

# **THE USE OF MORPHEMES: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO INCREASE THE MASTERY OF STUDENTS' VOCABULARY**

## **PENGGUNAAN MORFEM: CARA ALTERNATIF UNTUK MENINGKATKAN PENGUASAAN KOSAKATA SISWA**

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### ***Abstract***

*Using morphemes in English teaching and learning process is essential to increase the mastery of students' vocabulary. In the case, morphemes are the powerful aspects to build words. The article is intended to propose the importance of morphemes as one of linguistic approaches to help the learners figure out the meaning of unknown words by combining morpheme clues and context clues. In addition, it is expected that English teachers can apply the method in their teaching and learning process. Here, the method is divided into three phases: the instructional phase, the practice phase, and reviews and assessments.*

*Keywords: morphemes, English teaching and learning process, vocabulary*

### ***Abstrak***

*Menggunakan morfem dalam proses belajar mengajar bahasa Inggris sangat penting untuk meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata peserta didik. Dalam kasus ini, morfem adalah aspek kuat untuk membangun kata-kata. Artikel ini dimaksudkan untuk menunjukkan pentingnya morfem sebagai salah satu pendekatan linguistik untuk membantu peserta didik mengetahui arti dari kata-kata yang tidak diketahui dengan cara menggabungkan petunjuk-petunjuk morfemik dengan petunjuk-petunjuk kontekstual. Selain itu, para pengajar bahasa Inggris diharapkan dapat menerapkan metode tersebut dalam proses belajar mengajar mereka. Di sini, metode ini dibagi menjadi tiga tahap: tahap pembelajaran, tahap praktek, dan tahap ulasan dan penilaian.*

*Kata kunci: morfem, proses belajar mengajar bahasa Inggris, kosakata*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The mastery of vocabulary plays a vital role in learning a language. It is not only essential for comprehension in terms of reading skill, but also the other three skills of language learning: listening, speaking, and writing. By understanding the meaning of words, learners are able to apply a certain word in different social settings, spell it, or include it in their writing. In other words, the learner's success in their academic and social is determined by their ability to learn thousands of new words in a new language.

Studies on the importance of vocabulary in learning English have been carried out by many researchers. In general, they provide evidence for the fundamental role of vocabulary in mastering all the language skills. One of ways in increasing of the mastery of students' vocabulary is using morphemes as one of linguistic approaches in English teaching and learning process. It is important because morphemes are the powerful aspects to build words. Here, in other words, morphemes construct all words.

Morphemes are the building blocks of English vocabulary. In line with this, Yule (2006: 246) states that morphemes can be defined as the smallest unit of meaning in a word, or a "minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function". From the statement, it can be concluded that all the words are made up of morphemes. When learners are conscious of the structure, meaning, and function of morphemes, at the end they are able to develop a lifelong strategy to understand word meanings. In addition, Kieffer & Lesaux (2009) and Prince (2008) in Lems (2010: 92) argue that English language learners who can divide words into smaller parts and make connections between words that have the same morphemes have increased success in vocabulary development.

The discussion about the things in relation to morphemes will be presented in the following point. It includes general meaning of morphemes, free morphemes and bound morphemes, compound words, roots, affixes, and stems.

## B. DISCUSSION

### 1. General Meaning of Morphemes

Bishop (2009) defines morphemes as the smallest units of meaning that make up the words in a language. For example, the word *start*, which has five graphemes – written symbols, or letters (*s*, *t*, *a*, *r*, and *t*) and four phonemes – sounds (*s*, *t*, *a*, and *r*), has a single morpheme; there is one unit of meaning in this word. On the other hand, the word *restart* has two morphemes: the unit *re-*, which carries the meaning "again," and the unit *start*.

The word *girl* has a single morpheme, whereas the word *girls* has two morphemes: the unit *friend* and the unit *-s*, which signifies a plural. Likewise, the word *girl's* has two morphemes: the unit *girl*, and the unit *'s*, which signifies ownership.

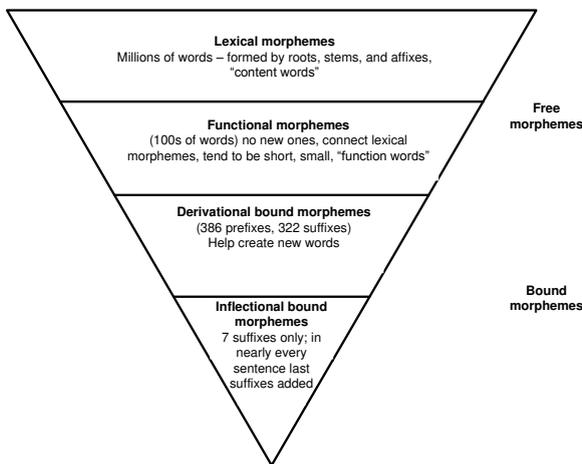
Words can have one, two, or more morphemes. For instance, *disagreed* has three morphemes: *dis-*, signifying "not," *agree*, and *-d*, signifying past tense. Similarly, the word *writers* has three morphemes: *write*, *-er*, signifying "a person who," and *-s*, signifying plural.

