



**THE DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGICAL
AWARENESS AMONG MALAYSIAN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINEES: A LINGUISTIC
ANALYSIS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Learning a second language requires a lot of effort as the new language might possess distinct features which require the users to cautiously consider the most suitable linguistic rules and features. The ability to consider the rules is affected by the acquisition of language skills, especially the awareness on linguistic areas. Sufficient amount of awareness especially, will be helpful in assisting the language users make informed decisions when using linguistic features. This study focuses on a type of linguistic awareness; the morphological awareness and specific attention is given to derivational forms; the suffixes. Kieffer and Lesaux's (2007) definition of derivational morphological awareness as well as Tyler and Nagy's (1987) derivational knowledge categories have been the theories which guided this present study. The respondents of this study were 44 Malaysian English language teacher trainees. It aims to find out their levels of derivational morphological awareness by examining their uses of derivational suffix forms in academic essays as well as their performance in Derivational Suffix Test (DST). In addition, the study employed the Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) in the attempt to gather information on the implicit strategies used to answer the DST. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the varied usage of the derivational suffix forms. The findings indicate that the teacher trainees could significantly perform when they encountered known words but deteriorated performance is observed when they faced unknown, nonsensical words. It can be deduced that derivational knowledge and awareness could be improved by using explicit instructions and giving exposures to language learners. The findings of this study have also unfolded the teacher trainees' level of morphological knowledge and awareness so the results would assist them in making informed decisions of the derivational processes involved as well as in providing pedagogical support when it comes to their turns in instructing future students.

ملخص البحث

إن تعلم لغة ثانية يتطلب الكثير من الجهد حيث إن اللغة الجديدة قد تمتلك سمات مميزة تتطلب من مستخدمي اللغة أخذ القواعد والخصائص اللغوية الأكثر ملاءمة بعين الاعتبار والحذر. وتتأثر قدرة النظر في القواعد باكتساب المهارات اللغوية وخاصة الوعي في المجالات اللغوية. حيث إن الإدراك الكافي بهذه الأمور خاصة سيكون مفيدا في مساعدة مستخدمي اللغة على اتخاذ قرارات مدروسة عند استخدام الخصائص اللغوية. وتركز هذه الدراسة على نوع من الوعي اللغوي خاصة الوعي الصرفي حيث تم إيلاء اهتمام خاص للصيغ الاشتقاقية واللواحق. وقد كان تعريف كييفر و ليزاكس (٢٠٠٧) للوعي الصرفي الاشتقاقي وكذلك درجات المعرفة الاشتقاقية لتايلر وناجي (١٩٨٧) النظريات التي تم الاستناد إليها في هذه الدراسة. وتم أخذ عينة تتكون من ٤٤ معلم لغة إنجليزية متدربا في ماليزيا لهذه الدراسة حيث يهدف البحث إلى معرفة مستويات إدراكهم للاشتقاقات الصرفية من خلال معاينة استخدامهم للصيغ الاشتقاقية الواردة في المقالات الأكاديمية وكذلك من خلال أدائهم في اختبار اللواحق الاشتقاقية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك قامت الدراسة بتوظيف أسلوب التفكير بصوت عال لمحاولة جمع المعلومات حول الإستراتيجيات الضمنية المستخدمة في الإجابة على اختبار اللواحق الاشتقاقية. وتسهم الدراسة في الفهم النظري للاستخدام المتنوع للصيغ الاشتقاقية الواردة وتشير النتائج إلى أن المعلمين المتدربين استطاعوا أن يبلوا بلاء حسنا عندما صادفتهم كلمات مألوفة بينما تدهور أدائهم عندما واجهتهم كلمات غير مألوفة ولا معنى لها. وبذلك يمكن استنتاج أنه يمكن تحسين الإدراك والمعرفة الاشتقاقية من خلال استخدام تعليمات واضحة وإيصالها لمعلمي اللغة. وكذلك كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة عن المستوى الإدراكي والمعرفي الصرفي للمعلمين المتدربين وبالتالي فإن من شأن النتائج أن تساعد في اتخاذ قرارات مدروسة فيما يتعلق بالعمليات الاشتقاقية وتقديم الدعم التربوي عندما يتعلق الأمر بدورهم في إرشاد وتوجيه طلاب المستقبل.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (English Language Studies)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMA	Derivational Morphological Awareness
DST	Derivational Suffix Test
ESL	English as a Second Language
MA	Morphological Awareness
TAP	Think Aloud Protocol

