spanish Samples

After a thorough analysis of English writing samples, Spanish writing samples within the corpus were closely analyzed, paying particular attention to repeated or common features within the corpus or features that displayed writing proficiency not evident in corresponding English samples.

The collected samples of student Spanish writing are comprised of 87 individual entries and 1975 words total. The mean length of entries was approximately 23 words. When considered as a whole, Spanish entries contain approximately 800 unique words, although as with the English part of the corpus, this figure includes misspellings. Measuring readability in Spanish is a challenging task. It should be noted Spanish readability is more difficult to measure than English due to fewer reliable indices available with which to measure readability. Spanish text cannot be analyzed using English algorithms and yield reliable results without modification, even though most English readability formulas have potential be adapted for the Spanish language. Spanish readability scores, therefore, should be interpreted with caution. Attempting to calculate grade-level readability yielded a range from 3rd to 9th grade, which is too wide to have any useful application; for this reason, readability indices are not reported for Spanish entries. The average sentence length is approximately 13 words, although, again, it

should be considered that many entries lack complete punctuation, meaning that the true average sentence length is likely shorter.

Overall, the writing within the Spanish part of the corpus would not meet grade-level expectations for students formally educated in Spanish. While most participants in this study had never received formal education in Spanish, it was still surprising to see how many children were intimidated by the prospect of performing tasks in a language they spoke fluently and used every day. For most participants in this study, Spanish functions as a means of social communication, used between family members and close friends; English is used at school for both social and academic purposes, but with a delineation for when and where each language is used. Most study participants were surprised by being asked to complete academic work in Spanish, and written responses generated by students range from nonresponsive to proficient. Salient features observed with the Spanish samples included in the corpus are discussed in greater detail below.

Orthographic patterns. Spanish is much more phonetically consistent than English; typically letters only one sound, so spelling and pronunciation rules are easier to learn. Therefore, this study did not anticipate to identify numerous incidences of orthographic inconsistency. However, because participants in this study are multilingual learners in English only classrooms, interactions between their L1 and L2 were sometimes evident in their writing. Where it was expected to find the influence of Spanish phonetic spelling on English orthography, often the opposite was true; throughout the corpus were multiple examples of ELL students adopting English orthographic patterns within their Spanish writing rather than the other way around, particularly when words included a *y/ll* sound, *k/q* sound, or letters that are silent in

Spanish (*h*). The first example below gives evidence of English phonetic patterns within a student's Spanish composition, again from the stimulus showing people at a cookout.

Transcription: *Éstan jugando é ýó áŕéó ťýenén uńó ćómpĺé anío é tóťhó ĺoś perśóńáś ťýenéń ambre.*
Corrected transcription: *Éstan jugando y yo creo tienen uno cumpleanos y todos los personas tienen hambre.*
Translation: *They are playing and I think they have a birthday and everyone is hungry.*

In this first example from 3rd grade, the student has misspelled several Spanish words, substituting orthographic patterns found more commonly in English to represent in multiple instances, eschewing typical Spanish spelling conventions. Particularly, this passage includes *ťýenéń* substituted for *tienen* (have) multiple times. This spelling deviation is interesting because Spanish does not use *y* as often as English to create this sound, and often *ll, ie, or ñ* are used instead. In this example, we can also observe overuse of accent marks, presumably to compensate for being unsure of where to place them. Similar spelling deviations can be observed in the following writing sample, in which a student is responding to three illustrations showing a girl playing with a doll as a small dog approaches her, takes the doll in its teeth, and runs away.

Transcription: *El pero le kito el jgete a la niñya.*
Corrected transcription: *El perro le quitó el juguete a la niña.*
Translation: *The dog took the toy from the girl.*

In this second example, we see an additional use of *y* to create a sound that is already represented by *ñ*. Here, this writer does not seem certain of pronunciation rules surrounding *ñ*, although she knows that *niña* includes its use. This example also includes the use of *k* to create a sound usually represented in Spanish by *q*. Use of the letter *k* is not common in formal Spanish, but is regularly used in informal contexts as shorthand.

There were also numerous examples of students spelling Spanish words in ways that reflected how they are sometimes pronounced, depending on dialect and fluency. In Castilian Spanish, *s* typically represents a *th* sound, and although none of the ELLs in this study speak that particular dialect, this orthographic feature was occasionally observed within the corpus. The example below was written by a 4th grade student taking Part 2 of the IPT-2 Form C, in which the student is responding to illustrations showing two people purchasing food from a fast food restaurant.

