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## **English Vocabulary Acquisition of Bilingual Learners at the Primary and Secondary Levels**

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports research findings of English vocabulary acquisition of bilingual learners at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 at Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University. The purpose was to find out the extent to which learners at these levels have acquired English vocabulary to communicate their ideas about themselves and their school life. The subjects were 34 Primary 6 students and 18 Secondary 3 students. All subjects were individually interviewed by two bilingual researchers of Thai and English: one Thai and one American. A set of ten questions was used in a 15-minute interview in English to secure lexical data or words from each subject. Vocabulary acquisition was assessed via communication skills at five levels: 1) Full control, 2) Functional control, 3) Moderate control, 4) Sufficient control, and 5) Marginal control. All interviews were recorded with consent of the subjects. During each interview, two more bilingual researchers of Thai and English were present to collect spontaneous speech data on words used by each subject. The obtained data were

analyzed in frequency and percentage. The major research findings indicate that those subjects at the level of Primary 6 performed at five levels with a majority at level 2. The subjects in secondary 3 performed at three levels (1-3) with a majority at levels 1 and 2; there was none at level 4 or 5. The subjects at the level of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 show similar lexical features at specific levels with some variation in each, depending on the meanings individual subjects would like to convey in responding to the interviewers. It was noted that the subjects with three years' exposure to language immersion performed dominantly at level 2 and those with less exposure in years performed at levels 3 and 4.

**Keywords:** vocabulary acquisition, lexis, English communication skill levels, bilingual learners

### **Rationale of the Study**

The study has its rationale in the prime importance of language education that enables learners to communicate in the mother tongue and the second language or in this study, English. Such importance is prescribed in the language curriculum in Basic Education of the Ministry of Education, Thailand. Language education that aims to develop effective communication skills of learners has prompted quite a large number of Thai schools at the primary and secondary level to offer an English Program in the following major subject strands: mathematics, science, social studies and English. Some other schools that have highly qualified teachers who are also native speakers of English have opted for a bilingual program that requires partial or full immersion.

It should be noted that a full immersion, though difficult in staffing qualified teachers for its operations, yields good results in language performance via natural language acquisition. This is because a target second language is naturally acquired by learners through interactions rather than by direct instruction. In interactions,

bilingual learners gradually acquire vocabulary for the various language functions. This aspect of acquisition deserves serious attention from researchers in the field of bilingual education. The strengths or limitations in learners' vocabulary acquisition prior to their structural language development should be identified early for remedy or enhancement as needed in a particular school context. This paper does justify that. It focusses learners' vocabulary acquisition at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 at Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS).

### **Background of the study**

The background of this study deals with a general perspective of Thailand language education, a brief profile of Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS), followed by a literature review of related areas.

#### ***General Overview of Language Education in Thailand***

Bilingual Education is of prime importance to academic and intellectual development of learners. Its significance has been well recognized as a major part of Thailand's Education Reform in rendering learners competent in the mother tongue as well as English which is a language of wider communication in business, science and technology (Office of National Education Commission 2009, 2011). As a result, a number of English Programs known as EPs, as part of the Ministry of Education Curriculum on a medium scale, and bilingual schools on a relatively small scale have been on the rise in the last decade in the country. The main purpose is to support Thai students to become competent in English communication skills in response to the far-from-satisfactory O-Net scores in English on the national test. It should be noted that in 2011, the O-Net English scores of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 at the national level were 38.37 (SD 17.77) and 30.09 (SD 10.79), respectively. Two years later in 2013, the English O-Net national scores still did not improve: Primary 6 at 33.82 (SD 15.20), and Secondary 3 at 30.05 (SD 10.59) (Office of National Assessment, 2011-2013).

It is obvious that evidence of relevancy and success of bilingual school operations definitely relies on English language performance of students who have gone through their language acquisition process for a number of years (Pholsward, 2006a, 2006b). Urgency for language assessment at specific levels has been apparent in quite a few local studies (Sukket 2007, Panti 2007, Kittitharawat 2008). It is important for language practitioners to assess language mastery of students after a period of three years' language exposure, especially at specific levels: Primary 3/6 and Secondary 3/6. This is to ensure that students' language performance be at the target level of functional competency and to enable the school to remedy language limitations of those learners identified as in need of a remedial language program.

In this perspective, the researchers have felt an acute need to assess student language performance in terms of words used in natural communication skills being acquired after a period of three years, i.e., Primary 3-6 and Secondary 1-3. This is to secure information on the linguistic foundation at the lexical or word level which is naturally acquired and gradually developed in strings into language structures.

### ***A Profile of Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University***

Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University is a co-ed school of Kindergarten 1- Grade 12, with an enrolment of over 900 students. Its typical class size is 15-25 students. One of its academic policies is to conduct educational research in bilingual education. This type of research serves as a tool to investigate whether learners can attain target English language skills, academic achievements in mathematics, and bilingual-bicultural mastery. The School has been assisted by the Faculty of Education Rangsit University in conducting research in bilingual education in the following areas: 1) Language acquisition of Kindergarten students in 2006, 2) English Language Proficiency of Secondary 3 students in 2006, 3) Assessment of Analytical Thinking Skills via Problem-Solving Tasks in Mathematics in 2006-2007, 4) A Study of Thai Writing Skills of Primary 1- Secondary 3

Students in 2008-2010, followed by 5) Teaching Methods Used by Social Studies Teachers in 2011 (Pholsward 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009, Pholsward et al. 2010, 2011]. In 2012-2013, research focused on a study on English Communication skills of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 students. The purpose was to assess their level of language mastery after three years. Strengths and limitations in students' language performance were identified.

