

# Children's own names influence their spelling

Rebecca Treiman

Brett Kessler

Wayne State University

Derrick Bourassa

Acadia University

# Kindergarten spellings

gp for “drip”	
yoonyy for “fur”	
tctba for “work”	
lstnfss for “jar”	
pelot for “potato”	

gp for “drip”	Nicole
yoonyy for “fur”	Danny
tctba for “work”	Scott
lstnfss for “jar”	Kristen
pelot for “potato”	Emily

# Sample 1: 20 words from Treiman and Bourassa (2000)

	Kind.	First	Second
N	30	28	33
Mean age	5,8	6,7	7,9
Time of testing	1 <sup>st</sup> half of year	1 <sup>st</sup> half of year	Middle of year

# Sample 2: 15 words from Cassar and Treiman (1997)

	Kind.	First	Second
N	64	56	24
Mean age	5,11	6,8	7,11
Time of testing	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of year	1 <sup>st</sup> half of year	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of year
Mean reading level	Pre first	Mid first	Beginning third

# Sample 3: 20 words from Treiman, Berch, Tincoff, and Weatherston (1993)

	Kind.	First	Second
N	21	20	20
Mean age	6,2	7,0	7,11
Time of testing	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of year	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of year	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of year
Mean reading level	Pre first	End first	End second

# Types of characters used

correct or phonetically reasonable

own name

neither

both

gp for “drip”	Nicole
yoonyy for “fur”	Danny
tctba for “work”	Scott
lstnfss for “jar”	Kristen
pelot for “potato”	Emily

# Proportion of spellings of various types

(Samples 1, 2, and 3 combined)

	Kind.	First	Second
Correct or phonetically reasonable letter	.45	.60	.65
Own-name letter	.15	.07	.02
Neither	.24	.10	.02
Both	.16	.22	.31



Kindergarten students in Sample 2 who do have *e* in their name:

59 of 788 total intrusions are *es* (.075)

Kindergarten students in Sample 2 who do not have *e* in their name:

47 of 913 intrusions are *es* (.051)

Proportion of name intrusions is higher than proportion of no-name intrusions for *e*

For kindergartners in all 3 samples combined, 22 of 25 letters show a higher proportion of name intrusions than no-name intrusions

For first graders and second graders, no significant difference

# Proportion of spellings of various types

(Samples 1, 2, and 3 combined)

	Kind.	First	Second
Correct or phonetically reasonable letter	.45	.60	.65
Own-name letter	.15	.07	.02
Neither	.24	.10	.02
Both	.16	.22	.31

