

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
UNIVERSITY OF DANANG

LÊ VĨNH HOÀNG LINH

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND
ENGLISH VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS
AT HANOI COLLEGE OF HOME AFFAIRS**

Study Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Code : 60.22.15

**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A SUMMARY)**

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Supervisor : **Ph.D. NGUYỄN VĂN LONG**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

Vocabulary plays an important role in teaching and learning foreign language. It is also a key part of any language teaching program. [59] proposed four general goals that are important in a language class room. These learning goals concern: Language, which includes vocabulary; Ideas, which covers content and subject matter as well as cultural knowledge; Skill; and finally Text or Discourse [59, p.1]. Furthermore, in learning a foreign language, specifically for vocabulary goal, there are three aspects to be looked at: the number of words in the language, the number of words known by the native speakers, and the number of words needed by a learner to use the language productively. In this thesis we mentioned about the words needed to use English productively, especially for EFL learners in Vietnam instead of the number of words in English and number known by English native speakers.

The study builds on this body of research by examining the relationship between the English vocabulary size of foreign language college students and their morphological awareness.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

The study is expected to investigate the students' perceptions about the relationship between English

morphology and vocabulary knowledge in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and to increase their vocabulary size and enrich the words they already know.

1.2.2. Objectives

- Obtain the measurements of learner vocabulary size and morphological awareness.

- Correlate to assess the degree to which knowledge of English morphological process and structures systematically related to vocabulary knowledge.

- Discuss the possible role that morphological awareness can play in second language vocabulary development.

- Suggest some implications for vocabulary instruction.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In view of the above situation, this study attempts to investigate the relationship between English morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge. It is intended that the study would enhance teacher's understanding of the vocabulary acquisition among the learners so that adjustments could be made to vocabulary teaching as well as strategy training.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to obtain the aim and the objectives of the study, the research questions will be answered:

1. What is the vocabulary size of the students of Hanoi College of Home Affairs in the study, and does this differ by students' gender?

2. What level of English morphological awareness do the learners possess?
3. Can measures of morphological awareness be systematically related to the measure of English vocabulary size?

1.5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

One of the most difficulties students have in reading is about vocabulary. In addition, vocabulary has played an important role in their English language learning. The investigation aims to fill this gap. This study aims at investigate the relationship between English morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for students of Hanoi college of Home Affairs in Danang.

For this reason, I choose to do research on the topic *“An investigation into the Relationship between Morphological Awareness and English Vocabulary Knowledge of Students at Hanoi College of Home Affairs”*

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1 is the introduction of the study, which includes the rationale, the aims and objectives, the scope of the study, the research questions, the significance, and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 includes, the literature review, presents the previous study related to the study

Chapter 3 consists of the methods and procedures of the study. It also describes the participants, the testing instruments, data analysis and the procedures.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and the discussion of the study.

Chapter 5 includes the conclusion and solutions for teaching and learning foreign languages. Besides, there are some suggestions for further researches related to the study.

CHAPTER2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. MORPHOLOGY AND MORPHEMES

Morphology refers to the study of forms. Linguistics morphology refers to the study of words, their internal structure and the mental process that are involved in word formation [3, p. 3-21]; [64, p.132-180]. It is ‘... the study of the hierarchical and relational aspects of words and the operation on lexical items according to word formation rules to produce other lexical items’ [43, p. 237]. Traditionally, a word can be divided into the minimal linguistic units that bear meanings or grammatical functions (i.e. morphemes).

2.2. VOCABULARY LEARNING

“Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write. Without an extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to native speakers, using the language in different contexts, reading, or watching television” [70, p 255].

2.3. MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

The role of morphology in vocabulary knowledge is well documented. Many studies show the beneficiary affect of

utilizing morphological information (i.e. morphological awareness) in determining word meaning (e.g. [67, p.287-296]), and therefore in maximizing vocabulary threshold ([73,p.227-269]; [86]). Below is a discussion on the nature of morphological awareness followed by a discussion of the morphological awareness and its relationship to vocabulary growth.

