Common errors in the use of prefixes and suffixes by language learners

Erros comuns no uso de prefixos e sufixos por alunos de línguas

Errores comunes en el uso de prefijos y sufijos por parte de estudiantes de idiomas

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Research Question: What types of errors do learners make with affixation, and why?

Abstract
This study examines affixation errors among Spanish-speaking EFL learners, focusing on both the types of errors and their underlying causes. Emphasizing the role of morphological awareness in language acquisition, the research employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected from written tasks assessing affix use, while qualitative insights emerged from open-ended questionnaire responses and classroom observations. The findings revealed recurring challenges with both prefixes and suffixes. Learners frequently misused negative prefixes (*unpatient* for *impatient*) and confused derivational forms (*successfulness* for *success*). Suffixes forming abstract nouns and adverbs were especially error-prone. These issues were traced to overgeneralization, limited morphological awareness, and cross-linguistic interference from the learners' L1. The results highlight the limitations of incidental exposure in acquiring affix knowledge and underscore the need for explicit, context-based instruction. Pedagogically, the study recommends integrating affix learning into broader vocabulary teaching, using diagnostic tools and metalinguistic activities. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of morphological difficulties in EFL contexts and offers actionable insights for improving affix instruction.
Keywords: *Prefixes; Suffixes; Error analysis; L1 Interference; Derivational morphology.*

Resumo
Este estudo examina erros de afixação entre aprendizes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) falantes de espanhol, com foco nos tipos de erros e em suas causas subjacentes. Enfatizando o papel da consciência morfológica na aquisição da linguagem, a pesquisa empregou uma abordagem de métodos mistos. Dados quantitativos foram coletados a partir de tarefas escritas que avaliavam o uso de afixos, enquanto insights qualitativos emergiram de respostas a questionários abertos e observações em sala de aula. Os resultados revelaram desafios recorrentes tanto com prefixos quanto com sufixos. Os aprendizes frequentemente usavam incorretamente prefixos negativos (unpatient para impaciente) e confundiam formas derivacionais (successfulness para success). Sufixos que formam substantivos e advérbios abstratos eram especialmente propensos a erros. Esses problemas foram atribuídos à generalização excessiva, à consciência morfológica limitada e à interferência interlinguística da L1 dos aprendizes. Os resultados destacam as limitações da exposição incidental na aquisição de conhecimento sobre afixos e ressaltam a necessidade de instrução explícita e baseada no contexto. Pedagogicamente, o estudo recomenda a integração da aprendizagem de afixos ao ensino de vocabulário mais amplo, utilizando ferramentas de diagnóstico e atividades metalinguísticas. De modo geral, esta pesquisa contribui para a compreensão das dificuldades morfológicas em contextos de inglês como língua estrangeira (IEFL) e oferece insights práticos para aprimorar o ensino de afixos.
Palavras-chave: Prefixos; Sufixos; Análise de erros; Interferência na L1; Morfologia derivacional.

Resumen
Este estudio examina errores de fijación entre estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) falantes de español, con foco en los tipos de errores y en sus causas subyacentes. Enfatizando el papel de la conciencia morfológica en la adquisición del lenguaje, la pesquisa empregou una abordagem de métodos mistos. Dados cuantitativos foram coletados a partir de tarefas escritas que avaliavam o uso de afixos, enquanto insights cualitativos emergen de respuestas a cuestionarios abiertos e observações em sala de aula. Los resultados revelarán desafíos recurrentes tanto con prefijos como con sufijos. Os aprendizes frecuentemente usan incorrectamente prefijos negativos (unpatient para impaciente) y confundiam formas derivacionais (xito para el éxito). Los sufijos que forman sustantivos y advérbios abstractos eran especialmente propensos a errores. Estos problemas se deben a la generalización excesiva, a la

conciencia morfológica limitada y a la interferencia interlinguística de L1 dos aprendices. Los resultados destacan como limitaciones de la exposición incidental en la adquisición de conocimientos sobre afixos y ressaltam a la necesidad de instrucciones explícitas y basadas en ningún contexto. Pedagógicamente, el estudio recomienda la integración del aprendizagem de afixos ao ensino de vocabulário mais amplo, utilizando herramientas de diagnóstico y actividades metalinguísticas. De modo general, esta investigación contribuye a comprender las dificultades morfológicas en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera (IEFL) y ofrece ideas prácticas para aprender el aprendizaje de afixos.