## **Literature Review**

The study reports selected literature as background of the study in four areas: 1) Significance of ICT literacy and communication skills, 2) Significance of bilingual education, 3) Language acquisition, and 4) Language performance assessment.

### ***Significance of ICT Literacy and Communication Skills***

Documents from the Ministry of Education Thailand and Office of National Education Commission underlined the significance of ICT and communication skills in English as tools to acquire new knowledge via information search and transfer to support continuous and lifelong learning (Ministry of Education 2008, Office of National Education Commission 2009, 2011). All Thai schools at the primary and secondary level were directed to follow Ministry guidelines with respect to ICT and English communication skills curricula.

### ***Significance of Bilingual Education***

Bilingual education has undoubtedly become a focus of educational practices in Thailand as seen in the increasing number of bilingual schools in different parts of the country. There has been some concern for the quality of educational practices in these schools which are now monitored by the Office of Educational Quality Assurance. Most bilingual schools tend to identify language proportion of Thai and English as a matter of preference; some schools repeat instruction in Thai for the subjects taught in English while others like Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University or SBS advocate to full immersion. Satit

Bilingual School of Rangsit University is a good example of bilingual education practices in Thailand; the school has adopted the curriculum of the Thai Ministry of Education and modified it with major components of international curricula [Ourairat 2011]. Besides concern for curriculum development and implementation, quite a few earlier researchers paid attention to the importance of culture in the language for natural performance of learners (Levine and Adelman 1993, Ziesing 2001, Tan 2006).

### ***Language Acquisition***

There have been many studies in second language acquisition especially in the theoretical aspects and practices of second language acquisition (Babakzai 2006, Ellis 2008), and the use of language activities and model instruction to support development of speaking skills (Sangmuang 2002, Boonsue 2003, and Boonsompan 2008). Other research issues in second language acquisition deal with the age factor (Fougere 2011), students' achievements and second language acquisition proficiency (Huda 1998, Dean 2006), vocabulary acquisition (Sukket 2007, Asbeck 2008, Ellis 2008), to name but a few. As seen in these studies, language acquisition has been considered a current issue of attention for quite a few researchers in language education.

In particular, the literature in 2013-2015 regarding language acquisition deals with vocabulary acquisition and its meaning or semantic features. Nine exemplified studies reflect such a trend. Schwartz (2013) reported that later immersion in L 2 and continuing development of L 1 did not result in retardation in language development of preschool bilingual children in L 2. The use of phrasal verbs was examined by Bronshteyn and Gustafson (2015); the researchers emphasized L 2 learners' understanding of the phrasal meaning and structure. As for more proficient learners, Booth (2014) found out that they tend to display less repetition of words and greater lexical diversity as shown in their writing tasks. Braun, Galts, and Kabak (2014) studied lexical encoding of L2 tones and found out that speakers of tonal languages are more sensitive to prosodic features of L 2 than

those speakers of word-stress languages. The issue of cross-linguistic transfer was investigated by Leider, Proctor, Silverman, and Harring (2013) regarding the effects of bi-literacy on vocabulary depth, Spanish oral language, and cross-linguistic transfer of elementary bilingual students.

Acquisition of receptive and expressive vocabulary was studied by Gross, Buac, and Kaushanskaya (2014). The researchers reported acquisition of receptive and expressive vocabulary as measured by conceptual scoring. Conceptual scoring does not yield difference in receptive vocabulary, but reveal difference in expressive vocabulary among bilingual learners. As for lexical error analysis, Kang and Chang (2014) examined lexical errors in Korean produced by beginner-intermediate American college students as resulting from the speakers' semantic misinterpretation. Another research into a contrastive analysis in the meaning of the linguistic units in the contemporary German and Macedonian language was conducted by Ivanovska, Daskalovsky, and Celik, (2012). The researchers reported differences in semantic features of lexical items in both languages. Semantic functions were later investigated by Hamdan (2015) who examined Saudi university students in handling syntactic functions better than semantic functions of deictic expressions [this, that, here, there] in their writing on a known place.

### ***Language Performance Assessment***

Bilingual Schools need to identify effective ways to assess students' language performance for the reason that a higher degree of language mastery can occur after a specific period of language exposure or immersion. There have been some studies that deal with the use of language activities to develop and assess vocabulary knowledge and speaking ability (Sukket 2007, Panti 2007, Kittitharawat 2008). As for international literature, the focus was on assessment of knowledge and skills (Roberts 2008), students' language achievements (Evans 2009), language performance with the approach of second language acquisition



(Yanyan 2009), to name but the recent ones. Assessing learners' language performance effectively and authentically has been a frequent challenge for many researchers.

### **Research Objectives**

The researchers used Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS) as a case to investigate language acquisition with an emphasis on vocabulary or lexical repertoire of learners at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 with consent of their parents.

The study had two objectives:

1. To examine vocabulary acquisition by means of assessing English communication skills of Thai bilingual students at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3.
2. To identify strengths or limitations in the learners' use of lexis or words as shown in the assessment of language communication skills.

### **Research Significance**

It was expected that the obtained data on vocabulary acquisition via communication skills assessment of students at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 would shed light on specific language performance levels with specific lexical features. These identified features could in turn reflect both strengths and limitations of language communication skills shown in specific lexical domains. Such information could be used to develop a remedial program for lexical repair. It could also be used to plan ways to accelerate vocabulary acquisition for stronger or more proficient students. In addition, the assessment methodology used in the study could serve as a model for other bilingual schools which wish to assess their students' vocabulary acquisition strengths and weaknesses.

