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An Analysis of the Problems in Learning English Words through Words Formation Processes by Undergraduate Students at Hazara University

Abstract *The present study analyzes the problems in learning English words through words formation processes by undergraduate students. The instrument of the test was used to collect data from one hundred seventeen undergraduate students selected through non-random convenient sampling. The findings of the study suggest that students had not acquired most of the English words through word-formation processes. The words formed through conversion, backformation, compounding and acronym were acquired less in number by students than the blending and abbreviation. The results show that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English common suffixes deriving English words as compared to the non-common ones. The common, occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both difficult, but the suffixes were a bit more difficult than prefixes, while the non-common occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both equally difficult for students. The idiomaticity of the words makes them difficult to learn.*

Key Words: Analysis, Problems, Words Formation, Conversion, Backformation, Blending, Prefixes, Suffixes, Acronyms.

Introduction

The current research study analyzed the problems/difficulties in learning English words through word-formation processes by undergraduate students. The learning English words through words formation process such as conversion, backformation, coinage, neologism, blending, clipping, acronyms, compounding, borrowing and affixes, among others were analyzed. In a second language learning context, these processes are commonly ignored, and the students as a result never get enough knowledge about these processes to help them learn English words and so to use them correctly later on. The derivations of all these words are studied in English morphology. All languages are composed of basic elements (words) to convey the message or meaning. Different languages have a different number of words with the same or different meaning. These words are formed from other basic units of meaning and form called morphemes. The study of these basic units of meaning and form is called morphology. Morphology thus is actually the study of the internal structure of the words (Verhoeven & Carlisle, 2006). The basic units from which words are formed are called morphemes. A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of a language that forms word or parts of words. The morphological processes deriving words from the combination of these free and bound morphemes are studied in morphology (Yule, 2014). Morphology is schematically conceptualized and described in sub-sections, inflexion and word formation. Word formation is divided into the categories of '*derivation*' and '*compounding*'. The derivation is classified into affixation and non-affixation. Affixation is further classified into suffixation, prefixation and infixation and non-affixation is classified into blending, conversion and clipping among others. Words are made of smallest units called morphemes, and there are many ways to create a new word with the help of affixation and non-affixation and the process of compounding, and also the more morphological process through which new words are made is on the bases of difference between word-formation and inflection (Plag, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

In language learning, word formation is a basic part of it. It is very much important to know how words are formed through word-formation processes. The learners can make many new words from a single

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word if they know how these words are formed through word-formation processes. If they have a lack of knowledge of words/vocabulary, then mastering the English language is a very much difficult task. The present study aims to find out the problems in learning English words through words formation processes by undergraduate students who have studied English as a language for more than eighteen years. These undergraduate learners still face difficulties in the correct use of the English derived words through words formation processes. Their competence in the target language improves if they have the knowledge of deriving a specific lexical category by the correct use of words formation processes. The learners mostly face difficulties in the formation of the new lexical category; this formation of the new words is an essential aspect of, lexicology, syntax and morphology. The focus of this research study was to find out such difficulties/problems for undergraduate learners at Hazara University. The aim of the present study was to find out whether the students knew and could use the derived words through word-formation.

