"I Asked My Mom to Read It, She Told Me to Change Some Words": The Influence of Identity on Students' Writing Among Two HLL in a Filipino Language Course

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Abstract

This study looked at how heritage language learner (HLL) identities influence learners’ writing in the target HL. Drawing from Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) definition of HLL identity as a “multidimensional construct”, this study investigated how two HLLs of Filipino with different upbringing, influenced their writing in a Filipino intermediate course. Using a case study approach, this paper analyzed sociocultural forces that affect writer identity formation of the two HLLs through retrospective interviews and examination of their writings. The study revealed that identities they bring with them to the act of writing are shaped by their life histories, multiple identities and surroundings that support their identities as HLL. These multiple identities, such as their invested identities, also affect their text representation in Filipino. Implications from this study addressed the importance of studying HLL identities and its relation to their writing development.
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**Introduction**

Yet writers are so important to writing. Writer identity is, surely, a central concern for any theory of writing in two senses: what writers bring to the act of writing, and how they construct their identities through the act of writing itself. (Ivanić, 1998, p. 96)

In a bold statement that attempted to address issues with students’ writing, Rosalind Ivanić, author of the book *Writing and Identity*, wrote, “Institutions of higher education are full of complaints about student writing” (p. 343). She wrote this statement in hope that writing teachers view their students’ writing as a “product of their developing sense of who they are” (p. 343) and consider the value of students’ writer identity. Significant findings on second language (L2) writer research have enabled us to compare behaviors, characteristics, and identities of various L2 writers (i.e. Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Manchón, 2011; Manchón & Matsuda 2016) which in turn, paved the way in teaching L2 writing among distinct groups of writers, such as English as a second language (ESL), foreign language (FL) learners of English, and to some extent, learners of languages other than English. However, these latter studies are exceedingly influenced by L2 and FL learners of English and place into question the appropriateness towards learners in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) contexts, such as heritage language learners (HLL) in the United States. One of those languages, that aligns with the focus of this study, is Filipino\(^1\). The purpose of this investigation serves as a response to the growing population of

\(^1\) Tagalog-based Filipino.
Filipinos in Hawai‘i as well as the number of HLLs in the Filipino language program at the University of Hawai‘i. In this study, I analyzed sociocultural, educational, and transnational forces that contributed to the construction of two HLL writers’ identities and how their HLL identity affected their writing in Filipino, after completing a semester of an intermediate Filipino language course in a public university.

**Literature Review**

**L2 writer’s autobiographical self**

According to Hornberger and Wang (2008), those classified as HL speakers or learners in the U.S. often have sociocultural struggles, such as their identity and home cultural values that compete with the dominant culture. As a result, “these individuals must constantly choose, construct, and perform their social identities” (p. 5). Therefore, I chose to investigate the notion of identity in my participants’ writer profile, following Ivanić’s (1998) writer identity aspect of *autobiographical self*, which emphasizes the fact that this aspect of identity is associated with a writer's sense of their roots, of where they are coming from, and that this identity they bring with them to writing is itself socially constructed and constantly changing as a consequence of their developing life-history: it is not some fixed, essential ‘real self’. The term also captures the idea that it is not only the events in people's lives, but also their way of representing these experiences to themselves which constitutes their current way of being. (p. 25)

Writer identity is best understood as choices writers make as well as how they present themselves in their writing and they carry with them life experiences such as *literacy practices*. When writers write, it is also dependent on the type of composition they do. Writers
may be asked to write about specific topics that may or may not prompt them to share their own personal accounts. Other kinds of writing described by Ivanić (1998) that writers write about may consist of writers’ personal interest and academic writing that requires them to form their own opinion, in which case, personal experience may not be reflected in the topic but instead in how they compose their writing, such as lexical choices taken or certain writing conventions followed. Abasi et al.’s (2006) study on writer identity construction among ESL graduate students, described how two participants’ difficulty in composing a critical analysis writing were traced back to their lack of experience researching articles during their undergraduate years. This affected the students’ claim to their own writing, identifying them as less experienced writers. Ivanić’s (1998) case study illustrated a writer, Rachel, whose writing was shaped “by her personal history of opportunities, constraints, and allegiances” (p.281). Moreover, Rachel’s life was made up of upsetting moments where her identity as a reader was challenged by her institutions which resulted in her being labeled as a “remedial reader”. As a result, it affected her abilities in writing as she completed her B.A. in Social Sciences and complicated her sense of belonging in these “discoursally constructed identities” (p.169).

As Ivanić (1998) says, “Each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demands of a new context” (p. 182). In this case, a distinction must be made between HLL and traditional FL learners through investigating what is known and the historical accounts that help shape HLL identity as reflected in their writing.
Heritage Language Learner Identity

One distinguishable factor that differentiates or complicates identification of FL learners is the presence of HLL, who by definition “are individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English” (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 27). These individuals may have had their exposure to the language from their family members, social media, television, movies, and to some extent through language schools (Doerr & Lee, 2013) that may have contributed to their HL development. In addition, HLLs bring with them their own sets of life experiences, knowledge, strengths, and abilities that help to construct their identity or multiple identities as they establish social memberships. I support Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) ecological take on understanding HLL identity construction as

…a hierarchical and multidimensional construct involving the perceptions, descriptions, and evaluations of one’s self in relation to significant others, the social environment, and specific contexts. As such, identity contributes to children’s sense (or lack thereof) of belonging, worth, competence, and achievements. The notion that there are multiple selves/identities, which are situated and contextually defined, regulated by self and others, and constantly negotiated, contested, shaped and reshaped. (pp. 6-7)

To gain deeper understanding among HLL, Hornberger and Wang (2008) gives attention to the placement of HLLs in social contexts such as opportunities for language learning, family and community perceptions about the language, and their sense of belonging to the HL group. This sense of “belonging” that can shift identities, may occur at any moment in life. Mendoza and Parba’s (2018) study among HLLs in an intermediate Filipino course in the U.S. discussed one HLL who took the class in order to avoid completely losing her heritage language and did not want to feel excluded during family trips in the Philippines. To emphasize the importance of
identity among HLL, Hornberger and Wang (2008) suggests uncovering how HLLs perceive themselves and to “understand that multiple memberships are necessary and possible in their negotiation of self-identity and empowerment (p. 15).” Awareness of HLLs life experiences and multiple identities they bring with them led this study to understand more about the construction of two HLL writers’ identity.

