EXPECTATIONS FOR UPCOMING CONTENT: Do children reason about speakers' informativity goals?

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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 favoured in comprehension:
- taking a sip from the waterfall > taking a sip from the transmitter
- the man will ride the motorbike > the man will ride the carousel

**→ transparent language use**

Speakers tend to **omit typical content** and include **informative content**:
- brown banana > yellow banana
- stabbed with an icepick > stabbed with a knife

**→ filtered language use**

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

RESEARCH QUESTION
Do children reason about speakers’ informativity goals in adult-like ways?

If so, they should expect speakers to make contributions that are **filtered**, i.e., conveying **informative** and **non-typical** content.

If child-directed speech favours mention of typical events and properties, particularly at younger ages, children may instead expect speech to **transparently** reflect what the world is like.

There might also be a developmental pattern, whereby older children are more likely to take the speaker’s production choices into account when estimating what a speaker will say.

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
Children:Adults

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

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**RESULTS**

**Example responses for the beach item:**

**Children**

- **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

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**REFERENCES**


