Text Production in Adults with Reading and Writing Difficulties

Abstract

This thesis deals primarily with the production of written texts by adults with reading and writing difficulties. Their writing is analysed from three different aspects: error analysis, non-error-oriented text analysis and analysis of the production process. These studies are based on data from on-line recordings of writing. The main question is how the written language production of adults with reading and writing difficulties is influenced by their writing difficulties.

A group of adults with reading and writing difficulties (R&W subjects) who have normal hearing is compared with a deaf group and a hearing control group. All subjects performed five different writing tasks on preset topics. The two hearing groups also performed three of these tasks in spoken language.

The results show that not only do the texts of the R&W subjects include a large proportion of misspellings, these subjects appear to devote a lot of effort to spelling. Their pause frequency, and specifically their frequency of word-internal pauses, is higher than that of the other two groups. Furthermore, a great many of their edtings are devoted to spelling. Clearly, their word level focus affects the production process as well as the final product. In addition to making many errors, these subjects' texts show no difference between speaking and writing as regards lexical density and diversity. They "write as they speak".

The deaf subjects make fewer spelling errors than the R&W subjects, but more than the controls. They make many grammar errors, but do not appear to be very concerned about their errors; they are faster writers and make fewer pauses than R&W subjects. They appear to write as if they were under "on-line conditions", which could perhaps by explained by a frequent use of the text telephone. Another explanation could be that they are less normative concerning written Swedish than the subjects with reading and writing difficulties.

The control subjects leave very few errors in their finally edited texts. They make a lot of "typos" while they are writing, but most of these are detected and corrected instantaneously. These subjects are quite fast and make fewer pauses than the group with reading and writing difficulties. They differ from both the other groups in that they make long pauses in the initial phase of the writing session and edit more content. Moreover, they have higher lexical density and diversity in written language than in spoken language, i.e. they appear to be aware of the differences between the two modalities.

To conclude, it is suggested that the main difference between the controls and the two other groups is that the latter are not aware of the differences in production conditions between speaking, signing and text telephone usage under on-line conditions on the one hand and off-line writing on the other, i.e. they lack a "written language awareness" that appears to be an important prerequisite of writing. Another important finding is that being a poor speller, does not necessarily influence the production process, but "worries about being a poor speller" influence all aspects of the writing process.

KEY WORDS: reading and writing difficulties, dyslexia, deaf, written language production, text, text production, misspellings, narratives, writing, lexical density, lexical diversity

The thesis is written in English