

The Association between Language Development and Pro-social Behavior in Middle Childhood – Research Proposal and Preliminary Data

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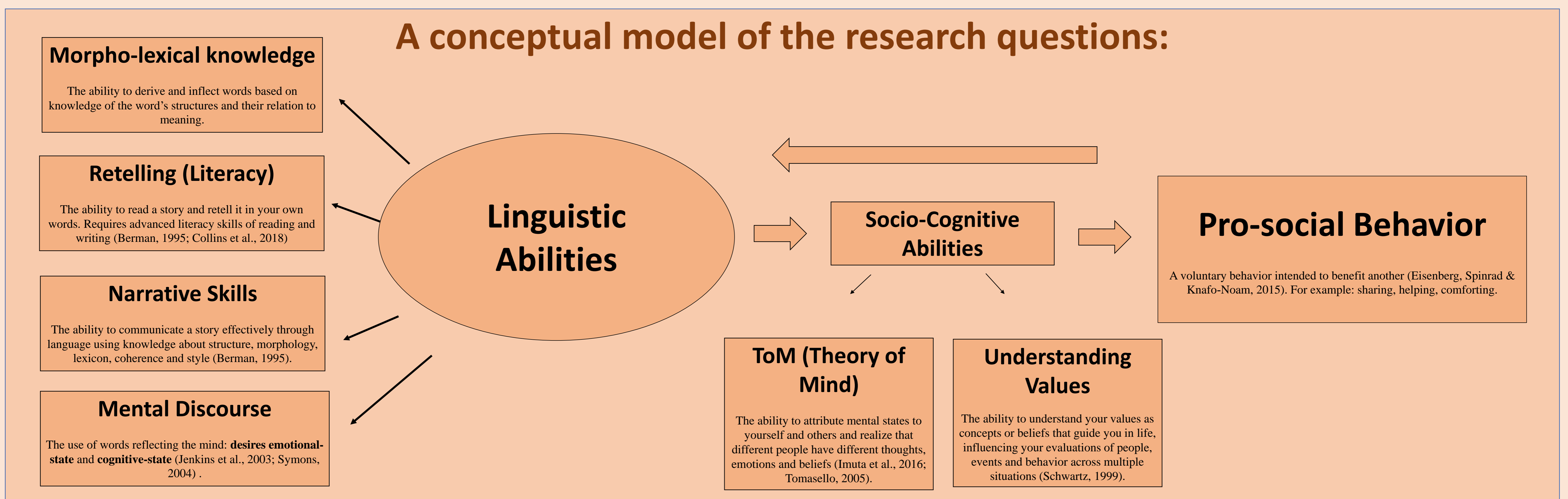
Introduction

Current research supports the idea that language is acquired through social interactions (Johnstone, 2018). However, much less is known about the contribution of linguistic skills to social behavior, and specifically to pro-social behavior. Studies investigating the role of language in social development have focused primarily on early childhood (Girard et al., 2017), leaving a gap in knowledge about the association in middle childhood. In this longitudinal study I will investigate the role of language in shaping pro-social behavior in middle childhood.

Research questions

1. How is the development of pro-social behavior related to language development in middle childhood?
2. How are different linguistic abilities (morpho-lexical knowledge, retelling, narrative skills, mental discourse) related to pro-social behavior in middle childhood?
3. What is the role of socio-cognitive abilities (ToM and Understanding Values) in the association between language development and pro-social behavior in middle childhood?

A conceptual model of the research questions:



Participants

Participants are children from 5 schools in the central area of Israel, in a medium-high socioeconomic status. They began participating in 2018, when they were in first and second grade (תשע"ח) until 2022, when they were in the fourth and fifth grade (תשפ"ב).