Transcription: *I ona store e i na then a e perda I dos personas I a e ona drarahord sta a e el dos presonas garand cometha.*

Much of this response is unintelligible, but the last line refers to "dos personas" and "cometha." Here, he writes *cometha* instead of *comida* (food), which is how the word would be pronounced when spoken aloud with a Castilian dialect.

Transcription: *Éstan jugando é ýó áŕéó ťýenén uńó ćómpĺé aníο é tóťhó ĺoś perśóńáś ťýenéń ambre.*
Corrected transcription: *Éstan jugando y yo creo tienen uno cumpleanos y todos los personas tienen hambre.*
Translation: *They are playing and I think they have a birthday and everyone is hungry.*

A similar substitution is seen in this earlier example from a 3rd grade student, where he has written *totho* to mean *todo* (all). The two sounds are very similar when spoken aloud in certain dialects, but it was surprising to see this convention of oral language expressed in within the corpus so often when considering that these students do not speak this dialect. Lastly, another common substitution within the corpus was swapping *b* and *v* sounds. In Spanish, *b* and *v* represent very similar sounds, and when spoken aloud, *v* in Spanish typically sounds like a soft *b*. In the example below, the student has substituted the two letters for one another, but in the opposite way one would expect. Based on oral

language expression, it is expected that ELL students might substitute *b* for *v*, but in the example below from a 3rd grade assessment, the student performs the opposite inversion, using *v* when the correct spelling would include *b*. In this stimulus item, a mother is purchasing a balloon from a vendor for her son. The balloon pops, and the vendor offers the boy another balloon.

Transcription: *El niño tiene el glov coñ el Seniu el la glov mama. el glov*
Corrected transcription: *El niño tiene el globo con el señor el la globo mama. El globo*
Translation: *The boy has the balloon with the man the balloon mom. The balloon*

There were other of instances within the Spanish part of the corpus of students using phonetic spellings that mirror Spanish oral language expression patters. Dropping an initial vowel sound or even a whole syllable is a common characteristic of fluent oral Spanish; this especially holds true for words with more than two syllables, because Spanish syllabic rules dictate that typically the initial vowel sounds or syllables do not receive stress unless they are accented. The following examples show students omitting initial syllables in their writing. The first example stimulus item shows children sitting on a beach with umbrellas and toys, then flying kites, then sitting under their umbrellas as it rains.

Transcription: *Unos nenios staban asiendo cosas para juagar. Terminado su cosas y juegaron pero esperado para yuviya. Garadon su sombrillas y esperado para que se vaye la yuviya.*
Corrected transcription: *Unos niños estaban haciendo cosas para jugar. Terminado su cosas y juegaron pero esperado para lluvia. Recogieron su sombrillas y esperado para que se vaye la lluvia.*
Translation: *Some children were doing things to play. Their finished their stuff and played but waited for rain. They picked up their umbrellas and waited for the rain to go away.*

This sample was written by a 4th grader completing Part 2 of the IPT-2 Spanish form. As with other samples in this corpus, this one includes numerous deviations from Spanish written expression that could be discussed, including again the use of *y* rather than *ll* used to represent a y sound. However, the most interesting miscue in this writing sample is the use of *staban* rather than *estaban* (were). Here, the writer as dropped the initial consonant, which aligns with the sentence would likely be interpreted by a native speaker but non-native writer if hearing it spoken aloud by a fluent speaker. Ironically, caricatures of Spanish accents often include inserting a short *e* sound at the beginning of words that begin with *s*, but here this student has omitted that sound from her writing, focusing instead on the consonant. The following example includes a similar deviation, and is another response to the stimulus showing two people buying fast food.

Transcription: Tonses lo cue este pasando acue es cue mirro una tienda. Y personas esten pasonda purr a ye. Y aldugle se sal lendo.
Corrected transcription: *Entonces lo que está pasando que es que miro una tienda. Y personas esten pasonda por a ya. Y alguien se sal lendo.*
Translation: *So what is happening is that I look at a store. And people are walking by now. And someone got out.*

In this sample, also generated by a 4th grade student completing Part 2 of the same assessment, *tonses* is substituted for *entonces* (then/so), eliminating the entire first syllable of the word and again mirroring oral language patterns in Spanish. These above samples do not provide direct implications for instruction for this group of students, as they are not instructed in Spanish, but they do provide evidence of the role of Spanish in these students' lives as occurring mostly in the realm of spoken word.