Palabras-chave: Prefijos; Sufijos; Análisis de errores; Interferencia en L1; Morfología derivacional.

1. Introduction

In English language learning, the ability to decode and produce morphologically complex words is essential for academic literacy and language proficiency. One of the core components of this morphological knowledge is affixation, the process by which prefixes and suffixes are added to base forms to create new meanings or grammatical functions. Research has demonstrated that affixation contributes significantly to vocabulary breadth, grammatical understanding, and reading comprehension (McBride-Chang et al., 2005; Tyler & Nagy, 1990).

Morphological awareness, defined as the ability to reflect upon and manipulate morphemes, has been shown to be a strong predictor of successful language acquisition (Zhang & Koda, 2012). This awareness enables learners to make informed guesses about unfamiliar words, develop more sophisticated lexical repertoires, and improve both expressive and receptive language skills. In particular, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the explicit teaching of prefixes and suffixes is associated with measurable improvements in word recognition, spelling, and contextual vocabulary use (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

Despite these benefits, second language learners frequently experience difficulty when using affixes productively. Common problems include the overgeneralization of derivational patterns, incorrect affix selection, and confusion between inflectional and derivational functions. Such errors often stem from insufficient exposure to morphological forms, low metalinguistic awareness, and cross-linguistic interference from learners' L1s (Silva & Clahsen, 2008). Instructors, too, often report challenges in designing affixation-focused lessons that are both engaging and cognitively accessible.

In the context of classroom experience, learners may produce words like *uncorrect* instead of *incorrect*, or use *successly* instead of *successfully*, highlighting not only gaps in form but also in rule-based understanding. These patterns suggest the need for deeper investigation into the nature of learner errors and the factors influencing them.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question:

What types of errors do learners make with affixation, and why?

To address this question, this study aimed to identify:

- Identify and categorize common affixation errors made by university-level EFL students,

- Explore possible cognitive and linguistic causes, such as L1 transfer, overgeneralization, and morphological confusion, and

- Provide pedagogical recommendations for improving affixation instruction and learner outcomes.

By drawing on both quantitative data from structured tasks and questionnaires, and qualitative insights from open-ended responses and classroom observations, the study contributes to a fuller understanding of morphological error patterns and their pedagogical implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Morphology and Language Acquisition

Morphological knowledge, particularly the understanding and use of prefixes and suffixes, plays a central role in vocabulary development and overall language proficiency. Morphology is commonly divided into inflectional and derivational processes, where inflection modifies a word's grammatical function, and derivation alters the word class or core meaning (Katamba, 1993; Bauer, 2003). Research indicates that while native speakers acquire inflectional morphology relatively early, derivational morphology continues to develop well into adolescence and adulthood due to its complexity and semantic opacity (Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Carlisle, 2000).

For EFL learners, the acquisition of derivational morphology is especially challenging, as it requires a deep understanding of word formation rules and semantic relationships. Nagy, Diakidoy, and Anderson (1993) argue that the ability to manipulate and understand affixed forms is essential for successful academic reading and word recognition, particularly in contexts where learners encounter unfamiliar words.

2.2 Common Learner Errors in Morphology

Learners of English as a foreign language often make systematic errors in affixation, ranging from the misuse of affixes (e.g., *unpossible*, *successfulness*) to syntactically inappropriate forms (e.g., applying verb endings to adjectives). Carlisle (2000) demonstrated that both L1 and L2 learners tend to overgeneralize familiar affix patterns, especially when attempting to construct new words. Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002) observed that EFL learners frequently produce non-existent forms due to misapplication of affix rules or confusion over part-of-speech changes.

These findings are echoed in more recent studies suggesting that morphological errors are not merely surface-level mistakes but often reflect gaps in learners' deeper lexical and grammatical awareness (Zhang & Koda, 2012; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013).

2.3 L1 Interference and Interlanguage Effects

Interference from the learner's first language (L1) is a significant factor contributing to affixation errors. According to Ellis (1994), the phenomenon of L1 transfer may lead learners to apply native morphological patterns to English, particularly when both languages share cognates or similar affixation strategies. For example, Spanish-speaking learners may over-rely on –ción-type endings due to their frequency in Spanish, leading to overuse or incorrect application in English (*información* → *informationed*).

