

Comparative signaling generated for expository texts by 4th–8th graders: variations by text structure strategy instruction, comprehension skill, and signal word

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Published online: 5 June 2018

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Abstract Explicit signals of important relationships in expository texts can provide efficient processing instructions for readers with strategic knowledge about text structures. However, such signal words do not help readers without strategic knowledge about use of text structures and signal words. This study provided the first detailed investigation about the effects of structure strategy instruction on understanding several types of comparative signal words in multi-paragraph expository texts. The study, set in 41 school districts, examined four comparative signal words generated by three groups of reading comprehenders in Grades 4, 5, 7, and 8 and how such understandings were impacted by instruction with the text structure strategy. Students in classrooms randomly assigned to structure strategy instruction showed more understanding of comparative signal words than those in the business as usual control. The intervention aided 4th, 5th, and 7th graders' generation of all signal words, but more so for the more difficult signaling words that transitioned between paragraphs. For Grade 4 the intervention helped some reading comprehension groups more than others depending on signal word difficulty. For Grade 8 the intervention increased understanding of difficult signal words, but not the easiest signal word. Males in Grade 5 using the web-based structure strategy instruction improved their generation of the easiest signal word more than females, but females improved more on the difficult signal words. The comparison text structure and its signaling words appear ideal targets for instruction at upper elementary and middle school. The findings have implications for classroom instruction about text structures.

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