### **Research Methodology**

This section describes the subjects and the research instruments used in the study.

### ***Subjects***

The subjects were from Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University, who, participated on a voluntary basis (with consent from their parents or guardians). The number of Primary 6 subjects was 34. There were 18 Secondary 3 subjects. All subjects were assumed to have had at least three years' immersion or exposure to the English language in SBS. However, it was found in the data collection stage that five students (P3=4; S3=1) had less than three years at SBS. Given such a circumstance, it was expected that the number of years of language exposure could have an impact on the subjects' language performance.

### ***Research Instruments***

Two tools were constructed by the researchers and validated for content relevancy by four language specialists. There was a group discussion on the try-out of Instrument 1 whether the question items can elicit target answers as intended. Instrument 2 criteria were also examined in detail to ensure accuracy of interpretation. These two instruments were tried out in interview simulations for clear-cut understanding among four evaluators before the actual data collection.

These tools are to assess learners' English communication skills with specific criteria as follows:

### ***Communication Skills Assessment***

**Instrument 1:** A List of Guiding Questions for a 15-minute oral interview

- Would you like to introduce yourself briefly?
- How did you or your parents find about the school?
- What is the best part of the school you enjoy most?
- What is the part of the school you would like to suggest improvement?
- What about your favorite subjects?
- What about some interesting school activities?
- What about your teachers?
- What about your friends/ your good friends?
- What is your plan for the future?
- Is there any question you would like to ask us?

**Instrument 2:** Assessment Criteria of English Communication Skills

A fifteen-minute timeslot was allocated for each subject interview with two interviewers--one bilingual Thai speaker and one native speaker of English. Each subject's language performance was holistically evaluated with respect to the following criteria: interviewee's language performance at the lexical, syntactical, and discoursal, together with interactions, and strategic competence. A five-point scale was used with the following meanings: 1 = Proficient, 2 = Highly functional, 3 = Functional, 4 = Sufficient, and 5 = Marginal. In addition, two observer-researchers--two bilingual Thai speakers--were present at the interviews to observe interactions and collect spontaneous speech data in five areas: 1) lexis, 2) syntax, 3) discourse, 4) interactions, and 5) strategic competence or detectable communicative strategies.

It should be noted that the learners' communication skills levels were holistically assessed in the first place to make a lexical data analysis at specific communication skills levels possible. Linguistic data in all five domains were obtained. This paper however reports only the analyzed lexical data to reveal the extent to which individual learners have acquired vocabulary in communicating about themselves and their school life.

***Specifications of Criteria*****Lexical Use**

- Level 1 Full control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 2 Functional control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 3 Moderate control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of vocabulary
- Level 5 Marginal control of the use of vocabulary

**Syntactical Use**

- Level 1 Full control of the use of structures
- Level 2 Functional control of the use of structures
- Level 3 Moderate control of the use of structures

Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of structures

Level 5 Marginal control of the use of structures

#### Discoursal Use

Level 1 Full control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

Level 2 Functional control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

Level 3 Moderate control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

Level 4 Sufficient control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

Level 5 Marginal control of the use of oral discourse (relevance and appropriateness of conversational turns)

#### Interactions

Level 1 Fully appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

Level 2 Functionally appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

Level 3 Moderately appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

Level 4 Sufficiently appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

Level 5 Marginally appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions

#### Strategic competence

Level 1 Fully competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

Level 2 Functionally competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

Level 3 Moderately competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

Level 4 Sufficiently competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

Level 5 Marginally competent in the use of verbal and nonverbal strategies

All these criteria were designed to guide bilingual interviewers to assess holistically English communication skills of the subjects by taking into consideration classified language

features of lexis, syntax and discourse as well as verbal/ non-verbal interactions/strategies.

### **Data collection**

Interviews of 34 Primary 6 subjects were completed in March 2013; interviews of Secondary 3 subjects were completed in August of the same year. It was noted that access to Secondary 3 subjects was somewhat difficult because almost all were engaged in seeking admission to a new secondary school or were participating in extra study programs after the second semester--typically in the period of March to May. With assistance of one staff member at SBS who made contact with parents asking for their cooperation, the researchers were able to interview 18 students at the Secondary 3 level in August. Such a delay in Secondary 3 data collection resulted in one research assistant not being able to take part in data collection due to unexpected illness.

Data collection procedures consisted of a fifteen-minute interview with each subject. All interviews were recorded with consent of the subjects and transcribed later by a research assistant. Transcribed data were meant to countercheck accuracy of spontaneous speech products collected by the two observer-researchers.

### **Data Analysis**

The obtained data were language performance or communication skill levels as assessed by two interviewers and supplemented by the two bilingual observer-researchers. These data were analyzed with respect to frequency and five levels of proficiency: 1 = Proficient, 2 = Highly functional, 3 = Functional, 4 = Sufficient, and 5 = Marginal.

The results with respect to the five communication skill levels are reported in this paper.

## Results of the Study

This section reports on the learners' years of language exposure, and their communication skill levels and lexical features.

