Teaching and Learning Morphology in the English Language Curriculum: An Exploration into Belief and Reality in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

	Language study includes different branches such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Morphology is one component that has proved supportive of learning vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. However, earlier studies have mostly focused on morphology as an integrated aspect in language classes, and not much has been done in the context of its being a separate academic subject in the English language curriculum. Therefore, this article aims to explore teaching and learning practices in Morphology classes and ascertain teachers' and learners' beliefs toward the subject. The study used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from ten English major students just completing their Morphology course and four teachers of the subject at a university in Vietnam. The findings show that both learners and teachers have positive attitudes toward Morphology, affirming it is challenging but worth studying and emphasizing the importance of its inclusion in the English language curriculum. This research argues that teaching and learning Morphology should prioritize explicit instructions in learners' utilization of their mother tongue accompanied by tasks and discussions.
Keywords: Morphology teaching practice, Morphology learning practice, morphological awareness, Morphology belief, Vietnamese instructions	

Introduction

The study of a certain language, for example, English, includes different branches, some of which are phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Syarif, 2016; Yule, 2020). Indeed, these elements are not necessarily studied by learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). Instead, it is common that students of English majors should or have to experience classes of such components. Phonetics and phonology deal with pronunciations, sounds, and patterns of sounds (Collins, Mees, & Carley, 2019; Roach, 2009). Morphology is about studying forms of words (Andrew, 2002; Claravall, 2016; Yule, 2020), and the term refers to a narrower notion, i.e., morpheme – the smallest unit

of word carrying a certain meaning (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Claravall, 2016; K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Ng, P. Bowers, & J. Bowers, 2022; Yule, 2020). Among those, one critical aspect teachers have ignored in their teaching is morphology (Anwar & Rosa, 2020), even though it is considered important to the acquisition of literacy among learners (Ng et al, 2022). Syntax studies structures and arrangements of sentence elements (Yule, 2020). Semantics analyzes meanings (Yule, 2020).

Researchers have termed "morphological awareness" or "morphological knowledge" (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Claravall, 2016; K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Templeton, 2012) to describe the fact that learners are knowledgeable of morphological constituents and apply them in their language learning. More specifically, learners with an awareness of morphology can improve their reading skills (Claravall, 2016; Nagy, Diakidoy, & Anderson, 1993; Templeton, 2012; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019), writing skills (K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Templeton, 2012), spelling skills (Templeton, 2012), grammar accuracy and vocabulary use (K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021).

Previous research shows that morphological awareness is vital to learners learning a new language, especially successfully confirming its correlation with reading comprehension (Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019) and vocabulary (Yousif, 2016). However, the teaching of morphology is just an integration into language classes in general, and there has been no exploration into a class where morphology is the subject itself, which English majors do. Moreover, no research has been done into what learners and teachers think about the subject or what they really deal with in the classroom. For this reason, the author will discover the teaching and learning practices of Morphology and students' and teachers' beliefs when they take it as a separate academic course.

Literature review

Morphology

Different languages have different forms and meanings, leading to difficulty in learning (Auni & Manan, 2023). Morphology is a branch of linguistics (Anwar & Rosa, 2020). According to Yule (2020), morphology is about "the study of forms" (p. 76). Andrew (2002) refers to it as words and their parts. In that sense of "form", it is closely related to the structures and meanings of words (Claravall, 2016). However, these structures must be understood as "internal" (Hammarström & Borin, 2011; Virpioja, Turunen, Spiegler, Kohonen, & Kurimo, 2011), which requires background knowledge to understand and analyze.

Morphemes

In order to examine the internal structures of words, scholars term "morpheme" as an element belonging to morphology (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Claravall, 2016; K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Ng et al, 2022; Virpioja et al, 2011; Yule, 2020). It is the smallest unit of word which has a certain meaning or a grammatical function (Yule, 2020). Andrew (2002) suggests that morphemes and structures of words are closely related to the notion of roots and affixes, which have been agreed by different researchers in their study of morphology (Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili,

