



Assessment of Morphological Awareness for Iraqi Undergraduate EFL Learners

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Abstract

The current study focuses on assessing the phenomenon of morphological awareness, which is counted as one of the most significant types of language awareness. The problem that this study seeks to discover is that most university students encounter difficulties when they identify issues that are concerned with morphology. This study aims at investigating how Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners identify issues of morphological awareness , assessing such knowledge that students learned , and examining to what extent they can manage morphological awareness in their academic study. The data is limited to 20 students of the second stage at the English department , University of Altoosi in Najaf, during the academic year 2024–2025. A quantitative method of analysis is employed. Depending on the results of the study, it has been shown that many second stage Iraqi student still face problems in capturing the complete understanding of morphemes. The overall number of incorrect answers is exceeded the correct ones, this shows that even when some students are capable of a certain level of morphological awareness, more help and focused training are required to improve their abilities in such grammatical issues.

Keywords: Assessment, learner, suffix, test, morphology

تقييم الوعي الصرفي لدى طلاب الجامعات العراقيين كمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المخلص

تركز هذه الدراسة على تقييم ظاهرة الوعي الصرفي ، الذي يُعدّ من أهم أنواع الوعي اللغوي. وتسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف المشكلة التي يواجهها معظم طلاب الجامعات عند تحديد المسائل المتعلقة بالصرف. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اكتشاف كيفية تحديد مسائل الوعي الصرفي من قبل الطلبة الجامعيين العراقيين كمتعلمي لغة أجنبية ، وتقييم المعرفة التي اكتسبوها في هذا المجال، ودراسة مدى قدرتهم على توظيف الوعي الصرفي في دراستهم الأكاديمية. وتقتصر البيانات على 20 طالبًا من طلاب المرحلة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الطوسي في النجف خلال العام الدراسي 2024-2025. تم استخدام المنهج الكمي في التحليل. وبناءً على نتائج الدراسة، تبين أن العديد من الطلاب العراقيين في المرحلة الثانية ما زالوا يواجهون صعوبات في استيعاب فهم كامل للمورفيمات. يتجاوز عدد الإجابات الخاطئة عدد الإجابات الصحيحة، مما يدل على أنه حتى عندما يمتلك بعض الطلاب مستوى معيناً من الوعي الصرفي، فإنهم يحتاجون إلى مزيد من المساعدة والتدريب المُركّز لتحسين قدراتهم في هذه المسائل النحوية. الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم ، المتعلم ، اللاحقة ، الاختبار ، علم الصرف



1-Introduction

Morphological awareness, or the ability to think about and engage with the morphemic structure of words, including their roots, prefixes, and suffixes, is a crucial component of language and literacy development. Across all developmental stages and linguistic contexts, it is essential for spelling competence, reading comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition. Carlisle (2000 , p. 194) mentions that morphological awareness is "the conscious awareness of the morphemic structure of words and the ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure,". Strong morphological awareness has been consistently shown to benefit learners reading development and academic achievement (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). For many learners, a lack of knowledge about word structure (morphology) causes problems with vocabulary and reading comprehension. Despite the fact that morphological awareness is recognized to aid learners in comprehending and decoding complicated words, it is frequently disregarded in language instruction. With an emphasis on English as a second language, this study aims to examine how teaching word elements including prefixes, roots, and suffixes can improve learners' vocabulary and reading skills

2. What is Assessment

According to Richard and Schmidt (2010), assessment is a methodical process of gathering data and drawing conclusions about a student's aptitude or the caliber or effectiveness of a course based on a variety of sources of information. A "test, interview, questionnaire, observation, etc." can be used for assessment. For example, evaluating an immigrant learner's comprehension ability may be crucial to determining if the pupils can follow academic programs in schools or whether more language instruction is required.

In order to evaluate the quality of instruction in the courses, students should take tests at the beginning and end of the courses. While the term "assessment" is used in a more expansive meaning to refer to a variety of ways to testing and assessments, the term "testing" is frequently associated with "large-scale standardized tests" (Richard and Schmidt, 2010).

Concerning types of assessment, Brown(2018) mentions four types: "formative assessment, summative assessment, formal assessment and informal assessment".Summative evaluation assesses students' performance at the end of an instructional session, whereas formative assessment is a continuous process that offers feedback to enhance learning during instruction .Formal assessment entails scheduled, systematic evaluations, like quizzes or tests, that yield measurable outcomes. On the other hand, informal assessment happens naturally through interactions in the classroom and instructor observations, providing information on students' development without the use of standardized tests. These types measure students learning relied on how learners can demonstrate



real-world skills on a performance test, such as writing essays or participate short discussions and conversation.

