

THE EFFECT OF THE NUMBER OF AFFIXES ON VOCABULARY LEARNING OF IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the current study is to investigate the use of one of the vocabulary learning strategies named word formation strategy (morphology) in terms of the number of affixes by English as foreign language (EFL) intermediate students in Qazvin Province in Iran. In order to investigate the variables, 43 intermediate EFL students in Qazvin Province were chosen randomly. The data were collected by using two separate tests. The results showed students who used word formation strategy have highest mean on the vocabulary test belongs to the root words followed by the single affixes and the third highest mean belongs to the double affixes. The data showed that students seemed not to have and employ word-building knowledge; they favored an approach which involved attention to the whole unit because they did not have enough knowledge of affixes. Then, the findings revealed that the more students learn about affixes, the better they perform on vocabulary learning. It is suggested that in order to further validate the general conclusions of the current study, more specific ethnographic research needs to be done and more participants needs in future studies.

KEYWORD: Vocabulary Learning, Affix, Suffix and Prefix

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the relationship between the number of affixation and vocabulary learning of Iranian intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. There are six language skills which EFL learners should learn to be a fluent English users, those are: vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Among those vocabulary is the most basic and vital element for EFL learners but it has been defined differently by different researchers. Most of the researchers defined vocabulary such as the sum of interrelated sub knowledge, it means, morphological knowledge, knowledge of word meaning, collocational and grammatical

knowledge, connotative and associational knowledge, and the knowledge of social or other constraints to be observed in the use of a word (Richard,1976; Ringbom,1987; Nation,1990,2001).

Vocabulary learning has a critical role in Iranian EFL students' English learning. One of the important strategies for vocabulary learning is word decoding (word formation strategy). It is a way of breaking up a word into understandable parts including root words, suffixes and prefixes. Then, learning vocabulary through affixes enables students to both deepen their present word knowledge and to better understand unknown words encountered in the future. Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn & Adler (2001) hold that word formation strategy is a mean to use word parts to figure out the meanings of words in text. This strategy can be useful to the students' vocabulary development. They also mention that knowing some common affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and root words can increase students' power to learn the meanings of many new words. The sense of curiosity toward the words parts and segments is very important, and also how to activate this sense of curiosity is more challenging.

Now what does an affix mean? According to Scalise (1984), "An affix is a morpheme that is attached to a word to form a new word" (p.79). He states that affix is a meaningful letter or group of word parts which changes meaning at the beginning of word or the end of word. It is useful for English learners who have at least some language knowledge to increase vocabulary domains by using these word parts. Therefore, affixation is defined as the making of words by adding derivational affixes to different types of bases. The derived words formed by affixation may be the result of one or more applications of word-formation rules and so the stem of words making up a word-cluster enters into derivational relations of different degrees.

Tankersley (2005) suggests that effective vocabulary learning for students should include encouraging students to experiment with words, and explicitly teaching word meanings and word formation strategy. A number of strategies specifically for learning vocabulary have been identified since vocabulary learning rapidly changed into an area of growing research and publication. One of these strategies is word formation strategy which deals with putting together smaller elements to form larger words with more complex meanings.

Statement of the Problem

As Huh (2009) stated, in the past, teachers often ignored vocabulary learning and enough attention had not been paid to them because they believed that vocabulary could easily be learned by learners themselves. Therefore, they prefer to teach vocabulary indirectly. Also from the EFL learners' side, vocabulary learning is one of the most challenging tasks compared to learning other skills of the language because the learning of vocabulary and syntax are completely different. Syntactic rules can be learned within a limited time for their finiteness, whereas vocabulary learning is a life-long process due to its infiniteness.

So far, there has been more study about the effectiveness of learning affixes on vocabulary learning, but there has been considerable gap in the relationship between effectiveness of the number of affixes and vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners.

Significance of the Study

It is logical to look for influential ways to improve our knowledge of vocabulary. One of these ways is having knowledge of affixes and roots, a knowledge of affixes and roots in English has two advantages for a learner: it can be helped the learning of unfamiliar words by relating these words to known words or to know prefixes and suffixes, and also it can be helped as a way of checking whether an unfamiliar word has been successfully guesses from context. More over by employing new techniques and strategies and then implementing them in our curriculum, it can be found a new and interesting way to cope with the difficulty of learning English in our schools.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Word in the language system is defined as a structural and semantic thing. It is the crucial unit of a language; it is a very challenging and difficult thing to define because it results from the association of a particular meaning with a particular group of sounds. So, the concept of the word is very challenging and difficult to define (Read, 2000). He points out that structure words as function words include: articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and auxiliaries which belong more to grammar of the language, while semantic words are known as content words and include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs and refer to the meaning of the elements. And in this distribution the base form of a word is known as a 'Lemma'.

