

Corpus Research on the Development of Children's Writing in L1 English

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That morning a meerkat mob was snoring there
heds of Suddenly a snaka slithed into the brow.
The snaka saw the baby. The baby ran to the
mum, the mum froo the snak. Next a jackal ran in
to Sunny. The jackal sede can I be your frend?
And they play together tag. Sunny a vitid him for
tea time the end.

one luge time ago there was a king colld king james the first and the cathlixs did not like him. and there was a bad man called Guy Fawkes he wantied to bow the houses of Parliament he wantid to cill the king to as well as the cathlixs he had 36 barols of gunpowder and he hid it. Robert Catesby sent a leter to the king.

Dear Sir, I am writing to express my views on the article you recently printed, detailing a scheme by the Divert Trust to help difficult students. At first I was unsure if this scheme could ever work, and was indignant, like so many others, that many good students remained unrewarded. However, after researching this scheme I have come to realise that it is rather a brilliant idea. Research shows that around 88% of schools admit to not being able to cope with difficult students.

Year 2: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)

Word	<p>Formation of nouns using suffixes such as <i>–ness</i>, <i>–er</i> and by compounding [for example, <i>whiteboard</i>, <i>superman</i>]</p> <p>Formation of adjectives using suffixes such as <i>–ful</i>, <i>–less</i></p> <p>(A fuller list of suffixes can be found on page 57 in the year 2 spelling section in English Appendix 1)</p> <p>Use of the suffixes <i>–er</i>, <i>–est</i> in adjectives and the use of <i>–ly</i> in Standard English to turn adjectives into adverbs</p>
Sentence	<p>Subordination (using <i>when</i>, <i>if</i>, <i>that</i>, <i>because</i>) and co-ordination (using <i>or</i>, <i>and</i>, <i>but</i>)</p> <p>Expanded noun phrases for description and specification [for example, <i>the blue butterfly</i>, <i>plain flour</i>, <i>the man in the moon</i>]</p> <p>How the grammatical patterns in a sentence indicate its function as a statement, question, exclamation or command</p>

Department of Education, 2014

Year 6: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)

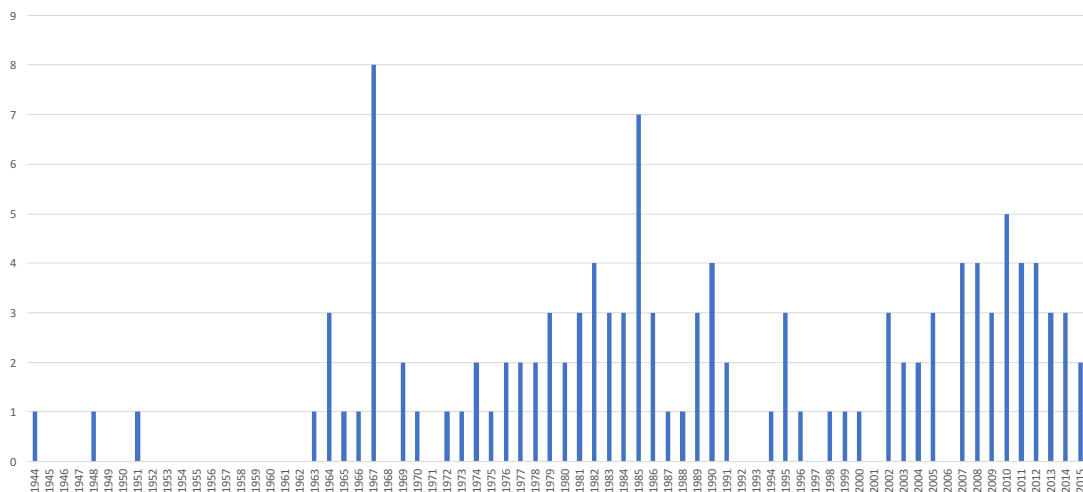
Word	<p>The difference between vocabulary typical of informal speech and vocabulary appropriate for formal speech and writing [for example, <i>find out</i> – <i>discover</i>; <i>ask for</i> – <i>request</i>; <i>go in</i> – <i>enter</i>]</p> <p>How words are related by meaning as synonyms and antonyms [for example, <i>big</i>, <i>large</i>, <i>little</i>].</p>
Sentence	<p>Use of the passive to affect the presentation of information in a sentence [for example, <i>I broke the window in the greenhouse</i> versus <i>The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me)</i>].</p> <p>The difference between structures typical of informal speech and structures appropriate for formal speech and writing [for example, the use of question tags: <i>He's your friend, isn't he?</i>, or the use of subjunctive forms such as <i>If I <u>were</u></i> or <i><u>Were they</u> to come</i> in some very formal writing and speech]</p>

Department of Education, 2014

Historical Overview

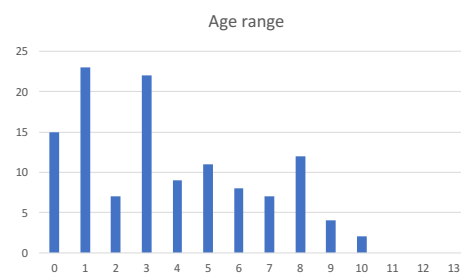
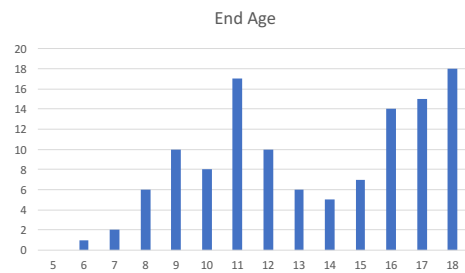
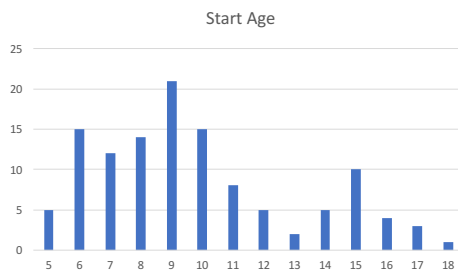
Quantitative comparisons of linguistic features in mainstream children's writing

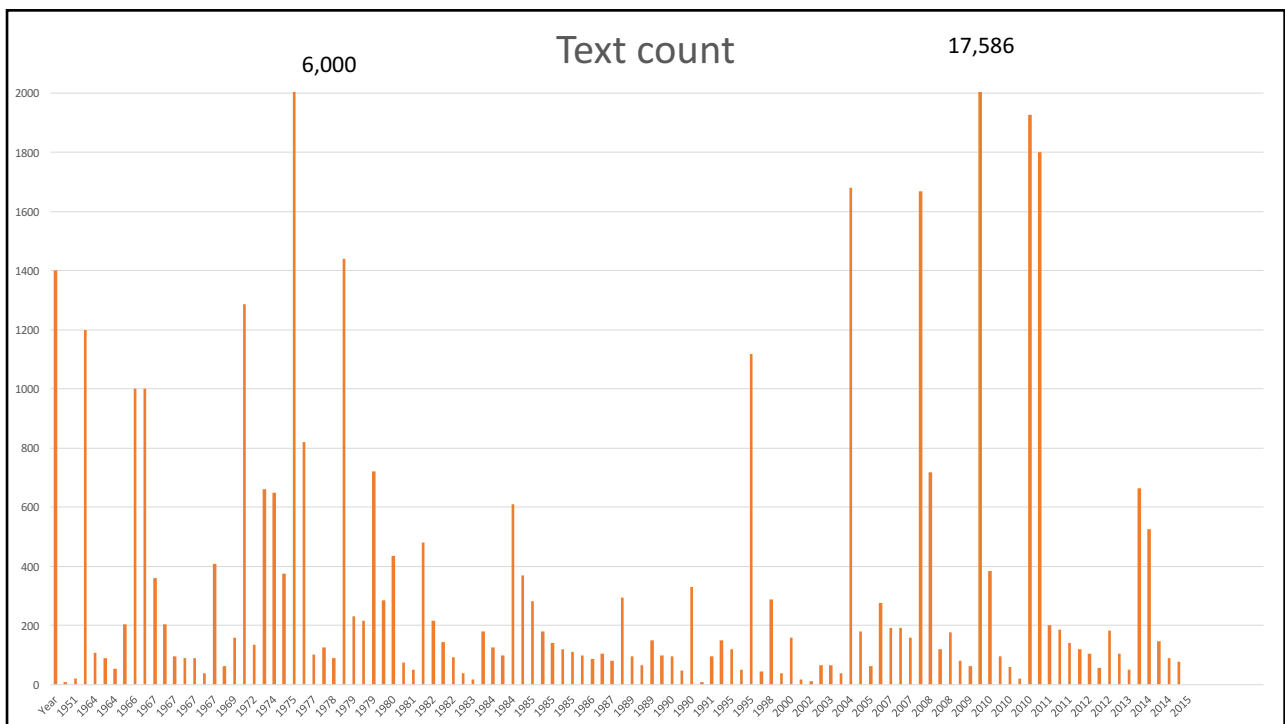
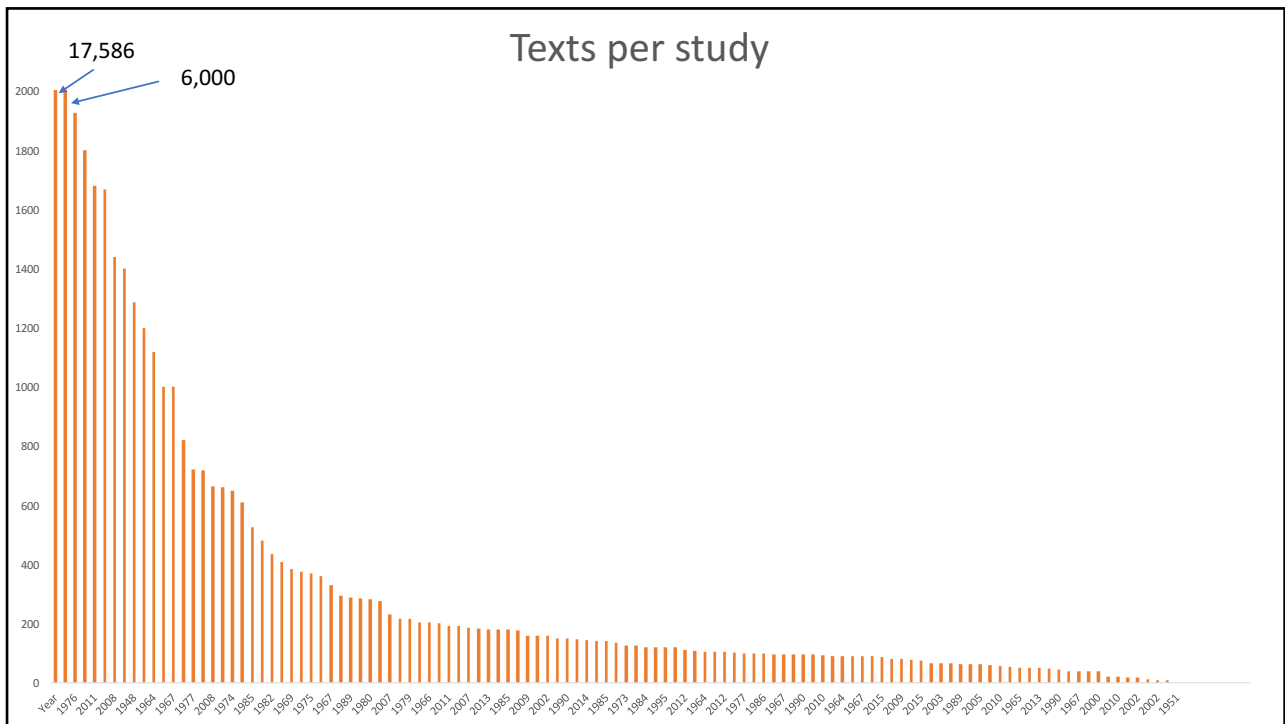
Studies per year: 1944-2015
(Total 120 studies)