2.3.1. Morphological awareness and its relationship to language skills

2.3.2. Vocabulary size and exposure to derived words

2.3.3. Vocabulary growth

2.3.4. Morphological awareness and reading proficiency

2.3.5. Morphological awareness as a word reading comprehension strategy

2.4. MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AS A VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGY

As noted above, morphological awareness refers to the awareness of and access to the meaning and structure of morphemes that are part of or related to the word. It cludes knowledge of derivational morphology such as prefixes (e.g, the *-un* in *undisciplined* to indicate the antonym of the original, disciplined), suffixes (e.g, the *-ion* in *graduation* changes the part of speech of the base word –graduate is a verb whereas *graduation* is a noun), and compounding (e.g., *cowboy* to create new word combining the two root morphemes: *cow*

and *boy*). On the other hand, knowledge of inflectional morphology focuses primarily on indicating grammatical changes in words (e.g., the *s* in *dogs* to indicate the plural form of the base or the *-ed* in *acted* to refer to the action in the past time).

2.5. MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS: CROSS - LINGUISTIC VARIATION

Morphological awareness is a skill that may vary across typologically distinct languages. The L1 and L2 may differ in lexical access processes. It has been shown that L2 morphological awareness is constrained by learners' experience of L1 processing [35]. Koda (2000) [35] investigated how L1 morphological processing of Chinese affected L2 morphological awareness of English. It is noted that some of L2 morphological units are less salient for L2 learners (e.g. the separability of English morphemic units in complex words are not salient for beginner Arab learners of English).

2.6. MEASURING ENGLISH MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS

2.6.1. Morpheme Identification Awareness

2.6.2 .Morphological Structure Awareness

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were the students at Hanoi college of Home Affairs.

In total 100 students participated in the study, 50 males and 50 females, and have learned English for about 7 years. English is not a main subject in the students' program curriculum. However, English is one of the subjects which has more periods than different basic ones. It is also a requirement for college entrance.

3.2. THE TESTING INSTRUMENTS

Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was used to measure the students' receptive vocabulary. This test was chosen because it is commonly used by other studies and it is easy to administer and score. Since the participants were college students, the receptive vocabulary levels test used tested the participants' knowledge of vocabulary items from the 2000, 3000 and 5000 most frequently occurring words. These are seen as words that all learners need to know to read basic texts and that should be concentrated on in class (Nation, 2001). Each level had ten items containing six words and three meanings. The participants must choose the right word to go with each meaning.

3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

To answer research question 1, which investigates the vocabulary size of the participants and compares the difference between sexes, the results of the VLT were summarized by mean score, percentage correct and minimum and maximum across the three different levels (2000, 3000 and 5000). The scores obtained were added to get the total scores of the three levels. In order to highlight the differences in the vocabulary knowledge that was employed by each group of participants, the results of all the participants in total and the separate results of each sex (Male and Female) were compared.

3.4. PROCEDURES

The test consisted of three parts. Part 1 was Nation's Levels Test (VLT - 90 items). Part 2 was the Morpheme Identification Test (5 items) and Part 3, the Morphological Structural Awareness Test (20 items). The participants also completed a 10-question survey about their perceptions about vocabulary learning and morphological awareness. The test was administered over two days to minimize fatigue.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the action research. The presentation includes the description of the Performance on the Vocabulary levels Test through the questionnaire. Along with the results, discussion is made about English Vocabulary Size, Morphological Awareness and The Relationship between Morphological Awareness and English Vocabulary Knowledge.

4.1. PERFORMANCE ON THE VOCABULARY LEVELS TEST (VLT)

The VLT was administered to 100 students from the two different genders . Each level of the vocabulary test consisted of 30 questions. The scores of each level were analysed, as were the total scores across the three levels of the test.

4.1.1. Results of the VLT

Table 4.1: Mean score, Percentage Correct, Minimum and Maximum in different level of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT)

Level	Mean (% correct)	Minimum	Maximum
2000	12.02(40%)	9	14
3000	4.68 (15.6%)	4	6
5000	4.54 (15.1%)	4	6
Total	21.24 (24%)	18	26

Note. There are 30 questions in each level and 90 questions in total. $N = 100$.