Strategies for dealing with vocabulary items are different and one of these strategies is learning vocabulary through affixes which is enable students to both deepen their present word knowledge and to better understand unknown words encountered in the future. Affix is divided into suffix and prefix. In modern English suffixation is mostly characteristic of noun and adjective formation, while prefixation is mostly typical of verb formation. In addition to contextualization, or indirect instruction, another powerful vocabulary teaching and learning method is structural analysis means word parts (Nourie & Davidson, 1992). Word parts are basic meaning, basic blocks used in many English words. Learning them can help ESL learners to guess and remember new words as well as to spell words.

According to Bauer and Nation (1993), learners whose L1 is related to English language because of the similarity between the L1 and L2, know the base form of the word as well as affix knowledge, also they could guess and use derivative words. The result of a questionnaire conducted by Schmitt (1997), focusing on the situation of Japanese EFL learners, shows that 69% of the learners think studying words by analyzing affixes and roots is helpful. But the learners who actually used this strategy were reported to be only %15. These results show that although the students have positive image of this strategy, many of them do not use it in their own learning. Aizawa (1998) holds that the Japanese learners' L1 is unrelated to English, then they lack sufficient affix knowledge, which makes it difficult for them to use word family concept. In addition, Okada (2005) holds that the Japanese learners' small vocabulary size and limited knowledge of affix are the reason for this.

Stoffer (1995, cited in Fahim, & Komijani, 2010) made one of the first attempts at categorization of vocabulary learning strategies. She designed a questionnaire with 53 individual strategies (involving over 700 learners) grouped into the following nine categories:

- (1) Strategies used for self-motivation,
- (2) Strategies used to create mental linkages,
- (3) Strategies used to overcome anxiety,
- (4) Strategies used to organize words,
- (5) Memory strategies,
- (6) Visual/auditory strategies,
- (7) Strategies involving physical action,
- (8) Strategies involving creative activities, and
- (9) Strategies involving authentic language use.

Schmitt and Meara's (1997) study showed the results that their participants' suffix knowledge was poor. They were Japanese students whose major was English. As a group, the participants showed 62-66% achievement (with 57% mastery of inflection on the receptive section); on the productive section, they mastered 59% of inflection and 15% of derivation. The top four verbal suffixes given to the participants were three inflections (-ed, -ing and -s) and a derivation (-ment). They also explained that the difference between the inflection and derivation scores was because inflections are more rule-based (for example, students know that inflectional suffixes in the tests can be added to verbs). On the contrary, derivations in the study needed idiosyncratic knowledge. This means students need to memorize L2 derived words because there is no principal way to recognize or recall the tested word from its word parts. In this case, the students could not make much use of the patterns of word formation.

Clark (1998) by production data concerning morphology has suggested that children find it easier to process suffixes than they do prefixes. This evidence comes from cross-linguistic studies of polysynthetic languages which mark inflection with both prefixes and suffixes. In a study, Nation (2001) states if learners have special purposes for learning English, it is worth investigating to recognize if there are affixes and stems in their areas of specialization which are important. Students of medicine, botany and zoology, for example, will find that there are affixes and stems like: haemo- and photo- that make access to many technical words in their fields.

To avoid confusion, Schmitt (2000) categorizes the vocabulary learning strategies into two categories: (1) strategies that are useful for the initial discovery of a word's meaning, and (2) those useful for remembering that word once it has been introduced. Some of these strategies are named "shallow" strategy but others are named "deeper" strategy, in general "shallow" strategies such as simple memorization, repetition, and taking notes are more commonly used by beginners, while more complex ones or "deeper" strategies are more commonly used by higher level learners, require significant active manipulation of information, for instance, imagery, inference, and the Keyword Method. If the depth of the processing perspective needs to follow, the relatively "shallow" strategies may be less effective than "deeper" strategies.

In learning new complex words, Nation (2001) classified the word part strategy involves two steps:

1. Break the unknown word into parts which requires learners recognize prefixes and suffixes occur in words.
2. Relate the meaning of the word parts to the meaning of the whole word which requires learners know the meaning of the common word parts and also requires learners should be able to re-express the dictionary definition of a word to include the meaning of its prefix, stem and suffix.