Spanish writing of ELLs with low ELP. Of particular interest in this study are Spanish writing samples generated by ELL students that especially struggled with writing

in English and evinced limited English proficiency. In this part of the analysis, both English and Spanish passages will be discussed so writing proficiency can be compared between the two. The following examples were taken from the student in each grade that scored the lowest in English written expression. First, consider the example below from a 3rd grade student responding to the prompt of a boy feeding his dog.

Transcription: *The boy a dog tiedt for his dog He calls his dog to get get food of dog treats*
Corrected transcription: *The boy has a dog treat for his dog. He calls his dog to get the food of dog treats.*

It is evident from the above example that this student is not a proficient English writer; he does not write in complete sentences, repeats words unnecessarily, and his composition does not reflect fluency. His writing does, however, accurately address the prompt. While he may be limited in how he responds, it can be observed that he does understand what is happening and can form a somewhat logical description of the scene and write two complete ideas about what is taking place: (1) the boy has food for his dog and (2) he calls his dog to eat. Compare this sample of English writing to the sample of Spanish writing below to see how his performance in Spanish differs. Here, the student is responding to the stimulus of a mother buying a balloon for her son.

Transcription: *El perrit lobot yse lo a buscan los ll el niño tiene el glov con el senior el oq glov mama. como.*
Corrected transcription: *El lo buscan. El niño tiene el globo con el senior el otro globo mama.*
Translation: *He is looking. The boy has a balloon with the man and another balloon with mom.*

This second example from the same student show limited Spanish writing proficiency as well. His sentences do not follow a logical flow, and there are several words within his

response that do not hold meaning. However, it can also be observed that this student writes more in Spanish than he does in English, and that he generates four complete ideas instead of two, even though they are not fully formed: (1) the boy is looking for something, (2) the boy has a balloon, (3) the man also has a balloon, (4) the boy is with his mom. For this specific student, proficiency levels for English and Spanish are comparable; he is proficient in neither language, but the use of a dual language assessment provides a more complete picture of his skills as a multilingual writer. It can be observed that while he struggles in both languages, he possesses a basic working vocabulary in both, and providing a writing assessment that measures the full scope of his linguistic ability is the only way to capture that knowledge.

The next example was generated by a 4th grade student completing Part 3 of the IPT-2 Form C and Spanish form. The first writing sample is from the English assessment, in which the student is responding to the prompt about children exploring the presumably haunted house.

Transcription: *... that the houes was haunted by ghosts so her friend's were sacred and they ran outside, and they came back. and they said "i think I pee my pants."*

On the whole, 4th graders represented the most proficient grade level of writers within this study, and while this student scored the lowest, her response is still successful in many ways. For a long-form response, it is short, but it logically addresses the prompt, expresses more than one idea, demonstrates correct use of quotation marks, and includes humor. She overgeneralizes use of apostrophes (friend's), makes spelling errors (houes, sacred), and lacks appropriate use of ending punctuation, but this response is intelligible and makes sense within the context of the assessment. The sample below shows how the

same student responded to the long-form prompt in Spanish about spending Sunday with cousins when something strange happened.

Transcription: *En domingo y primos y yo habiamos y vens a la casa y que les habia una cosa me dijeron que y te vas a la casa. En al hora de comal.*
Translation: *On Sunday, my cousins and I talked and went to the house and there was one thing they told me and then you go home at dinner time.*

As with the previous example, this student shows a similar proficiency level in both languages. She writes to a comparable length in both languages and expresses a similar number of complete ideas; both writing samples include run-on sentences and lack appropriate punctuation in places. When comparing the two samples, it can be observed that she is a more proficient speller in Spanish, but perhaps more comfortable with the mechanics of English. Were this student to complete a writing assessment in English only, her teacher would not have an accurate idea of the full extent of her linguistic abilities. As with the 3rd grade examples, without the use of dual language assessment, there would not be a complete picture of this student's writing ability on which to base decisions regarding subsequent instruction.

Lastly, consider these examples from a 5th grade student. Presented below are responses from Part 3 of the IPT-3, both from Form D and the Spanish form of the assessment, in which the student is responding to a prompt about exploring a mysterious cave while on a hike.

