

Unpacking the Role of Genre and Word-Level Information in Reading Hebrew

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Word-level Processes

Pointed Hebrew

Fully vocalized

Full representation of 5 vowels
Diacritics-like signs

Highly transparent סָפֵר, פָּרוּחַ

Readers decode words
phonologically with ease

Unpointed Hebrew

Partially vocalized

Under representation of 5 vowels
Inconsistent

Opaque ספר, פרוח

Readers need to rely on contextual
information

- The contrast between the pointed and unpointed systems has provided fertile ground for numerous studies exploring **the role of phonology** in reading Hebrew

The role of **phonology (diacritics)** in reading Hebrew

Ravid (1996) - reading-aloud sentences*

* included linguistic constructions for which the spoken form is different from the pointed form

- ✓ **Grade 1** - relied entirely on diacritic marks; higher accuracy than in Grade 4
- ✓ **Grade 4** - disregard diacritics; same reading rate for pointed/unpointed
- ✓ **Adults** - highest accuracy; diacritics slightly slow reading rate

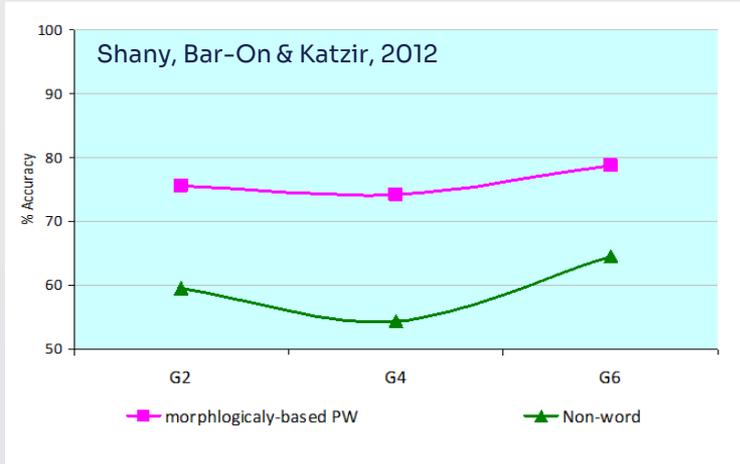
Ravid & Shlesinger (2001)

- ✓ **Grade 5, 7, 10 < Grade 11, Adults**

Diacritics - learned, forgotten, and relearned again

Non-linear U-shaped developmental pattern

The role of phonology (diacritics) in reading

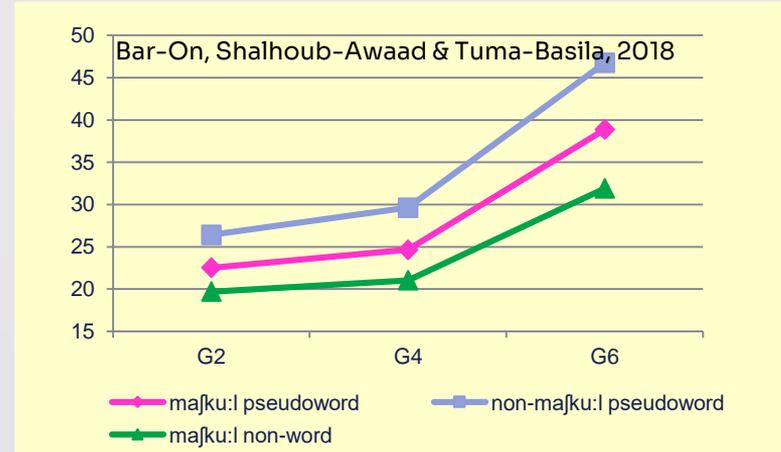


Accuracy

U-shaped developmental pattern for Non-words

Better accuracy of Morph-based PW already in G2

G2 = G4, though division of labor between phonology and morphology is different



Rate (WPM)

Morphological information accelerates reading

Phonological information (given by diacritics) slows down reading

The role of **phonology (diacritics)** in reading Hebrew

- Diacritic marks – a critical role in the initial stage of learning to read Hebrew
- As readers develop orthographic-based strategies, they shift from exhaustive phonological decoding to higher-order, word-level processing
- At this stage, diacritics not only become a redundant system but may also impede reading accuracy and speed

These findings are based on studies employing manipulative designs...