	T1	T2	T3	T4
תשע"ח	275	181	198	172
N				

Morpho-lexical knowledge T1, T2, T3, T4

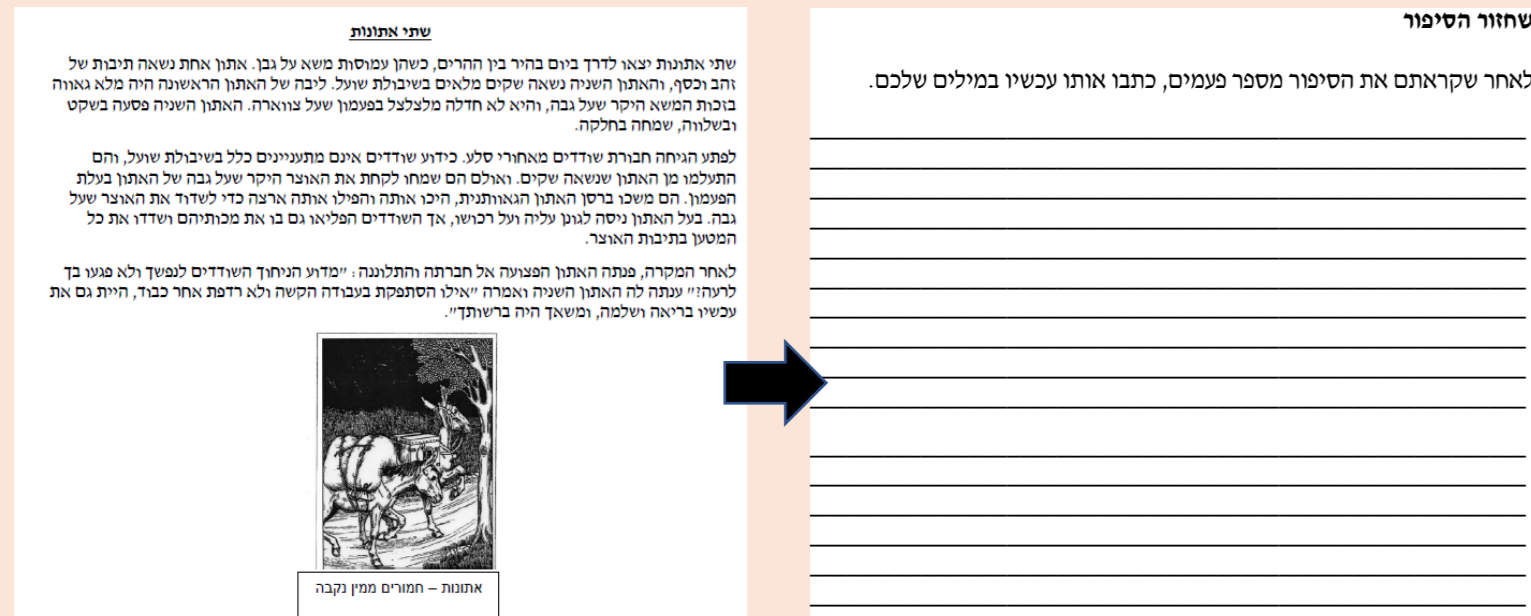
Includes: Irregular noun plural formation, noun-adjective agreement (number and gender), verb derivation, resultative adjectives, optional possessive marking (disassembling), optional possessive marking (assembling), noun compounds, abstract noun production

One nose 'af – many ... [noses 'apim']

Retelling (Literacy) T4

(Sandbank, 2004)

"After reading the story multiple times, hand it back to me and write it in your own words"



- Number and quality of content units
- The presentation of characters in the text
- Vocabulary

Mental discourse T1, T2, T3, T4

(Jenkins et al., 2003; Symons, 2004)

Desires	Emotional-state	Cognitive-state
wanted, tried	felt hurt, sad	guess

Method

Linguistic Measures

Interview T1, T2, T3, T4

Children are asked to rank values presented in pictures according to levels of importance (Picture Based Value Survey for Children- PBVS) (Döring et al., 2010). Then we interview them about the values they ranked as most important and most unimportant (Shachnai & Daniel, 2020).

