

## The Development of Plural Expressions in a Malay-English Bilingual Child

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### Abstract

In a postcolonial country such as Malaysia, English plays an important role in governance, education and popular culture. With English now becoming the lingua franca of the globalised world, many Malaysian urban families use English to speak to their children at home, in conjunction with the Malay language or other ethnic languages. Recognising the important relationship between the two languages, this paper investigates early bilingual development of Malay and English focusing specifically on the development of plural marking in a child raised simultaneously in these typologically distant languages. These two languages express plurals differently: Malay through various forms of reduplication and English by morphological marking on nouns. But how does the child manage to learn, simultaneously, such divergent systems? In order to shed some light on this question, a bilingual child growing up in these two languages was audio- and video-recorded in each language over 6 months, that is from 3 years 4 months (3;4) to 3 years 10 months (3;10). Results suggest that though the child appeared to develop two distinct systems of plurality in Malay and English, the two developing systems also manifested

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considerable cross-linguistic influence in both directions. Implications for the study of world Englishes are discussed.

### **Keywords**

Malay, Malaysian English, Australian English, childhood bilingualism, plural development, reduplication

### **Introduction**

This paper investigates early bilingual development of Malay and English focusing specifically on the development of plural marking in a child raised simultaneously in two languages that are typologically distant. Understanding the development of this understudied linguistic constellation may contribute to understanding the growth of an important variety of the so-called “world Englishes,” that is the growth of Malaysian English (MalE) side by side with a native variety of Malay. According to Tadmor, Malay, an Austronesian language spoken in Southeast Asia with over 250 million speakers, is the most widely spoken language in the region (791). On the other hand, English is a world language (Brutt-Grieffler 107), given the number and spread of its speakers. An important factor contributing to the rise of English as a world language is the increase of the number of speakers of many emerging “nativised” varieties of English throughout the world (e.g. Indian English, Singapore English, Nigerian English and so forth). The characterisation of English as a world language, however, implies its existence being additional to other languages, thus creating a natural environment for bilingualism/multilingualism (Brutt-Grieffler 121). World Englishes (WE) is now recognised as a field of scientific enquiry, one that investigates, among others, the development of English as a world language. However, studies on the acquisition of the varieties of WE are still scarce (Mukherjee and Hundt 1-5; Sridhar and Sridhar 3-14). Following the influential Three Circles model for the spread of English proposed by Kachru (3), the study of the acquisition of WE in many countries outside the Inner Circle is usually regarded as an area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). One drawback to this approach is that it tends to focus on individual bilingualism *after* the first language is in place whereas, in fact, in many WE contexts we are dealing with a range of bilingual speakers, many of them from birth. This, therefore, creates a natural overlap in the study of bilingualism. In this regard, Schneider believes that WE should account for the strong proportion of first language (L1) English speakers in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, among others (“Developmental patterns of English” 382). In addition, Schneider challenges the concept of English “native speakers”, which traditionally only applies to English speakers from dominant English-language nations such as the UK, the USA or Australia. Yet, children who grow up speaking English as their L1, for instance in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and other countries, are also, arguably,

“native speakers” of English, alongside one of the local languages. Plainly, this is a case of bilingual first language acquisition or BFLA (Genesee and Nicoladis 324-30). Schneider suggests that MalE is in Phase Three of Dynamic Model i.e., at the stage of “Nativization” of the Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes, where there is a lot of variation due to phonological and structural transfer from Malay and other ethnic languages (*Postcolonial English Varieties* 144-53). In fact, in Malaysia, English is becoming the first home language of a growing number of families, particularly those in the urban areas (Hashim 464). These children’s language acquisition and development should be investigated and evaluated on their own merit (Grosjean 163) which should include the circumstances surrounding the bilingual/multilingual environment the speakers are in (Romaine, “Bilingualism” 573-75). Empirical research on the development of English and Malay in these bilingual children would benefit not only the field of BFLA, but also WE as it would inform scholars about the nature of the development of Malaysian English variety.

Research into language acquisition of young bilingual children provides the opportunities for studying how children develop two language systems simultaneously and what may be the interrelationship between the two systems within a single child. Studying bilingual children will yield valuable insight into the order of grammatical development between the different competing languages the children are exposed to (Slobin 181). In BFLA, research investigating dual language development has increased significantly over the past two decades, both in the number of scholars pursuing the subject and in terms of geographic diversity (De Houwer 13). This includes studying English in combination with Southeast Asian languages such as Cantonese (Yip and Matthews), Mandarin (Qi) and Japanese (Itani-Adams). However, BFLA literature on Malay-English is extremely limited.

The significance of this study is further underscored by the typological distance between Malay and English. From a morphological point of view, word stems in Malay tend to be relatively constant, and there is little grammatical inflection while English commonly uses inflection to mark tense, number and so on (Svalberg and Chuchu 32-33). The encoding of plurality in English and Malay, which will be explained further in the next section, well illustrates the typological distance between the two languages. Given such divergent ways of marking plurality in each language, this paper addresses the following questions:

- a) How does the bilingual child simultaneously develop plural expressions in English and Malay respectively?
- b) If cross-linguistic influence occurs in the child’s plural encoding development in English and Malay, what is its nature?

- c) How should the development of the English varieties the child is exposed to be described, given the findings?

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: a description of the structures of plurality in English and Malay will be provided in the next section, followed by a review of relevant BFLA literature. The method adopted for this study is explained next, which is then followed by results and discussion and finally, the conclusion.

