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## THE PROBLEMS IN COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY IN THE PROCESS OF CESOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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**Abstract:** *A knowledge of morphology aids in both teaching and learning a second language and in teaching and learning reading. Methods of teaching a second language vary in the attention they give to morphology. Methods based on a learning view give more attention to morphology than methods that take an acquisition view. However, inferring word meanings through structural analysis can be difficult because it is sometimes hard to recognize word parts, learn the meanings of the parts, and combine the parts to determine the meaning of a word.*

**Keywords:** *morphology, morpheme, approaches, learning skills, comprehension, parts of speech, methods, techniques, and second language acquisition.*

**Introduction.** Morphology is the study of meaningful parts of words. However, linguists find it difficult to define the term word. This may seem strange to anyone who can read. In most modern written languages, each word is set off from other words by spaces. Even in written language, though, it is not always clear whether an item should be considered one word or two. When it comes to oral language, decisions about what constitutes a word become even more difficult. Another reason that linguists find it difficult to define a word is that words can be broken down into small meaningful parts called morphemes. Morphology is the study of the morphemic structure of words. Linguists use the same process to describe the morphology of a language that they use to describe its phonology or syntax. Words can be grouped based on their morphological structure into simple words, complex words, and so on. They can also be grouped based on criteria that include semantic and syntactic criteria as well as their morphology. This grouping system divides words into different parts of speech, such as nouns and verbs. There are both traditional approaches to identifying parts of speech and scientific approaches based on research in linguistics.

Most adults remember identifying parts of speech in school. They learned that a noun is the name of a person, place, or thing and then found all the nouns on a worksheet. They learned the difference between main verbs and helping verbs. Usually, language arts texts list eight parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. The traditional definitions of the parts of speech reflect an earlier period in history. At one time, the school was conducted in Latin. When English became the language of instruction, many teachers suddenly had nothing to teach. The children already knew English, so they didn't need to be taught the language of school.

**The literature review .** Morphological concepts are important in understanding second language acquisition. Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis is based on morpheme studies. Even though language is very complex, it is possible to observe the order in which different common inflectional morphemes appear in an emergent bilingual's speech. In addition to inflectional morphemes, these studies included free morphemes, such as forms of the verb to be (am, is, are), articles, and irregular past-tense forms like came [3.139p]. The Natural Order Hypothesis maintains that people acquire parts of a second language in a natural order. For example, some sounds are acquired before others. This hypothesis was based on Krashen's analysis of data from several earlier studies of the order of acquisition of morphemes in oral language, including Dulay and Burt's study of the acquisition of morphemes by second language adults and children. Some morphemes appear in an English learner's speech before others [6.54p].

The order of acquisition is the same for both children and adults from different language backgrounds. French speakers and Chinese speakers in the Dulay and Burt study acquired English morphemes in this same sequence. The order of acquisition for English as a second language is similar to that of English as a first language. However, Dulay and Burt found that native English speakers acquire auxiliaries and forms of the verb to be (the copula) later than English learners. This order holds for natural learning contexts in which people are acquiring English. Teachers may attempt to teach certain bound morphemes, such as the past tense -ed, before students are ready to acquire the morpheme. This will result in a temporary ability to add -ed to verbs on an exercise in class. However, students can't fully incorporate the form into their speech or

writing until they acquire it. Direct teaching doesn't change the order of acquisition. Language is complex, and students are acquiring phonology and syntax at the same time that they are acquiring morphology, so this list of morphemes can't be turned into a teaching sequence. Even so, this knowledge of the natural order of acquisition should be part of a teacher's pedagogical language knowledge. Teachers with this knowledge have a general idea of what to expect from their students and can better support students' English language development.

By teaching students to use morphological clues from prefixes, roots, and suffixes, teachers can help students construct meaning from texts. However, as Graves points out building students' vocabulary requires involving students in extensive reading and discussions, teaching some individual words, and teaching word-learning strategies such as the use of structural analysis. Graves writes that the goal of vocabulary instruction should be to increase students' word consciousness. Word consciousness is an awareness of and interest in words. Teachers with knowledge of linguistics can help their students develop word consciousness. At times, students identify parts of words as morphemes that are not actually morphemes. For example, students might notice the word *hot* in the word *hotel*. However, *hot* is not a base here, so it does not help a reader understand *hotel*. Since *hotel* has only one morpheme, there are no smaller meaningful parts that can be used as clues to word meaning. Or, to take another example, a student could spot *quit* in the word *mosquito*, but this is just a coincidence. There is no relationship between the meanings of *mosquito* and *quit*.