Another identity HLLs bring with them are their goals and aspirations in taking the heritage language class. In college settings, most HLLs take HL courses to “find identity, communicate with family and members of their HL community, and explore their cultural roots” (Carreira & Kagan, 2017, p. 155). Connections HLLs wish to establish with the HL may or may not include interacting with speakers in the U.S. or in the target country. For example, HLLs investigated in Parba (2018) were students who view the U.S. as their home, establish strong connections to the Philippines “through their parents and through interaction with relatives and friends in the Philippines” (p. 231), while others only see themselves as part of their local heritage community, and as a result, these connections influence their motivation to enroll in the class.

Invested HLL

Other HLL groups (Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese) are also motivated in learning their heritage language for professional reasons (Carreira & Keigan, 2017), and these HLLs may be viewed as invested (Norton, 1995) rather than motivated. According to Leeman’s (2015) observation among HLL, an invested HLL, “refers to the extent to which learners see the language of study as able to provide material and symbolic resources or cultural capital” (p. 107) and goes hand in hand with the notion of imagined community, which is “the impact on language
learning of learners’ desire to gain or strengthen their membership in social groups associated with the language” (p. 107). Leeman (2015) described a study among university HLL of Chinese, whose investment in learning Mandarin was more than Cantonese as they see Mandarin having a “commodified value in the global economy” (p. 107), while learners of Cantonese imagine themselves using the language to interact with family, friends, and the local community.

**Heritage Language Writers**

In terms of writing, a few studies have observed practices of HLL writers such as their behavior in comparison to FL writers (Hanson, 2019; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 2011; Reichelt et al., 2012; Valentin-Rivera, 2019). Reichelt et al. (2012) briefly describe HLL as “less likely to feel comfortable serving as metalinguistic resources for FL learners” and suggest that their “lack of formal TL training contributes to their feelings of linguistic insecurity and belief that their FL classmates have a better grasp of grammar” (p. 25). Findings from Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2011) suggest that Spanish HLL writers have learning-to-write needs as opposed to traditional writing-to-learn approaches. Thus, HLL learners have particular learning needs that are geared toward academic writing, in contrast with traditional learners with relatively more exposure to academic vocabulary. Valentin-Rivera (2019) also pointed out that Spanish HLLs’ repertoire involves home and non-academic contexts. In addition, Filipino HLLs reported in Mendoza and Parba (2018) faced difficulties in writing about critical issues due to lack of exposure to vocabulary beyond conversational topics. Moreover, Mendoza and Parba found that HLL relied heavily on translation skills to build their vocabulary, while other participants voiced their frustration over this technique. Furthermore, other HLL writers from various groups (Korean, Russian, Thai, Vietnamese) in Jensen and Lorena (2007) self-reported writing as their least proficient skill compared to other skills. A study by Yi (2008), following two high school
Korean HLLs, found that the two participants preferred Korean in informal writing and English for formal writing. Moreover, English was preferred when participants were asked to write a literacy autobiography and felt comfortable using Korean to chat with their online community even though both participants show high proficiency in the two languages. Despite the growing interest in studying HLL identity, most studies tend to focus on HLL in Spanish classroom settings (i.e. Hanson, 2019; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 2011; Valentin-Rivera, 2019), and this calls for a need to expand research among less commonly taught or underrepresented languages. One of those languages, the focus of this study, is Filipino.

It is also important to note that each language group has their own sets of history and sociocultural contexts. Starfield (2002) points to the value of “prior life histories, the socially structured opportunities, and [how] the more or less privileged discourses they have had access to” (p. 138) affect students’ writings. In the next section, I will talk about the history of Filipinos in the U.S., its relation to language and identity construction of HLLs.

Filipinos in the US

The history of Filipino migration in the U.S. may shed light to the development of literacy among Filipino Americans (Fil-Am). Though there are no empirical studies that look into home language policy of Filipinos, Paz and Juliano (2008) mentioned informal instruction among plantation workers in Hawai‘i to their children in their native languages (Ilokano, Filipino, Cebuano). As the new wave of Filipino immigrants entered the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, Filipinos faced discrimination and contributed to their racist representation. The “racist demonization of Filipinos” (Okamura, 2008, p. 163) were reflected in the media,

\[^2\] I am using Filipino American (Fil-Am) to describe those who see themselves aligned with both Filipino and American culture.
racially profiling Filipinos who committed crimes by referring to their ethnicity. On the other hand, other ethnic groups from the plantation era had established after school programs to help maintain language. For example, children of Japanese immigrants in Hawai‘i had access to Japanese language instruction (Doerr & Lee, 2013), which led to a number of after school programs that provide formal instruction of the Japanese language. Among Filipinos in Hawai‘i, however, after school programs addressing Filipino language are unheard of. Due to the discrimination towards Filipinos, home policies reflect against learning the language and culture, resulting in Filipinos othering themselves from immigrant Filipinos and addressing themselves as local Filipinos.

Okamura (2008) mentioned “since 1989, students also have told me or written in their papers about feeling ashamed of their parents because they were immigrants” (p. 175). In addition, ethnic jokes contributed to the division among Filipinos in Hawai‘i. When students enter college, both local and immigrant Fil-Ams can now be found in the same classroom. Described as a “born-again experience” (Strobel, 1996), this group of students tries to fill the gap in their identity by taking Filipino language and culture courses in college. Okamura describes this as part of constructing their “diasporic identity,” a way to incorporate their Fil-Am identity.