### Years of Language Exposure

It was found that communication skill levels were related to the years of language exposure for the subjects both at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 as follows:

- The subjects with 3 or more years at SBS performed at the highly functional level (level 2) to Proficient level (level 1) in their communication skills. There were no limitations in listening skills or speech production.
- The subjects with 1-2 years at SBS performed at the functional level (level 3) to the sufficient/ marginal level (level 4/ 5). The subjects appeared to possess functional listening skills though with some limitations in speech production. It should be noted that one P 6 subject at the marginal level showed great difficulty in communicating with the interviewers.

### Communication Skill Levels

Communication skill levels of the primary 6 and secondary 3 subjects are shown in tables 1-4.

**Table 1:** Communication Skill Levels of Primary 6 Students (N=34)

Level 1: Proficient= 4 of 34 (11.77%)
Level 2: Highly functional= 16 of 34 (47.06%)
Level 3: Functional= 11 of 34 (29.41)
Level 4: Sufficient= 3 of 34 (8.82)
Level 5: Marginal= 1 of 34 (2.94)

**Table 2:** Levels of Communication Skills of Primary 6 Students (N=34)  
Established after Assessment with the Use of Instruments 1 and 2

Name	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Evaluator 3	Evaluator 4	SUM	Averaged	Established level
P 6 Level 1: 4 of 34= 11.77%							
Student 21	1	1	1	1	4	1	1
Student 9	1	2	1	1	5	1.25	1
Student 25	1	2	1	1	5	1.25	1
Student 31	1	3	1	2	7	1.75	1
P 6 Level 2: 16 of 34= 47.06%							
Student 11	2	2	2	2	8	2	2
Student 34	2	3	1	2	8	2	2
Student 20	2	-	2	2	6	2	2
Student 3	2	2	2	2	8	2	2
Student 24	2	3	2	2	9	2.25	2
Student 29	2	3	1	3	9	2.25	2
Student 35	2	3	1	3	9	2.25	2
Student 23	2	3	2	2	9	2.25	2
Student 26	2	-	2	3	7	2.33	2
Student 15	2	3	3	2	10	2.5	2
Student 33	2	4	2	2	10	2.5	2
Student 22	2	4	2	2	10	2.5	2
Student 19	2	4	3	2	11	2.75	2
Student 7	3	3	2	2	11	2.75	2
Student 30	2	3	3	3	11	2.75	2
Student 13	2	3	3	3	11	2.75	2
P 6 Level 3: 10 of 34= 29.41%							
Student 1	3	4	3	2	12	3	3
Student 32	2	4	3	3	12	3	3
Student 4	3	3	3	3	9	3	3
Student 8	3	3	3	3	12	3	3
Student 10	3	3	3	3	12	3	3
Student 2	3	4	3	3	13	3.25	3
Student 18	3	4	3	3	13	3.25	3
Student 12	4	4	3	3	14	3.5	3
Student 27	2	5	3	4	14	3.5	3
Student 17	4	5	3	3	15	3.75	3

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P 6 Level 4: 3 of 34= 8.82%

Student 6	5	4	4	4	17	4.25	4
Student 14	4	5	4	4	17	4.25	4
Student 16	4	5	4	4	17	4.25	4

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P 6 Level 5: 1 of 34= 2.94%

Student 5	5	5	5	5	20	5	5
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Evaluator 1: R-Principal Researcher

Evaluator 2: S-Assistant Researcher 1

Evaluator 3: D-Assistant Researcher 2

Evaluator 4: J-Assistant Researcher 3

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As seen in Tables 1 and 2, the Primary 6 subjects were dominantly at level 2 with respect to communication skills. It should be noted that evaluation among the four evaluators appeared dominantly consistent.

**Table 3:** Communication Skill Levels of Secondary 3 Students (N=18)

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Level 1: Proficient= 9 of 18 (50.00%)
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Level 2: Highly functional= 8 of 18 (44.44%)
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Level 3: Functional= 1 of 18 (5.56)
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Level 4: Sufficient= NIL
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Level 5: Marginal= NIL
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**Table 4:** Levels of Communication Skills of Secondary 3 Students (N=18) Established after Assessment with the Use of Instruments 1 and 2

Name	Evaluator 1	Evaluator 2	Evaluator 3	Evaluator 4	SUM	Averaged	Established level
Level 1: 9 of 18= 50%							
Student 11	1	-	1	1	3	1	1
Student 12	1	-	1	1	3	1	1
Student 2	1	-	1	1	3	1	1
Student 5	1	-	1	1	3	1	1
Student 14	1	-	1	1	3	1	1
Student 4	2	-	1	1	4	1.33	1
Student 1	1	-	2	2	5	1.67	1
Student 6	1	-	1	3	5	1.67	1
Student 16	2	-	1	2	5	1.67	1
Level 2: 8 of 18= 44.44%							
Student 8	1	-	2	3	6	2	2
Student 9	1	-	2	3	6	2	2
Student 7	2	-	2	3	7	2.33	2
Student 3	2	-	2	3	7	2.33	2
Student 13	2	-	3	2	7	2.33	2
Student 18	2	-	2	3	7	2.33	2
Student 15	2	-	3	3	8	2.67	2
Student 10	3	-	2	3	8	2.67	2
Level 3: 1 of 18= 5.56%							
Student 17	2	-	4	3	9	3	3
Evaluator 1: R-Principal Researcher							
Evaluator 2: S-Research Assistant 1							
Evaluator 3: D-Research Assistant 2							
Evaluator 4: J-Research Assistant 3							

As seen in Tables 3 and 4, the Secondary 3 subjects were at levels 1 and 2.