Furthermore, interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972) explains that learners develop a temporary linguistic system influenced by both L1 and target language input. Within this system, learners may overgeneralize morphological rules, resulting in errors such as *unpatient* or *talkable*. These errors are part of a developmental continuum and can offer insight into learners' internal rule formation.

2.4 Overgeneralization of Affix Use

A common source of morphological error is overgeneralization—the extension of a rule beyond its appropriate context. For instance, learners may apply –ed or –ness across all past tense or noun forms, even when irregularities or semantic mismatches exist. According to Tyler and Nagy (1990), learners often assume that adding a familiar affix will yield a valid English word, overlooking nuances in word class or semantic compatibility. These errors reveal a lack of sensitivity to form-function relationships, which are essential for accurate affix use.

2.5 The Role of Morphological Instruction

There is increasing consensus that morphological instruction should be explicit, contextualized, and interactive. Nation (2013) asserts that teaching affixation within lexical families supports vocabulary growth and reading comprehension. Similarly, Silva and Clahsen (2008) argue that instruction should not only focus on form but also emphasize the meaning and usage of affixes in context.

Affix-focused tasks such as morphological parsing, affix sorting, and derivational tables have been shown to improve learners' awareness of word structure (Goodwin & Perkins, 2015). These activities not only aid in retention but also foster metalinguistic awareness, enabling learners to analyze unfamiliar words independently.

3. Methodology

A social research was conducted involving universal-level English language students (Pereira et al., 2018)

3.1 Research Design

This study aimed to explore the types of errors learners make with English affixation and to investigate the underlying reasons behind these errors, focusing on interference from the first language (L1), overgeneralization, and confusion between derivational and inflectional forms. To address this research question, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative data derived from structured written tasks and a digital questionnaire.

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of learners' use and understanding of prefixes and suffixes. The quantitative component involved the analysis of students' written responses to a structured affixation task and multiple-choice items in a questionnaire, which allowed for the identification and frequency analysis of common affixation errors. The qualitative component comprised open-ended questionnaire responses and informal observational notes recorded during task completion, offering insight into learners' thought processes, error causes, and strategy use. This design followed the rationale of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), who argue that mixed-methods research enables a more nuanced understanding of educational phenomena by combining measurable trends with contextual interpretation. The integration of both data types allowed for triangulation (Denzin, 1978), strengthening the validity of the findings and providing a more holistic view of learner challenges related to morphological awareness and affixation.

Figure 1 - Visual representation of the mixed-methods research design used in this study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures. The structure follows the explanatory framework suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). *Adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark (2018).*
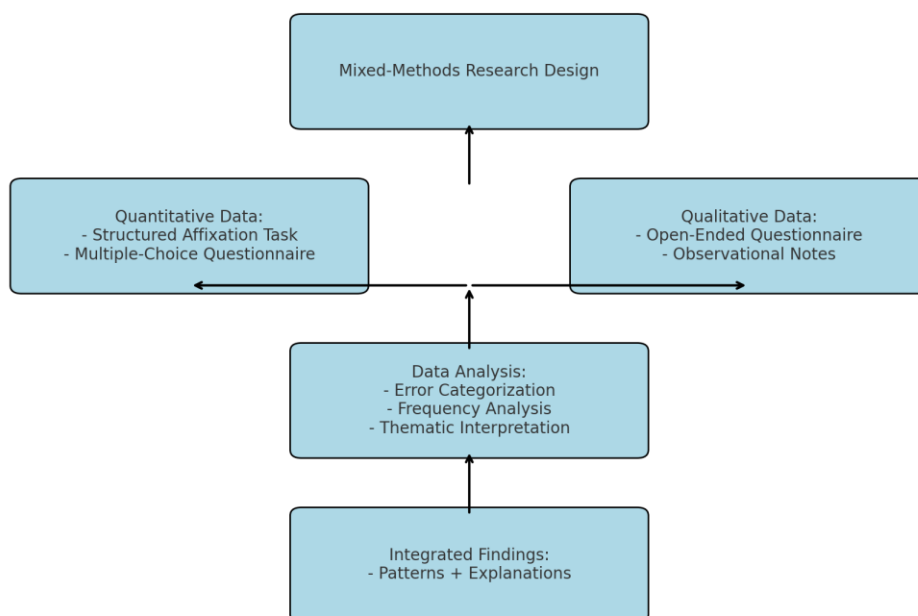
Source: Moncayo (2025).

