The contribution of preschool morphology to first and second grade Hebrew reading

Dr. Ravit Cohen-Mimran, Post-doc. Supervisor: Prof. David Share

Research topic: The main purpose of the present study is to examine the question of whether inflectional and derivational knowledge among kindergarteners contributes uniquely to later reading skills. The hypothesis is that morphological skills (both inflectional and derivational knowledge) will contribute uniquely and significantly to reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension *over and above phonological abilities*.

Why is this research unique? The research literature is still debating whether the contribution of morphology to reading is subsumed by phonology (Shankweiler et al., 1995), or whether morphology has an *independent* contribution to reading over and above phonology (Carlisle, 1995; Deacon, 2012). The present investigation will be the first to address this controversy in Hebrew – a non-European language with a rich morphology and written in a non-alphabetic (abjadic) script. This study explores the longitudinal/predictive association between inflectional and derivational tasks administered in kindergarten and several reading subskills (including word reading accuracy, rate, and fluency, comprehension, and spelling) in both pointed (the fully vowelled and phonologically transparent script that children first learn to read) and unpointed (partially vowelled) variants of Hebrew script. This will be the first study to address this question among a large representative sample of Hebrew-speaking children at the very beginnings of reading acquisition, at a stage where the effect of reading itself on language is minimal.

Planned analyses: The analyses will include correlations and hierarchical regressions to examine whether morphology contributes to reading beyond phonology. The key prediction is that morphology will contribute significantly to word reading (accuracy and fluency) and to reading comprehension, after partialling out phonology. Furthermore, the magnitude of this effect is expected to be greater in 2nd grade compared to 1st grade, as predicted by Share and Bar-On's Triplex model (2018).

Significance of this research and relevance for education: The present study is likely to help clinicians as well as policy makers plan and implement effective intervention programs regarding morphological abilities. Specifically, findings can shed light on critical information regarding (i) the optimal age to invest in the promotion of morphological abilities, (ii) the morphological

abilities (and not just phonological abilities) that should be emphasized in early instruction, and (iii) what outcomes are expected.