

VOCABULARY AND CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE WRITTEN WORKS OF A YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNER



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INTRODUCTION

- According to the structuralist views of the mid-20th century, words are only needed to express a grammatical construction. (Milton, Donzelli 2013: 442).
- Nowadays many authors suggest the main or core unit of language acquisition is the word (Long, Richards 2007; Juffs 2009; Hunt, Beglar 2005).
- In order to form a construction, not only grammatical information is needed, but also lexical items to fill the templates (vt nt Bates, Goodman 1997).



AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Provide the description of young learners' lexical and grammatical inventory used in their written texts.**
- To detect correlations between the wealth of vocabulary and the amount of constructions.
- To compare the children's lexical and grammatical inventory with the vocabulary and grammatical constructions indicated in the description of language level A2 (young language learner) of the Sõnaveeb
- To find out whether there is a difference in the children's lexical and grammatical inventory used in descriptions and letters.



METHOD AND SAMPLE

- 9-10 years old children acquiring Estonian as their second language (n=25), tested during the project “Professional Estonian-speaking teacher in multilingual classroom”
- Two tasks: a description (15) and a letter (16)
- The texts of both tasks were analyzed according to:
 - the number of different lexemes,
 - types and number of constructions,
 - correlation between the number of lexemes and the number of constructions.
- Results are compared with the vocabulary and constructions indicated in the description of language level A2 (young language learner) of the Sõnaveeb, i.e. the expected language level of the children under observation.



CHILDREN'S WRITTEN TEXTS

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- Descriptions (15): descriptions of children's rooms or some picture
 - Letters (16): to a friend, family member, Santa Claus, story about their summer vacation etc.