### **Plurality in English and Malay**

English and Malay belong to different language families; English is an Indo-European language and Malay is an Austronesian language (Tadmor 791). Many languages grammaticise numerical concepts (Johnston 48-49) through singular-plural marking (e.g. a cat/several cats), quantifiers (e.g. some, many, all), classifiers and measure words (e.g. piece, bit, pound) (Barner et al. 10). However, languages vary in how they linguistically express the concept of “one versus more than one.” English and Malay, too, differ in the expression of plurality.

Plurality in English is commonly expressed by suffixing the morpheme *-s* for most countable nouns. Irregular suffixes expressing plurality include *-i*, *-ae* and *-a* (as in *cacti*, *formulae*, *phenomena*), as well as the suffix *-(r)en* that shows up only in *oxen*, *children* and *brethren* (Carstairs-McCarthy 34). By contrast, Malay designates plurality for countable nouns through the morphological structure of reduplication: *anak-anak* “a number of children”, is the plural form for *anak* “a child” and *buku-buku* “books” pluralises *buku* “a book” (Sew 23; Tadmor 799).

A further significant difference in the expression of plurals is in the construction of numeral classifiers. In English, high countability nouns occur in direct construction with numerals, for example, *one woman*, *three dogs*. Nouns with low countability, however, occur with an additional item, such as *one glass of water*, *two pounds of sand* and *three plumes of smoke* (Gil). Malay numeral classifiers, on the other hand, classify objects based on dimensionality, for example, a pen, a rigid one-dimensional object is paired with *batang*, as in “*satu (one) batang (numeral classifier) pen*” while flexible dimensional objects such as a necklace are paired with *utas*, as in “*satu (one) utas (numeral classifier) rantai (necklace)*” (Salehuddin and Winskel 291). The following table summarises critical differences in plural structures between English and Malay showing, among other things, the complexity of each of the systems the child has to learn simultaneously and eventually master.

Table 1: The competing systems of plural, singular and generic expressions\*

English	Malay
<p>1) The count-mass noun distinction is a grammatical feature of English. Mass nouns in English is classified with mensural classifiers and unitisers, e.g. <i>some cheese, two pounds of rice, a drop of water</i> (Sew 20-21). English also has an open class of words that are similar to classifiers, often rigid in their collocations, i.e. <i>a loaf of bread, a lump of cheese, a herd of cows, a school of fish</i>.</p>	<p>1) The count-mass distinction is ambiguous in Malay. Malay nouns lack the feature of quantity because a noun can be construed either as singular or plural (Sew 22). Malay is also a classifier language. Classifiers are used for countable nouns and uncountable nouns, e.g. <i>Tiga</i> “three” <i>ekor</i> “tail”(cl) <i>kucing</i> “cat”(three cats); <i>tiga</i> “three” <i>buku</i> “book”(cl) <i>roti</i> “bread” (three loaves of bread).</p>
<p>2) The regular English plural is morphologically marked on countable nouns by the inflectional suffix <i>-s</i>. This <i>-s</i> suffix has three allomorphs: [s] (e.g. <i>cats</i> or <i>lamps</i>), [z] (e.g. <i>dogs</i> or <i>days</i>), and [əz] (e.g. <i>horses</i> or <i>watches</i>) (Carstairs-McCarthy 22; Ettliger and Zapf 295).</p>	<p>2) Though Malay nouns may be interpreted as either singular or plural, reduplication encodes plurality in Malay. The reduplication for count nouns is commonly a simple N-N duplicate (e.g., <i>pelajar-pelajar</i> “students”, <i>buku-buku</i> “books” <i>anak-anak</i> “children”) (Sew 23; Tadmor 799).</p>
<p>3) There are some lexically determined irregular plural forms, e.g., <i>children, women</i>. Some nouns are also isomorphic, e.g., <i>sheep, fish, deer</i>.</p>	<p>3) There are lexically determined reduplications with the addition of the suffix <i>-an</i>. N-N+an designates the meaning of varieties, as in <i>buah</i> “fruit” to <i>buah-buahan</i> “fruits of all kinds” and <i>bunga</i> “flower” to <i>bunga-bunga</i> “various types of flowers”(Sew 24). Reduplication may also change some parts of the duplicate, e.g., <i>kuib</i> “cake” to <i>kuib-muib</i> “cakes”, <i>lauk</i> “a meal” to <i>lauk-pauk</i> “meals” and <i>gunung</i> “mountain” to <i>gunung-ganang</i> “mountains”(Kroeger 310)</p>
<p>4) Generic entities in English are expressed with plural <i>-s</i> if they are countable e.g. <i>I like apples</i>, but uncountable generic entities use the singular form e.g. <i>I like tea, I like coffee</i>. However, generics in English can also be expressed through definite singulars (e.g. <i>The tiger is a ferocious beast</i>) and indefinite singulars (e.g. <i>a tiger is a ferocious beast</i>) (Hollander et al. 883)</p>	<p>4) Genericity in Malay reflects “minimal marking tendency” (Sew 39). Thus, generic entities in Malay, whether countable or uncountable, are expressed with singular forms e.g., <i>Saya suka epal</i> “I like apples” <i>Air adalah sumber hidup</i> “Water is a source of life”.</p>

\* These lists are not meant to be exhaustive.