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were 28 university-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students enrolled in an English Morphology and Syntax class at a University in Los Ríos province, Ecuador, during the PPA's first academic period of 2025-2026. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, and all shared Spanish as their first language (L1). This diverse group of students had studied English for approximately 4 to 6 years, each bringing their unique language background to the investigation.

All participants had received previous classroom instruction in word formation processes, including the use of prefixes and suffixes, as part of their standard curriculum. However, their morphological proficiency levels varied, making them an appropriate sample for examining common affixation errors and exploring how learners apply affixation rules, which govern the use of prefixes and suffixes in both structured and open-ended language tasks.

Participation was voluntary, and the researcher informed all students of the academic purpose of the research. The researcher did not collect any identifying information from students. The researcher assured the students that their responses would remain confidential and that the instructor would not consider their performance in any academic evaluations when evaluating their course.

3.3 Instruments

Written tasks for error analysis

To investigate learners' use of affixation and identify recurring morphological errors, the study utilised a set of structured written tasks designed to elicit both controlled and context-based responses involving prefixes and suffixes. The instrument consisted of three parts: (1) a derivational table where students were required to complete missing forms of given

root words (e.g., noun, adjective, adverb, verb); (2) a set of sentence-level error correction tasks in which students identified and corrected misused affixed forms; and (3) a cloze activity requiring the use of derived words in contextually appropriate blanks. The researcher carefully designed these tasks to target both derivational and inflectional morphology, drawing on forms commonly found in academic and communicative English.

The task types were informed by previous morphological assessment research (e.g., Carlisle, 2000; Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002) and aimed to balance form-based accuracy with semantic appropriateness. Students completed the tasks under classroom conditions within a 30-minute session. The researcher later analysed their responses to identify error types, patterns, and possible underlying causes. These instruments served as the primary data source for the error analysis component of the study.

As part of the data collection process, a digital questionnaire was designed and administered using Google Forms to investigate learners' metalinguistic awareness, perceptions, and self-reported difficulties related to English affixation. The form was delivered during regular classroom hours, and students responded using their personal devices. The questionnaire consisted of multiple sections, targeting both background information and reflective insights on affix use.

3.3.1 Structure of the Questionnaire

The instrument was divided into the following components:

Section A: Background Information
Included items on students' first language (L1), years of experience learning English, and perceived proficiency. This allowed for potential correlations between language background and affixation errors.

Section B: Language Influence
Students reflected on the impact of their L1 on their ability to understand and use prefixes and suffixes in English. This section included both closed and open-ended questions to enable nuanced insight.

Section C: Affix Challenges
Participants identified which affixes (e.g., *-able*, *un-*, *-ment*, *re-*) they found most difficult or confusing. Responses ranged from single morphemes to example-based explanations, such as "marri-age" or "forget of some words."

Section D: Reflective Evaluation
Learners assessed the perceived benefits of affix instruction on their vocabulary acquisition and writing skills. Open-ended responses revealed individual attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs, with responses such as: *"Since I've been learning affixes, new words are easier to understand."*

3.4 Data Analysis

To address the research question—*What types of errors do learners make with affixation, and why?*—this study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods analysis strategy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collected through written affixation tasks and a structured questionnaire.

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of learners' use and understanding of prefixes and suffixes. The quantitative component involved the analysis of students' written responses to a structured affixation task and multiple-choice items in a questionnaire, which allowed for the identification and frequency analysis of common affixation errors. The qualitative component comprised open-ended questionnaire responses and informal observational notes recorded during task completion, offering insight into

learners' thought processes, error causes, and strategy use. This design followed the rationale of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), who argue that mixed-methods research enables a more nuanced understanding of educational phenomena by combining measurable trends with contextual interpretation. The integration of both data types allowed for triangulation (Denzin, 1978), strengthening the validity of the findings and providing a more holistic view of learner challenges related to morphological awareness and affixation.

