Bilingualism has now been acknowledged as an important area of inquiry, which embraces insights emanating from multidisciplinary studies such as applied linguistics, language acquisition, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. The plethora of multidisciplinary research on bilingualism available now (see for example Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; May, 2014, Romaine, 2000) attests to the importance of the field as a scientific inquiry worthy of investigations. Furthermore, the publication of two refereed international journals like Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, and International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism is telling evidence that the field has grown rapidly to maturity. Just as the aim of refereed journals in other disciplines, these two journals were published with the aim of disseminating and promoting research related to bilingualism as well as of encouraging debate in the field.

However, despite recognition of the field as one of the important areas of inquiry, discussions on bilingualism are always replete with controversies (see Krashen, 1996, 1999; Hamers & Blanc, 2002). The crux of the intellectual rift lies in the cognitive effects of being bilingual. The serious accusation often exposed to bilingualism and bilingual education is that they result in the erosion of English (Krashen, 1996, 1999).

Furthermore, almost no single study on bilingualism is conclusive and generalizable, and no single study has eluded criticisms. The problem common to studies on bilingualism is often ascribed to the flaws in the methodological designs, which includes a number of factor such as limited or biased data, vague definition of what constitutes individual bilingualism (bilinguality) 1, lack of control of bilingual experience, and co-varying factors and validity measures (Hamers & Blanc, 2002).

Apart from these criticisms, published studies on both bilingualism and bilinguality have been engrossed in psycholinguistics models of language learning, and not embraced insights from socio-cultural studies. As such, students' language competence and communicative ability has been seen as an in intellectu construct. Clearly, most bilingualism and bilinguality studies offer a very limited view of language learning.

Without attempting to offer a panacea to the flaws the previous studies have suffered (especially those reviewed both in Hamers & Blanc (2000) and Romaine (2000)), the present study aims at finding out the impact of adult bilinguality from a completely another look by merging both a cognitive perspective and a socio-cultural vantage point. In particular, it examines the extent to which bilinguality affects the ways students employ coping strategies in completing their writing tasks. Undoubtedly, as writing involves a complex process of meaning negotiation and is shaped by socio-cultural variables, a sound understanding of how students employ coping strategies during writing is of paramount importance. In the context of increased interest in multilingual, identity, and literacy studies inspired by post-colonialism (Norton, 2014), treating bilingual students by taking into account their self and identity in coping with writing tasks can generate important insights into how a second language and additional languages are
Acquired.

**Previous studies on bilinguality**

Previous studies on bilingualism, despite their unidimensional nature (Hamers & Blânc, 2000), have indeed thrown useful light because they generated important insights necessary for the hypothesis building and theory construction. Furthermore, the practical implications of such studies can serve as a helpful impetus for language pedagogy. In light of the purpose of the present study, I shall review here studies on the effects of bilinguality on students’ academic achievement. The studies reviewed here are concerned primarily with the usefulness of the mother tongue, a prevailing assumption in the field of second language acquisition (Krashen, 1996, 1999; Benson & Kosonen, 2013, Kosonen, 2014; Sugiharto, 2014). They have much in common: to counter-argue widespread public opinions that the development of the first language is a hindrance to acquiring a second language as well as to illuminate the controversy over the use of the first language in studying English as a foreign language.

Butzkamn’s (1998) investigated the use of the mother tongue in bilingual content teaching as well as in conventional foreign language class. His subjects were German students who were in their third year studying English as a foreign language. Using the recorded transcription of a history lesson, Butzkamn found that code-switching was an effective learning aid as it “provides the most immediate and direct access to the foreign language expression needed to carry on the conversation and to get one’s message across (p.95). In interpreting his finding, he was cautious that the use of the mother tongue was not supposedly to take over the use of English, but it is instead a necessary “conversational lubricant” (p.95).