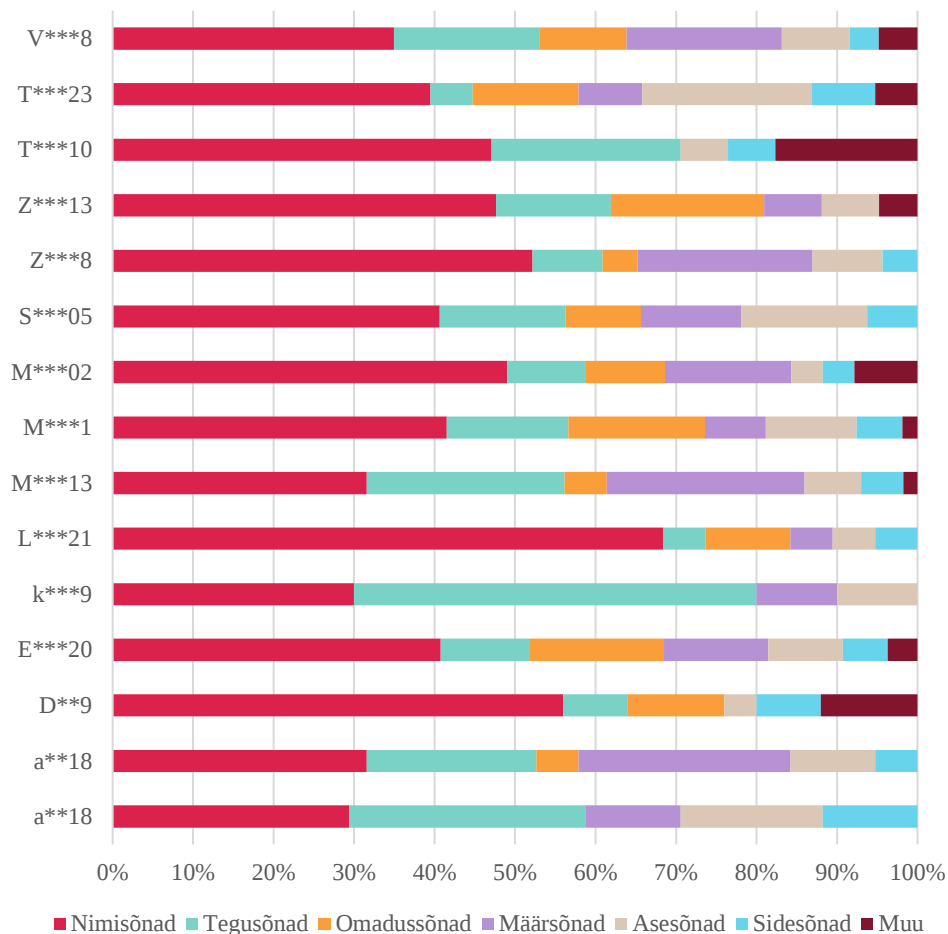


RESULTS 1

VOCABULARY

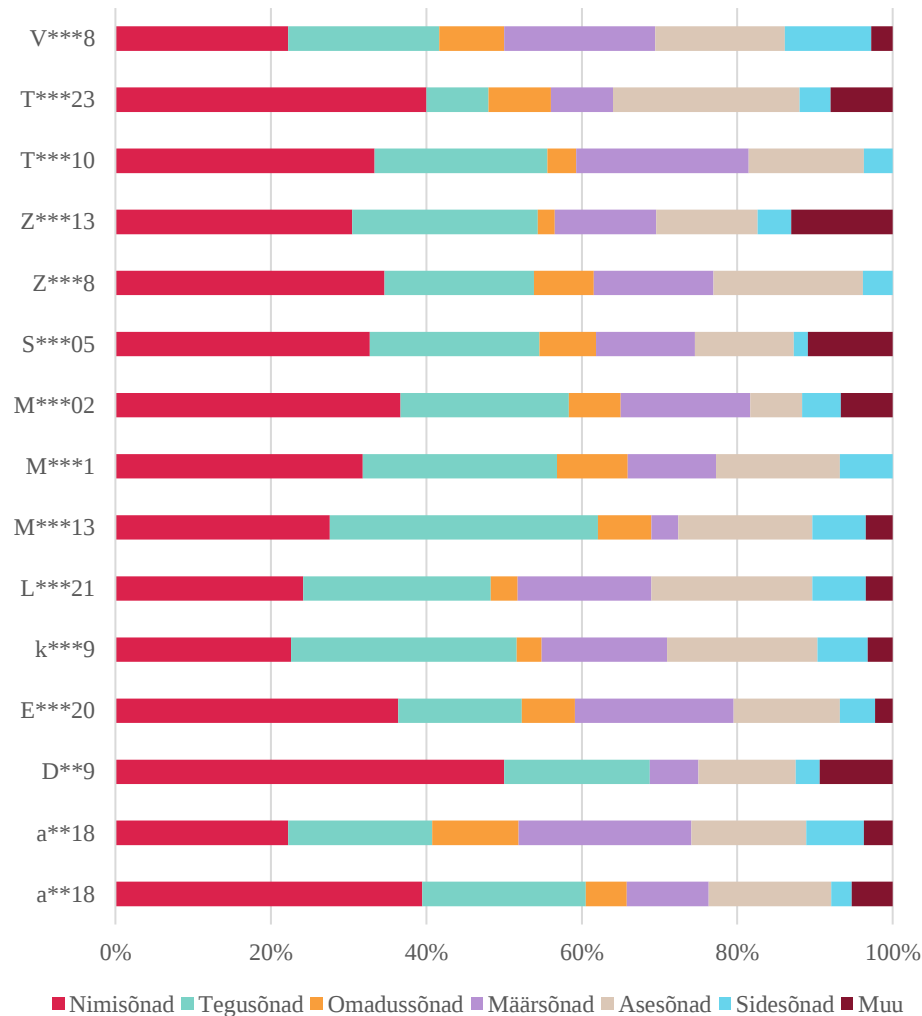
DESCRIPTIONS

- The average number of lexemes: 31, (varying from 83 to 0). The type and token ratio was 1.8, which means that in average, one lexeme was used twice per one description.
- Children's vocabulary is dominated by nouns. The number of adjectives is relatively small.



LETTERS

- The average number of lexemes: 48 (varying from 77 to 0). The type and token ratio was 1.6.
- Lesser nouns and adjectives than in descriptions. More verbs than in descriptions.