Literature Review

The English language has undergone the productive process of borrowing from other languages, increasing the vocabulary size of English, along with other word-formation processes (Rodriguez-Puente, 2020). Word formation deals with the study of the formation of new words such as complex words like an employee, decomposition, inability, responsibility, invention etc. and compound words like a whiteboard, classroom brother-in-law, Whitehouse etc. (Robinson, 1994). The students and teachers should know about the use of English words in different contexts, as there are many shapes and grammatical categories inside them (Tahaineh, 2012). Besides, English words are formed through different word-formation processes. The newly derived words are commonly enlisted in the dictionaries of the language, but no dictionary can transcend the possibility of listing the entire lexicon (Berg, 2020). One of the ways to improve the number of words in the target language is by familiarizing learners with word formation processes (Diasti, & Bram, 2020). Some of these important word-formation processes are compounding, acronyms, abbreviation, blending, borrowing, clipping, folk etymology and backformation (Ratih & Gusdian, 2018). The figurative language is intentionally integrated into the word-formation process (Dimaculangan & Gustilo, 2018). Out of all these processes, few are used more than other processes demanding their earlier learning of correct use. Various word-formation processes are used in conversation on social media leading to the misinterpretation and confusion among the users who are not aware of the processes of deriving new vocabulary, spelling modifications, symbols and emoticons. The most commonly used word-formation process on social media (Facebook) was inflection followed by other processes like an acronym, borrowing, clipping, compounding, blending and backformation (Mustafa, Kandasamy & Yasin, 2015). These common uses of word-formation processes on social media by Malaysian adults were also analyzed by Zubaidah, Mageswari and Mohamad (2015). Similarly, the effect of L1 structures on the awareness about derivational and inflectional morphemes and compound words in the second language were analyzed, and a small number of inflectional morphemes were found to be used with root words (Vidra, & Zabokrtsk´y, 2017). In languages where, for example, compounding is less creative (Spanish), the learners of English of such languages have problems in learning English compound words (Ramirez, Chen, Geva, & Luo, 2011). Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002) claim that inflections and derivations generate dissimilar learning problems. Learning of derivations and inflections demand different learning burdens. Most English inflections are easy for learners because they are rules governed, while derivation is not rule-governed and dissimilar derivatives have to be made individually, it leads to the difficulty to have memorization of each and every item. Gardner (2007) notices that inflections are learned earlier than derivations. The second language learners usually had partial knowledge of derivation, and the knowledge of nouns and verbs derived from other classes was more than knowledge of adjective and adverb clauses (Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002). The supposition that the creative use of English derivatives presents a problem for L2 beginners has not been demonstrated due to insufficient research on the problem. Mochizuki and Aizawa (2000) claim that even though affix information clearly practices an important cause in vocabulary learning, "little is known as to how L2 affixes' knowledge develops". Derivative data having no doubt donates to the recognition of unaware words and the spreading of the lexicon. Affixation was found to be one of the

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most productive morphological processes deriving new English words (Ratih & Gusdian, 2018), where prefix-derivation was more creative than suffix-derivation (Bizhkenova et al., 2017). Word formation processes like conversion are highly productive in English, and if these newly derived forms do not have clear morphological markers, they pose interesting linguistic challenges for learners (Kisselew, Rimell, Palmer, & Padó, 2016). The conversion of verbs to nouns was not easier for students like the conversion of adjectives to nouns, unlike the conversion of nouns to verbs (Diasti, & Bram, 2020).

Zhang (2017) has given attention mostly to the relation of morphology and reading comprehension, finding out that derivational and compound responsiveness amongst the students were interrelated and contributed to EFL reading comprehension. Similarly, reading and spelling or the vocabulary size were associated with the extent of morphological awareness the learners have built up (Verhoeven & Carlisle, 2006). Readings show how L1 beginners continue to form their affix information all through their school years, from elementary information to syntactic information, until now there is no pure understanding of how L2 beginners' affix knowledge extends. Mochizuki and Aizawa (2000) found out that affix and the associated information were certainly connected and both were associated with vocabulary size and word association was also correlated with general language ability. All lexical items in the target language cannot be taught; therefore, the teaching and learning of morphological processes become significant for a number of reasons like increasing their vocabulary on the basis of already learned words and generalizing the already learnt lexical items' morphological markers (Shchuklina, Mardieva, & Alyokhina, 2016), although rejected by some researchers in favor of communicative approaches to language teaching and learning (Balteiro, 2011). The morphological instructions, which are a portion of language teaching, facilitate the speakers with the means to produce new word (Booij, 2012); otherwise, the rules of L1 are applied in L2 learning (Domínguez, 1991).

Research Methodology

The current study was based on the analysis of the problems in learning English words through words formation processes by undergraduate students at Hazara University. The focus of the current study was on identifying problems through errors in learning English words through words formation process by second language learners. The research used a descriptive quantitative survey design to analyze the problems in the learning words formation and mechanism. A representative sample of one hundred and seventeen students (fifty female and sixty-seven male participants) was selected through non-random convenient sampling procedure from the English department. The participants were BS level students selected from 4^{th}, 5^{th}, 6^{th}, 7^{th} and 8^{th} semester with ages ranging from 21 to 25 years. The test contained questions about different English word-formation processes. Every question was about one particular morphological process deriving English word through a different mechanism. The nature of the questions was different keeping in view different morphological processes and exact elicitation of the required data. The derived new words were either adverbs, nouns, verbs or adjectives. The test was meant to measure the ability of the students to derive English words through different word-formation processes. If the students correctly derived the word through a word-formation process, the response was considered correct, otherwise not. All the correct and incorrect responses were noted for analysis. The test was checked for correct and incorrect replies. After the calculation, the data was tabulated, and the percentage of correct and incorrect responses was shown. The incorrect responses highlighted the problems for undergraduate students in learning English words through word-formation.