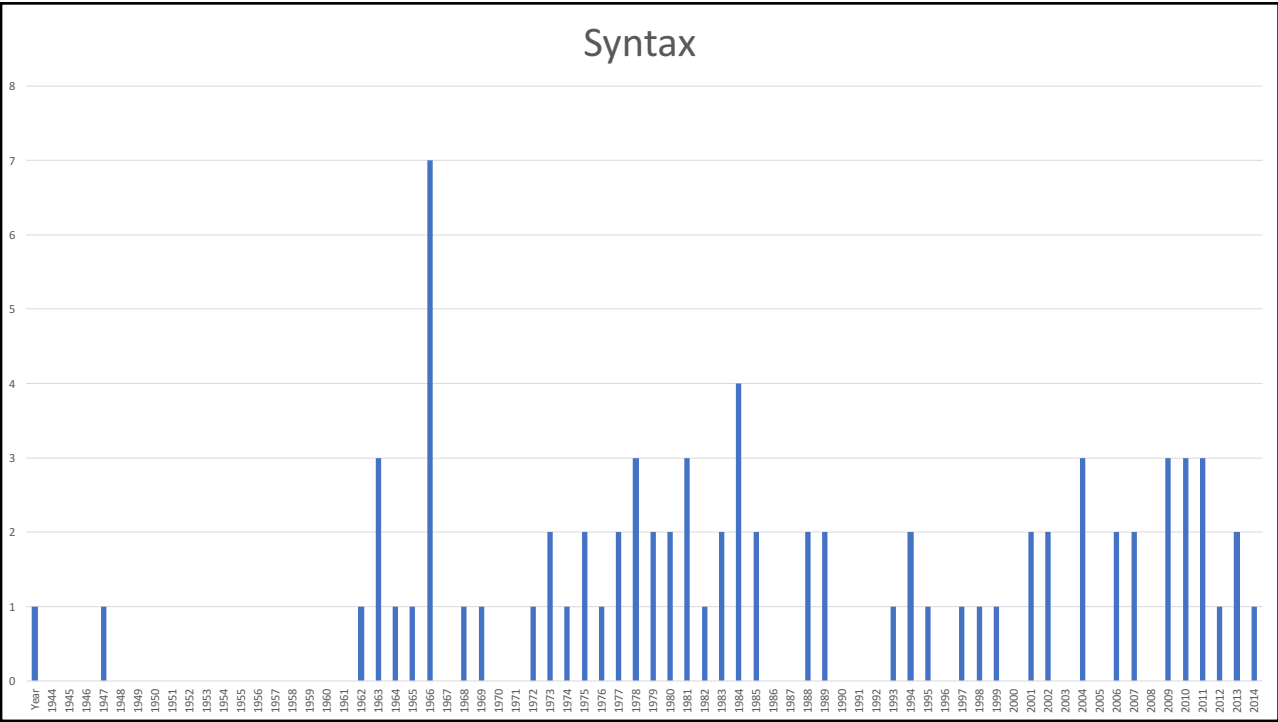
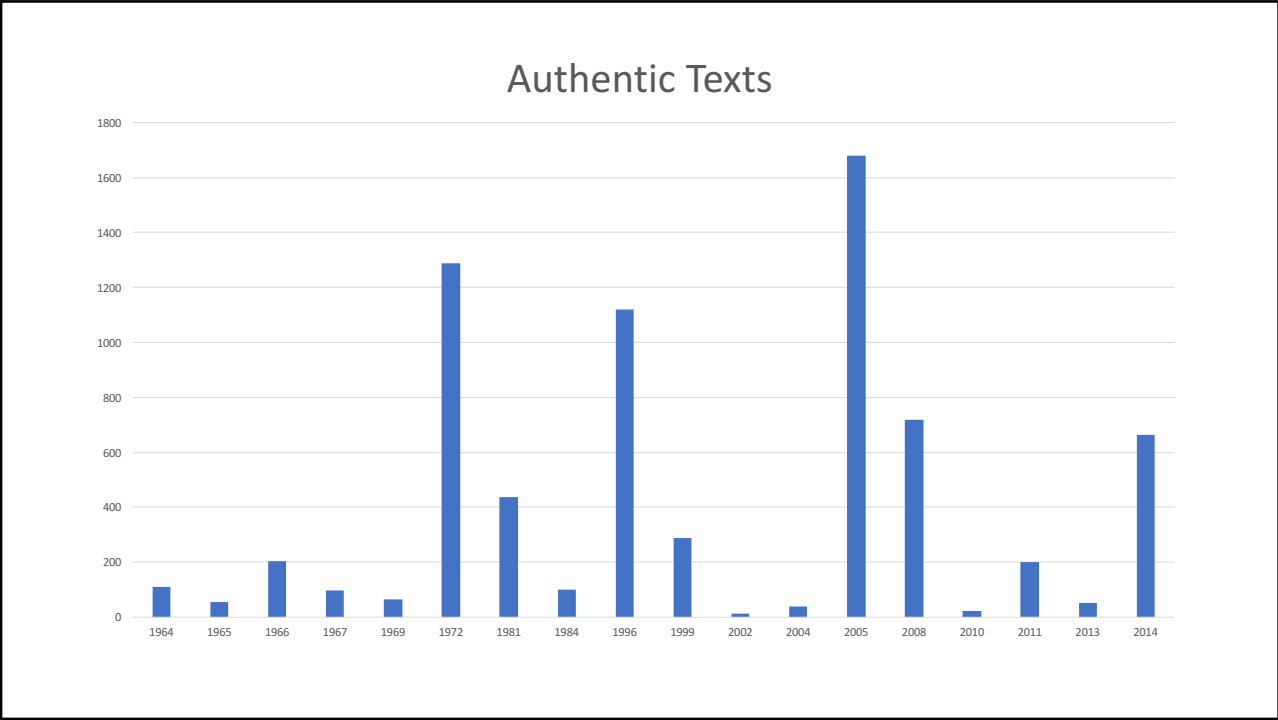


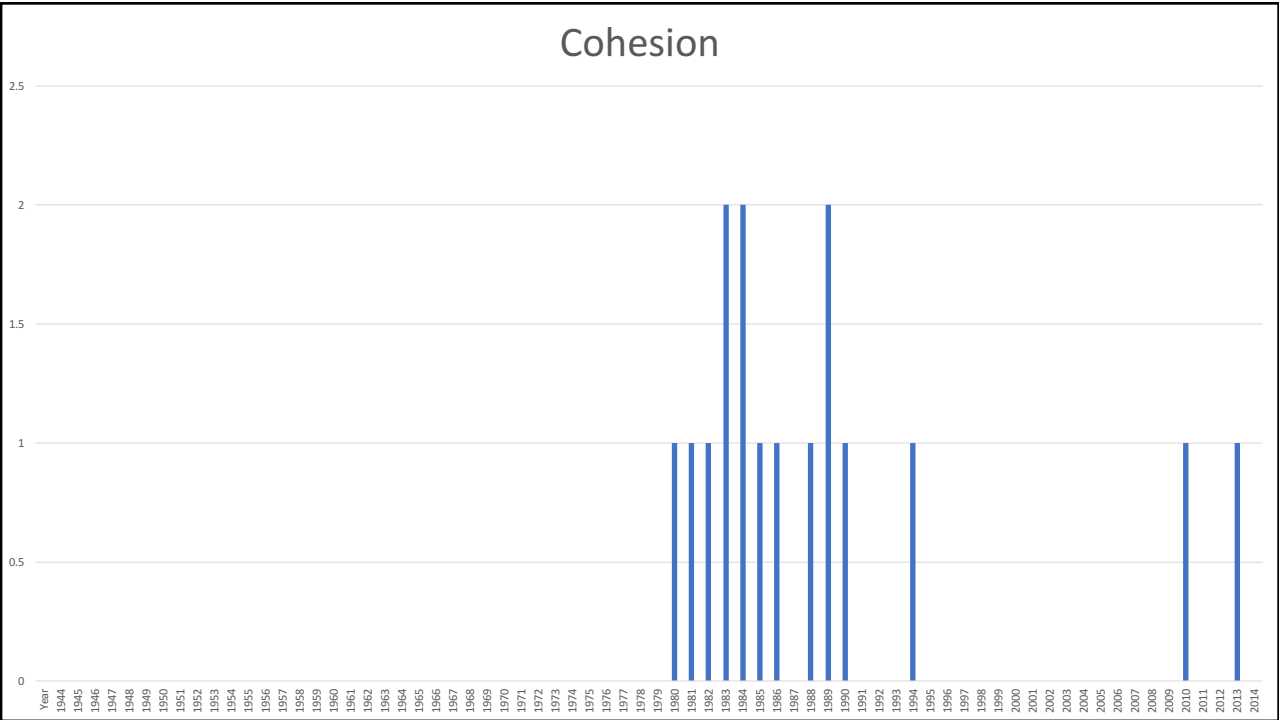
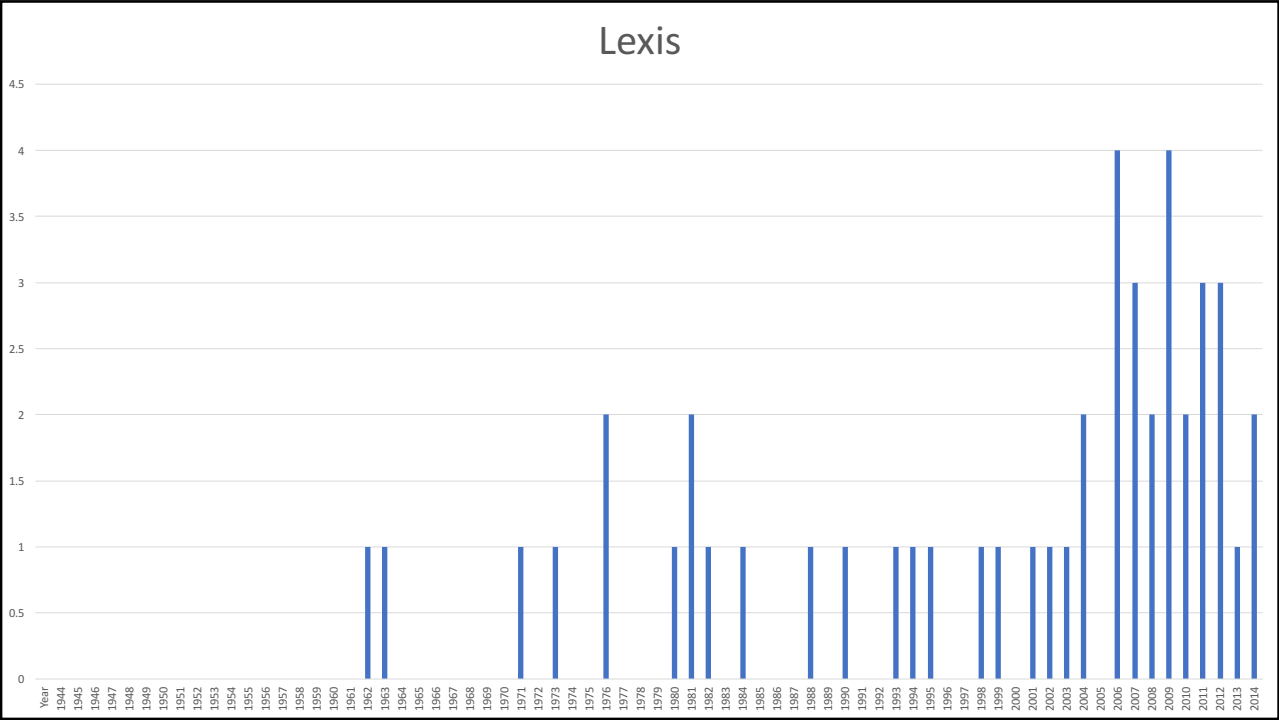
Provenance