Another compelling study on the merit of the mother tongue in learning English is conducted by Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen (2001). Refuting the widespread public opinions that accuse the use of the first language as the factor that impairs second language development, they examine the extent to which the use of the primary language accelerates second language acquisition. The subjects of the study were 588 Vietnamese speaking students in elementary and middle school in California. Using a Likert scale questionnaire probing the perceptions of Vietnamese and English competence, language preference, and attitudes towards maintaining Vietnamese language and culture, Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen found a positive correlation between first and second language competence, leading them to conclude that the development of the first language is not a barrier to second language acquisition either oral or written. This conclusion is consistent with the previous research done by Shin & Krashen (1996).

Dolson (1985), quoted from Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen (2001), has demonstrated the benefit of bilingualism in students’ academic achievement. Involving fifth and six Spanish-speaking graders in Los Angeles, Dolson found that his subjects’ consistent use of Spanish at home had a positive impact on school performance. These students excelled their counterparts who use only English on the test of mathematics and had higher grade point averages. Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen (2001) interpreted this finding as the cognitive and affective advantages of being bilinguals.

Probably, the most convincing arguments espousing the benefit of both bilingualism and bilingualism come from the meta-analysis studies (Greene, 1998; Krashen, 2005). Meta-analysis method has been used to review research studies so as to obtain the effect size (the degree of superiority of one treatment over another), allowing the reviewers to minimize the subjectivity or reviewer bias. Using such a method, Krashen (2005) has reported that children in bilingual programs typically outperform their counterparts in all-English programs on tests of academic achievement in English.

A study by Fu and Matoush (2006) provides illuminating evidence on the benefit of being bilingual. Studying the development of bilingual Chinese students who learnt to write in English in a New York Chinatown middle school, they identified four transitional stages of writing, which moves from “First Language Usage” to “Code-Switching” to “Trans-Language Usage”, and to “Approaching Standard English” (p. 12). From their observation, Fu and Matoush found that in the process of writing the student writers did not progress in a linear fashion like these stages, but they recursively moved back and forth depending on the nature and complexities of the writing tasks given. From this finding, they deemed it normal for student to employ their first language and codeswitching during the meaning-making process in writing. Aiming for correctness to directly attain Standard English, as they further argue, impedes their developmental growth as writers and “prevents them from fully expressing their thoughts and emotions” (Fang & Matoush, 2006, p.26).

**On coping strategies**

This study employs Leki’s (1995) typology of coping strategies – one which serves as a pedagogically valuable framework for the analysis of strategies students employ while they are writing. The reason for employing this paradigm is that it can assist teachers in evaluating the preferred strategies the students employ in the process of constructing texts. In addition, this typology allows students for empowerment in writing (Canagarajah, 2002).

Followings are the elements which constitute coping strategies:

*Clarifying strategy.* This strategy is employed by the students to talk to the teachers or their colleagues in order to understand the assignment better, to ask for specific feedback, and to interpret the teacher’s purpose in an assignment.

*Focusing strategy.* This includes rereading the assignment several times, and rereading books to narrow down the assignment.

*Relying on past writing experiences.* The students resort to their past experiences as useful evaluative
strategies to accomplish their current writing assignment.

Taking advantage of first language/culture. This is a strategy used by the students to resort to their native language to resolve the problems while writing in a second language.

Using current experience or feedback to adjust strategies. The students employ this strategy to individual students' feedback (both oral and written) or feedback given by their teachers to the other students as guidance in writing.

Looking for models. The students consult English language books and other professional research articles as models to imitate in their formats, organizational styles, and wordings.

Using current or past ESL writing training. The students employed strategies they have had from their current and previous writing class.

Accommodating teachers' demands. The students try their best to meet the expectations of their teachers by even suppressing their own opinions.

Resisting teachers' demands. The students do the assignments based on their own opinions and interest without necessarily complying with what their teachers asked them to do.


It is important to note here that this typology was the result of an ethnographic research, which involved student-participants from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While all of these strategies can be universally applied for language learning in general, they are to a greater extent impinged upon by the students' socio-cultural histories. They are therefore not value-free, but are loaded with cultural values. The way a student employs such a strategy as “resisting teachers' demands”, for instance, may vary depending on to which cultures and learning traditions the students come from. A student who hails from a culture which portrays teachers as someone who hold the authority in classroom is less likely to display resistance to teachers' demands. If he/she does, the resistance is often displayed in a covert, rather than overt manner.

