



Learning to Spell: Research, Theory, and Practice Across Languages

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This distinctive cross-linguistic examination of spelling examines the cognitive processes that underlie spelling and the process of learning how to spell. The chapters report and summarize recent research in English, German, Hebrew, and French.

Framing the specific research on spelling are chapters that place spelling in broad theoretical perspectives provided by cognitive neuroscience, psycholinguistic, and writing system-linguistic frameworks. Of special interest is the focus on two major interrelated issues: how spelling is acquired and the relationship between reading and spelling. An important dimension of the book is the interweaving of these basic questions about the nature of spelling with practical questions about how children learn to spell in classrooms. A motivating factor in this work was to demonstrate that spelling research has become a central challenging topic in the study of cognitive processes, rather than an isolated skill learned in school. It thus brings together schooling and learning issues with modern cognitive research in a unique way. Testing, children writing strings of letters as a teacher pronounces words ever so clearly. In parts of the United States it can also bring an image of specialized wizardry and school room competition, the "spelling bee." And for countless adults who confess with self-deprecation to being "terrible spellers," it is a reminder of a mysterious but minor affliction that the fates have visited on them. Beneath these popular images, spelling is a human literacy ability that reflects language and nonlanguage cognitive processes. This collection of papers presents a sample of contemporary research across different languages that addresses this ability.

To understand spelling as an interesting scientific problem, there are several important perspectives. First, spelling is the use of conventionalized writing systems that encode languages. A second asks how children learn to spell. Finally, from a literacy point of view, another asks the extent to which spelling and reading are related. In collecting some of the interesting research on spelling, the editors have adopted each of these perspectives. Many of the papers themselves reflect more than one perspective, and the reader will find important observations about orthographies, the relationship between spelling and reading, and issues of learning and teaching throughout the collection.

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