

Morphology of the english language research paper examples

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



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Introduction

Language is not static. Many factors contribute to it instead being dynamic – continually changing, developing and evolving over space and time. Part of that evolutionary process concerns the morphology of the language – the way words are formed and the rules that govern their formation; an important element in pedagogy, facilitating the teaching / learning of the language in part by understanding those rules and utilizing them as elements of the instructional framework. This paper examines how the English language including its word structure and vocabulary has evolved / morphed over time, and discusses how the morphology of the English language is used in the classroom and can be used in the future.

The Research

The Causes of Language Change. There are numerous reasons why variations in language occur – geographically, between social groups, and with time. According to a Penn University lecture entitled “ Language

Change" (2003), changes can and often do come from the invention of new words. It was noted that pronunciations change and evolve and over successive generations, word meanings acquire subtle changes and that morphology " develops or decays."

The Penn lecture indicated that language changes can arise from " language learning, or through language contact, social differentiation, and natural processes in usage." Expanding on those four causal factors, language learning is described as the way language becomes transformed in the process of transmitting it from generation to generation, during which process every youngster has to acquire and develop the grammar and vocabulary derived from the information received from parents, family members and others. Because every individual is different and learning is not a perfect process, small variations occur, resulting in " systematic drift" through the generations. In the case of language contact as the causal factor for change, the process of speakers of a language coming in contact with native speakers of a different language (e. g. through trade, or migration), results in words and sentence constructions from the other language being " borrowed." Social differentiation (the process where certain social groups tend to exhibit common modes of dress, behavior, etc within the group) can also result in the adoption of distinctive elements in language, perhaps including the frequent use of slang expressions or group-specific jargon, or exaggerated pronunciation. The Penn lecture suggests these social differentiation effects may include " morphological processes, syntactic constructions, and so on." Language changes categorized as due to " natural processes in usage" are postulated as arising from the use of either rapid

speech or casual speech, which in certain instances become the norm even in regular speech. In a similar fashion, word meaning changes can become accepted through usage. In summarizing those four causes of language change, the Penn lecture compares the process with Darwin's theory of evolution, in that certain language features more easily learned by children are thus more likely to be replicated.

Sound Changes in Language. Numerous sound changes in language – also called “ phonological systems changes” have been documented. A notable example quoted in “ Language Change” (2003) is one that occurred around the time of Shakespeare, and referred to as “ the Great Vowel Shift.” At the time this change occurred, the English language featured both long and short vowels, and the change had a global effect on the pronunciation of all of the long vowels. The following diagram (reproduced from the Penn lecture “ Language Change”) illustrates the effects of those changes. The original vowel pronunciations are shown alongside the example words, with the modern pronunciations shown at the ends of the arrows:

The Penn lecture also describes various processes of sound change that can be categorized and illustrated when comparing (for example) Old English and Modern English. Sound “ mergers” are one such change that can occur even in contemporary English, arising from regional variations in pronunciation. As an example, it provided a short table of words featuring either the short “ o” or the long open “ o” that may be pronounced with the same vowel sound if you are a native of certain parts of North America, (e. g.) California, Canada or the U. S. Midwest:

Related Languages. When a language change occurs within a group of

people using the same variety of a language (a speech community) the change eventually takes effect across the entire community. However, if over time the speech community has split and as a consequence contact has been lost, changes occurring in one part are not reflected in the other. As an example, (“ Language Change, 2003”) when the speakers of late Latin in Spain and Portugal lost contact with other late Latin speakers, the languages diverged. Yet those now different languages may well feature words derived from the original language and known as “ cognates.” Taking the following table, extracted from “ Language Change” (2003) as an example:

In the six so-called “ Romance” languages included in the table, the words used for “ mother” are cognates in all of the six languages; however the words for “ father” are cognates in only five; in contemporary Rumanian, the original Latin word “ pater” has been substituted by a quite different word “ tata.”