METHOD

Subject

Subjects of this study were forty-eight students enrolling in my academic writing class. They were divided into two groups: the bilingual group (BG) and the monolingual group (MG). The former came from such regions in Indonesia as Pontianak (West Kalimantan), Medan (South Sumatra), Semarang, (West Java), and Surabaya (East Java). The students in BG speak two languages: their local languages (Hokkien, Teow Chew, Hakka, and Javanese) as well as Indonesian. They had been speaking their local languages with their parents at home since they were children. They also spoke them with their peers coming from the same regions outside of the classroom. However, they switched to Indonesian in a formal situation like in the classroom and in a situation where using local languages is hardly possible. The monolingual group was born in Jakarta and spoke only Indonesian as means of their daily interaction. To control language proficiency, in general and writing proficiency in particular, the students in the two groups were selected on the basis of their GPA (the Grade Point Average), which range from 3-3.5 on a 4 scale and their latest writing score, which ranged from B to B+.

Data collection

This study uses a pre-experiment method in which the pre-and post-tests are not always necessary. Data were obtained from the score of writing prompt given to the students in the two groups. They were given two hours to write. To ensure the reliability in scoring (Hughes, 2003), the writing task was restricted to one topic only. In other words, the students were not given freedom to choose their own topics. The writing prompt was given in order to find out the students' overall writing ability. Another source of data was ten reflective essays written by five student in BG and five students in MG. This additional data were intended to discover the students' coping strategies in producing texts. Furthermore, I interviewed five students from both BG and MG at the end of the class, asking what strategies they employ before, during, and after writing. This allowed me to triangulate the previous data and information, so as to produce a more complex, richer, and thicker description.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

To gain a rich perspective, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis. In the quantitative analysis, the overall writing performance of the groups was compared and evaluated using the ESL Composition Profile proposed by Jacob et al. (1981). This profile divides writing into five components, i.e. content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. Each component has a set of criteria ranging from “excellent to very good” to “very poor” with a specified range of scores. This profile assumes 100 as the highest possible score and 34 as the lowest for overall proficiency in English composition. The first data (the score of the writing prompt) was analyzed using the descriptive statistics so as to give confidence that the description of the data was correct. The inter-rater reliability in the scoring between the first and second writer was computed using the correlation coefficient. This measurement was used because it serves as an index of the extent to which the scores are consistent. The correlation coefficient indicated that the difference in scoring between the two raters was consistent with p<0.001.

In the qualitative analysis, the additional data (the reflective essays) and the results from the interview were coded and interpreted in light of Leki's (1995) typology of coping strategies described in the previous section. As bilingualism has always been assessed quantitatively using a test instrument (Garcia & Flores, 2014), which is clearly product-oriented, the use of qualitative analysis can provide detailed information about the process of
writing students underwent while completing writing tasks. This process includes what strategies the students employed to cope with writing tasks assigned to them. Ineluctably, in the paucity of, if not the absence of, process orientation to measure bilingualism, qualitative analysis using such methods as observation, interview and field notes, just to mention a few can help unravel the complexities of bilingualism and bilinguality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics analysis revealed that the BG excelled the MG in the overall writing proficiency, with the means 67.57 in the former and 62.00 in the latter. This result indicates that BG is more superior in terms of the writing gains than MG. One of the plausible explanations to account for this result is the students’ shrewdness in using the coping strategies in writing process. The analysis of the reflective essays, coupled with classroom observations and interviews, from the two groups indicate that the students in BG employed richer, yet flexible, coping strategies than did their counterparts in MG. For example, the reflective essays written by the students in BG reflect their coping strategies in meaning negotiation during writing:

“We as students clearly have the authority over the content of our writing. We can pour out whatever we want to say without being pressed by other people including our writing teachers. In fact, we can just ignore if we are forced to follow ideas of our teachers, which are not fit to our wishes. We are supposed to be creative in elaborating out topic.” (CRLTA)

This bilingual student clearly exhibited resistance strategy as she seemed unwilling to follow what her teacher’s demands of her in following the former’s ideas in writing. She feels comfortable to maintain her own strategies by directly composing by “pouring out whatever we want to say without being pressed by other people including our writing teachers.” Thus, rather than relying on the imposed writing strategies, which may not work for her, this student is confident to experiment with her way of “pouring out” the ideas and to free herself from any external pressure that may distort her creativity in writing.