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In becoming a proficient English language user, it is essential for one to be well acquainted with the linguistic features and rules which govern and help make the language meaningful for its speakers. Numerous linguistic features and rules can be found in the English language which requires its speakers, especially the ones who use English as a second language (ESL), to make careful judgment and consideration of their decisions when communicating as these rules can help convey specific intent or content. With the numerous morphological rules attached to the English language, users have no choice but to internalise these rules alongside the structures and rules they have acquired for their first language. A study to examine if the influence of ESL users' first language morphological awareness on the strength of their second language morphological awareness has shown that this seems to be the case especially when the structures of the first language are morphologically transparent (Marinova-Todd, Siegel, & Mazabel, 2013). Acknowledging that there could be many factors that help develop users' proficiency especially in morphological skills, this study however, aims at finding out ESL users' level of awareness, how users decide on the linguistic features and what processes are involved when users produce derivational morphological forms.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The processes that take place in one's mind when making linguistic judgments especially about derivational forms, are challenging. When an ESL user encounters

linguistic features, the process that he goes through is often not expressed, hence making it difficult to be observed, measured, explained and categorised. Questions on what are the considerations involved and how mental operations take place when producing language; specifically when producing derivational morphology forms, have therefore risen. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007, p. 784) have described the process of morphological analysis as “requiring the integration of lexical knowledge of particular derivational suffixes and root morphemes with the metalinguistic ability to recognise these units and dissect them”. What do “recognise these units” and “dissect them” refer to? How does one show his ‘integration of lexical’ knowledge? These questions fascinate and call for studies that can help gauge and provide answers to these questions.

The absence of explicit description that is needed in morphological related features might impede learners’ knowledge of the language that they are learning especially when they are dealing with intricate and unique features of the language. This study therefore, focuses on exploring the different level of capabilities that belong to ESL teacher trainees. Subsequently, this study would attempt at recommending significant actions to help improve the trainees’ levels of morphological awareness in ensuring that ample knowledge will be imparted to their future learners.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings will help to illustrate the different levels of morphological awareness teacher trainees possess as well as the processes they go through when dealing with derivational morphology. Consequently, it is hoped that new insights in the area of derivational morphological awareness are gathered, particularly for trainees who are

going to embark into teaching English. Nam (2010) suggests that lack of vocabulary knowledge could cause an obstacle to language learning, therefore an important emphasis should be given to its teaching as it helps to facilitate students' proficiency in the four skills. Thus, in order to ensure such emphasis could be imparted to the students, this current study is focused on unfolding the teacher trainees' acquisition of morphological knowledge and awareness so that the results would assist the teacher trainees in estimating their own morphological awareness besides making informed decisions of the processes involved as well as in providing support when it comes to their turns in teaching and facilitating future students. Findings of the study would also support the trainers in identifying areas in which the trainees specifically need help. Trainers or programme developers may consider expanding the teaching of morphology-related subjects to the trainees. While there are many areas a teacher-to-be has to master, knowledge of language structure can certainly be useful for these trainees in order to be successful with different ranges of learners later. The findings of the study can also contribute to the body of the theoretical knowledge of the derivational morphological awareness levels. It specifically allows for the current research to look at non-native English language teacher trainees' ability to manipulate the derivational suffix form, recognise connections between them and produce new derived forms.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study involves teacher trainees who are enrolled in the Teaching of English as a Second Language Bachelor's degree programme at the Institute of Teacher Training College for International Languages (IPG-KBA) in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur. The findings of this study, however, could not be generalised to other teacher training

in Malaysia. It can only serve as a representative of the studied area for teacher trainees in the abovementioned context.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- i. identify the derivational morphological forms used by teacher trainees in academic writing.
- ii. identify the accuracy level of derivational morphological forms used by teacher trainees in academic writing.
- iii. find out the teacher trainees' level of derivational morphological awareness.
- iv. identify the correlation between the teacher trainees' use of derivational morphological forms and their levels of derivational morphological awareness.
- v. find out the processes involved in producing derivational morphological forms.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the derivational morphological forms used by teacher trainees in academic writing?
- ii. How accurate is the teacher trainees' usage of derivational morphological forms in academic writing?
- iii. What are the teacher trainees' levels of derivational morphological awareness?