COMPARISON WITH A2-LEVEL VOCABULARY

Descriptions

- Mostly A1-level vocabulary (78% of all lemmas), three children used only A1-level words.
- Max 8% of all lemmas were A2-level words (e. g., *tapeet, aknalaud, kaktus, medal, rõdu, kardin, sale, sportlik*, only one verb: *nautima*).
- Words beyond the level A2 (32 lemmas) were:
 - proper names (*Horvaatia, Peipsi, Võru, GTA, XBOX*),
 - mostly nouns (*karikas, vahend, valgustus, kübar, juukseumm, paat, tossud* etc.),
 - three verbs (*veetma, kujutama, ratsutama*).

Letters

- Mostly A1-level vocabulary (75% of all lemmas), two children used only A1-level words.
- Max 5% of all lemmas were A2-level words (e.g., *üllatus, jooksul, bassein, pärast*, two verbs: *tervitama, saabuma*).
- Words beyond the level A2 (36 lemmas) were:
 - mostly proper names (*Euroopa, Tallinn, Pariis, Egiptus, Trofim, Monopol, Martin, Volvo* etc.);
 - 10 other words (*kofemasin, kaunistus, lumepall, krõps, hoki, jäähoki, meel, sügisvaheaeg, paat, ooper*);
 - one verb: *šoppama*.

Words beyond A2-level, used by several children

In letters: *tervitama* (3 children), in descriptions: *riided* (2 children), *trikoo* (3 children)