4.1.2. Results of the VLT across the two genders

The vocabulary size scores were also compared by the two groups, Females and Males. As shown in bar chart, on average there was little difference on all levels individually. However, the two groups showed the same results when the total score for the three levels was combined

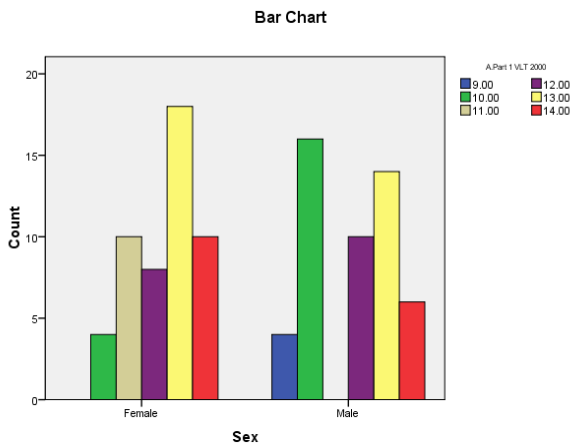


Figure 4.1: Students's vocabulary knowledge at the 2000 level

Figure 4.1 indicated at the 2000 level, only male knew 9 out of 30 while female knew 10 out of 30 in minimum. In general, most female knew 13 out of 30 while most male knew only 10 out of 30. This result is not very high, perhaps they did not like learning English or they did not have much condition to improve this language

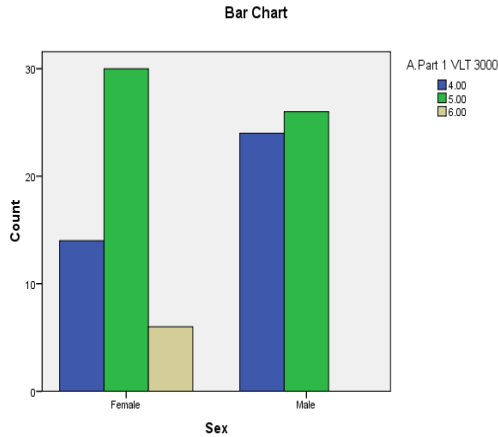
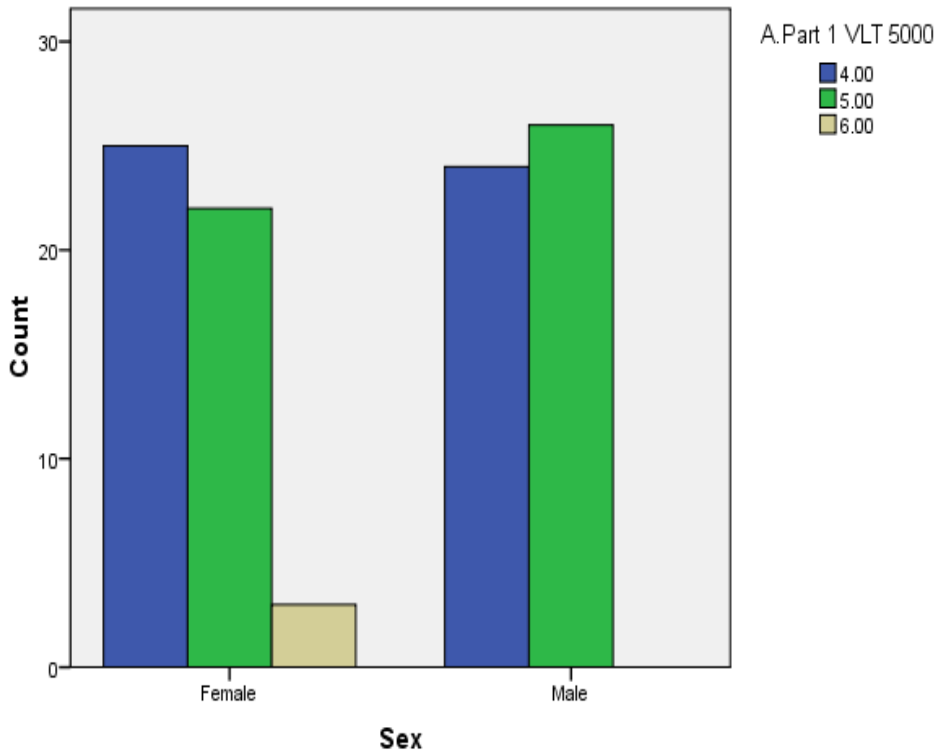


Figure 4.2: Students's vocabulary knowledge at the 3000 level

As can be seen in figure 4.2, at the 3000 level only female got 6 out of 30 words while male did not reach it and most of female students knew 5 out of 30 words. We could realize that female learned English vocabulary better than male at any way. Although most students agreed that vocabulary was very important in learning English, they rarely planned their vocabulary learning and spent very little time on it. Especially male students, they spent most of the free time watching movie, listening to songs and reading newspaper and they did not often put in extra time or effort in learning English vocabulary.

