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Verb Errors of Bilingual and Monolingual Basic Writers

This study analyzed the grammatical control of verbs exercised by 145 monolingual English and Generation 1.5 bilingual developmental writers in narrative essays using quantitative and qualitative methods. Generation 1.5 students made more errors than their monolingual peers in each category investigated, albeit in only 2 categories was the difference statistically significant. Yet the overall effect was cumulative: The total number of verb errors in the essays of bilinguals was statistically larger than that in the essays of monolinguals. Both monolingual and bilingual writers inappropriately transferred the features of spoken English into the written medium, and both displayed difficulties in the appropriate use of the perfect aspect. However, Generation 1.5 learners also exhibited ESL-like traits in their writing, demonstrating a weak control of verbal inflection. The findings suggest that explicit grammar instruction may be warranted in all Developmental Writing classes, especially those with large proportions of Generation 1.5 learners.

The term *Generation 1.5 learners* first appeared on the scene of educational research in 1988 in a report on the adaptation of school-age refugees to life in the US (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). The study found that Generation 1.5 students, that is, young immigrants born outside the US but growing up in the country during their formative years,[1] although highly acculturated, often lagged in academic achievement, due not in small part to their underdeveloped literacy skills. Despite the distinctive linguistic and educational needs of these learners, it took another decade for SLA and Composition Studies researchers to bring their full attention to the challenges that Generation 1.5 students faced in acquiring advanced literacy skills and to the ways of fostering their academic success (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal,

1999). Today, research on Generation 1.5 learners is thriving (Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009; Roberge, Losey, & Wald, 2015), and it is needed more than ever. In California alone, in the 2016-2017 academic year, 1.332 million public school students—more than 21%—were English language learners, or ELLs (California Department of Education, 2017).

Many of these students are now heading to college. Their academic literacy needs, therefore, must be adequately met to ensure educational success. However, there still exist programmatic and pedagogical challenges in doing so effectively. A key issue underlying these challenges is the debate about Generation 1.5ers' command of Standard written English and, in particular, grammar. Researchers such as Doolan (2011, 2013, 2014, 2017) and Valdés (1992, 2001), among others, have argued that in the overall quality of writing and grammatical ability, Generation 1.5ers are more similar to native-speaking students than to traditional ESL learners; thus, they are best served in mainstream composition classes, which normally do not include explicit grammar instruction.[2]

Others, such as Ferris (2009), Frodesen (2009), Frodesen and Starna (1999), Holten and Mikesell (2007), Kies (2011), and Mikesell (2007), have demonstrated that Generation 1.5 learners often retain ESL-like errors even after years of English-medium schooling. While acknowledging that Generation 1.5 students are not ESL learners in the canonical sense, these scholars argue that they benefit from the explicit focus on grammar in composition courses (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & vanDommelen, 2001; Holten, 2002, 2009; Kies, 2011) and during writing tutoring (Destandau & Wald, 2002; Thonus, 2003).

The present study contributes to this scholarly discussion by analyzing the grammatical control of monolingual (EL 1) and Generation 1.5 bilingual (BL 1.5) college writers over the morphology, syntax, and discursive use of English verbs. The findings suggest that grammar instruction is necessary for most developmental writers, and especially for Generation 1.5 students so that they can develop both overall linguistic awareness of the forms expected in academic writing and the metalinguistic knowledge necessary for efficient self-editing.

Generation 1.5: A Brief Research Review

Generation 1.5 learners are a broad category with varying migration, linguistic, and educational histories, and, therefore, varying language and literacy needs. They comprise young immigrants, students born in the US and growing up in large linguistic enclaves, children experiencing frequent transnational migration, and in-migrants from non–English-speaking US territories (Roberge, 2009). Such students

tend to develop complex linguistic and cultural identities that affect both their opportunities and motivations to acquire Standard written English (Chiang & Schmida, 1999; Harklau, 2000; Haswell, 1998). Many consider themselves either native speakers of English or native bilinguals (Holten, 2002; Huster, 2011; Janssen, 2005) and actively resist the "ESL" label (Talmy, 2005, 2008). Their educational histories, however, may be beset with interruptions, prejudicial treatment, limited or absent L1 support, or inadequate ESL instruction upon first entry into the American school system (Benesch, 2008; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012; Olson, 2010; Roberge, 2002; Soto, 2013). Thus, Generation 1.5ers acquire high levels of oral proficiency in spoken English, but they frequently lack some aspects of grammatical competence, which leads to ESL-like errors in writing (Holten & Mikesell, 2007; Huster, 2011; Janssen, 2005; Mikesell, 2007; Reid, 2006; Schwartz, 2004; Singhal, 2004; Thonus, 2003). As a result, they are regularly placed in ESL classes in college.

Not only does the ESL placement clash with (and is damaging to) the students' sense of identity and language ownership (Talmy, 2004), but it is also not pedagogically effective. Traditional college ESL classes rely on the pedagogy aimed mostly at international students, who learn English as a foreign language with a heavy emphasis on grammatical terminology and formal rules. Generation 1.5 learners acquire English through oral input and interaction rather than formal instruction (Reid, 2006) and are often unfamiliar with grammatical terminology (Foin & Lange, 2007). Like monolingual native speakers, they rarely possess the declarative knowledge of English grammar.