A fundamental question that hasn't been addressed..

What is the role of **phonology** in a **natural context-based reading*** in Hebrew ?

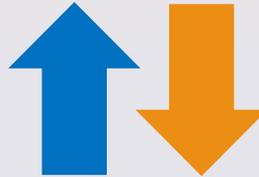
*Natural context-based reading = Text reading

To what extent does **phonology** play a role in **text reading** in Hebrew?

Text Reading

Syntactic analysis of content units; word/sentence/ text-level meaning construction

Bottom-Up

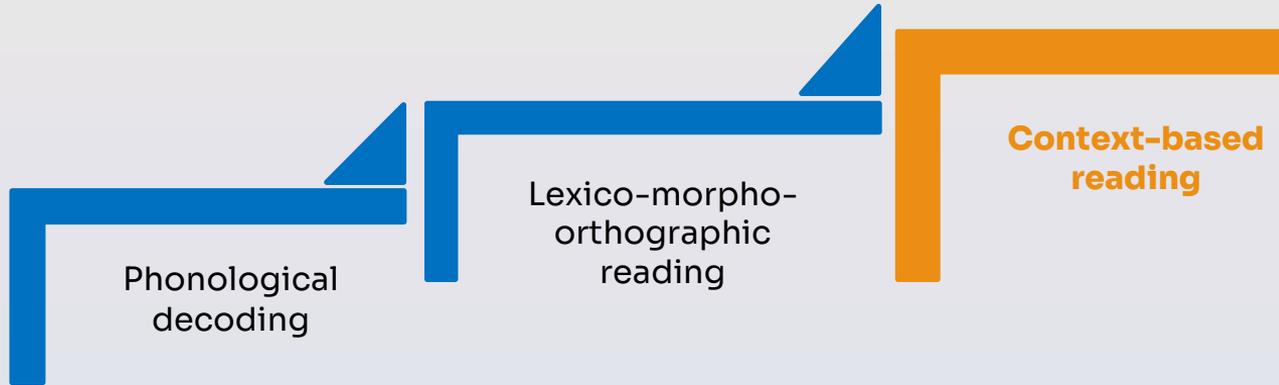


Top-down

Phonological decoding of individual words

Text-level processes

- The triplex Model (Share & Bar-On, 2018)
- The Combinatorial Model (Share, 2025)



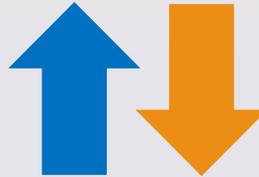
What is the role of **contextual information** in text reading in Hebrew?

The role of contextual information in reading Hebrew

Text content; cognitive and linguistic complexity

Syntactic analysis of content units; word/sentence/ text-level meaning construction

Bottom-Up



Top-down

Phonological decoding of individual words

Text Reading

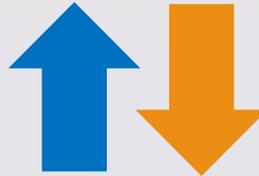
Narrative

Informational

Text content; cognitive and linguistic complexity

Syntactic analysis of content units, word/sentence/ text-level meaning construction

Bottom-Up



Top-down

Phonological decoding of individual words

Text Genres in the Classroom

Narrative text

- ✓ *Agent-oriented*, everyday events
- ✓ Dynamic stance
- ✓ Familiar structure, hierarchical
- ✓ Everyday vocabulary
- ✓ Clear temporal and causal links

Processing is straightforward
and fairly automatic

Informational text

- ✓ Topic-oriented, more abstract
- ✓ Static stance
- ✓ Prior knowledge
- ✓ Complex/less predictable structure
- ✓ More complex language