In this paper, I argue that Filipinos are also adding to their diasporic identity through their writing based on their life history with the Filipino language and culture. The absence of formal instruction among Filipino Americans contributed to their lack of metalinguistic knowledge in Filipino literacy but some have maintained their oral proficiency. Most times, HLLs that come in the program would have the same narrative of “I can understand, but I can’t speak”; this sums up the pre-existing experience students bring with them in the classroom, their inability to produce Filipino through speaking and writing. Now that these Filipino Americans have entered
the classroom, they struggle to put words and sentences together as they lacked metalinguistic skills.

The process of growing up in Hawai‘i as Filipinos consists of many shifts in one's identity that may even involve acceptance or rejection of one's own ethnic race, which also results in dismissal of using their native tongue. Filipinos who grew up in Hawai‘i may need a comfortable space to produce their language whether by speaking or writing. By looking into the experience of two students enrolled in Filipino 302 in regard to writing, this study aimed at addressing the following research question: In what ways does the two participants’ HLL identity help shape their writing in Filipino?

Methods

Context

This study looks at two writers in an intermediate Filipino language course offered at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM). Filipino 300-level courses are designed for students who are minoring or majoring in Philippine language and culture. Other students enrolled in the class are students who came from placement exams with a goal to comply with second language graduation requirements. The prerequisite of the course is completion of Filipino 101-202 or a successful placement result done through the Filipino program at UHM. In the past, the course was designed to learn Philippine literature embedded with language. However, in 2018, changes were implemented to satisfy student demographics seen in the article by Mendoza and Parba (2018) as well as Parba’s (2018) dissertation. In Parba’s (2018) dissertation, students enrolled in the class consist of students born in California, Hawai‘i, and the Philippines and come with varied levels of language expertise in the Filipino language as well as exposure to the target language. The changes include use of multimodal texts (poetry, music, fiction, documentaries)
that pose critical issues surrounding Filipinos in diaspora by having students “use all available linguistic and semiotic resources” to comprehend critical course materials (Mendoza & Parba, 2018, p. 4). The Filipino 300 courses have an Oral Focus (OF) and a Writing Intensive (WI) designation that requires students to produce 16 pages of writing throughout the semester.

According to the Filipino Curriculum Map available on the program website, students enrolled in Filipino 301 and 302, in terms of writing, should be able to:

- Write in Filipino in various contexts and for diverse audiences
- Demonstrate a familiarity with current events, and knowledge of history and culture of various Philippine ethnic groups
- Analyze, evaluate, and critique texts written in Filipino from a variety of genres and contexts
- Conduct research on Filipino language and/or culture using acquired knowledge and skills

(Filipino Curriculum Map, n.d.)

The courses also require that students produce three 3-5-page critical papers and a 8-10-page final paper. However, in recent years writing assignments were reworked but still meet the 16-page WI requirement. From here on, I will address students’ writing by using the labels Paper 1, Paper 2, and Paper 3; Table 1 shows the prompts and their translation into English as well as the number of pages required by the teacher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Name</th>
<th>Prompt (in Filipino)</th>
<th>Translation of prompt</th>
<th>No. of pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>Ipagpalagay na ikaw ay isang kaibigan, kamag-anak, o kapamilya ng isang OFW na gustong pumunta sa o nasa ibang bansa upang magtrabaho.</td>
<td>Let’s pretend you are a friend or relative, or family member of an OFW that wants to go or is in another country to find employment. Write a letter to them and tell them what you learned about the experiences and condition of OFWs. Relate these to the experiences of Filipino women that went to other countries according to the documentary we watched in class. Be positive but critical in your writing.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>Sino ako bilang Fil Am, o Filipino? Ano ba ang karanasan ko bilang Filipino sa Amerika? Sa pagiging multilinggwal? Sa paggamit ng mga wikang alam ko? Sa pakikisama sa ibang tao na may ibang kultura at sa kapwa ko Filipino.</td>
<td>Who am I as a Fil Am, or Filipino? What are my experiences as a Filipino in America? As a multilingual? In using the languages that I know? In my interaction with people from other cultures and my fellow Filipinos?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3</td>
<td>Ang huling papel ay kritikal na pagsusuri sa mga isyung makikita sa lipunan dito sa Hawai’i, Amerika at Pilipinas gaya ng diskriminasyon, pang-aapi, at kawalan ng pagkakapantay-pantay.</td>
<td>The last paper is a critical evaluation of societal issues here in Hawai’i, America, and Philippines like discrimination, oppression, and inequality.</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interested in learning more about recent changes in the curriculum in terms of writing, this study looked at how the two participants’, James and Chad (pseudonyms), HLL identity shaped their writing in Filipino. I chose these two participants due to their interest in pursuing Philippine studies as their major and also the difference in their upbringing. James was born in Hawai‘i and Chad was born in the continental U.S.

**Participants**

James is Filipino and was born in the United States but spent a year living in the Philippines at the age of three; he now resides in a predominantly Filipino neighborhood in Oahu with his parents. His first language was English; he was introduced and exposed to Ilokano and Tagalog during his time in the Philippines. He also understands Hawaiian creole (pidgin) but does not claim speaking the language. James attended public school in Hawai‘i for his primary and secondary education. In high school, James took Japanese and continued at the university level as an undergraduate, but his Japanese study was cut short as he began to feel dissatisfied with his progress in Japanese and instead gained curiosity and interest in learning Filipino. James’ primary reason in taking Filipino courses is to improve his speaking ability in order to communicate with family and friends. Having no formal education in Filipino, he first enrolled in Filipino 101 during Fall 2018 and decided to double major with Public Health as his primary major and Filipino Language and Culture as his additional major.

