Sentences may contain two consecutive negatives even without negative concord. This is despite the fact that, logically, affirmative should suffice to convey the same meaning. Nonetheless, doubly-negated expressions seem to convey a meaning different from the affirmative element: “not unhappy” does not mean “happy” (Jespersen 1924). It has been suggested that adding negation to an already negated adjective makes a weaker statement than the (equivalent) affirmative, by compelling an unexcluded middle (Horn 2017) or by a mitigation effect (Giora 2006). The main aim of my research is to provide empirical evidence for the interpretation of doubly-negated expressions, and the motivations for their use.

In Experiment 1, I examine the interpretation of double negation, asking whether double negations are interpreted logically as an affirmative, or whether they are interpreted similarly to hedges. Participants (N = 104) determined the domain of several adjectival expressions on a scale. For analysis, three measures were extracted: (i) the domain's size, (ii) its location, and (iii) inclusion of the logically-relevant edge. Doubly-negated expressions differed significantly (ps < .001) from affirmatives on all three measures: Their domains were larger, located farther from the edge, and included the edge less. Doubly-negated expressions also differed from hedges (dey ‘kind of’ and kcat ‘a bit’): They were larger (ps < .007), and closer to the edge (p < .001). These results confirm the suggestion that double negation allows a weaker interpretation than the affirmative, while retaining the possibility of being interpreted logically under particular contexts. They also suggest that double negations afford a wider range of interpretation than hedges, likely determined by context.

In Experiment 2, I examine one motivation for using double negation, that of politeness. A speaker may wish to weaken their upcoming statement to avoid offense. In this experiment, contexts that trigger politeness are to be identified, and then tested with double negation. Naturalness and reaction times will be collected to determine if such contexts do favor double negation. Future direction for testing interpretation of double negation based on adjective types, and other motivations for using double negation will also be presented.

The talk will be held online via Zoom.
Copulative perception verbs (CPVs) such as English *sound* and Hebrew *nišma* ‘sound’ are known to have an evidential use, on which they modify propositions, as well as a perceptual or attributary use, on which they relate individuals and properties (Lasersohn 1995, Gisborne 1996, 2010). I tackle a number of empirical questions regarding Hebrew CPVs, using experimental and corpus evidence. I focus on the three constructions in (1), of which the verbal construction (1a) has heretofore been entirely overlooked.

(1) a. *hen nišma’ot muzar.* 
   they.F.PL sound.F.PL weirdly 
   ‘The way they sound is weird.’ 
   Verbal & Attributary

b. *hen nišma’ot muzarat.* 
   they.F.PL sound.F.PL weird.F.PL 
   ‘They sound like they are weird.’ 
   Copulative & Evidential

c. *nišma še-hen muzarat.* 
   sounds that-they.F.PL weird.F.PL 
   ‘It sounds like they are weird.’ 
   Impersonal & Epistemic

I show that the distinction between the verbal and copulative constructions (1a-b) aligns with the semantic distinction between attributary and evidential uses. I also show that the frequency and semantic contribution of the optional dative argument are different between these two constructions. Finally, I draw a semantic distinction between the copulative and impersonal constructions (1b-c), teasing apart the evidentiality of the former from the epistemic modality of the latter (Faller 2002, Cornillie 2009, cf. Matthewson 2012).

The talk will be held online via Zoom.

23.04.20

Avoiding Marked Structures in Sentence Processing: Evidence from Hebrew Post-Verbal Subjects

During sentence processing, comprehenders incrementally form syntactic structures and interpret the sentence without unequivocal evidence. I suggest that in doing so, comprehenders actively refrain from constructing marked sentential representations. A series of psycholinguistic experiments investigates the processing of temporary ambiguity in Hebrew VSO relative clauses like *ha-talmid še-etmol hixlit ha-more le-ha’aniš*. The results exhibit that comprehenders do not predict the post-verbal subject in such cases,
and are even willing to compromise subject-verb agreement to refrain from such (grammatical but) highly-marked structures. This suggests that comprehenders maintain uncertainty as to the fidelity of the input and prefer assuming an error occurred (a typo or misperception) over forming a marked sentence structure.

The talk will be held online via Zoom.

02.04.20

Neta Haluts
Tel Aviv University

*Signs for Similar Language Mechanisms: Phonological Output Buffer Impairments in Deaf Users of Israeli Sign Language*

In spoken languages, individuals with specific impairments to a language component called the Phonological Output Buffer (POB) make phonological errors in production, repetition, and reading aloud of morphologically-simple words and nonwords, as well as stems of morphologically-complex words, whereas they make whole-unit errors (i.e., substitutions, omissions, and insertions of whole-units from the same category) with number words, function words, and morphological affixes (Dotan & Friedmann, 2015). Since phonology seems at first glance to be very different between spoken languages and sign languages, it is interesting to test whether the same type of phonological impairment may be present in signers as well.

I will present the first examination of how POB impairments are expressed in deaf native signers of Israeli Sign Language (ISL), by first addressing phonology of sign languages, as well as unique morphological structures of sign languages – such as classifier constructions, morphological facial expressions, and agreement verbs, and will show that despite the different modality, language impairments are expressed similarly in spoken languages and in sign languages.

The talk will be held online via Zoom.

12.03.20 – Cancelled due to COVID-19

Naomi Havron
École Normale Supérieure, Paris

*Prediction as a Key Mechanism in Language Acquisition?*

Prediction has been proposed to be a fundamental aspect of cognition. Some have proposed that language acquisition also happens through prediction (e.g., Chang, Dell, & Bock, 2006). Nevertheless, there is currently little direct evidence that children generate linguistic predictions rapidly enough to allow for learning through prediction, and no evidence that these expectations can guide the learning of novel linguistic information. I will present a series of studies conducted with children, which show that they do not only update their predictions about what speakers
will say next, but also use their adapted predictions to learn novel information. I will also show my results from an experiment with infants, and discuss what these might tell us about the developmental time course of prediction in language acquisition.