

Derivational or Inflectional Morpheme: A Case of Papuan EFL Students' Comprehension in Narrative Text

**Inna Mahjanisuri Woretma¹, Shilviya Irna Dwiyantri², Hasanudin³,
 Yuliana⁴, Ahmad Wael⁵**

^{1,2,3,4,5}Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong
 Jl. Pendidikan No.27, Kelurahan Klabulu, Malaimsimsa, Sorong City, West Papua 98416

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to scrutinize how students in the English Language Department distinguish derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes using narrative text. Consequently, student's obstacles in distinguishing between both of bound morphemes. Qualitative methods are employed to this research with a descriptive approach to collect and analyze derivational and inflectional morphemes. The findings revealed a total of fifty-three derivational and inflectional morphemes, comprising fifteen derivational morphemes and thirty-eight inflectional morphemes. In terms of comprehension, EFL students score 66.5 in derivational morphemes, falling under the C category, indicating a good level of understanding. For inflectional morphemes, students achieve a score of 89, placing them in the A category, signifying a very good understanding. Regarding the obstacles, students face in comprehending derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes the main challenges are the lack of vocabulary and the lack of grammar, which make it difficult for EFL students to know word class changes and grammar function changes.

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Corresponding Author:

Hasanudin

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong

Jl. Pendidikan No.27, Kelurahan Klabulu, Malaimsimsa, Sorong City, West Papua 98416

Email: hasanuddinmr@um-sorong.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Morphology involves examining how words are created and how their forms change based on their usage within sentences, encompassing both word formation and word alteration in language worldwide (Lieber, 2004). Further, morphological awareness is a crucial aspect of language learning, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. (Amirjalili & Jabbari, 2018) has highlighted numerous challenges that arise in the use of morphological awareness, which significantly impacts the development of EFL students' vocabulary. As highlighted by (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2014), words play a crucial role in our linguistic understanding and are a fundamental element of our mental language structure. However, it's possible to acquire a vast vocabulary in a language and yet not possess a comprehensive grasp of the language as a whole. In other words, words are the major component of a language, and the fact that someone can communicate in a particular language does not necessarily imply that they are familiar with every single word employed in that language.

The word used in the communication have so many forms and complex. For example, the word of "happy" has different forms of word, such as "unhappy" and "happiness". The word of "forget" has at least four different forms, such as "forgot", "forgetting", "forgotten", and "unforgotten". Every word has their own meaning and function in the term of 'morpheme'. Generally, there are two morphemes. Morpheme that can stand alone with a specific meaning which is Free Morpheme and cannot stand alone, Bound Morpheme. In addition, it is

complicated for EFL students in acquiring (Budiharto, Linarsih, Widjajanti, & Nazalatus, 2021) because it demands students' proficiency to know the word-meaning, function and the morphological rules.

There are two types of bound morpheme, (Lan, 2020) states derivational morpheme creates a new word by either altering the meaning or grammatical class of the original word when added. On the other hand, (Allerton, 2016) explains that inflectional affixes, such as noun plural -(e)s, verb past -(e)d, and verbal -ing, do not change the major class of the word but determine its subcategory, which may need to agree with another word in the sentence (Hazen, 2015). Further, several researchers had explored derivational and inflectional morphemes in various contexts. (Fitria, 2020) investigated the functions of morphemes in selected news from tempo.co, while Kusumawardhani (2020) studied the usage of affixes in storytelling. (Halawa Edarmawati, 2022) explored the derivation and inflection affixes in Selena Gomez's songs, and (Aprianti & Parmawati, 2020) examined the affixes in Lady Gaga's album "A Star is Born." Additionally, (Juanillo & Fernandico, 2022) investigated on Fernando A. Bernardo's poems. Despite these valuable contributions, it remains a gap in research regarding EFL teacher-students' capabilities in distinguishing the morphemes which they already learnt about both of the morphemes.

Likewise, this research needs to identify the obstacle facing by the students in comprehending narrative text. The principles employed in the process of affixation may likely pose challenges for individuals in the process of acquiring proficiency (Lieber & Štekauer, 2014), high motivation which affect students' improvement (Hasanudin, Akib, Said, Wael, & Hartanti, 2023), awareness of affixes or suffixes, spelling and pronunciation changes (Carstairs-Mccarthy, 2002; Veselovská & Emonds, 2016), as well as phonological dyslexia (Caplan, 1987). Among these challenges, understanding bound morphemes poses a major obstacle for EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong. Specifically, they struggle with comprehending derivational and inflectional morphemes due to difficulties in identifying word classes and grammar changes when bound morphemes are added. In light of these observations, this study intends to investigate whether English Department students can accurately differentiate between derivational and inflectional morphemes in English narrative texts.