Chad was also born and raised in the United States; his father is Filipino while his mother is Canadian of mixed European descent (British, Irish, German, and French). He spent his childhood on the east coast of the continental U.S. He grew up in an English-speaking household but was exposed to Filipino through his father’s phone conversations with family members in the U.S. and the Philippines. Starting in middle school, he learned Spanish and
gained advanced fluency. He graduated from college in 2015 with a biology major and is now pursuing a graduate certificate in Philippine studies at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. His interest in learning Filipino started at a very young age; however, his father refused to teach him, so he took it upon himself to learn the language on his own. As soon as he graduated from college in 2015, he packed his bags and decided to visit the Philippines by himself to learn more about his Filipino side. Since then, Chad has been going back to the Philippines and has stayed for between a week and three months each time, which explains his high oral proficiency in the language. As a graduate student, he took the placement test in Filipino and earned himself a spot in Filipino 302.

The instructor of Filipino 302, Daniel, has been teaching Filipino 300 since 2013 and took an active role in developing the Filipino 300 curricula. He currently holds a doctorate degree in Second Language Studies focusing on critical pedagogy. Daniel’s first language is Cebuano, and he learned English and Filipino simultaneously in the Philippines.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

I selected the two HLL students to participate in my study due to the difference in their language history. Using a qualitative approach, I conducted a retrospective interview after the two students had completed Filipino 302 during the Spring 2020 semester. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted for about 40-60 minutes using the video conferencing platform Zoom. The participants had an option to use Filipino or English during their interviews; the students used English and the instructor used a mix of English and Filipino. I collected three different writings from each student--Paper 1, Paper 2, and Paper 3--and also other small writings done in class as well as outside the classroom. These writings were then used as talking points in the interview as I allowed them to talk about their writing process in Filipino. I covered questions
about challenges they had as well as how they manage to resolve them. In the beginning of the
interview, I had the students talk about their language experience with Filipino growing up and
asked them to elaborate on stories regarding their language development. Then, I had the
students talk about their process in regards to each paper and I focused my questions on their
experience as L2 writers of Filipino with each writing assignment and centered the questions (see
Appendix A) around forces that helped them to produce their writing in Filipino. I also inquired
about issues or obstacles they had in completing their writing assignments. To increase
reliability, I triangulated my data by conducting a cumulative interview with the instructor and
used his answer to support my findings (see Appendix B for questions). All interviews were
audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by me. Translations into English of
selected excerpts were validated by another Filipino highly proficient speaker to capture the
voice from each participant.

This research on writing was writer-oriented and focused on personal experiences of the
participants. A retrospective interview was done to capture the “emic perspective” of the writers
and stressed the performative act of writing through investigation of “personal and social
histories” in specific contexts (Hyland, 2015, p. 337). In addition, Casanave (2018) recommends
qualitative approaches in investigating writer identity as they “they highlight the social nature of
writing, its complexity and nonlinearity, its situatedness, and its particularity and individual
diversity” (p. 3). It is for the aforementioned reasons I sought to investigate James and Chad’s
HLL identity and how it influences their writing as well as their writer identity. The interviews
were transcribed followed by coding the interview text thematically as related to how the
participants’ HLL identity shaped their writing. In the interview text, I took note of distinct
aspects of HLL identity mentioned in the literature, for example, HLLs’ sense of belonging and
how their identity is shaped by society (Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Valdés, 2014). In addition, I also created new categories as they emerged from the interview data. Then I connected how their HLL identity influenced their writing in Filipino by having both participants talk about how they engaged themselves in writing in Filipino. Additionally, I approached my data inductively and examined if what the students said in the interview was consistent with their writings as well as what the teacher said in the interview. The following themes emerged from the study:

- complex issues with the Filipino language growing up,
- different representation of writer identity in text,
- supporting HLL identity through literacy sponsors,
- and, invested identities in the Filipino language.

**Findings**

**Complex Issues with Filipino Language Growing up**

Ivanić (1996) pointed out that writers have identity that they bring with them that is “socially constructed and constantly changing as a consequence of their developing life-history” (p. 25). The development of James and Chad’s literacy contributed to the construction of their writer identity. Their unique overlapping experiences with the TL led them to learn more about their Filipino culture through formal language education.

When James returned to the U.S. education system as a first grader, he was placed in an ELL program dedicated to immigrant students to receive what James describes as “extra push” in English. When I asked him to elaborate more about his experience in the ELL program, James shared with me the following in an e-mail:
It made me feel slightly inadequate and different because I didn’t know that I had an issue with my literacy skills. Therefore, it sort of stifled my ability to stick with and use my native tongue.

James has blurred recollection of speaking or learning Ilokano at home. When I asked about his experience using his native tongue at home, he mentioned that his parents were supportive in terms of using Ilokano. However, on his Paper 2, James wrote his experience as a Filipino American in Hawai‘i:


_[When I was young, I felt that I was different, and I do not belong at school. As an example, my classmates would laugh at my pronunciation of English words, wearing colorful clothes and as well as bringing baon [home lunch] that is Filipino food. They said, “Your food stinks.” or “What are you wearing? Bukbuk ka!” For a child, this is painful and these things are not easy to forget.]_

3 _bukbuk is_ a term used by local Filipinos in Hawai‘i to describe Filipinos who wear colorful or mismatched clothing. Usually used to describe Filipino immigrants. _ka_ refers to pronoun you.
Chad, as a biracial Filipino American, found himself struggling with his identity in school. In his Paper 2, he shared his emotions regarding his Filipino American identity:


[Sometimes, I am unsure what my identity is especially when there is a checkbox for ethnicity during exams at school. Should I pick White or Asian? Before, there were no options to pick two ethnicities, which is why I was confused. Depending on how I feel, sometimes Asian, sometimes I pick White. I am not sure why I perceived myself to be white, but I think my mom told me I am white, so I picked that.]