### 2. Free Morphemes and Bound Morphemes

Some linguists commonly have classified morphemes into two parts: free morphemes and bound morphemes. Free morphemes are those that can stand alone as words (Bishop, 2009:161). In the case, the examples of free morphemes are as follow: *start*, *girl*, *agree*, and *write*. Meanwhile, bound morphemes cannot stand alone; they must be connected (or bound) to another morpheme, such as the morphemes *re-* in *restart*, *-s* in *girls*, *'s* in

*girl's, dis* and *-ed* in *disagreed* and *-er* and *-s* in *writers*.

Furthermore, in more detail the linguists have identified four major categories of English morphemes (Lems, 2010). They are free morphemes, which consist of two subcategories: lexical and functional morphemes, and bound morphemes, which also consist of two subcategories: derivational and inflectional morphemes. The morphemes category belongs to determines where it can be used in the English grammar system. Lems (2008) in Lems (2010: 95) figures the morphemes category in the following pyramid to help the English learners to see the distribution of the four categories.



The explanation of the figure is as follow. The top two levels of the pyramid represent words. The lexical morphemes are identified as the vast majority of words of a language. Here, the lexical morphemes are also referred as content words. It is said so because lexical morphemes considered as the vital organ of the body of language (Lems, 2010). They include nouns, verbs, adjectives, some prepositions, and adverbs. The examples of lexical morphemes are: *house, speak, beautiful, figure out, fast*, etc.

The second level is functional morphemes. The morphemes include most prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, modals, and auxiliary verbs. Functional

morphemes are also called function words. The examples of functional morphemes are: *in, he, but, modal auxiliary verbs*, such as *will*, and *auxiliary verbs*, such as *is*. The functional morphemes describe the relationship among the content words around them, for example in the case of modals, the function words provide the tone of meaning of a certain word. In line with this, Lems (2010:96) states that English does not make sense without function words because the relationships among the words cannot be expressed.

The two other categories are the subcategories of bound morphemes. They are derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes are one of the devices to generate so many new words in English. Also, they can change the grammatical category, or part of speech, of a word, for instance adding *-ful* to *color* will change the word *color* from noun to the adjective *colorful*. Here, derivational morphemes can be either prefixes or suffixes.

However, inflectional morphemes serve as grammar markers that show tense, number, possession, or comparison. There are seven inflectional morphemes. First, *-s* or *-es*, the morpheme indicates noun plurals added to nouns or third person singular in present tense added to verbs. Second, *'s* or *s'*, the morpheme *'s* indicates possessive for singular or uncountable nouns and the morpheme *s'* indicates possessive for plural nouns. The morpheme *-ed* indicates the regular of past tense or past participle added to verbs. Meanwhile, the morpheme *-en* shows some plurals added to noun, some past participles added to verb, derivation from noun added to verb or adjective.

Another inflectional morpheme is *-er*. It indicates comparative form of adjectives and adverbs added to adjective or adverb. Moreover, the morpheme *-est* indicates superlative form of adjectives and adverbs added to adjective and adverbs. The other inflectional morpheme

is *-ing*. It indicates derivation from verb added to noun (gerund) and present continuous added to verb. Unlike derivational morphemes, inflectional morphemes do not create new words.

Here, the learners can practice by naming free and bound morphemes from each word provided by the teacher. For an illustration, teacher asks how many morphemes each word contains. The teacher will help with the first one. The word *uncrowded* has two morphemes: *un-* and *crowded*. *Crowded* is a free morpheme and *un-* is a bound morpheme (i.e., as used here, it cannot stand alone as a word).

No.	Word	Free morpheme	Bound morpheme
1	uncrowded	crowded	un-
2	understandable		
3	unlike		
4	reconnect		
5	longer		

### 3. Compound Words

Bishop (2009) explains that compound words are words composed of two or more free morphemes that have a single meaning that maintains some of the meaning of the original words, for example: the words *buttermilk*. If students know the meaning of the word *butter* and the meaning of the word *milk*, they will likely be able to determine the meaning of the word *basketball*: fatty food substance made from milk. An understanding of the two parts of each of these words allows students to understand the compound word.

