Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis: An Effective Tool to Analyze Deaf Students' Writing
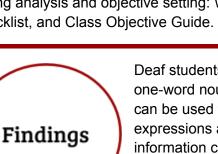
Topic & Purpose

Researchers received a 3-year grant from the Institute of Education Sciences to develop writing interventions for deaf elementary students. A part of the study was to support teachers with identifying appropriate writing objectives to guide writing instruction. Teachers report struggling with analyzing deaf students' writing and setting objectives to guide writing instruction. They feel overwhelmed by the amount of errors in students' written expressions, thus they do not know where to begin. Researchers explored whether Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis was a tool teachers could use, involving reviewing whether each sentence has a "who", "do what", and "how".

Researchers collected 52 writing samples from deaf students and 18 writing samples from hearing students in grades 3-6. Researchers color coded each sentence for the following features: who (noun group), do what (verb group), and how (prepositional group). Researchers identified common patterns in deaf students' writing that could inform decisions regarding objective setting for written language instruction. Researchers developed the following educator-friendly resources for writing analysis and objective setting: Written Language Inventory, Individual Checklist, and Class Objective Guide.

Study Outline

Findings

Deaf students in this study demonstrated a range of written expressions, from one-word nouns to multiple-word sentences. Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis can be used to identify the features (a) students are already including in their written expressions and (b) the features that they still need to work on including. This information can assist teachers in creating objectives that align with students' present strengths and needs for writing development. Teachers found these resources, Written Language Inventory, Individual Checklist, and Class Objective Guide, to be beneficial.

Teachers' writing instruction should be driven by individual and class objectives based on students' strengths and needs. Systemic Functional Grammar Analysis enables teachers to quickly look at how deaf students are expressing their ideas in writing and identify areas of need that can become the objectives of their instruction.

Ideas to Consider

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