

ABSTRACT

GRADATION OF THE DISJUNCTIVE ACCENTS
IN THE BIBLE RECITATION OF JEWS OF YEMEN AND IN OTHER JEWISH
TRADITIONS: ON THE PROSODIC HIERARCHY IN THE RECITATION

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The reading tradition of Jews of Yemen interprets the masoretic accentuation as prosodic marks pertaining primarily to the declamation rhythm. The melody of the recitation chant does not represent the accents; with rare exceptions, it only supports the rhythmic structure. The duration of the prosodic pauses does not express their hierarchic significance directly; its gradation serves only the delimitation of the higher domains in the prosodic hierarchy. The length of a pause is determined by a rhythmic algorithm, which expands or contracts the pause according to its position in the higher domain, regardless of the sense relations. The same rhythmical mechanism operates in other Jewish traditions of Bible recitation. In this prosodic system, a prolonged pause merely indicates that the next pause is not going to mark the end of the higher domain. The hierarchical strength of the accents is a structural distinction of the graphic representation not implemented in the prosody directly. The claim that errors occur in the traditional recitation because of the lack of congruence between the temporal relations and the sense relations stems from misunderstanding the operation of the recitation prosody.

The dissimilarity between the prosodic expressions in Yemenite recitation and the hierarchical distinctions in the accentuation shows that the Yemenite recitation tradition did not originate in the accent signs; it apparently preceded them. However, the comparative analysis of the accentual hierarchy and the prosodic structure in the recitation shows that both systems express the same prosodic hierarchy; they are merely different in the way the domains are marked. This leads to the conclusion that both Yemenite recitation and the Tiberian prosodic marks (accents) might stem from the same prosodic archetype. The accentuation presumably does not record the melody of the recitation chant; it combines indication of the prosodic domains with the expression of their relations not necessarily reflected in the prosody. The purpose of the chant, besides enhancing the recitation aesthetically, is to establish the time relations in the declamation and to delineate the highest prosodic domains.