

Title: Young Children Store Familiar Sequences of Words
in Memory: Evidence from
Imitation Studies.

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It is widely accepted that children's earliest language use consists of unanalysed chunks of adult input reproduced as wholes. More controversial is whether such chunks play a role later in development. We will report on the first in a series of studies in which we tested children's ability to repeat frequent and infrequent four-word sequences (taken from a dense corpus of CDS). 13 high frequency sequences (e.g. a lot of noise) were matched with 13 low frequency sequences, which were the same except for the final word (e.g. a lot of juice). The final words and bigrams in matched sequences were identical in part-of-speech and frequency. Children at 2:6 and 3:6 were significantly more likely to correctly repeat frequent items, and the three-year-olds were significantly faster when correctly repeating the first three words of frequent items. This suggests children retain and utilise memories for frequently occurring sequences of words.