The Effect of Morphological Strategies Training for English Language Learners

Q. Deng  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

G. Trainin  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

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Native speakers have a vocabulary size of about 50,000 when they enter college, but English as a second language learners (ELLs) have a size between 3500 and 4500 word families to take TOEFL exam (Chujo & Oghigian, 2009). It is not difficult to conclude that, when students enter college, the vocabulary size of native speakers is about 12 times of that for ELLs.

There is evidence, however, that college students do not have a little knowledge about morphological strategies, especially ELLs (Francis & Simpson, 2009; Nation, 2001). Up to date, it is not known how well ELL college students are equipped with morphological strategies and knowledge that enable them to learn vocabulary more effectively.

**Morphological Awareness Pre- and Post-test (20 minutes).**

- **Sentence Completion:** 10 sentence completion questions where students are asked to use the right form of given words to complete the sentences.
- **Analogy:** 10 word analogies to measure students' metalinguistic ability to recognize and manipulate morphological relationships. The first 5 analogies followed the form A:B::C:D that asked them to select a word that is not related to the given words.
- **Break down words:** Asked students to break words down into smaller word parts. All words were non-words that are composed of word parts (e.g., prefix, word roots, and suffixes) in order to minimize the confounding factor for students' prior knowledge of word meanings.
- **Meaning Guess:** Asked students if they could guess the meaning of the words they've just broken down.

**Cognitive Load Measure.** Following Sweller's (2010) cognitive load theory, at the end of each of the four parts, a single question was created to ask students to report their mental effort they put forward: “How difficult is it to finish the tasks on this page?” Students rated their effort on a scale ranging from 1 (very easy) to 7 (very difficult).

The intervention took place in a quiet room on campus in groups ranging from 2 to 6 students that took about 1.5 hours. The training resemble a real classroom teaching format. The training procedure consisted of the following sections after obtaining students' informed consent: (1) Morphological Awareness Pre-test, (2) a Demographic Survey, (3) Morphological Strategies Intervention with Guided and Independent Practices with Feedback, (4) Morphological Awareness Post-test. For the intervention, the experimenter used overhead projector to present the training material and distributed printed handouts for guided and independent practices. During teaching the morphological knowledge, the experimenter engaged students by asking students to provide examples and giving them credit by providing positive feedback. Students receive positive and corrective feedbacks during guided practices and after independent practices.

**Conclusions**

1. Morphological strategies training positively affect the morphological awareness of ELLs.
2. Morphological strategies training reduces the cognitive load of ELLs for all four types of tasks.
3. The training is effective to ELLs’ morphological awareness regardless of their English proficiency level.
4. The training reduces ELLs’ cognitive load regardless of their English proficiency level.

**Bibliography**