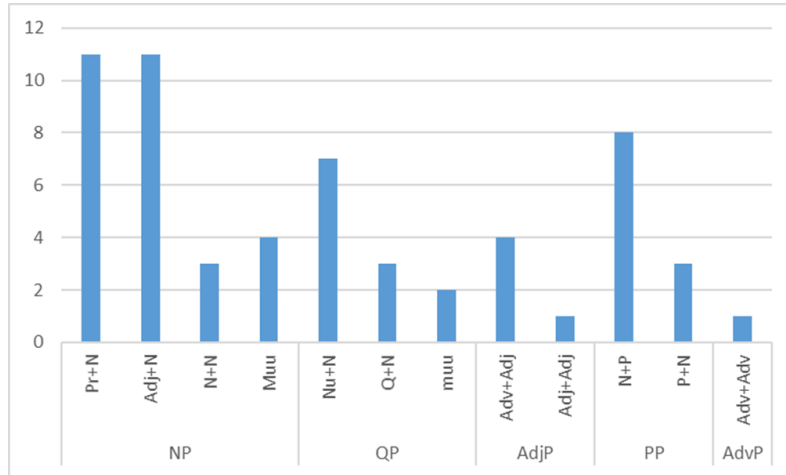


RESULTS 2

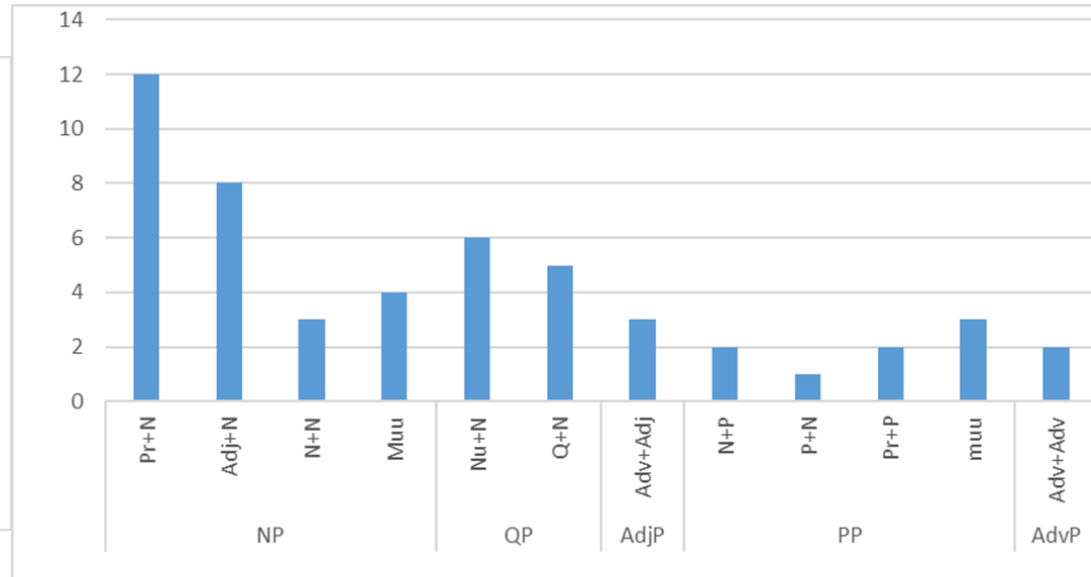
CONSTRUCTIONS

PHRASE TYPES AND STRUCTURES

Description

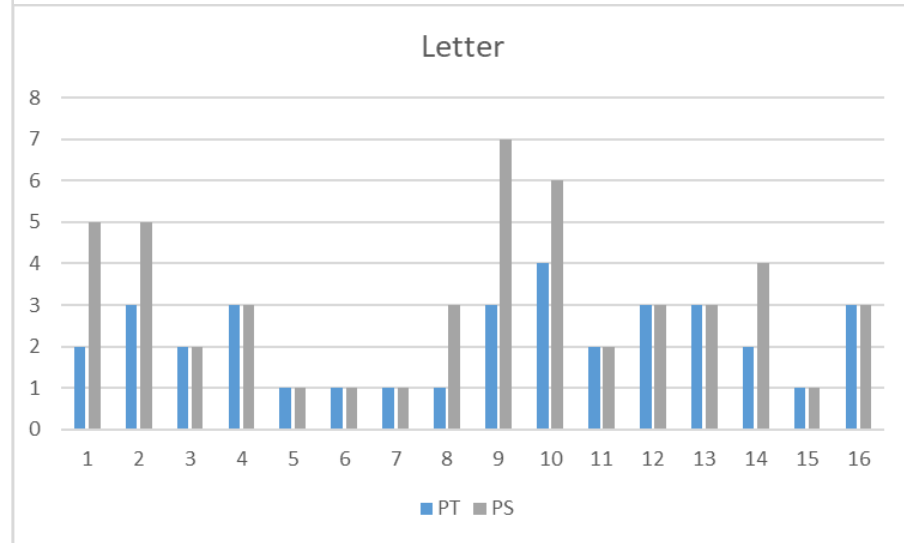
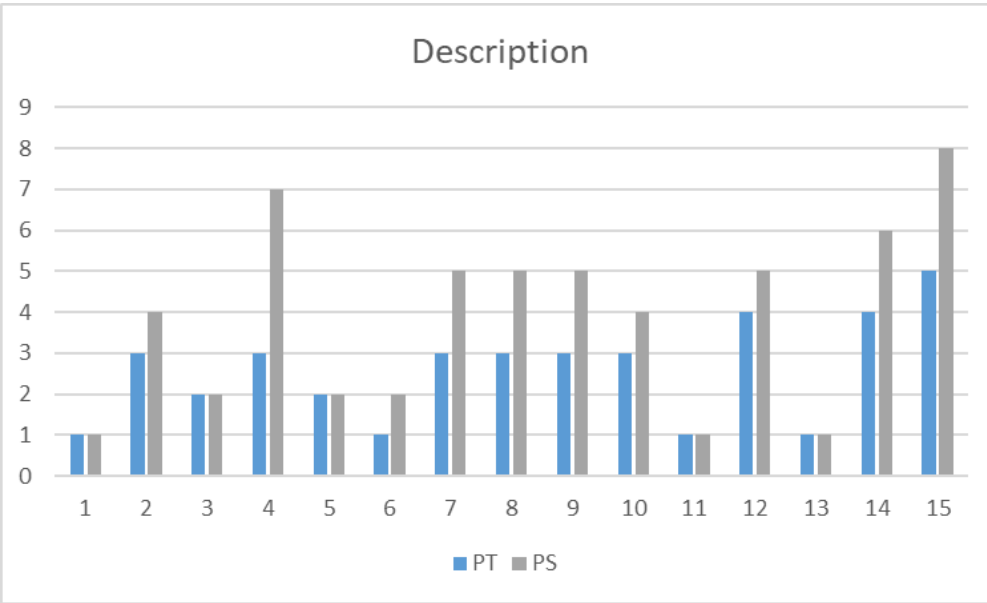


