Morphological Awareness and Vocabulary Development among Senior Secondary Two (II) Students in Ibadan Metropolis

By

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Abstract

The study investigated senior secondary school II students' morphological awareness and vocabulary development in English in Ibadan North East and Lagelu Local Government Areas of Oyo State. Five research questions were answered in the study. Participants were 200 students from four schools in the area. The survey research design was adopted in the study. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentage, and t-test. Findings showed that students' awareness of morphological principles is high and Students' application of morphology in writing is low. There was no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing. The study also revealed that there was no significant difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles. It was also revealed that there was a significant difference between students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development. Based on the findings, discussions, conclusions and recommendations were made on how to improve students' vocabulary development through morphological awareness in English.

Introduction

Morphology is the principle of language that accounts for word formation. It helps word meaning processes. It is a principle that is accountable to every language whether indigenous or foreign. Students are therefore expected to learn and master the morphological principles like inflections– a suffix added to a word to indicate tense, number, possession or comparison; derivations– the process of creating a new word out of an old word usually by adding a prefix or a suffix, and compounding– the combination of lexical categories that consists of nouns, adjectives, verbs or prepositions. These principles cover topics like parts of speech, synonyms, antonyms, vocabulary building, reading comprehension etc. It is because of the importance of these principles that the topics are included in the curriculum of English Language in secondary schools.

Closely related to morphology is vocabulary development, a logical sequence from the application of the principles of morphology which promotes word formation in English. Similarly, adequate provision has been made in the curriculum on English to reflect vocabulary development. As Wilkins (1972) asserts, "without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". According to Anglin, Miller, and Wakefield (1993), word knowledge makes language production as well as language comprehension possible. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the language skills crucial for fluent language use (Nation, 1993). The research literature in vocabulary learning in a second language (L2) has revealed the importance of acquisition of vocabulary to function in the language (Duin and Graves, 1987; Walker, Greenwood, Hart

and Carta, 1994; Nation, 2001; Read, 2004; Tschirner, 2004; Zimmerman, 2005).

The English language curriculum contains different sections namely: vocabulary, lexis and structure, writing, comprehension, summary, and grammatical structures. There is no way any one of this could be taught without a mention of morphology and morphological principles. Thus, several years after the introduction of the curriculum, students are expected to have been exposed to morphological principles and then be taught how to apply them in order to be able to cope with the subject, English Language. Not only coping with it in terms of using it but also using it to write and pass their exams. But over the years, there have been complaints on students' competence in the use of English. These complaints cuts across their knowledge and application of the several principles that could help them to learn the language better.

Efforts have been made by researchers to examine the problems that students face in the English language and how they can be helped to overcome them. Some of the problems identified are strategies of teaching, quality of teaching personnel, absence of materials, and students' poor attitude to the subject. In spite of this however, students still demonstrate gross inefficiency in the use of the subject as a result of which it has become inevitable to examine the structure of the language itself.

Several years after the introduction of vocabulary in the curriculum, it is clear that students have challenges with being aware of morphological processes and applying them in building words. One of the most obvious weaknesses of students seems to lie in the area of morphology. Students face problems in the areas of prefixes and suffixes where they represent 60% of total grammar mistakes in language committed by the students (Jalaluddin, Awal, and Bakar, 2008). Students face problems with affixes such as plural inflection: -s, -es and -ies; adverbs: -ly and comparatives and superlatives: -er and -est (Jalaluddin, et al., 2008). Secondly, spelling errors occur due to inappropriate use of derivational morphology in written English. For examples, base (e.g., noise and breeze), and derived (e.g., noisy and breezy) forms (Jalaluddin et al., 2008).Feldman (1993) argues that learners are less competent in derivatives than inflections and compound words because of the large number of derivational affixes. Carlisle and Fleming (2003) mention that there is a large number of derivational affixes in English:

adjective-to-noun: -ness(*slow* → *slowness*);
adjective-to-verb: -ise(*modern* → *modernise*);
adjective-to-adjective: -ish(*red* → *reddish*);
adjective-to-adverb: -ly(*personal* → *personally*);
noun-to-adjective: -al(*recreation* → *recreational*);
noun-to-verb: -fy(*glory* → *glorify*);
verb-to-adjective: -able(*drink* → *drinkable*);
verb-to-noun (abstract): -ance(*deliver* → *deliverance*);
verb-to-noun (agent): -er(*write* → *writer)*

These derivational affixes constitute a major source or problem to students when they need to apply them.

