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Exploring the Affix Knowledge of EFL Students in Taiwan

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Abstract

Affix knowledge plays a vital role in reading and vocabulary development (Nagy et al., 1993). Language learners may develop their affix knowledge by exposure to vocabulary or reading. However, little is known about the development affix knowledge by EFL high school students. The purpose of this study aims to investigate EFL students' affix knowledge and attempts to discover the order of affix acquisition in the L2 learning process. Tests of affix knowledge were administered to one of the high schools in Taiwan. The results showed 48.8% accuracy average for the EFL students' affix knowledge. In particular, students' performance on suffix knowledge was greater than their performance on prefix. This finding further revealed that EFL students have better awareness of suffixes in their English learning. In addition, students' affix knowledge could be ranked by order of the facility value. Based on the findings, several pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: affix, prefix, suffix

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I. Introduction

According to the survey, second language acquisition is related to psychology, cognitive ability and education. L2 learners expend a lot of effort to understand how second language vocabulary can be acquired under different learning situations. In addition, the methods of memorizing the lexicon of L2 should be considered, such as note taking, wordlist, or applying affix knowledge. We have noticed that affix knowledge plays a significant part in reading and vocabulary development. It helps learners train themselves when seeing new vocabulary, to speculate the meaning and eventually to understand the deeper meaning of the vocabulary and moreover to associate it with synonym and antonyms. It would be difficult for learners to learn second language without complete understanding of their mother tongue. In a classroom setting, teachers may focus on affix knowledge for vocabulary development. They assist our knowledge of derivation by teaching prefixes and suffixes. Accordingly, knowing the knowledge of affix development seems to be of great importance for researchers and learners, because it might shed light on the process of vocabulary acquisition and reading in a second language setting.

Vocabulary is an important element in learning a second language. The L2 studies show that there could be strong relationship between affix knowledge and vocabulary knowledge or size (Tyler & Nagy, 1989). In addition, the study by Schmitt and Mara (1997) indicates that affix acquisition is frequently and useful for the L2 learner's knowledge of vocabulary. The purpose of this study, as a result, attempts to investigate how the affix knowledge effects vocabulary development. Also, it is important to point out the connection between affix acquisition and second language learning.

II. Literature Review

Tyler and Nagy (1989) suggested that L1 learners learn different affixes for every section. During elementary school, L1 learners expand on a basic knowledge for discerning stems or bases for derivation. During junior high school; they have to reinforce their knowledge of the syntactic usage of derivational suffixes. In addition, L1 learners have been continue to develop their knowledge of significant affixes before entering university. Even so, L2 learners acquire less affix knowledge during their development. There are some different opinions between vocabulary knowledge as well as vocabulary size and general language proficiency that many studies have attempted to explore their interrelationship. Schmitt and Mara (1997) measured

learner's suffix and word association knowledge in productive tasks. In addition to Schmitt and Mara (1997) study, Mochizuki (1998a) has another empirical study of L2 learner's affix knowledge. Mochizuki (1998a) and Schmitt and Meara (1997) used different methods to measure affix knowledge. Mochizuki (1998a) investigated 82 English affixes, including 26 prefixes and 56 suffixes from Umeda's (1983) lists of important prefixes.

Even if Schmitt and Meara(1997) provided the first empirical data of L2's study that accounts for interrelationship between different types of word knowledge and shows that an interrelationship occurs between affixes and word association, whereas, the study only limited to 14 suffixes and no prefixes word. This study only showed a limited range for L2 learner's affix knowledge. Mochizuki (1998a) did a better job of investigation and representation of affix system learning, but there still have some problems in his study. One is that familiar words were used as examples for prefixes, so that subjects were able to know the meaning. Another was that low frequency words were chosen as examples for suffixes so that the subjects might recognize word meaning instead of suffix knowledge. Consequently, this research design would have impacts the prefixes and the word classes of suffixes of the meaning for subject's identification.