Processing is less automatic,
places greater demands on
working memory and executive
functions

Genre Effects on Reading Processes

Strong empirical evidence for genre-dependent processing

Genre → **Reading comprehension**: extensively studied

Genre → **Reading accuracy/rate**: less studied, mixed findings

Reading rate:

Narrative texts show an advantage (especially in young and struggling readers)

Reading accuracy:

Inconsistent findings

- Higher accuracy in narratives
- Higher accuracy in informational texts
- No difference

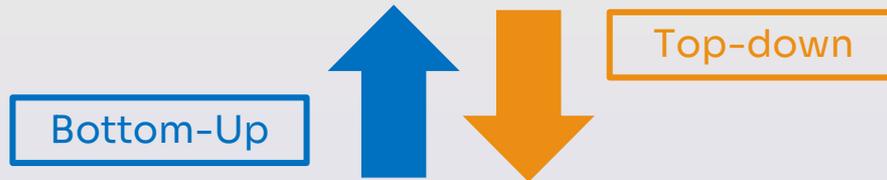
Skilled readers (adults): Genre has minimal influence on reading

(Mar et al., 2021; Paige et al., 2015)

Research Questions

Two individual variables

Contextual complexity - captured by **text genre**

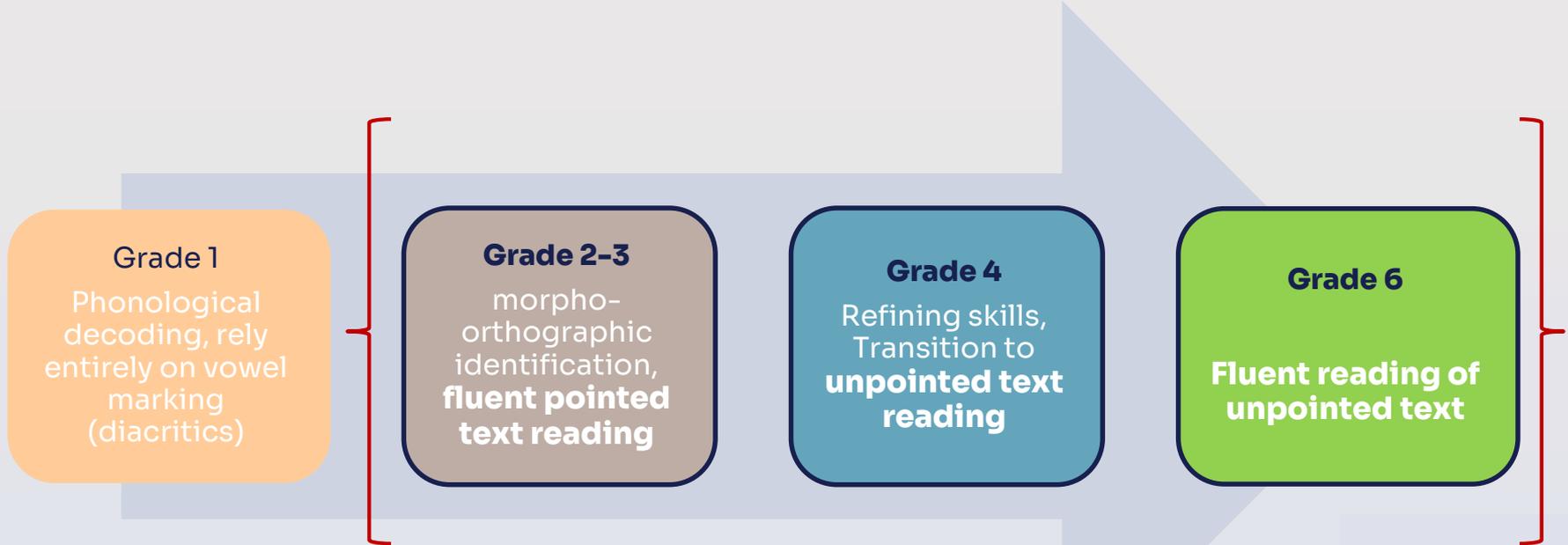


Phonological transparency - marked by **diacritics**

How do **text genre (T-D)** and **diacritics (B-U)** affect reading accuracy and rate in text reading in Hebrew?