It should be noted that Evaluator 2 was absent from data collection; however, evaluation among the three evaluators appeared dominantly consistent, except students 8 and 9.

1. To examine vocabulary acquisition by means of assessing English communication skills of Thai bilingual students at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3.
2. To identify strengths or limitations in the learners' use of lexis or words as shown in the assessment of language communication skills.

### ***Lexical Features***

Words or lexical features in spontaneous speech data of individual subjects were examined with respect to frequency. These lexical items are of significance in that they appear in actual communication of Thai bilingual learners in the interview context. The obtained lexical items obviously reflect the learners' acquisition at the expressive or explicit level. It should be noted that ranking and level of lexical difficulty were not part of the lexical analysis in the study for the fact that the subjects in the study freely expressed their ideas or viewpoints in response to the interviewers' questions. The choice of lexical items was in fact determined by what the subjects would like to explain their viewpoints. In this regard, comparison of lexical items in spontaneous speech data in terms of ranking and level of difficulty was not carried out in this study.

The words in the subjects' spontaneous speech data are listed alphabetically in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5:** Lexical Items of Primary 6 Students at Five Levels of Communication Skills Established after Assessment with the Use of Instruments 1 and 2

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P 6 LEXIS Level 1 N= 4 of 34= 11.77%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

academic aunt	activities Autocad	advertisement	alien	America	Australia
baby broccoli	balloon	basketball	beautiful	bilingual	blame [2]
cabbage chemistry	Canberra Chinese	canteen clearly	cards coloring	cheerleading competition	
difficult	drawing				
education experiment [3]	electronic	energized explore	English	expat teacher	
favorite [2]	finish				
games	gymnastic				
harsh	helping				
information	Internet				
language	listen	Los Angeles			
math	mom				
nutrient					
onion					
parents primary	planets projects	phonics proud	possible punish	practice	presentation
questions					
remember					
scientists species	sharing speech	snacks stars	solar system studied	solid surface	sometimes
technology	translated	Thai			
understand [2]		universe			
vegetable	vegetarian	video games			

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P 6 Level 2: 16 of 34= 47.06%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

a bit	activities	activity [2]	ago [2]	algebra	alien
allergy	a little bit [2]	a lot [3]	already	always	am [7]
America	angry [2]	anymore	April area	areas	Art [2]
asked	assignment	astronomer	astronomy [2]		Australia
bad	badminton	ball	banana	basic	basketball [5]
battery	boat	Bangkok	Basic	beach	beautiful
because[6]	best	better	bicycle [2]	big [3]	bigger
birthday	black	book	break	brother [3]	buildings
butterfly					
call	came	candies	canteen [2]	card	cartoon
centimeters	chair ball	chemistry	chicken	China	Christmas
class [4]	circuit	classroom	classic	clean	cheer chemical
Chula [2]	close [2]	club [3]	come [3]	competition	competitor
country	cry	cube	curried rice		
dad	dance	day [3]	design	did	die
different	dirt	do [7]	doctor	dog	draw
duck	dust				
easy	easier	eight	eighty	electricity	eleven England
[2]	English [10]	enjoy [2]	every [3]	Everyday	experience
experiment [2]					
Facebook	family	fast	fat	favorite [5]	feel
festival	field	fifty	Finish [2]	first [3]	five
floor	football [7]	food [2]	four	free	friend [3]
friends [10]	full moon	fun [7]	fun fair [4]	funny [3]	future [3]
game [5]	games [2]	Grandma	general	get [2]	give go [5]
good [8]	grammar	grass	great	guardian	guitar [3]
Gungnum style		gymnastic			
happen	hard [2]	has	have [7]	Help [5]	here
high school	hip hop	history	hobby	holidays	home [3]
homework	homeroom	teacher [2]	host	hour	house [4]
how	hundred				
ICT	idea	interesting [2]	internet [2]	is [5]	
joke	jet ski				
kick [2]	kind [2]	Kindergarten [4]		know [4]	
lab	late	last	laugh	learn [5]	Learned
leave	lecture	left	lesson	library	like [10]
liquid	listen	live [3]	living	look [3]	long
loud [3]	love	lunch			
magnetic	make [3]	math [6]	mathematics	many [3]	may
mean	medicine	meter	minutes [2]	money	mom

monk	month	more	most	mother	move [3]	mum
music fair	myself [2]	much [3]	my [9]			
name [3]	Near [4]	need	nickname [5]	nine [6]		normal [2]
now [2]						
old [7]	one [3]	only	open	outside		oulele
paranoid	parent	parents [2]	Pass	Pathumthani	PE [2]	
people [6]	percent	phone [3]	photoshop	pictures [2]		place
plan	planet	play [10]	piano [2]	pool [2]		poster
pressure	problem	put				
questions						
racquet	rain	remember [3]	return	ride		rubic
run [2]						
said	salt	saw [2]	say [2]	scare		science [10]
scientists [2]	school [5]	scare	score	second [3]		September
seven [3]	shapes	sheep	shout	show [2]		since
sing-song	Singapore	sister	six sixty	skill		sky
small	snow	soccer	solar	system		social [4]
solid	some [2]	someone	something	sometimes [6]		song [2]
songs	speak [4]	sport [6]	sport day [2]	star		start
stay [2]	staying	strict [2]	students [2]	studied		study [7]
South Africa [2]	subject [5]	sure [3]	swimming [4]			
table [3]	tall [2]	teacher [14]	teach [5]	teaching		team
teams	tear	technology	ten	tennis		term
test [2]	Thai [8]	thing [4]	things	think [6]		thinking
thirteen	thirty	thirty-one	thirty-five	three		time [6]
to be	today	together	toilet	told [2]		took
torture	toy	trouble	Tuesday [2]	twelve		two
universities	university	use				
very [6]	video game	Vitamin C	volume			
wake up	want [5]	warm-up suit	water ski	week		weeks
weekend	well [2]	went	what [3]	what's		where
white	whole	work [2]	workplace	world [2]		
ya	yeah	year [6]	years [8]	young		your

