

Research question:

Does the presence of a written word (orthography) help a child to learn a new spoken word?

phonology
(sound)

semantics
(meaning)

“caracal”

mammal



type of wild cat

eats birds

orthographic form

What was done:

- 58 children were taught made-up words that were described as “things an alien might use”
- During training, they were shown 12 pairings between new spoken words and unfamiliar pictures of 3D objects
- Half of these pairings were taught with the written form above the picture, half were not
- The presence of written words was incidental: attention was not directed to the written words
- Learning for the new spoken words, their meanings and their spellings was assessed



Picture Source: Nick Youngsen, <http://nyphotographic>

What was found:

- Children learned new words better when orthography was present
- More advanced readers benefitted more from the presence of orthography

What this could mean:

- Children are more likely to learn words that have been taught with support from orthography
- Written words are emphasised when teaching new vocabulary in the classroom – this strategy is common but not universal
- Written forms should be incorporated into vocabulary intervention approaches
- This strategy is easily achieved in the classroom and in interventions, and it is not costly in terms of time and resources