I Can Read Without Vowels!

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“Litteras didicisti, quando scis, sine alios discere.”
— Plautus, Truculentus, I. 735. (c. 186BCE)

1 Theoretical Background

(1) Pronouncing is different than reading:
   (a) Pronouncing involves sound.
   (b) Reading involves meaning.
   (c) Pronouncing mostly involves the letters.
   (d) Reading involves ignoring the letters (Assink & Knuijt 2000).
   (e) Reading involves recognizing the words.

(2) Reading Hebrew is different than reading English (Eviatar 1999).

(3) Vowels are necessary for pronouncing Hebrew, not for reading Hebrew (Frost 1995).

(4) Vowels are not necessary for recognizing Hebrew words (Frost & Kampf 1993).

Wrong vowels make it harder to recognize Hebrew words (Navon & Shimron 1981).

Reading aloud makes reading harder, not easier (Magliano et al. 1999), (Rubin & Turano 1992); even though people might silently pronounce their words (Keller et al. 2003).

2 Observations

Reading without vowels reinforces the consonants.

Hebrew structure is clearer without vowels:

(a) without vowels: “and” = יִד
   i. יִדְוָלֶד “and peace”
   ii. יִדְוָלֶד “and you shall be”
   iii. יִדְוָלֶד “and keep”
   iv. יִדְוָלֶד “and faith”
   v. יִדְוָלֶד “and I”

(b) with vowels: “and” = יִד, יִד, יִד, יִד etc.
   i. יִדְוָלֶד “and peace”
   ii. יִדְוָלֶד “and you shall be”
   iii. יִדְוָלֶד “and keep”
   iv. יִדְוָלֶד “and faith”
   v. יִד “and I”

(c) without vowels: “king” = מֶלֶך
   i. מֶלֶך “king”
   ii. מֶלֶך “kings”
   iii. מֶלֶך “our king”
   iv. מֶלֶך “kings of”

(d) with vowels: “king” = מֶלֶך, מֶלֶך, מֶלֶך, מֶלֶך etc.: 
   i. מֶלֶך “king”
   ii. מֶלֶך “kings”
   iii. מֶלֶך “our king”
   iv. מֶלֶך “kings of”

Reading without vowels is fun.
3 Examples

(11) From http://www.exc.com/JoelHoffman/Resources:
   (a) Cognates
   (b) Word structure
   (c) Word find

(12) Games:
   (a) Hangman
   (b) Beads
   (c) Reverse Transliteration

4 Discussion

Selected References