- iv. Is there a correlation between teacher trainees' use of derivational morphological forms and their levels of derivational morphological awareness?
- v. What are the processes used in producing derivational morphological forms?

1.6 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.6.1 Derivational Morphological Forms

In this study, Derivational Morphological Forms refer to the suffixes that are attached to the base words to create derived forms. The suffixes are derivational forms which branch from grammatical morphemes or also known as bound morphemes as they could only be meaningful when they are combined or attached to other words. There are two types of bound morphemes; the inflections as well as the derivations. The inflectional forms only occur as suffixes while the derivational forms can occur in two forms; either as suffixes or prefixes. To maintain focus, this study is only looking at the suffix derivational forms and not the prefixes derivatives. The derivational suffixes, according to Plag (2003), are able to change the part of the speech of the base word. This present study identifies the different uses of derivational suffixes in four most frequently used word classes, which are verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs in the respondents' academic essays.

1.6.2 Derivational Morphological Awareness

Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) define Derivational Morphological Awareness as abilities to manipulate derived words and to recognise connections between different morphological forms of a word as well as the ability to produce new derivations of

known words. In this study, Derivational Morphological Awareness, therefore refers to the respondents' ability to appropriately use the derivational suffixes by recognising the different functions it can bring to the word to produce derived forms. Such abilities are measured by examining the respondents' academic essays; which were written for their Linguistics course. The analysis looks at the use of derivational suffix forms applied in four word classes which are verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Then, respondents were asked to complete a test called Derivational Suffix Test (DST) which has two sections that require the respondents to choose the best derived words to complete the sentences.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THESIS

The first chapter covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, scope of the study, research objectives and research questions. Chapter Two provides the review of the literature related to the study area. It also delivers definitions and insights of related studies. Chapter Three describes the systematic approach employed in the process of data gathering and data analysis. In the fourth chapter, the results of the procedures are presented and discussed. The final chapter highlights the conclusion of the findings, its implications as well as the limitations found in the study. The chapter also provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This section presents reviewed literature on morphological awareness, derivational forms, awareness in language learning, first language transfer, linguistic skills as well as the use of introspection as a method of finding out mental processes through verbalised thoughts.

2.1 MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) refer to morphology as the study of the structure of words, particularly the smallest units of meaning in words, namely morphemes. These morphemes consist of inflectional ones such as *-ed* and *-s* that indicate the tense or number of a word without changing its part of speech as well as derivational morphemes such as *-ity* and *-tion* that when added to bases change a word's part of speech. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007, p. 2) has defined morphological awareness as having the understanding of the word structures which are made of combination of meaningful morphemes.

The knowledge and understanding of inflectional and derivational processes are essential in developing morphological ability and subsequently assisting the vocabulary growth of a language user. The morphological awareness relates closely to users having to cautiously think and be fully aware about the manipulation involved in reading or understanding a word. For example, a morphological process is needed in detecting the meaning of the verb *cooked*, by looking at the morpheme *-ed*, which is added to signify past actions. In addition, there are five different morphological word

types, which are root words, inflected words, derived words, literal compounds or opaque and idiomatic compounds or lexical idioms which add to the richness of the vocabulary acquired by a user (Anglin, 1993 in (Carlisle, 2000)). These types of word are vital in an individual's lexicon and vocabulary growth; therefore, suggesting that conscious considerations have to be made by ESL users in order to understand and produce these words. Even though the importance of the five different morphological forms in human lexicon has been highlighted, this study however, investigates only the derivational suffixes which are used in derived words that have transformed into nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs when the suffixes are added to base words.

2.2 DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS

In the English language, all words could be categorised into lexical or grammatical morphemes. The lexical morphemes are the ones which possess meanings that could stand on its own. As examples, the words '*dog*', '*boy*' or '*big*' are considered as lexical morphemes. Grammatical morphemes, on the other hand, are the ones which often attach itself to other morphemes and help to bring meaning to the attached morphemes. These two types of morphemes could be categorised further into either being free morphemes or bound morphemes which means that there are both free and bound lexical morphemes and there are also both free and bound grammatical morphemes. The free grammatical morphemes comprise of articles, prepositions and conjunctions while the bound ones consist of inflectional and derivational morphemes. For the purpose of this present research, focus is given to only a type of the bound grammatical morphemes; the derivational forms and specifically on the suffixes.

