



Structured Analysis of Written Language: Monitoring Deaf Students' Writing Across Languages

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Topic & Purpose

This study explores whether the Structured Analysis of Written Language (SAWL), originally developed to assess the writing of deaf American students, can also be used to evaluate the writing of deaf Chinese students. Because Chinese and English differ greatly in grammar and sentence structure, the researchers adapted SAWL for Chinese and examined its usefulness as a cross-linguistic assessment tool for monitoring writing development and supporting writing instruction.

The researchers collected narrative and informative writing samples from 22 deaf students, including 11 Chinese and 11 American students matched by language, literacy level, and hearing characteristics. SAWL was modified to reflect the characteristics of written Chinese by redefining words and identifying critical sentence structures that differ from English. The researchers then analyzed each writing sample using six SAWL measures, including word count, number of t-units, percentage of complete sentences, and WER I, II, and III scores, to compare the writing performance of the two groups across the two writing genres.

Study Outline

Findings

The results showed that SAWL could be successfully adapted for analyzing Chinese writing with only minor modifications, demonstrating its potential as a cross-linguistic assessment tool. Most writing measures revealed no significant differences between the Chinese and American groups, suggesting that deaf students in both countries shared similar writing patterns and challenges. Differences appeared only in informative writing, where American students produced a higher percentage of complete sentences, while Chinese students achieved higher WER I scores.

The study suggests that SAWL has the potential to become a practical assessment tool across different languages and educational contexts. It also highlights the importance of considering language-specific features when evaluating writing and designing instruction. By identifying students' strengths and areas for improvement, teachers can provide more targeted support in grammar, sentence construction, and genre-specific writing skills.

Ideas to Consider

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