Additionally, assessment creates quantifiable and explicit learning scores for students, provides enough learning opportunities to achieve these results, employs systematic methods of collecting, evaluating, and interpreting evidence to show how your students' learning relates to expectations, and uses the information gathered to demonstrate improvement in students' learning (Brown, 2018).

3. Morphological Awareness

Morphological awareness, as suggested by Phil et al (2012), means the capacity to identify and make detailed morphemes. On the structure level, It may be associated with learner's interpreting and basis of morphological structure processes. The fundamental study of morphological knowledge in an alphabetic language places a strong emphasis on lexical and inflectional morphology. Language users' ability to comprehend and apply morphologically complicated word features accurately, or their morphological knowledge, can be used to determine morphological awareness (Meiling et al., 2013).

Moreover, According to Apel (2014), morphological awareness has begun to get attention as one of the linguistic awareness skills that affects written language proficiency. In addition , it can be claimed that morphological awareness is an explicit awareness that is the same as explicable declarative knowledge. In other words, learners' capacity to explain the meaning and purpose of affixes and root words is known as morphological awareness (Carlisle, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that people often confuse morphological knowledge and morphology acquisition. When learners use metacognitive strategies to reflect and alternate word formation processes to determine the meaning of new words without communicative context, this is known as morphological awareness. Morphology acquisition means the cognitive abilities to use and comprehend morphological structure in natural speech. Thus, morphological awareness falls under the cover of morphology acquisition, (Al Farsi, 2008).

Consequently, According to McCutchen and Logan (2011), morphological awareness increases with age and linguistic experience, and learners who possess a high level of morphological awareness are able to generate correct derivational forms. Additionally, students benefit from the strategic application of morphological analysis in terms of vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.



3.1 Morphology, Morpheme and types of morphemes

Yule (2010, p. 66) defines morphology as " the study of internal structure of words and words by which they are formed or in other words the study of word formation". Crystal (2011,p. 313) states that morpheme is "the minimal distinctive unit of grammar, and the central concern of morphology".

Besides, Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) maintain that morphemes can be considered as the smallest structurally significant linguistic components. Although it is the standard definition and an excellent place to start, it does not mean that all morphemes are included. A morpheme may be comprised of a "word, such as book, or a meaningful piece of a word, such as the -ed of played, that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts". Therefore, the smallest linguistic units with a grammatical function are called morphemes.

Concerning the types of morpheme, Morphemes are categorized into two primary groups by : bound morphemes, which must attach to other morphemes (e.g., re- and -ful in replayful) and free morphemes, which can occur independently as words (e.g., play) . Monomorphemic words are made up of only one free morpheme, whereas polymorphemic words are made up of multiple morphemes. There is also a difference between inflectional morphemes, which convey grammatical relationships like tense or plurality (e.g., -ed for past tense), and derivational morphemes, which create new words or change lexical categories (e.g., -ness, -ment). Grammatical words are inflectional morphemes that manifest as distinct words (Crystal, 2011).

3. 2 Distinction between Inflectional and Derivational morphemes

Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) provide the following differences between inflectional and derivational morphemes:

1. Inflectional morpheme does not change the grammatical category or lexical meaning of a word. For example, when the term pen is pluralized as pens, it nevertheless retains its noun status. On the other hand, derivation can alter both category and meaning, as in the case of happy (adjective) turning into happiness (noun).

2. Inflectional morphemes convey morphosyntactic characteristics like case, number, and tense that are important to sentence structure. Meaning is usually impacted by derivative morphemes, which are not syntactically required.

3. Compared to derivational morphology, inflectional morphology is more productive and applies more freely to words that belong to the same category. With the exception of irregular forms like children or uncountable nouns like furniture, the majority of English nouns, for instance, create plurals with -s (e.g.,



vehicles). On the other hand, not all verbs can use the derivational suffix "er" to form nouns; we can say writer but not editer.

4. Inflectional morphemes are found farther from the root than derivative ones. The derivational suffix -ize comes before the inflectional suffix -s in popularizes, for instance.

5. Compared to inflected morphemes, derived morphemes have a higher chance of being retained in the mental lexicon. Derived words like happiness (from happy) alter their grammatical category and meaning, increasing the likelihood that they will be stored as distinct entries, whereas inflected versions like walked (from walk) usually retain meaning and are frequently created by rules.

4. Methodology and Data analysis

In this section, the researcher will measure morphological awareness by selecting the sample of this study, comprising (20) English undergraduate students at the second stage in the English Department, University of Altoosi, during the academic year 2024–2025. The method that is utilized in the present study is quantitative in relation to data collection as well as data analysis.

To perform the prerequisite of the test instruments, one question is carefully established to assess the knowledge level of "university students' recognition of morphological awareness." It is crucial to establish that the test instructions are elaborated to ensure that the learners give obvious answers to the concerned questions of the designed test.

