In the first edition of *Psycholinguistics* (1971), Dan Slobin commented that the Harvard–M.I.T. breakthroughs in cognitive psychology and language of the early 1960s promised insights into the nature of the human mind. In the completely rewritten second edition of 1979, he notes how things have changed in 20 years of research: The psycholinguistic study of the mind now promises insights into the nature of human language.

The study of language is indeed alive—not just research on the nature of language per se, but especially research on the many forms, purposes, and contexts of its use. Moreover, the focus of this research is increasingly on the forms, uses, and processes of *written language*. Linguists and psychologists, for example, have become interested in problems of texts and discourse. Psychologists and anthropologists have become interested in the structure and nature of narrative. Scholars of all sorts have become deeply involved in issues related to public documents in society. All these strands of research point far beyond the sentence in the investigation of language: The common denominator here is written discourse—its structure and use, plus the ways in which it is learned. Investigation of the language and structure of written discourse is essential to the study of texts, stories, and public documents for the simple reason that most sustained texts in English are written, not spoken.

The current state of writing research is not unlike linguistics in the wake of Chomsky’s revolution in 1957. There is curiosity about children learning to write and read, for example, that is reminiscent of interest in children’s acquisition of speech in the early 1960s. There is renewed interest, too, in
the systemic character and internal logic of language forms, especially
texts. Above all, there is a clear sense in all this research that important
new insights about language are imminent—that the research gap, for
example, between language comprehension and language production, as
well as between reading and writing, is about to be narrowed, if not en-
tirely closed. Writing research is an exciting, emerging area of inquiry—
rapidly expanding and increasingly multidisciplinary.

There are some important differences, however, between psycholinguistics
in the early 1960s and current writing research. There are many new
experimental methodologies, plus some old ones which have been put to
profitable use in this new venture (many are included in this volume).
Moreover, there is new interest in the social context of language use and
the language functions associated with these uses. Indeed, it may be ar-
gued that written language has become interesting to social scientists
largely because of interest in the problems and contexts of language use:
Spoken and written language do not differ in terms of grammatical con-
bstructions (Wardhaugh, 1969) or lexicon (Miller, 1951) available to users,
though these resources are deployed very differently both in proportion
and complexity in various ways of writing and speaking (Joos, 1962; see
Smith, 1975, for discussion).

Indeed, writing research is in such an active state of change that during
the 10 months in which the present volume was written, it became neces-
sary to change the subtitle from Studies in the Psychology of Writing to The
Language, Process, and Structure of Written Discourse. The contents of this
volume are very comprehensive; they deal not only with the psychology of
writing but also with the language of written discourse, the social functions
of written language, and the structure of written discourse.

What Writers Know: The Language, Process, and Structure of Written Dis-
course focuses on the unique features of written language by investigating
what writers know and non writers must learn in order to write. The con-
tributors bring to bear many important methods and concepts from psy-
chology, linguistics, rhetoric, and artificial intelligence to investigate this
knowledge. They seek to clarify relations between writer and reader, writer
and text, and text and context, as well as to characterize writing adequately
in terms of these relations—that is, to show how requirements of context,
text, and reader affect and constrain writers in their tasks. In many cases,
the investigators seek to distinguish written language and writing from
other forms and uses of language such as speech and reading, hence offer-
ing a characterization of writing as writing.

This book is written for researchers, graduate students, advanced
undergraduates, and many educators concerned with the special problems
of writing and written language. It will also be useful in courses in cogni-
tive psychology, applied linguistics, the philosophy of language, rhetoric,
educational measurement, the linguistics of literacy, and English education.

REFERENCES