Transcription*: … got in the cave and we see Bat's so we ran fast. Than we see*

In this example, this participant has limited English proficiency, perhaps to an even greater degree than the students from the previous examples from 3rd and 4th grade. Her

first sentence is a clear and logical response to the prompt, but she cuts her response before she finishes the story and does not generate a true long-form response or meet grade level expectations. Her long-form Spanish writing is below for comparison, in which she is responding to a prompt about a girl's father arriving late to a Christmas celebration.

Transcription: *... a esperba sola sin sou papa po como sou mama es ta a apada y bspes Josefina a ryo la peta y la papa es ta meto y es ts ma yo.*
Corrected transcription: *…a esperaba sola sin su papa pero como su mama esta occupada y despues Josefina la abrio la puerta y la papa esta muerto y ella mama vio.*
Translation: *She was waiting alone without her father but since her mother is busy and then Josefina opened the door and the father is dead and her mother saw.*

While this student's Spanish response is not advanced and includes numerous orthographic errors that could impede comprehension, she uses more complex language in this Spanish sample than she does in English, including different tenses and expression of multiple ideas, even though they are not fully formed in the composition. Her Spanish-long-form response, while perhaps overly dramatic, gives a more complete narrative than her English response. Her Spanish writing, although not at the level to be expected of proficient 5th grade students, gives a greater level of detail than her English composition, and displays writing skills that are not accurately assessed by English assessments.

These examples indicate that while some ELLs may struggle with writing in their target language, dual language assessments reveal more of what they know to give a more holistic impression of student writing competency.

Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

Statistical findings from this study indicate that while some participants in this study, especially those with limited English proficiency, do possess writing skills not

captured by typical English writing assessments, these ELLs are overall much more proficient at writing in English than in their native language of Spanish. This finding is not all that surprising given that all participants in this study have received formal writing instruction in English only. However, additional findings based on textual and linguistic analysis give a clearer picture of how ELL writing varies between their native and target languages, and may offer some small insight into interactions between Spanish as a first language and English as a second language. The analysis of the corpus samples shows that there are some common features within the writing of Spanish-speaking ELL students. We can observe common orthographic patterns and short but logical sentences that can serve as a foundation for later learning.

To gain a better understanding of the scoring process and the types of responses students wrote, consider the following examples. First is an example of Part 3 of the IPT-1 Form C, completed by a 3rd grade student in response to the prompt depicting mother watching TV with her two sons.

Transcription*: the box is small because is fun. the yirel is small because She is eat PonPorn the hater box is small is fun your gapen on the TV*

In this example, the student has been asked to write a story that corresponds to the picture above. While this writing sample does contain several recognizable words, the meaning of this student's writing is unclear. Referring to the rubric, this sample meets the criteria for a non-expressive rating and a score of zero. What is written does not address the prompt in a clear of logical way, and while it appears to be written mostly in English, it is hard to comprehend. For an example of writing by a student with a higher degree of ELP,

see the example below from a student responding to the prompt about children exploring a house they believe to be haunted.

Transcription: *I heard some screaming than I saw some red wet stuff hit the window, than somebody come to the window and wave than and it wasn't my friend so I run to the police station to tell but everone thought I was crazy because we went up there than and went in the house, so than they went up there and when they get there the Body was nothing there and the Blood was gone. So the next day I saw my friend but when I touch her my hands went straghit thought her body and I fell to the floor.*

This prompt is taken from Part 3 of the IPT-2 Form D, and the response was constructed by a 5th grade student. The response is, for the most part, well written. The intended meaning can be understood and it makes sense within the context of the prompt. However, when considering the rubric, it should be noted that in order to be considered competent and receive a score of three, the writing sample must fulfill all criteria listed on the rubric. This sample should be considered limited and receive a score of two for a number of reasons. More than once, the student substitutes *than* for *then*. Several verbs are conjugated in their present forms (i.e. *come* for *came*, *run* for *ran*, *get* for *got*, and *touch* for *touched*). The passage lacks complete punctuation, and includes minor spelling (*everone*) and capitalization mistakes (*Body, Blood*). While all of these errors are minor and do not impede comprehension, this passage is not a good representation of grade level writing expectations for a 5th grade student. While it is evident that this student understood the prompt, had multiple logical ideas about how to complete the story, and possesses the writing skills with which to communicate them, it does not fulfill the criteria for competent writing as defined by the rating rubric. Lastly, consider the following example in Spanish written in response to illustrations showing two people buying fast food.

