

Compounding patterns in Hebrew writing:

A developmental study

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Compounds constitute a junction of lexicon, morphology and syntax, serving as testing grounds for linguistic theories of processing and development (Bauer, 2017; Libben, Gallant, & Dressler, 2021). Modern Hebrew compounds are strictly nominal, with three structural (bound, free, and double) types reflecting its historical roots, respectively associated with syntactic, semantic and discursive functions (Ravid & Zilberbuch, 2003).

The current study explored Hebrew compounding properties in developmental perspective across the school years and beyond. The study corpus consisted of 500 texts, written by native-speaking participants from middle-high SES, in five age/schooling groups – 4th, 7th, and 11th graders, young adults (aged 19-20), and older adults (aged 26-35). All 2,015 compound tokens in the corpus were classified by structure, semantic-pragmatic functions, and syntactic properties. Analyses indicated that most compounds were construct state compounds which mostly expressed complex subcategorization (hyponymic) relations as in *coffee table* or *blood test*. Most compounds were in non-subject position, which does not burden short-term memory and processing abilities. Subject compounds in post-verbal subject position were the preferred mode for introducing new topics. Texts written by younger participants had more compounds expressing genitive relations, whereas adult texts had more partitive and exocentric compounds. With age and schooling, compounds contained increasingly abstract nominals. Three major clusters were identified in the corpus: (1) the Simplex cluster, characterized by non-expanded hyponymic bound compounds, mainly prevalent in informative texts written by younger participants; (2) the Complex cluster, mostly containing syntactically expanded free and double compounds expressing genitive and partitive relations, prevalent in narratives written by older participants; and (3) the Unique cluster, containing rare compounding devices such as counting constructions, adjective-headed compounds and compounds based on proper names, associated with texts written by the older adults.

These results indicate that compounding is a central nominal device in Hebrew, relating discourse functions with morpho-syntactic and semantic compound properties, which evolves and diversifies across development al age.

Bauer, L. (2017). *Compounds and compounding* (Vol. 155). Cambridge University Press.

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Ravid, D. & S. Zilberbuch. (2003). The development of complex nominals in expert and non-expert writing: A comparative study. *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 11, 267-297.