Yet the placement of Generation 1.5 students in mainstream First Year Composition (FYC) is equally problematic because such classes tend not to address the grammatical needs of these students (Holten, 2002, 2009), despite the fact that such needs have been both observed by classroom instructors and documented in research. Mikesell (2007), for example, found that although traditional ESL learners and Generation 1.5 bilinguals made somewhat different types of verb errors in their writing, the proportions of errors to correct usages were nearly identical in both groups. Di Gennaro (2009, 2013) demonstrated that for Generation 1.5 students as a group, grammatical control was at least as problematic as for traditional ESL learners, and often even more so. Foin and Lange (2007) documented Generation 1.5 learners' limited ability to correct their own grammatical errors unless explicitly marked by the teacher because the learners were unable to identify how the original structure was problematic in the first place. Comparisons between Generation 1.5 bilinguals and monolingual students (e.g., Doolan, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2017; Doolan & Miller,

2012) have similarly shown that, despite similarities to native speakers in overall textual and grammatical control, Generation 1.5 learners still experienced difficulties in the accurate use of verbs, prepositional phrases, and word forms, especially in syntactically complex sentences. These findings suggest that including grammar instruction in composition classes may be necessary, especially where Generation 1.5 learners comprise a large part of the student population, but that instruction cannot rely on the methods employed with traditional ESL students.

Since verb usage appears to be a particular locus of grammatical problems for Generation 1.5 learners (Doolan & Miller, 2012; Foin & Lange, 2007; Frodesen, 2009; Frodesen & Starna, 1999; Mikesell, 2007), the present article focuses on comparing the control of verbal forms and functions between Generation 1.5 and monolingual college writers. The study addresses the following questions:

1. Do monolingual English speakers and Generation 1.5 bilinguals differ in the overall number of verb errors produced in writing?
2. Are there quantitative differences in the specific types of verb errors produced by Generation 1.5 and monolingual English-speaking developmental writers?
3. Are there qualitative differences in the specific types of verb errors produced by Generation 1.5 and monolingual English-speaking developmental writers?

Methodology

One hundred and fifty-eight (158) students from seven sections of a Developmental Writing course at a large public university participated in the research project, part of which is reported here. Each participant completed a questionnaire on his or her linguistic and educational background (see Appendix A) and wrote a short personal narrative essay (see Appendix B for the prompt). Based on the reported native language, home language, and the grade of entry into the US educational system, the students were assigned to one of the three linguistic groups:

1. Monolingual English speakers (EL 1)—50 participants;
2. Bilingual Generation 1.5 speakers (BL 1.5)—96 participants;
3. Traditional ESL speakers (EL 2)—12 participants.

The summaries of the participants' linguistic and educational backgrounds are available in Appendices C and D, respectively.

For the purposes of the present study, the essays of traditional ESL speakers were removed from the analysis.[3] One essay by a BL 1.5 participant was also removed from the analysis because of illegible handwriting. Thus, the total corpus analyzed here consisted of 145 essays: 50 by EL 1 students, and 95 by BL 1.5 students.

The researcher tagged the essays for errors in verb forms or the misuse of tense and aspect.[4] All errors were grouped into the following eight categories based on their morphosyntactic or discursive nature (see Figure 1):[5]

	Error type	*Examples 1-8*
1	Missing inflections in obligatory contexts	The most memorable event that ***happen*** in my life had to be graduation day in high school. (EL 1)
2	Extraneous inflections	I was sick & tired of this so my friend Mario recommend that I ***joined*** wrestling. (BL 1.5)
3	Misspellings based on the oral form/ nonstandard usage	If it weren't for my team encouraging me from the sidelines I probably ***would of never won*** the match. (BL 1.5)
4	Tense inconsistency	He moved up front so he ***can see*** both of us. We were half way up the cliff when my sandle got stuck in some mud. (EL 1)
5	Misuse of present perfect for events not anchored to the present	The most memorable day in my life was when I visited my grandparents in Mexico, in 2008, for the 2nd time in 10 years. It was about a decade since I ***have not seen*** them because my parents did not have their papers yet. (BL 1.5; written in the winter of 2013).
6	Overuse of past perfect	It was too late and the wave was going to break right on top of me. I ***had forced*** my body into its too feet and to my amazement I ***had been riding*** the wave. I ***had leaned*** my body in a forward direction, in result the pressure on the board has caused it to turn in the right hand direction. (EL 1)

7	Auxiliary misuse (missing, extraneous, inappropriate)	That day June 10, ***was seem*** like it wasn't ever, but it was the most memorable day of my life I could never forget. (BL 1.5)
8	Idiosyncratic errors (varying types occurring only once in the entire corpus)	The guitar came with a video, but I lost interest ***to learn*** until freshmen year. (EL 1)

Figure 1. Verb error types.

The errors in Category 8 were included in the total error analysis but not compared between the two groups because of their singularity.

All error types were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Because the data with respect to the total number of errors and each error type were not normally distributed, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney *U* test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between EL 1 and BL 1.5 participants. The alpha level was set at 0.05 for all comparisons.