Graves also emphasizes the benefits of teaching strategies for learning words. One word-learning strategy is using morphological clues to infer meanings of words. He points out that words that make up the academic vocabulary of English often have Latin or Greek roots as well as prefixes and suffixes. Students can use morphological structural analysis to infer the meaning of words in context. For example, Thompson and Rubenstein describe how a math teacher used morphological clues to help her students understand a content-specific math term. The teacher explained, "Perpendicular comes from a root, *pend*, meaning 'to hang, ' because when a weight hangs freely on a string, it forms a perpendicular to the ground"[2.175p]. Then she connected the math term to other, everyday words they knew like *pendant* and *pendulum* to help the students remember the meaning of the Latin root. This teacher used the word-root to explain *perpendicular*. She helped her students remember the word by connecting it to other words they knew, and she showed that word histories can be interesting.

**Methods.** When linguists examine the physical speech stream, they do not find breaks between what people normally consider separate words. Consider the sentence, "I should have gone." A spectrographic display of this sentence would show no breaks between the words. In addition, in casual speech, this sentence is pronounced /aɪʃʊd hæv ɡən/. The word that is written *have* is reduced to /v/ and attached to /fud/ to form one unit. Like phonemes, words are psychological units, not physical units. When people speak, they cause sound waves to travel through the air. The interpretation of speech involves perceiving these sound waves as individual words. Humans do this effortlessly in a language they have acquired, but as anyone who has listened to a foreign language realizes, it can be very difficult to pick out individual words in a new language.

The first step in describing the morphology of a language is to divide the speech stream into discrete units. For morphology, the discrete units are morphemes, the smallest meaningful parts of words. In a word like *tree* there is just one morpheme. This word can't be divided into smaller meaningful parts. However, the word *trees* has two morphemes, *tree* and *s*. Each part of the word carries some meaning. *Tree* refers to a kind of tall plant, and *s* carries the meaning of plural. Two other examples of words that consist of more than one morpheme are *injections* and *replacements*. *Injections* can be divided into four morphemes: *in* + *ject* + *ion* + *s* and *replacements* can also be divided into four meaningful parts: *re* + *place* + *ment* + *s*.

The second step in describing the morphology of English or any other language is to categorize the units. Words like *trees* are made up of two kinds of morphemes: free morphemes and bound morphemes. Free morphemes are units that could stand alone as words by themselves. *Tree* is a free morpheme. Bound morphemes are units that must be attached or bound to a free morpheme. They cannot be written as separate words. The *s* in *trees* is a bound morpheme. Bound morphemes in English are either prefixes or suffixes. The general term *affix* refers to a prefix or a suffix. Some languages also have infixes, bound morphemes that are inserted into the middle of a word rather than being bound to the beginning or the end. Words can be grouped based on their morphological structure into simple words, complex words, and so on. They can also be grouped based on criteria that include semantic and syntactic criteria as well as their morphology. Methods of teaching a second or foreign language take different approaches to teaching morphology. Methods based on a learning view either teach morphology directly or contextualize the instruction in drills, role-plays, and other classroom activities. Methods based on an acquisition view assume that morphology will be acquired naturally, or they design lessons to teach morphology through academic content. The

grammar-translation method includes lessons designed to teach different aspects of language, including morphology. Students learn to add the correct endings to show person or tense. These aspects of morphology are taught directly.

In contrast, methods associated with both a communicative and an empiricist view includes activities that require students to use correct morphological forms. For example, students might tell a partner what they did yesterday, what they plan to do tomorrow, or even what they would do if they had the time and money. In each case, students would need to use auxiliaries and verbs with the proper suffixes to indicate the time. Students also engage in dialogues in which they need to use inflectional suffixes to indicate the person in some languages. A student learning French would use -es to indicate the second person you and or to indicate first person In the following lines:

("Can you go to the store?")

("Yes, I can go.")

However, in these methods, grammar is not taught directly.

One feature of the Silent Way is the use of Cuisenaire rods. Students use these rods to represent different parts of a language. In building words, students could use a long orange rod to represent the base of a word like prevention, a short green rod for the prefix pre-, and a short yellow rod for the suffix -tion. Although morphology is not taught directly in this method, students are made aware of word parts and use the rods to visually represent the parts.

In other methods, including Community Language Learning, Problem Posing, and the Natural Approach, the assumption is that students will acquire the language naturally if they receive comprehensible input. Morphology is not taught in these methods. On the other hand, teachers using methods such as CALLA and SIOP in which language is taught through content include both language and content objectives. Language objectives can focus on word parts. For example, a biology teacher might teach Latin roots of scientific words to help students build science vocabulary. A literature teacher might teach the future tense for students to use in reading and writing during a thematic unit on the future. Language objectives are drawn from academic content, so teachers using these content-based methods may teach aspects of morphology. Any teaching of morphology would be contextualized. Teaching Reading and Morphology

Insights from linguistic studies of morphology can inform reading instruction. Teachers who employ both methods that are consistent with a learning view and those who take an acquisition view include instruction designed to help students use morphological information as they read. Teachers who have a learning view teach structural analysis to help students decode complex words since those words are difficult to decode using phonics rules. The emphasis in learning classrooms is on helping students identify individual words. Students can then combine the meanings of the words to make sense of sentences, paragraphs, and complete texts.