Results of English Words Through Word Formation Processes

The following table contains the results for the eleven processes deriving English words. The correct uses of these processes in different English sentences were analyzed. Eight words were selected in the test for the derivation of English words through conversion. The selected words were nouns, and the students were asked a question about their uses as verbs to know whether they knew that these could be used as a verb as well. Similarly, five words for the derivation of English words through backformation, five words for the derivation of English Words through blending, eleven words for the derivation of English words through clipping, five words for the derivation of English words through

abbreviation, six words for the derivation of English words through acronyms, seventy-six words for deriving words through affixes and three words for the derivation of English words through compounding were selected.

Table 11. Results for English Words Through Word Formation Processes

Word Formation Process deriving English words	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
Acronyms	21.5%	78.5%
Conversion	25%	75%
Backformation	26.6%	73.4%
Blending	36.1%	63.9%
Compounding	36.36%	63.64%
Affixes	49.5%	50.5%
Clipping	66%	34%
Abbreviations	72.4%	27.6%

The above table shows that the most problematic word-formation process was an acronym. The incorrect responses (78.5%) for acronyms were more than the correct responses (21.5%) showing that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning acronyms than other words formation processes. Similarly, the incorrect responses (75%) for the conversion of nouns into verbs were more than the correct responses (25%), suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English words formation through conversion. The incorrect responses percentage shows that they had no sufficient knowledge of English word formation through conversion. Almost the same results were found for backformation with 73.4% incorrect responses, more than the correct responses (26.6%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English backformation. The correct responses (36.1%) for the blending of nouns were less than the incorrect responses (63.9%) show that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning English words through blending. Similarly, the same results were found for the derivation through compounding as a whole with 36.36% correct responses and 63.64% incorrect responses. The correct responses (49.5%) for affixes deriving new words were more than incorrect responses (51.5%) showing the difficulties students face in learning new words through affixes. The different types of affix had different results, but the results as a whole suggest that the words derived through affixes had significant difficulty for students in learning and using these processes. The correct responses (66%) for clipping were more than the incorrect responses (34%) showing that students had comparatively fewer difficulties in learning clipping than other words formation processes. Almost the same results were found for abbreviations with 72.4% correct responses and 27.6% incorrect responses, suggesting that students had the least difficulties in learning English words through abbreviations.

Results of Different Types of Affixes

The following table contains the results for common affixes deriving English words. The correct uses of these affixes in different English sentences were analyzed. Six common suffixes (forming nouns) were selected in the test for the derivation of English words. Similarly, six common suffixes for the derivation of English new words through suffixation, six common suffixes for the derivation of adjectives from nouns, and twelve common prefixes for the derivation of English new words through prefixation were selected.

Table 2. Showing Results for Common Affixes

Words	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
Common prefixes forming new words	52%	48%
Common suffixes deriving noun	58%	42%
Common suffixes deriving adjectives from nouns	60%	40%
Common suffixes forming new words	82%	18%

The above table shows the results for common affixes, the most problematic among these were common prefixes forming new words of different categories. The incorrect responses (48%) for common prefixes forming new words were less than the correct responses (52%) showing that students had comparatively difficulties in learning common prefixes than other affixes. Similarly, the incorrect responses (42%) for common suffixes deriving nouns were less than the correct responses (58%), suggesting that undergraduate students had difficulty in learning common suffixes deriving noun. Almost the same results were found for common suffixes deriving adjectives from nouns with 40% in correct responses, less than the correct responses (60%) suggesting that undergraduate students had less difficulty in learning common suffixes. The correct responses (82%) for common suffixes forming new words were more than the incorrect responses (18%) show that students had no significant difficulties in learning common suffixes forming new words.

The following table contains the results for non-common affixes deriving English words. The correct uses of these non-common affixes in different English sentences were analyzed. Four non-common suffixes (forming nouns) were selected in the test for the derivation of English words, twelve non-common suffixes for the derivation of English new words through suffixation, twelve non-common prefixes for the derivation of English new words through prefixation were selected.

Table 3. Showing Results for Non-Common Affixes

Words	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
non-common suffixes forming new words	35%	65%
non-common prefixes forming new words	41%	59%
non-common suffixes deriving noun	42%	58%

The above table shows that the most problematic non-common affixes among these were non-common suffixes forming new words. The incorrect responses (65%) for non-common suffixes forming new words were more than the correct responses (35%) showing that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning non-common suffixes forming new words than other non-common affixes. Similarly, the incorrect responses (59%) for non-common prefixes forming new words were more than the correct responses (41%), suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning non-common prefixes forming new words. The correct responses (42 %) for non-common suffixes deriving noun were less than the incorrect responses (58 %) show that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning non-common suffixes deriving noun, showing the difficulties students face in learning new words through affixes.