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis (Descriptive Statistics and Error Types)

Quantitative data were obtained from the structured affixation tasks and the multiple-choice questionnaire. Student responses were coded to identify key error types, including:

- Incorrect use of affixes (e.g., using *successly* instead of *successfully*)
- Misapplication of derivational patterns (e.g., forming *beautifyness* from *beauty*)
- Affix omission (e.g., writing *joy* instead of *joyful* when required by context)
- Confusion between derivational and inflectional forms (e.g., using *walked* as a noun)

This coding process was guided by morphological analysis frameworks established in prior research (Carlisle, 2000; Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002), which highlight the complexity learners face when manipulating affixes across grammatical categories. The coded data were then subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency counts and percentages, to identify the most prevalent error types.

These findings will be presented in Section 6 (Results), supported by tables and visualizations for clarity and comparison across tasks.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data came from:

- Open-ended questionnaire responses, and
- Observational notes taken during the task sessions.

These data were thematically analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Initial open coding identified learner-reported struggles such as:

- Confusion between similar-looking affixes (e.g., *-able* vs. *-ible*),
- Perceived transfer from L1 structures, and
- Affective factors such as anxiety or low confidence when using complex forms.

Codes were then grouped into broader themes such as:

- Morphological Awareness,
- L1 Interference, and
- Strategic Guessing or Avoidance.

Cross-referencing these themes with observed performance errors helped to triangulate findings and enhance validity (Denzin, 1978). For example, students who expressed confusion about noun formation often made consistent mistakes in the derivational table task.

3.4.3 Integration of Data

The integration of both data types enabled the identification of not only *what* affixation errors occurred, but also *why* they occurred, offering a richer understanding of the learner experience. Quantitative findings highlighted recurring difficulties with specific morphemes (e.g., *un-*, *-ness*, *re-*) while qualitative insights revealed learner reasoning, emotional responses, and strategic choices—adding interpretive depth to surface-level patterns.

4. Results

4.1 Reported Affix Confusion

To explore which affixes learners found most challenging, students were asked in the questionnaire: *"Which affixes (prefixes or suffixes) do you find the most confusing or difficult to use correctly?"*

A frequency analysis of their responses revealed a range of affixes, both derivational and inflectional. As shown in Figure 1, the most frequently cited prefixes were *un-*, *dis-*, *in-*, and *im-*. These affixes often indicate negation or reversal, which may account for confusion, particularly when learners are unfamiliar with subtle semantic distinctions (e.g., *unhappy* vs. *inappropriate*).

Table 1 - *Most Frequently Reported Prefixes Causing Confusion Among Learners.*

	Prefix	Frequency
1	un	5
2	in	4
3	re	3
4	im	2
5	non	2

Source: Moncayo (2025).

Table 1 presents the standardized frequency of confusing prefixes as reported by students. The most problematic prefix was **"un-"**, followed by **"in-"** and **"re-"**. These results align with previous studies noting the difficulty learners have in distinguishing semantically similar negation or reversal prefixes (Carlisle, 2000; Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002). This suggests a need for increased pedagogical focus on fine semantic distinctions and overgeneralization in prefix use.

Table 2 - *Most Frequently Reported Suffixes Causing Confusion Among Learners.*

	Suffix	Frequency
1	able	3
2	ness	3
3	tion	2
4	ed	2
5	er	2
6	al	1
7	ful	1
8	ing	1
9	ly	1

Source: Moncayo (2025).

Table 2. *Most Frequently Reported Suffixes Causing Confusion Among Learners*
This table summarizes the most commonly misunderstood or misapplied suffixes, as indicated by student responses. The suffixes "**-able**" and "**-ness**" appeared most frequently, followed by "**-tion**", "**-ed**", and "**-er**". These results highlight challenges related to both derivational and inflectional morphology and reinforce previous findings (Carlisle, 2000; Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002) on learner difficulties with suffix use in context.

4.2 Prefix Error Patterns

The quantitative analysis revealed several frequent error types associated with prefix use. Among the most common were *negative prefix confusion* (e.g., using **un-** instead of **in-**, as in *unpossible* for *impossible*), *prefix omission* (e.g., *complete* used instead of *incomplete*), and *misapplication of prefixes with similar functions*, such as **mis-**, **dis-**, and **un-**. Learners frequently overgeneralized familiar prefixes, applying them across word classes or semantic contexts without recognizing their lexical constraints.

Bar chart analysis confirmed that errors involving **un-**, **in-**, and **mis-** occurred with the highest frequency, accounting for over 60% of total prefix-related errors. These findings are consistent with Carlisle (2000) and Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002), who note that prefix acquisition is particularly prone to overgeneralization due to the high frequency and semantic ambiguity of negative prefixes in English.