Letter



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PHRASE TYPES AND STRUCTURES



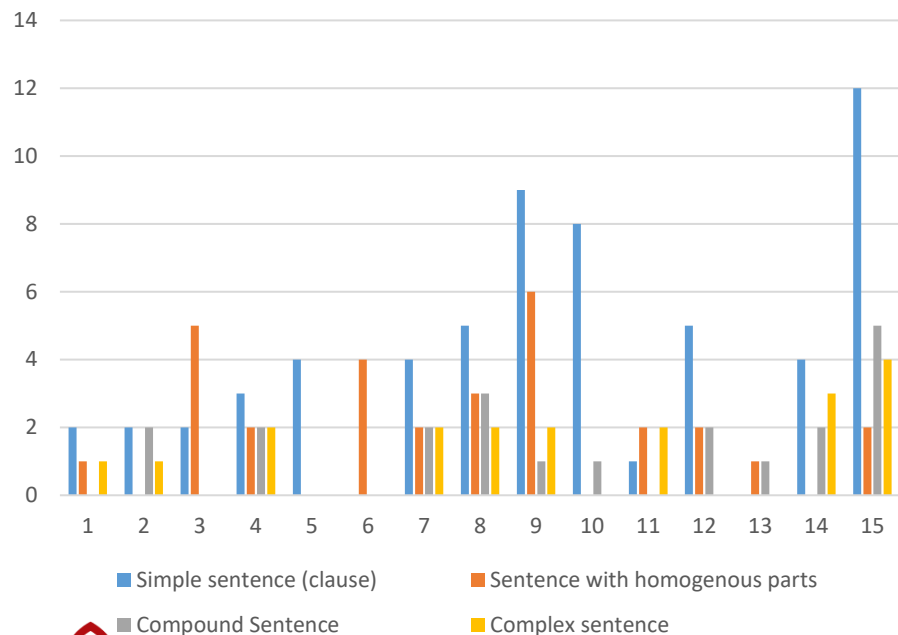
PHRASE TYPES AND STRUCTURES ON AVERAGE



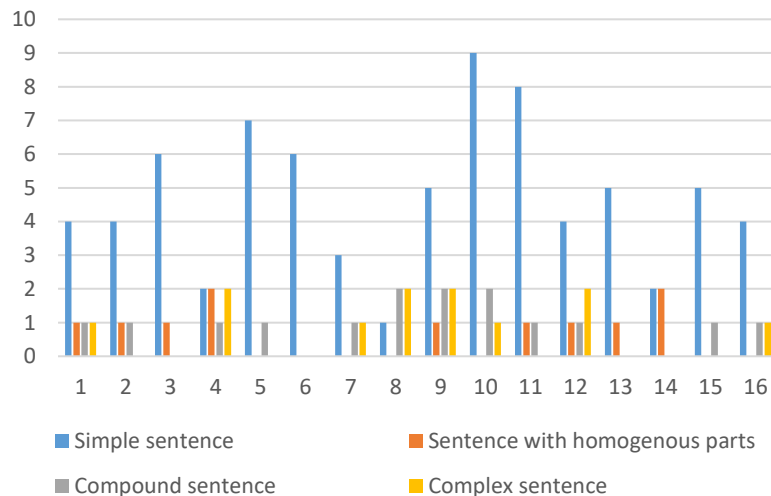
Type of construction	description	letter	avreage
Phrase type (FT)	2,6	2,1	2,35
Phrase structure (FS)	3,9	3,4	3,65

