

Title: Rethinking difficulty: Cognitive challenges support children's language development

Abstract: Children's word learning is often described as one of the most incredible feats of human cognition. In addition to being theoretically interesting, language learning is also practically important; many studies have linked word learning to children's long-term academic and life success. Philosophers, scientists, practitioners, and educators often assume that the best way to teach children new words is to reduce the difficulty of the task. In this talk, I will outline how this assumption can be wrong. I will provide evidence that certain cognitive challenges imposed on children during language learning may be what leads us to proficient use of language later in life. Moreover, I will show that parents, speech-language pathologists, and the broader public use task difficulty when deciding how to foster language development, suggesting that adults may be using misconceptions to guide their construction of learning environments.