To spell or not to spell? Explicit versus implicit creation of spelling expectations during spoken word learning

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When learning novel spoken words, literate children and adults generate preliminary orthographic representations (i.e., orthographic skeletons) even before seeing novel words' spellings (Wegener et al., 2018; 2022). Importantly, they do so even when novel words spellings are uncertain due to multiple spellings options (Jevtović et al., 2022; 2023). The present study investigates whether orthographic skeletons are generated automatically during spoken word learning (without participants' conscious attention) or whether generating them results from a voluntary process participants purposely engage in with the aim to facilitate the learning process. Two groups of participants were first trained on pronunciations of novel words with one (consistent words) or two possible spellings (inconsistent words).

Importantly, while half of the participants knew they were in a learning context (explicit learning group) the other half was naïve as to the aim of the learning task (implicit learning group). Next, participants were presented with words' spellings in a self-paced reading task. The results show differences in reading words acquired through explicit versus implicit spoken words learning. Participants from explicit learning group were faster to read previously acquired words with one as compared to those with two spellings, suggesting that orthographic skeletons were generated during the learning phase. By contrast, no differences in reading aurally acquired words with different spellings were observed in the implicit learning group. These findings show that generating orthographic expectations during auditory word learning is not an automatic process, but rather a strategy participants employ with the aim to facilitate the learning process.

References

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