---

P 6 Level 3: 10 of 34= 29.41%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

about [3]	activities	admin	again [2]	a little [older]	A lot
am [2]	animal	animals	animation	anything	art [2]
Ayutthaya					
ball [2]	Bangkok	basketball [2]	because [2]	book	build
building [2]					
can [2]	car	career	canteen	cartoon	chair ball [2]
change	children	circle	class [2]	classroom	clean
computer [3]		continue			
day	design	do [3]	doctor [3]	doing	don't
draw [2]	drive				
easy	eat	eleven	every [2]	everything	
fair	feel	fifteen	find	finish	five [2]
food [2]	friend [3]	forty	four	frog	fun [2]
game [3]	get	glasses	go [2]	gold	good [3]
grade	guitar [2]				
hand	have [4]	health	history	hobby	house
ICT [2]	Internet	is [2]			
king [2]	know [4]				
learn [2]	Learning	let [2]	like [8]	live	
make	math	medium	minutes	more	move
mum	music [2]	my [2]			
nickname [3]		nine			
old	older	open			
parents	party	PE	people	photo	photoshop
picture [2]	Play [9]	pool	pop	program	programming
rally	read	remember			
same	say	sell	seven	school [3]	shoot [2]
short					
science [5]	sister	six [4]	sixteen	skype	
sport [2]	sport day social [5]	some [2]	something [2]	sometimes [4]	song
stories	students	swimming			
talking	take [2]	teach [3]	teacher [7]	telephone	tell
ten [2]	Thai [4]	Thailand	that	things	think [2]
thirty-one	this [3]	three-forty-five	time	to be	twelve [2]
two					
want [3]	war	week	weeks	what [2]	work [2]
worm	would like				
yah	yeah	year	years [3]	yet	your

---

P 6 Level 4: 3 of 34= 8.82%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

all	area	a lot of			
Barcelona	basketball [2]				
card	chair ball	champion	Christmas	circle	
don't					
eleven	English	EP	everybody	exams	
favorite	five	football	friend		
games	go	Gocart	good		
have [2]	homework				
is [2]	Italy				
kind	know				
last	like [2]				
Malaysia	math	much	my [2]		
nickname	name [2]	nine			
old [2]	one [2]	other			
PE [2]	play	practice			
remember					
science	show	speak	sport	student	study
studying	Sunday	sure			
tall	teach	teacher [3]	telephone	tell	term
test	that	things	twelve		
very					
want	week				
year	years [2]				

---

P 6 Level 5: 1 of 34= 2.94%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

brown  
small  
tall

---

**Table 6:** Lexical Items of Secondary 3 Students at Five Levels of Communication Skills Established after Assessment with the Use of Instruments 1 and 2

S 3 LEXIS Level 1: N =9 of 18= 50%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

a bit	about [3]	after	air conditioning	a lot	also [2]
America	American	Apartment	architecture	are [2]	art [2]
ask	attend	Australia [2]			
bad	basketball [4]	Be [3]	beautiful	because [2]	before
better [2]	bilingual	board	brand	brother [2]	business [2]
call	cats	come [2]	Came	care	cars
chance	chat	check	chemistry	clean	computer
computer engineering		continue	cricket	curriculum	
dad [2]	difficult [2]	Doctor	dorm	dormitory	draw [2]
drawing					
Eat	engineer	economics	English [4]	explain	every [2]
fair [2]	father[2]	favorite	finish	first [2]	fixed
football [2]	four	friendly [2]	friends [5]	fun	funny
future					
game	games [2]	garment	give	go [2]	go to
going out	going to	good [3]	grade	guitar	gym
hang out	hard [2]	have [6]	have to	hobby	home
homeroom	Hong Kong	host			
ICT [2]	information	is [3]	interview		
Japan	Japanese	jokes			
keep					
LCD	learn	learning	left	like [7]	live [2]
look	love [2]	lunch			
make	makes	Mandarin	may	maybe	me
mom	mum	more	month	movies [3]	muscle
my [8]					
name [4]	near	net	now	nothing	
okay	old [2]	one [2]	online	our	own
parents [2]	PE	people	physics	place	play [5]
playing [2]	primary	pretty [2]	programming	project	projector
questions	quite [2]				
real	reason	resort	resorts	return	returned
right					
school [6]	science [1]	screen	seven	since	sixteen
shopping	should [2]	sister [2]	social	sometimes	special
specialist	speak	speaks	spell	spend	started [2]



stay [2]	students	study [3]	studied [3]	summer [2]	sure
the States					
talk	talking	talked [2]	talks	taught	teacher [6]
teachers [2]	teaching	tell [2]	ten	than	Thai [2]
that	their	them	they	this [2]	thought
time	today	tourism	track	travelling	
UK	uncle [2]	understand [2]		use	usually
want [2]	was	watch [3]	way	week	weekend
went	what	when	whether	with [3]	work
working	write	would	why		
years [3]	year [2]				