## **The Acquisition of Plurality in First Language Acquisition (FLA) and BFLA**

The morphological development of children acquiring English has been investigated and documented in numerous studies in the field of First Language Acquisition (FLA). Pioneering research by Berko-Gleason, Cazden, Brown, and de Villiers and de Villiers found that plural markers are among the first bound morphemes acquired by English L1 children. Typically, children learning English produce plural forms for highly frequent nouns, at around one year and six months (1;6) but do not produce them in all required contexts until the age of four to seven years. In a seminal experiment, Berko-Gleason presented her respondents, children ranging from four to seven year olds, with a single novel item which she named *mug* and asked the children to provide the plural form. However, she found that even early school-age children were not able to produce the regular plural consistently in all plural contexts (160-64).

As for Malay, an exhaustive literature search shows that studies in plural development on FLA children below the age of four have not been carried out to date. A recent study by Salehuddin and Winskel investigated the acquisition of Malay numeral classifiers, but the participants involved were six to nine-year-old children. This study found that the production of Malay numeral classifiers is a prolonged developmental process as even nine-year-old Malay L1 children still make errors in using numeral classifiers. Hence, there is limited information about Malay L1 early development.

Based on the FLA literature on the acquisition of plural expressions, the question arises whether plural marking development of bilingual children follows a similar timing to that exhibited by English-speaking children. In a study investigating morphological development of a Persian-English bilingual child, Keshavarz found that his bilingual participant produced the English plural suffix *-s* at age 1;11. In fact, the child's use of English plural *-s* reached 29 occurrences at 1;11; some utterances with English plural *-s* include *nuts*, *babies*, *ducks*, *socks* and *cars* (Keshavarz 264). Interestingly, Keshavarz's finding is consistent with the timing of Brown's L1 children plural acquisition, which is around 1;11 to 2;6. In another recent study, Itani-Adams also found that her Japanese-English bilingual child produced the English plural *-s* relatively early, at age 2;4. Based on these studies, it appears that the timing of acquisition of the English plurals of these two bilingual children are similar to that of English monolingual children.

However, studies investigating specific plural development in BFLA are still very limited. The sequence of plural acquisition in bilingual children does not appear to be robust and so the present study is timely and well positioned to shed some light on this issue.

## Methodology

This six-month longitudinal case study investigated how an English-Malay bilingual acquirer developed plural marking in each of the two languages. The child was audio- and video- recorded on a weekly basis from 3;4 up to 3;10 over two different sessions: one 30-minute English session and one 30-minute Malay session. For the Malay sessions, the child was recorded at home with the parents and for the English sessions, she was recorded while playing with other children whose L1 was English. During both sessions, in addition to recording her spontaneous speech, picture-based tasks eliciting linguistic expressions of single and multiple items were used. Recordings were later transcribed and coded on ELAN 4.9.3 (Sloetjes and Wittenburg), a software tool for language documentation.

### *The Informant and Linguistic Background*

The participant in this study is a girl named Rina (a pseudonym). She was born in Malaysia where she lived with her Malaysian parents until she moved to Australia when she was 1;11. Rina was exposed to both English and Malay from birth when she lived in Malaysia since her parents opted for the “one parent, one language input approach” (Romaine, *Bilingualism* 183-84). Her father spoke Malay to her, and her mother spoke English. Between the parents, the medium of communication was Malay. The variety of English used by the mother to talk to Rina in Malaysia is the acrolectal variety (Hashim and Tan 57) of Malaysian English (MalE). MalE is the nativised variety of English in Malaysia.

In Australia, the parents no longer used the one parent one language approach but instead opted for “context-bound language input and use in one language, one environment setting” (Qi 6) in order to continue providing Malay input. Thus, in the home domain the input was entirely in Malay, except for some TV viewing time which was approximately an hour daily. On the other hand, Rina was exposed to Australian English (AusE) variety when she was outside the home domain, e.g. her kindergarten. Her mother (henceforth, Mother) and father (henceforth, Father) were both born in Malaysia and raised in monolingual Malay families. The family was a middle-class family; Father and Mother both acquired their qualifications from local universities in Malaysia.

During the first two years of Rina’s life, the Malay language was dominant. The only English input she received was from Mother (i.e. MalE) for several hours per day at home. All other persons and contexts would provide her with Malay input. When she started speaking at 1;4 she started with Malay. Some utterances described by Mother at this stage were *ayah* “father,” *jom* “let’s go,” *bai* “hi” and *bai* “bye-bye.” Rina did not speak English at all though she understood Mother, who continued to talk to her in MalE at home for 3-4 hours daily. According to Meisel, the nature of dominant and weaker language only pertains

to the presence and frequency of use (i.e. performance rather than competence) (498). The language that is highly used and activated is considered the dominant language. In the context of Rina’s life in Malaysia, Malay was the dominant language and English, because of the limited input condition, became her weaker language.