After the quantitative analysis, a qualitative comparison was made of the contexts in which EL 1 and BL 1.5 writers made particular types of errors in order to determine whether the potential sources of error might be the same or different for the two groups.

Results

Essay Length

The BL 1.5 students produced, on average, shorter essays (group total of 27,830 words; $M = 292.94$; $SD = 90.16$) than EL 1 students (group total of 15,490 words, $M = 309.8$; $SD = 68.09$), but not significantly so ($p > 0.24$ on an independent samples *t*-test) and with a greater variance in the length among the individual essays. Thus, EL 1 and BL 1.5 students were found to be comparable in the amount of written output produced, confirming previous findings (e.g., Doolan, 2011, 2014, 2017).

Total Verb Errors

The first research question sought to determine whether BL 1.5 and EL 1 developmental writers differed in the overall number of morphosyntactic errors in verb use. The results are presented in Table 1. Even though BL 1.5 students wrote shorter essays than EL 1 students, they produced more verb errors per text ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 3.14$) than their peers ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 3.34$). The difference was determined

to be statistically significant at $p = 0.009$. BL 1.5 writers thus displayed greater difficulty in using verb forms, tense, and aspect correctly.

Table 1
Total Errors: Descriptive and Mann-Whitney *U* Statistics

Language group	**N *of texts***	**N *of errors***	***Mean***	**SD**	***Mean ranks***	***Standard test statistic***	***Significance (2-tailed)***
EL 1	50	112	2.24	3.34	60.60	-2.61	0.009
BL 1.5	95	298	3.14	3.14	79.53		
Total	145	410	2.83	3.22			

Error Types: Quantitative Analysis

The second research question sought to determine whether there were quantitative differences between BL 1.5 and EL 1 writers in producing specific types of errors. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Error Types: Descriptive Statistics and Mann-Whitney *U* Test

Error type	***Mean* (SD)**		***Mean ranks***		***Standard test statistic***	***Significance (2-tailed)***
	EL 1	***BL 1.5***	***EL 1***	***BL 1.5***		
Missing inflection	0.48 (0.91)	0.73 (1.43)	68.87	75.17	-1.025	0.306
Extraneous inflection	0.06 (0.31)	0.20 (0.45)	66.53	76.41	-2.299	0.021
Misspellings based on the oral form/ nonstandard usage	0.04 (0.198)	0.095 (0.33)	70.88	74.12	-1.004	0.315
Tense inconsistency	0.50 (0.97)	0.96 (1.96)	67.79	75.74	-1.283	0.200
Present perfect misuse	0.24 (0.56)	0.41 (1.24)	71.11	73.99	-0.557	0.577
Past perfect misuse	0.40 (2.55)	0.43 (1.29)	66.83	76.25	-2.098	0.036
Auxiliary misuse	0.04 (0.198)	0.13 (0.33)	68.90	75.16	-1.667	0.096

BL 1.5 students made more errors of each type, sometimes considerably so, as indicated by the means above. The greater standard devia-

tions for BL 1.5 students also point to a greater variability within the group. Nevertheless, in only two categories were the differences found to be statistically significant: the use of extraneous inflections and the overuse of past perfect in contexts that did not require the event to be marked as prior to another past event.

The large standard deviation combined with a small mean for EL 1 writers in past perfect overuse suggested a possible anomaly in the use of the structure. The reexamination of the data revealed that out of 20 past perfect errors, 18 were made by one EL 1 student, whose essay was written almost entirely in past perfect, even though none of the sentences required it contextually. The remaining two errors were made by two different students. In contrast, past perfect errors in the BL 1.5 group were distributed among 18 students, with a minimum of one and maximum of 10 errors per text. Because of the extreme outliers in each group, the data were reanalyzed using the Moses test, trimming two outliers from each end. The statistical significance in the difference between the two groups increased, with $p = 0.000$, indicating that BL 1.5 writers did, indeed, display less control of past perfect than EL 1 students.

The finding presented in this subsection suggests that although Generation 1.5 writers may have only a slightly weaker control than their monolingual peers of specific structures within the English verb system, their errors add up, and the cumulative effect is not favorable for bilingual developmental writers. This finding differs considerably from those of Doolan (2013, 2014, 2017) but is consistent with Doolan and Miller (2012).

Error Types: A Qualitative Comparison

The third research question sought to determine whether there were qualitative differences between the errors of the same type produced by BL 1.5 and EL 1 writers. To that end, a qualitative comparison of sentences in which the errors were made was conducted. This analysis revealed that not only did BL 1.5 students make more errors than their EL 1 peers, but also that their errors frequently differed in nature from those of their EL 1 counterparts.

Missing Inflections. Both BL 1.5 and EL 1 students occasionally missed inflections in obligatory contexts. In EL 1 essays, all but two omitted inflections were phonetically nonsalient past tense or past participle suffixes:

Example 9

> The chanting ***seem*** to have worked because within seconds the curtains opened and there she was. (EL 1)

The *–ed* suffix in this sentence occurs in the cluster /mdt/ (for *seemed to*). Alveolar stops following nasals and preceding other alveolar stops are frequently elided in connected speech. In other words, the /d/ is not typically pronounced in *seemed to* and similar phonetic contexts. The fact that most inflections omitted by EL 1 writers were phonetically nonsalient suggests that the students were relying on their orality in writing, and that their intuitions about grammatical forms even in their L1 may be not as flawless as many theoretical linguists have tended to posit to date.

