



**Cambridge
Assessment**

Spelling errors in 16-year-olds' writing

Conference Paper Abstract

Nicky Rushton

Presented at the annual conference of the British Educational Research
Association,
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK,
September 2017

Author contact details:

Nicky Rushton
Assessment Research and Development,
Research Division
Cambridge Assessment
1 Regent Street
Cambridge
CB2 1GG
UK

rushton.n@cambridgeassessment.org.uk

<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk>

As a department of Cambridge University, Cambridge Assessment is respected and trusted worldwide, managing three world-class examination boards, and maintaining the highest standards in educational assessment and learning. We are a not-for-profit organisation.

How to cite this publication:

Rushton. N. (2017, September). *Spelling errors in 16-year-old students' writing*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.

Abstract

The Aspects of Writing study is a cross-sectional study analysing features of 16-year-old students' writing from samples of narrative writing taken in 1980, 1993, 1994, 2004, 2007 and 2014. Three major studies have been completed using this data. The latest study included samples from 2014, which was the first cohort of students to have experienced the National Literacy Strategy throughout their primary education. For this reason, it is interesting to compare this cohort with previous cohorts in the study.

One area of the Aspects of Writing study that has attracted attention over the years is spelling. Each study has reported the proportion of words that students misspell in a 100-word extract; however, Elliott and Johnson (2008) carried out a more detailed analysis of the errors made by students using a single sentence from the 2004 cohort. They developed a framework to categorize the spelling errors, which allowed them to define five broad types of error, each consisting of several sub-categories. As Elliott and Johnson's analysis only used single sentences, this paper will initially investigate whether the framework can be used for larger samples of words, such as the 100-word extract. Initial findings suggest that Elliott and Johnson's framework can be applied to larger samples, although a flowchart is required to code the errors consistently.

The second part of the paper will investigate whether the proportions of errors in each category were similar across the 100-word extracts from 2004, 2007 and 2014. The authors identified the misspelt words in approximately 450 100-word extracts from each year. They checked each other's words to make sure no errors had been omitted, or correct spellings included. Individual errors within each word were then classified using Elliott and Johnson's framework. The most commonly misspelt words from each year were also identified.

The proportion of spelling errors within each category and sub-category for the three years will be presented, along with the most commonly misspelt words. Links will be made to the curriculum for spelling, for example identifying commonly misspelt words that appear in Key Stage 1 and 2 spelling lists. Implications for teaching and learning will also be discussed.

References

Elliott, G. L., & Johnson, N. (2008). *All the right letters – just not necessarily in the right order. Spelling errors in a sample of GCSE English scripts*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Edinburgh, UK. Retrieved from <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/images/109772-all-the-right-letters-just-not-necessarily-in-the-right-order.-spelling-errors-in-a-sample-of-gcse-english-scripts.pdf>.