Mother and Father moved to Australia when Rina was 1;11. English (i.e. AusE) gradually became the dominant language. According to Mother, Rina said her first English word *more* at 2;0, a month after she started attending a local childcare centre. Mother and Father spoke Malay to Rina at home. Rina went to the childcare centre four days a week from 8 am until 4 pm. On average, Rina was exposed to AusE for eight hours daily and to Malay for four hours daily. Her Malay language input was also limited by the fact that Father was frequently absent from home because of work. At times, Malay input was highly increased due to visits from relatives from Malaysia or occasional trips to Malaysia, which might last for a month or so. The following figure estimates the proportion of Rina’s exposure to Malay and English environments from birth up to 3;10;

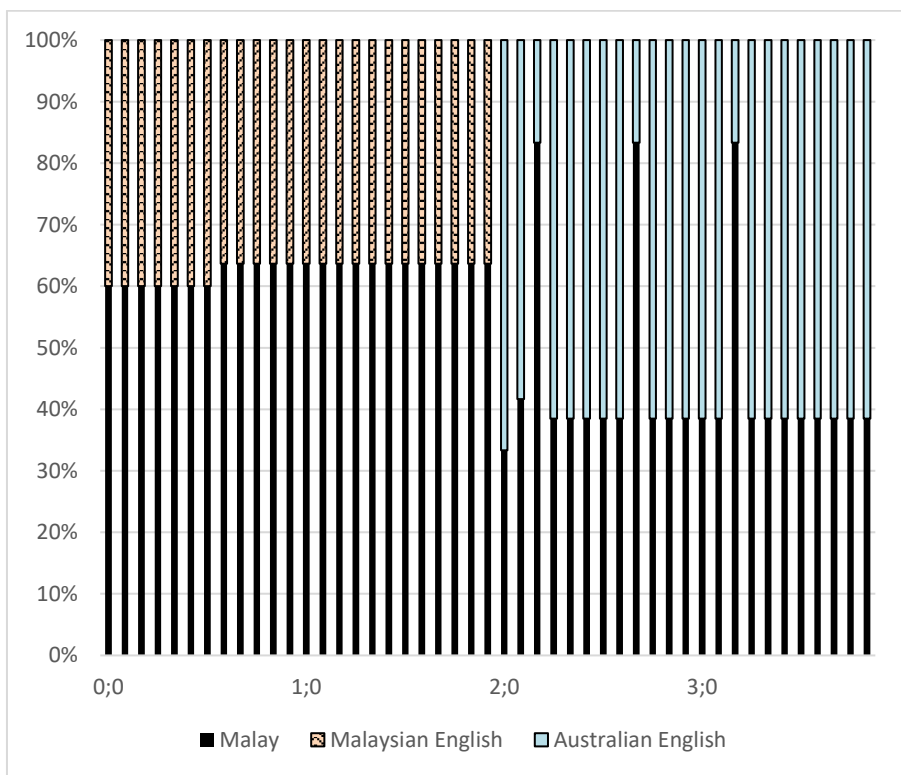


Figure 1: Proportion of Malay and English environments from birth to 3;10



From birth to age 3;10, Rina was exposed to two different English varieties, MalE and AusE. There are significant differences in linguistic features between MalE and AusE, particularly in their distinctive lexicon and phonological features (see Hashim and Tan 57-72 for MalE and Burridge 133-42 for AusE). However, in terms of marking plurals, there are no differences between them. Both varieties express plurality with the standard English grammatical features (suffix *-s* and so forth, see Table 1).

#### *Data Analysis*

The recordings were transcribed on ELAN (Sloetjes and Wittenburg). Each singular or plural output of the child in its respective singular or plural context was tagged in ELAN. After the transcription of the recordings, instances of the plural output in the plural contexts were classified into several plural categories. These plural categories were generally based on formal grammatical categories. However, there were also some categories in the child's production that were not strictly part of formal grammar. For these, we used the categories employed in previous plural acquisition studies on English-speaking children. The categories are detailed in the following table:

Plural categories	Definition of the categories	Example from the corpus
<b>Default form</b>	When the child was shown a picture of multiple items, the child used the same form she used for a single item.	<i>cat</i> <i>dog</i> <i>kucing</i> (cat) <i>anjing</i> (dog)
<b>Iteration</b>	The child repeated the lexical item based on the number of the items (typically with a finger-pointing gesture). Thus, the more items she saw, the more repetitions of the word she made. This category is based on the finding by Clark and Nikitina (125) who found that six children in their research used iteration in pluralising English nouns.	<i>cat cat cat cat</i> <i>dog dog dog dog</i> <i>kucing kucing kucing</i> <i>anjing anjing anjing</i>
<b>Counting</b>	The child only counted the items (without uttering the noun).	<i>one two three four</i> <i>satu dua tiga empat</i>
<b>Suffix -s</b>	The child used suffix -s to express plurals.	<i>cats</i> <i>dogs</i> <i>mainans</i> (toys)
<b>Reduplication</b>	The child used reduplication to express plurals. However, to avoid confusion with iteration, reduplication in the corpus was classified as such only when the child referred to more than two items.	<i>cat-cat</i> <i>dog-dog</i> <i>kucing-kucing</i> <i>anjing-anjing</i>
<b>Indefinite quantifiers with default form</b>	The child used indefinite quantifiers such as <i>lots of</i> , <i>many</i> and <i>banyak</i> with the default form to express plurals in phrasal constructions.	<i>lots of book</i> <i>many pig</i> <i>banyak cat</i> <i>banyak kucing</i>
<b>Indefinite quantifiers with suffix -s</b>	The child used indefinite quantifiers <i>lots of</i> and <i>many</i> with suffix -s to refer to more than one item.	<i>lots of books</i> <i>many apples</i> <i>many bees</i>
<b>Numeral quantifiers with default form</b>	The child used numeral quantifiers such as <i>ten</i> and <i>two</i> with the default form to express plurals in phrasal constructions.	<i>ten flower</i> <i>two car</i>
<b>Numeral quantifiers with suffix -s</b>	The child used numeral quantifiers such as <i>four</i> with suffix -s to express plurals in phrasal constructions.	<i>four brooms</i>

Table 2: Plural categories coded in Rina’s speech

## Results and Discussion

After the transcriptions were made in ELAN, the instances of pluralisation made by the child in the plural contexts were counted. Before presenting the analysis of her plural development, we show Rina's Mean Length of Utterance (henceforth MLU) in English and Malay throughout the study in Figure 2. This shows her general language development from 3;4 to 3;10.

