

Talk by Dr. Adam Ussishkin (Univ. of Arizona)
Friday, Dec. 2 from 3:00 to 4:00 pm in Trimble 200

"What can auditory masked priming tell us about the role of morphology in auditory word recognition?"

Words consist of a phoneme or letter sequence that maps onto meaning. Most prominent theories of word recognition (auditory and visual) portray the recognition process as a connection between these small units and a semantic level. However, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting in the priming literature that there is an additional, morphological level that mediates the recognition process. In morphologically linear languages like English, however, morphemes and letter or sound sequences are co-extensive, so the source of priming effects between related words could be due to simple phonological overlap as opposed to morphological overlap. In Semitic languages, however, the non-linear morphological structure of words reduces this confound, since the morphemes are interdigitated in a non-linear fashion. Semitic words are typically composed of a discontinuous root (made up of three consonants) embedded in a word pattern specifying the vowels and the ordering between consonants and vowels. Active-passive pairs in Maltese, the official language of Malta, illustrate this relationship (the root is underlined); e.g., *fetaħ* 'open' - *miftuħ* 'opened'.

In this talk, I report on a number of experiments our lab has carried out in Maltese and Hebrew investigating the extent to which the non-linear morphemes used in Semitic facilitate auditory word recognition, and to what extent potential priming effects are independent of the phonological overlap typically inherent in morphological relationships. These experiments make use of the auditory masked priming technique (Kouider and Dupoux, 2005). I show that not only do roots facilitate auditory word recognition in these languages, but that these morphological effects are independent of phonological overlap effects.