He made distinction between two types of affixes: derivational and inflectional. The derivational affixes also include suffixes and prefixes. Most of the derivational suffixes and a few prefixes can change the part of speech of the word. For example: they are added to (sad (adjective) / sadness (noun)). Then, it can be said that most of the affixes, especially prefixes, can change the meaning of the word (happy / unhappy). The inflectional affixes are all suffixes, they include –er, -ing, -s (third person singular), -s (plural), -er (comparative), -est (superlative). Inflections suffixes do not alter the part of speech of the word and are added after a derivational suffix, but a derivational suffix alters the part of speech of the word or word group.

As it was said one of the essential strategies for learning vocabularies is using word parts or so called word formation strategy, this strategy can be beneficial to the students' vocabulary development by "knowing some common prefixes and suffixes (affixes), and root words can help students learn the meaning of many new words.

Al-Farsi (2008) declares that Affixes can appear in these forms:

- Prefixes (e.g. uni-): bound morphemes attached in front of a stem.
- Suffixes (e.g. –able): bound morpheme attached at the end of a stem.
- Infixes: bound morpheme attached in the middle of a stem (not in English)
- Circumfixes: bound morpheme attached simultaneously before and after the stem. (not in English)

According to Ebbers and Denton (2008), students can be taught to make inference by combining information gained from the surrounding context around the word names outside clues and the morphemes inside the word names inside clues. This is a good strategy called the outside-in strategy. Good teachers by keeping this key goal in mind, modeling the outside-in strategy frequently in order to help students become adept. They also use a think-aloud procedures to help enable transfer of knowledge of affixes and roots to all reading materials across the curriculum. Therefore, students memorize the meanings of key prefixes, suffixes and roots to learn new words better. Moreover, Nakayama (2008) examined whether teaching affixes knowledge intentionally leads to better vocabulary learning. His study focused on prefixes only and found that systematic teaching of prefix knowledge is effective for learners who do not have prefix knowledge at the beginning and in order to retain a vocabulary item in the longer term, a thorough review of each vocabulary item is more important.

There are many studies of English affixes because a large portion of the words coming from Latin or Greek make use of affixes so their studies have attempted to calculate the proportion of English words. And some of them study the effectiveness of affixes knowledge such as study by Sadeghi, Nasrollahi, Mazandarani, and Mesgar (2011) explored the positive effect of teaching vocabulary through word formation strategy on vocabulary learning of Iranian Intermediate EFL students. This study revealed some interesting facts. In brief this research showed that the students who received the special treatment with word formation strategy performed much better than the students who were instructed with conventional strategies in the posttest. Also in another study by Nation (1990) investigated the role of using affix knowledge in vocabulary learning of advanced learners concerning unfamiliar words by relating them to known words or known prefixes and suffixes. Also in another study, He states that if learners have special purposes for learning English, it is worth investigating to recognize if there are affixes and stems in their areas of specialization which are important. Students of medicine, botany and zoology, for example, will find that there are affixes and stems like: *haemo-* and *photo-* that make access to many technical words in their fields.

Therefore, one of the factors may have been the novelty of this study by those intermediate learners is the fact that they needed more opportunity to focus more on the number of affixes and affixation instruction. Although teachers pay attention to this issue, it is less than it should be. There is no doubt that affixation instruction can be a great help for learners in improving the proficiency level in English courses.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there a significant difference in the vocabulary performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners in terms of the number of affixes?

Research null hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the vocabulary performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners in terms of the number of affixes.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In the present study, a sample of 43 Iranian EFL students (both male and female) with ages among 18-23 were chosen randomly among English students in Qazvin universities. They were at the intermediate level and were chosen from B.A. students. The initial number of participants was 43 then reduced to 40 because 3 of them did not complete the questionnaires. After the administration of KET (Key English Test) proficiency test for intermediate students 40 students whose scores were between one standard deviation below and above the mean were remained as the participants of this study.

Instruments

The current study employed two tests. One of the tests was a proficiency test and the other was a vocabulary recognition test for intermediate level.

KET test of English language proficiency

First, to homogenize the participants, a general proficiency test (KET or Key English test) was administered at the outset of the study. Ket certificate is valid for life and widely recognized at the international level. It is an elementary level qualification that covers basic practical English, such as understanding simple questions, instructions and phrases and includes 30 items in multi-choice test requiring completion of a sentence. The participants who scored between -1st and +1st were included in the study. (See Appendix A)

A vocabulary recognition test for intermediate level

A multiple - choice of intermediate test was administered to the participants as a criterion to assess the outcome of the participants. It consisted of 51 questions inducing 17 vocabulary items from roots, 17 vocabulary items from single affixes, and 17 vocabulary items from double affixes. These questions have undergone several major revisions and changes by assistant professors in this major. They were chosen mostly from the English book of pre-university and some of them are chosen from intermediate level of Internet Lanquiz site. (See Appendix B)

Procedures

Data collection was done in one ninety minute session to achieve the purpose of the study, so the following procedures were followed. Initially, to homogenize the participants, a multiple-choice KET proficiency test was administered to the participants. It consisted of 30 vocabulary items requiring selection of a synonym or completion of a sentence. The analysis of the scores indicated that 3 of the participants were excluded because they did not respond to the tests.