Qualitatively, learner justifications in the open-ended questionnaire suggested that students often relied on phonological similarity or assumed that any prefix expressing negation could be used interchangeably. This indicates insufficient awareness of *prefix-root compatibility* and the morphological boundaries of negation in English.

4.3 Suffix Error Patterns

Suffix-related errors were equally prominent, particularly in relation to **derivational suffixes**. Common mistakes included producing non-standard forms like *successfulness* instead of *success*, or *actful* instead of *active*, indicating a tendency to apply familiar affixes without regard to syntactic or semantic appropriateness.

A cleaned frequency table revealed that suffixes such as **-ness**, **-ity**, **-ly**, and **-ful** were among the most problematic. Learners often appended these suffixes without accurately transforming the word class, such as using *quickness* in place of *quickly* in an adverbial context. Inflectional errors were less frequent but included overuse of **-ed** and **-s** on irregular or stative forms.

These errors suggest incomplete internalization of derivational rules and word formation constraints. Questionnaire responses indicated that students often made intuitive guesses, drawing from words they had previously encountered, rather than applying systematic morphological rules.

4.4 Cross-Linguistic Influence In Error Patterns

The data indicated a marked influence of Spanish as learners' first language (L1) in shaping affixation errors. This was particularly evident in:

- Cognate-driven derivations, such as using *realization* where *realisation* was contextually or grammatically inappropriate.
- Suffix order transfer, where learners appended suffixes in patterns aligned with Spanish morphology.
- Prefix omission, possibly due to the different syntactic strategies used in Spanish to convey negation or aspect.

As De la Fuente and Goldenberg (2020) argue, Spanish-speaking EFL learners may be more likely to transfer affixation patterns directly from their L1, particularly when confronted with cognate roots. This was evident in the repeated misuse of -ción-like equivalents (*identification*, *intention*) where the English derivational pattern did not align with the learner's assumptions.

This cross-linguistic transfer, coupled with limited explicit instruction in morphology, contributed significantly to the systematic nature of many affixation errors observed.

4.5 Summary of Key Findings

- Learners exhibited frequent errors in both prefix and suffix usage, with derivational morphology posing greater challenges than inflectional morphology.
- Prefixes un-, in-, and mis- were the most error-prone, often due to overgeneralization and semantic ambiguity.
- Suffixes -ness, -ity, and -ly were commonly misapplied, reflecting weak morphological awareness of word class changes.
- L1 transfer from Spanish played a significant role in shaping morphological errors, especially in derivational forms.
- Qualitative data reinforced the need for explicit instruction in affixation rules and raised awareness of form-function relationships in word formation.

These findings align with earlier work by Carlisle (2000), Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002), and Tyler and Nagy (1990), reaffirming that morphological instruction is critical for developing affixation competence in EFL contexts.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting Common Affixation Errors

The findings of this study demonstrate that learners frequently encounter difficulties in both the application and recognition of English affixes, particularly prefixes like *un-*, *in-*, and *re-*, and suffixes such as *-able*, *-ness*, and *-tion*. These affixation errors were evident in both the structured word formation tasks and in students' self-reported challenges on the questionnaire.

The high frequency of derivational errors suggests that learners struggle not only with affix meaning but also with how affixes interact with word classes. For example, participants often attempted to form adjectives with *–able* from intransitive verbs, leading to morphologically impossible or semantically odd forms. This supports Carlisle's (2000) observation that students' morphological awareness significantly influences their reading and word construction abilities.

5.2 Sources of Affixation Difficulty

Three main causes of error emerged from the analysis:

- L1 Interference: Learners often mapped Spanish affix rules onto English, leading to misapplications such as adding *–ed* to stative adjectives or translating directly from cognate structures.
- Overgeneralization: Learners applied known affixation rules to inappropriate contexts, such as overusing *in-* as a general negation marker instead of distinguishing between *in-*, *im-*, *un-*, or *non-*.
- Contextual Misuse: In the cloze tasks, several errors involved using grammatically correct but semantically inappropriate affixed forms, suggesting a lack of deeper understanding of contextual fit—echoing points raised by Schmitt & Zimmerman (2002).

