

Same but different? Syntax encoded on the written word across languages: The example of French plural spelling and German noun capitalization

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Written words do not only encode phonological, morphological and lexical but also syntactic information at word level. One famous example is written French that represents a consistent inflection morphology in writing, unrelated to phonology. The most regular written inflection is French plural (FPS) with <-s> for nouns and adjectives and <-nt> for verbs. One example in German is noun capitalization (GNC). GNC has been modelled as syntactic, visually emphasizing the nucleus of the noun phrase, and surpassing the word class noun (Maas, 1992). Despite the difference of FPS and GNC, both seem to be similar in (a) the salience of encoding syntactic information, and (b) the unrelatedness to phonology.

FPS and GNC are difficult in spelling acquisition. Teaching that raises syntactic awareness related to the syntactic markers has been shown to be effective for syntactic spelling in German (Brucher et al., 2020) and French (Totereau et al., 1997).

The current paper presents and discusses the results of an intervention study training syntactic awareness to foster FPS and GNC based on teacher videos in Grade 4 (N = 176) with learners who become literate in German and French. The study examined whether the learners benefit similarly from a parallel designed training for FPS and GNC. All students participated in the French and the German training and were tested in both languages at four test points. To test the training effects, we applied a GLMM including all test points, both languages and training groups as fixed factors. The results showed positive effects of the French training on spelling, short-term and long-term, confirming previous results. However, unlike in previous studies, no training effects were found in GNC when compared to the control group.

The paper discusses the results from a linguistic perspective and from the educational context of the study.

Brucher, L., Ugen, S., & Weth, C. (2020). The impact of syntactic and lexical trainings on capitalization of nouns in German in grade five. *L1 Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.17239/l1esll-2020.20.01.01>

Maas, U. (1992). *Grundzüge der deutschen Orthographie*. Niemeyer.

Thévenin, M.-G., Totereau, C., Fayol, M., & Jarousse, J.-P. (1999). L'apprentissage / enseignement de la morphologie écrite du nombre en français. *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 126, 39–52.