

The Effect of Teaching Word Formation Theory to English Students

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Abstract

The word-formation theory is often avoided in English language course books and little research is conducted on the pedagogical status of word-building process. However, many researchers and lecturers have realized the effect of teaching word-formation theory in English languages course books. English language lecturers have noted that vocabulary is very important in various subjects of English language branch curricula. For this reason, we must admit that the processes of word-formation, through which every language vocabulary can be enriched, are very important in English language teaching and learning. Word formation components such as prefixes, suffixes, etymology, history of words and other required materials in composing the vocabulary of English language are tested in Aleksandër Moisiu University. The results have revealed a significant and successful effect of teaching Word formation theory, this way showing the colossal importance of this important language aspect in every English language edition course book. This paper has two aims: first to review types of English word-formation and, second, to discuss the absence and the need for word-formation theory in English language course books.

Keywords: Word formation, prefixes, suffixes, words, vocabulary.

Introduction

The lexicon has been characterized as mental inventory of words and productive word derivational processes. The lexicon contains rules governing three productive processes of English word formation; compounding, derivational affixation and conversion. Vocabulary plays a very important role in learning a second language, as well as it is one of the most important elements, that make up any language. ESL and EFL students should learn the most common and useful derivational prefixes and suffixes to expand their productive and receptive vocabularies. Which words take which affixes is not always predictable (*suggestion), sometimes the prefix is part of the root (resent) etc. . [Murcia-Freeman]

Wilkins (1972) quotes "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed". A similar point of view was also presented by Krashen (1982) in his 'Natural Order Hypothesis'. According to this hypothesis, words are the building blocks of any language and there is no point in lengthy explanations of grammar structures as students will always acquire them in a fixed predetermined order regardless of their mother tongue. With the third year students of English language branch, we study vocabulary in terms of semantics not formation. We discuss formation though not by the theoretical viewpoint.

Even (Matthew, 1974) notes this. According to him "English word-formation is not treated theoretically by teachers, they treat language functions, grammatical structure, parts of speech and their paradigms, via a technique which goes back for two millennia".

Matthews (1974:38) divides morphology into two major subjects: "one concerned with the process of inflection, and the other with the process of word-formation." (Word-formation covers all the processes whereby new words can be created. According to (Robinson, 1994:569) "These processes include: derivation, compounding, conversion, clipping, reduplication, acronymy, blending, back formation, folk etymology, and antonomasia".

English language course-book planners have ignored to some extent the processes of word-formation.

Students deal with word formation exercises but neither an explanation nor a hint is given in proficiency level books on word structure, prefixation, root, and suffixation. The exercises don't treat only one word class, nor do words have the same affixes. The students don't follow a special rule. They usually consult dictionaries or the lexicology text book.

1. English Word-Formation

According to Bauer, (1983) the two large groups of morphemes can be further subclassified on the basis of other criteria. Morphemes may occur independently, or only in conjunction with others. This leads to the distinction between free and bound morphemes.

It is important to know whether a morpheme only occurs once, as a blocked morpheme, or repeatedly.

There are four main ways of word formation in modern English: Affixation, composition, conversion, abbreviation. There are also secondary ways as sound interchange. Stress interchange, sound imitation, blends, backformation, acronym, coinages, nonce words, borrowing, calquing, eponyms. [Stefanllari, l. pg. 178. A course in English lexicology, Geer, 2011]

1. 1 Affixation

Affixation is one of the most productive ways of word building throughout the history of English. Its main function is to form one part of speech from another; the secondary function is to change the lexical meaning of the same part of speech.

The process of affixation consists in coining a new word by adding an affix or several affixes to some root morpheme. The role of the affix in this procedure is very important and therefore it is necessary to consider certain facts about the main types of affixes. Affixation is divided into suffixation and prefixation (Antrushina G. B. 1985). In English word-formation, infixes do not occur. English has almost no true infixes and those it does have are marginal. A few are heard in colloquial speech, and a few more are found in technical terminology.