Bar Chart



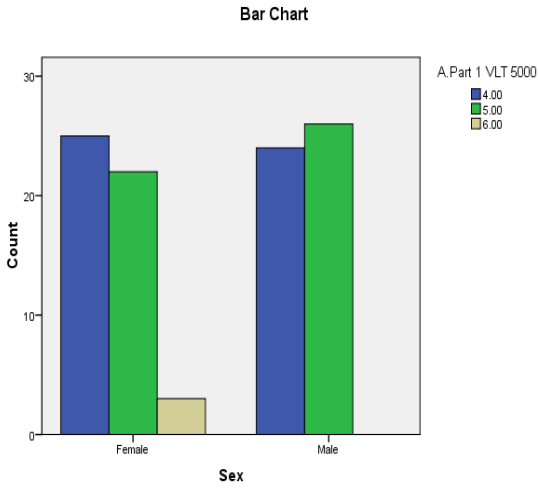


Figure 4.3: Students's vocabulary knowledge at the 5000 level

4.2. PERFORMANCE ON THE MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS TASKS

4.2.1. Results of Morphological Awareness Test

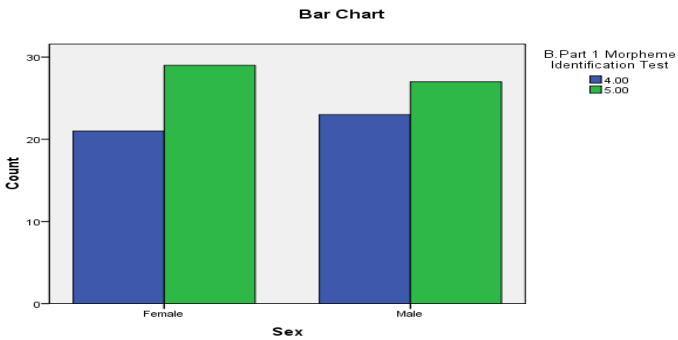


Figure 4.4: Students' level of Morpheme Identification Test

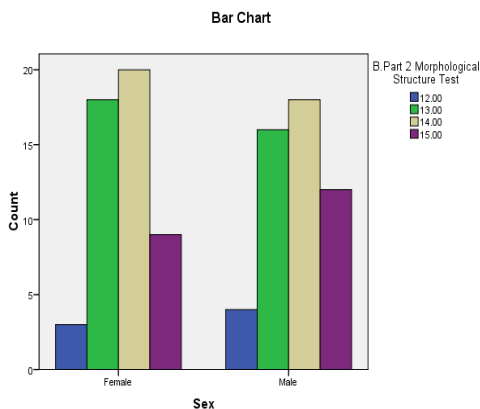


Figure 4.5: Students' level of Morphological Structure

4.2.2. Students' Perceptions of the Morphological Awareness Test

Table 4.2: The percentages of Students' Perceptions on the Difficulty of the Two Types of Morphological Awareness Test

	Difficulty of the test					Pref
	1	2	3	4	5	
Morpheme Identification	11.34	25.77	37.11	11.34	14.43	64.58
Morphological Structure	3.16	35.79	29.47	12.63	18.95	35.42

Note. Scale for difficulty of the test: 1 = very difficult, 2 = difficult, 3 = moderate, 4 = easy, 5 = very easy, Pref = students preference in the two task types, N = 100.

4.3. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE VLT TO THE MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS TEST

The third question concerned the relationship between the English morphological awareness and the vocabulary knowledge of the EFL learners in the study. The mean scores of the VLT and the two Morphological Awareness tasks for the whole group (100 participants) were correlated to assess the strength of association between the tests. Also, the correlation of the 2 groups' performances (Female and Male) in the VLT and the two Morphological Awareness tasks was analysed.

4.4. ENGLISH VOCABULARY SIZE

The first research question concerned the size of the English vocabularies of students of Hanoi college of Home Affairs in the study, as reflected in their performance on the VLT, and whether there was a difference between the Female and Male groups. The vocabulary size score was assumed to highlight the students' vocabulary proficiency after studying English for almost 7 years. The results revealed that the students performed better in doing the vocabulary test at the 2000 level than at the 3000 and 5000 levels of the VLT.