Reading Acquisition in Hebrew

Transition from pointed to unpointed text reading



Hebrew Reading Acquisition Model (Bar-On, 2011)

Participants

N = 261 native Hebrew-speaking children 135 girls / 126 boys

Grade 2 (end)/ 3 (beginning)

N=81, age 7;6–9;0

fluent pointed text reading

Grade 4

N=58, age 9;1–10;9

transition to unpointed
text reading

Grade 6

N=120, age 11;0–12;4

skilled readers | unpointed
texts

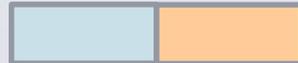
Typical development, mid-high SES

Public/religious schools

Research Design

Narratives (standardized test)	Text A	pointed	unpointed
	Text B	pointed	unpointed
Informational texts (adapted to 4 th grade reading level)	Text A	pointed	unpointed
	Text B	pointed	unpointed

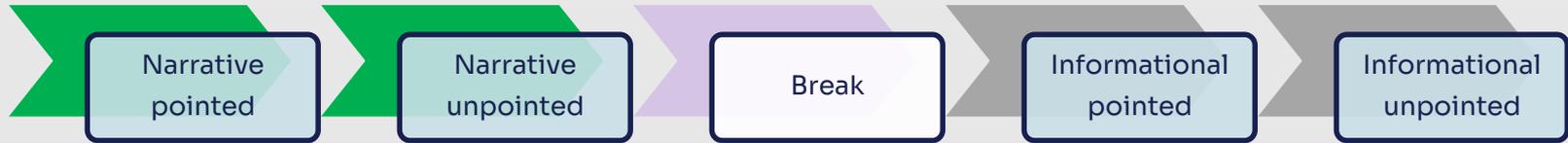
Grade 2 / 6



Grade 4



Procedure



Read aloud, as accurately as possible and at a comfortable pace

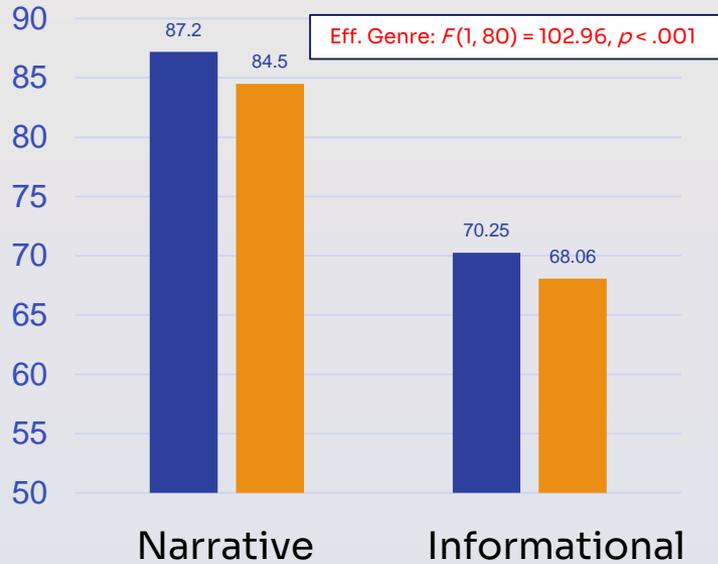
Results and Discussion

Findings by Age Group

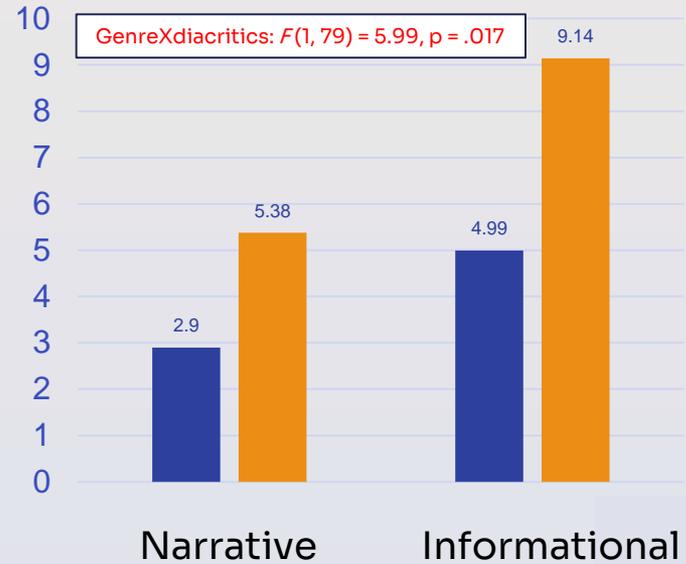
Grade 2-3

fluent reading of pointed texts

Rate (WPM)



Accuracy (% errors)

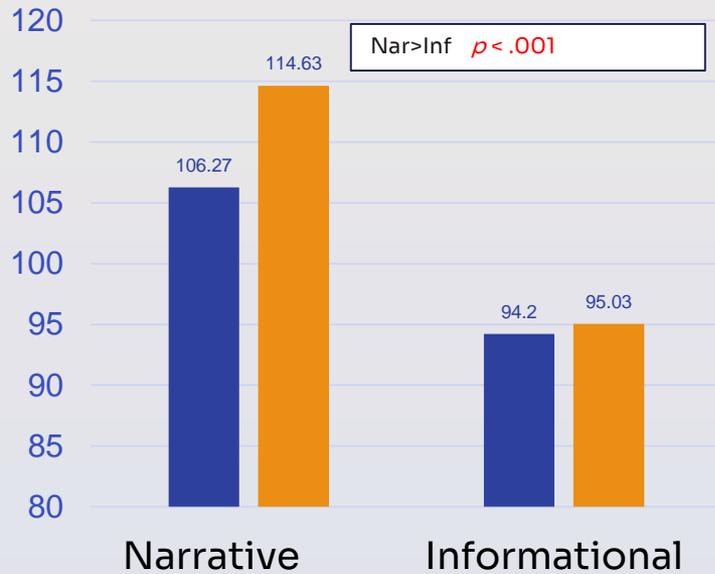


pointed ● unpointed ●

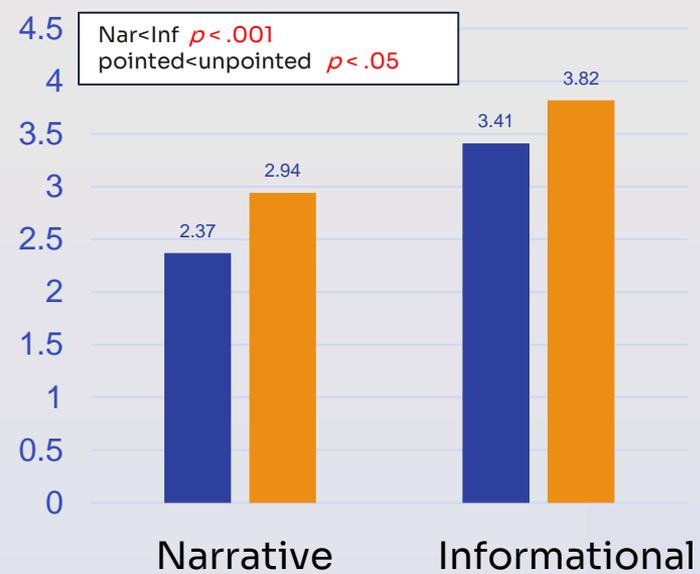
Grade 4

transition to reading unpointed text

Rate (WPM)



Accuracy (% errors)