A similar pattern of omitted inflections was observed in the sentences produced by BL 1.5 learners:

Example 10

> I got a crew to help me, actually I got a team, Mr. James ***pick*** three guys to help. (BL 1.5)

The suffix *–ed* of *picked* occurs in the cluster /ktθ/, consisting of three voiceless obstruents. Such a cluster is typically simplified in speech by the elision of the middle consonant. Like in EL 1 writing, this was the most common type of inflection omission for BL 1.5 writers.

Another similarity between the two groups was missing *–ing* suffixes when bare infinitives were used instead of gerunds in syntactic environments calling for the latter.[6] The remaining two missing inflections in the EL 1 corpus belonged to this category and occurred in the same sentence:

Example 11

> My nephew Angel and I were young and knew nothing about life, except ***play, eat***, and school. (EL 1)

In BL 1.5 writing, the same error was also made twice, albeit by different writers:

Example 12

> ***Listen*** to the one of the greatest album in the dark make you realize that beauty came in different shape and forms. (BL 1.5)

In both Examples 11 and 12, the bare infinitives occur in the NP positions, where gerunds are appropriate.

The EL 1 corpus contained no other instances of omitted inflections, but three more types of errors, with three or more tokens of each, were found in the BL 1.5 essays. The first of these was noninflection of irregular verbs in the past tense or past participle form:

Example 14

> That day, after school ended, my mother called me on the phone and ***tell*** me to come home right after school ends. (BL 1.5)

The surrounding context indicates that that the verb *tell* refers to a past event and must be inflected for past tense. Because inflection in this case requires a phonetically salient sound alternation in the root, it is doubtful that the writer's speech patterns interfered with the use of the correct form in writing. Rather, the most likely cause of the error is the lack of nativelike command of irregular verbs.

The second type of error found only in BL 1.5 writing was the lack of subject-verb agreement with simple NP subjects:

Example 15

> Luckily the old lady ***leave***, but leaves me with a reminder that she will find me. Once she ***leave***, I run to my trunk, shaking and crying from the fright I just experienced. (BL 1.5)

This excerpt presents an emotionally charged episode of the narrative written consistently and justifiably in the historical present. Yet the writer's control over subject-verb agreement is wavering: Two of the three instances of the verb *leave* lack the present tense singular inflection necessary for agreement with the singular subjects "the old lady" and "she."

Finally, BL 1.5 writers displayed a tendency to use other parts of speech (as evident in the written form) instead of verbs in cases when both words were semantically related and phonologically similar, yet not syntactically substitutable:

Example 16

> It was an agonizing and bitter pain to have ***loss*** someone beloved for the first time. (BL 1.5)

Phonetically, the noun *loss* is similar to the past participle *lost,* in which the /t/ is not prominent. Yet it is a different part of speech that cannot syntactically fill the past participle slot after the auxiliary *have.* BL 1.5 writers, thus, appeared to experience difficulty in distinguishing between phonetically similar but syntactically different words—a phenomenon also observed by Reid (2006).

Nonstandard Usage and Misspellings Based on the Oral Forms. Nonstandard forms were few in the corpus overall, and most of them were limited to the spellings of verb forms based on oral pronunciation and rendered ungrammatical only in the written form. Only two

such usages were found in the EL 1 essays, both of the *modal + of (for have)+ past participle* type:

Example 17

I ***should of spent*** more time driving. (EL 1)

This error, while it can be classified as syntactic when it appears in writing—as the preposition *of* is substituted for the perfect auxiliary *have*—is phonetically based since it reflects the typical fluent pronunciation in colloquial speech. Like the missing inflections in phonetically nonsalient contexts (see Examples 9 and 10 above), such usages suggest that even native speakers possess less than perfect intuitions about the grammatical structure of their native language.

BL 1.5 writers made the same error. In addition, two other types of colloquial usages were found in BL 1.5 writing: the use of past tense instead of past participles and vice versa and the phonetic spelling of the phrasal modal *going to:*

Example 18

Since throughout my life, I was judged by many people which included my dad on many of the bad habbits I tended to own, there was always this feeling of doubt I ***seen*** in his eyes when it came down to me graduating. (BL 1.5)

Example 19

Before that day, I had never been on my own. All summer, I've imagen what it was ***gonna*** be like on my own for the first time ever in my life. (BL 1.5)

While the latter two errors were not found in the current EL 1 corpus, they are not uncommon in colloquial speech, and potentially they could occur in a larger data set.

The occurrence of nonstandard forms and phonetically based misspellings in both BL 1.5 and EL 1 writing confirms Roberge's (2002) assertion that Generation 1.5 learners often acquire nonstandard dialects of English spoken by their monolingual peers. Moreover, the presence of such errors suggests that both monolingual and bilingual developmental writers rely on the sound shapes rather than syntactic structure of certain verb forms. Yet in composition classrooms, these usages may be attributed to the "ESL-like" status of bilinguals rather than to dialectal influences and overreliance on the phonetic form.