Country	Number of Studies
USA	77
UK	22
Canada	16
Australia	2
USA, UK & New Zealand	2
USA & New Zealand	1









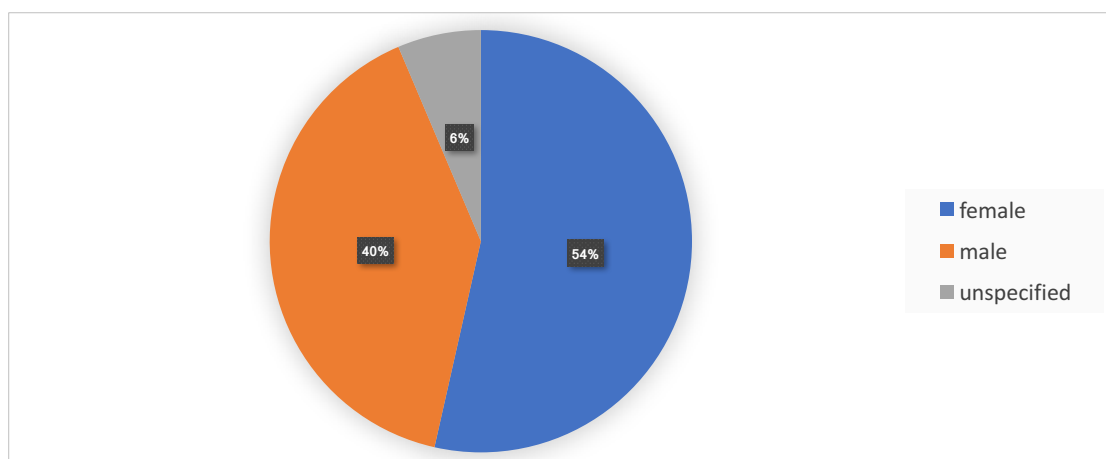
The Growth in Grammar Project

- Creating a corpus of educationally authentic writing from children in schools across England at Key Stages 1-4
- To be analysed for changes at the levels of lexis, phrase and clause.
 - NB: Analysis of structures used, not of accuracy.
- Corpus to be made publicly available from August 2018
- Combining with APU Corpus (we hope!)

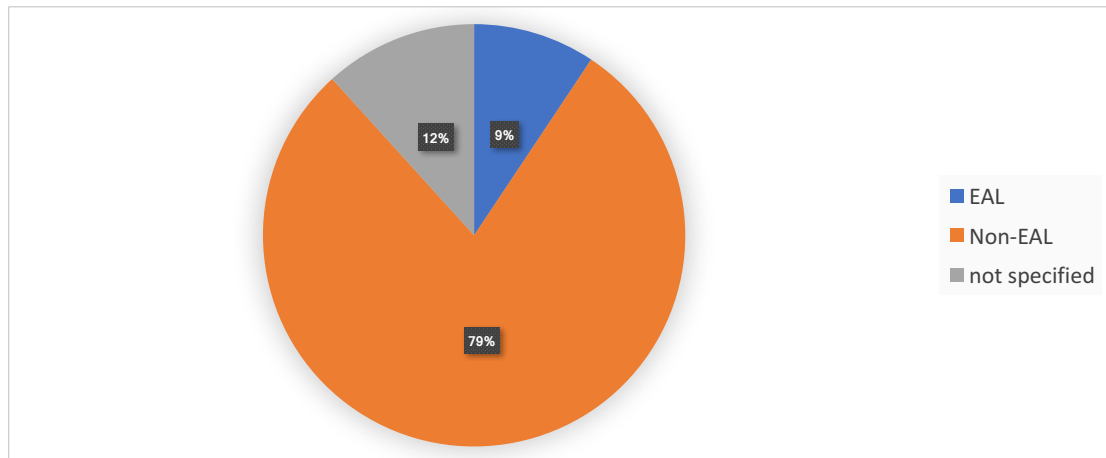
Corpus to date

	Total texts	Total schools	Total children	Discipline		
				English	Science	Other
Year 2	543	5	138	452	7	84
Year 4	49	2	10	25	2	22
Year 6	868	7	185	548	171	149
Year 9	761	12	465	483	166	112
Year 11	191	6	85	137	54	0
All years	2,412	21	883	1,645	400	367

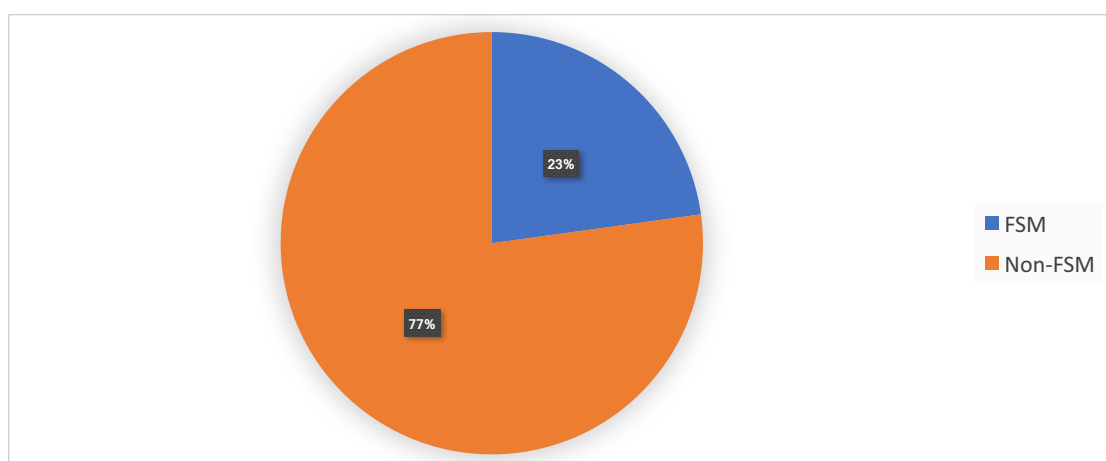
Corpus to date: Gender



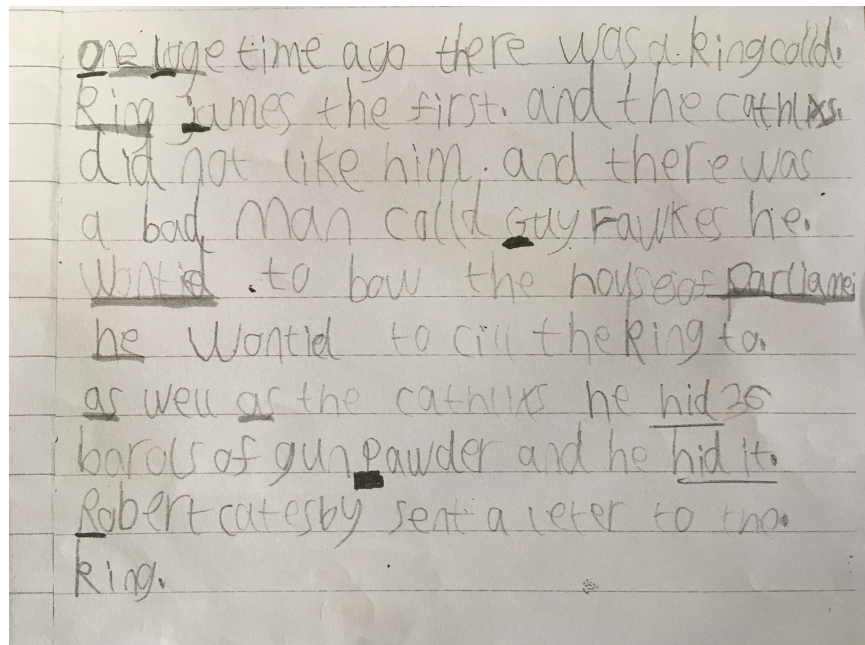
Corpus to date: EAL



Corpus to date: SES



Issues 1: Transcription



one longe time ago there was a king called
King James the first. and the catholics
did not like him. and there was
a bad man called Guy Fawkes he
wanted to blow the house of parliament
he wanted to kill the king too.
as well as the catholics he hid 36
barrels of gun powder and he hid it.
Robert catesby sent a letter to the
king.