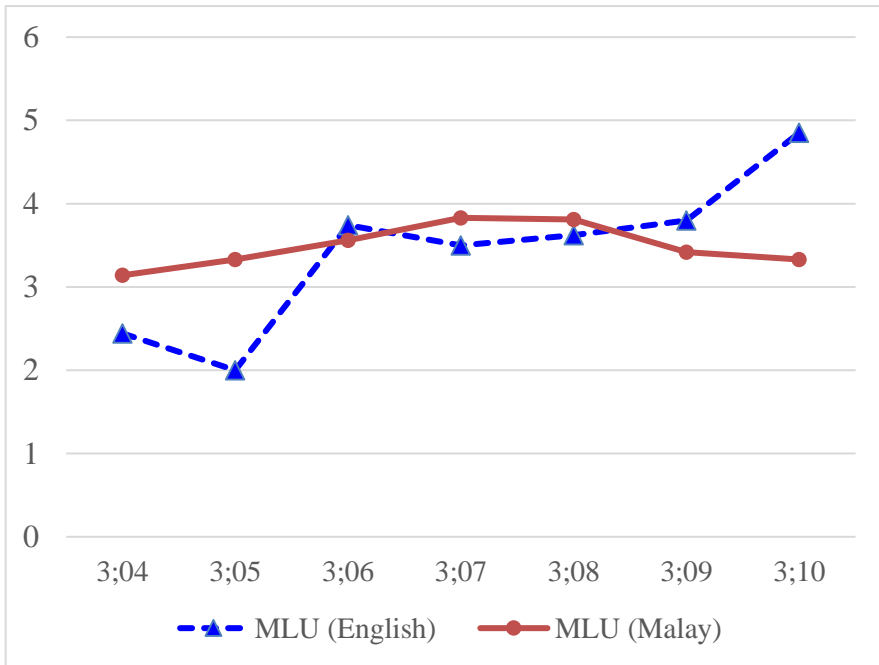
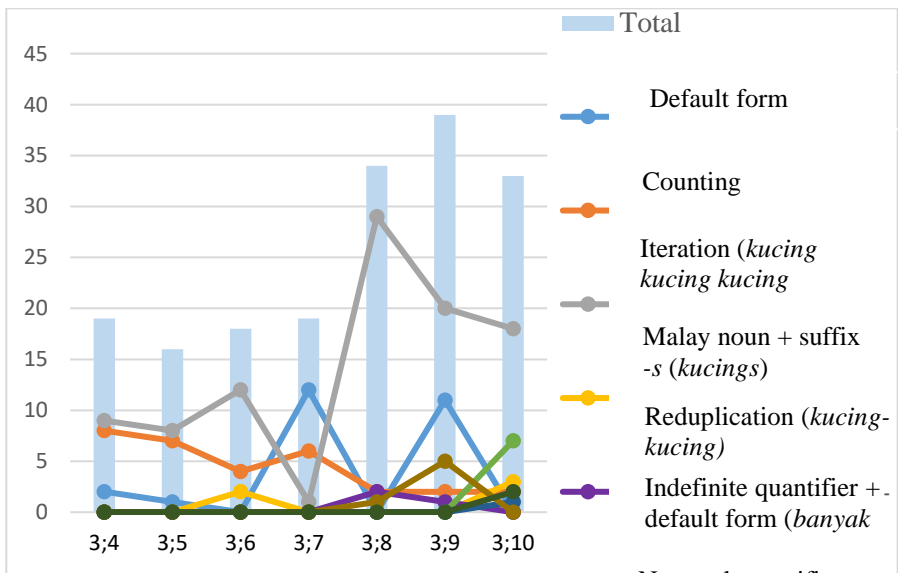
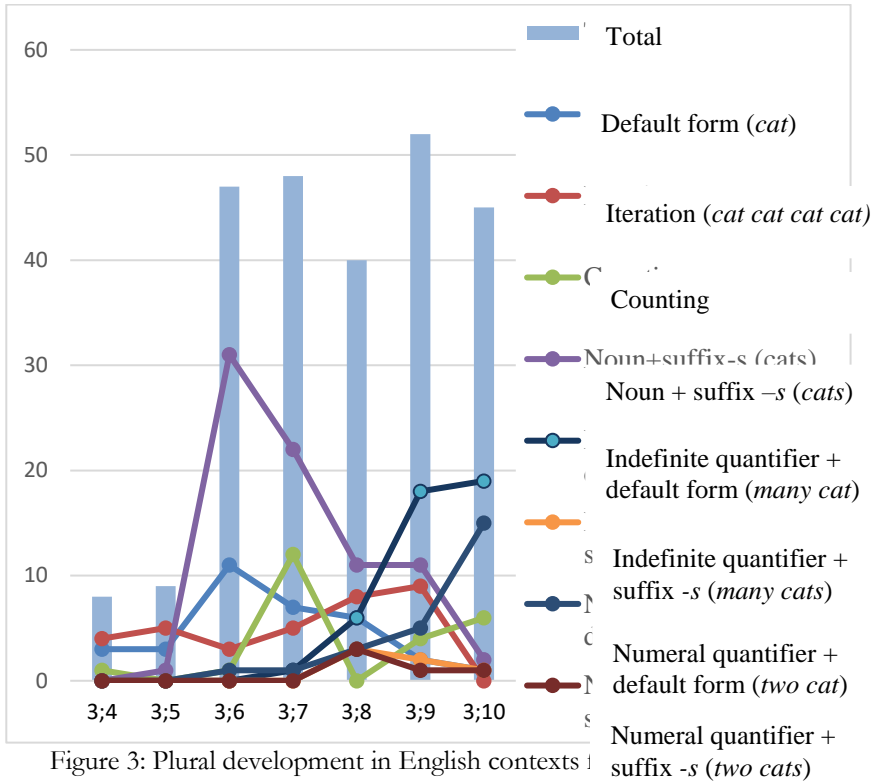


