

## **On Derivational Morphemes: Grammatical Competence of College Students**

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**Abstract** - Morphology is one of the several branches of linguistics that can help students highlight particular words and decode them. Teachers or lecturers should implement and develop a variety of strategies and instruction to promote students' grammatical competence so that students comprehend the importance of morphological roles in teaching-learning English. This study aimed to determine the grammatical competence of college students. Specifically, it sought to answer the level of grammatical competence of 93 Education English major students of Pangasinan State University (PSU) on derivational morphemes and difference in the respondents' grammatical competence when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics such as type of senior high school last attended and preferred reading materials in English. The descriptive survey method was utilized as the research described and attempted to interpret the level of grammatical competence on derivational morphemes of Education English major students and how the grammatical competence of the respondents differs when categorized in terms of the aforementioned demographic characteristics. Survey and written test questionnaires were used as instruments of this study. Findings revealed that majority of the college students were found to have high grammatical competence on derivational morphemes. Instrumental to this are the demographic characteristics such as type of senior high school last attended and most preferred reading materials in English which affected grammatical competence. Thus, grammatical competence on derivational morphemes would mean proficiency in word formation processes and its underlying complexities.

**Keywords** – Derivational Morphemes, Grammatical Competence, College Students

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the population of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) increased, many schools have implemented practices to ensure that all students are performing academically at levels that will ensure readiness and success as they prepare for continued learning experiences grounded in college and career readiness standards as they progress through school (Bornfreund, Cook, Lieberman, & Lowenberg, 2015).

Research has repeatedly shown that it takes seven to 10 years for English language learner students to reach that threshold needed to proficiently perform

academic tasks in English (Fuhrman, Perry, & Shinn, 2013; Slama, 2014).

Grammar may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words in order to form longer units of meaning. There is a set of rules which govern how units of meaning may be constructed in any language: one may say that a learner who knows grammar is one who has mastered and can apply these rules to express him or herself in the acceptability of the language forms (Chung and Pullum, 2015).

According to Nassaji and Fotos (2011), grammatical competence is the speakers' knowledge of the forms and

meanings that exist in grammar, and a theoretical knowledge of how to use them reflected in the grammar rules. In other words, competence is in the head. Tasks that are sentence-based typically develop the grammatical competence.

Morphemes, which incorporate roots, stems, prefixes, and suffixes, are the smallest parts of words that convey significance. In terms of English, morphemes supply the crude materials for making new words, and the dexterity of morphemes gives some portion of the generative force of the English dialect. Numerous new words are promptly reasonable on the grounds that they are made out of well-known morphemes. Morphology is the study of “how words are made” (L.V. Shcherba, 2011) or simply the creation of new words.

Knowledge of morphology can be applied not only in linguistic research, but also in business, politics, media, and many other areas. Once you acquire the basics of morphology and linguistics in general, the possible applications of your linguistic knowledge become numerous since you learn how language can be used in creative ways. For instance, you can name a company’s new product, write a memorable slogan for the company, write an advertisement, or write a political speech (Aronoff and Fudeman, 2005).

Locally, the study of Pangasinan State University alumni Cariño and del Rosario (2012) entitled “*Competence and Performance on Derivational Bound Morphemes Among Freshmen AB English Students*” showed that a fraction of students are still consigned to moderate and low levels of competence along the use of derivational bound morphemes hence English major students need more improvement in their level of linguistic competence particularly in their use and usage of derivational bound morpheme.

This study aimed to determine the grammatical competence of college students. Specifically, it sought to answer the level of grammatical competence of 93 Education English major students of PSU on derivational morphemes and difference in the respondents’ grammatical competence when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics such as type of senior high school last attended and preferred reading materials in English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized the descriptive survey method as it described and attempted to interpret the grammatical competence on derivational morphemes of 93 Education English major students and how the level of grammatical competence of the respondents differ when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics. This study employed purposive sampling to determine the number of respondents.

The two research instruments used in this study were the survey and written test questionnaires. The survey questionnaire dealt with the demographic characteristics of the students which includes the type of senior high school last attended and preferred reading materials in English. The written test focused on morphology. This instrument measured the level of grammatical competence of the respondents on derivational morphemes.