The vocabulary comprehension subtests for intermediate students were used to measure the vocabulary knowledge of the participants. . All required information was given to the participants before administering the instruments, information like how to answer the tests. Each subtest contained 51 items, 17 question from root words, 17 question from single affix in multiple-choice format were be used. At the end, the tests were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16. Descriptive statistic was used to show the means and standard deviations, moreover repeated measurements ANOVA was used to identify learners' performance and to stimulate them with interaction of their proficiency level to measure that whether or not the proficiency variable impacts on their performance on vocabulary recognition. Each learner was required to complete the questions by answering the multi-choice tests.

Data Analysis

To analyze, the data obtained through using One-way repeated measurement ANOVA to compare the results of the three factors (root words, single affixes, and double affixes) and its interaction with proficiency test.

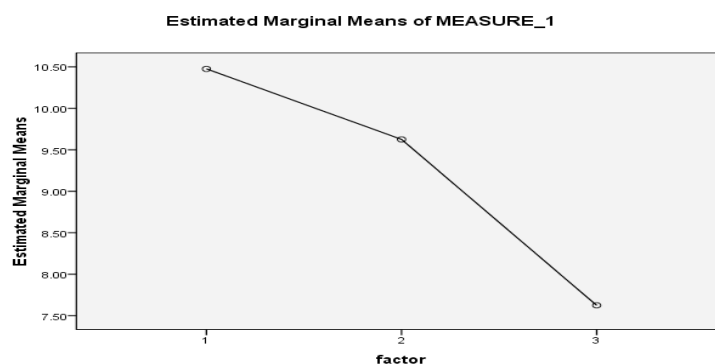
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results showed that EFL intermediate students in Qazvin Province performed weak in their tests. It can be concluded that use of various vocabulary learning strategies particularly word-formation strategy was not very common among the students. To determine to what extent the learners perform better the tests and answer the research question, the mean scores and standard deviation were calculated (Table 1)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on Intermediate vocabulary performance

Descriptive Statistics				
	proficiency	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
root	intermediate	10.4750	2.94381	40
single affix	intermediate	9.6250	3.20806	40
Double affix	intermediate	7.6250	3.49863	40

Table 1, indicates that the highest mean on the vocabulary test belongs to the root words followed by the single affixes words. The double affixes words have the lowest mean. The graphical representation of the results (Graph 1) shows the differences among the number of affixes more conspicuously.



Graph 1: Performance of the participants regarding different numbers of affixes

In order to see whether or not the differences among the numbers of affixes are statistically significant, the one way Repeated Measures ANOVA procedure was run. The results are given in Table 2.

Table 2: The results of the one way Repeated Measures ANOVA

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
factor	171.267	2	85.633	22.869	.000	.370
Sphericity Assumed	171.267	1.463	117.068	22.869	.000	.370
Greenhouse-Geisser	171.267	1.506	113.747	22.869	.000	.370
Huynh-Feldt	171.267	1.000	171.267	22.869	.000	.370
Lower-bound	171.267	1.000	171.267	22.869	.000	.370

Based on Table 2, since the F-value is statistically significant ($F= 85.633, p < .05$), we can safely claim that there are significant differences among the effects of different aspects of vocabulary learning. Thus, the first null hypothesis is rejected. Partial Eta Squared shows that 37 percent of the total variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable ($\eta^2 = .41$).

Discussion

The present study attempted to investigate the effect of the number of affixes on intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary learning, including root, single affix, and double affixes in EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The findings showed that there were significant differences among the above-mentioned number of affixes of word knowledge during EFL learners' vocabulary learning and it has positive effects on vocabulary learning. In other words, by learning words with different number of affixes, learners can perform better in vocabulary learning while it can be seen that when learners are at the intermediate level, their proficiency for learning words with single and double affixes are very low from root words so they answer root words better in their tests.

The results were the same as the research done by Sahbazian (2004). She explored vocabulary learning strategies of 934 Turkish EFL undergraduate students through interview and questionnaire; students were studying at different universities in Istanbul. According to him, vocabulary learning for most Turkish learners followed more traditional rote memorization pattern that involved many mnemonic techniques.