2019; Templeton, 2012; Yousif, 2016). The classification of morpheme types and examples can be seen in the following figure.
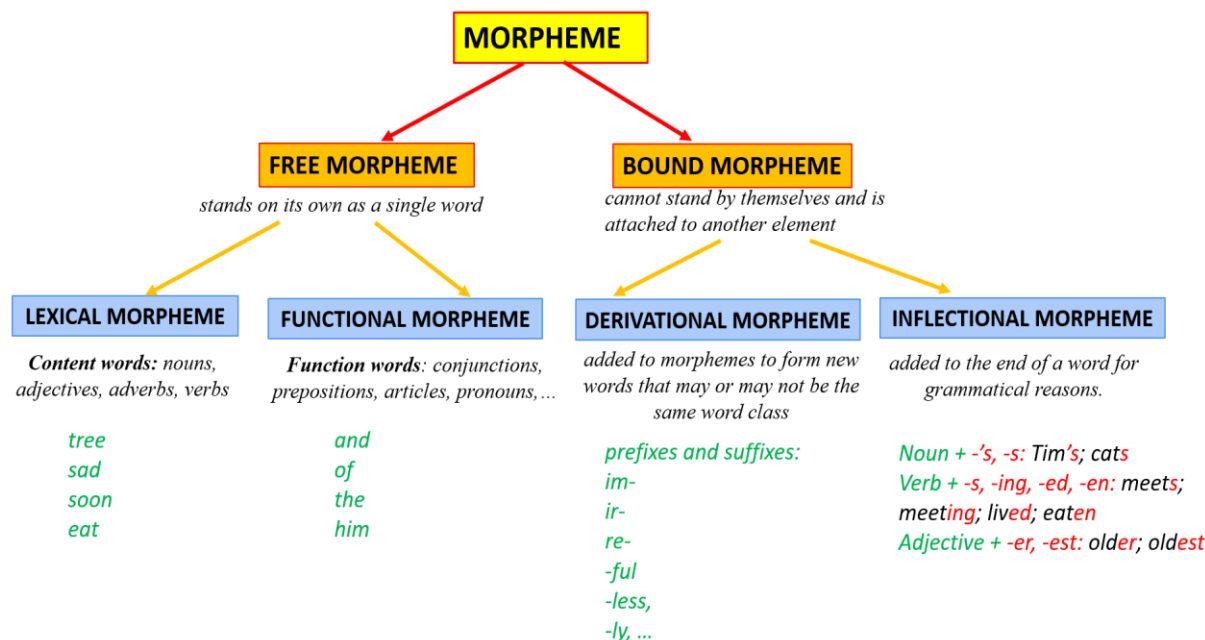

Figure 1. Types of morphemes

Morphology and its Role in Language Skills

Washburn and Mulcahy (2019) suggest that morphological awareness is critical to students, especially to would-be teachers. Ghasemi and Vaez-Dalili (2019) affirm that many empirical studies have inspected the correlation between morphological knowledge and reading comprehension. The training in morphology can help improve reading skills. Indeed, this correlation has been found by Templeton (2012) and was later proven evident by K. Yadav and S. Yadav (2021). This is because reading involves the process of interpreting forms of language that include morphological elements (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2003).

One of the reasons for better reading is the mastery of vocabulary, thanks to morphological knowledge (K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021). Yousif (2016) conducted a study at Sudanese University with English-major students and recommended including vocabulary study connected to morphology to improve students on this aspect, which led to enhancing reading comprehension. Templeton (2012) finds that students' study of morphology aids learners in English and other languages as long as they have the opportunity to explore and analyze morphological structures deeply.

The improvement in vocabulary repertoire and reading skills benefits writing skills (Templeton, 2012). K. Yadav and S. Yadav (2021) assert that it improves critical and original writing. More specifically, inflectional morphology improves learners' grammar, and derivational morphology improves their vocabulary in writing (K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021).

The above advantages of mastering morphology should be taught in four English skills, viz. listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Anwar & Rosa, 2020).

Teaching and Learning Morphology

According to Syarif (2016), English language teaching and learning should take linguistics components into consideration. Therefore, the inclusion of morphology in the curriculum is advisable, especially for English majors. The teaching and learning of Morphology can be done in different ways. For example, teaching morphology can take place in implicit or explicit ways (Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019), so the learning can be passive or active.

Explicit instructions involve teaching morphology directly, including the teaching of the word formation process and affixes, which helps learners enhance their decoding ability and spelling, from which they can understand the inner content of morphological concepts easily (Claravall, 2016). Different studies have conclusively proven this (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019). Nevertheless, implicit ways have also been chosen as the better ones (Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019). In this method, learners infer from the given constructs and find other similar associations themselves. Therefore, any element concerning morphology should be explored by students either implicitly or explicitly. This can be done by analyzing, not by learning by heart (Pham & X. Nguyen, 2022).