### 4. Roots, Affixes, and Stems

Basically, words are arranged of three kinds of morphemes: roots, affixes, and stems.

#### a. Roots

Pinker (2007:128) states that roots are morphemes “that cannot be cut up into any smaller parts.” Here, roots may structure complete words, or they may need other morphemes added to them to

form a word. Bishop (2009) explains that over 60 percent of the English language is drawn from Latin and Greek origin. Knowing the meaning of Latin and Greek roots will help students’ vocabulary development. The following tables are adapted from Bishop (2009: 165-166) present the roots of Latin and Greek used in English language.

#### 1). Common Latin roots

Latin Root	Meaning	Sample Words
aud	to hear	auditorium, audible, audition
dict	to speak, to tell	contradict, dictate, predict, diction
gress	to walk	progress
ject	to throw	inject, eject, reject
min	little	minimum, minimal
mis, mit	to send	mission, transmit
mov, mot	to move	movement, motion
ped, pod	foot	pedal, podiatrist, gastropod
pend	to hang	append, depend
port	to carry	export, import, report
rupt	to break	disrupt, interrupt
scrib, script	to write	describe, manuscript, transcript
spect, spic	to see	inspect, spectator
struct	to build, to form	construct, instruct, structure
tract	to pull, to drag, to draw	attract, contract, extract
vert	to turn	convert, divert, invert, revert
Vid, vis	to see	vision, television, visible

#### 2). Common Greek roots

Greek Root	Meaning	Sample Words
anthrop	human	misanthrope, philanthropy, anthropomorphic
astro	star	astronaut, astronomy, astrology, astrophysics

Bio	life	biography, biology, biosphere
chron	time	anachronism, chronic, chronicle, synchronize, chronometer
dem	people	democracy, demography, demagogue, endemic, pandemic
geo	Earth	geology, geography
meter	measure	thermometer
morph	form	amorphous, metamorphic, morphology
path	feeling, suffering	empathy, sympathy, apathy, apathetic, psychopathic
philo, phil	having a strong affinity or love for	philanthropy, philharmonic, philosophy
phon	sound	microphone, telephone, polyphonic, cacophony, phoneme, phonics
tele	far, distant	telescope, telecommunicate, telephone, telegraph

## b. Affixes

Affixes are bound morphemes that are attached to a root to modify its meaning or change its grammatical function. In the case, affixes are morphemes but they are not words, and they cannot stand on their own. Affixes connect to roots and are called prefixes (word beginning) and suffixes (word ending) (Lems, 2010).

There are two types of suffixes: inflectional and derivational. Inflectional suffixes modify the tense or number of a word or represent a comparison. For example, *-ed* is typically used to make a verb past tense, as in the change from *study* to *studied*. The suffix *-s* is often used to change number, as in *book* to *books*. The inflectional suffixes *-er* and *-est* are added to a root such as *long* to form *longer* and *longest*. Derivational suffixes are

those that change a word's grammatical function. For instance, when the suffix *-less* is added to the end of *speech* to form *speechless*, the word's part of speech changes from a noun to an adjective. When the suffix *-ly* is added to the end of *happy* to form *happily*, the word changes from an adjective to an adverb. The meaning can also change significantly, as in the case of *speech* and *speechless*.

The following tables (adapted from Bishop, 2009: 170-171) will show the examples of prefixes and suffixes that are very beneficial for students to learn them.

### 1). Most common prefixes

Prefix	Selected Meanings	Examples
un-	not reverse, or do the opposite	unhappy untie
re-	again back	reexamine repay
in-, im-, ir-, il-	not	inappropriate, impossible, irreversible, illiterate
dis-	not reverse, or do the opposite	dislike disconnect
en-, em-	in, into to cause to be	ensnare, encircle enslave, enable
non-	not	nonviolent
in-, im-	in or into	insight
over-	too much	overdo
mis-	wrong, incorrect	misbehave
sub-	below, beneath	submarine
pre-	before	preschool
inter-	between, among	international
fore-	before in time front	forecast forehead, foremast
de-	removal negate	decontaminate
trans-	across or over, change	transport transcontinental transform, transcribe
super-	over or above	superman, superscript
semi-	half,	semicircle

	partly	semiskilled
anti-	opposed	antislavery
mid-	middle	midnight
under-	too little	undercooked