Transcription issues

- Legibility – especially with irregular features of spelling/punctuation
- Creating a ‘parser-ready’ version: regularization of spelling, punctuation; syntax.
- Anonymisation

Issues 2: Genre

Issues 3: Coding Grammatical Features

Coding grammatical features

The captain ordered me to douse the fire in the galley in case the fire spread and burnt down the ship

Coding grammatical features

The captain ordered **me** to douse **the fire in the galley** in case **the fire** spread and burnt down **the ship**

Coding grammatical features

The captain ordered **me** to douse **the fire in the galley in case the fire** spread and burnt down **the ship**

Coding grammatical features

the **fire** in the **galley** in **case** the **fire spread** and burnt down the **ship**


Coding grammatical features

the **fire** in the **galley** in **case** the **fire spread** and burnt down the **ship**



Coding grammatical features

the **fire** in the **galley** in **case** the **fire spread** and burnt down the **ship**



noun modifier noun modifier

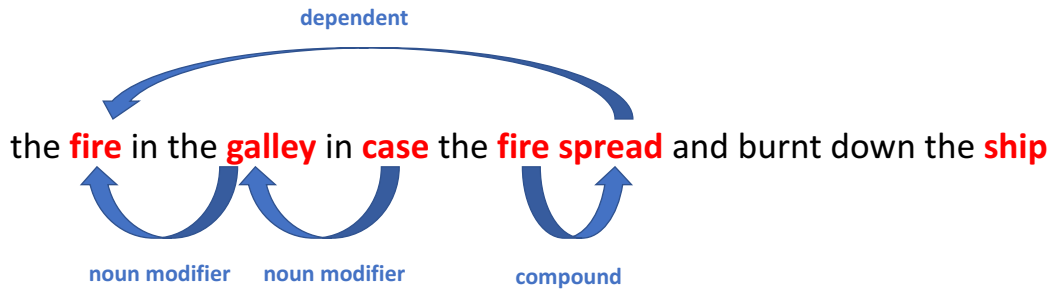
Coding grammatical features

the **fire** in the **galley** in **case** the **fire spread** and burnt down the **ship**

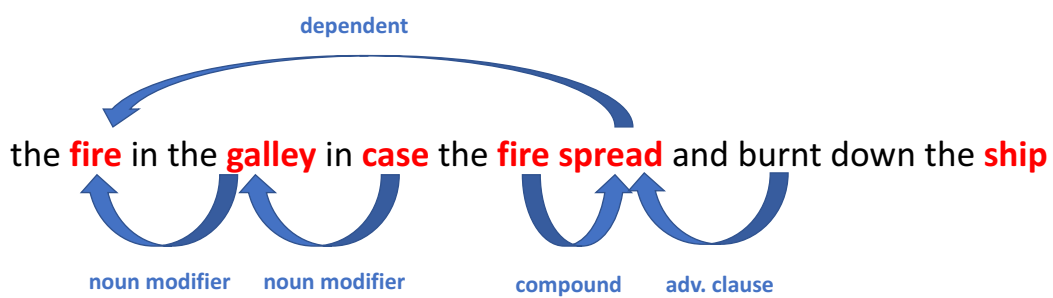


noun modifier noun modifier compound

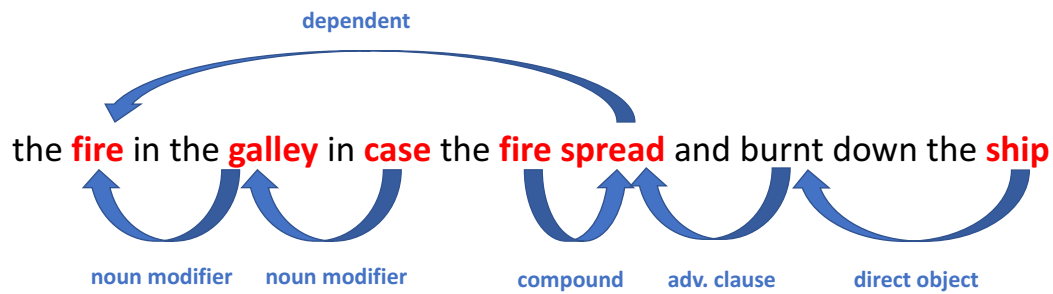
Coding grammatical features



Coding grammatical features

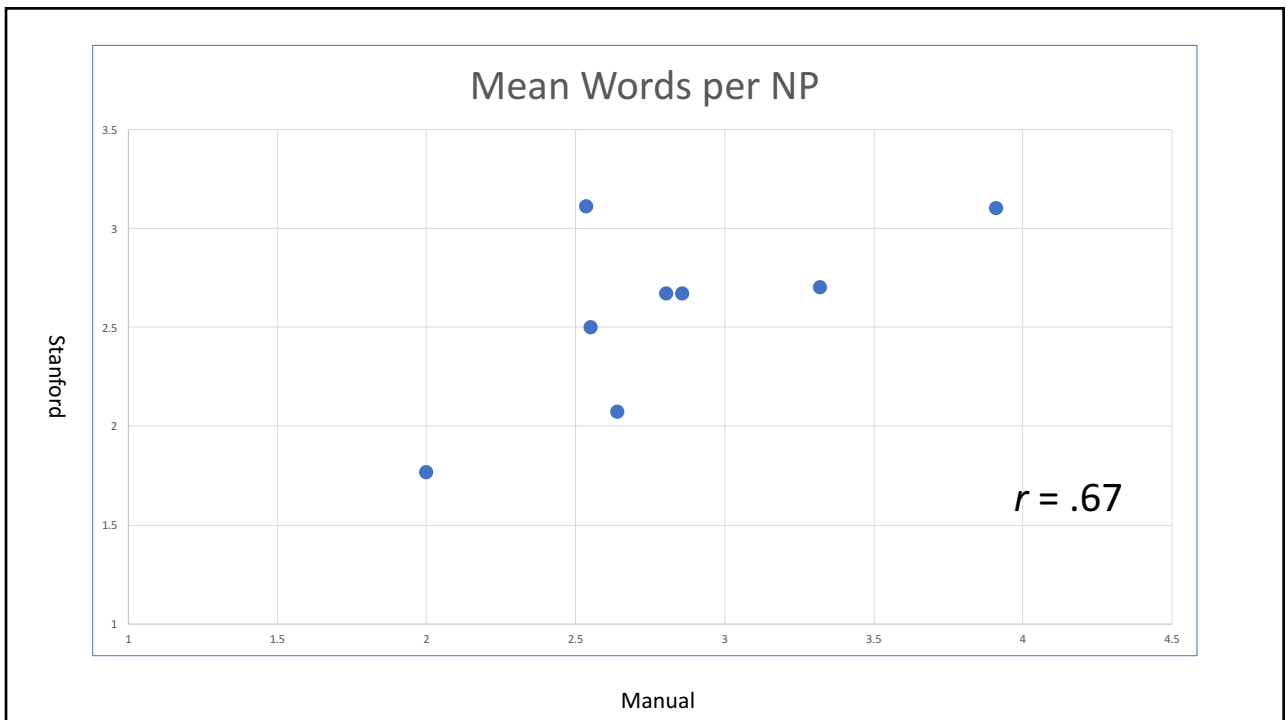
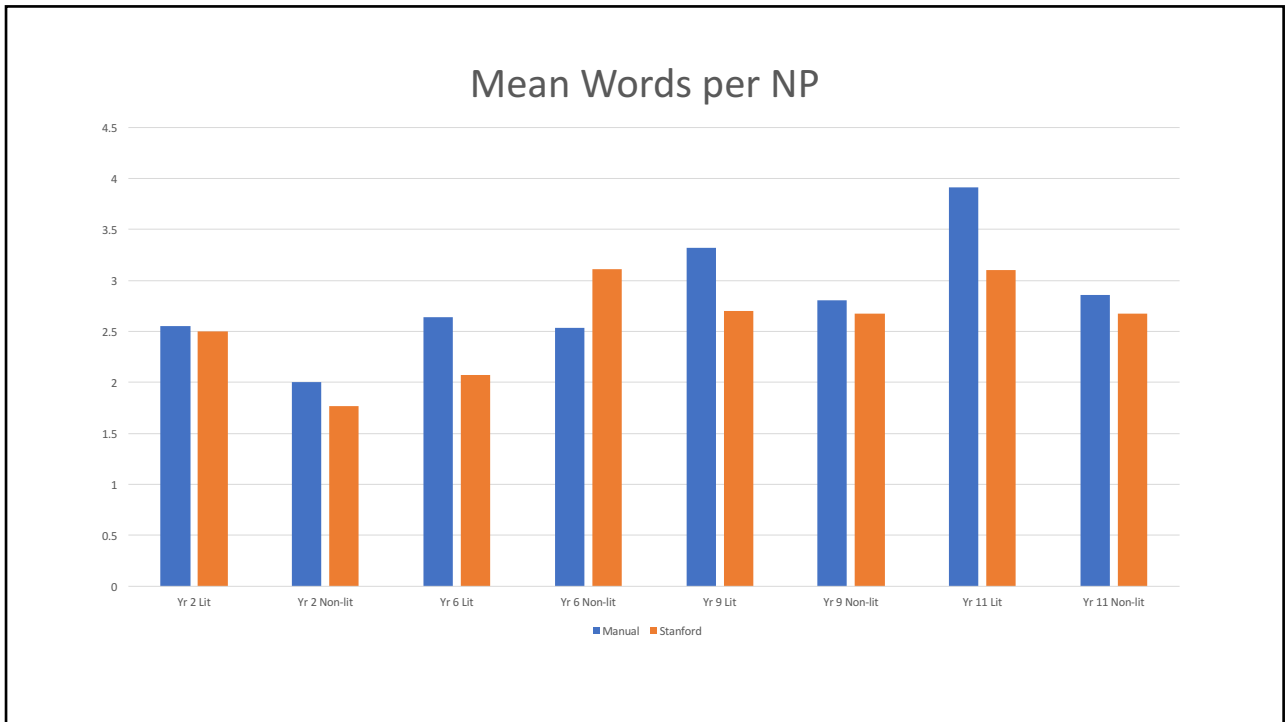