1. 2 Prefixation

Prefixation is formed by adding a derivational to a derivational base Prefixes in English can be classified according to different approaches and criteria. Diachronically prefixes are subdivided into native and borrowed ones as miss-, un-, over-, and borrowed as anti-, uni-, vice-.

Structurally they are subdivided into prefixes used in notional words un- (Unimportant, and) and prefixes used in functional words as (as over, under-. Synchronically they may be classified from the point of view of their valency, their ability to collocate with other lexical units as arch- (archbishop) and dis-, disagree. Prefixes may also be classified according to the type of lexico-grammatical character of the base they are added to as deverbal (reuse), denominal (cohabit), deadjectival (bilingual.) [Stefanllari, l. 2011:170]

1. 3 Suffixation

Suffixes are the bound morphemes that occur after a base. They display all kinds of relationships between form, meaning, and function. Some are rare and have only vague meanings, as with the "-een" in "velveteen". Some have just enough uses to suggest a meaning, as with "-iff" in "bailiff, plaintiff" suggesting someone involved with law. Tom McArthur 1992).

Synchronically, suffixes like prefixes, are classified according to the type of the lexico-grammatical character of the base they are added to as deverbal (agreement, denominal (childish), deadjectival (reddish)). Like prefixes, suffixes are differentiated according to the part of speech they form as noun-forming (freedom), adjective-forming (changeable), verb-forming (darken), adverb-forming. westward). They determine the part of speech of the word more than prefixes.

According to Arnoff (1976:21) only nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs can be the product of word formation and that only these form classes can be used bases in the formation of derivations. According to Bauer (1973:225), only the first part of this claim is true, but there are many examples that minor form classes can be used as bases in established forms like backer, lewdness, newness, etc.

1. 4 Compounding

We have mentioned already that traditionally the essential criterion for a combination to be a compound is that it is made up of at least two free lexical morphemes. L. Lipka 1992:83)

A compound, as Bauer (1983) claims, is a lexeme containing two or more potential stems that has not subsequently been subjected to derivational process. It is a very common process in most languages of the world, especially among synthetic ones

Compounds are classified according to different criteria

Classification according to means of composition.

They are coined by a mere juxtaposition of the derivational bases without linking elements as day-break, bedroom

- a). Composition with a linking element, as speedometer, sportsman
- b). Compounds with linking elements as bread-and-butter, pepper-and-salt

1. 4. 2. Classification according to the structure of derivational bases

- a) Compounds consisting of simple stems as blackbird, rock star
- b) Compounds with derived stems: as office-management
- c) Compounds where the first component is a clipped stem as T-shirt, TV-set
- d) Compounds in which one of the components is a compound base as fancy-dress-maker
- e) Compounds of synthetic type as pay-as-you-earn

1. 4. 3. Classification according to the relations between the immediate constituents of compound words. The relation of coordination and subordination.

In coordinative compounds the two constituents are semantically important as boy-friend, Anglo-Saxon

- a) Reduplicative compounds are formed by the repetition of the base as hush-hush.
- b) Repetition of the base with alteration either of a root vowel phoneme as zigzag, or an initial consonant phoneme as willy-nilly
- c) In additive compounds the derivational bases denote (a person or an object which is two things at the same time as bed-sitting-room or actor-manager.

In subordinative compounds the relations between the immediate constituents are based on domination of one of the constituents which is a semantic and structural center, its head member is the second immediate constituent as a rule as shipwreck, the first immediate constituents (as in layout/ The head member determines the part of speech as ashtray (noun) sky-blue (adjective)

1. 4. 4. Classification according to the structural correlation between compounds and free phrases

- a) Syntactic are compounds the order or the components of which correspond to the order of the words in free phrases according the norms of English syntax as door-handle (n+n) like in a door handle (n+n)
- b) Asyntactic are compounds the order of the components of which do not correspond to the order of the words in free phrases as in hand-made= made by hand

Classification based on a functional criterion. Functionally they belong to different parts of speech

Noun compounds, as cigar smoker, toothpaste, upbringing etc. .