Ng et al. (2022) introduced two tools for instructions of morphology: base-centric matrix and affix-centric matrix, in which the former proved to be more effective than the latter. The illustrations can be seen in Figure 2 below.
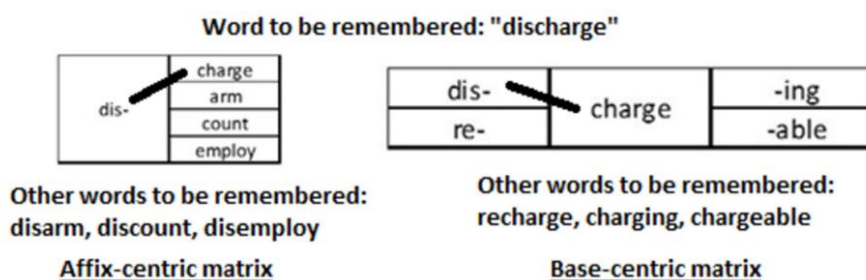

Figure 2. How the matrices were used to form the to-be-remembered word. Adapted from "A promising new tool for literacy instruction: The morphological matrix," by Ng, M. M., Bowers, P. N. and Bowers, J. S., 2022, PLoS ONE, 17(1), p. 8. Copyright 2022 Ng et al.

The Vietnamese Context

In the context of university Vietnamese English majors, morphology courses in the curriculum may be integrated into linguistics classes that cover many linguistic aspects, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Cao & A. Nguyen, 2018; T. Nguyen, 2018). Cao and A. Nguyen (2018) praise the translanguaging approach in which both Vietnamese and English are utilized to understand the examined concepts better. According to the authors, learners should even be asked to give feedback in Vietnamese, and there is an English-Vietnamese switch for better terminology explanations from the teacher. T. Nguyen (2018) conducted a study in English linguistics courses at a university in Vietnam, and found some innovations in the process of teaching and learning such components. To elaborate, the teaching of linguistic elements includes explicit instructions and project-based teaching, while the learning involves facilitating students' activeness and shifting from a teacher-centered approach

to a learner-centered one. When it comes to the focus on students' activeness and learner-centered approach, a linguistic classroom can consider games, especially mobile-based games, for a phonetics class. One typical example of such games is found in the Blue Canoe application to prove pronunciation, which has been proven to be effective in mastering vowels by learners (C. Nguyen, H. Nguyen, & Le, 2021).

The learning of morphology in general, and English morphology in particular, would be challenging. This is due to the fact that the Vietnamese language does not carry inflectional elements, which an inflected language like English does (Ngo, 2001). Therefore, the differences may lead to a negative transfer from Vietnamese to English (Tang, 2007; Vu, 2017). Besides, Vietnamese learners may not take into consideration morphological features in their expressions (Tang, 2007).

Research Questions

To achieve the purposes of the study, the researcher is going to address the following research questions:

1. What do students think about Morphology as a separate academic subject?
2. How do they deal with the subject during the Morphology course?
3. How do teachers feel about Morphology as a separate academic subject?
4. How do teachers teach Morphology?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The participants in this study are English-major students from a foreign language faculty at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They study English as their major at university and are to get a bachelor's degree in the English language on a four-year curriculum. There are around 3000 students in the faculty. The students take linguistics courses in their curriculum, including Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics. Among those students, there are around 400 students who have recently completed the course "Morphology". This course covers theoretical introductions to morphemes, inflection, derivation, word formation, and word part analysis.

The author called for student participants in the classroom and for teacher participants by oral invitation in the faculty office. Ten students met the nature of the study, and four teachers of Morphology accepted the interview. All students are juniors (4 males and 6 females), all of whom have more than 10 years of learning English. Four teachers (2 males and 2 females) taking part in the study have three or four years of teaching Morphology as an academic subject, and each of them has more than 9 years of teaching English to EFL and ESL students. Two of them have a master's degree in TESOL, and the other two are in Applied Linguistics.

The research employed convenience sampling to collect the data due to the fact that it is easy to access the participants who reflect the nature of the study regarding teaching and learning

Morphology. The author coded the participants and referred to them as codes (T1, T2, T3, T4 for teachers; S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10 for students).

Design of the Study

The study employed a qualitative method, using a semi-structured interview as an instrument to collect data. According to Mann (2016), this kind of interview creates an opportunity to negotiate, discuss and expand the responses from the interviewees. It can generate a deep understanding of people's perceptions, beliefs, and experiences, which is impossible with questionnaires (Richards, 2009).