How I would like to be in my life



"Tell me about a time when it was very important / unimportant to you to [value caption]"



My two friends, they don't get along, always fighting. This one time they had a huge fight, and there weren't many girls around to help, just three, and I really wanted to help them both, because both felt hurt, so like I went up to each and asked what happened, why she was sad, what the other one did to her, and really tried to help. Finally, they just made up naturally, but still, I guess, I helped them.

Narrative skills T1, T2, T3, T4

(Berman, 1995; Berman & Ravid, 2008)

Structure: opening providing appropriate background, a closing segment.
Evaluative elements: I wanted to help. I guess I helped
Lexicon: abstract noun- "fight"

Socio-Cognitive Measures

Understanding Values T1, T2, T3, T4

Does the child describe values as abstract concepts?



Low "...if I lost something I go out to find it..."

High "To be free in the world, to do whatever you want"

Theory of Mind (ToM) T1, T2, T3

- 5-steps-ToM scale (Wellman & Liu, 2004), testing the children's ability to infer the right mental state (e.g. desire, belief) in multiple situations.
- Sarcasm Task (Peterson et al., 2012).

The girl says: "It's a lovely day for a picnic."
 Is it true, what the girl said? (Happé, 1994, Peterson et al., 2012)

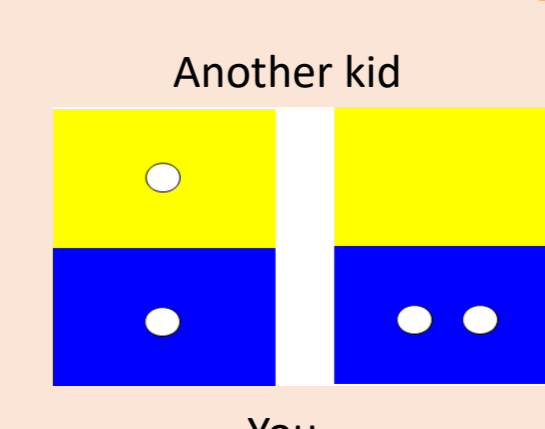


Pro-Social Behavior Measures

Resource allocation task T1, T2, T3, T4

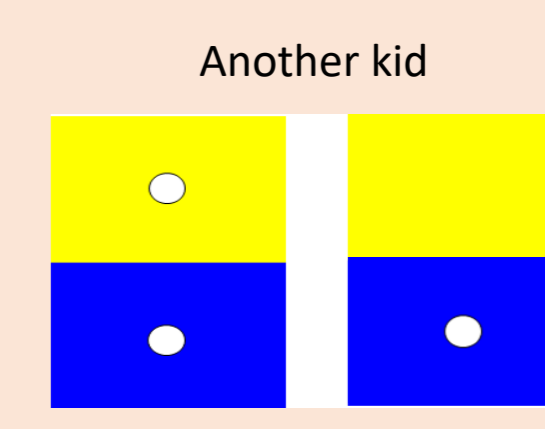
(Abramson et al., 2018; Fehr, et al., 2008)

Costly Sharing



"Would you prefer to get two stickers or getting one sticker and giving one to another kid?"

Non-costly Sharing



"Would you prefer to get one sticker and give one to another kid or getting one and not giving any to another kid?"

Teachers' reports T1, T2, T3, T4

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire - SDQ (Goodman, 1997)
 Behavior Questionnaire (McDonald et al., 2015)

Self-Initiated helping task T4

(Knafo, Steningberg & Goldner, 2011)