III. Methods

III.1 Instrumentation and procedure

According to the research questions, this study is conducted by one test. It was about exploring the affix knowledge based on the study of EFL students in middle school of Taiwan. There are two parts of questions in the questionnaire, and there are fifteen prefixes and thirteen suffixes included in both criteria. For a prefix item, students who did this study have to choose the best answer of four choices per question. For suffix items, they have to identify which part of speech is true. These four choices are noun, verb, adjective, and adverb, respectively. In terms of statistical analysis, we can discover how much did EFL students knew about this affix knowledge test.

III.2 Subjects

The subjects taking part in this study were 100 high school students in central. These high school students who answer this study have learned English school at least six years and studied in middle of Taiwan. Moreover, all of these students are

choosing from random sampling.

IV. Results and Discussions

Table 1 Affixes knowledge of EFL high school students

N=100	Prefixes	%	Suffixes	%	Affixes	%
M	6.47	43.1%	7.22	55.5%	13.69	48.8%
S.D.	3.41		3.18			

Note. N = Number, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, * $p < .01$

The results of the affix knowledge test are shown in Table 1. It was found that the subjects knew 6.47 out of 15 prefixes and 7.22 out of 13 suffixes on average. In addition, the results showed that the average of the EFL students' affix knowledge was with 48.8% accuracy. In particular, students' performance on suffix knowledge with 55.5% accuracy was greater than their performance on prefix with 43.1% accuracy. This finding further revealed that EFL students have better awareness of suffixes in their English learning. In addition, students' affix knowledge could be ranked order by the facility value, as shown in Figure 1 and 2 provide an accuracy order of prefixes and suffixes in the affix knowledge test. In terms of prefixes, more subjects realized the meaning of *Re-*, *Pre-*, *Bene-* and *Para-*, which were better than *Mal-*, *Syn-*. As for suffixes, *-ation*, *-er*, and *-ous*, subjects respond more correctly than *-ate*, *-ize*, and *-al*, which in turn was more correct than *-ify*. Under such condition, these accuracy orders could be potentially viewed as an acquisition order of prefixes and suffixes and assumed that affixes known by more learners are acquired earlier than those known by fewer.

According to Figure 1, it can be observed that the prefix, *Re-*, was frequently known by the subjects. For example: *reduce*, *repeat*, *recur* and so on. In Figure 2, the suffix, *-ation*, was frequently known by the subjects. It was suggested that teachers could apply verb suffixes skills to their teaching. Furthermore, most adverbs belong to *-ly*, so there are few questions in the statistic. Compared with two statistics, the order of suffix accuracy is higher than that of prefix accuracy one. The words of these suffixes are more than words of these prefixes. Even if one knows a word of prefix, one can't understand what it means. However, if you know a word that is a noun, you may find others verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