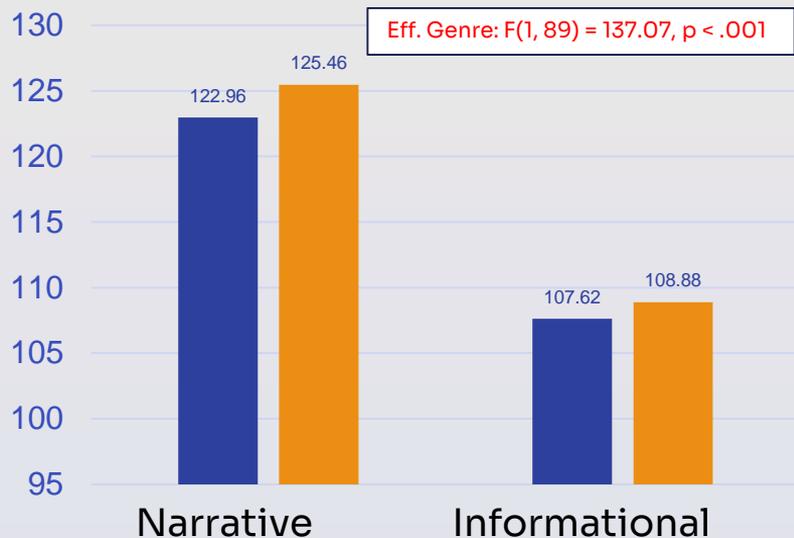


pointed  unpointed 

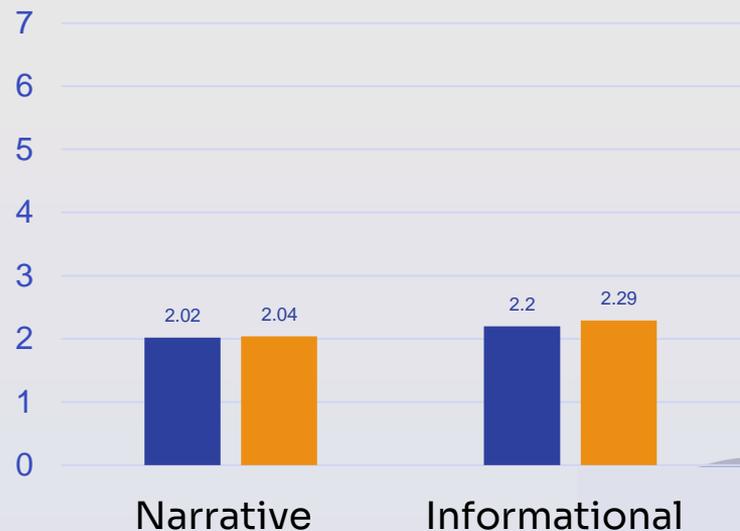
Grade 6

skilled reading of unpointed text

Rate (WPM)



Accuracy (% errors)



pointed ● unpointed ●

Reading: A matter of Processing

Tandem Theory (Paige et al., 2014)

- ✓ Skilled readers adjust reading rate to match text demands
- ✓ cognitive and linguistic complexity slows reading speed to allow comprehension

- ✓ Informational texts: The main challenge: **Building a coherent mental representation** of the content (not decoding words)

- ✓ Narratives - easy to process, support more fluent reading

Conclusions

Contextual complexity - Genres

- ✓ Genre effect starts already during the act of reading
- ✓ Informational texts place heavier demands on comprehension → readers slow down
- ✓ Readers' natural tendency is **always to process and make sense** of what they read



Top-down

Conclusions

Phonological information - Diacritics



- ✓ Once readers can recognize words orthographically, they rely less on diacritics (Grade 2)
- ✓ Slower reading in challenging segments – less familiar/ more complex words
- ✓ Diacritics contribute to accuracy—very strongly in Grade 2, still noticeably in Grade 4, though to a lesser extent

A Universal Clinical Point

The balance between reading fluency and meaning-making isn't unique to Hebrew. The **natural tendency to process and understand** is a universal feature of reading

As clinicians, this natural tendency is important for **understanding reading processes** and for **tailoring interventions** that align with the way readers process text

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