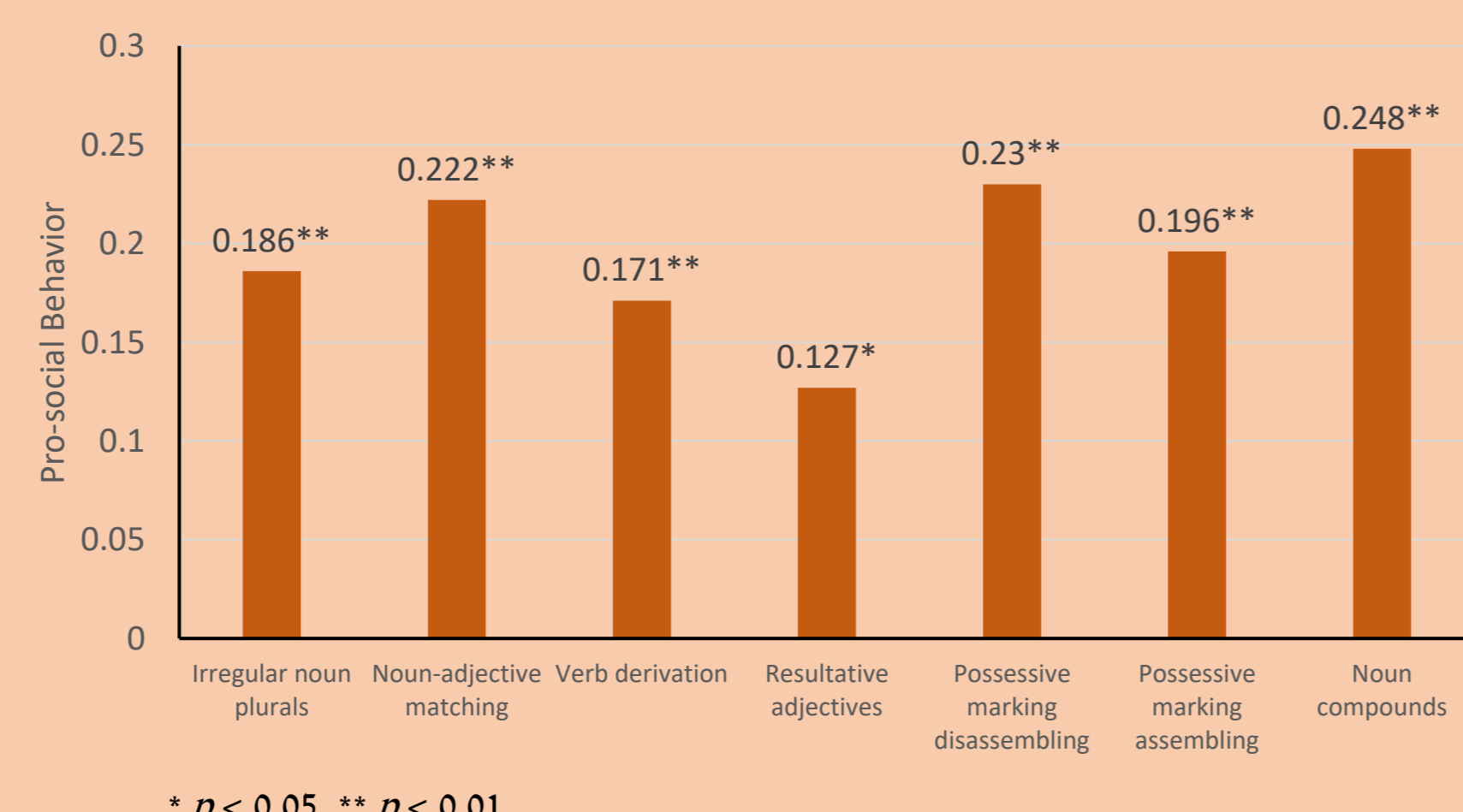
The experimenter "accidentally" drops paper clips on the ground and waits to see if the child helps to gather them.