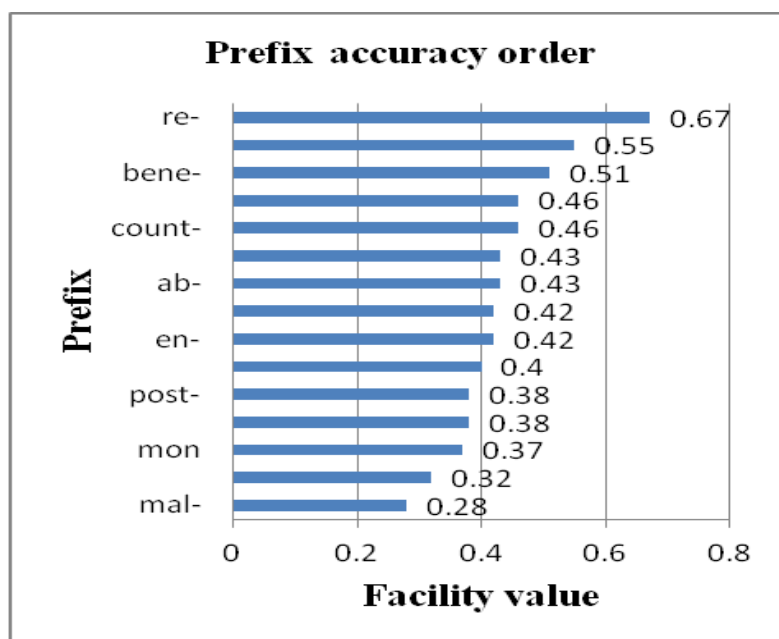


Figure 1 Prefix accuracy order

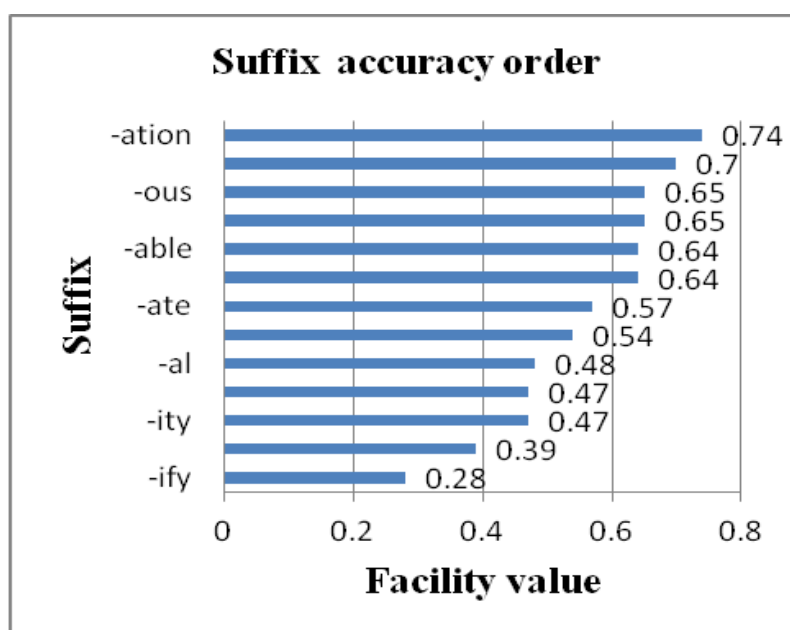


Figure 2 Suffix accuracy order

V. Conclusion

According to information, second language learners did not do quite well on affix knowledge. The results also showed there would be a tendency of order in the affix knowledge test. In the prefix test, students in senior high school have more understanding of the words of begin of “re”, but they are not familiar with the words

of begin of “mal”. In the suffix test, they know well of the suffix“-ation”, but they have little awareness of “-ify”. Obviously, students did the suffix test better than the prefix test. It means that they understand the part of speech better than the affixes. ESL learners’ knowledge of English affixes was found to be insufficient. Teachers make more effort on the recognition of speech. The identification of prefix and suffix were often ignored. If learners would like to learn second language, they must make great effort in vocabulary. Either the students want to perform well in the test. L2 learner should focus on many aspects. Moreover, the vocabulary includes the affix knowledge as well as the part of speech. Being recognized the most efficient way of learning English is divided the word into prefix, suffix and root. Besides, they can remember the meaning of words that come from it and the meaning of it. In addition, they can find the prefixes from which language and you can use the examples to help you to enhance memory. Even though they don’t know the vocabulary they can separate it and comprehend it. Using this way, you can do less work and the performance will be better. Students should learn more affixes to improve their second language ability. The affix development benefits the vocabulary learning because the vocabulary is one of the important parts on second language learning, learners greatly know the affix then they will learn vocabulary well. Learning the second language is not an easy work. You may not learn yourself in the process. Therefore, learners have to find the appropriate method in their learning.

In this study, it might show pedagogical implications. To begin with, it is about the ESL teacher’s teaching. In Taiwan, ESL teacher seldom mention affix knowledge in English teaching. Compared with prefix, teachers have emphasized on suffix, because suffix can help students to recognize word’s speech. In addition, ESL teachers should more speak of prefix .Prefix help students to be more easily to learn vocabulary. Finally, teachers should teach students affix systematically. It can make students intent in studying English.

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