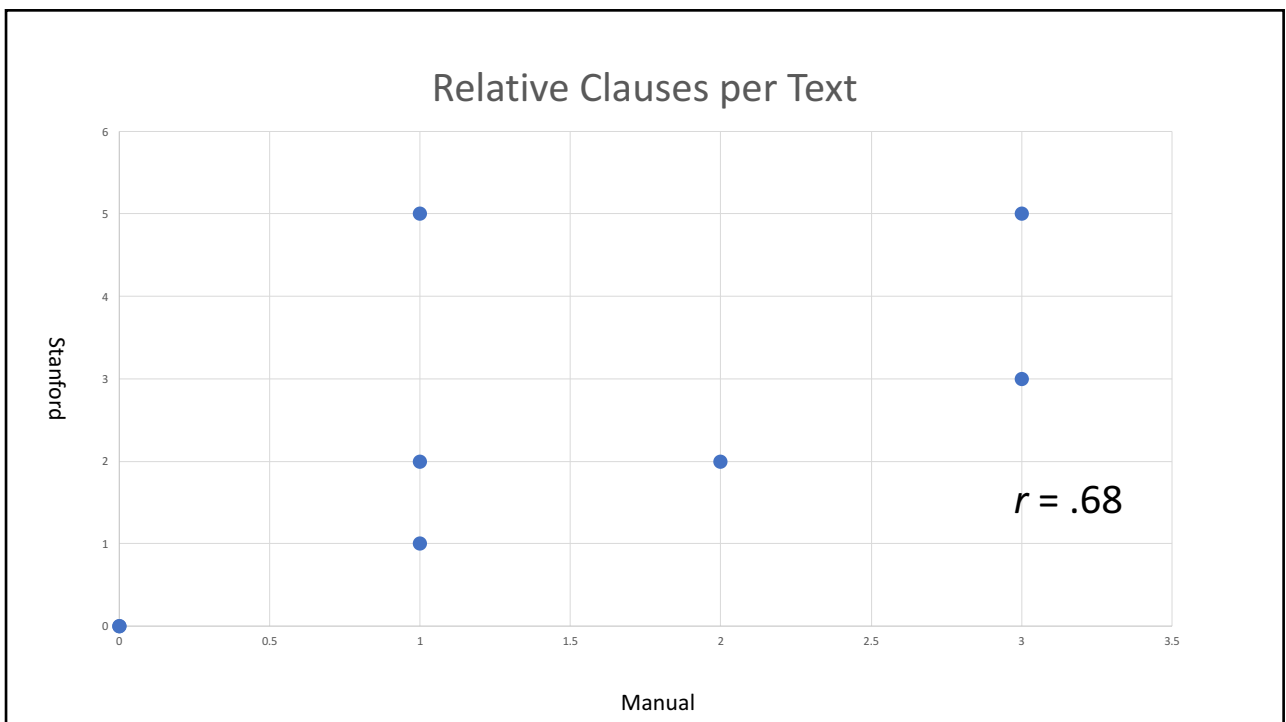
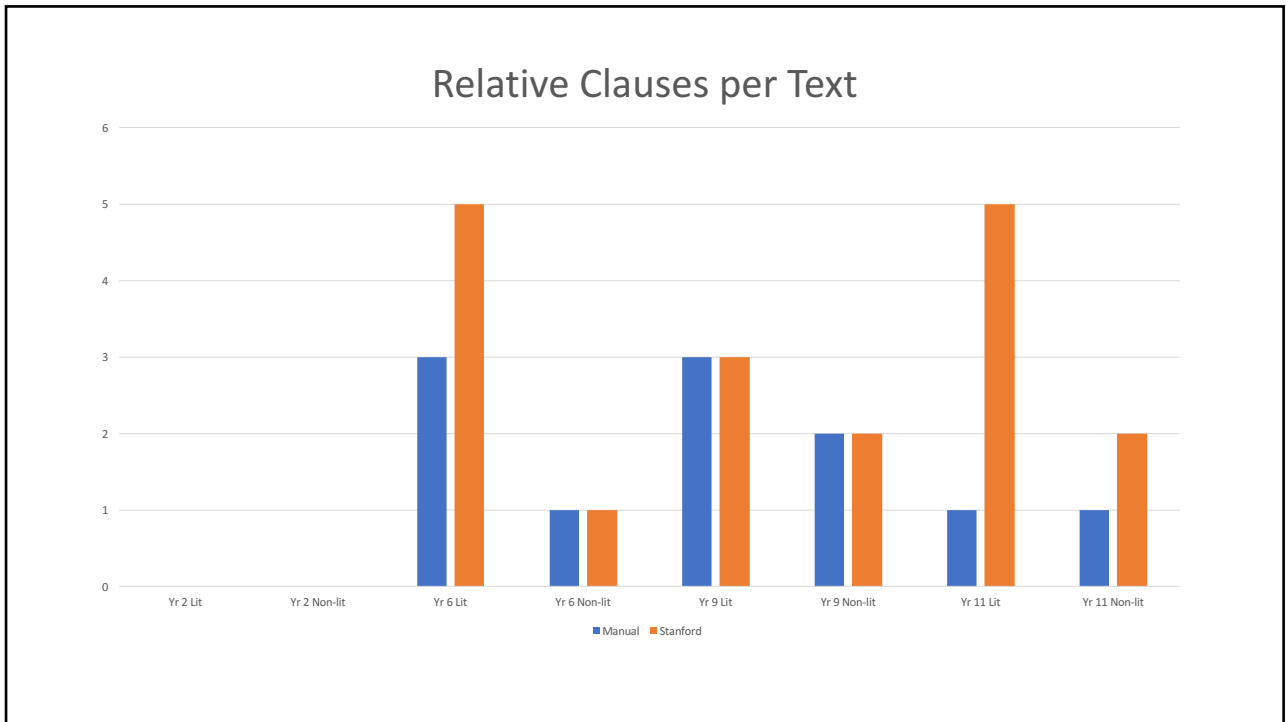
Coding grammatical features

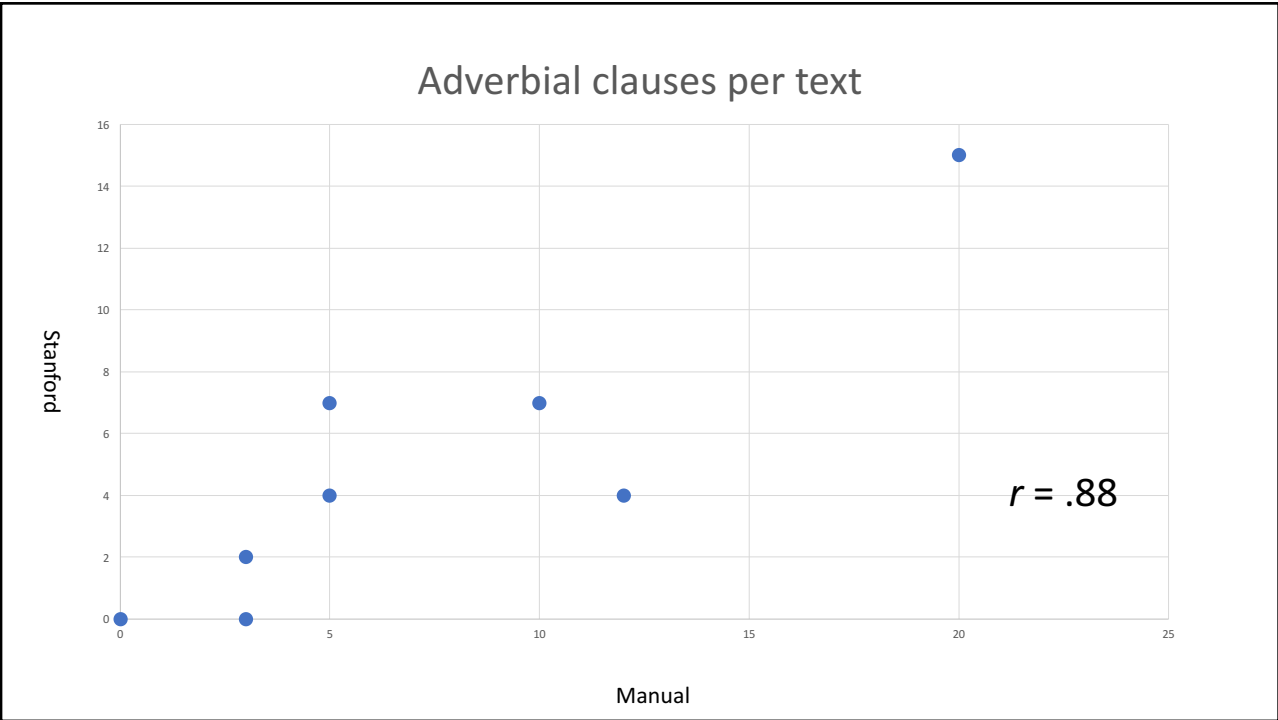
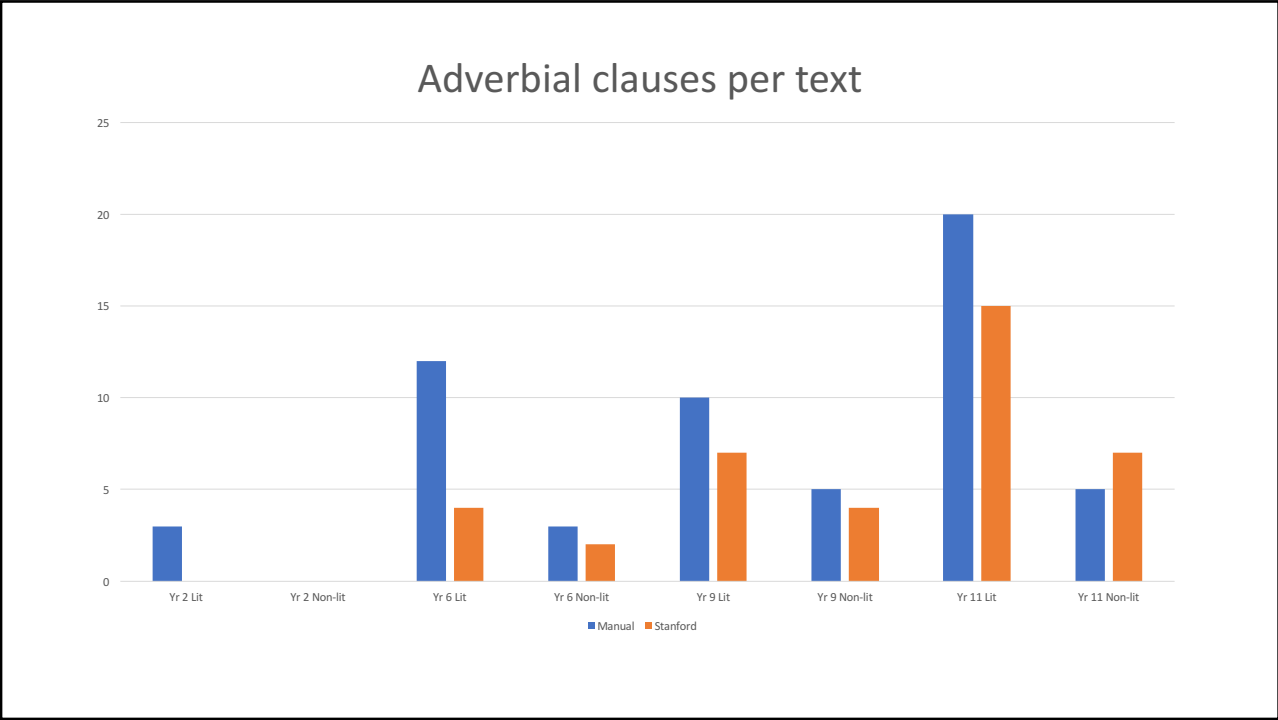