Chad’s experience with Filipino language growing up was a bit different from James. His father, the only source of Filipino at home, did not take an active role in teaching him the language.

_Chad:_ I didn’t really know what being Filipino was exactly growing up and I would only hear him speak Tagalog on the phone or if he was angry at me [laughter]. I would rarely watch films or anything in Filipino so wasn’t really exposed to that growing up until college. I would attempt to learn it in high school using audio books but it was hard. My dad wouldn’t be able to teach me and we’d both get frustrated so I gave up for a little.

While growing up in the U.S., Chad had expressed his desire to visit the Philippines but would receive the same reply from his dad, _next year_, but they would never go. For Chad, the process
of growing up with his dad were full of promises and disappointment whenever he tried to learn more about his Filipino side.

Chad:  

[…]my parents wanted to raise me as American. He is the eldest in the family but had a traumatic experience in Manila so I believe this is why he also didn’t want to share with me much or go back to Philippines. my dad didn’t want me to go because he was scared for me since I didn’t look Filipino.

As soon as he graduated from college, he packed his bags and decided to visit the Philippines all by himself to learn more about his Filipino side.

Chad:  

I decided I've always wanted to go to the Philippines, I'm just gonna go by myself but my uncle lives there and my cousins I went there for the first time. So while I was there I really wanted to learn more about my father's side and the culture, while I was there I lived in my tito’s [uncle’s] house, I would just ask them questions [about the language].

Since 2015, Chad has been going back to the Philippines yearly, and despite the influence of English in the country, he managed to learn Filipino, which explains his high oral proficiency in the language. As a graduate student, he took the placement test in Filipino and earned himself a spot in Filipino 302.

James and Chad’s life history reflected in their writing and the interview showed challenges they faced with their identity as HLLs. Daniel’s decision in prompting students to write about their Fil-Am life in America as opposed to the nationalistic topics about the Philippines, allowed Chad to share his internal issues with his identity as half white and half
Filipino. James on the other hand shared external issues he had with the oppressive attitude of his peers in his early school years. James and Chad’s experiences validate their struggles with their identity and that are, as Hornberger and Wang (2008) described, “contested, shaped and reshaped” (p. 7) reflected in their writing.

**Different Representation of Writer Identity in Text**

The task for Paper 1, writing a letter, turned out differently for both participants. Here I see Ivanic’s (2001) aspect of *autobiographical-self*, as their texts reflect their identities based on the formality of their language training in Filipino. Their background with the language played a role in their textual representation. James had spent two years of instruction in the language, whereas Chad was taking a formal course in Filipino for the first time. According to Valdez (2001), HLL may not exhibit equal abilities because “individuals seldom have access” to the HL in “every domain of interaction” (p. 28). James’s and Chad’s writing in Paper 1 (writing a letter) showed how their different paths, part of their HLL identity, in learning Filipino shaped the way they wrote Paper 1.

**James’ Formal Use of Language**

Reflecting on his practices for his Paper 1, James said:

> *I used a lot more advance vocabulary because I figured [Daniel] wanted it more academic, for education I used pag-aaral.*

James wrote his entire paper using formal vocabulary, which were seen in the first few sentences of his Paper 1.

[How are you there? How is your first winter? I hope I could be in your presence. I wish to let you know how lonely we feel without you.]

He also said he borrowed some words and phrases from the letter sample shown in class such as his first line “Minamahal kong kuya” (my beloved brother) to start his paper. Being that this was the first assignment, he was unsure of what to expect from the teacher. He later revealed that he received the lowest score for his Paper 1 and that the prompt, which called for writing a letter to someone who is an OFW⁴, Jame’s found it difficult and said, this is imagined, it’s not real, I don’t have a family [that is an] OFW. Since James had taken Filipino 101-202 classes in the same program, he had learned some academic words along the way that he used to compose his letter. He also shared that he had a difficult time understanding some of the idiomatic expressions and nuances, which he lacked from his formal instruction of Filipino. Valdez (2001) points to possible profiles of HLL as not having “completely developed the interpretive and presentational communication mode” (p. 32).

Chad’s Informal Use of Language

Naaalala mo ba last year? Noong pumunta tayo sa Gyu-aku kasi alam ko mahal na mahal mo ang Japanese food, lalo na ang bbq! Wag kang mag-alala, tatlong taon na ang lumipas pero buhay pa ang pangarap natin at malapit na ang muli nating pagsasama.

Imagine ang lahat ng mga posibilidad na meron sa mga pangarap natin. Nangunguna,

⁴ Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW)
pupunta tayo sa paboritong lugar mo sa Blue Mountains. Magpipiknik tayo sa bantayan ng bundok sa ilalim ng canopy. Alam ko na mahilig ka ng sa tunog na ibon at ngayon na ang panahon ng ibon kasi na mangitlog na siya. Funfact! Ang national bird ng Australia ay Emu, siya ang pangalawang pinamalaking ibon sa mundo! [Chad, Paper 1]

[Do you remember last year? When we went to Gyu-kaku because I know you really love Japanese food, especially barbeque! Don’t worry, three years has passed but our dreams to be together is near. Imagine all the possibilities we can achieve. First, we will go to your favorite place at the Blue Mountains. We will have a piknik on top the mountain under the canopy. I knw you like the sound of birds and this time the birds are laying their eggs. Funfact! The national bird of Australia [sic] is Emu, this is the second biggest bird in the world!]

Chad’s overall tone of his Paper 1 was casual and were comprised of words that are not academic. His experience in Manila attributed to his lexical choices and being that this is first time receiving formal education in Filipino. He used words such as “magpipiknik” and integrated Taglish (Tagalog and English) such as seen in his first sentence Naaalala mo ba last year? After sharing his Paper 1, he shared the following about his peer feedback experience.

Chad: my partner, fixed stuff, changed stuff […], he put like narito instead of nandito and then he changed mommy to nanay, and I didn’t know like you’re not supposed to use meron when writing [in Filipino] he said.