4.5. MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS

The second question addressed in the study concerns the level of morphological awareness possessed by the participants in the study. As in the first question, there was also interest in how the two groups compared. For the Morpheme Identification test, the results show that the students could perform well in choosing one target picture as the one that best

corresponded to the meaning of the morpheme intended. However, the results also show the appearance of a ceiling effect, which is consistent with the previous study by Chang et al. (2005). The students answered the questions very well and more than 50% of the participants obtained the maximal score, 100%. This ceiling effect is assumed to cause the test items to be less reliable.

4.6. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ENGLISH VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

The third research question concerned the possible relationship between performance on the VLT vocabulary measure and the morphological awareness test, and whether there are differences between the female and male groups in this regard.

Some students wrote in their comments about this morphological awareness test:

I can easily imitate the examples (student 52)

I like doing this test because it is interesting and enjoyable (student 37)

Doing this test encourages my interest to find the words' meaning (student 57)

I like the test because it makes me think about applying the concept in the examples given to find the target word (student 62).

I like this test because I need to think more when I try to find the target words, it is not simply guessing (student 93)

I like this test because it is enjoyable and motivating me to study more about English and English vocabulary (student 6)

I do not know what the morphological awareness is, but after doing the test, I feel curious and want to try another test (student 21)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATION

In this chapter, I will summarize majors findings in the present study and implications of these findings. I will next spell out the areas in which this study has made contributions to existing knowledge on vocabulary learning and the limitations of this study. I will finally offer some suggestions as to the directions future research might take.

5.1. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

To sum up, the current study investigated the vocabulary size of the students in Hanoi college of Home Affairs, the nature of their morphological awareness and the relation of morphological awareness to building the learners' English vocabulary. The findings revealed that the students had better performance at the 2000 level of Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test, than at the higher levels.. However, the correlations between the VLT and the two aspects of the morphological awareness tasks may be a significant predictor of the vocabulary knowledge for college students. The results of the female students were significantly better than the male students in the Morphological Structure test. In addition, the current study also found that there was a significant association between morphological awareness and vocabulary size. Finally, the participants wrote about the methods they used to develop their vocabulary. Also, they indicated their interest in

building morphological knowledge and applying it to their English vocabulary learning.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

The findings for the first question indicated a need to give more attention to the building and development of English vocabulary for EFL college students in Hanoi college of Home Affairs. Next, the findings on the morphological awareness tasks revealed the aspects of morphological knowledge that may contribute to vocabulary learning. This suggests teachers should introduce aspects of morphological knowledge to the students. Initially, teacher should give explicit instruction and then gradually the learners can apply their morphological awareness automatically when faced with new vocabulary that has the possibility of morphological analysis. Finally, the significant correlation of morphological awareness to vocabulary size may suggest the need to apply this strategy for English vocabulary learning for the students. In addition, the students themselves confirmed their interest to use this method in their learning. Therefore, the concept of using morphological knowledge as a vocabulary-building tool is necessary for inclusion in the curriculum.

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The current study revealed some insightful findings in and for the development of English vocabulary learning in Hanoi college of Home Affaris, however, there are also weaknesses that should be looked at for future study. The main

problem was the appearance of the ceiling effect in the results of the Morpheme Identification task that limited the reliability of that test. This problem might occur because of some modifications to the test from the original study. In the previous study by Chang et al., (2005), a problem arose because the test was done through oral presentation. This meant it could not solely test morphological awareness, as, due to the oral presentation, phonological awareness was a factor too. Therefore, for the current study, the researcher modified the test by presenting the scenarios in written form and by using pictures. Unfortunately, there were only five questions developed due to the limited time for preparing the test items. Also, the lack of time meant no trial of the test took place.

The results of the participants in this study may also differ from those of other students because of their environment. They live in a rural area that may limit them to have access to English in their surroundings. The result could be very different if the participants were from schools in big cities.

Finally, future studies should focus on controlling for previous vocabulary knowledge, ensuring that the test results are based on morphological analysis rather than the ability to memorize vocabulary. In addition, it is necessary to focus on the five separate components of morphological knowledge more systematically, for example, by clearly dividing the morphological awareness task into separate sections covering root words, inflected words, derived words, literal compounds

and idioms. This separation will show whether participants can perform equally for each part and hopefully these modifications will give a truer result.

Obviously, there is still much to learn and explore in the field of vocabulary acquisition. It is important for the language learners and teachers to work collaboratively towards the same learning goal.