A considerable area of difficulty lies in understanding the relationship between root words and derived forms when prefixes or suffixes are attached. Two primary problems will guide in this investigation. First, how do English Department students distinguish derivational and inflectional morphemes and the second is the obstacles encounter when attempting to differentiate between derivational and inflectional morphemes.

2. METHOD

This research used qualitative methods with the descriptive approach to collect and analyze textual data from the narrative text entitled "Hansel Gretel". The participants were ten students of the English Language Department, who finished the morphology class in the seventh semester. The researcher employed two instruments to gain the data, a test and an interview. In analyzing the data, three stages were used in the process of managing the findings, namely, data reduction, data presentation and finally conclusion from all the data that had been obtained. In addition, to analyze EFL students' comprehension of derivational and inflectional morphemes, the researcher used Students' Level of Comprehension from (Sudijono, 2008).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Result

The researcher employed a combination of document tests and interviews to gather pertinent data. In this phase, EFL students were tasked with reading a narrative and subsequently identifying the root and affixes, as well as categorizing derivational and inflectional morphemes and also analyzed the obstacle. The ensuing section outlines the identified derivational and inflectional morphemes within the narrative.

1) Students' Comprehension of Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes

From the data obtained in comprehension of derivational and inflectional morphemes, there are some word class changes in derivational morphemes: noun to adjective, verb to noun, adjective to adverb, and adjective to verb. In noun to adjective there is the word "Ungodly" Four EFL students answered correctly, while six EFL students were confused about determining the word class. The verb to noun there word "Getting" five EFL students answered correctly and five others did not answer because they were confused about the word class. Adjective to adverb there is the word "Greedily" Nine EFL students answered that when greed is added to the affix -ly it will change to greedily which is a class of words from adjective to adverb while one student did not answer because did know the word greed. Adjective to verb there is "Fatten" Four students answered correctly while ix others did not answer because they were confused with the context of fatten. EFL students answered more correctly on the word class change from adjective to adverb, compared to other word class changes.

Furthermore, in inflectional morphemes, there are plural, past tense, progressive, past participle, comparative and superlative. In the plural, there is the word "Cakes" All participants that are ten EFL students correctly answered that 'cakes' are part of the plural. Past tense there are word "Walked" All ten participants successfully answered correctly that walked is part of the inflectional morphemes which is the past tense. Progressive there are

words “Eating” and Screaming” All ten EFL students succeed in answering all questions correctly. In past participle there are words ‘Eaten” there were six EFL students who successfully answered correctly, and four others did not answer at all because they have lack grammar. Comparative there is the word ‘Fatter” there were nine EFL students who answered correctly. Superlative there is word “Deepest” nine EFL students managed to answer and one EFL student did not answer.

Among that EFL students more understand about plural, past tense and progressive. Based on the data, many EFL students have succeeded in finding derivational and inflectional morphemes in the narrative text entitled Hansel and Gretel. There are also fifty-three derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes in the narrative text. There are fifteen derivational morphemes and thirty-eight inflectional morphemes in the narrative text.

Regarding EFL students' understanding of derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes, the result of EFL students' understanding is 66.5 for derivational morphemes, which is in category C or good enough, while 89 for inflectional morphemes is in category A or very good. It can be concluded from the percentage of students' understanding that EFL students understand inflectional morphemes better, which is a fairly high result compared to derivational morphemes, which is 89, in category A or very good.

2) Students' Obstacles Regarding Morphemes

In this section, data were taken from interviews with EFL students of this research. The result shows EFL students that there are EFL students who have no interest and motivation towards understanding derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes, but when there is a motivating influence, EFL students begin to be little by little interested and motivated by it. In learning media and the way lecturers teach according to EFL students is quite interesting, and lecturers also teach to equalize style and language with students. Besides that, some EFL students have difficulty distinguishing roots and affixes, as well as changing the spelling and pronunciation of words when root words are added with affixes.

The result revealed the EFL students' obstacles in comprehension of derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. The data can be presented as follow:

- Motivation

“I am not interested and do not have the motivation in learning and understanding derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes because I think derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes are difficult to understand. But I will be motivated when there are friends who are active in class.”

The findings indicated that a majority of the students reported the one of the obstacles primarily due to a lack of motivation. For instance, one student expressed that her engagement with the subject was limited because she found it uninteresting and challenging to grasp. Nevertheless, she expressed her willingness to become more engaged if her peers contributed more actively to the subject matter.