Transcription: *Este es un retrato de un restaurante de comidas corridas. Las personas estan pidiendo la comida y pagandom. Entonces las personas salen del restaurante con su comida.*

In this example, a 4th grade student is responding to a stimulus item form Part 2 of the IPT-2 Spanish writing test. The writing translates to:

This is a portrait of a fast food restaurant. People are ordering food and paying. Then people leave the restaurant with their food.

This response should be considered competent and receive a score of three; all words are spelled correctly, the response makes logical sense, and the lexical density is appropriate for a 4th grade student; holistically, it should be considered an ideal response. The noun *retrato* (portrait) and the verb *pidiendo* (ordering) are somewhat sophisticated verbs. The only part that could be corrected is the apostrophe in *persona's*; here interactions between English and Spanish can be observed, as this student is using an English grammatical convention for possession to pluralize a word.

It is important to note that the student directions for the English test tell students to write as much as they can, while the Spanish form simply asks students to write a story, which could potentially affect how students respond. However, the proctor scripts are nearly identical excluding the fact that they are in different languages. It is unknown if or how this small discrepancy is reflected in student responses. It is also important to note that scoring in Spanish requires a working understanding of the features of fluent Spanish writing, as it differs from English across multiple domains, including syntax rules, verb structure and conjugation, and capitalization conventions. More specifically, Spanish syntax dictates that adjectives typically follow the nouns they describe rather

than before. For example, in Spanish, one would say *el gato negro* instead of *the black cat*. However, adjectives can sometimes precede nouns as well, depending on the intended meaning of the word or phrase. Additionally, Spanish features a verb structure quite different from and more complex than English; it includes cases that do not exist in English and a wide range of verb conjugation forms, many of them irregular and many of them scarce in spoken language. Learning how to conjugate verbs in Spanish and choose the correct conjugation when writing is a key instructional objective for elementary writers in Spanish classrooms, but ELLs with little to no formal instruction in writing in Spanish are likely to struggle with using many verb forms outside of ones common in oral language. Lastly, Spanish includes gendered nouns that require corresponding pronoun and adjective forms; a group of young boys could be *called los niños* (the boys or children) or *ellos* (them), while a group of young girls would be referred to as *las niñas* (the girls) or *ellas* (them). Learning to choose appropriate gendered forms and correct corresponding parts of speech is also directly taught to emergent Spanish speakers. These examples of ways in which Spanish differs from English by no means comprise an exhaustive list, but they are key features of which to be aware when scoring student writing. These nuances are easy for young children to ignore in their writing, but they are also important features for raters of Spanish essays to keep in mind, especially if those raters are native English speakers.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The findings of this study point to the potential beneficial effect of numerous adjustments that can be done to the way writing assessments for ELLs are constructed, conducted, scored, and interpreted. Some of these adjustments are more immediately feasible than others and are therefore more practical in terms of application. This final chapter offers some general recommendations and best practices in ELL assessment and instruction and guidelines for administering better assessments to ELL students. It concludes by discussing the limitations of the study and its pedagogical implications.

The IPT, as an assessment of ELL writing ability, as shown in this study, is a helpful resource within the larger scope of best assessment practices for ELLs; it is a valid and reliable measure that yields actionable results. A principal using this IPT data to make staffing decisions in order to meet the needs of ELL students could observe that he or she has many students that will need some support and plan to have ESOL faculty push in to their classrooms to facilitate language learning within the general educational classroom. Teachers can use classroom reports to more readily identify ELL students would benefit from language scaffolds and additional vocabulary instruction. Individual student reports can be used to update ESOL teachers on present levels, identify specific areas in which students struggle, and refer to instructional recommendations.

Because many of the writing assessments ELLs take are constructed around and within a monolingual paradigm, they often function more as a measure of English Language Proficiency rather than written expression (Escamilla et al., 2018) and are more sensitive to lack of English proficiency rather than low writing ability (Brown, 2013). Assessments like these tend to underestimate abilities of ELL students because they

simply cannot capture a full picture of what students know (Brown, 2013) and do not consider second language development in their construct. Writing assessments administered in English only function differently for ELL students, and while it is not always inappropriate to assess ELLs in only the target language, the assessments that they do take should account for second language development and limited ELP. Another factor to consider when assessing ELLs is how data from these assessments are used. ELLs are often compared to their native English-speaking counterparts in terms of writing achievement, even though L2 trajectory does mirror L1 development (Brown, 2013; Grosjean, 1998) and, as the literature review points out, such comparisons are not particularly meaningful (Escamilla et al., 2018).