Figure 2: Rina's English and Malay MLU

From the graph, we can see that Rina's MLU was higher in Malay at the beginning of the study (3;4). English MLU was lower initially, but then at 3;6 there was a spurt in the use of English whose MLU gradually became higher than the Malay MLU from 3;9 to 3;10.

Figure 3 shows her plural output in English contexts and Figure 4 shows her plural output in Malay contexts. The x-axis marks the age of the child while the y-axis represents the number of occurrences distributed according to the categories presented in Table 2.



In what follows, we discuss our findings according to the research questions raised earlier:

a) How does the bilingual child simultaneously develop plural expressions in English and Malay respectively?

The results presented in Figures 3 and 4 show that, in this study, the child developed simultaneously, two different plural systems in English and Malay. In Figure 3 (English plural contexts), the child began with a low plural output at age 3;4 and 3;5, in parallel with a low English MLU at that age (see Figure 2). The default form (e.g. *cat*) and iteration (e.g., *cat cat cat cat*) to express plurality emerged in fact between 3;4 and 3;5. However, at 3;6, there was a surge in the occurrences of plural output, particularly the noun + suffix *-s* (e.g. *cats, dogs*). The default form, iteration and counting (e.g. *one two three four*) were also present at 3;6. Thus, several competing strategies expressing plurals coexisted at this stage. The MLU spurt from 3;5 to 3;6 reflects the child's lexical and grammatical development in English. The child acquired more words in English and hence, the greater plural output. The correlation between the child's lexical growth and plural output is supported by Sansavini et al., who state that "grammatical abilities develop not only as a function of age but also depend crucially on lexical abilities. Indeed, word combinations are usually absent when children still produce less than 100 words and remain infrequent until the vocabulary reaches 300 words" (200).

In fact, using the noun + suffix *-s* construction is the most prominent plural strategy in the English contexts at that stage; Rina used the strategy predominantly from 3;6 until 3;9 and then it dropped significantly at 3;10. Interestingly, at that point the child started using indefinite quantifiers + the default form (e.g. *many cat*). From 3;9 to 3;10, the use of quantifiers with the default form (e.g. *many cat, two cat*) predominated Rina's plural strategies with the consequent drop in the use of noun + suffix *-s* constructions. This finding strongly suggests that when the child started to mark plurals with indefinite quantifiers such as *many* and *lots of*, she tended to omit the plural suffix *-s* from the nouns, thus marking plurality on only one element in the noun phrases, which in turn, helped to avoid redundancy and lessen the processing cost for her. This finding is consistent with that of Clark and Nikitina; they found that their English L1 children used quantifiers + "bare-stem forms" (e.g. *two duck, two blanket*) when expressing pluralities in English (103).

The target noun phrase form for English quantifiers, i.e., indefinite and numeral quantifiers with suffix *-s*, e.g. *many cats, two cats*, emerged at 3;8, with only three occurrences each. Thus, we can assume that at this time Rina became able to process and produce grammatically required plural agreement between the quantifiers and the head noun of the phrase, thus establishing a fully grammatical phrasal construction in English beginning at 3;8. Interestingly, this sequence is

completely parallel to that found by Di Biase et al. in a five-year-old Japanese background child who moved to Australia at five years of age which could be characterised as SLA or late bilingual acquisition (90).

In Figure 4 (Malay contexts), a different pattern of plural marking strategies can be discerned. Unlike English, in Malay Rina produced a higher plural output at 3;4, possibly because the Malay MLU was higher at that age. In Malay, it appears that Rina tended to use iteration predominantly (e.g., *kucing kucing kucing kucing* “*cat cat cat cat*”) when pluralising entities. Figure 4 shows that iteration was the highest plural expression used from 3;4 to 3;10, except for 3;7, when it dropped against an increase in the use of the default form. It is unclear why Rina preferred the default form at 3;7 and 3;9. However, she continued to iterate when expressing plurals. The reader may recall that at age 3;6 there was an exponential increase of the noun + suffix *-s* constructions (e.g. *cats, dogs*) in the English contexts. This strategy also spilled over to the Malay lexical items (e.g. *mainan* “a toy”, *kucing* “a cat”) with the *-s* plural (e.g. *mainans* “toys”, *kucings* “cats”) used in the Malay contexts. The following conversation from the corpus illustrates this phenomenon:

- 1) Child: Mommy I want mainans (pointing to a bucket of toys)  
Mother: Nak mainan-mainan?  
“want toys?”  
Child: No, mainans (pointing to a bucket of toys)

