A Model of Discourse Features in African American Students' Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This investigation is a subset of a larger study of the language and literacy development and school achievement of 263 African American students who attended low-performing schools and whose state mandated test scores placed a majority of them at academic risk (Gordon Pershey, 2003, 2008, 2011). The present investigation employed a theoretically grounded protocol to assess whether and how 170 different narrative conventions (Chantrell, 2003; Mainess, Champion, & McCabe, 2002) but there is a lack of research on written narratives. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the developmental use of narrative structure and discourse features by African American student writers. In-depth analysis revealed 31 clusters of significant (p<.05) structural and discourse features utilized in written language. This excerpt pertains to structural and discourse features utilized in written language. The present investigation

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Researchers have proposed numerous measures of written narrative assessment (Applebee, 1978; Bamberg, 1997; Hewitt & Duchess, 1995; Hughes, 1988; McCutcheon & Smidbeck, 1967; Ranger, 1989; Nelson & Van Meter, 2007; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Developmental norms for narrative have been proposed but are not fully established (Widening, 1969; Fey, Cats, & Proctor-Williams, 2001, Johnson, 1995; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Naremore, 1997; Richardson, 1992; Scott, 1988). Available norms tend to pertain to sentence construction or the use of a limited number of narrative conventions (e.g., dialogue) and do not address an array of structural and discourse features. Little information exists on the construction of written narrative by African American students. Prior studies have considered gender (Chantrell, 2003; Mainess, Champion, & McCabe, 2002) but there is a lack of research on written narratives. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the developmental use of narrative structure and discourse features by African American student writers. In-depth analysis revealed 31 clusters of significant (p<.05) structural and discourse features utilized in written language. This excerpt pertains to structural and discourse features utilized in written language. The present investigation

PROTOCOL EXCERPT

First, within grade analysis was conducted. Cross-tabulation of all 170 variables revealed the strength of association between variables and the use of each variable for each pair of variables. 62 variables remained significantly correlated at p<.05. Second, in pair analysis, identified the most parsimonious and strongest interactions between the 62 variables. 58 variables continued to interact with others. 11 variables, 31 significant (p<.05) interactions remained. This included 11-3 variable clusters (a 2x2x2 way interaction) and 20 4-variable clusters (a 2x2x2x2 way interaction). Listed below are some of the 31- and 4- variable clusters that are the most significant for both 4th and 6th grade.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Frequency tabulations indicate that both 4th and 6th graders’ narratives included the use of introductory information, coherence, description, reasonable problem patterns, a proposal or goal unit, and a beginning, middle, and end to the narration. A modest increase among 6th graders occurred for the use of overt connections, causal patterns, explanatory statements, mention of abstractions, mention of time, describing a character’s role, and actions by characters. It is important to explore the types of variables that contribute to the statistically significant core variables used. 50 (86%) of the 58 core variables represent narrative and discourse features. In contrast, syntax accounts for 10%, and semantics accounts for 4% of the 58 variables that interact consistently and significantly with all other variables. All mechanical features, semantic elements, and syntactic forms listed on the protocol interact less frequently than discourse elements interact. The only sociocultural feature that interacted was the use of topic associative narration. The 31 interactions vary as to goodness of fit but all are significant and offer potential interpretations.

METHODOLOGY

Borrowing from several theoretical and practical systems of analysis of narrative writing, a narrative writing analysis protocol was constructed. A brief excerpt of the 15-page, 170 item instrument appears in the next column of this poster. The instrument assesses both structure and discourse by gathering from 4th (n=41) and 6th (n=63) graders’ samples are page-long handwritten narratives. This excerpt pertains to structural and discourse features utilized in written language. The present investigation

FREQUENCY TABULATIONS

These findings suggest that discourse features co-occur and complement one another. Not only is a student writer going to use some discourse element – the student is likely to use multiple discourse elements within a composition.

CONCLUSIONS

AUTHOR'S PRIOR RESEARCH


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