---

S 3 Level 2: N = 8 of 18= 44.44%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

about [3]	abroad	activities [2]	again	ago	a lot
are	art	around [2]	ask [3]	Ayuttaya	
back	badminton	basket	basketball [3]	because [2]	
better	biology [2]	book [2]	bottled	brother	brothers
building	buildings	bungalow	business [3]	buy	
called	came	cartoons	celcius	chemistry	class
club [2]	colder	come	come to [1]	computer [2]	container
cooking	costumes	court [2]			
dad	degree	dentist	detention	do [2]	dormitory
doctor					
eat	eight	engineer	England	English [6]	
enjoy	enjoyed	equal	exciting	explain	experiments [2]
family	father	field	fifteen	find	fine
fishing	Five	floor	foam	food [3]	football
forms	free [4]	Friday	Fridays	friend [4]	friends [5]
fun	funny [2]				
game [2]	get	give	go [2]	go out by	good [2]
grade	gym				
Halloween day	hang out	has	have [4]	have to [3]	heard
help [3]	here	history [2]	hobby	home [2]	homeroom
how					
ICT [2]	interview	is [5]			
Japanese					
know					
lab [2]	land	larger	learn [3]	like [4]	listen to
live [3]	London	long	love	lunch	

make [2]	math [2]	maybe	me [2]	Monday	month
more	more than	mum	mum's	music [2]	my [10]
name [5]	near	need	new [2]	nickname	now
old [6]	okay	one [2]	once	other [4]	outside
online					
parent	parents [2]	pass	physics	piano	place [2]
play [7]	please	PM	postcard	primary	problem
public					
read	reading	reimburse	Resort	return	rice
roller coaster					
Saturdays	say [2]	saw	sea	school [8]	singing
sister [2]	slip	snorkeling	so	some	sometimes
space	speak	spelled	Stonehenge	study [5]	studied
subjects [2]					
talk	talked	teacher [4]	teachers [2]	team	ten
Thai [4]	Thailand	think [2]	this	they [2]	time [6]
to be	together	too [2]	tractors	translator	turn
two					
uncle	understand [2]		university		
very [2]	visit				
want [3]	walk	watch	water	Wednesdays	well
	when	why	with [5]	wrong	
yourself	year [2]	years [6]			

---

S 3 Level 3: N = 1 of 18= 5.56%

Frequency in square brackets [ ]

American  
Barcelona  
champion  
English  
favorite      football  
good  
help  
is  
Job  
know  
little      like  
math      me      my  
play      performing arts  
sports  
teacher  
world

As seen in Tables 5-6, the subjects at the specific communication skill levels revealed some similarity in lexical items in their speech products. The subjects at Levels 1 and 2 had good control of lexis and used a variety of words to convey their intended meanings. It was noted that lexical features of the primary 6 subjects at level 2 appeared to generate a greater variety and the number of words recorded. This was simply because once the primary 6 subjects at level 1 had put their meaning across in responding to the interviewers' questions, they did not elaborate any further. On the contrary, the primary 6 subjects at level 2 often asked for clarification from the interviewers and they tended to be more talkative and produced more words than those at Level 1.

### ***Exemplified Contrastive Analysis of Conceptual Complexity of Lexical Items***

As for conceptual or semantic complexity of the lexical items, it was considered similar at specific communication skill levels. An exemplified contrastive analysis of lexical items at Level 1 was needed to illustrate conceptual or semantic complexity of words used in the subjects' speech products. It was emphasized that the use of a contrastive analysis of lexical items was to enable the researchers to perceive certain degrees of their conceptual or semantic complexity. The choice of lexical items or words in one's speech product is naturally determined by the meanings the speaker would like to convey as well as the functions intended with the use of specific words. As a result, it was difficult to find much repetition of lexical items used by two groups of speakers addressed or prompted by the same question. However, older speakers (Secondary 3) tended to use a greater variety of speech products.

Some examples of lexical items with a similar degree of conceptual complexity in the speech products of the primary 6 and secondary 3 subjects at Level 1 of Communication Skills are given in Table 7. It was noted that older speakers at Secondary 3

tended to generate a variety of lexical items in their speech products.

**Table 7:** Exemplified Contrastive Analysis of Conceptual Complexity of Lexical Items of Primary 6 and Secondary 3 Students at Level 1 of Communication Skills

---

P 6:	academic	advertisement
S 3:	apartment	architecture
P 6:	balloon	blame
S 3:	brand	business
P 6:	canteen	competition
S 3:	continue	curriculum
P 6:	difficult	drawing
S 3:	difficult	dormitory
P 6:	energized	experiment
S3:	engineer	explain
P 6:	favorite	finish
S3:	favorite	finish
P 6:	games	gymnastic
S 3:	games	garment
P 6:	harsh	helping
S 3:	host	hang out
P 6:	information	Internet
S 3:	information	interview
P 6:	NIL	
S 3:	Japanese	jokes
P 6:	NIL	
S 3:	keep	
P 6:	language	listen
S 3:	learning	left
P 6:	math	Mom
S 3:	Mandarin	Mom
P 6:	nutrient	
S 3:	nothing	

P 6:	onion	
S 3:	online	
P 6:	primary	projects
S 3:	primary	projects
P 6:	questions	
S 3:	questions	
P 6:	remember	
S 3:	reason	
P 6:	species	surface
S 3:	specialist	screen
P 6:	technology	translated
S 3:	tourism	taught
P 6:	understand	universe
S 3:	understand	usually
P 6:	NIL	
S 3:	video games	vegetable
P 6:	NIL	
S3:	weekend	whether
P 6:	NIL	
S 3:	year	years

---

### **Discussion of Major Findings**

The reported data show that older students at Secondary 3 tended to have a greater lexical variety than Primary 6. However, conceptual complexity was surprisingly similar.