Extraneous Inflection. BL 1.5 writers produced significantly more extraneous inflections than their EL 1 peers. The qualitative

analysis also demonstrates that the two groups added extraneous inflections in different linguistic contexts. EL 1 writers overregularized only complex verbs with irregular roots:

Example 20

> Before I was called upon to perform, I was ***overcomed*** by anxiety and nervousness. (EL 1)

The irregular verb root *come* requires no change in the past participle form. The same rule applies to the prefixed form *overcome,* yet the writer regularized it in this context, adding *–ed.*[7]

BL 1.5 writers, on the other hand, tended to overregularize common root-only verbs:

Example 21

> Just as about our lips were going to touch her phone and my phone ***ranged***. (BL 1.5)

In this sentence, not only did the writer perform the root vowel alternation (i.e., *ring* → *rang*), but he/she also added the regular past tense suffix (i.e *rang*+*ed* → *ranged*).

BL 1.5 writers also used inflected forms after modals and modal equivalents:

Example 22

> Inside the dish was tomatoes, sausage, eggs, and rice. I never knew that would ***mixed***. (BL 1.5)

They double-marked past tense both on the auxiliary and the main verb:

Example 23

> It was time to dance and there was this hand move that I always failed but when I ***didn't failed*** live my family applauded with laughter. (BL 1.5)

And they used inflected forms in nonfinite clauses:

Example 24

> That day made me ***appreciated*** my family and every friends that I left behind so much more (BL 1.5)

The differences in syntactic environments where EL 1 and BL 1.5 writ-

ers added extraneous inflections suggest differences in the underlying linguistic competencies of the students. The former appear to be struggling with more sophisticated vocabulary and overgeneralizing the application of the regular past-tense suffix to less common irregular verbs, but they nevertheless place inflections at the right structural nodes. The latter appear to struggle not only with more common irregular verbs, but also with the notion of what can and cannot be inflected for tense or aspect in general.[8]

Tense Inconsistency. The conventions of formal writing dictate that writers should not shift between past and present tenses if the events they are describing remain in the same time. Tense inconsistency, however, is a common problem of developing writers, as many a composition instructor can attest. In the present corpus, inconsistent tense use was found in the essays of both BL 1.5 and EL 1 writers without a statistically significant difference in the frequency. There were no qualitative differences between the groups, either.

Most commonly, the writers referred in the present tense to events or states that they perceived as being true both at the time of the narrative and at the time of writing. This pattern reflects widespread colloquial usage.

Example 25

> Everything my family prepared for me reminded me of how much I ***am loved*** by them. (BL 1.5)

Second, both EL 1 and BL 1.5 writers frequently failed to backshift modals in subordinate or embedded clauses to reflect reference to the past. Modal auxiliaries do not have syntactic tense (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999); nevertheless, there is a tendency for historically past modals, such as *could, would,* and *might*, to be used as semantic markers of past modality. However, both EL 1 and BL 1.5 writers used "present" modals *can, will,* and *may* when referring to past events:

Example 26

> Once my name was called all I ***can*** think of was not fall of stage. (EL 1)

The last common context in which both groups used verb tenses inconsistently involved writing about events that were concurrent with the developments in the narrative, but were over and completed at the time of writing:

Example 27

> I remember sitting in the assembly next to my friends thinking that I ***will never get*** an award like this (BL 1.5 [the following text describes being given the aforementioned award]).

These errors, irrespective of the linguistic backgrounds of their originators, suggest difficulties in using complex syntax to accurately and fluently express intricate temporal concepts in formal texts.

Present Perfect. The frequent misuse of present perfect for events clearly occurring at a specified past and not anchored to the present moment (or the moment of writing, in the current study) was an unexpected finding, at least with respect to monolingual writers. Although this particular error is considered typical of L2 users (Swan & Smith, 2001), both linguists and nonlinguists often assume that native speakers acquire the tense-aspect of their language perfectly. The latter assumption appears to be not entirely accurate, at least with respect to developmental writers, as the examples below indicate.

Example 28

> When I was very young, my family took a trip to one of the Hawaiian Island with my grandmother. We ***have been*** to the Hawaiian Island before but as a treat, we brought my grandmother because she ***has never been*** there before. (EL 1)

Example 29

> When I was three years old was the last time I ***have seen*** them, and when I finally did, I was happy. (BL 1.5)

The examination of the contexts in which present perfect was used inappropriately revealed no differences between BL 1.5 and EL 1 writers, albeit the former made more such errors. However, in all cases, the writers used this tense to describe an action that occurred before something else, and their use of the perfect aspect unmistakably marked this priority. They were failing, however, to mark the pastness of the action through the relevant tense inflection on the auxiliary.

Past Perfect. The overuse of past perfect was another area in which EL 1 and BL 1.5 differed significantly, with BL 1.5 writers employing the structure much more frequently than EL 1 writers. Yet both groups used the tense in contexts where there was no need to grammatically mark the events as occurring before other past events.

Example 30

> Due to my expired passport my father spent the last week of my school year renewing my passport. This week my father ***had spent*** the majority of time renewing it while I was at school. (BL 1.5)

The past perfect verb here denotes an event occurring simultaneously with other events in the passage, not a prior one, thus making past perfect an unnecessary and somewhat confusing choice.