Another student in the BG group demonstrated clarifying strategies by asking a feedback from her peers when she said:

“After I finished my writing, I reread and revise it. I make correction when there are mistakes in grammar, collocation, or diction. Then, I asked my friends to read it and to give comments about it, and then I revise it.” (CNTH)

This is the strategy that most successful writers employ during the meaning making process in writing. A plethora of research in writing process has confirmed that unlike unskilled writer who stop after finishing their writing, skilled writers do not stop, but continue to revise their own writing (Raines, 1985; Krashen, 1984; Zamel, 1983). It is through the revision stage that students obtain feedbacks and correctives which are necessary for further improvement of their writing. Many process writing scholars believe that willingness to revise (to discard old ideas and to add new emergent ideas) can lead to successful writing.

It is also compelling to see bilingual student in the BG who showed her resistance to her teacher because she felt that her teacher’s comments are discouraging and irritating. However, as she realized that her teacher is the one who has the authority to determine the grade, she flexibly switched her strategy to accommodate her teacher’s expectation. As she said:

“When I write, I just go with the flow. But sometimes the teacher considers my writing product inappropriate. As a result, I had to revise my writing to meet his taste. It is annoying, but there’s nothing I can do about it given that the teacher is the one who determines my grade in writing class.” (IDH)

Although this student in the BG group expresses her aversion of being dictated by her teacher, she is quite flexible to accommodate what her teacher required of her. This strategy can be interpreted as student’s willingness to temporarily relinquish her role as a writer, and to accept what her teacher thinks suitable strategies to apply in writing. Leki (1995) contends that in many ESL writing classes, teachers have structured writing assignment for the sake of students’ success in achieving writing goals.

Finally, there is also a student in BG who demonstrated his strategy of relying on his writing experience in the first language. His experience in writing in Indonesian greatly helped him write in a language he initially find strange to him. In a stark contrast to prevailing perceptions among second language learners that academic writing is too difficult, this student finds writing in English fun, as it stimulates his imagination.

“I wrote in my mother tongue. I could also express whatever I wanted to express when I write in English. There was no limitation for my creative writing. I could write whatever I had in my mind with no boundaries.” (HDK)

It is a common assumption that writing by resorting to the students’ first language will impede the acquisition of second language or additional languages. This assumption prevails in pedagogic context, and students are often advised for not being too much intervened by their first language while composing an academic prose. Yet, this student seems not to have succumbed to this traditional wisdom. Instead, he remains adamant for making use of his experience in writing in his home language while he wrote in English. Contrary to the traditional wisdom, studies in second language acquisition (Krashen 1996) as well as in second language writing (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992) have confirmed that students’ first language facilitates the development of writing ability in second language, and a solid knowledge of one’s native language will automatically transfer to the
learning of a second language, hence the transfer hypothesis.

In contrast to students in BG group, those in MG also demonstrated their coping strategies, but most of them exhibited a relatively stable coping strategy (accommodating teacher's demand strategy), with none of them showing resistance strategy and strategy of relying to first language. For the students in this group, satisfying their teacher's expectations is sufficient for the ability to write in English. To this, one may argue that students' heavy reliance to accommodating teachers' demand strategy is simply due to their apprehension for not earning good marks or probably for not passing the class. Yet, my interviews with the students revealed that accommodating to teachers' demand was the only strategy that they could think about during completing writing tasks, and that this strategy could help them effectively learn English academic writing. There were however, some students in MG who exhibited a looking for models strategy. The use of this strategy was highly likely related to the accommodating teachers' demand strategy in that teachers might exhort students to learn to write through instances of good writing models to imitate.

