



A description of ASL features in writing[☆]



Kimberly A. Wolbers^{a,*}, Shannon C. Graham^b, Hannah M. Dostal^c, Lisa M. Bowers^d

^a University of Tennessee, Department of Theory & Practice in Teacher Education, A214 Bailey Education Complex, 1122 Volunteer Blvd, Knoxville, TN 37996-3442, USA

^b Washington School for the Deaf, 611 Grand Blvd, Vancouver, WA 98661, USA

^c University of Connecticut, 249 Glenbrook Rd., Unit 3033, Storrs, CT 06269, USA

^d University of Arkansas, 606 N. Razorback Road, Office #266, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Six categories of language transfer were identified in deaf adolescent writing.
- The most prevalent category was the use of lexical ASL features.
- The most common syntactical category was adjectives.
- Both lexical and syntactical ASL features responded similarly to instruction.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 June 2014

Received in revised form

9 October 2014

Accepted 11 November 2014

Available online 26 November 2014

Keywords:

Language transfer

Cross-linguistic influence

Writing

Deaf

ASL

Bilingual

ABSTRACT

Similar to second language students who embed features of their primary languages in the writing of their second languages, deaf and hard of hearing (d/hh) writers utilize features of American Sign Language (ASL) in their writing of English. The purpose of this study is to identify categories of language transfer, provide the prevalence of these transfer tendencies in the writings of 29 d/hh adolescents and describe whether language features are equally or differently responsive to instruction. Findings indicate six categories of language transfer in order of prevalence: unique glossing & substitution, adjectives, plurality & adverbs, topicalization, and conjunctions. ASL features, of both lexical and syntactical nature, appear to respond similarly to instruction.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

1. A description of ASL features in writing

Second language (L2) students draw on their existing linguistic repertoires when attempting to convey meaning through written text. They use multiple strategies to make sense of morphological and syntactical structure variations, and while developing L2 language proficiency, they may embed L1 (primary language) features in L2 writing (Baker and Jones, 1998; Bhela,

1999; Hedgcock, 2012; Hinkel, 2002; Valdes, 2006). This phenomenon of incorporating grammatical features of one language into the other is known as language transfer (Paradis and Gene-see, 1996). The basis of this phenomenon suggests that L2 writers may use an L1 to generate or communicate ideas prior to or during production of text (Woodall, 2002). Developing a sophisticated understanding of a L2 generally diminishes the language transfer occurrences, suggesting that as writers gain competence in their L2 and build linguistic awareness, there are fewer features of L1 in their writing (Baker and Jones, 1998).

In cases where a child is exposed to two languages before reaching fluency in one, the child is engaged in bilingual language acquisition whereby L1 and L2 are developing simultaneously at similar or dissimilar rates. For various reasons, the child may apply knowledge of one language to his/her productions in the other and vice versa (Hulk and Miller, 2000), leading to incidents of blending or cross-linguistic influence.

[☆] Author's note: Preliminary findings of this research were presented at the meeting of the Association of College Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACE-D/HH), Jacksonville, FL.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 865 974 2375.

E-mail addresses: kwolbers@utk.edu (K.A. Wolbers), scgraham08@gmail.com (S.C. Graham), hannah.dostal@uconn.edu (H.M. Dostal), Lmbowers@uark.edu (L.M. Bowers).

The occurrence of cross-linguistic influence, or language transfer as used in this paper, has been known to occur among deaf and hard of hearing (d/hh) writers, whereby structures of American Sign Language (ASL) are utilized in writing (Menéndez, 2010; Niederberger, 2008; Wolbers, 2010; Wolbers and Dostal, 2010). We can examine this phenomenon from a Universal Grammar perspective, where there is a finite set of parameters, or specific grammar rules, that differentiate languages syntactically (Pinker, 1995). Although many of the grammatical errors that d/hh children make are similar to those of hearing children during acquisition (which may reflect similar parameters across languages), ASL and English do have dissimilar parameters such as the position of WH questions (e.g., English: Where is the boy? ASL: BOY WHERE? or WHERE BOY WHERE?). Use of ASL during writing of English can happen, for example, if the student knows the ASL parameter setting but does not know the English one, and then he applies his ASL linguistic knowledge (Lillo-Martin, 1997). Errors of this nature would fall away (and parameters reset) once students are provided with further linguistic input or evidence (Lillo-Martin, 1993, 1997). While an examination of errors may allow us to identify language transfer when ASL and English have different parameter settings, it would not, however, lend itself to identifying the application of ASL linguistic knowledge when language parameters are similar (e.g., use of WH questions in the initial position).