Adjective compounds as well known, two-legged, soaking-wet etc.

Verb compounds as look forward to, house-keep etc.

Adverb compounds as through-out, fully employed etc.

1. 5 Conversion

Conversion occurs when an item changes its word-class without the addition of an affix (Quirk, et al. , 1985). It is a very productive way of word formation in English. Conversion forms words of almost any class (i. e. noun, verb, adjective, and

adverb). The major kinds of conversion are: noun + verb (goggle, to goggle), **verb + noun** (to sleep + sleep) and adjective (dizzy, to dizzy).

2. Unpredictable Formations:

These formations are also named "oddities" by Arnoff (1976) who emphasizes that many of these types depend on orthography to some extent. The most common are:

2.1 Clipping

It means cutting off the beginning or the end of a word, or both, leaving a part to stand for a whole. For e. g. : bike, champ, grad, memo, auto, and countless others.

2.2 Blending

It is the fusion of two words into one, usually the first part of one word with the part of another as in glimmer, from gleam + shimmer, stagflation (stagnation + inflation), slangage (slang + language, infotainment (information + entertainment).

2.3 Acronyms

They derive from the initials of two or more words. For e. g. AAMOF (as a matter of fact), DYK (do you know) YVM (you're very welcome) etc.

Now that we have skimmed through English word formation, let's turn our attention to the effect of Word Formation theory in English language course books.

3. English Word Formation in English language course books.

If we look at the English language textbooks, we are struck by the presence of many available exercises concerning word formation. The books guidelines focus on syntax of the language (i. e. clauses, phrases, and sentences) without offering any theory to help English students understand how words are formed.

EFL mainly consists of teaching patterns of social use and how to use them to express meaning. So neither the grammatical syllabus nor the more recent ones give any importance to word formation theory. The understanding of word formation is usually left to the students guessing skills and their ability to use the dictionary. Word expressions are said to be "lexically simple since there are productive rules which enable their users to construct new words out of pre-existing ones" (Lyons 1981, 42).

Lyons does not even see the necessity of listing a word like "politeness" in a dictionary as a vocabulary unit, since both its meaning and its grammatical properties are predictable by rule and that speakers of a language have intuitions about what is or is not an actual word of their language. Lyons' above statement might be true for the natives, but what about the foreign learner who lacks those intuitions and who is denied the listing of derived words in the dictionary as Lyons suggests? Hamdallah (1992)

How can a foreign learner come to understand that **boredom** or **broaden** are words formed by the addition of "**-dom**" and "**-en**" respectively? How can he/she understand that **highway** is the stringing of two words (high + **way**) which can be found separately with other meanings? Unless these processes are made explicitly clear to English students, it is very doubtful that they can cope with them by themselves.

To explain what I aim to by skimming the word-formation processes let us take two examples from the third year course book, **New Proficiency PassKey**.

In unit 4, page 82, there is an exercise (**Blissful Memories**), but no theory about word formation processes and the same thing happens in unit 9, page 187 (**A Real Chore**).

Thirty students were tested for both exercises and the findings for each exercise are shown in two charts, respectively, chart one and chart two. Then, chart 3, is referred to both exercises. According to following data, it is noticed that 60% of the students gave only 1-5 correct answers and 40% gave 5-10 correct answers.