In general, assessments administered to ELLs, especially those designed to measure any domain of language proficiency, should be constructed specifically for ELLs (Escamilla et al., 2018; Pitoniak et al., 2009). More specifically, ELLs should be assessed using instruments that are sensitive to the trajectory and variation of second language acquisition and account for typical maturation, which often involves the use of multiple assessments (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Brown, 2013; Escamilla et al., 2018). The literature supports a need for high quality assessments that are shown to be valid and reliable measures of ELL writing proficiency (August et al., 212) and that reflect reasonable language proficiency goals based on empirical evidence (August et al., 2012; Ballantyne et al., 2008). Regardless of what type of summative assessment is used, ELLs need a plethora of opportunities to practice and develop written language skills in a context in which they receive rich immediate feedback (Baker et al., 2014). In addition to standardized measure, educators of ELLs should implement frequent, regular, and

ongoing formative assessments to more accurately capture the scope and sequence of their students' English Language Proficiency growth (Baker et al., 2014).

Final Thoughts: Limitations and Implications

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the study only included students from within one school. Ideally, this study would have included students from other schools across the district with ESOL sites. However, district COVID-19 policy limits school visitors to employees and staff. Also due to the pandemic, there is no longitudinal data from the previous school year, which would provide additional data points into second language writing development. In spite of these limitations, however, the study provides a snapshot of representative bilingual writing of ELL students and its main features. This study, while small in scale, has wide-reaching implications for writing assessment practices for ELL students in grades 3-5.

A key goal of implementing bilingual assessment is to inform subsequent instruction; the IPT writing component generates an explanation of a student's proficiency along with instructional recommendations for students based on their writing performance. As previously mentioned, second language acquisition follows a somewhat predictable sequence. Therefore, the instructional recommendations made for each student are a valuable starting point for the teachers delivering instruction to these students. As noted before, these recommendations are not tailored to each student's lexical profile, but rather are based on the student's proficiency level and are designed to reflect their current linguistic abilities and developmentally appropriate next steps. They can, however, provide report-readers with a deeper understanding of a student's proficiency level and what they should be expected to do based on their designation. To

complement these descriptors, individual score reports include corresponding recommendations for continuing instruction.

Examples of those instructional recommendations are listed below (Baker et al., 2014):

- Teach students to analyze writing prompts to figure out the topic and task expectations.
- Use reading texts or samples of good writing to help students see how supportive details improve writing and make it lively. Show a range of different examples, including adjectives, adverbs, subordinate clauses, and additional sentences.
- Show examples of how to review and revise one's own writing. At different times, concentrate on accuracy, connectedness, informativeness, better flow, and effect through vocabulary selection. Have students review and revise their own and their peers' writing with support from you and from examples or paragraph frames.
- Show examples of correctly used writing conventions, have students identify different writing conventions in each other's writing, and review their own writing for appropriate writing conventions.
- Consider providing students help with content area tasks, such as:
    - analyzing tasks to figure out the structure of expected responses. Use models and examples to help with this.
    - writing introductions and conclusions that follow informational structures that are expected in the school context.

Many of these recommendations mirror the best practices discussed above, and all provide students with language scaffolding on one way or another. While these

instructional recommendations are helpful starting points for further classroom instruction, they still do not fully address the features observed within the corpus of English writing. Most recommendations rely on exemplars, which are helpful, but do not provide the full scope of support that ELL writers' needs. Based on the patterns and commonalities observed within the corpus (short responses, simple sentence structures, and spelling errors), ELL students would benefit from a greater number of opportunities to practice writing, especially as a socially motivated practice. They also need direct instruction in conjugating irregular verbs, as do all English learners, including native speakers. Finally, they would also benefit from sheltered vocabulary instruction in order to feel empowered in using a broader range of words in their compositions.

This study's findings also suggest that students with particularly low ELP, because of limited formal English language learning experiences, may perform better in their native language, revealing skills and competencies that can leveraged into further English language learning. Each ELL is a unique individual with their own language needs, which is why dual language assessment is so crucial for this group of students. It is hoped that this study provides a seed of evidence of how important native language assessments are for ELLs with limited English proficiency, particularly newcomers with background educational experiences in their native language. It also outlines improved assessment practices for ELLs, whether they are in English-only or bilingual educational settings.