The fact that one EL 1 student wrote his/her entire essay in past perfect, combined with the frequent overuse of the tense by BL 1.5 writers, indicates the possibility that these writers have not acquired the aspectual meaning of the structure—that of marking priorness.

Auxiliaries. Auxiliaries did not appear to present a major problem for either BL 1.5 or EL 1 writers, with few errors found in the corpus. A common area of trouble for both groups was the use of the modal auxiliary *would* to hedge statements, thus displaying a lack of confidence as writers:

Example 31

> The most memorable event ***would happen to be*** one of the saddest days thus far. (EL 1)

Example 32

> This event is so memorable because I went on my first date with a guy. I ***would wonder*** where is he now. What is he doing? (BL 1.5)

Both EL 1 and BL 1.5 writers also omitted auxiliaries, albeit in different contexts. The only omission of a copular (rather than auxiliary) *be* by an EL 1 writer appeared in an extended parallel structure:

Example 33

> It was scorching hot that day while we all had our sunglasses on and ***prone*** to being burnt by the end of the day. (EL 1)

BL 1.5 writers, however, tended to omit the auxiliary *be* in passive and passivelike structures:

Example 34

> My aunt was such a beautiful bride when she walked into the Chapel, which ***located*** on the first floor of the hotel. (BL 1.5).

Finally, BL 1.5 writers used the auxiliary *was* to mark past tense in the absence of the progressive aspect or passive voice:

Example 35

> The whole crowd ***was just had*** an expression of amazement and feeling that I receive was just unexplainable. (BL 1.5)

The comparison of modal auxiliary use between EL 1 and BL 1.5 writers indicates that both tend to be hesitant writers. This problem is largely stylistic in nature and can be addressed from a rhetorical point of view. The omission of auxiliaries in obligatory contexts, however, and the use of auxiliaries irrelevant to the necessary tense and aspect, point to a weak syntactic control, especially in longer sentences expressing relatively sophisticated ideas.

Discussion

This study highlights the similarities and differences between Generation 1.5 and monolingual English developmental writers with respect to the use of verbal morphology, syntax, and discursive use. The results show that while both groups make verb errors in writing, Generation 1.5 students' control of the English verb system is notably weaker than that of their native-speaking counterparts. Seven types of verb errors were investigated: the omission of inflections in obligatory contexts, extraneous inflections, nonstandard usage, tense inconsistency, misuse of present perfect for events not anchored to the present time, overuse of past perfect, and auxiliary misuse. Of these, statistically significant differences were found only in extraneous inflections and the overuse of past perfect. Yet even when the differences were not statistically significant, Generation 1.5 writers made more errors in every single category of verb errors investigated, even if we account for the larger size of the BL 1.5 corpus. The overall effect was cumulative: The errors added up to a statistically significant difference in the totals, demonstrating that the writing of Generation 1.5 students was noticeably less grammatical.

The quantitative comparison of specific error types indicates that Generation 1.5 bilingual writers may in many ways be similar to their monolingual counterparts. To a certain extent, this is not surprising. Like monolingual English speakers, Generation 1.5ers acquire English from a young age and mainly from oral input and interaction. This accounts for the fact that they develop considerable fluency but also pick up on the nonstandard and colloquial features of speech in their surroundings. Like monolingual English speakers with at times insufficient instruction in academic literacy—a phenomenon not unusual

for children of lower socioeconomic status irrespective of their linguistic background—they transfer these features of everyday speech into writing. The ubiquity of speech-based errors in the essays of most developmental writers often leads composition instructors to conclude that Generation 1.5 students are just like native speakers and do not need grammar instruction, but rather that the raising of awareness that writing requires more formal language choices than speaking.

Yet I would like to posit that this conclusion is at least partially erroneous. The qualitative comparison of specific error types reveals a much more complex picture. It makes conspicuous the differences in the underlying grammatical competence of native speakers and Generation 1.5 learners that may be obscured by the comparable numbers of errors and by the presence of speech-based errors in the writing of both groups. For example, while the numerical difference in the omitted inflections between the two groups was not found to be statistically significant in this study, the qualitative analysis revealed that monolingual and bilingual students did not omit the same types of inflections. Both groups left out phonetically nonsalient suffixes, yet only Generation 1.5 students also displayed trouble with phonetically prominent forms of irregular verbs and confused phonetically similar yet syntactically different parts of speech.

Similarly, from a statistical point of view, both groups misused auxiliaries almost equally, but a closer look at *how* they misused them revealed an appreciable difference. Monolingual English speakers tended to overhedge their statements with modals, thus displaying a lack of confidence as writers, or to omit auxiliaries in extended parallel structures, thus showing lack of control over longer stretches of discourse. Generation 1.5 learners, on the other hand, either used an active verb where passive was called for, irrespective of the length of the sentence, or used auxiliaries not compatible with the required tense and aspect. Both of the latter errors are typical of traditional ESL learners.