The data were subjected to statistical treatment such as frequency counts, percentage distribution and mean.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

On the basis of statistical analyses, this study presented the following salient findings:

### **Grammatical Competence of Education English Major Students of PSU on Derivational Morphemes**

Level	Score Range	Derivational Morphemes (Mean=23.32)	
		Frequency	Percentage
Very High	25 – 30	44	47.3
High	19 – 24	36	38.7
Average	13 – 18	10	10.8
Low	7 – 12	3	3.2
Very Low	0 – 6	0	0.0
TOTAL		93	100%

The respondents' level of grammatical competence on derivational morphemes posted a mean of 23.32 which is interpreted as high. Among the 93 respondents, 44 or 47.3% obtained scores ranging from 25-30 with very high level of competence. This very high level of grammatical competence has reference to affixes –ion and –able. Most of the respondents supplied the affix –ion correctly to the base words *construct*, *obsess*, and *consider* likewise supplied the affix –able correctly to the base words *account*, *accept*, and *comfort*. Affixes –ment for *agree* and –er for *contain* encompassed the 36 or 38.7% who obtained scores ranging from 19-24 with high level of competence. 10 or 10.8% who had scores ranging from 13-18 and is described with average level of competence and 3 or 3.2% who garnered scores ranging from 7-12 which exhibited low level of competence have differently understood the usage of affixes –il and –less for the base words *literate* and *daunt* when used in sentences. Nonetheless, none of the respondents exhibited very low level of grammatical competence.

Generally, the respondents of this study are grammatically competent on derivational morphemes as evidenced by the tabular data shown above. However, the result obtained from this study differs greatly from the result generated from the study of Cariño and del Rosario (2012), as the respondents of the said study had low to moderate competence in derivational morphemes.

### Type of Senior High School Last Attended

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Derivational Morphemes	
		Mean Score	DE
Type of Senior High School Last Attended	Private (n=20)	24.05	H
	Public (n=73)	23.12	H

The respondents who graduated from private school exhibited a more prevailing grammatical competence with a mean score of 24.05 described as high on derivational morphemes as compared to the participants who graduated from public school that obtained a mean score of 23.12 interpreted as high.

The kind of secondary school one has attended may have long-term influence on the academic achievement of a student. Jaschik (2014) cited certain research findings such as one which was conducted by Black et.al. (2014) proving that the quality of high school a student attended is a key predictor of grades in college, not only in freshman year, but continuing into the sophomore and junior years as well. Similar point is made by Nagaoka et.al. (2009).

However, research finding published by Center on Education Policy (2007) pointed out that no difference in reading achievement test was found among those who graduated from private and public high schools. This strongly suggests that the type of school one has attended is not a factor in college achievement, which includes language performance.

### Most Preferred Reading Materials in English

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Derivational Morphemes	
		Mean Score	DE

<b>Most Preferred Reading Materials in English</b>	Textbook (n=52)	23.08	H
	Online Publications (n=17)	23.65	H
	Pocketbooks (n=8)	24.51	VH
	Magazines (n=6)	25.00	VH
	Dictionary (n=5)	21.20	H
	Newspaper (n=3)	23.67	H
	General Articles (n=2)	22.00	H

The respondents who prefer reading magazines showed a more commendable grammatical competence with a mean score of 25.00 described as very high on derivational morphemes than respondents who prefer reading pocketbooks with a mean score of 24.51 described as very high, newspaper with a mean score of 23.67 described as high, online publications with a mean score of 23.65 described as high, textbook with a mean score of 23.08 described as high, general articles with a mean score of 22.00 described as high, and dictionary with a mean score of 21.20 described as high respectively.

With reference to the results above, reading habits have been singled out to immensely affect the scholarly output of the students (Hangu, Capps, Blacklock, & Garza, 2014). It is an indispensable method of acquiring knowledge and is essential for higher academic performance (Bashir & Mattoo, 2012), and it determines the success of university students around the globe.

It is also strongly supported by Chettri and Rout (2013) that reading habits are “the number of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well and the average time spent on reading” (p.13). Similarly, Wagner et al. (2002) describe reading habits as the volume and the extent to which materials learned, and the

maximum number of hours spent reviewing and reflecting on the concepts.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the salient findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

Majority of the college students - the Education English major students were found to have high grammatical competence on derivational morphemes. Instrumental to this are the demographic characteristics which affect the grammatical competence such as type of senior high school last attended and the most preferred reading materials in English. Their grammatical competence must be reinforced since they need this in their academic performance as students and in their future career as English teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the salient findings of this study and conclusions drawn, the following are recommended:

1. For the school administrators to approve the development of learning enrichment materials in morphology to be employed by the Languages Education faculty as an instructional aid in order to further the grammatical competence of Education English major students of PSU.
2. The conduct of further studies about teaching-learning strategies and styles geared towards the reinforcement of the grammatical competence of Education English major students in order to help them enrich their English proficiency.

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