

**CATEGORY-SPECIFIC PHONOLOGY:
EVIDENCE FROM ADULT AND CHILD HEBREW**

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Category-specific phonology is a state of affairs that every phonological theory has handled, one way or another. Regardless of the theoretical framework, be it a rule-based (SPE or Lexical Phonology) or a constraint-base (indexing or co-phonologies), category-specific phonology adds to the complexity of the grammar.

Nevertheless, I claim that category-specific phonology is the preferred state of affairs in languages. The intuition behind this claim is that phonological distinctions among lexical categories support processing, by allowing speakers to identify the word's category by its phonological form, which is the most accessible information.

I support this claim with evidence from two types of data: (i) a morpho-phonological distinction among Hebrew verbs, nouns, and adjectives, in particular the increasing dichotomy between nouns and adjectives, and (ii) a developmental distinction between nouns and verbs in the early stages of the acquisition of Hebrew.

Hebrew has stem configurations (prosodic structures and vocalic patterns) that can host verbs, nouns, and/or adjectives.

(1)	Configuration	Verb	Noun	Adjective
	CaCaC	katav 'he wrote'	kazav 'lie'	katan 'small'

Given the stem alone, as in (1), speakers have to resort to the syntax and the lexicon to identify the lexical category. Given the morphological paradigm, the inflectional suffixes (person-number-gender for verbs and number-gender for nouns) isolate verbs from nouns and adjectives, where the distinction is, in most cases, further enhanced by the phonology (vowel deletion in the penultimate stem syllable in verbs and in the ultimate stem syllable in nouns and adjectives).

(2)	Verb	CaC_C-V	Noun	C_CaC-V	Adjective	C_CaC-V
	katv-u	'wrote 3ms.pl'	kzav-im	'lie ms.pl.'	ktan-im	'small ms.pl.'

Nouns and adjectives, however, employ the same gender-number suffixes, and are traditionally grouped together with respect to their morpho-phonology.

(3)		ms.sg.	fm.sg.	ms.pl.	fm.pl.	
	Noun	fafan	ffan-a	ffan-im	ffan-ot	'rabbit'
	Adjective	katan	ktan-a	ktan-im	ktan-ot	'small'

I argue that despite the structural similarity between nouns and adjectives, these two categories are developing towards two different morpho-phonological systems. The differences are in the lexical representation and the constraint ranking. The argument is based on the regularity of vowel deletion, which applies with very few exceptions in adjectives but is lexically marked for nouns.

(4)		ms.sg.	fm.sg.	ms.pl.	fm.pl.	
	Noun	fafan	ffan-a	ffan-im	ffan-ot	'rabbit'
		gamad	gamad-a	gamad-im	gamad-ot	'dwarf'
	Adjective	katan	ktan-a	ktan-im	ktan-ot	'small'

The developing distinction between Hebrew nouns and adjectives supports the claim that speakers, and thus languages, strive to distinguish among lexical categories, and will do so at the cost of category-specific phonology. That is, category specific phonology is "supportive phonology".

Further evidence for this claim is drawn from early acquisition of Hebrew. Data from a longitudinal study show that even before the morphological paradigm is

surface-true, i.e. when children produce mostly stems, the phonological development of nouns is isolated, though not different, from that of verbs. In particular, the prosodic development of verbs lags behind that of nouns, such that the development of verbs is at stage n during the period when the development of nouns is already at stage $n+m$ (where $m > 0$).

(5)

Age	Child's productions	
	Nouns	Verbs
1;02.00 –	S1 □, □□	
1;02.16 –	S2 □, □□, □□	
1;04.03 –		
1;04.17 –	S3 □, □□, □□, □□□	S1 □, □□
1;05.29 –		S2 □, □□, □□
1;08.17 –		S3 □, □□, □□, □□□

S1 – Initial Stage; S2 – Minimal word stage; S3 – Pre-final stage

The conceptual distinction between nouns and verbs is manifested in the children's prosodic development. When verbs start appearing in the children's productions, they do not adopt the prosodic structures already available for nouns, but rather start from the very beginning of the prosodic development. When the children reach the pre-final stage (S3) in verbs, the two categories do not merge, since the languages' morphological and phonological distinctions start appearing.

Evidence from child and adult Hebrew show that phonology supports category distinction from the very beginning of language production. However, since supporting category distinction adds to the complexity of phonology, the distinction is minimized. The Optimality Theoretic analysis of the relevant morpho-phonology of Hebrew nouns adjectives and verbs will indeed reveal a minimal distinction in constraint ranking among these categories.