Specifically, derived forms often involve phonological or/and orthographic changes (e.g., decideand decision), and adding a derivational affix to a base word usually leads to change of the meaning, and sometimes the grammatical category, of the base form. In addition, derivation is also constrained by the grammatical category of a base word (Zhang and Koda, 2013). Jalaludin et al. (2008), Muhamad, Ahama, MEngku, Sarudin, Abdul, and Abdul. (2013) as well as Rizan, Mohd, Stapa, Omar, Aziz, and Darus (2012) agree that

Malaysian students generally make morphology-related errors (affixes) especially in derivations: noun and adjective. According to them, prefixes and suffixes represent more than half of the total grammar mistakes in vocabulary committed by the students. As a result, the lack of morphological knowledge among the local ESL learners contributes to the weaknesses and inability to acquire English vocabulary (Jalaluddin et al., 2008). Also, a research carried out on Morphological Errors in the English usage of some Nigerian Learners: Causes and Remedies by Akande (2005) shows that the level of competence of Nigerian SSS pupils in English morphology is very low. His work contains actual morphological errors that were encountered by SSII students in Ondo and Osun states of Nigeria, the errors were subdivided into: Affixation-related errors, Compound-related errors, morphological errors resulting from the wrong pronunciation of the plural and tense morphemes, and conversion related errors. Akande (2005) realized that such errors are a result of their under-developed linguistic awareness and their limited knowledge of derivational morphemic rules. Kaweera (2013) on the other hand, argues that it would be an ongoing concern among researchers if this problem is not dealt with care.

Schmitt (1997) examined the use of learning strategies as one means to foster the development of L2 vocabulary knowledge. These learning strategies include Memory Strategies (MEM), Social Strategies (SOC), Cognitive Strategies (COG), Metacognitive Strategies (MET) and Determination Strategies (DET). Morin, 2003; Chang, Wagner, Muse, Chow, and Shu; 2005; and Schiff and Calif, 2007) have also suggested that use of morphological cues for inferring meaning can help L2 learning. Pikulski and Templeton (2004) show that teachers can help students to develop their vocabulary through reading by using "instructional" read-aloud method; providing direct instruction in the meanings of clusters of words and individual words; systematically teaching students the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, and root words; linking of spelling instruction to reading and vocabulary instruction.; teaching the effective, efficient, realistic use of dictionaries, thesauruses, and other reference works; teaching, modelling, and encouraging the application of a word-learning strategy; encouraging wide reading; creating a keen awareness of and a deep interest in language and words.

Of all the methods and strategies listed, it can be said that the systematic teaching of students the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, and root words is hardly carried out by teachers. This strategy seems to be crucial in developing students' vocabulary. Some factors can be responsible for this lack of morphological awareness among senior secondary school students in the study area. One problem may be as a result of negligence on the part of teachers. Morphological principles are in the current SSII English syllabus, topics like prefixes and affixes are contained in the syllabus. Also, the current West African Senior School Certificate Examination syllabus in its structure contains 'The patterns of changes in word-forms which indicate number, tense, degree, etc.', and this is in line with morphology. The process by which words are formed in English is known as morphology (Kolawole and Adelabu, 2006). From the WASSCE syllabus, it can be inferred that students are expected to already know the patterns of changes in word-forms which is part of the structure in the syllabus. Some of the recommended textbooks for senior secondary II like Intensive English and New Concept

English contain topics on prefix and suffix.

Also, there are some textbooks for senior secondary schools which richly deals on Morphological processes, some of them are: A Basic Text on Use of English by Kolawole and Adelabu, Gateway to the use of English for Schools and Colleges by Akano, English Grammar and Lexis and Structure for Senior Secondary schools and Higher Institutions, volume 2 by Adekunle etc., which should be recommended for senior secondary schools. Having been made aware of the fact that recommended textbooks for SS2 and other textbooks some of which have already been mentioned contain topics on morphological processes, it should be assumed that students' morphological awareness is high in Nigeria but the reverse seems to be the case and this automatically affects students' vocabulary development. The problem therefore may largely depend on negligence on the part of teachers to effectively teach these topics and also the problem of incompetency to teach topics associated with morphology.

Since one cannot allow these problems that result in lack of morphological awareness among some students in secondary schools to remain unresolved, it becomes imperative to conduct a study of this nature which seeks to examine morphological awareness and vocabulary development among senior secondary school students.

Statement of the Problem

Morphological awareness enables students to develop in their vocabulary, but studies show that students are weak in their vocabulary. However, little research has been done on the effect of morphological awareness in the study area as a result of which students have problems in applying morphological principles in their vocabulary development. Similarly, when teachers teach vocabulary development, they hardly link it up with morphology. Hence, the benefit that students should have derived from that knowledge and application is lost. But research has shown that both morphological processes and vocabulary acquisition are closely interrelated and therefore need to be taught. Study in response to the said existing in literature sought to examine morphological awareness and vocabulary development among senior secondary II student in Ibadan metropolis.

Research questions

R Q1: To what extent are SS2 students aware of morphological principles?
R Q2: To what extent do S.S 2 students apply their knowledge of morphology in writing?

Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing.
Ho_2: There is no significant difference between science and art students' application of morphological principles.
Ho_3: There is no significant difference between S.S 2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development.

Significance of the study

The results of this research are expected to provide insightful evidence of how to improve vocabulary instruction through morphological awareness in senior secondary schools. This in itself will improve students' vocabulary building via writing. The study will also help Teachers of English language to easily detect the exact reason behind a student's poor vocabulary development and proffer a right solution to it. The study will also improve the syllabus of senior secondary II; morphology as a topic can be included in their syllabus and its features properly looked into and taught by their teachers.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of this study comprised all the Senior Secondary II students in private secondary schools in Ibadan North and Lagelu Local Government Areas, Oyo State. A total of two hundred (200) S.S II students of four private schools were randomly selected from four schools in Ibadan North East and Lagelu Local Government Areas. At least 50 copies of questionnaire were administered to the students in each school.

An achievement test titled "Test on students' Awareness and Application of Morphological principles" is used to collect data from S.S.II students. The instrument contains six (6) sections; section A, B, C, D, E, and F. Section A sought information on the demographic data of the respondent, section B contains basic questions on morphological awareness, and section C contains questions on students' knowledge and use of inflection. Section D contains questions on knowledge and use of derivation, section E contains questions on knowledge and use of compound words while section F contains questions on use of vocabulary. Items in B, C, D, and E are scored one mark each giving an overall total of 70 marks which is finally converted to 100%. The instrument was validated and the internal consistency of the instrument using Spearman-Brown yielded a value of 0.80. The researcher purposively selected 50 students in each school and gave them copies of the test to answer. This was done under the supervision of the researcher and the copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot. At least, 50 copies were administered to the students in each school and 50 copies were also retrieved from each of the schools.

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages. The T-test was used to analyse the difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing, the difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles and the difference between students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development.

Results

The results are presented in the tables below.

Research Question 1: To what extent are SS2 students aware of morphological principles?

Table 1 Students Awareness of Morphological Principles

Students Score on Awareness of Morphological Principles	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Not at All (1-39)	33	16.5%	82.04	12.360
A little Extent (40-49)	1	.5%		
Some Extent (50-59)	3	1.5%		
A great extent (60-100)	163	81.5%		
TOTAL	**200**	**100%**		

Table 1 presents students' awareness of morphological principles. It shows that 33 (16.5%) of the students are not aware of morphological principles, 1 (.5%) of the students is aware to a little extent, 3 (1.5%) of the students are aware to some extent while 163 (81.5%) of the students are aware to a great extent. The mean score is 82.04 and standard deviation is 12.360. This implies that SS2 students are aware of morphological principles to a great extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent do SS2 students apply their knowledge of morphology in writing?

Table2: Students' Application of Knowledge of Morphology in Writing

Students Score on Application of Knowledge of Morphology in Writing	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Not at All (1-39)	43	21.7%	47.74	14.234
A little Extent (40-49)	64	32.%		
Some Extent (50-59)	40	20%		
A great extent (60-100)	51	25.8%		
TOTAL	**198**	**100%**		

Table 2 presents students application of knowledge of morphology in writing. It shows that 43 (21.7%) of the students do not apply knowledge of morphology in writing. It further shows that 64 (32%) of the students apply knowledge of morphology in writing to a little extent. Still, 40 (20%) of the students apply the knowledge of morphology in writing to some extent while 51 (25%) of the students apply the knowledge of morphology in writing to a great extent. The mean score is 47.74 and standard deviation is 14.234. This implies that SS2 students can apply their knowledge of morphology in writing to a little extent.

Analysis of Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis of Difference between Male and Female Students' Application of Morphology in Writing

Variable		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	DF	Sig.	Remarks
Gender	Male	91	81.12	12.950	-.961	198	.231	Not Significant
	Female	109	82.81	11.850				
Application of morphology								

sig. P < .05

Table 3 shows the difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing. It shows that there is no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing ($t = -.961$; $df = 198$; $p > .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that gender does not influence students' application of morphology in writing.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis of Difference between Science and Arts Students' application of Morphological Principles

Variable		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	DF	Sig.	Remarks
Class	Science	103	84.77	10.280	3.294	198	.067	Not Significant
	Arts	97	79.14	13.709				
Application of morphology								

Table 4 shows the difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles. It shows that there is no significant difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles ($t = 3.294$; $df = 198$; $p > .05$). Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that students' class does not influence students' knowledge and application of morphological principles.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development.

Table 5: Summary of t-test Analysis of Difference between SS2 Students' Awareness of Morphological Principles and their Vocabulary Development

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	DF	Sig.	Remarks
Awareness of morphological principles	198	82.24	12.235	35.024	197	.000	Significant
Vocabulary development	198	47.74	14.234				

Table 5 shows the difference between SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development. It shows that there is a significant difference between SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development ($t = 35.024$; $df = 197$; $p < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that students' awareness of morphological principles influence their vocabulary development.

