# 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.

**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, Kittitherawat 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 (Babrakzai 2006, Ellis 2008), and the use of language activities and model instruction to support development of speaking skills (Sangamuang 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, Kittitherawat 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)

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Level 1: Proficient= 4 of 34 (11.77%)

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Level 2: Highly functional= 16 of 34 (47.06%)

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Level 3: Functional= 11 of 34 (29.41)

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Level 4: Sufficient= 3 of 34 (8.82)

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Level 5: Marginal= 1 of 34 (2.94)

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**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 |

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%)

_____

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

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**Discussion of Major Findings**

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

It is interesting to note that vocabulary acquisition, to quite 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?