Results of Language Change. According to “ Language Change” (2003), permanent population splits in the shorter term cause divergences of dialect - such as the differences between American and British English for example. Then - in the longer term - those differences develop into separate languages. For the purposes of definition, the difference between a language and a dialect (according to “ Language Change”), is that “ dialects are mutually intelligible, whereas languages are not.”

The Origins of English. The English language as we know it today was originally derived from a group of languages known as the Indo-European Language Group. A Family Tree illustration of that language group, reproduced from an archive of the free online teaching resource website

created by the late Andrew Moore (), is included for informational purposes as Appendix 1 to this paper.

Morphology in the Classroom. O'Sullivan (2004) described programs used to develop and enhance the vocabulary of high school students using morphological analysis. She offered two different programs to achieve those same objectives, both requiring certain basic knowledge of the principles on the part of participating students. For example, the students should understand that " a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of grammar" and must also understand " the differences between a root word, suffix and prefix." The two programs were:

- An interactive computer-based program;
- A classroom-based group activity.

Whilst the classroom- based version of the program requires no technology and offers the merit of more direct teacher-student and student-to-student interaction, the computer-based system is probably the way forward and more interesting to most students, and aligns well with their contemporary lives that feature personal technology such as iPhones, electronic tablets, etc. In the computer-based program, the computer screen would display a welcome screen (perhaps with musical accompaniment), followed by a series of sentences with the word requiring analysis and definition highlighted.

Example, derived from O'Sullivan (2004):

The computer's software could be arranged so that by (e. g.) hovering the mouse over the word " prefix", " root word" or " suffix" its meaning would be displayed. Typing in the correct answer to any part of the solution would result in a positive outcome such as awarding a point and/or producing a

positive sound for the student, then automatically moving on to the next sentence and another word to be analyzed.

Using the above example (the word unladylike), the classroom/group-based version of the program could be organized and implemented as follows:

- Each student is assigned as being a root word, a prefix, or a suffix and is given a reference list of prefixes and suffixes;
- The teacher or a student writes the sentence on the board, e. g:

The young girl’s behavior was unladylike.

- A student is asked to write the subject word on the board but split into morphological units (un lady like).
- Each student assigned as a specific element of the word then gives the meaning of the word’s individual parts.
- The remaining students then indicate if the analysis and definitions were correct and award points accordingly.

In both program versions (computer- and group-based), O’Sullivan emphasized the importance of immediate feedback to stimulate and maintain interest on the part of the students.

The contribution of morphological awareness and the teaching of morphology to increased vocabulary and levels of reading achievement were stressed by Kirby and Bowers (2012) in their research monograph “Morphology Works.” The authors introduced their monograph by stressing the importance of vocabulary in the cognitive development of children and its contribution to reading and comprehension and therefore to learning – not just in English but in every academic subject. Kirby & Bowers also

emphasized how morphology helps students understand just how to pronounce and spell words. As an example, they cited that the combination of in the word reach equates to a single sound because it is in a single morpheme, whereas that same vowel combination in the word react is pronounced as two sounds because the two adjacent vowels are in two distinct morphemes.

Kirby & Bowers reviewed 22 studies, concluding that morphology instruction resulted in higher achievement levels in language (“word reading, spelling, reading comprehension, and vocabulary”). They also noted that the benefits were seen to be greater in children in the earlier grades and for children whose skills were previously less developed. On the basis of those studies, Kirby & Bowers recommended that teachers should augment existing teaching practices with instruction in morphology, beginning as early as in kindergarten.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research has shown that actively including morphology instruction in the early school grades brings benefits later in terms of enhanced vocabulary as well as improved understanding and better reading skills, which in turn help students with all subjects studied – not just English. It is also likely that introducing this somewhat theoretical aspect of English language study would be helpful to those students learning English as a second language. The interactive computer-based learning program described by O’Sullivan shows promise and could clearly be enhanced and expanded to provide a more sophisticated learning tool for the future.

Since the studies reviewed by Kirby & Bowers show a clear link between morphological instruction and improved English skills in general, it should – with the objective of raising educational standards across the board – become a core element in the English curriculum.

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Appendix 1

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