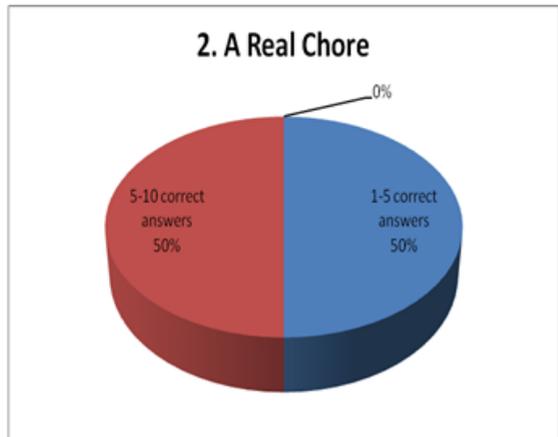
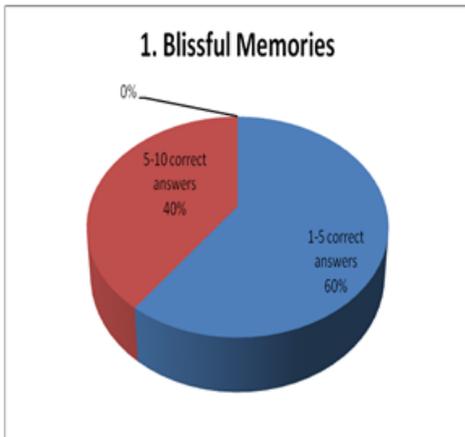
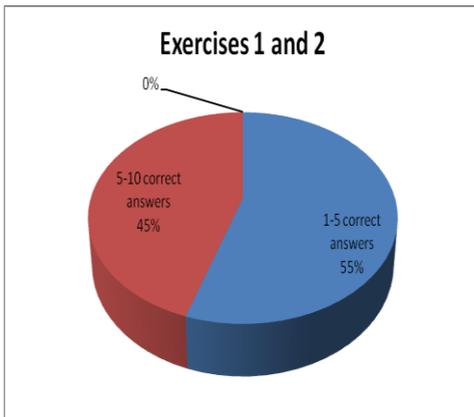


Chart 1 & 2

According to the above data, it is noticed that students are divided into two groups of 50%. Respectively 50% of the students gave only 1-5 correct answers and 50% gave 5-10 correct answers.



From the above data of both exercises, it is clearly seen that 55% of the students answered correctly to 1-5 questions and 45% answered correctly to 5-10 questions.

Some of the most problematic answers were connected with the derivation of the word '**vague**' and '**infect**', from the exercises in page 82 and for the word formation of the word '**margin**' from the exercise in page 187. The correct answers were based on their

(Chart 3 (previous knowledge on word formation process, but no theory was provided from their course book. The lack of word formation theory makes the lecturer provide further theoretical formation to resolve problems for many exercises concerning word formation practice. Thus one can conclude that the neglect of word-formation theory or guidelines is an obvious error on the part of the text compilers. Word-formation is an important aspect of the English language that no teaching method can afford to ignore. Dik (1967) states: "To learn a language is not so much to memorize a set of sentences; rather, it is to familiarize oneself with a linguistic system in such a way and to such extent that one is able to construct sentences and other linguistic structures on one's own. A lot of researchers emphasize that knowledge of word-formation processes in English, enlarges the learners' vocabulary knowledge. Students must know the way words are put together, which components the words consist of, because these can help them to be able to identify the word class of a

lexical item. Having knowledge about affixing rules and derivation principles can be a helpful tool, especially for advanced learners of English language. It is known that acquisition and learning of English vocabulary is a very complex and unpredictable process in which some items are remembered easily and others are refused by the memory for some reasons.

Therefore, it is of great importance to suggest that a word-formation theory or guidelines should be included in any English language course book and should always have an important place in English language course book syllabi. Hence, what teachers can do at best is to use the many techniques that they have at their disposal to help the learners build, as As Tickoo (2003: 216) says, "a 'web of associations' of different kinds which give every new word, word form and word meaning a strong base in the learner's mind."

6. Conclusions

In summing up, it is important for language lecturers to admit that in English language vocabulary learning exercises, word formation theory is the key to enhancing new vocabulary. Hence, what teachers do is the use of many techniques as "a 'web of associations' which help the learners of different kinds which give every new word, word form and word meaning a strong base in the student mind". The ultimate aim of all teachers, of course, is to make students more self-reliant and autonomous and to achieve this, developing independent vocabulary learning strategies, raising awareness to course book authors towards this aspect of English language.

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