Precious: It’s a letter right?

Chad: Yeah it’s a letter, it could be informal.
The use of the words *nandito* and *meron* as opposed to *narito* and *mayron* are considered colloquial and everyday language used among speakers of Filipino. Additionally, he claimed that writing letters is similar to his daily activity of texting, and when he texts in Filipino, his text messages are sometimes as long as a paragraph.

These findings support Reichelt et al.’s (2012) and Hedgcock and Lefkowitz’s (2011) assessment of HLL feeling of linguistic insecurity. However, Chad took a stance regarding comments given to him to use formal words in a letter by ignoring the comments. Since Chad’s HL development in Filipino took place outside the classroom and is in the Philippines, he echoes the same profile of students described in Valentin-Rivera (2019) and Mendoza and Parba (2018) whose language repertoire involves home and non-academic vocabulary.

**Supporting HLL Writer Identity through Literacy Sponsors**

Another factor that supported James and Chad’s HLL writer identity are the people who helped them with their writing. Termed as *literary sponsors* (Brandt, 2011), these are people who contribute to their literacy. For this study, I looked at literacy in terms of their development of *Filipino* literacy, parallel to Brandt’s (2011) understanding of literacy as “built up from people’s accounts of their lived experiences, embracing those instances in which anyone said they learned anything about reading or writing” (p. 9). When asked about who helped for each of their papers, James and Chad revealed multiple sources; help came from friends, peers, classmates, relatives, teachers, and parents. For James’s Paper 1 and Paper 2 he sought help from his classmates and friends who are “native speakers” of Filipino. Before submitting their paper, it was a common practice for both James and Chad to have a native speaker read their texts.
James: I just [long pause] I sometimes ask for help like when I am using the word correctly, but I try not to ask and answer them myself
Precious: From friends or family?
James: uh oh um friends, yeah friends like native speakers yeah

James relied a lot from his friends and classmates who are native speakers to help him with his papers. Additionally, he talked about another source in the Philippines who is attending a university; specifically, this friend provides vocabulary help for James. James also revealed he connects with his university friend through a social media platform, Instagram, by using the chat feature embedded on the app.

By the time James and Chad were writing their final paper, the university had already announced that all classes were to be moved online for Spring 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak. When asked for new sources on their final paper, James shared that his mom had helped him with his writing assignment.

James: Oh I asked my mom to read it, she told me to like change some words, she told me I had a lot of like um like the um particles like I use ng and ang wrong and or like sa and she replaced those yeah.
Precious: I think you didn’t ask her for the first two papers
James: I don’t think so

I saw the involvement of a parent in helping James with certain grammatical and lexical aspects in his writing. As shared earlier, James’ family were welcoming in maintaining their native language, Ilokano. Since Filipino is the national language of the Philippines, most Filipinos who have had experience of going to school in the Philippines, can also speak and understand the
Filipino language. Aside from James’ friends, James’ mother too, took an active role as a literacy sponsor.

Chad revealed that he asked for feedback from his cousins and friends. Chad had different sources of help for each paper. He received help from his friend for his Paper 1 after he had written it on his own, and he asked for feedback from his cousin for Paper 2. Since the second paper required them to write a personal narrative about life as a Filipino American, Chad experienced difficulties in composing and described it as “such a big thing to write about like write about myself, my identity is something important.” He reacted a bit dissatisfied with the type of help his cousin was giving him. During Chad’s second paper, he revealed that he shifted receiving help from his family member and asked Daniel for help instead.

**Chad:** Yeah I did talk to him [Daniel] about it [because] I would ask him, how can I get better at this? And I also shared my writing with a native speaker like a friend or family member and sometimes my sentence would change completely [from] what I wrote. I decided to ask him because he’s my teacher. I think it’s also easier and it might be easier. Sometimes for my friends [they say] I don’t know why it’s like that [in Filipino]. I think it’s the same in English, I forgot why it’s like that.

Daniel’s view regarding outside help students receive, acts as resources for him that students should “tap into” to learn more about the language. It was essential for him to get to know his students in terms of their literacy level especially the type of writing each student can produce. In a way, Daniel served as an important sponsor for James and Chad to regulate their HLL identity by supporting and encouraging them to ask help within their community.
Another aspect revealed in Chad’s interview is the informal help he received growing up. Though not a help in terms of writing in Filipino, following Brandt’s (2001) definition of literacy sponsorship, they also “represent the causes into which people’s literacy usually gets recruited” (p. 19). Chad explained:

*I would learn more about the Philippines and life there from my *tita* [aunt], during high school years, she would share with me about my dad’s life and their life growing up in Manila. With her, I did watch some movies but there was no subtitles so I was a little lost, but I would eat delicious Filipino food which was hard to find in XX. I’d say my tita and *tito* [uncle] in XX would share a lot more about Filipino culture with me than my dad.

Chad was able to keep up with his interest in learning more about his culture as well as his language. These events led him to explore Philippines to get in touch with his Filipino side of the family. From there, he found comfort with his family who not only provided support with his speaking but also continued their overseas support with his writing in Filipino.

For one of Chad’s small writing assignments, he asked a relative in the Philippines for help to double check his sentences using the Google Doc comment feature (see Figure 1). We see here that Chad’s relative is providing explanation on his pronoun error on composing the sentence in Filipino *I cleaned my room* and due to his limited metalinguistic awareness, he instead constructed the sentence to mean *the room did the cleaning*. As a response, Chad replies with laughter to the first correction and *pucha*⁵, on the next correction. The way Chad responded to his relative speaks volume of their relationship with each other.