TYPES OF SENTENCES

Description



Letter



TYPE OF SENTENCE ON AVERAGE

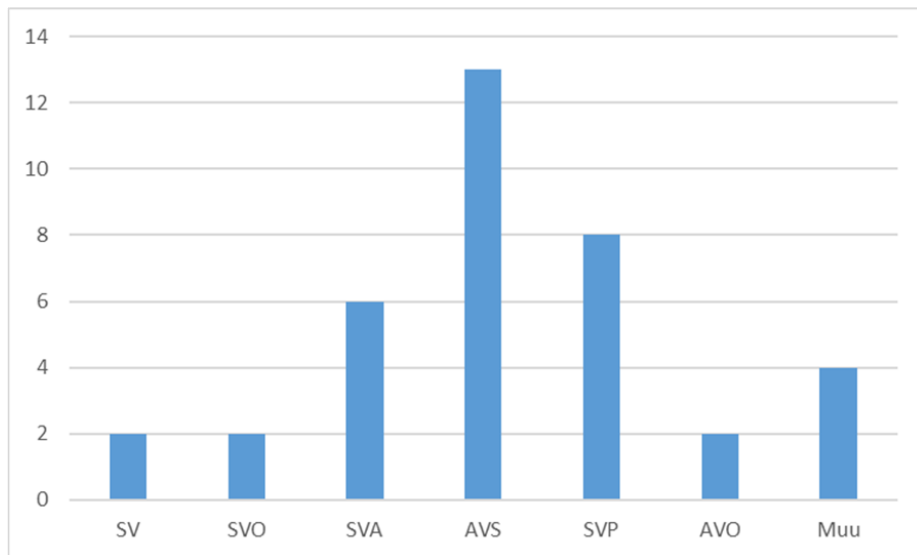


	Simple sentence	Sentence with homogenous parts	Compound sentence	Complex sentence
Description	4.07	2	1,4	1,27
Letter	4,69	0,69	0,94	0,75
Average	4,38	1,35	1,17	1,01

