

ENGLISH WORD FORMATION AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL

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ملخص

ان تشكيل الكلمة بالانجليزية عادة ما تؤخذ على انها من المسلمات من قبل المدرسين والمخططين ، فالكلمات لا تزال تعين لتصنوف (اسم ، فعل ، ظرف ، صفة) بأسلوب يعود الى الفي سنة (ماتيو ١٩٧٤) .

هذه الورقة هدفان : الأول هو مراجعة انباط التشكيل بالكلمة الانجليزية وثانياً لمناقشة الحاجة لتدريس تشكيل الكلمة في اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية .

ABSTRACT

English word-formation is usually taken for-granted by teachers and planners , and words are still assigned to classes (noun , verb , adverb , adjective ...) by a technique which goes back for two millennia (Matthew , 1974) .

This paper has two aims : first to review types of English word-formation and , second , to discuss the need for word-formation teaching in EFL .

Introduction :

EFL course-book designers and planners tend to ignore processes of word-formation . For example : students learn **sunny** as a vocabulary item to describe the weather . However , no exercise is given to explain to the learner that the word **sunny** is formed by **sun** + the suffix -Y .

In this paper , types of English word-formation will be reviewed and the absence and the need for word-formation teaching in EFL will be discussed .

English Word-Formation

English word-formation is generally divided into two main parts (Bauer,1973; Quirk et al 1985) . The first part includes affixation (i.e. prefixation and suffixation), compounding , and conversion ; the second part includes what Bauer calls " unpredictable " formations : clipping , blending , and acronyms .

■ Affixation : An affix is a bound morpheme that occurs before or after or within a base , commonly known as : prefixes , suffixes , and infixes . In English word-formation , infixes do not occur .

- 1 – Prefixes : Prefixes are those bound morphemes that occur before a base as in **prefix** . Prefixes in English are a small class of morphemes , numbering about seventy-five . Their meanings are often those of English prepositions and adverbials .
- 2 – Suffixes : Suffixes are bound morphemes that occur after a base like **failure** , **noisy** , **dreamed**, etc . Unlike prefixes , suffixes frequently alter the word-class . Four main sorts of suffixes are usually distinguished .

a – Suffixes forming nouns :

- From nouns : **kingdom**
- From verbs : **categorization** , **flirtation** , -- etc .
- From adjectives : **militancy** , **excellency** .

b – Suffixes forming verbs :

There are two main suffixes deriving verbs from nouns , **ify** and **ize** as in **purify** **colonize** , — .etc

Another suffix forming verbs is **–en** as in **shorten** , **widen** .

c – Suffixes forming adjectives :

- From nouns : **educational** , **environmental** , **transformational**.
- From verbs : **believable** , **tireless** .
- From adjectives : **greenish** .

Arnoff (1976:21) claims that only nouns , verbs , adjectives , and adverbs can be the product of word formation , and that only these form classes can be used bases in the formation of derivations . Bauer , however (1973:225) argues that the first part of this claim may be true , but there is plenty of evidence that minor form classes can be used as bases in established forms like **downer** , **inness** , **whyness** , etc .

■ Compounding :

A compound is a unit consisting of two or more bases . But this definition is not quite sufficient , since derivational processes may sometimes apply to forms combining more than one base (e.g. **super-high-way**) : In such cases , it is said that the base of the derivational process is a compound but not that the whole lexeme is a compound . A compound , Bauer (1973) suggests , may therefore be more fully defined as a lexeme containing two or more potential stems that has not subsequently been subjected to derivational process . Four major kinds of compounds are generally distinguished in English .

1 – Compound Nouns :

This kind of compounds , which constitutes the rest majority of English components , is obtained by stringing two nouns together . Four kinds of compounds are distinguished within this group .

a – Exocentric Compounds :

This is where the compound is not a hyponym of the grammatical head . For example , **red-skin** where the compound refers to a person rather than to a skin which is red .

b – Endocentric Compounds :

This is where the compound is a hyponym of the grammatical head and informs that , e. g. **armchair** is kind of a chair .

c – Appositive Compounds :

This is where the compound is a hyponym of both the first and the second

element (or grammatical head) , for example **maid servant** is a hyponym of both « maid » and « servant » . The element of appositional compounds , generally marks the sex of person as in **boy -friend**, **woman-doctor** , etc .

d – Copulative Compounds :

This is where the two elements of the compound name separate entities combined to refer to one entity , e.g. **Rank-Hovis** . These are not very common in English .

2 – Compound Verbs :

The majority of compound verbs in English are formed by conversion or by the process known as back formation . That is by subtracting an affix thought to be part of the word . However , verb compounds are rather rare . The different kinds are : noun + verb (**sky–dive**) , verb + verb (**freeze–dry**) , adjective + verb (**soft–land**) , particle + verb (**over–look**) , adjective + noun (**bad–mouth**) , and noun + noun (**breath test**)

3 – Compound Adverbs :

The most common way of forming these is by the suffixation of -ly to a compound adjective .

4 – Compound Adjectives :

These are formed according to a large number of different patterns , e.g. noun + adjective (**space–born**) , verb + adjective (**fail–safe**) , verb + noun (**turn–key**) , adjective + adjective (**bitter–sweet**) , etc .