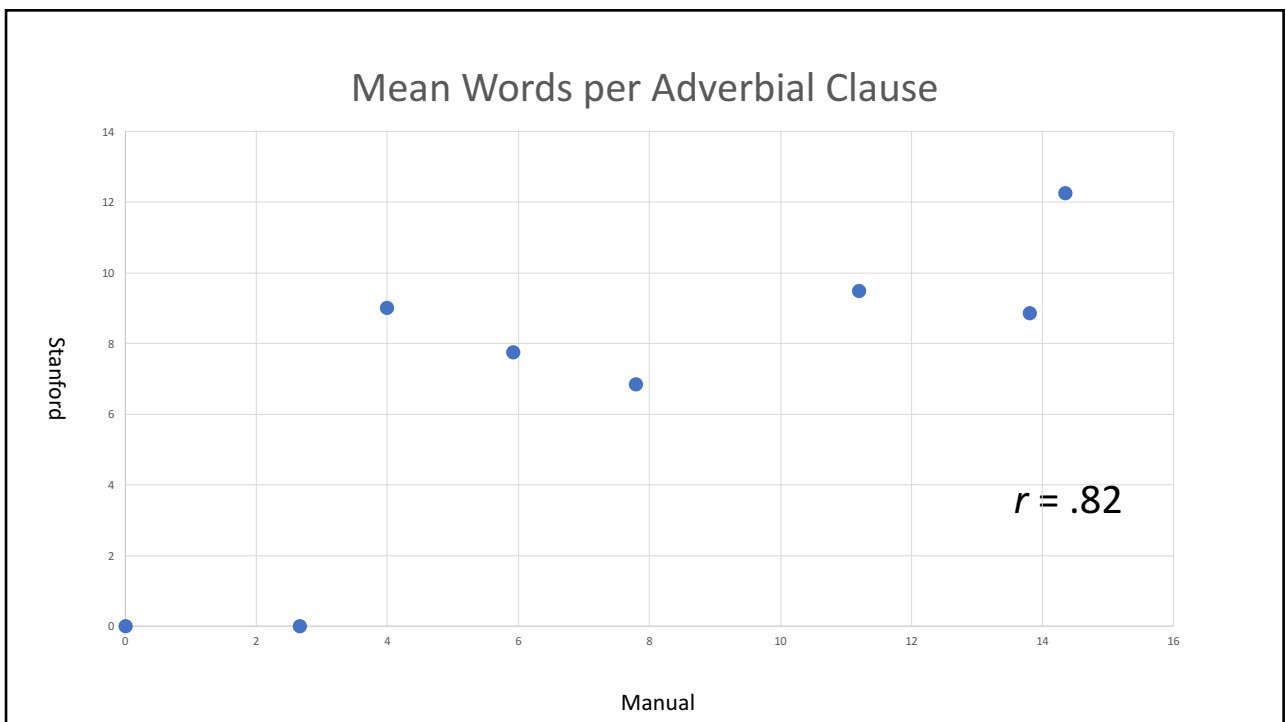
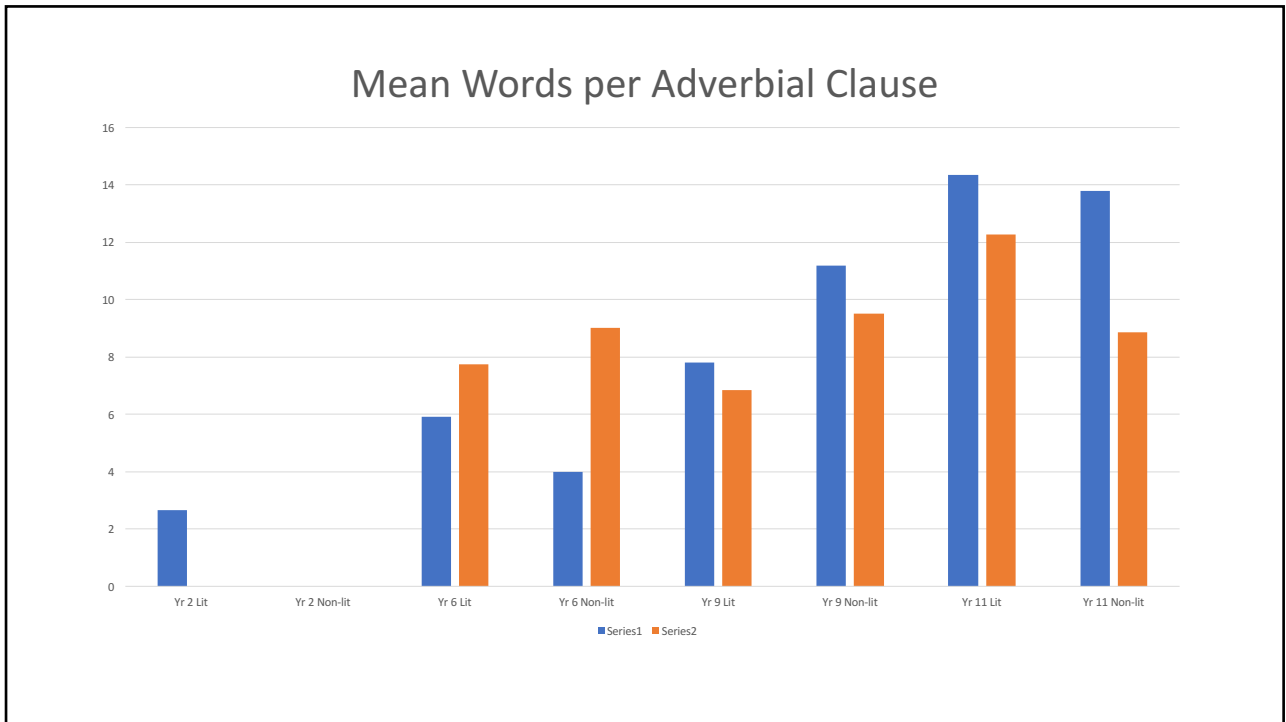
Coding grammatical features

- Target result:
 - 1 x 1 word; 3 x 2 word; 1 x 5 word
 - Mean: 2.4 words per noun phrase
- Stanford:
 - 2 x 1 word; 2 x 2 word; 1 x 4 word; 1 x 8 word; 1 x 15 word
 - Mean: 4.7 words per noun phrase









Issues 4:
Understanding attainment

Some Initial Findings:
Vocabulary development

Vocabulary development



Density

Effect	Source	Ages
No age effects	Golub & Frederick 1979	9-10 vs. 11-12
	Berman & Nir 2010	9-10 vs. 12-13 vs. 16-17 vs. adult
	Hall-Mills & Apel 2015	7-8 vs. 8-9 vs 9-10
No correlation with quality	Uccelli et al 2013	Mean age 18;4

Diversity: total types

Effect	Source	Ages
Increases with age	Thomas 1972	7-8 vs. 10-11
	Finn 1977	9-10 vs. 13-14 vs. 16-17
	Wagner et al 2011	6 vs. 9
	Nelson & Van Meter 2007	6-7 vs. 7-8 vs. 8-9 vs. 9-10
No age effects	Hall-Mills & Apel 2015	7-8 vs. 8-9 vs 9-10
Increases with quality	Berse 1974	10-11
	Blatchford 1991	Mean 7;6
	Grobe 1981	10-11; 13-14; 16-17
	Bourke & Adams 2003	Mean 6;11
	Bourke & Adams 2011	Mean 4;9
	Roessingh et al 2015	8-9

Diversity: types controlled for text length

- Types in N words
- Type:token ratio
- Corrected type:token ratio ($\text{types}/2 \cdot \text{tokens}^2$)
- D
- MTLD

Diversity: Adjusted measures

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Increases with age	Types in N words	Clendon & Erikson 2008	Mean 5;7 vs. 6;7 vs. 7;6 vs. 8;5 years
	TTR	Holdich et al 2002	11 years
	Corrected TTR	Moore 1977	14 vs. 17 years
		Olinghouse & Graham 2009	Mean 7.6 vs. 9.6 years
		Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	7-8 vs. 9-10 years
	D	Malvern et al 2004	7 vs. 11 vs. 14 years
		Berman & Nir 2010	9-10 vs. 12-13 vs. 16-17 vs. adult
		Crossley et al 2011	14-15 vs. 16-17 vs. 18-19 years
No age effects	TTR	Hall-Mills & Apel 2015	7-8 vs. 8-9 vs 9-10

Diversity: Adjusted measures

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Increases with quality	Types in N words	Koutsoftas & Gray 2012	10 years
	TTR	Grobe 1981	10-11 vs. 13-14 vs. 16-17
	Corrected TTR	Olinghouse & Graham 2009	Mean 7.6 vs. 9.6
		Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	7-8 vs. 9-10
	D	Malvern et al 2004	7 vs. 11 vs. 14
		Ucelli et al 2013	Mean age 18;4
	MTLD	Olinhouse & Wilson 2013	10-11
No correlation with quality	TTR	Cameron et al 1995	9;10

Sophistication

- Word length
- Word Frequency
- Register
- Semantics

Sophistication: Word length

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Increases with age	Words \geq 7 letters	Houck & Billingsley 1989	10 vs. 14. vs. 17
	Syllables per word & Words > 3 syllables	Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	7-8 < 9-10
Ambiguous age effect	Words > 3 syllables	Berman & Nir-Sagiv 2007	9-10 = 12-13 < 16-17 = adult
No age effect	Letters per word	Malvern et al 2004	7 = 11 = 14
Increases with quality	Letters per word	Massey et al 1996 & 2005	7 & 11 & 14
		Malvern et al 2004	16
		Vanderberg & Swanson 2007	15
		Myhill 2009	16
Ambiguous quality effect	Letters per word	Grobe 1981	<div> ✓ 10-11 & 16-17 ✗ 13-14 </div>
	Syllables per word; Words > 3 syllables	Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	Task/age/measure dependent weak correlations

Sophistication: Word frequency (age)

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Decreases with age	% words < 1/100K	Finn 1977	9-10 < 16-17
	% words not on high-frequency list	Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	7-8 > 9-10
	% 1K words	Sun, Zhang & Scardamalia 2010	8 > 10
	% 2K words	Sun, Zhang & Scardamalia 2010	8 < 10
	% off-list words	Sun, Zhang & Scardamalia 2010	8 < 10
Ambiguous age effects	% words not on high-frequency list	Lawton 1963	12 > 14 for working-class children, not middle class
	Mean frequency from reference corpus	Crossley et al 2011	14-15 < 18-19 14-15=16-17 16-17=18-19
No age effects	P-Lex	Malvern et al 2004	7 = 11 = 14

Sophistication: Word frequency (quality)

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Decreases with quality	% words on low-frequency list	Massey et al 1996, 2005	16
	% words on low-frequency list	Olinghouse & Leaird 2009	7-8 & 9-10
Ambiguous effect of quality	% words on low-frequency list	Olinghouse & Wilson 2009	10-11 (effect in 1/3 genres)

Sophistication: Register

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Age effect	Greco-Latin vocabulary	Corson 1985	12 < 15
	AWL words	Sun, Zhang & Scardamalia 2010	8 < 10
Ambiguous age effect	Latinate:Germanic ratio	Berman & Nir-Sagiv 2007	9-10 = 12-13 < 16-17 < adult

Sophistication: Semantics

Effect	Measure	Source	Ages
Age effect	Abstract nouns	Fox 1982	15-16 < 17-18
	Word concreteness	Crossley et al 2011	14-15 < 16-17 < 18-19
Ambiguous age effects	Abstract nouns	Nippold, Ward-Londergan & Fanning 2005	7=8 < 11=12
		Berman & Nir-Sagiv 2007	4=7 < 11=adults
	Word polysemy	Crossley et al 2011	14-15 < 18-19 14-15=16-17; 16-17=18-19
Increases with quality	Abstract nouns	Fox 1982	15-16 & 17-18

To summarise...