Discussion of findings

Findings from the study showed that respondents have a very high awareness of morphological principles. From the result of the analysis, students generally are very much aware of morphological principles. This shows that morphological components like root words, prefix, suffix, compounds, etc. are properly taught in schools.

Findings reveal that students' application of morphological knowledge in writing was poor. Kuo and Anderson (2006) believe that morphological awareness can make students more aware of the writing system by recognising spelling…. Since the students who are very much aware of morphology are poor in their writing, it then likely means that the students have not been taught on how their knowledge of morphological principles can aid their writing. Therefore, proper teaching of students on how to use their morphological knowledge in writing will help in improving their writing.

Findings on Male and Female students' application of morphology in

writing reveals that there is no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing. This implies that gender does not determine students' application of morphology in writing. Although male students' mean score is lower than their female counterparts, this difference is not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$). This could probably be because most of the females appeared to be more relaxed and calm than the males. This finding is in agreement with the seminal paper by Newman-Ford, Lloyd and Thomas (2009) who showed that gender had only minor impacts upon educational achievement. It also agrees with educational psychology literature that deals with general differences in intellectual and cognitive abilities [which] indicate that, overall, no significant gender difference is apparent in measures of general intelligence (e.g. Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974).

Findings on Science and Arts students' Application of Morphological Principles reveal that there was no significant difference between Science and Arts students' application of morphological principles. Although Arts students' mean score is lower than science students' mean score, the difference is not statistically significant ($p>0.05$).

Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference between SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development. The difference is very significant; ($p < .05$) and the value of $p = .000$. This implies that students' vocabulary development depends on their morphological knowledge. This is in line with what some researchers said. For instance, Kuo and Anderson (2006) found that morphological knowledge is closely correlated with vocabulary. KooshaMansour and SalimianMohsen (2011) has shown that there is a significant relationship between overall morphological knowledge and vocabulary knowledge in Iranian pre-university students.

Summary of findings

The major findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles was high.
2. Students' application of morphology in writing is low.
3. There was no significant difference between male and female students' application of morphology in writing.
4. There was no significant difference between science and arts students' application of morphological principles.
5. There was a significant difference between SS2 students' awareness of morphological principles and their vocabulary development.

Conclusion

The poor use of vocabulary among secondary school students and the belief that morphological awareness can be a solution to this problem necessitated this study. Studies have shown that morphological awareness is a key to students' vocabulary development, and studies have also shown that students' vocabulary development in secondary schools is poor which means that the extent of their morphological awareness determines their vocabulary development. Although the vocabulary development of students from this research work is low, their morphological awareness is high. Students need to be properly taught on how to improve on their vocabulary through their awareness of morphology.

Therefore, the English language teachers' role here is indispensable. The success of students in their vocabulary performance greatly lies in them. There is a need for teachers to enlighten students on how their awareness of

morphology can aid them in their writing because one thing is to be aware of morphological principles and another thing is to know how to apply them correctly especially as it relates to vocabulary development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in line with the findings of the study.

1. The role of teachers in the teaching of English Language cannot be over emphasized. They play a very crucial role in determining the extent of students' competence and performance in English language. Students can improve on the four basic language skills (Listeining, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) if they are well drilled on how to develop their vocabulary. Morphology should be taught as a distinct component of a vocabulary improvement program in senior secondary schools but should also be related to semantics. Teachers should teach students how to use morphology to build students' vocabulary and also teach students the meaning of the different types of bound morphemes. This will prevent students' awareness of morphological principles from being vague in meaning. Teachers should give students practical examples on how morphological principles can be used to aid students vocabulary development. Also, teachers should attend seminars, workshops, short term courses and also read recent textbooks and reference books in order to be current with new linguistic development and pedagogical innovations. Teachers should be creative when teaching their students; they should be eclectic in their method of teaching and should also create a conducive learning environment for their students which can motivate the students extrinsically towards learning.
2. Curriculum designers should include 'Morphology' as a topic to be taught in senior secondary schools. They should also relate it with meaning. When students are taught the meaning of inflections, derivations and compounds in relation to their vocabulary, it will increase their performance in vocabulary and will also influence their performance in English Language as a whole.
3. Parents/Guardians should make efforts to provide students with all relevant academic materials and a conducive environment that will boost learners' performance in English Language and also in their other subjects.
4. The ministry of education should ensure that secondary school teachers attend public workshops, seminars, and conferences that stress and address the relevance of morphology to vocabulary development in writing.
5. English language learners in a formal school should attend the English lessons punctually and regularly, participate effectively in all the learning activities and also cultivate the habit of extensive and intensive writing not just for experience but for language development.

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