# Types of characters used

correct or phonetically reasonable

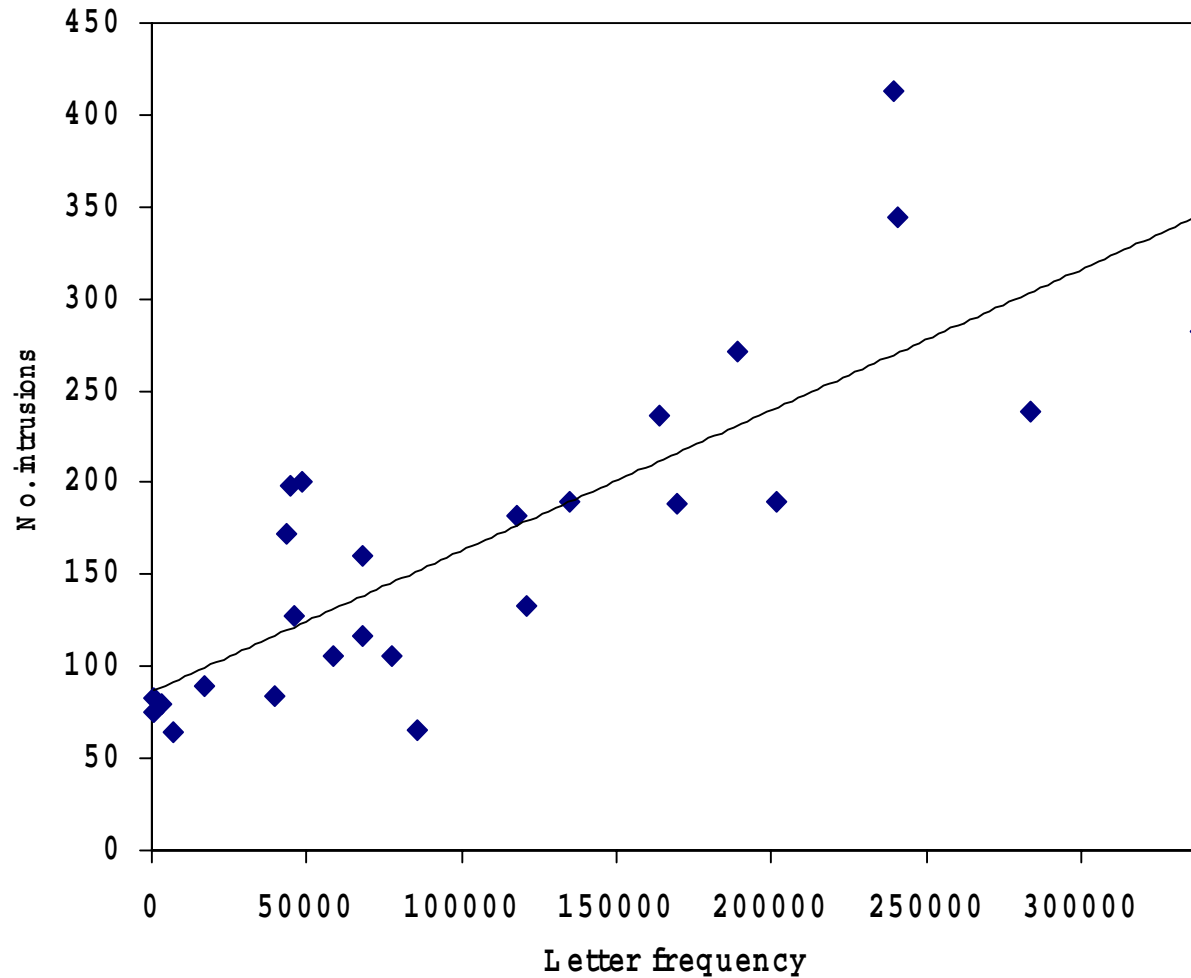
own name

neither

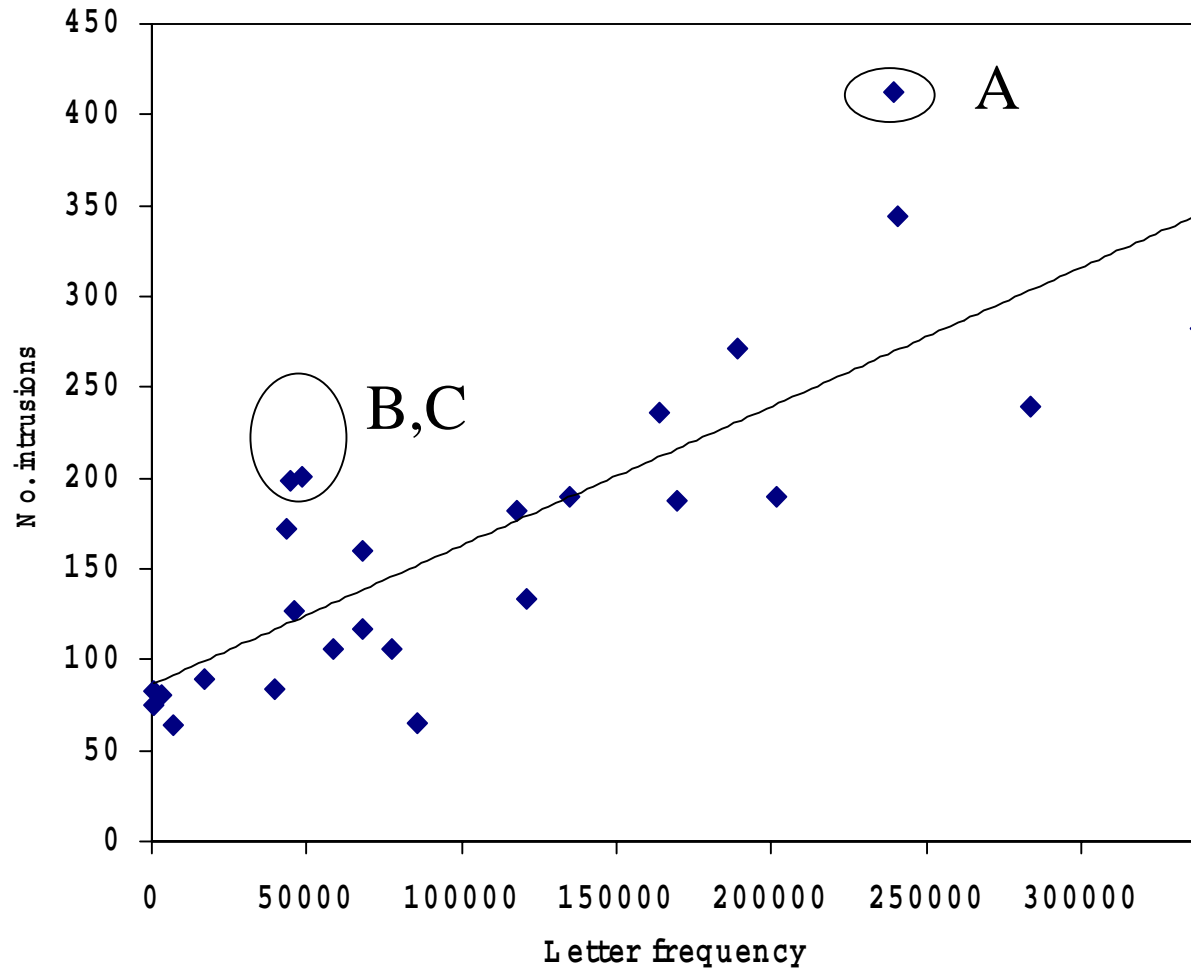
both

gp for “drip”	Nicole
yoonyy for “fur”	Danny
tctba for “work”	Scott
lstnfss for “jar”	Kristen
pelot for “potato”	Emily

Number of intrusions in spellings of  
kindergarten children as a function of  
letter frequency



Number of intrusions in spellings of kindergarten children as a function of letter frequency



Children retrieve letters for use in spelling in a way that reflects their frequency of exposure to the letters

For young children, frequency of exposure is affected by

own name

objective frequency

order in alphabet

# Conclusions

We must look beyond phonology to understand the reasons behind young children's spelling errors

We should not be too quick to label children's early spellings as haphazard or unmotivated