Lexical Density	No effect (not a vocabulary measure?)
Lexical Diversity	Increases with both age and quality (of course!)
Word Length	Appears to increase with age and quality, but variable results. But what is the construct here?
Word Frequency	Appears to increase with age and quality, but variable results.
Register	Greek/Latin vocabulary and academic vocabulary appear to increase with age, but few studies
Semantics	Contradictory findings re. abstraction. Initial evidence of effect of polysemy
Phraseology	???????

Vocabulary Development in the
GiG baby corpus

Sample for the current study

- Years 2, 6 and 9 only
- English/Humanities classes only
- Exclude texts with > 100 illegible words per 1,000
- Exclude poems
- Exclude samples more than 1SD from mean word length
- Randomly select texts to give equal numbers in each year group

Study Corpus

	Schools	Writers	Texts	Text Length				Genre		
				Mean	Median	Min	Max	Story	Exposition	Persuasion
Year 2	3	78	219	66.6	62	27	131	116	99	4
Year 6	4	90	219	284.2	261	120	521	114	82	23
Year 9	6	189	219	343.3	330	181	560	130	59	30

TAALES* Indices

- Frequency
- Ngram frequency/association
- Concreteness ratings

*Kyle & Crossley 2014

Frequency/Range: 72 indices each

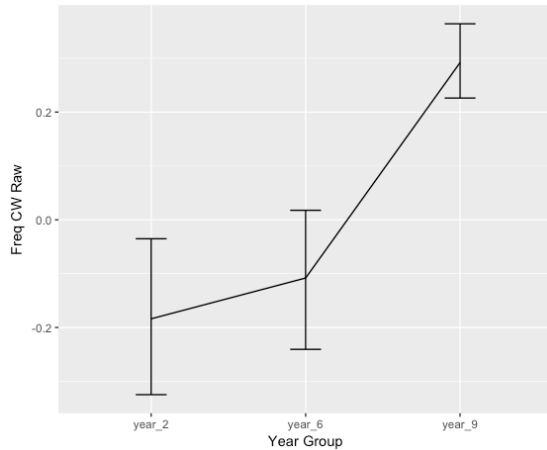
- Range of reference corpora
- Separate indices for:
 - all words vs. content words vs. function words
 - raw frequency vs. log frequency

Combining results from different corpora: frequency

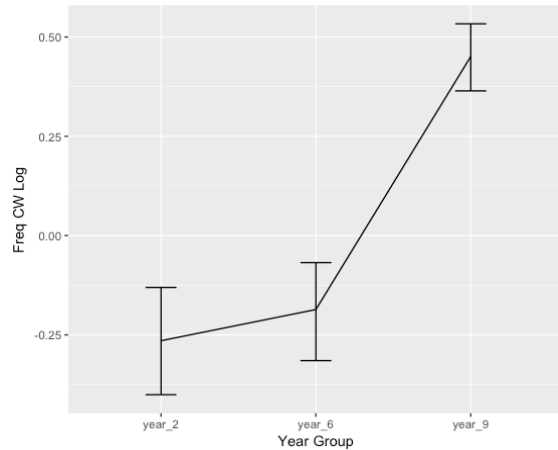
Sub-category (1)	Sub-category (2)	Cronbach's alpha	Deleted
All words	Raw	.99	SUBTLEXus ($r = .41$)
	Log	.98	
Content words	Raw	.98	
	Log	.98	
Function words	Raw	.99	SUBTLEXus ($r = .41$)
	Log	.98	

		All words		Content words		Function words	
		Raw	Log	Raw	Log	Raw	Log
All words	Raw	1.00					
	Log	0.18	1.00				
Content words	Raw	-0.15	0.61	1.00			
	Log	-0.27	0.80	0.76	1.00		
Function words	Raw	0.83	-0.17	-0.30	-0.42	1.00	
	Log	0.68	-0.08	-0.29	-0.35	0.86	1.00

Content words



$F(2, 654)=18.38, p < .001, \omega^2=.06$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 = year 6 < year 9

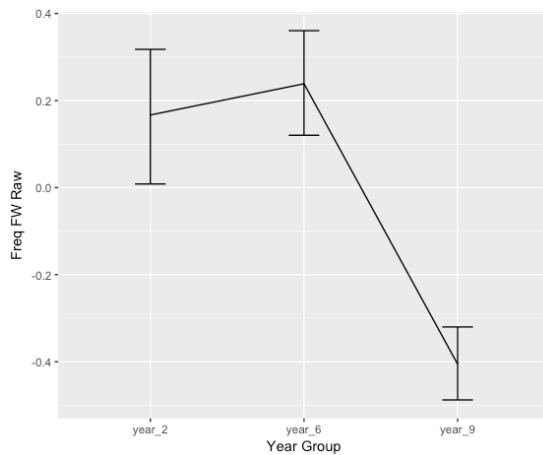


$F(2, 654)=43.99, p < .001, \omega^2=.11$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 = year 6 < year 9

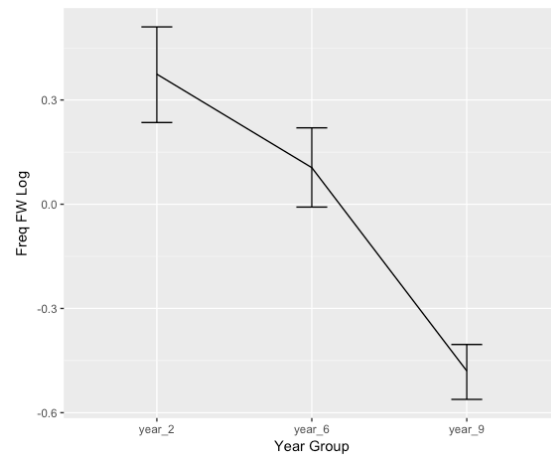
For example

One morning, five meerkats finished eating crunchy scorpions but there predators like slithering snakes, lions and falcons. But one woke up and went meerkats, meerkats and woke up the others. One stepped on the snake and it went hiss hiss! And the other predators ran away. But a fennec fox was coming to take two pups. The scary fox wishes to eat them even the nice scorpions.

Function words



$F(2, 654)=32.47, p < .001, \omega^2=.09$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 = year 6 > year 9



$F(2, 654)=57.45, p < .001, \omega^2=.15$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 > year 6 > year 9

*Kyle & Crossley 2014

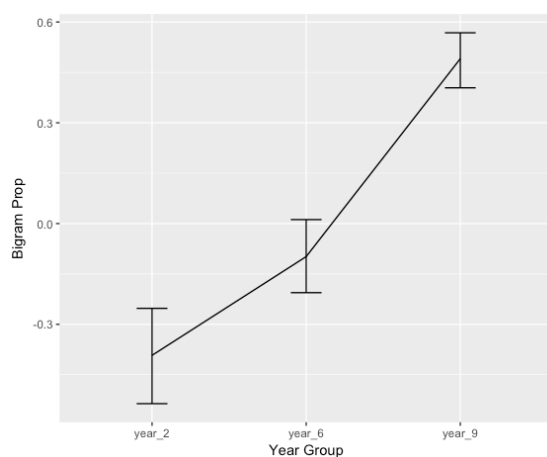
Ngram measures: Frequency & Proportion

- Frequency: 7 x reference corpora; Association: 5 x reference corpora
- Frequency: Raw vs. Log vs. Proportion
 - Proportion: 10K; 20K; 30K...100K)

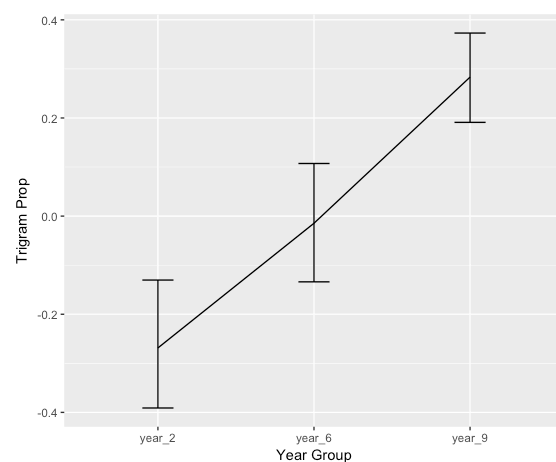
Combining results from different corpora: Ngram proportions/frequencies

Category	Sub-category	Cronbach's alpha	Deleted
Frequency	Bigram Proportion	1	
	Bigram Log	.95	
	Trigram Proportion	1	
	Trigram Log	.93	BNC Spoken: .14 BNC Written: .20 COCA Academic: .65

Proportions: Bigram & Trigram

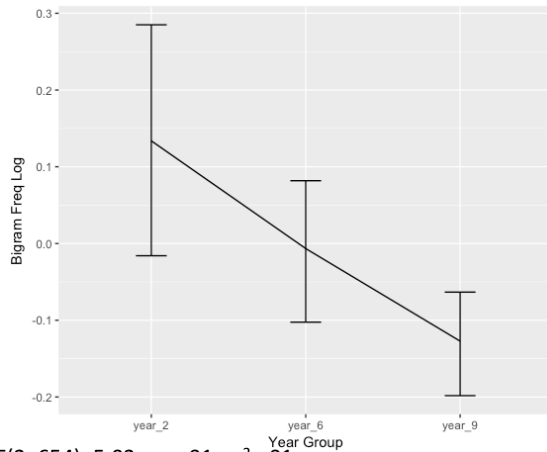


$F(2, 654)=58.43, p < .001, \omega^2=.15$
post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 < year 6 < year 9



$F(2, 654)=21.38, p < .001, \omega^2=.06$
post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 < year 6 < year 9

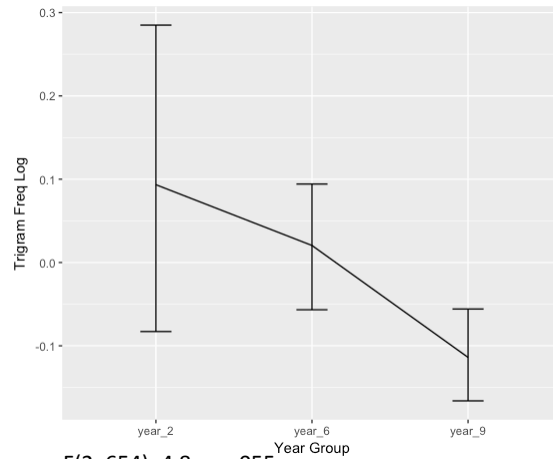
Frequency: Bigram & Trigram (Logs)