5.3 Questionnaire Insights and Learner Awareness

Self-reported confusion aligned strongly with actual performance. Learners frequently cited *–tion*, *–ed*, and *–ness* as problematic, especially in recognizing whether a word required a nominal or verbal form. These insights add a valuable qualitative dimension to the study, illustrating how perceived difficulty and actual error frequency can reinforce each other.

Additionally, the task-based observation notes indicated that students were hesitant to commit to an affix form when given multiple plausible options. This suggests an instructional gap where learners may benefit from more morphological decision-making practice, not just rule memorization.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to investigate the types of affixation errors that learners commonly make and the underlying causes contributing to these difficulties. By combining quantitative analysis of written task responses with qualitative insights from questionnaire data and classroom observations, the findings revealed systematic issues in learners' morphological processing — particularly with derivational prefixes and suffixes.

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Carlisle, 2000; Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013; Zhang & Koda, 2012), the results confirmed that morphological awareness remains a developing area for many EFL learners. High-frequency affixation errors included:

- Incorrect derivational forms, such as *actful* instead of *active*
- Overgeneralized application of inflectional suffixes, such as adding *–ed* to irregular verbs or stative adjectives
- Contextually inappropriate affixed forms, where semantically correct affixes were used incorrectly within sentence structures

Three primary sources of error were identified:

- L1 Transfer: Learners often applied affixation patterns from their L1 (Spanish), particularly with cognates or suffix positioning.
- Overgeneralization: Students relied on familiar affixes (e.g., *–ed, in–, –tion*), applying them even when morphologically or semantically incorrect.
- Limited Morphological Awareness: Many errors reflected difficulty in understanding how affixes interact with base words and affect grammatical category.
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6.2 Pedagogical Implications

These findings challenge the assumption that affix exposure alone leads to morphological competence. Instead, they underscore the necessity for explicit instruction in affix rules, form-function distinctions, and decoding strategies (Tyler & Nagy, 1990; Silva & Clahsen, 2008). Based on the results, the following pedagogical recommendations are proposed:

- Teach affixes in lexical families (e.g., *create, creator, creative, creation*) to illustrate consistent patterns in word formation.
- Contrast commonly confused affixes, especially those with similar meanings but different grammatical behavior (e.g., *in-* vs. *un-*).
- Use metalinguistic tasks such as affix sorting, bingo, or puzzles to enhance awareness of morphological structure.

- Embed affixation practice in context, through readings, cloze tasks, and writing assignments, to ensure transfer beyond isolated forms.
- Encourage guided error analysis, which helps learners reflect on their mistakes and internalize correct patterns.

These strategies align with Nation's (2013) view that explicit instruction in word parts significantly contributes to vocabulary development and reading comprehension.

6.3 Personal Teaching Reflection

Throughout this investigation, I observed firsthand that even intermediate to advanced EFL learners struggle with affixation. While recognition was often accurate, production revealed persistent confusion—particularly with abstract nouns and negative prefixes. Frequent errors such as *unpatient* or *successfulness* highlighted the need for a deeper focus on word formation processes.

This research has reshaped my teaching practice. I now dedicate more classroom time to explicitly teaching affix meanings, functions, and category changes. I also integrate metalinguistic discussions and reflective correction activities that empower students to analyze and repair their own errors.

Looking ahead, I plan to use diagnostic tasks more consistently to identify morphological gaps early in the term. This data-driven, reflective approach has reinforced the value of bridging linguistic theory with real-world teaching strategies to enhance learners' morphological competence.

7. Limitations And Future Research

7.1 Limitations

While this study provided valuable insights into learners' affixation errors and the underlying cognitive mechanisms, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to a specific educational context and group size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader learner populations. Additionally, the written tasks and questionnaire responses were collected in a single session, which limited the opportunity to track development over time or assess retention.

Another limitation lies in the potential influence of task design. Although tasks were carefully crafted to reflect both controlled and contextual affix usage, they may not have captured all facets of learners' morphological competence, particularly in spontaneous spoken discourse. Furthermore, while the observational notes added qualitative depth, they were informal and not systematically coded, which could introduce subjectivity.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to examine how affixation knowledge develops over time and how instructional interventions impact long-term retention. Expanding the participant pool to include learners from different proficiency levels, age groups, and L1 backgrounds would enhance the applicability of results across educational settings.