Teachers who take an acquisition approach also teach students to use information from word parts as one strategy for constructing meaning from texts. Teaching prefixes, roots or bases, and suffixes always occurs in the context of meaningful reading so that readers can combine cues from morphology with graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to make sense of what they read. The suffixes of complex words provide clues as to the word's part of speech. For example, words that end in -tion are usually nouns. This morphological information helps readers determine the syntax of a sentence as they read since they know that nouns serve as subjects and objects.

Fortunately, some creative children's authors have written books that can help children acquire many of the terms of traditional grammar. They have produced colorful, interesting books that contain many of the labels children are expected to master [1.215p].

### **Results and discussions.**

There are fewer dependencies among morphemes. Bound morphemes must be added to a base or root to form a word. A prefix like re- must be attached to a base, such as a search, or to a root, such as ject, to form a word. In the same way, a suffix, such as -ize, has to be added to a root or a base word to form an English word. In this respect, bound morphemes depend on roots and bases to form words. However, the only requirement when adding more than one affix is that inflectional suffixes come at the end of a word and follow derivational suffixes, as in energizes where the inflectional -s follows the derivational -ize. There is no general rule for adding prefixes before suffixes or suffixes before prefixes. In forming a word like a replacement, the prefix re- could be added to form replace, and then the suffix -ment could be added to form replacement, but it would also be possible to add -ment first to make a placement, and then add the re- In forming a complex word with both a prefix and a suffix, adding one doesn't depend on adding the other one first.

For teachers, it is important to understand something of the structure of words and sentences in the first languages of their emergent bilingual students. If a student speaks a language that is synthetic, agglutinative, or polysynthetic, then the student's transition to English will need more support than a student who speaks a language that structures words and sentences in similar ways to the way English does. This knowledge of different kinds of words and sentences is part of a teacher's pedagogical language knowledge. Word formation rules account for many of the words in the lexicon of English. Speakers of English create these words by analogy with known words, following the same pattern. People also understand many new words by analogy. If someone knows what the nonsense verb *braf* means, they know that a *brafer* must be a person who *brafs*. They also know that to *unbraf* means to reverse the action of *braffing*.

Knowing one word can open up the meanings of many other words formed by adding derivational affixes. A problem with word formation rules is that there are often different derivational affixes that can be used to achieve the same effect. Both *un-* and *ir-* can signify the negative. A colleague recently used the word *humbleness* to describe a mutual friend. We understood what he meant, but English already has the word *humility*, so the rule for forming nouns from adjectives like *humble* is blocked by the presence of the word *humility*. Despite these problems, word formation rules are used by speakers of a language to create and understand new words.

In addition, by reading extensively, readers in acquisition classrooms build vocabulary. When readers come to a word or phrase they don't understand, they can use a number of strategies to make sense of the text, and one of these is to use their knowledge of word parts to comprehend individual words. Since academic texts contain many complex words, knowing some common prefixes, roots, and suffixes helps students build academic vocabulary.

Although using knowledge of word structures during reading is useful, there are several difficulties in applying structural analysis. These include difficulties in recognizing prefixes, roots, and suffixes; a lack of knowledge of some word parts; and the problems with combining word parts to infer the meaning of unknown words. Because of these difficulties, teachers should judge carefully how much time to spend teaching prefixes, roots, and suffixes. While such study can be useful and interesting, teachers always work within time constraints, and time spent teaching word parts is time taken away from having students read.

Research by Anderson and Nagy (1992) shows that students can learn many new words by reading without any explicit teaching. In addition, Krashen (2004) has summarized research studies showing the benefits of free voluntary reading. In their analysis of the international tests of reading, Brozo, Shiel, and Topping found that engagement in reading was a key predictor of high levels of reading proficiency. When teachers provide rich and varied oral and written language experiences, their students become better readers and build their vocabularies [11.17p].

In addition, teachers should teach some individual words. These should be words related to the academic subjects students are studying. Marzano and Pickering outline an approach to teaching words that many teachers have found useful. In teaching linguistics, for example, it would be important to teach words like *phoneme*, *morpheme*, and *syntax*. The key is to embed vocabulary instruction, in meaningful reading [4.29p].