Results of Types of Compounding

The following table contains the results for the compounding processes deriving English words. The correct uses of this process in different English sentences were analyzed. This compounding was categorized into twelve different categories. One word was selected for each category except pronoun plus noun, verb plus noun, and noun plus verb the selected words for these three categories were 2, 2, and 3, respectively.

Table 4. Showing Results for Compounding

Words	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
verb plus preposition	15%	85%
verb plus adverb	20%	80%
preposition plus noun	25%	75%
noun plus preposition	27%	73%
noun plus verb	28%	72%
verb plus noun	29%	71%
noun plus adjective	30%	70%
preposition plus verb	41%	59%
adjective plus noun	57%	43%

Words	Correct responses	Incorrect responses
adjective plus adjective	63%	37%
pronoun plus noun	68%	32%
adjective plus verb	70%	30%

The above table shows that the most problematic category was verb plus preposition in compounding. The incorrect responses (85%) for compound words formed from a verb plus preposition were more than the correct responses (15%) showing that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning compound words formed from a verb plus preposition than other compound words. Similarly, the incorrect responses (80%) for compounds words formed from a verb plus adverb verbs were more than the correct responses (20%), suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning compound words formed from a verb plus adverb. The incorrect responses percentage shows that they had no sufficient knowledge of compounds. The incorrect responses for preposition plus noun were 75% were more than the correct responses (25%), almost the same results were found for compound words formed from noun plus preposition with 73. % incorrect responses, more than the correct responses (27%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning compound words formed from preposition plus noun, and noun plus preposition. The incorrect responses (72%) for noun plus verb were more than the correct responses (28%) show that students had comparatively more difficulties in learning compound words formed from a noun plus a verb. Almost the same results were found for verb plus noun with incorrect responses 71% were more than the correct responses (29%), suggesting that students had difficulty in learning compound words formed from a verb plus a noun. Similarly, the same results were found for noun plus adjective with 30% correct responses and 70% incorrect responses. The incorrect responses (59%) for preposition plus verb were more than correct responses (41%) showing the difficulties students faced in learning compound words formed from preposition plus a verb. The correct responses (57%) for adjective plus noun were more than the incorrect responses (43%) showing that students had comparatively fewer difficulties in learning adjective plus noun than other compound words. Similarly, the correct responses (63%) were more than the incorrect responses (37%) show that students had difficulty in learning compound words formed from adjective plus an adjective. The correct responses (68%) for pronoun plus noun were more than incorrect responses (32%), suggesting that students had fewer difficulties in learning pronoun plus a noun. Almost the same results were found for adjective plus verb with 70% correct responses and 30% incorrect responses, suggesting that students had the least difficulties in learning compound words formed from adjective plus a verb. The classification of words formation is very much important, and the function of deriving new words is very significant in this regard. These processes must be included in English language teaching because they were not easy to acquire. The results above suggest that there were significant problems for students in deriving English words through some of the words formation processes. Some of the words formation processes, though they were found out not difficult for students. These differences in results were because of the nature of the different word-formation processes. The results of the study are discussed in light of the research questions asked.

Discussion

The results above revealed that percentages of correct responses were less than the incorrect responses in all the tables, suggesting that students had not completely learnt words formation processes in spite of their advance academic level. Their scores were different for different words formation processes signifying that students had learnt some of these processes, but not all of them. The results show that the undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English word formation through conversion, suggesting that the learners use the word semantically not syntactically while the words are positioned syntactically, not semantically. In conversion, a word is derived from another word without the addition of any affix. The phonological and morphological structure remains the same for newly derived words which create ambiguity for the learners in learning and using the words syntactically in the correct order. Similarly, the results confirm that students had difficulty in backformation. Backformation is the removing of seeming affixes from existing words which turn the

word into a new one; this removing of affixes brings morphological and syntactic change for the new word which makes it difficult for the learners. There is no model rule in backformation, so, that it could confirm the rules for backformation. The subjects' performance in the test has also revealed that EFL learners encounter more difficulties in using backformation at the production level than at the recognition level because of morphological and semantic knowledge of words.

