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Alternative uses of examination data: the case of English Language writing

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Examination boards are unique in that they have access to examples of student writing that span attainment levels and, if stored, can span time. This resource can be harnessed to generate valuable insights capable of informing education policy and practice. One use of this resource is to investigate students' use of written language over time. This study compared two corpora consisting of 100-word extracts of students' examination writing from 2004 and 2014. The corpora consisted of 858 narrative texts written by 16-year-old students as part of a government-regulated high-stakes examination in English Language.

The aim of the research was to examine whether the formality in students' examination writing changed over time. The analysis focused on a number of linguistic features serving either as discriminators between spoken and written discourse (e.g. lexical variety, lexical sophistication), or as markers of informal electronic communication (e.g. abbreviations, omitted stops, non-capitalised sentences). The statistical analysis carried out between the two corpora indicated that, overall, the texts produced in 2014 were characterised by less formality than the texts produced in 2004, particularly for lower attaining students. These findings suggest that students should be supported in developing their awareness of context-appropriate written language.