The difference between groups in the use of extraneous inflections was both statistically and qualitatively significant. Native speakers tended to overregularize less common verbs—an error possibly stemming from their limited academic vocabulary. Generation 1.5 students' largest source of error by far was adding inflections to nonfinite verb forms, which violates the descriptive syntactic rules of both spoken and written English. Generation 1.5 learners were also prone to overregularizing common irregular verbs.[9] These errors serve as evidence that even "early arrival" Generation 1.5 learners with seven or more years of immersion in English-medium education may retain ESL-like features in their interlanguage, especially when the syntactic

structures they attempt to use are complex. It follows, then, that grammar instruction with overt focus on form may be necessary for these students.

Finally, one of the rather puzzling findings in this study is the misuse of the perfect tenses by both monolingual and bilingual writers. In the review of the contexts in which the forms were used inappropriately, it appears that at least some of the students in both groups failed to acquire the temporal component of present perfect, focusing only on its "perfectiveness," that is, the ability to mark events as occurring before something else and/or completed. With past perfect, the pattern was reversed: Some students failed to acquire the aspectual component and instead picked up solely on the temporal one, indicating the pastness of the events and not their "priorness." Because of the small number of errors of both types, especially in the EL 1 group, it would be imprudent to draw any conclusions about the phenomenon now, but it is worthy of further careful and focused investigation.

The overall findings of the study point to the need for grammar instruction in Developmental Writing classes, especially if they contain a large proportion of Generation 1.5 students, who may not have been able to acquire the level of grammatical competence necessary for strong academic writing by simply being immersed in English-medium secondary education. Such instruction need not be ESL-like, of course. Ferris (2016) persuasively argues for grammatical instruction in the context of composition, that is, for the teaching of grammar as a tool for more effective, accurate, and coherent expression of ideas in writing. Similarly, Mikesell (2007) aptly points out that Generation 1.5 learners are most comfortable and successful in acquiring English grammar when they can focus on the functions and meanings of grammatical structures, rather than on their discrete forms or on the production of somewhat simplistic isolated sentences, as is common in ESL classes.

Multiple authors—for example Ferris (2016), Frodesen (2008), Goen et al. (2002), Holten (2002), Holten and Mikesell (2007), Thonus (2003), and so forth—propose a variety of discourse-, genre-, and usage-based strategies for teaching grammar to Generation 1.5 learners. Such strategies are generally grounded in the Focus-on-Form (FonF) approach (Long, 1991), that is, the teaching of a grammatical structure in response to the students' need to use it meaningfully, appropriately, and accurately in real-world contexts, be they college papers or professional documents.

One of the main premises of the discourse-based approach to teaching grammar-for-writing involves raising the students' awareness of how a particular grammatical phenomenon functions in real

texts—academic or nonacademic—and how variation in structure leads to the changes in the meaning or affect expressed by the author. Such consciousness raising can be accomplished by designing discovery activities in which students explore the use of a particular structure in authentic academic texts. Students may also benefit from being explicitly taught the key points about a grammatical structure in short, narrowly focused minilessons incorporated into the composition class and from engaging in active investigation and creation of multiple lexicogrammatical means of expressing the same meanings in their own and their peers' writing. Guided practice is also necessary, providing students with the opportunity to develop strong self-editing skills that they can use for the rest of their academic and professional lives. In fact, structured (i.e., aided by concrete editing guides) peer- and self-editing exercises make grammar instruction particularly relevant and, thus, interesting to the students since it allows them to increase the clarity of their written expression.

These strategies allow instructors to focus both on the form and on the semantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical consequences of choosing specific grammatical structures. At the same time, discourse- and genre-based teaching of grammar provides room for the instructors to capitalize on and affirm the students' strengths as long-term and often dominant users of English and their sense of language ownership.

The number of morphosyntactic verb errors produced by monolingual students suggests that they also could benefit from overt attention to grammatical form in their writing. The discursive approach to grammar instruction allows it to be expanded to classrooms with monolingual developmental writers, as it is not inherently "ESL" in its structure or purpose.

Conclusion

This study has examined verb use in academic writing of monolingual English and bilingual Generation 1.5 learners enrolled in Basic Writing classes at a large public university. The study revealed a complex picture of the similarities and differences between the two groups of students. It demonstrated that Generation 1.5 students, being long-term users of English, share a variety of problems in the morphology, syntax, and discursive use of verbs with their monolingual peers. These problems likely stem from the heavy reliance on orality in writing and from the limited exposure to and instruction in advanced academic literacy before entering college. At the same time, Generation 1.5 students often display ESL-like traits in the syntax of English verbs even after years of immersion in English-medium schooling.

These problems, be they nativelike or ESL-like, should not hinder

the students' success in college. Writing instructors can help students become better writers if they are willing to incorporate discourse- and genre-based grammar instruction into their courses, focusing on grammar as one of the components—on par with clear organization, masterful use of rhetorical strategies, and thoughtful content—of effective written communication. Both bilingual and monolingual writers can benefit from a stronger command of the skeleton of the language—grammar.

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Notes

[1]In the nearly 30 years since Rumbaut and Ima's original 1988 report, the definition of Generation 1.5 learners has been updated to include students born in the US and growing up in linguistic enclaves where their use of English is limited almost entirely to the school environments, and their home/heritage language serves as the main means of communication in the family and community. See Roberge (2009) for specific details.

[2]The term *grammar* is often understood by students and some composition instructors as instruction in punctuation. In this article, however, I will use the term *grammar* in the meaning more traditional for SLA research: as that of referring to morphosyntax.