The derivatives could occur as prefixes or suffixes which can help alter the meanings of the words when the derivational forms are attached to the bases. The

alteration of meanings is caused by the different functions each derivative can initiate. The respondents of this present study are English language teacher trainees who can be considered as matured language users of the English language. Therefore, it can be assumed that they are able to identify and distinguish the different types of derivational suffix forms (though the list of the suffixes is extensive) that can be used with different words, subsequently producing new derived words with different meanings. To be able to make meaningful combination of the base words and the derivatives, language users must rely on their knowledge of the original meanings of the base words and more importantly the functions of the different derivatives. The teacher trainees' knowledge is usually developed from their experiences of using the language which is then stored and made available when they encounter the need to form new derived words. Furthermore, the usage frequency of derivational forms by the respondents could also contribute to the development of their awareness of the derivative patterns which then improves their ability to use the derivational forms appropriately.

Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) propose that Derivational Morphological Awareness can be demonstrated by one's ability to manipulate derived words, to recognise connections between different morphological forms of a word, and to produce new derivations of known words. In the same vein, Tyler and Nagy (1987) specifically describe that full knowledge of derivational forms must involve three aspects; lexical semantic, syntactic and distributional knowledge. The description of the three aspects can be referred to in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Categories of Knowledge of Derivational Form (Tyler & Nagy, 1987)

Aspects of Knowledge	Description	Examples
Lexical Semantic	Being able to recognise that words have complex internal structure and that two or more words may share a common morpheme.	<i>Driver</i> is related to <i>drive</i> , while <i>me</i> is not related to <i>meter</i> .
Syntactic	Having the implicit knowledge that different suffixes, when added to bases, may result in different word class.	When <i>-ise</i> is suffixed to <i>trauma</i> , it becomes a verb, but when <i>-ic</i> is suffixed to the same word, it results in an adjective.
Distributional Knowledge	Being able to understand the rules or constraints on the concatenation of stems and suffixes when it comes to derivations.	Suffix <i>-ness</i> can be added to <i>quiet</i> , as <i>quiet</i> is an adjective resulting in <i>quietness</i> , but it is not appropriate when being suffixed to a verb. Therefore, <i>playness</i> is not a correct word.

Source: Tyler and Nagy (1987)

Thus this knowledge is crucial for English language users because these skills could assist them in appropriating their language use which subsequently help them become better and proficient users. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) have discovered that morphological knowledge has been helpful in helping learners with comprehension as well as vocabulary acquisition. They found that learners with greater understanding of morphology have better reading comprehension scores. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) have also suggested that morphology and vocabulary have a reciprocal relationship. Learners who have better understanding of morphology tend to have broader grasp of vocabulary which reciprocally work in helping them improve their morphology understanding. If these are put into this research's perspective, having greater

understanding would definitely be helpful for language users who are in the teaching positions as they are required to impart such important skill to their learners.

2.3 DERIVATIONAL FORMS OF VERBS, NOUNS, ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

For the purpose of this study, focus has been given to verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs as these are the four frequently used word classes. Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002) stress that the ability to use appropriate word forms in grammar context is essential in ensuring the suitability of the grammar in the language used thus indicating that language users must know the appropriate forms to use when he or she is encountering a linguistic need; for instance how *-ion* is added to *prohibit* thus changing the verb into a noun. Specifically, Plag (2003) highlights the four types of suffixes in the English language which are the verbal suffixes, nominal suffixes, adjectival suffixes and adverbial suffixes.

Plag (2003) explains that the verbal suffixes have a limited list with only four suffixes which could be used to derive verbs from other word classes, especially adjectives and nouns. The suffixes are *-ate*, *-en*, *-ify* and *-ize*. Among the examples for how these suffixes are used are *initiate*, *strengthen*, *modify* and *computerize*. A similar attribute that can be noticed from these suffixes is how it helps to derive formations that are causative. Different suffixes are however used due to the different form of the base words, especially phonologically. For example, the suffix *-en* attaches itself to monosyllables that end in a plosive, fricative or affricate while the suffix *-ify* attaches itself to monosyllabic words, to words that are stressed on the final syllable and to words that are stressed on the penult followed by a final syllable ending in unstressed /l/ (Plag, 2003, p. 93).