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⁵*Pucha*, a Filipino curse word, its closest meaning in English is “damn.”
Aside from help they receive from their parents, friends, and teachers, I noticed a type of transnational help among Chad and James through their literacy sponsors that support their HLL writer identity, which was made possible by technology such as Google Docs and chat features in social media platforms. As described in the literature (Carreira & Kagan, 2017; Valdés, 2014), most HLL take courses in order to communicate with family, and the examples provided here clearly shows how writing in Filipino is a possible entryway to interact with friends and family that support their HLL identity.

**Invested Identities in Learning Filipino**
In this section, I will describe James and Chad’s invested identities in terms of taking a Filipino language course as it relates to writing. James initially stated his interest in listening to Filipino music and watching Filipino dramas and wished to understand what was being said, since his home language was Ilokano. In addition, James was also interested in going to the Philippines to “speak, speak, speak!” Chad on the other hand, having spent some time in the Philippines and gained proficiency in speaking, his main goal was “to take a Tagalog class” utilizing the grant he received from the U.S. federal government. Both students initially shared that they wanted to improve their speaking and listening in Filipino but were aware of the writing demands in class. When I asked them to express their thoughts about writing in Filipino, I argue that their invested identity with the writing practices in class is shaped by their beliefs about Filipino literacy.

Shaped by their life experiences, both James and Chad shared their perspectives about writing that carried over into their views about writing in Filipino. For James, writing was something he already enjoyed doing in his L1, despite spending five years in ELL and feeling “inadequate” at the time. He also took pride with his writing in his L1 and shared that he had won an award for an essay writing in English. In his spare time, he loves to write poetry and keeps a journal to write down his thoughts and ideas that pop in his head. Currently, he is also a member of his university’s student publication as an associate feature editor. Supported by his literacy practices in his L1, writing in Filipino serves as another platform for him to express his thoughts as he sees speaking in Filipino as his weakest skill.

Precious: What are your thoughts about writing, do you think it’s an important skill to learn?
James:  
Absolutely yeah, it’s used every day. I don’t know, we use it everywhere. 
It’s a good way to be able to communicate um with people, not just 
through speaking [...] when I watch the news, there’s headline in Filipino 
and I can’t read it. It’s just as important, speaking is just [a] short cut to 
what you write.

Chad also sees writing as an important skill to learn but also emphasized that developing literacy 
in the mother tongue is just as important. When I asked him to elaborate on the importance of 
writing, he shared his experience in the Philippines while doing volunteering work.

Chad:  
I was in Cebu, I noticed in the job it was important to connect. If there’s 
instruction in English it’s not like everyone knows the English, especially 
in the province area. I think it’s definitely important to write in Cebuano.

Both James and Chad see the value of writing in Filipino as an important means of 
communication. For James, writing is another way of expressing his ideas as opposed to 
speaking. On the other hand, Chad recounts his experience that made him see the importance of 
writing, not only for himself, but the target community. Therefore, their beliefs in developing 
literacy in Filipino has influenced their investment in choosing to pursue Philippine studies.

A key finding in this study shows how two HLLs, despite the struggle with their identity 
as Fil-Ams growing up, became invested in learning the language and see themselves as part of 
specific social networks in the future. James hopes to teach Filipino one day in the U.S., only “if 
the opportunity comes,” and Chad sees himself living and working in Cebu, Philippines, where 
he spent some time getting to know the local community. I see Chad and James' investment in 
the language, through their professional and personal goals, aligning with the notion that
“investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space” (Norton, 1995, p. 18). It is only a matter of time that we see the results of Chad and James’ investment in the language. However, both began to see positive results as I noticed a change in their confidence when they talked about the current status of their writer identity.

*James:*  
*I think my writing now was a lot more in a sense a lot more analytical*

For Chad producing writing in Filipino was already an improvement on his part:

*Chad:*  
*It improved a lot, when I first started, I have never written. To start a sentence, then a paragraph, a page, now three pages. I was happy that I was able to get to that level.*

James considered his writing as *“more analytical”* shows that he has improved on his writing in Filipino, while Chad on the other hand, apart from his ability to write up to three pages of formal writing, also gained confidence in texting in Filipino as he stated, *“I’m more sure that this is the correct way.”* James and Chad’s investment in the language shaped their writing in Filipino through their professional and personal goals.

**Discussion**

I presented excerpts from the interview as well as students’ writings and analyzed how their textual representation represents their identity as HLLs. It was evident that the formality of their language training affected the way they wrote. Valdez (2005) supports this view by stating that HLLs "may seem quite superior in some respects and quite limited in others" (p. 30) in terms of their language abilities. However, the results of this study showed that regardless of their
HLL identity, James and Chad were able to produce writing in Filipino and it showed through their invested identity and the literacy sponsors who supported their HLL identity. Additionally, the relevance of writing prompts that explore students’ past experiences (i.e. Mendoza & Parba, 2018; Parba 2018), played an important role in regulating James and Chad's HLL identity and writing about life experiences, such as being a Fil-Am, may help to validate the history of Filipinos in the diaspora that may have been overlooked in the past.

Additionally, a common practice between James and Chad was accessing their literacy sponsors. These sponsors range from classmates to people they hold personal connections with. When I asked what type of help they received for all three papers, they shared different literacy sponsors for each assigned paper. What impressed me the most regarding James and Chad’s literacy sponsors was the transnational help they received with their writing assignments. Both James and Chad accessed help through family and friends who reside in the Philippines. Specifically, Chad’s sponsor was someone in his past who also helped him during his time in the Philippines. Another noteworthy sponsor in Chad’s life were his aunty and uncle, who during his childhood years had supported his Fil-Am identity through introduction of Filipino food and media. Ever since Chad took his first trip to the Philippines in 2015, his interest in developing his Filipino language has not been suppressed. For James, even if he does not go on frequent trips to the Philippines like Chad, his connection was established through the social media platform Instagram. These literacy sponsors, seen as supporters, who legitimize their HLL identity by providing help with their writing in Filipino.

