

English or Chinese

Someone Someone

English 106i

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I was raised in a place where everyone knew at least 3 different languages and several dialects. To master one language in writing, one has to focus and try to never get mixed up between different languages.

I remember vaguely when I was about 5 years old; I was taught the fundamentals of English, which is the ABC. I still remember the song that we sang in kindergarten—"ABCDEFGH IJKLMNOP... Now I know my ABC who would like to play with me." From that song, I learned all the alphabets of English. After that, we used the alphabets to form words into different groups, for example words into colors, vegetables, fruits and etc. After mastering the spelling, we proceeded to form sentences. In addition, we learned the basics of grammar, the present, future and past tenses. From forming a simple sentence like "My name is Cheah Hansheung, my favorite food is potato-made dishes and I was studying yesterday"; I managed to construct my first essay which was my own autobiography. The first essay that I wrote was a simple one, using simple sentences that I learned. This became my starting point in writing in English, at least properly.

At the age of five, I had to learn two other languages. One of them was Chinese and the other was Malay language. The Malay language has somewhat huge similarity with English language. On the contrary, Chinese language is a totally different from English. Firstly, we learned to write instead of pronouncing the words. As I recalled, we learned to write more than we sang. I still remember that time when we had to learn the proper writing style of each Chinese character. Every stroke of a Chinese character has to be written correctly. The teachers were very strict about our writing. If we were to make any

mistake, we would be punished to write our names. I pitied those who had difficulty in writing their own name. Twenty to thirty strokes for each character multiplied by 50 isn't a joke especially for a 5 year old kid. Moreover, we have like 3 characters per Chinese name. I remember once I was punished to write my name for a hundred times and my hand went numb after finishing the task. Coming back on how we learnt to write, we learned the meaning of each character. Well, Chinese is again a totally different from English whereby each character has multiple meaning depending on where you put it in a sentence. Every character in a Chinese word has its' own origin. There are no alphabets for us to remember and no song for us to sing. We have to learn its origin and why it is being used in a certain manner. For example, the letter "One" in Chinese is just a horizontal stroke. The character is written in this way because it represents only a stroke of something, which is one. Furthermore, two in Chinese is an additional stroke to one, which represents two things. We had to memorize most of the characters. I would say my learning in Chinese was rather boring and tedious. Like every other language, upon learning simple words, we proceeded into forming sentences. We make simple sentences and then we proceeded to write our very first simple essay which is also our own autobiography. In my opinion, learning Chinese was a much harder task than learning English.

The writing process continued from my elementary school till my high school. English is considered as a second language in my country. Knowing that English is an important language, my parents hired 3 tutors to let me master the language. The teachers were very strict towards me. I was a rascal when I was being told to write.

During those times, I never enjoyed writing or learned to enjoy it. The teachers that I had will always ask me to write on some topics that they might think will come out on in the exam. I was trained to write for a grade and not for what I liked. When the teachers say that this paper will be graded, I will be so reluctant in class that even the teacher felt guilty for giving us the homework. Furthermore, most of my teachers do not like to praise any student if one managed to write a beautiful essay. I think most of my teachers are sadistic; they enjoy punishing the students rather than rewarding them. As I recalled, if I were to make any mistake in my essays, marks will be deducted and I have to rewrite the whole essay again and again until the teacher felt that I would not repeat the same mistake again. I was cursing and swearing about the teacher when I had to rewrite the whole essay. Eventually, I lost touch with my writing.

Therefore, I switched to Chinese. Maybe it was because I had only one teacher to deal with. The Chinese teacher that I had was not so strict but too kind in fact. He does not give a lot of work to us. As a consequence, I wrote less in Chinese as well. Again, we were not thought to write freely in Chinese and all my essays were again written to be graded. As time goes by, I lost touch with my writing, even in Chinese! I became very lazy and reluctant to write. I would only write if being asked by the teachers or required by my class. I had no more interest in writing.

Then one day, I realized that I had a lot of ideas flowing through my brain. I thought of a way to write them down. I started to keep a journal. I started to write all the ideas and interesting stuff that I encountered in a day. In the beginning, I will write non stop and let all the sentences flow freely in my journal. I remembered that there was one

time I wrote till my pen ran dry. This situation could never have happened in my previous days of writing. I began to fall in love with writing again.

Nowadays, I will write my journal before I retire. I will write in English as well as in Chinese. I am also trying to catch up on my writing skills. Not only will I write about my daily routine but I will also try to construct nice quotes, for example: abiding by the past will provide us nostalgic illusion; perception in life is usually the otherwise. My journal became an inspiration to me. Sometimes when I read my journals and found the things that I have written down, I felt very good about myself. Therefore, by keeping the journal I really felt in love with writing again.

Last but not least, I am lucky that I have the opportunity to learn three different types of languages. Given a chance I would say that everyday is still a learning day for me. I have learned so many things a long the way in becoming a better writer. Therefore, I cherish the moment that I have now and will try my very best to improve my writing skills—English or Chinese.