$F(2, 654)=5.02, p < .01, \omega^2=.01$

post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 < year 9;

year 2 = year 6; year 6 = year 9



$F(2, 654)=4.8, p = .055$

Ngram measures: Association

- Association:
 - MI, MI2; t-score; Delta-P; Collexeme
 - Bigram vs. Trigram
 - Trigram 1 (*double – espresso please*)
 - Trigram 2 (*double espresso – please*)

Combining results from different corpora

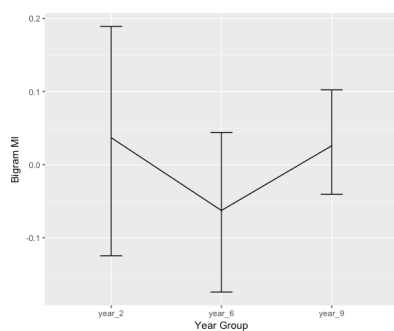
Sub-category	Cronbach's alpha	Deleted
Bigram / MI	.95	
Bigram / MI2	.95	
Bigram t-score	.97	
Bigram Delta-P	.97	
Bigram Collexeme	.99	

Combining results from different corpora

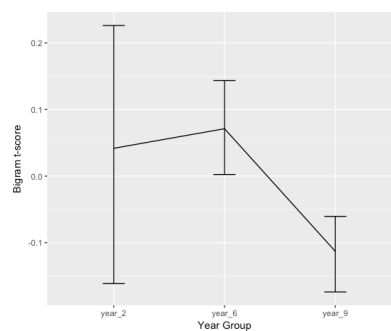
	Sub-category	Cronbach's alpha	Deleted
Trigram (1)	MI	.93	COCA Academic: .59
	MI2	.91	COCA Academic: .64
	t-score	.94	
	Delta-P	.94	
	Collexeme	.93	
Trigram (2)	MI	.95	COCA Academic: .65
	MI2	.93	COCA Academic: .62
	t-score	.94	COCA Fiction: .67
	Delta-P	.94	
	Collexeme	.94	COCA Academic: .68

	2G MI	2G MI2	2G T	2G DP	2G Clex	3G1 MI	3G1 MI2	3G1 T	3G1 DP	3G1 Clex	3G2 MI	3G2 MI2	3G2 T	3G2 DP	3G2 Clex
2G MI	1.00														
2G MI2	.61	1.00													
2G T	.30	.65	1.00												
2G DP	.30	.37	.44	1.00											
2G Clex	-.06	.32	.76	.43	1.00										
3G1 MI	.45	.05	-.12	.13	-.24	1.00									
3G1 MI2	.39	.36	.23	.22	.08	.67	1.00								
3G1 T	.23	.42	.43	.20	.29	.19	.72	1.00							
3G1 DP	.06	.12	.29	.38	.43	.19	.34	.38	1.00						
3G1 Clex	.13	.36	.39	.21	.35	.09	.60	.91	.43	1.00					
3G2 MI	.46	.07	-.09	.16	-.19	.65	.47	.14	.13	.09	1.00				
3G2 MI2	.43	.33	.20	.24	.07	.49	.80	.61	.26	.53	.73	1.00			
3G2 T	.22	.42	.44	.28	.32	.12	.64	.84	.38	.84	.22	.67	1.00		
3G2 DP	.15	-.01	.11	.49	.19	.34	.35	.24	.49	.24	.44	.43	.31	1.00	
3G2 Clex	.12	.36	.39	.22	.36	.07	.59	.87	.43	.98	.11	.56	.89	.27	1.00

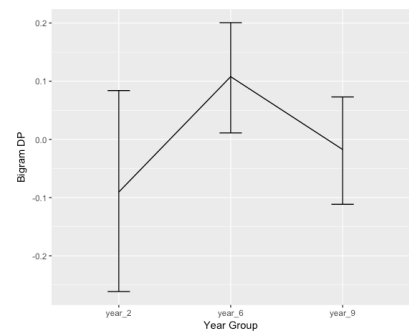
Bigram associations: MI; t-score; DP



$F(2, 654)=0.79, p > .05$

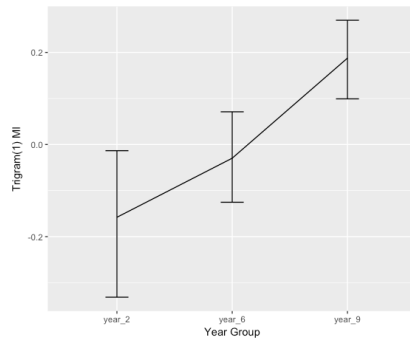


$F(2, 654)=2.37, p > .05$

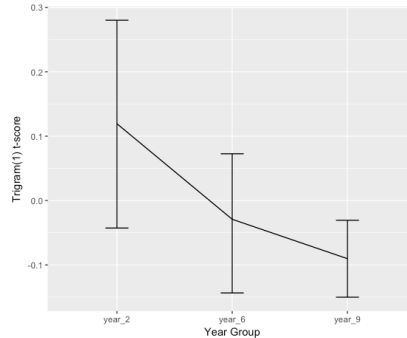


$F(2, 654)=2.44, p > .05$

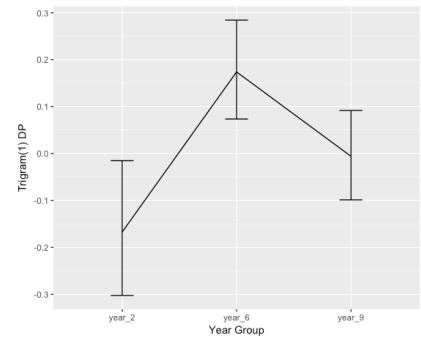
Trigram (1) associations: MI; t-score; DP



$F(2, 654)=8.30, p < .001, \omega^2=.02$
post-hoc (FDR correction):
year 2 = year 6 < year 9

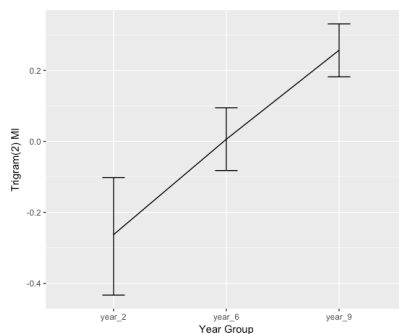


$F(2, 654)=3.17, p < .05, \omega^2=.01$
post-hoc (FDR correction):
year 2 = year 6; year 6 = year 9
Year 2 < year 9

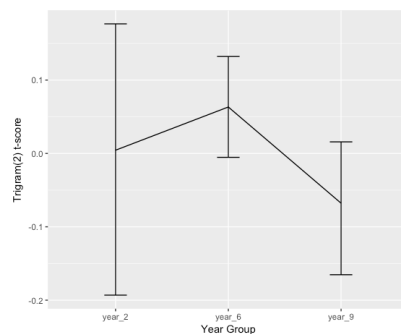


$F(2, 654)=7.97, p < .001, \omega^2=.02$
post-hoc (FDR correction):
year 2 = year 9; year 6 = year 9
year 2 < year 6

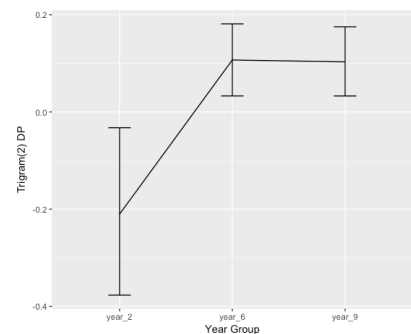
Trigram (2) associations: MI; t-score; DP



$F(2, 654)=17.79, p < .001, \omega^2=.05$
post-hoc (FDR correction):
year 2 < year 6 < year 9



$F(2, 654)=1.11, p > .05$

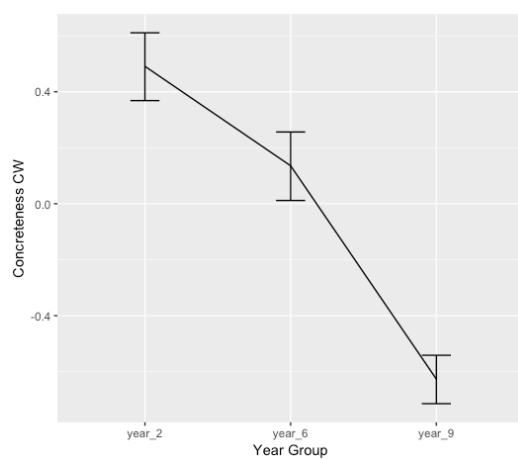


$F(2, 654)=9.32, p < .001, \omega^2=.03$
post-hoc (FDR correction):
year 2 < year 6; year 2 < year 9
Year 6 = year 9

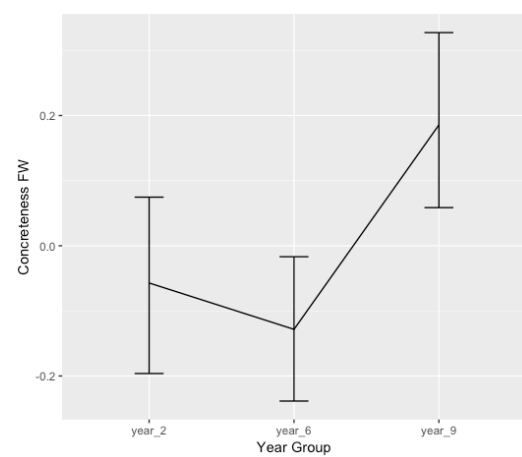
Concreteness

Sub-category	Cronbach's alpha
Content words	.95
Function words	.94

Concreteness



$F(2, 654)=96.49, p < .001, \omega^2=.23$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 > year 6 > year 9



$F(2, 654)=11.9, p < .005, \omega^2=.02$
 post-hoc (FDR correction): year 2 = year 6 < year 9

Conclusions - methodological

- Counts from different reference corpora mostly consistent
- Log frequencies enable patterns to emerge more clearly

Conclusions: frequency

- Mean content word frequency increases with age
- Mean function word frequency decreases with age

Conclusions: n-grams

- Percentage of ngrams attested in corpora increases with age
- Frequency of attested ngrams may decrease with age
- MI & DP of attested trigrams increase with age
- T-scores of attested trigrams decrease with age(?)

Conclusions - concreteness

- Older children use more abstract content words
- Older children use more concrete function words(??)

So...

- Corpus research under-exploited in study of L1 English writing development.
- Our corpus to be completed early 2018
- Online (with APU) late 2018
- Full analyses of vocabulary, NP-expansion, subordination soon.
- And the book of the lit. review...
- Future prospects:
 - Historical oral/written corpus
 - Studies of attainment

Keep in touch!

- Twitter: @growing grammar
- Facebook: facebook.com/growthingrammar
- Email: p.l.durrant@exeter.ac.uk

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