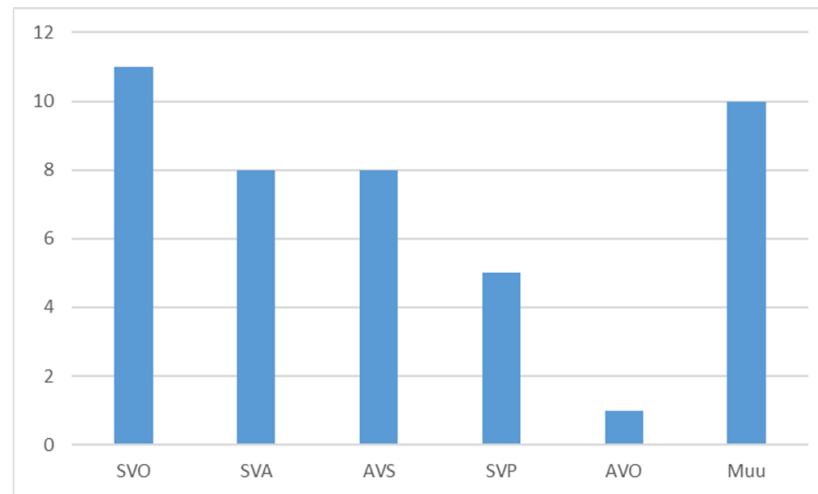


CLAUSE STRUCTURES

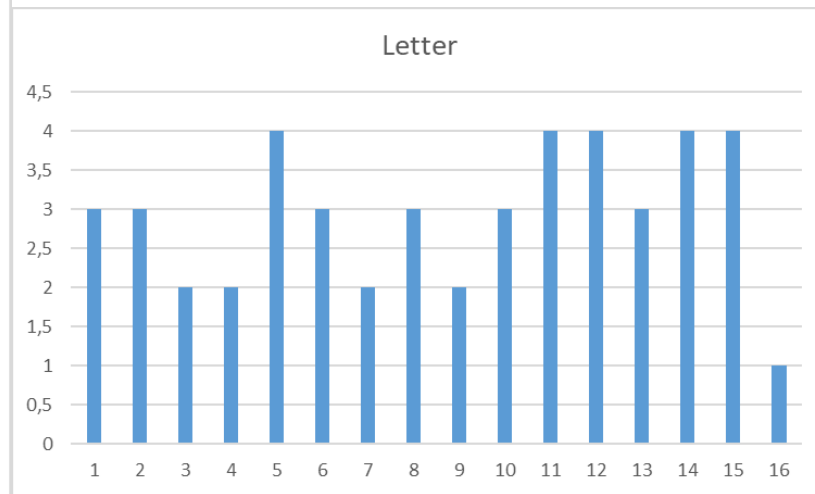
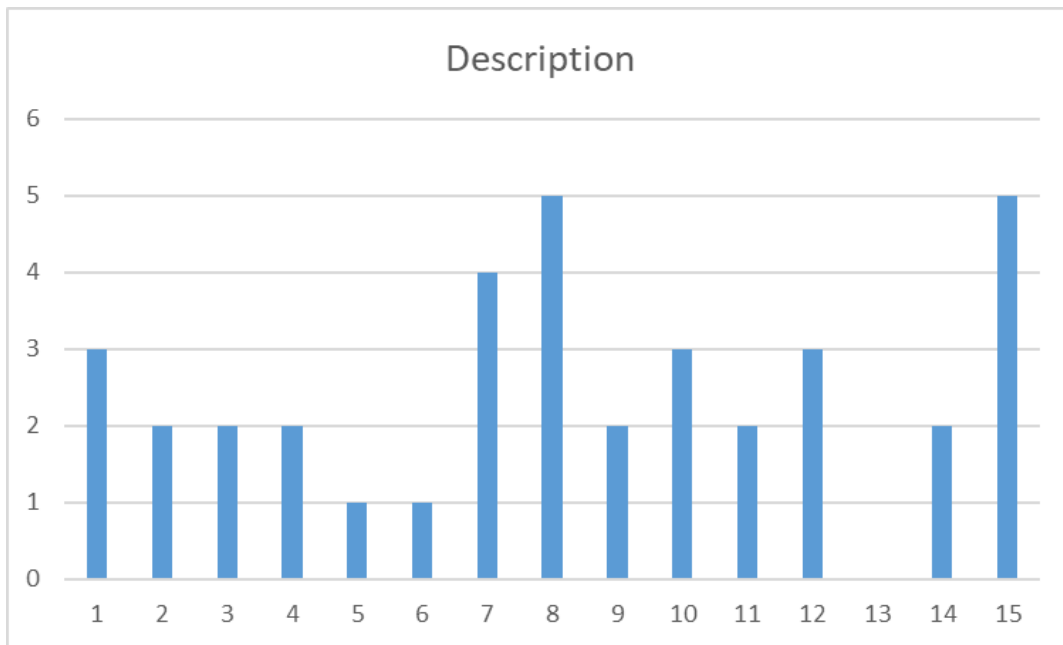
Description



Letter



CLAUSE STRUCTURES



YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LANGUAGE LEVEL

Monitored young language learners constructions compared to the description of the A2 level of the young language learner of the Sõnavaab.

Monitored young language learners used

- All phrase types and structures
- All sentence types (simple, with homogenous parts, compound, complex)
- All clause structures

NP			QP		AdjP	PP			AdvP
Pr+N	Adj+N	N+N	Nu+N	Q+N	Adv+Adj	N+P	P+N	Pr+P	Adv+Adv

SV	SVO	SVA	AVS	SVP	AVO	Muu
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The amount and complexity of constructions used by monitored young language learners varies considerably between language learners: not all of them have reached the expected A2 level

Children use more complex language in descriptions, but clause structures' variability is higher in letters.



SUMMARY



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VOCABULARY AND CONSTRUCTIONS

- The more different lexemes there are in a text, the more different types of structures are present. There is the strong positive correlation between the amount of lexemes and constructions: The descriptions: p-value is $< .00001$, letters: p-value is $.011828$. (The results are significant at $p < .05$).
- The data strongly supports Rogers's (2013) view that syntactic development is driven by lexicon-level development, i.e. sufficient words must be acquired to learn the language so that morphosyntactic templates or constructions can be recognized and used.

LETTERS OR DESCRIPTIONS?

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- **Vocabulary:** Bigger variability of lexemes in letters, more verbs in letters than in descriptions. No difference in adjectives. Slightly more A2-level words in descriptions.
 - **Constructions:** Bigger variability in phrase types, structures and sentence types in descriptions, but less in clause structures. A2 level constructions present in both.

VOCABULARY

Children used mostly A1-level vocabulary, only max 5% lemmas they used in their written texts belong to A2-level and approximately 3% were beyond A2-level.

CONSTRUCTIONS

The usage of constructions generally corresponds to the A2 level described in the Sõnaveeb, but the level of different learners varies significantly.

Still, the distribution of lexemes and constructions belonging to a certain language level need further investigation.



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