It is interesting to note that vocabulary acquisition, to quote a few researchers, tends to focus on language input and opportunities in using the acquired words in actual communication (Sukket 2007, Asbeck 2008, Ellis 2008, Leider et al. 2013, Gross et al. 2014, Bronshteyn and Gustafson 2015). Moreover, one's vocabulary repertoire can be further developed or one's vocabulary acquisition can be enhanced by appropriate language activities as shown in the study by Boonsampan (2008) and Booth (2014). It is important for schools to examine student performance on given

communication tasks after a period of three years or six years, for example. The importance of assessing language and academic achievements has been emphasized by researchers like Wrenhall (2005), Roberts (2008), and Yanyan (2009).

This study has shown that the Primary 6 and Secondary 3 subjects have lexical limitations in their communication skill levels. Their lexical strengths are seen in the variety of words they generated in responding to the interviewers' questions; such a variety was confined by their identified communication skill levels as well. Primary 6 subjects at Level 2 generated more lexical items than those used by their peers at Level 1. Also as mentioned earlier, Primary 6 subjects at Level 2 required clarification from the interviewers. The subjects appeared willing to give examples to support their responses. As a result, their spontaneous speech products yielded a variety of words used in their communication tasks.

One point that should be underlined is that bilingual learners in an immersion program can easily absorb and use new words while interacting with their native English-speaking teachers. The significance of immersion is emphasized in the work of Dean (2006) and Schwartz (2013). In addition, it can provide opportunities for bilingual learners to learn the cultural features embedded in semantic concepts when applied to social interactions (Levine and Adelman 1993, Ziesing 2001, Tan 2006). As for semantic complexity of lexical items used by the primary 6 and secondary 3 subjects at Level 1 of Communication Skills, their choice of words was in fact determined by the meanings the speakers would like to convey. Such semantic complexity in terms of features and functions naturally appear in more proficient speakers' speech products (Ivanovska et al. 2012, Hamdan 2015).

## **Conclusion**

This paper reports vocabulary acquisition in the immersion context at Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University. As noted in the major findings on the lexical items found in the subjects' responses at the levels of Primary 6 and Secondary 3, it was

evident that their spontaneous speech products contained lexical variety and semantic complexity. The researchers touched upon the significance of interactions which naturally determines the quality and complexity of acquired words or lexical items. The importance of assessment at a target point in time also deserves attention from those practitioners in the field of bilingual education.

Thus, it is important for bilingual school academic staff to assess bilingual learners at certain stages, particularly to determine whether or not learners have acquired specific communication skill levels. It should be noted that the number of participating subjects, if too small, could present a limitation in representativeness of the obtained spontaneous speech data. More important, training of evaluators of communication skills should be carefully planned and executed to avoid misinterpretation of criteria that may occur in the evaluation tasks. As seen in this paper, a practical assessment and planned interview procedure can serve as a guideline for schools to check their students' actual speech products, or their use of language in real communication settings, rather than focusing on language proficiency conventionally measured in pencil-paper tests.

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## **Appendix**

### **Example of Transcribed Data of Secondary 3 at Level 1**

Secondary 3 Level 1 Name ... [I=Interviewer; S= Student]

- I: Name., I'm ...name ... this is ...name .... We're going to ask you some questions, so try to answer as much as you want. They are really easy questions. Just relax and tell us what you want to tell us. First of all can you just introduce yourself?
- S: My name is ..... Im 16 years old. I was born on ...October 1977. I study at Satit angsit School University. I'm in grade 10, Mathtayom 4. That's it. I can't say "S."
- I: Okay. Tell me more about SBS. How long have you gone there?
- S: 3 years. Grade 4
- I: What did you do before Grade 4?
- S: My brother finished grade 6 and my mother was looking for school so Satit School.
- I: How do you like it?
- S: Good
- I: Do you remember your primary teachers?
- S: Yes, teacher ...name... my Thai teacher.
- I: Is she still there?
- S: Yes, she still teach there
- I: What you like to do at school?
- S: Umm.....I don't know. Activities..... Nothing special. Drawing pictures. I like to draw. My drawing is kind of Japanese style. I learn to draw by myself. I draw quite good.
- I: How about subjects what subjects you like?
- S: I like English. The teacher is great. He's open mind. He's from Australia, teacher ...name.... He plays basketball.
- I: Tell me more about your English class. What you like about it?
- S: I like conversation not much work... He lets us watch movies, American movie.
- I: what do you do on your weekend?
- S: I don't really do anything on my weekend. Most just rest and sleep.

- I: Do you live around here? How do you come to school?
- S: I live in ... place.... My mum drive here.
- I: Can you tell us about your friends?
- S: My best friend is ...name...
- I: He's from SBS?
- S: Oh yes.
- I: He likes to draw as well.
- S: No, he doesn't like to draw.
- I: When you finish SBS. What do you like to do in the future?
- S: Be a doctor. Muscle specialist. I like to go to .. name ... University
- I: Do you have a good grade?
- S: Yes, 3.54
- I: Good job
- S: Thank you
- I: Would you like to ask us anything?
- S: Why you do this?