- Awareness of affixes

“Yes, it is true that I have great difficulty in understanding the difference between affixes and roots because sometimes I don't understand the changes when roots are added with affixes, this makes it difficult for me to distinguish between affixes and roots.”

The second hurdle encountered by the students pertains to affixes. As per the response provided earlier, the students continue to struggle in distinguishing affixes from root words due to the intricate alterations involved, which contributes to their confusion.

- Lack of vocabulary

“Well, the understanding of word class changes in derivational morphemes can be affected by vocabulary, if the vocabulary is lacking it will make it difficult for me to understand word class changes in derivational morphemes.”

The fact of lack of vocabulary is still the significant challenge in comprehending derivational morphemes. It showed all the students feel vocabulary is the most critical things to absorb to understand word class changes in derivational morphemes.

- Lack of grammar

“It is difficult because some word classes have a grammar that makes it difficult for me to understand the grammar in derivational morphemes.”

The response indicates that grammatical errors persist, particularly in the context of changes in grammatical functions within sentences. In other words, students are still struggling with issues related to the correct usage and understanding of how different grammatical elements and structures function within the context of sentences. This suggests that they may have difficulty in distinguishing and correctly applying various grammatical rules and principles in their writing or communication.

In summary, the primary obstacle for EFL students in understanding is recognizing the changes in word class. Additionally, having a limited vocabulary and a poor grasp of grammar are contributing factors. Moreover, derivational morphemes present significant challenges for all students. The interviews also indicate that the practice of using morphemes is a key factor in achieving language proficiency. However, some students may face limitations in opportunities or motivation.

b. Discussion

The most common findings are about inflectional morphemes compared to derivational morphemes, which are in line with the findings of (Kusumawardhani, 2020), who found many suffixes in the story regarding inflectional morphemes. Further, the researcher found that in analyzing EFL students' comprehension of derivational and inflectional morphemes. EFL students tend to understand inflectional morphemes more easily than derivational morphemes. This is because inflectional morphemes are more likely to change the function of the grammar and do not change the word class, which is why EFL students have a very good understanding of inflectional morphemes. This also verified that inflectional morphemes organize relationships and affect grammar (Hazen, 2015).

In terms of students' motivation regarding derivational and inflectional morphemes, the majority of students participating in the interview sessions reported having less interest in learning the material. This diminished interest can be attributed to their struggles in comprehending the material (Budiharto et al., 2021). Additionally, it was found that the use of learning media posed a burden for students (Hazen, 2015). Similarly, EFL students continue to face difficulties in distinguishing between affixes and root words due to their limited affix awareness. This finding aligns with the assumption made by (Carstairs-Mccarthy, 2002) and (Veselovská & Emonds, 2016), who highlighted that affixes and root words are not always clearly discernible for EFL students struggling with this distinction.

Furthermore, it was also found that EFL students encounter deficiencies in both vocabulary and grammar. The insufficiency of vocabulary presents a substantial challenge for EFL students in comprehending derivational morphemes, as it exerts a detrimental influence on their grasp of changes in word classes. Due to this vocabulary deficit, EFL students struggle to recognize the shifts in word classes that occur when base words are augmented with affixes, thereby significantly impeding their comprehension, especially in the context of derivational morphemes. Likewise, the deficiency of grammatical knowledge adversely affects EFL students' comprehension of inflectional morphemes, as unfamiliar changes in grammatical functions posed considerable as obstacle.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it is evident that EFL students exhibit varying degrees of comprehension when dealing with derivational and inflectional morphemes. In the realm of derivational morphemes, the students displayed proficiency in understanding adjective-to-adverb transformations but encountered more challenges when it came to shifts from nouns to adjectives or verbs to nouns. On the other hand, inflectional morphemes, which typically alter grammatical functions without changing word classes, were grasped more easily by the students, with strong performances in plural, past tense, and progressive forms. The overall pattern suggests that EFL students tend to have a better grasp of inflectional morphemes compared to derivational ones, highlighting the importance of recognizing these distinctions in morphological analysis.

Additionally, the research has shed light on the obstacles that EFL students face when tackling morphemes. These challenges include a lack of motivation, particularly stemming from students' perceptions of difficulty, affix-awareness deficits, difficulty distinguishing affixes from root words, vocabulary limitations affecting word class changes, and deficiencies in grammatical knowledge affecting inflectional morpheme comprehension. While these obstacles present formidable barriers to morphological understanding, the findings offer valuable implications for educational practice. Addressing these issues through engaging teaching methods, fostering peer interaction, and developing educational resources can significantly enhance EFL students' morphological awareness, ultimately facilitating their language proficiency.

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