## 2). Most common suffixes

Suffix	Selected Meanings	Examples
-s, -es	plural verb form	cats, houses, plays, runs
-ed	past-tense verbs	played, hibernated
-ing	verb form (present participle)	jumping
-ly	characteristic of	gladly
-er, -or	a person who	runner, inventor
-ion, -tion, -ation, -ition	the act of, process	construction, persecution
-ible, -able	is can be	audible reliable
-y	characterized by	slimy, chewy, cheery
-ness	having	happiness, boldness
-ity, -ty	state of	sanity
-ment	state of	contentment
-ic	having characteristics of	metallic, acidic
-ous, -eous, -ious	having, full of	joyous, dangerous, courageous, curious
-en	made of	silken, wooden
-er	comparative	happier, bigger
-ive, -ative, -itive	being	creative, imaginative
-ful	full of, having	thankful
-less	without	hopeless
-est	comparative	happiest, biggest

### c. Stems

Lems (2010: 94) states that “stems consist of a single root plus one or

more affixes.” For instance, the word *trees* is a stem consisting of the root *tree* and the affix *-s*; the word *description* consists of a prefix *de*, a root *script*, and a suffix *-ion*.

After explaining roots, affixes, and stems to the learners, teacher can give the word: *prediction* as an illustration for them. From the word *prediction*, it can be clarified that *pre-*: prefix (bound morpheme) meaning “before”, *dict*: root word (but not a base word) from Latin meaning “tell”, *-tion*: derivational suffix (bound morpheme) indicating “the act of” and the whole meaning for the word *prediction* is the act of telling previously.

## 5. How to Apply the Theory in the Classroom

In order to arouse the students’ motivation in learning vocabulary in relation to the use of morphemes, the writer proposes an explicit method to teach it in the classroom. The method is divided into three phases: the instructional phase, the practice phase, and reviews and assessments.

### a. The Instructional Phase

In the instructional phase, first, ask the students to learn the morpheme and its meaning. For instance, the suffix *-er* or *-or* has the meaning *a person who*. Then, put the students in small groups. Have them read the sentences aloud, with a group assigned to read each different column in the table, reading across each row. The following table will show the steps have mentioned.

**Suffix *-er* and *-or***

Group A reads column 1 aloud.

Group B reads column 2 aloud.

Everyone reads column 3 together aloud.

Example	Meaning	Sentence
instructor	“a person who instructs”	The <b>instructor</b> gives a brief instruction about the program.
teacher	“a person who teaches”	The <b>teacher</b> gives the students English assignment.
lawyer	“a person who practices law”	You should always consult a suitable qualified <b>lawyer</b> about any specific legal matter.
runner	“a person who runs”	There is already a team of marathon <b>runners</b> in place.
advisor	“a person who gives advice”	Mr. Hartono is my <b>advisor</b> .

Here, the students discuss the meaning of the words and sentences by using context and morpheme clues. The next step, ask them to highlight the morpheme, circle the root and underline the affixes. If the students cannot find the meaning of unknown words, help them to figure out the meaning of the words by combining morpheme clues and context clues. Through this way the students will understand how morphemes and meanings bend with context. This phase should take about 15 minutes.

**b. The Practice Phase**

In this phase, students complete the practice in relation to the new morpheme on the instructional phase. Here, the teacher explains the instructions and models a few samples. Then, allow the students to complete the page individually or in partners. In the case, a dictionary is available for reference. Students discuss the answers together, and the teacher gives immediate and explicit feedback. The practice phase should take about 10-15 minutes.

**c. Reviews and Assessments**

The discussions about morphemes are very vast. In this phase, it is expected that the practice review all the

concepts learned in prior lessons. This phase can be used as tools to monitor the students’ learning and plan for the future lessons. The immediate feedback upon completion of the tests is crucial. Here, the results of the tests indicate the students’ success in mastery English vocabulary. In addition, teachers also can look for the increasing use of morphemic analysis in context during content-area reading.

**C. CONCLUSION**

Vocabulary knowledge is a good predictor of academic and social success. One of ways in increasing students’ mastery of vocabulary knowledge is teaching morphemes as one of linguistic insights in English. Morphemes are powerful tools for building English vocabulary. When learners are aware of the structure, meaning, and function of morphemes, they are able to develop a lifelong strategy to figure out word meanings. Besides, morphemes also give clues about the grammatical categories, or parts of speech, that words occupy within a sentence.

An explicit method to teach vocabulary in relation to morphemes is essential to help the students to figure out the meaning of unknown words by combining morpheme clues and context clues. This classrooms activity is able to

build students' metacognitive awareness in English vocabulary.

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