Reduplication, the target form of Malay plural marking, began to appear at age 3;8 (two occurrences) and 3;9 (one occurrence). Reduplication only appeared when the recording was conducted by Father, who explicitly instructed Rina to reduplicate when she encountered multiple objects. However, though Father taught Rina to reduplicate, these attempts were largely futile as Rina continued to iterate nouns to express plurals. Most of the time, Rina argued with Father and refused to reduplicate. The following exchange exemplified an instance of Rina arguing with Father in this regard:

- 2) Father: Rina yang ini kangaroo-kangaroo  
“Rina these are kangaroo-kangaroo”  
Child: bukan ni kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo  
“no these (are) kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo”  
Father: kangaroo-kangaroo lah  
“it’s kangaroo-kangaroo”  
Child: no kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo kangaroo  
(yelling)

For Malay reduplication, the child had yet to use any alternative form of lexically-determined targets such as those with suffix *-an* (e.g. *buah-buahan* “fruit”, *sayur-sayuran* “vegetables”) or those with changes in the repeated word (e.g. *kuib-muib* “cakes”, *lauk-pauk* “meals”). Finally, the target noun phrase form for Malay quantifiers (indefinite and numeral quantifiers, i.e. with the default form, e.g. *banyak kucing*, *dua kucing*) emerged at 3;10. However, one primary difference in Rina’s plural development between the English and Malay contexts lies in her code-switching. We found that Rina tended to code-switch to English in the Malay contexts but rarely did she code-switch to Malay in the English contexts when describing plural objects. Thus, although we found in the corpus that the noun phrases for Malay quantifiers emerged at 3;10, Rina had actually begun using this construction earlier (at age 3;8) with English quantifiers paired with the English default form (e.g. *many cat*, *two cat*). Interestingly from the results, it was evident that when Rina developed a plural strategy in the English contexts, she would use that strategy in the Malay contexts as well, albeit in lower frequencies. To summarise our discussion, the following diagrams illustrate Rina’s path to the grammaticalisation of plural number in English and Malay, bearing in mind that the appearance of a new form does not implicate the automatic dropping of earlier forms.

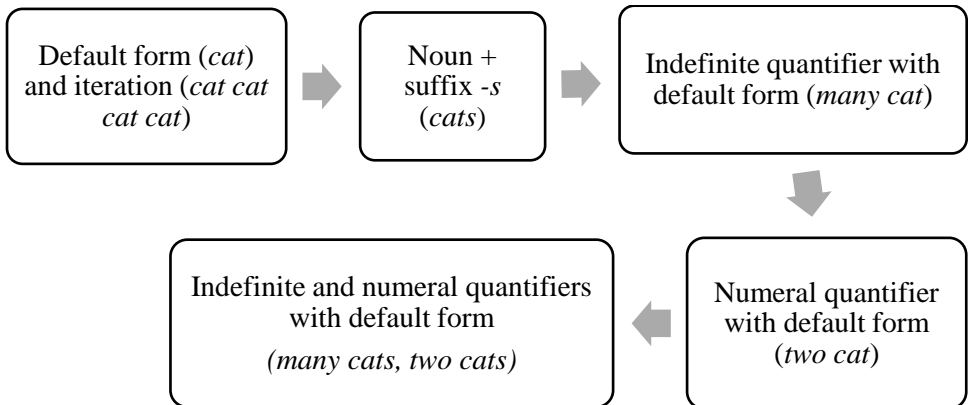


Figure 5: Summary of Rina’s plural development in English

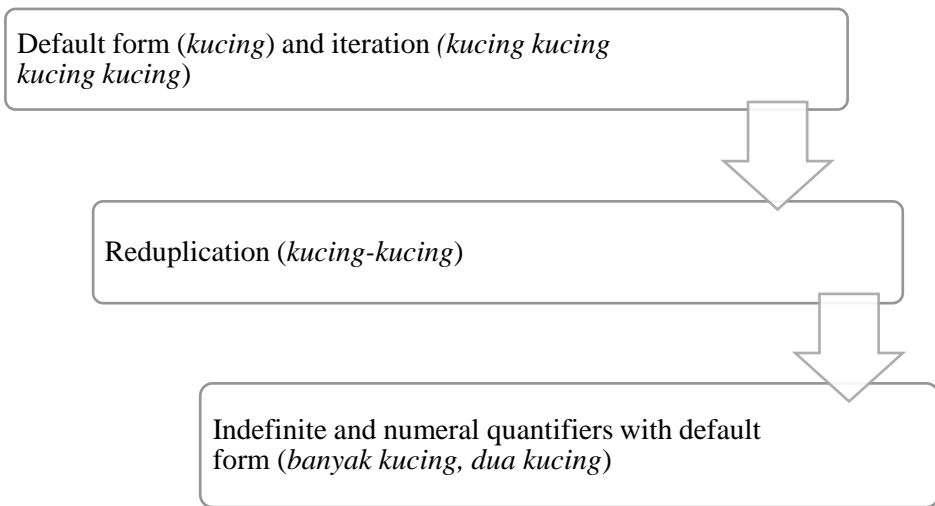


Figure 6: Summary of Rina's plural development in Malay

b) If cross-linguistic influence occurs in the child's plural encoding development in English and Malay, what is its nature?