The results show that students had no significant difficulty in learning common suffixes deriving nouns. While they had significant difficulty in learning non-common suffixes deriving nouns suggesting that common suffixes are easily learnt compared to non-common suffixes. The non-common suffixes are rarely used, and so, the students faced many problems here. The common the use, the lesser the difficulty for students was observed in data in term of word-formation processes. The frequent use of the suffixes deriving nouns makes them easier to learn because nouns are the mostly used lexical categories in English. Same was the case with common suffixes deriving other lexical categories which were found out easier than non-common suffixes deriving other lexical categories as hypothesized in the study. But in some cases, like common suffixes and non-common suffixes forming adjectives from nouns, the difference was not that much significant. Almost the same results were found out for common prefixes forming new words which were easier while non-common prefixes deriving new words were difficult for students.

The common, occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both difficult, but the suffixes were a bit more difficult than prefixes; while the non-common occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both equally difficult for students. The findings reveal that non-common occurring prefixes and suffixes were both difficult than commonly occurring ones, but the suffixes were easier than prefixes. The results of the words formed through abbreviations showed that they were easier than acronyms because of the complex structure and meaning of the acronyms beside the reason that acronyms stand for something about which the learners commonly did not know. The acronyms as words were easy for students, but when students were asked what they stood for, they found them difficult.

The word-formation through compounding had mixed results. The compound words formed from noun plus a verb, pronoun plus noun, preposition plus verb, adjective plus adjective and adjective plus verb were easier for students. They were easier because the headword in these compound words formed was the noun which was semantically easier to recognize, and the meaning of such compound word was easier for students. Similarly, the headword in pronoun plus noun compound word was the noun which too was easily recognized like the recognition of head verb in preposition plus verb compound word. The easily semantic recognition of the headword made these types of compounding easier to learn. On the other hand, if both the words of the compound word are from the same category, the meaning of the compound word becomes easier to learn if the compound word is frequently used like '*hardworking*' though having structure complexity becomes easier for students.

The compound words formed through adjective plus noun, noun plus an adjective, preposition plus noun, verb plus noun and verb plus adverb were found out a bit difficult, while the compounding formed from a verb plus preposition and noun plus preposition were found out the most difficult ones for students. The students could not decide which part of the compound word to put first in these combinations. The reverse order of the compounded words changes the meaning altogether or convey the meaning of the entire phrase like '*red blood*' from '*blood red*', and the students confused the compound word with the phrase. The verb plus preposition and noun plus preposition type of compound word additionally convey idiomatic meaning like the word '*passerby*' which makes it more difficult than other compound words. The words derived through the word-formation process of clipping were quite easier for students. It was because of the reason that both the full form and the short forms are used by first and second language learners like the words 'exam' and 'examination' which are daily used. The results as a whole reveal that students had problems in learning and using English words derived through most of the word-formation processes.

Conclusion

The present research study was concerned with the analysis of the problems in learning English words through words formation processes by undergraduate students at Hazara University, Mansehra. The

English words are derived through different word formation mechanisms which were specifically focused in the study. It was hypothesized that students had significant problems in learning and using such words. The percentages of correct responses were less than the incorrect responses suggesting that students had not learnt all English words formation processes. They had acquired some of them, but not all of them. The results show that the undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English word formation through conversion, suggesting that the learners use the word semantically not syntactically; while the words are positioned syntactically not semantically. The phonological and morphological structure remains the same for newly derived words which creates ambiguity for the learners in learning and using the words syntactically in the correct order. Similarly, the results confirmed that students had difficulty in backformation. The removal of affixes in backformation brings morphological and syntactic change for the new word, which makes it difficult for the learners. The subjects' performance in the test has also revealed that EFL learners encounter more difficulties in using backformation at the production level than at the recognition level because of morphological and semantic knowledge of words. The results show that students had comparatively fewer difficulties in learning common suffixes deriving English words as compared to the non-common ones. The common, occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both difficult, but the suffixes were a bit more difficult than prefixes, while the non-common occurring prefixes and suffixes forming new words were both equally difficult for students. The words formed through abbreviations were easier than acronyms. The word-formation through compounding had mixed results. The compound words having semantic regularity and syntactic simplicity were easily learnt. The frequent use of words makes them easy to learn besides the structural complexity. The order of words mattered in recognition of correct meaning. The idiomaticity of the words makes them difficult to learn. The different forms available to second language learners make sure their correct use. The results as a whole reveal that students had problems in learning English words derived through different word-formation processes and these should be focused in English language teaching and learning in our contexts.

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