The results of the current study were congruent with the results of Sarani and Kafipour (2008). According to their results, medium use of strategies by Iranian students was due to their slight awareness of the vocabulary learning strategies.

There is no study based on the effect of the number of affixes on vocabulary learning, but lots of studies have been carried out on the impact of affixation on vocabulary, like studies of Graves and Hammond's (1980), who reported that learning prefixes are very good because there are few prefixes with constant meaning, spelling and they are used in a large number of words. Likewise, Nation (1990), Bauer and Nation (1993), who believe that one of the most popular strategies supported by many researchers is using affix knowledge. Furthermore, Nourie and Davidson (1992), who found that in addition to contextualization, or indirect instruction, another powerful vocabulary teaching and learning method is structural analysis of word parts.

The findings of the present study are also in accordance with the findings of Schmitt and McCarthy (1997), who reported that using word parts can be very useful in teaching ESL learners how to attack new words constructing solid vocabulary. Armbruster, et al. (2001) hold that knowing some common affixes (prefixes and suffixes), root words, and base words can increase students' power to learn the meanings of many new words. The sense of curiosity toward the word parts and segments is very important. This finding also supports Laufer's (2005) finding that focus on form of the vocabulary is an effective and essential component of instruction in vocabulary learning.

The results of the present study are in line with those of Nakayama (2008), who reported that systematic teaching of prefix knowledge is effective for learners who do not have prefix knowledge at the beginning. Moreover, this finding is similar to the finding of Davoudi and Yousefi (2009), who reported that fundamental elements of vocabulary are suffixes, prefixes, and roots of words which are common to many English words. Suffixes and prefixes cannot stand on their own as words.

The results are also in line with those of Sadeghi, et al. (2011), who found that the word formation strategy on vocabulary learning of Iranian Intermediate EFL students has positive effect. Hence, the students who received the special treatment with word formation strategy performed much better than the students who were instructed with conventional strategies.

Tahlah and Karavi (2012) investigated the learners' background knowledge of English vocabulary with affixes, effectiveness of explicit instruction on the use of affixation in vocabulary learning and also the learners' satisfaction of explicit affixation instruction with students of the two groups: control and experimental group. The findings show that the learners' background knowledge of English vocabulary with affixes in both groups was at low level and was not significantly different; the explicit affixation instruction could enhance the learners' knowledge of English vocabulary and the learners' overall satisfaction of the explicit affixation instruction was at the high level. This study indicates that the explicit affixation instruction not only can help students improve their English vocabulary learning, but it also enhances learners' satisfaction on English vocabulary development.

On the other hand, the findings of the present study are in contrast to those of Su (2005), who found that intermediate students used more learning strategies than other proficiency level students. One of the reasons may be participants' level of language proficiency. Another reason could be attributed to the participants' background knowledge.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The learning of English vocabulary is the basis of language learning, just as the root for an edifice. And affixation provides us with a good perspective to enlarge vocabulary. Hence, mastering the formation rules of affixation is indispensable to enlarge vocabulary easily, productively and effectively, and also learners are not supposed to learn English words only by rote but sum up some learning skills. Then, affixation is such a useful way.

As the results reveal, the level of students has a significant effect on students' performance. Intermediate students are not more aware with single affix and double affixes, their performance are weak and the more the number of affixes the less learners are successful. Thus, tentatively it can be said that the explicit instruction of affixation in terms of the number of affixes can be regarded as an effective method for students who are lack of English vocabulary knowledge. It is an appropriate method helps learners improve their English vocabulary development.

For those who are interested in conducting research in this area, the following areas are suggested:

This study was conducted on the effect of affixation in terms of their numbers on vocabulary learning, so further research can be conducted on the effect of other variables on vocabulary learning. In addition, the impact of using the effect of number of affixation instruction by applying word games can be another area of research. Further investigation may look into the effect of affixation on other language skills such as writing, speaking, or listening; these can be subjects for future studies. Moreover, as Bauer and Nation (1993) suggest, the knowledge of root forms has a possibility of affecting the results of this study. Thus, further studies are required to clarify the effect of root form knowledge on systematic learning affixes. Last but not least, this study can be conducted to explore the effects of the number of affixes on active or passive vocabulary performance of EFL learners.

Limitations of the study

This research, like the majority of educational studies, suffers from certain limitations which have to be taken into consideration:

1. This study focused on vocabulary knowledge and other language skills and other components (speaking, writing, etc.) were not of concern here.
2. Aspects such as participants' interests, language background and some other factors influence the findings of the study and caution should be taken into consideration in generalizing the results.
3. The number of words selected to be worked on was limited because of practicality deliberations. So, care must be exercised in generalizing the finding beyond their proper limits.

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