The transfer of ASL to English in writing provides for a unique area of research and discussion since the manual and visual nature of ASL and the absence of a written form differentiates it from spoken languages. The purpose of this paper is three-fold: (1) to describe the types of ASL grammatical features that appear in the English writings of d/hh adolescents, (2) to provide the prevalence of language transfer types or categories, and (3) to describe whether categories (e.g., syntactically and morphologically related categories) are equally or differently responsive to instruction, specifically Strategic and Interactive Writing Instruction (SIWI).

1.1. ASL in English text

American Sign Language (ASL) constitutes a grammatically complex system and includes its own elements of language such as phonology, morphology and syntax (Stokoe, 1960). For example, the visual nature of ASL allows for the expression of more than one concept simultaneously or the use of space around the body to show relationships between objects. These features among others differentiate ASL in structure from English. As such, ASL and English are entirely different languages and "...it would be highly unusual for an ASL sentence ever to have exactly the same grammatical structure as an English sentence" (Liddell, 2003, p. 2). This makes it possible to identify some specific ASL features in English writing.

An example of ASL features existing in English text comes from the Deaf Way II Anthology (Vol II) (Stremlau, 2002), which is a literary collection of works by d/hh writers. This collection includes a poem, entitled "Salt in the Basement: An American Sign Language Reverie in English", written by Willy Conley. The author of this poem, who is fluent in ASL and English, purposefully transliterated ASL features into text. A few excerpts are provided for clarification.

me little, almost high wash–wash machine
down basement, me have blue car
drive drive round round

happen summer
me inside blue car
drive round round
basement

me drive every corner
drive drive drive

then BOOM! Me crash (Conley, 2002, p. 184)

In this brief excerpt, the author includes several phrases that have specific ASL features. "Wash–wash machine" is an example of substitution for "washing machine", to which the sign for "wash" is repeated two, maybe three times, depending on the context. "Drive drive round round" would likely be signed using classifiers to describe the object, location and movement of the car. Based on one perspective, this statement could be translated to English as, "Driving in a circular motion". "Happen summer" in the second section is an example of how "happen" functions as a conjunction in ASL (Fischer and Lillo-Martin, 1990). The poem provides an example of how ASL grammatical features have been used in written English to illustrate visual concepts in text.

More examples of purposeful use of ASL features in English writing come from Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs). Bishop and Hicks (2005) examined the written email conversations between CODAs who used a purposeful blending of ASL and English, referred to as "CODA-talk" (p.196). The analysis identified ASL characteristics in their writing and visual descriptions of ASL signs. They found, for example, that 146 of the 275 lines used unique ASL glossing, a notation method to translate individual signs into text (Valli et al., 2011). One example of ASL gloss in Bishop and Hicks (2005) is "not my taste". The English translation could be "not my preference". There were also English features that were commonly dropped. Of the 275 lines analyzed, the most common features were dropped subjects (69) (e.g., "Hope lots of room on plane"), dropped copulas (62) (e.g., "That nice"), and dropped determiners (59) (e.g., "That point"). Dropped subjects in English could be explained because the "subject is understood through context" (Bishop and Hicks, 2005, p. 205). While not as frequent, objects were also dropped, which may reflect aspects of ASL whereby persons indicate the space where objects were previously placed through pointing or directing verbs (Liddell, 2003). Additionally, elements of visual representations in ASL such as space, facial expression, and body language may not be literally translated into English and result in these drops. While the above examples come from purposeful adult writing rather than unintentional instances of language transfer, they do provide a beginning illustration of how ASL features may present in English writing.

1.2. Trends among developing d/hh writers

It is possible that ASL transfer may contribute in part to common writing trends among developing d/hh writers. Some trends identified in the literature involve text that is typically shorter, less complex, and sentences that are comprised of repetitions of basic grammatical patterns (Marschark et al., 2002, 1994; Mayer, 2010; Singleton et al., 2004; Spencer et al., 2003). New topics are introduced without producing fully developed ideas, and content-oriented vocabulary is employed over functional words (Singleton et al., 2004; Wilbur, 2000). English grammatical features containing little semantic value are particularly difficult for d/hh persons who are unable to acquire them acoustically (Fabbretti et al., 1998). And, additional words are added out of context, necessary words are not considered, and there are substitutions of text or phrases (Paul, 1998). Writing characteristics among d/hh such as simplified sentences, grammatical errors or non-standard usages have persisted over time (Mayer, 2010).

Persons draw on their linguistic repertoires to convey meaning through written text, and d/hh students vary considerably in their linguistic knowledge of ASL and English. While approximately 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents and are exposed to spoken English as their first language (Mitchell and Karchmer, 2004), many do not have the auditory capabilities to fully access that language for development. Lengthier written texts, to some

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1100470>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1100470>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)