Contrary to the positive sponsors that influenced Chad’s and James’s lives, there were people and experiences that withheld their literacy in Filipino which played a major role in their writer identity. As Hornberger and Wang (2008) noted, no single definition can describe the
lives of HLL, but they belong to “a part of a larger system in which they shape and are shaped by various factors in the system” (p. 6). James’ journey back to the Philippines, at the age of four, was the starting point of his Fil-Am identity. Despite being born in the U.S., his placement in ELL added to the stigma surrounding Filipino immigrants. Reflected in his writing, he described being called a *bukbuk* a traumatic moment; this type of incident is also parallel to the experience of many Filipino immigrants in Hawai‘i who were criticized for having a “thick accent” and for wearing “bright colored clothes” (Okamura, 2008). As a result, Filipinos in Hawai‘i (local and immigrant) “shunned” being Filipino, and some refused to learn or speak their parents’ native tongue. In James’s account, he self-reported that speaking was his weakest skill. However, he also emphasized that speaking was not the only means of communication and can be done through writing. Writing, for James, enabled a space to project his ideas in Filipino, a language he gave less attention to growing up because he needed to assimilate to his old but new culture. James’s experience writing personal narratives and analytical texts made him claim that he made significant progress in his writing.

Chad’s story on the other hand, showed us another type of HLL who longed to learn about their heritage but was denied by others. Like James, Chad also faced struggle with his identity. As a mixed-race person, it was evident in his writing that he was conflicted with his identity and sense of belonging such as dealing with his school form that asked him to check only ONE ethnicity. In addition, Chad’s condition at home deprived him of learning Filipino language, but somehow, Chad created an environment that made him invested in learning his language, which was opposite of what happened to James.

Overall, James and Chad’s experiences in the past, in contrast to their experiences now, legitimized their HLL writer identity through the process of writing in Filipino, which in turn,
provided a space for James and Chad to construct their writer identity and improve their writing skills. This study revealed that being in an environment that supports your identity can have an impact to foster your writing proficiency.

**Limitations**

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the university shifted to online teaching which prompted me to make changes in my research design. My initial intention was to conduct observations in the classroom and track more students’ perspectives across the semester to provide data of their progress over time.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

James and Chad gave us more understanding of what it means to be a second language writer of Filipino as they talked about their engagement with writing in Filipino. The findings of this study cannot be generalized among FL writers in HLL settings but it shed some light to the unique profiles of James, a U.S. born Filipino who spent a year in the Philippines then came back, and Chad, a biracial Filipino born in the continental U.S. who experienced denied opportunities in learning Filipino. Their beliefs and stance about developing writing in Filipino contributed to their investment in the language. Chad’s experience in the target language helped him realize the importance of literacy among the community. In addition, the findings revealed that those who support HLLs identity are important forces that help to foster language learning, which this study showed to have aided the two participants in their writing in Filipino.

Qualitative approaches allowed me to see the complexity of HLLs and how it influences their language production, in this case, their writing in Filipino. To assert better claims on my end, an ethnographic approach to this study would have resulted in richer data regarding the construction of writer profile. Discoveries made in this study generated areas about HLL writers
that can be studied such as vocabulary development, impacts of literary sponsors, as well as writings outside the classroom. Hopefully, this study sparked curiosity to those interested in FL settings, especially less commonly taught languages that tend to have smaller class size. The approach taken in this study can serve as a plausible method in such situations. This study also revealed a great deal of knowledge that needs to be addressed about the complex nature of L2 writing in an HLL setting. This also calls for studying how writing in Filipino is used in community both locally and globally, along with the advancement of technology and multiple types interactions HLL students have with the language.
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INFLUENCE OF HLL IDENTITY ON STUDENTS’ WRITING


Appendix A

Interview Questions for Students

Student Background
1. What is your first language?
2. What other language did you grow up with?
3. What is your primary reason for taking Filipino 300?
4. Did you study Filipino prior to taking the class?
5. Have you ever been to the Philippines? If yes, where and how long did you stay there?

Questions about students first language (L1) writing:
1. In general, what are your thoughts about writing? Do you think it’s an important skill to learn?
2. Do you like to write in English?
3. What types of writing do you do in your first language (L1)?
4. Can you describe your writing process in your L1?

Questions about students second language (L2) writing:
1. How do you feel about writing in Filipino?
2. Do you think Writing is equally as important as the other skills (reading, speaking, listening)? Why or why not?
3. What motivated you to major or go beyond FIL 202?
4. How do you feel before and after completing FIL 302?
5. In terms of writing, did your 101-202 classes help you prepare for 302?
6. How did you feel about your first writing assignment?
7. What was your process?
8. Do the things in class help you with your writing? If so, what specific activities help the most?
10. Did writing in Filipino help you in terms of learning the language? If yes, how? If no, why not?
11. Is it important to you that you can write in Filipino? Why?
13. Can you talk about your writing process in Filipino? How do you start?
14. Did anything change in your process throughout the semester?
15. How satisfied are you with your writing in Filipino after completing one semester of Filipino 300?
Appendix B

Interview Questions for Teacher

Teacher Background:

1. What is your first language?
2. What other language did you grow up with?
3. Could you describe your teaching experience about writing (any language)? What about writing in Filipino?
4. What are some of your beliefs regarding writing in Filipino? Do you think it is an important skill for students to learn? Why?
5. What type of students do you usually have in your class? (classroom demographic)
6. How long have you been teaching Filipino 300 courses?
7. Could you talk about changes (if any) in the curriculum as it relates to writing?
8. FIL 302 is a writing intensive (WI) course, how do you prepare students regarding the course requirements in terms of writing?
9. What materials do you use in the classroom to help students improve their writing in Filipino?
10. What are some challenges you faced when dealing with students’ writing? How did you overcome them?
11. Overall, how do you feel about the progress of your students’ writing during Spring 2020? Were you satisfied with the results?