Conversion :

Conversion is the derivational process whereby an item changes its word-class without the addition of an affix (Quirk, et al. , 1985) . It is an extremely productive way of producing new words of English since there are no morphological restrictions on the forms that can undergo conversion . Conversion seems to be able to produce words of almost any form class (i.e. noun , verb , adjective , adverb) . The major kinds of conversion are : noun

→ verb (a bottle → to **bottle**), **verb** → noun (to call → **call**) and adjective → verb **dirty** → to **dirty** .

Unpredicatable Formations :

These kinds of formation are also termed " oddities " by Arnoff (1976) who points out that many of these types depend on orthography to a certain degree . The most common are :

a – Clipping :

It means cutting off the beginning or the end of a word , or both , leaving a part to stand for a whole . Examples are : **lab** , **dorm** , **prof** , **exam** , **math** , and countless others .

b – Blending :

It is the fusion of two words into one , usually the first part of one word with the part of another as in **gasohol** , from **gasoline** and **alcohol** . The resultant blend partakes of both original meanings .

c – Acronyms :

They are words derived from the initials of several words . They are usually pronounced as the spelling indicates : SALT (for Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) , NATO (for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) etc.

Now that we had an idea about English word formation , let us discuss some of its pedagogical implications for EFL teaching .

English Word Formation And Its Pedagogical Implication for EFL.

Word formation , in grammar books , is usually taken for granted by teachers and planners , and words are assigned to classes (verb , noun , adverb , adjective , etc) .

In EFL , most language teaching materials are derived from grammatical syllabuses which accept the view that language is a

grammatical system and that learning a language consists of learning that system . If we look at the West bank English textbooks , we are struck by the absence and inadequacy of the very few available exercises concerning word formation . The books are packed with structural exercises which make the students memorize the syntax of the language (i.e. clauses , phrases , and sentences) without offering any sort of exercises that help West Bank learners understand how word structures are formed .

As Matthews (1974) put it : " How does one plunge into syntax when one cannot identify and understand the elements whose role and distribution is in question ? It is only in favoured cases , where the morphology is simple or is already thoroughly explored , that a beginner can plunge into syntax " (p.8) . The last twenty years have witnessed the development of new approaches to language teaching and learning i.e. situational ⁽¹⁾ and notional ⁽²⁾ syllabuses . In these approaches , word formation is not considered in the name of communicative language .

According to these new approaches , EFL mainly consists of teaching patterns of social use and how to use them to express meaning . So neither the grammatical syllabuses nor the more recent ones give any importance to word formation . The understanding of word formation is usually left to the students guessing skills and their ability to use the dictionary . Word expressions are said to be " lexically simple since there are productive rules which enable their users to construct new words out of pre-existing ones " (Lyons 1981,42) . Lyons does not even see the necessity of listing a word like " politeness " in a dictionary as a vocabulary unit, since both its meaning and its grammatical properties are predictable by rule and that speakers of a language have intuitions about what is or is not an actual word of their language . Lyons' above statement might be true for the natives , but what about the foreign learner who lacks those intuitions and who is denied the listing of derived words in the dictionary as Lyons suggests ? How can a foreign learner come to understand that **madness** or **discourage** are words

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- 1 – *The situational syllabus takes setting of the use of the language (i.e. the type of the interaction involved) as primary and linguistic forms as dependent on the situation .*
 - 2 – *The notional syllabus takes semantic knowledge as primary , viewing knowledge as a system of meaning rather than forms .*

formed by the addition of **-ness** and **dis** respectively ?

How can he/she understand that **blackboard** is the stringing of two words (**black + board**) which can be found separately with other meanings ? Unless these processes are made explicitly clear to the foreign learners , it is very doubtful that they can cope with them by themselves . Moreover , by their familiarity with the structure of words , learners are able to understand their meaning , thus understanding the meaning of sentences , which is , after all , the aim of modern language learning .

To explain what I mean by explaining word-formation processes let us take one example from the third secondary class text book , **Oxford Secondary English Course , Jordan , Book Three** .

In unit 3 , page 38 , students learn the word **discovery** as a vocabulary item to talk about new drugs . However , no exercise is provided to explain to the learner that the word **discovery** is formed by **discover** + the suffix **-y** and that the same suffix **-y** can be used in forming other words (i.e. adjectives) and also that **-y** has got distinct morphological meanings : adjectival (e.g., **icy**) , nominalizing (e.g., **modesty**) , or diminutive (e.g. **doggy**) . As a result , students usually learn words (e.g. **unjust** , **employer** , **blackboard**) all as single units without being aware that most words they learn are derived or composed words which they can break down into components to help them understand their form and , therefore , their meaning . Many researchers (e.g. Corson 1985 ; Cutler , 1983) emphasize the importance of word-formation in language acquisition . Corson (1985) states : " Difficulties for many people in articulating and decoding words in a context often seem due to the form rather than to the meaning of the words " (p. 49) .

Thus one can conclude that the neglect of word-structures is an obvious error on the part of the text designers . Word-formation is an important aspect of the English language that no teaching method can afford to ignore . Dik (1967) states : " To learn a language is not so much to memorize a set of sentences ; rather , it is to familiarize oneself with a linguistic system in such a way and to such extent that one is able to construct sentences and other

linguistic structures on one's own . (p. 352) .

Therefore , it is of great importance to suggest that at least the main processes of word-formation should always be treated in any EFL course book and should always have a carefully considered place on the part of foreign language planners and teachers .

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