

Growth in Grammar: A multidimensional analysis of student writing between 5 and 16

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This poster will report on an in-progress project investigating the development of written language in school children in England. The study aims to provide a more thorough understanding of linguistic development in writing and to inform national and international curriculum policies on the teaching of English. It will also generate an updatable corpus of linguistically-annotated, educationally-authentic student writing, which will be made accessible to researchers and teachers.

We will address the following research questions:

1. What combinations of linguistic features distinguish school students' writing across:
 - a. different year groups?
 - b. different levels of writing attainment?
 - c. different text genres students are expected to write?
2. How do these combinations compare with those found in adult writing?

To answer these questions, we are building a new corpus of children's writing, sampled from schools across England. To capture the range of variation found in children's writing, the contents of the corpus will be balanced across year groups, levels of attainment, academic disciplines, text genres, geographic locations, student gender and student socio-economic status.

We will then use a combination of existing and custom-built software to identify and count linguistic features of potential interest (as identified by a systematic review of the research literature) in these texts. These counts will form the basis of a series of multi-dimensional analyses to determine the key dimensions of variation across ages, genres, and levels of attainment.

On completion of the project, we will be making our corpus available for other researchers and teachers to use. We will also be creating an online interface which will enable users to explore the corpus for themselves.

This poster will describe the design of the corpus and methods of analysis and report on progress to date.