BACKGROUND
A comprehender’s estimate of what events or situations are typical in the world is distinct from their estimate of what a speaker is likely to report on.

Even so, there seems to be a discrepancy between what type of estimates is used by comprehenders and speakers

Plausibility and typicality are favored in comprehension: taking a sip from the waterfall > taking a sip from the transmitter\(^1\)
the man will ride the motorbike > the man will ride the carousel\(^2\)
\(\rightarrow\) transparent language use
Speakers tend to omit typical content and include informative content:
brown banana > yellow banana\(^1\)
stabbed with an icepick > stabbed with a knife\(^4\)
\(\rightarrow\) filtered language use

Recent work shows that comprehenders also pay attention to speakers’ production choices\(^5\).
The more the speaker’s role as an intentional communicator is emphasized, the more comprehenders expect contributions about non-typical content, i.e., filtered language use - the ability to reason about speakers’ informativity goals guides comprehenders’ expectations\(^6\).

METHODS
Sentence continuation task: about what can be found at 11 different locations as an index of expectations for upcoming content.
Participants aged 5-11 (US school grades 0-5) with English as first language (\(N=111\)).

Manipulate the presence or absence of a speaker in two conditions (between participants):

[bare] \(N=39\)
At the zoo, there’s _____

[visible speaker] \(N=38\)
I’m at the beach, and there’s _____

Typicality baseline was elicited from the remaining participants:
[typicality baseline task] \(N=34\)
What do you usually find in a playground?

Data collection is ongoing.

RESULTS
Example responses for the playground item:

Like adults, children’s responses are more informative in the visible speaker condition:
• higher entropy
• less use of typical nouns
• more modification

Also some indication of a developmental pattern:
• less entropy as age increases
• marginal interaction for typicality, such that the children better distinguish between the two conditions as they get older

TAKEAWAY
Yes – children are attuned to speaker informativity, possibly with changes across development. Stay tuned for more data collection!


Contact: vilde.reksnes@ed.ac.uk