Moreover, further research could explore affixation performance in oral production tasks or digital writing contexts, which may uncover different patterns of error and awareness. The integration of eye-tracking, think-aloud protocols, or stimulated recall could also offer deeper insights into learners' real-time processing of morphological forms.

Finally, comparative studies investigating affixation across languages (e.g., English and Spanish) could help clarify the role of cross-linguistic influence in morphological acquisition and inform more effective contrastive teaching strategies.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire: Understanding and Use of Prefixes and Suffixes
Section A: Background Information
1. What is your first language (L1)?
    - o
2. How many years have you been learning English?
    - o   Less than 1 year
    - o   1–3 years
    - o   4–6 years
    - o   More than 6 years
3. How would you rate your knowledge of prefixes and suffixes?
    - o   Excellent
    - o   Good
    - o   Fair
    - o   Poor

Section B: Knowledge and Awareness
4. Can you define what a **prefix** is?
    - o   Yes
    - o   No
    - o   If yes, please explain briefly: _____
    - o   _____
5. Can you define what a **suffix** is?
    - o   Yes
    - o   No
    - o   If yes, please explain briefly: _____
    - o   _____

6. Choose the correct meaning of the prefix **"un-"**:
    - o   again
    - o   not
    - o   before
    - o   Between

7. What is the correct meaning of the suffix **"-able"**?
    - o   full of
    - o   the act of
    - o   able to
    - o   without

Section C: Strategy Use
8. When you see a new word with a prefix or suffix (e.g., *disagree*, *happiness*), how do you guess the meaning?
    - o   I look at the whole word.
    - o   I try to separate the prefix/suffix from the root.
    - o   I translate the word into my L1.
    - o   I just memorize it without analysis.
    - o   Other: _____

9. When writing, how do you decide which affix to use?
    - o   I follow rules I've learned.
    - o   I go with what "sounds right."
    - o   I think in my native language.
    - o   I try to guess based on similar words.
    - o   Other: _____

10. Do you think your native language affects how you use prefixes and suffixes in English?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, how? _____

Section D: Reflection
11. Which affixes (prefixes or suffixes) do you find the most confusing or difficult to use correctly?

12. Do you think learning about affixes has helped your vocabulary and writing skills? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Coding scheme for affixation errors
5.3.2 Correct the Errors
Instructions: Each sentence has one affixation error. Underline the incorrect word and write the correct one.

1. She made an *uncorrect* decision under pressure. → _____
2. His *happyless* attitude surprised everyone. → _____
3. They *recome* to the office after lunch → _____
4. I want to *successed* in my studies. → _____
5. The movie was *boreing* and too long. → _____
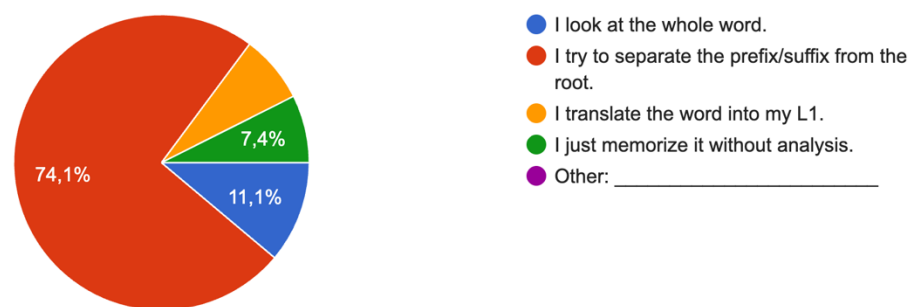
Make New Words
Instructions: Add a prefix or suffix to form a new word. Make sure it fits the sentence.

1. That exam was very _____. (*stress*)
2. The students showed a lot of _____ in class. (*active*)
3. You should never be _____ to others. (*respect*)
4. Her explanation was _____ and helpful. (*clear*)
5. I will _____ the file before sending it. (*check*)

Appendix C: Sample student responses (anonymized)

When you see a new word with a prefix or suffix (e.g., disagree, happiness), how do you guess the meaning?
27 respuestas

- I look at the whole word.
- I try to separate the prefix/suffix from the root.
- I translate the word into my L1.
- I just memorize it without analysis.
- Other: _____

Do you think your native language affects how you use prefixes and suffixes in English?
27 respuestas

Yes — 13 (48,1 %)
No — 13 (48,1 %)
If yes, How? — 1 (3,7 %)