

**The Department of Linguistics**  
is pleased to present

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speaking on

**Roots, or consonants?**  
**On the early role of morphology in lexical access**

**Friday, February 16, 2018**

**1:20 PM**

**Location: HUM 1 - Room 210**

**Abstract:**

Words consist of a phoneme or letter sequence that maps onto meaning. Most prominent theories of both auditory and visual word recognition portray the recognition process as a connection between these units and a semantic level. However, there is a growing body of evidence in the priming literature suggesting 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, though, the morphological structure of words reduces this confound, since 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 illustrate this relationship (the root is underlined); e.g., *fetaħ* ‘open’-*miftuħ* ‘opened’.

In this talk, I report on a series of experiments on the Semitic language Maltese investigating the extent to which root morphemes facilitate visual and 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 visual masked (Forster and Davis, 1984) and auditory masked (Kouider and Dupoux, 2005) priming techniques. The results of the experiments show that not only do roots facilitate visual and auditory word recognition in Maltese, but that these morphological effects are independent of phonological overlap effects.