It is interesting to note here that in learning to write academically some students in both the BG and MG exhibited a similar strategy, i.e. looking for models strategy. From this finding, there seems to be a causal relationship between the BG's gains in writing scores with the use of coping strategies in writing. This study suggests that the richer and the more varied, and the more flexible the strategies are used, the more likely writing ability will improve. Clearly, the extent to which the students in BG had more writing gains than their counterparts in MG showed that the former's access to more than one linguistic code (their state of bilinguality) contributed these gains. In fact, access to one's native language while acquiring additional languages has been deemed vital resources and linguistic repertoires for achieving communicative goals in the latter (Canagarajah, 2011, 2014).

Despite the paucity of studies on bilingual students' writing strategies, the available studies reviewed above and elsewhere are enlightening as they provide indirect evidence that bilingual students develop specific strategy both perceptually (Goodz, 1985, as quoted in Hamers & Blanc, 2000) and productively (Macswan, 2001). It has been found that the ability in developing this specific strategy is the result of the exposure to bilingual environment (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Thus, it is reasonable to argue here that a rich exposure to bilingual environment shapes the way the students in BG employ a variety of the coping strategies. Sociolinguistically, the BG’s rich use of the coping strategies reflects an attempt to use language not as response to “a fix predetermined set of prescriptions”, but “to build their own and their audience's abstract understanding of situational norms, to communicate metaphoric information about how they intend their words to be understood” (Gumperz, 1982, p. 61).

The bilingual students' experience in shifting the language (from his local languages to Indonesian) may also be a strong predictor which can account BG students' rich use of the coping strategies in writing. In light of this, Krashen (1999) has hypothesized that language shift is powerful as it can provide the speakers with effective strategies of understanding the system of the languages they speak. The understanding of such a system is advantageous as it can accelerate the acquisition of other languages the speakers are trying to learn.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This present study has shown that the students in BG demonstrated better writing performance than did their counterparts in MG. The quantitative gain in writing scores obtained by the former has been accounted for in terms of the rich coping strategies the students employed. There seems to be a strong connection here between the coping strategies used and writing ability. The richer, more flexible use of coping strategies the students employed during the meaning-making in the writing process, the better their writing performance will be. Thus, access to students' native language in coping with academic writing tasks provides a strategic shortcut to acquiring written codes in additional language (in this case English academic writing). As the pendulum of teaching academic writing has swung from a cognitive orientation to social-practice perspective (Canagarajah, 2002), students need to be encouraged to employed rich strategies of coping with writing tasks at their own disposal. Exhorting students with strategies not derived from their own preferred writing strategies may be of little pedagogic significance. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that the coping strategies students employ are impinged upon by the students' identities, cultures, and rhetorical traditions they brought with them in a new rhetorical context.

Despite the superiority in writing gains in the BG, a note of caution is in order. As the present study controls only the subjects' language proficiency and previous writing scores, excluding other important variables, the finding should be at best suggestive rather than conclusive. It could be the case that factors other than the subjects' language proficiency and previous writing scores contribute to the gains in the writing test scores. Such factor as the subjects' state of bilingualism, social psychological, sociocultural contexts, socioeconomic status, and other relevant factors may be responsible for accounting the gains. For example, a recent study attributes to the socioeconomic status of bilingual students' academic achievement (Krashen & Brown, 2005; see also Krashen 1999).

Furthermore, one may call into question the methodological design of the present study for the lack of control of co-varying factors above, validity measure of bilinguality, and the relatively small sample size. Nevertheless, though this study may suffer some methodological shortcomings, it adopts an empirical approach – one that helps “unravel the complexities of bilingual development” and give us a better insight into
a better understanding of bilingual development (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). It should be clear here that future studies on the impacts of bilinguality and bilingual education need to address the aforementioned issues, so that the generalizability of the present study can be further extended.

REFERENCES


**NOTES**

It should be noted here that as research literature in bilingualism studies mix the use of the notion of bilinguality and bilingualism, I shall, for the sake of precision in using a term, adopt the notion of bilinguality defined by Hamers and Blanc (2000) as “the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication” (p.6).