Preliminary results from

240 first and second graders in the first year of the study indicate:

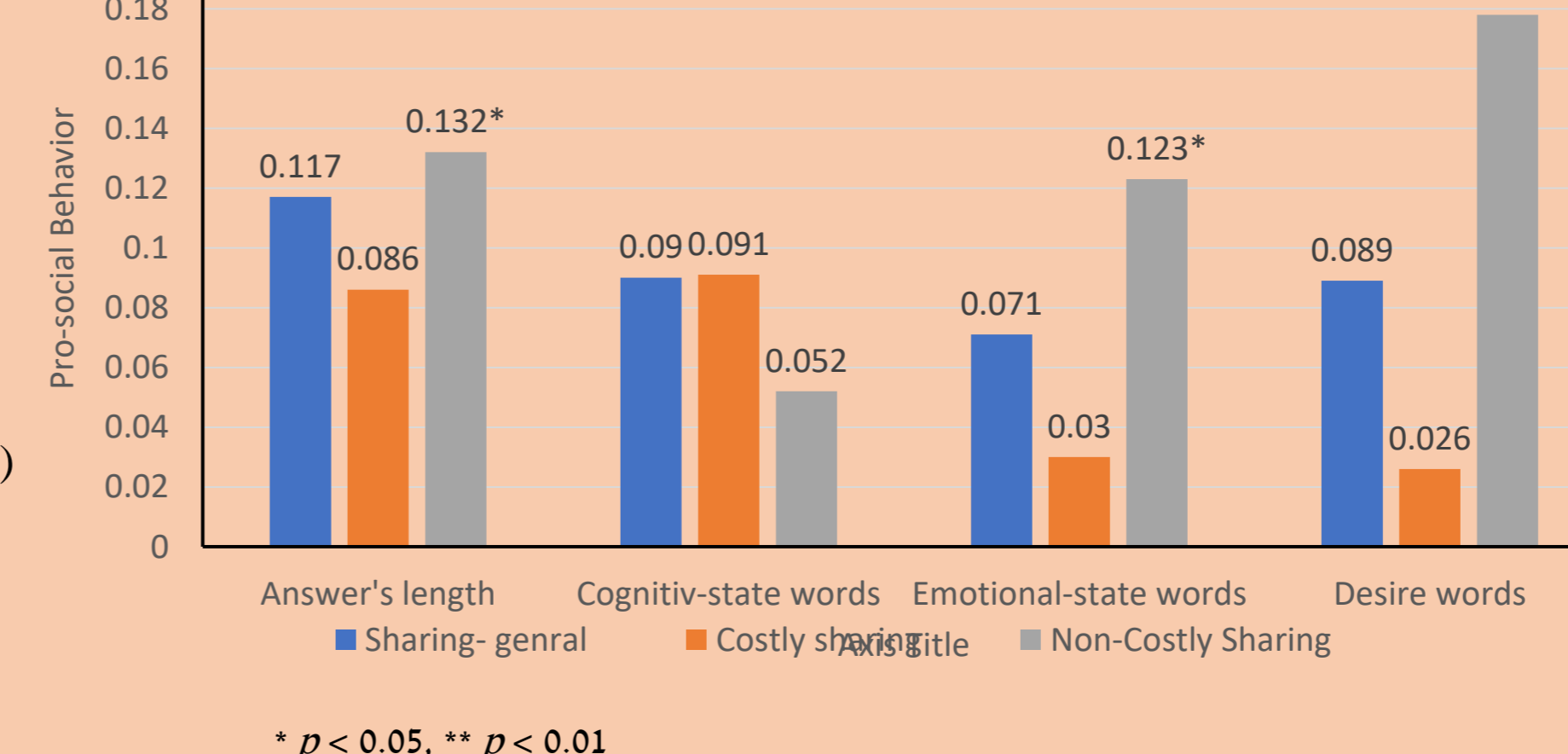
- Significant positive association between morpho-lexical knowledge skills and pro-social behavior:

Correlations between pro-social behavior and various morpho-lexical skills



- Significant positive associations between mental discourse (answer's length, emotional state words and desire words) and non-costly sharing.

Correlations between Mental discourse and Pro-social behavior



References



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