

**Max-Wertheimer Minerva Center for  
Cognitive Processes and Human Performance**  
Head of Center: Prof. Ruth Kimchi ראש המרכז פרופ' רות קמחי

אנו שמחים לארח את

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***Starting Big - The role of multi-word phrases in language learning and processing***

Why are children better language learners, despite being worse at other cognitive tasks? Previous accounts have focused on biological, cognitive or neural differences between children and adults. Here, I focus instead on the linguistic units speakers learn from and how those shape the construction of grammar. I argue that children are better at some aspects of language learning because they start off attending to larger sequences of language (e.g. 'I don't know') in addition to words; that these sequences facilitate grammatical and lexical learning; and that reliance on them persists in adulthood. I suggest that language learning in adults might improve if they were encouraged to store and attend to sequences like children do. I explore three concrete predictions of this hypothesis 1) that children's single word production is facilitated in frequent sentence-frames, 2) that adults attend to the frequency of multi-word phrases, and 3) that L2 learning of grammatical gender will improve when learners are first exposed to larger chunks of language. I test these predictions using several experimental tasks: corpus studies of natural speech, elicited production, lexical decision, and artificial language learning.

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בחדר ההרצאות במעמק"ה, הבניין הרב תכליתי, אוניברסיטת חיפה.

**נשמח לראותכם בין אורחינו**

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