The data collection is achieved via the researcher collecting the test papers of students' answers. For the test format, it is designed in such a way that it contains ten items of questions; 1 mark is given for the correct answer and 0 marks for the incorrect one. The percentages of the results of all students' responses (correct and incorrect answers) are done in such a way:

The percentage of total correct/ incorrect responses = The total number of the correct / incorrect responses x 100 ÷ Number of the total items of the question x Total Number of students

For The percentages of the results of each student responses (correct and incorrect answers) are done in such a way:

The percentage of the correct/ incorrect responses = The total number of the correct / incorrect responses x 100 ÷ Number of the total items of the question



5. Quantitative Data Analysis

In this section, all students' answers are analyzed quantitatively. Through This analysis is to show the frequencies and the percentages of correct and incorrect students' answers. This is shown in the table below:

Table(1) Percentage and frequencies of the Students' answers

Number of students	Number of Correct response	Percentage	Number of Incorrect response	Percentage
1	4	40%	6	60%
2	7	70%	3	60%
3	3	30%	7	70%
4	3	30%	7	70%
5	3	30%	7	70%
6	4	40%	6	60%
7	6	60%	4	60%
8	3	30%	7	70%
9	5	50%	5	50%
10	4	40%	6	60%
11	3	30%	7	70%
12	4	40%	6	60%
13	5	50%	5	50%
14	6	60%	4	40%
15	6	60%	4	40%
16	5	50%	5	50%
17	5	50%	5	50%



18	4	40%	6	60%
19	7	70%	3	30%
20	6	60%	4	40%
Total	93	% 19	107	21%

6.Results and Discussion

Based on what is shown in the abovementioned table, it can be observed that the students perform differently in answering the test in question. The percentage of the correct answers is 19%, and the number of the frequencies is 93, whereas the percentage of the incorrect answer scores is 21%, and the number of the frequencies is 107, respectively, according to the analysis.

Ten questions are given to each student, and each student's number of correct and incorrect answers is varied. Some students do well; Student 2 and 17 answer seven correct answers, leaving only three wrong ones. Other students, on the other hand, have found that the questions are more difficult. For example, Students 3 , 5, and more only correctly answer three of the questions, which results in a higher number of erroneous answers (7 each).

With this mixed range of correct and incorrect responses, it is observed that some students have found the morphological content in the test is easier to understand, while most others found it more difficult. Based on these results , it has been observed that some Iraqi university learners are facing problems in capturing morphological awareness.

7.Conclusion

The study concludes that Iraqi university students as EFL have different degrees of competency in morphological awareness as it is noted in the analysis. The greater proportion of incorrect answers suggests that many students still have difficulty comprehending and using morphemes completely, which has an impact on their learning results and general language understanding. These findings promote further study into successful tactics catered to a variety of learner requirements and emphasize the necessity for focused instructional support to develop morphological abilities, particularly for those who are facing difficulties in morphological comprehension .

8.Suggestions for solving the problem and improving Morphological Awareness

Both students and instructors help improve students' awareness of morphology. There are some suggestions that help develop this ability. They are as follows:

1. Use illustrations and examples to clearly and methodically teach morphemes (roots, prefixes, and suffixes).



2. Provide tasks that require students to dissect and examine word components in order to comprehend their structure and meaning.
3. In order to improve vocabulary and comprehension, encourage students to use their morphological knowledge when reading and writing.
4. Engage in discussions, ask questions, and take notes during morphology-focused instruction.
5. Regularly apply skills to deconstruct words, identify morphemes, and infer meanings independently or in groups.
6. Use morphological awareness to decode unfamiliar words while reading and choose more precise words when writing.

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Appendix

Q/Fill the blanks with one suitable word for the actions which are described in bold words as required in brackets .

- 1.Allen has attractive **beauty**. Allen is very.....(Adjective)
- 2-When you make an **interview** with someone. You are..... (Noun)
- 3- Aseel has a sight problem. she can only see **short distances things** . So she is..... (short-sight) person (Adjective)
- 4-I see **a passer- by** near my father's company . Next day , I see two others . So there are three..... (plural)
- 5-Noor feels **happiness**. She isthan Suzy .(Comparative adjective)
- 6- Begging is the most widely spread **phenomenon** among other social..... nowadays. (plural)
- 7.Ahmed was good at **shooting**. Last year, he.....a thief . (verb)
- 8-Rana has written a wonderful poem. **Rana**.....Poem is wonderful . (Possessive)
- 9-Rami's **tallness** is distinctive among his colleagues . He is the.....student in the school.(Superlative adjective)
- 10 .Sara is a good English **teacher**. Shepupils and she is interested in her job (verb)