Based on the findings, it appears that there are systematic differences in marking plurality in the two languages. In this study, Rina started to use the noun + suffix *-s* construction (e.g. *cats, dogs*) from 3;6 to 3;9 and then English quantifiers with the default form (e.g. *many cat, two cat*) from 3;9 to 3;10 in English. In the Malay contexts, iteration seems to be Rina's preferred strategy to express plurals (from 3;4 to 3;10, with the exception of 3;7). Nevertheless, despite having two different ways of marking plurals in English and Malay, it was also manifested that some plural categories that appeared in one language were also used occasionally in the other language. For instance, iteration, which the child used to mark plurals predominantly in the Malay contexts was also strongly used in the English contexts (e.g. *cat cat cat, dog dog dog dog*) though in lower frequencies than in Malay given the simultaneous presence of competitors for plural marking in English. Likewise, the plural suffix *-s* which the child frequently used in the English contexts, also appeared occasionally in the Malay contexts (e.g. *mainans* "toys," *kucings* "cats").

However, the findings also indicated that Rina tended to code-switch more in the Malay contexts than in the English ones. As discussed earlier, Rina used phrases for English quantifiers (e.g. *many cat, two cat*) in the Malay contexts. This strongly suggests that Rina was more advanced in English during this time, which is corroborated by her higher English MLU from 3;9 to 3;10 (see Figure 2). Thus, it seems that Rina used the strategy she acquired in her more dominant language (English) for her less dominant one (Malay) although it needs to be noted that



she also used the iteration strategy for marking plurality in English. This supports Cummins who states that in BLFA and SLA, children are able to utilise language skills and knowledge of one language when working in another language. Therefore, although the expression of plurality in each language is increasingly differentiated, we can identify distinct cross-linguistic influences, both from the more linguistically dominant language to the less dominant and vice-versa. The issue of language dominance has been a recurring subject in BFLA. Many case studies have shown that children who acquire two languages simultaneously exhibit different abilities in their developing languages (Itani-Adams; Lanza; Leopold; Qi; Ronjat; Yip and Matthews). Dominance has been interpreted in many different ways, invoking most often linguistic contact factors (Deuchar and Muntz; Genesee and Nicoladis; Li Wei; Petersen; Yip and Matthews). In this study, dominance was observed to vary according to the environment the child operated in. Other than that, it seems to be more reliably measured by MLU for each language the child was exposed to, as proposed by Yip and Matthews (40).

c) How should the development of the English varieties exposed to the child be described, given the findings?

Earlier, we highlighted that Rina was exposed to two English varieties; MalE (from birth to 1;11) and AusE (from 1;11 to 3;10). When Rina was living in Malaysia, the input to MalE was limited to Mother only. Based on the report from Mother, Rina did not produce any English at that time though she could comprehend her. This is unsurprising as MalE was the less dominant language. De Houwer (2) defines this phenomenon as “early passive bilingualism” or the state in which bilingual children appear to understand two languages but produce only one.

In Australia, when Rina started going to the kindergarten, AusE gradually became her dominant language. The development was not instantaneous as we could see from her MLU profile. It was not until 3;6 that she began becoming more dominant in English than in Malay. Thus, the development of these two varieties supported the decisive role of the linguistic environment, i.e. the higher the input the child received from the environment, the more dominant (and faster developing) that language became. The changes in linguistic environment (rather than any intrinsic linguistic feature of either language) may explain why the child began speaking Malay first and afterwards, why she became more dominant in AusE in Australia.

The implication of this finding to WE is that in understanding learners’ acquisition of the English varieties, scholars have to look further into the input the learners receive in their daily linguistic environment. WE speakers are either bilingual or multilingual. Therefore, to assess their English development based on the English monolingual standard as it is often the case in SLA, would be, at

best, misleading. Our findings show that to understand Rina's language development, we need to take into account her linguistic input from the environment and the development of all the languages she was exposed to. Also, it is important to examine the role of interaction (Tomasello 61-82) as it provides crucial information of the language to the learner in understanding English varieties through corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning. It is important to investigate not just the individual's development of bilingualism but also the linguistic setting or the "speech community bilingualism" (Brutt-Griffler 146) in which the bilingual individual lives in.

### **Limitation of the Study and Conclusion**

One obvious drawback of this study is the lack of generalisability of the findings as it is based on the experiences of one bilingual subject. However, we have to take into account that research in general is cumulative and the increasing number of case studies provide the opportunity to compare and verify the findings with one another (Qi 46). Indeed, most classic studies that have advanced our understanding of bilingualism have been, first and foremost, case studies of individuals in increasingly different linguistic constellations. This in itself increases predictability and allows for a moderation of the claim of lack of generalisability.

Further limitations relate to the boundaries imposed by the study itself and its focus on the development of the concept of plurality and its linguistic marking in two languages. Of course, the child would have developed other systems in parallel, to which other studies will make further contribution.

Thus, to conclude, our study investigated the development of plural marking in a bilingual child acquiring English and Malay simultaneously from birth. The child's speech productions in both languages were analysed in terms of the different strategies the child deployed in marking plurality from age 3;4 to 3;10. Rina appeared to be developing two distinct systems to express plurality in each language. However, our findings also show that though the plural development is differentiated, there are bidirectional cross-linguistic influences from Malay to English (e.g., use of iteration in English) as well as from English to Malay (the code-switching utterances).

With regard to WE, we contended that for a fuller understanding of the language acquisition process of WE speakers, we should take into consideration not only the individual linguistic development, but also the setting and the bilingual speech community the speakers are in. To judge a WE speaker based on English monolingual norms would be inherently problematic.

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