[3]Students who reported a single native language other than English and who entered the US educational system at age 12 or later were designated as traditional ESL learners. This designation was theoretically based, following the findings of previous studies on the ultimate L2 attainment of "early" versus "late arrivals" (Collier, 1987, 1989; Ferris, 2009; Holten, 2002; Johnson & Newport, 1989) and L1 attrition/L2 dominance (Huster, 2011; Montrul, 2008).

[4]Unfortunately, because of a lack of funding, it was not feasible to engage a research assistant to check the data coding and conduct an interrater reliability analysis. This, of course, is a limitation of the study.

[5]All punctuation, spelling, and word choices are retained as they were in the original student writing. If more than one error or inconsistency is present in any example, the structure relevant to the discussion is highlighted through italicizing and boldfacing.

[6]I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer, who pointed out that

the nature of this error—that is, substitution of a bare infinitive for a gerund—may be ambiguous since gerunds, while derived from verbs, function as nouns and, therefore, may be classified as missing nominal suffixes. In this article, I chose to classify this as a verb error since the students used verbal forms (bare infinitives) and seemed to perceive gerunds as more verblike than nounlike. The nature of this particular error may call for further investigation in future research.

[7]While *overcomed* is still not an acceptable form in Standard English speech or writing, it may reflect the ongoing tendency for prefixed or compound forms with irregular roots to be regularized. For example, currently, the verb *broadcast* can be used both in the form *broadcast* and in the form *broadcasted* for past tense and past participle, whereas the root verb *cast* remains unsuffixed.

[8]The following sentence that occurred in a BL 1.5 essay may provide additional evidence for the relatively weak grasp of some bilingual writers on the concept of tense and aspect inflection: "The moment I walked ***the staged***, was the moment I realized why I was there." In this sentence, the noun *stage* is inflected for tense—a morphosyntactic impossibility. Because the example was unique in the corpus, it is possible that it was merely a spelling error or a "slip of the pen." The possibility of inflections' being applied to the "wrong" parts of speech may be investigated in future studies.

[9]Marcus (1996) demonstrates that while this is a typical developmental error for native-speaking children, it largely disappears by mid-elementary school, with only about 1% of fourth graders overregularizing less common verbs.

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Appendix A
Background Questionnaire

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. If you do not wish to answer some of the questions, please write "prefer not to answer" or leave the line blank.

1. Name

_____

2. Student ID Number

_____

3. What was your total English Placement score? If you do not remember, please say so here.

_____

4. What is your major?

_____

5. What language or languages do you consider to be your native language(s)?

_____

6. Do you speak another language (or languages) in addition to English?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you have answered this question "No," please skip to Question #13.

7. If you answered Question #6 above "Yes," what language or languages do you speak in addition to English?

_____

8. Which language or languages do you consider to be your strongest? Please feel free to list more than one if necessary.

_____

9. Which language or languages do you speak with your parents?

_____

10. Which language or languages do you speak with your siblings?

_____

11. Which language or languages do you speak with your friends?

_____

12. In which language do you write best?

_____

13. In what grade did you start your education at an American school?

_____

14. If you started your education at an American school in 1st grade or later, where (in which country) did you attend school before? What was the language in which classes were taught?

_____

15. Have you ever been a student in a Bilingual Education Program?

☐Yes ☐No

16. If you answered Question #15 "Yes," how many years were you in Bilingual Education? In which grades?

_____

17. Did you take foreign language classes in elementary, middle, or high school?

☐Yes ☐No

18. If you answered Question #17 above "Yes," which language(s) did you study and in which grades?

_____

19. If you took foreign language classes in elementary, middle, or high school, how would you describe your proficiency or skills in that language/those languages?

_____

20. What do you consider your greatest strength in English writing?

_____

21. What do you consider your greatest weakness in English writing?

_____

22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about yourself?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you!!!

Appendix B
Essay Prompt

Write about the most memorable day or event in your life. How old were you when it happened? Describe what happened and who was there. Explain why this day or event is especially memorable to you. Use specific details. You have 30 minutes to write your essay.

Appendix C
Native and Additional Languages

L1	*Number of speakers*	*Home language (alone or in combination with English*		*Number of participants*
English	64	English only		50
		Non-English		14
			Spanish	10
			Unspecified Chinese	2
			Korean	1
			Armenian	1
Non-English	45	Mandarin		1
		Cantonese		2
		Unspecified Chinese		8
		Spanish		23
		Korean		3
		Arabic		3
		Vietnamese		3
		Urdu		1
		Burmese		1
Bilingual	47	Spanish		35
		Chinese		3
		Tagalog		3
		Vietnamese		2
		Korean		2
		Arabic		1
		Multiple languages		1
None named	2	Chinese		1
		Spanish		1

Appendix D
Grades of Entry Into the U.S. Educational System

In 1st grade or earlier (pre-K and K not mandatory in CA)	134 (84.8%)
Between 2nd and 5th grade (in elementary school)	9 (5.7%)
Between 6th and 8th grade (middle school)	4 (2.5%)
Between 9th and 12th grade (high school)	7 (4.4%)
No K-12 education in the US (international students)	2 (1.3%)
No response given	2 (1.3%)