ELLs as a group are more likely to struggle economically. They are less likely to graduate high school or enroll in higher education institutions. They are, more often than any other demographic, underestimated by the assessment tools used in public schools in

the U.S. However, they deserve assessments that accurately and holistically capture the scope of their full language knowledge and more opportunities to show their competencies. In order to fully address the language achievement gap between ELLs and their monolingual counterparts, high quality assessments are needed to measure bilingual students' language and literacy skills. The politicization of speaking Spanish in the United States has influenced language policies in public schools. Spanish and English do not share equal prestige in public schools in the U.S., and speaking a native language other than English has long been seen as a barrier to academic achievement (Escamilla, 2002; Ruiz, 1988). Many states, including Tennessee, have legislated language use in the classroom to install English as the only language through which instruction can be delivered. Other states with higher ELL populations, such as Arizona and Colorado, have passed legislation to limit bilingual education. These policy decisions were not made based on empirical evidence of what language teaching practices best support ELLs. They are more an indicator of anti-immigrant sentiment, even though most ELLs are born within the U.S. Political attitudes like these influence policy decisions at the district, school, and classroom level as well, and often they stand in the way of policies and practices that would benefit English acquisition for ELLs.

Rejecting the mindset that ELLs are working from a linguistic deficit is a core part of addressing their educational needs. ELLs' native language skills and knowledge should be seen as an asset and a rich source of potential language learning within the classroom. Effective ELL instruction requires educators to leverage what students already know rather than seeking to address a perceived deficit. As Domínguez and Gutiérrez (2019) have observed, ELLs deserve access to an instruction that recognizes them as

individuals and celebrates their contributions to the community, not one that separates them out or forces them to assimilate. Given that ELLs have a unique set of language needs, these needs require language education policies and practices that reflect that reality and are more sensitive to their differences (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Adopting an additive mindset is important because it creates a bridge to best language learning practices for ELLs.

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APPENDIX A: SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER

Wolftever Creek Elementary School

5080 Ooltewah-Ringgold Road (423) 933-3671 (office)
Ooltewah, TN 37363 (423) 238-6502 (fax)

Where Children are Empowered to Succeed

Ms. Gail Huffstutler
Principal

Ms. Visa Williams
Assistant Principal

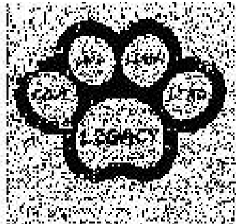
Ms. Tammy Alger
School Secretary

Ms. Yesmin Toolo
Clerical Assistant

Ms. Vanessa Hughes
Bookkeeper

Ms. Mallary Netterville
Parent Volunteer
Coordinator

Find us on FaceBook:
Wolftever Creek
Elementary



March 22, 2021

To whom it may concern:

Ms. Kari Yount has my permission to complete the research for her doctoral dissertation in our school the week of March 29th-April 1st. She has agreed to notify parents to gain their permission for their children to participate, as well.

Thank you,

Gail Huffstutler

Gail Huffstutler

APPENDIX B: IRB EXPEDITED APPROVAL

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Friday, May 07, 2021

Principal Investigator **Karilena Yount** (Student)
Faculty Advisor Mohammed Albakry
Co-Investigators NONE
Investigator Email(s) *ksw4d@mtmail.mtsu.edu; mohammed.albakry@mtsu.edu*
Department English

Protocol Title ***Here is a Working Title for my Dissertation***
Protocol ID **20-2128**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior.* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated below:

IRB Action	**APPROVED for ONE YEAR**		
Date of Expiration	3/31/2022	Date of Approval	3/20/20
Sample Size	100 (ONE HUNDRED)		
Participant Pool	Target Population: Primary Classification: **Healthy Minors (age 7-12)** Specific Classification: **Elementary school students**		
Exceptions	1. Contact information is permitted to coordinate the study. 2. Handwriting samples allowed with restriction (refer below).		
Restrictions	**1. Mandatory SIGNED Parental Consent and ACTIVE child assent.** **2. Identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., must be used for research purposes as described in the protocol. The data must be destroyed or deidentified once the date processing is complete.** **3. Mandatory Final report (refer last page).**		
Approved Templates	MTSU templates: Parental consent, child assent, and recruitment email Non-MTSU Templates: Verbal recruitment script		
Comments	Refer to Post-Approval Actions for important COVID-19 Actions		