Emergent bilinguals also benefit from knowledge of some prefixes and suffixes. These word parts occur frequently and provide consistent clues that help students infer word meanings. In many cases, prefixes and suffixes attach to English base words that students know. If they also know the meaning of the prefix or suffix, they can infer the meaning of the whole word. White, Sowell, and Yanagihara analyzed words taken from a word-frequency list for school texts in grades 3 through 9. They found that four prefixes (*un-*, *re-*, *in-*, and *dis-*) accounted for 58 percent of the prefixes in their data. They recommend teaching these four prefixes first. Teachers can begin by listing these four prefixes on a chart and having students find words with the prefixes as they read and add them to the chart. Looking at the list of words, the students and teacher can discuss the meaning of each prefix [6.305p].

Students might notice that *in-* means not in a word like *ineligible* and it means in for *inside*. The teacher can suggest that students try each meaning to see which one makes sense. The teacher can also add other words to the chart. For example, *impossible* has a prefix that looks like *in-* and means not so students could infer that *impossible* means "not possible." Students can gather other words with *im-* and try to make a generalization about when the prefix is spelled *im-*, not *in-*. Activities like these can trigger students' word consciousness.

Teaching these four most commonly occurring prefixes can give students clues to the meanings of many words. In addition, teachers can work with students to create a wall chart listing suffixes that signal that a word is a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb. As students read, they can look for words with suffixes that indicate each of these major parts of speech. For example, the suffixes *-tion* (*attention*), *-ence*

(independence), and -ment (acknowledgment) can be added to a base word or a root to make it a noun. Teachers can discuss how knowing whether a word is a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb can help readers figure out its meaning in a sentence. Students will also see that adjectives and adverbs usually provide extra descriptive information and are not as important in understanding the meaning of a sentence as the nouns and verbs.

Teaching word-part clues can be a useful word-learning strategy if used judiciously. Teachers should choose words related to their content area. They should look primarily for words with a recognizable English base that occurs in several words in their field. Then teachers can show students how prefixes modify the meaning of the base and how suffixes provide clues about the part of speech. Although students may encounter difficulties applying structural analysis if they are simply told to look for little words inside the big words, they are more successful when teachers introduce and teach common prefixes and roots as one strategy readers can use. As long as students ask themselves the question, "Does this make sense?" they won't be led to think that the meaning of a word like hotel is related to the meaning of hot.

There would be other ways to divide cognate. One common root is cogn meaning "to know" and the suffix -ate means "to make." Thus, cognate could mean "to make known." The student might know a word like recognize and assume that recognize and cognate are related in meaning. However, the words have different roots. The root of cognate is gnatus and the root of recognize is cogn. If students have trouble recognizing the morphemes in a word, then they are not able to use structural analysis effectively. For words like cognate it would be better for a teacher to explain the meaning and provide examples than to ask students to use structural analysis. Despite the difficulties in using structural analysis during reading, both emergent bilinguals and native English speakers can benefit from some knowledge of word parts to help them read academic texts. Structural analysis is one strategy students can use to comprehend the complex vocabulary in these texts.

Another way that teachers can help students use their knowledge of morphology to develop academic vocabulary is through the study of cognates. Cognates are words that come from the same root, that were literally "born together." If emergent bilinguals speak a Latinate language, they may understand many academic English words when they connect those words to related words they know in their first language. A Uzbek speaker could understand the English word hypothesis by associating it with the Uzbek cognate hipótesis. Knowledge of the Uzbek word transfers to reading in English. Support for the idea that what a person knows in one language can transfer to a second language comes from Cummins' theory of a common underlying proficiency. Cummins cites research that shows interdependence among the concepts, skills, and linguistic knowledge in two languages. If a student understands the concept of the water cycle in one language, that concept transfers into a second language. If a student knows how to summarize a chapter, that skill also transfers [9.142p].

Conclusions and recommendations .

Methods of teaching a second language vary in the attention they give to morphology. Methods based on a learning view give more attention to morphology than methods that take an acquisition view. Morphology is taught directly in the Grammar Translation method and is taught in the context of communication in other empiricist methods. Rationalist methods, such as the Natural Approach, assumed that morphology would be acquired without direct teaching.

Methods such as CALLA and SIOP call for language objectives and these may include teaching prefixes, roots, and suffixes to help students develop academic language. Morphology also plays a role in reading. Students learning to read should develop strategies for constructing meaning from texts. One strategy is the use of structural analysis. However, inferring word meanings through structural analysis can be difficult because it is sometimes hard to recognize word parts, learn the meanings of the parts, and combine the parts to determine the meaning of a word.

Teaching vocabulary In the Vocabulary Book: Learning and Instruction, Graves summarizes the research on vocabulary teaching and learning. Based on his review of the research, he concludes that teachers should follow four procedures to ensure effective vocabulary development:

1. Provide rich and varied language experiences.
2. Teach individual words.
3. Teach word-learning strategies.
4. Foster word consciousness (awareness of, and interest in, words)

The best way to help students build their vocabulary is through class discussions and extensive reading.

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