The questions of the interview were created based on morphology concepts by Yule (2020), matrix base by Ng et al. (2022), and the concept of explicit instructions by Anwar & Rosa (2020), Claravall (2016), Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili (2019), and Washburn & Mulcahy (2019). The questions for students focus on asking about their feelings towards the subject before and after completing it, what they learned, how they learned, and what aspects in which they could apply their learning. The questions for teachers include exploring their teaching practices and their beliefs about Morphology.

Data Collection & Analysis

After getting acceptance from the learners and teachers, the author scheduled the meetings with each of them through Zoom – a popular platform for meetings. Each one-on-one interview lasted for twenty to thirty minutes, and all questions were asked and answered successfully. Before the interview started, the author asked for recording permission and explained that all the data collected served research purposes only. The entire process of collecting data lasted for one month.

The responses from the participants were then transcribed into Word Processor. Then, the author continued with coding and theming the scripts using Excel. At this stage, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis is popular in analyzing qualitative data, for it secures the process of coding and theming the data content as well as the flexible and accessible nature (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It took one month to code and theme the data.

Results/Findings

Research question 1: What do students think about Morphology as a separate academic subject?

From Negative Assumptions and Sense of Curiosity

All students agree that they had a negative feeling towards the Morphology course even before they really took the course. Specifically, these negative feelings came from the "myth" about it established by seniors.

> S1: […] I heard that this subject was a nightmare to students of English majors, and it would be really challenging to survive the course. I would say I was lost at the time I signed up for the course, fearing that I would never make it.

Before taking it, their feelings towards the course were closely related to "rumors", which reflected their morphological awareness and fearness.

Before students took the course, most of them expected that it was going to be really about sophisticated terms and associated it with grammar.

> S2: [..] This subject would be really complex, for I had done some research before I studied about the subject and realized that I could not make out what it was about.

> S10: […] I would associate the subject with grammar, for I understood that we were going to explore the word structures and grammar of words, but I was not sure whether this would be correct.

Learners' expectation of the course is also vague, for they would not figure out exactly what they were going to explore.

> S5: […] Actually, I did not know anything about this, except for the fact that I would have to take it, and it is required in my curriculum.

Even though some are uncertain of what they are going to explore, they are curious and get ready for it.

> S6: […] I don't have any basic background information about it, but I still would welcome it, though, for I love to explore something new.

Basically, before taking the course, learners seemed to have no clue of what they would explore and somehow were affected by rumors from the elders. They generally would love to study the subject and were eager for it.

To Positive Feelings and Deserving Experience

Students' perspectives about the subject changed substantially after the course. The vast majority of them agreed that the course was not as hard as they had imagined. Actually, most of them found the course interesting.

> S7: […] I would not believe that morphology was so interesting to me. I love to discover new things, and this subject is just right for me […] I can learn new things about word formation, and morphemes, and these would help me with other aspects of language in the future, i.e. learning vocabulary, grammar and so on.

They all agreed that, upon completing the course, they could easily understand the morphological terminologies. Some of the terms include what morpheme is, the process of forming words, and the analysis of the internal structures of words.

> S4: […] I must admit that some of the terminologies were hard to understand at first; however, with the comprehensible and well-organized lectures, I could state confidently that the easiness outweighs the challenge.

Generally, they are aware of what morphology is and confident they would apply it in analyzing words, thus improving their grammar accuracy and vocabulary repertoire.

Inclusion in the Curriculum as a Separate Academic Subject

Even though most students feel this subject is hard to master, especially in analyzing morphemes and their meanings, they still love to explore the subject deeply and conclude that it should be included in the English language syllabus. There are some reasons for this.

S3, S4, S6, and S7 agree that it is useful for English majors when it is necessary to sharpen and deepen their knowledge of linguistics elements. S1, S9, S10 added that learning morphology means learning all about advanced grammar and increasing vocabulary repertoire. This means morphology does support them in other areas of language learning.

> S9: […] I must admit that morphological knowledge can help me pay more attention to my use of grammar and vocabulary. I will take into consideration the word class I choose based on affixes attached to them, and may use different word forms in the sentence I write […] I also find reading skill less challenging, for I can guess words' meanings better.

S2, S6, and S8 explain that the inclusion of morphology in the English language curriculum is right for getting students to have an insight into the language and its internal nature. They also agree that morphological awareness is a base for other elements like syntax and semantics.

> S6: […] Understanding morphemes and affixes help me to identify the correct word class, and put them in the correct position of a phrase or a sentence, and of course, I know its exact meaning and the message I want to convey.

In conclusion, learners have changed their attitudes from being curious, doubtful, and unaware to being excited, confident, and satisfied. This proves that what they have experienced from the course is positive, which rejects bad rumors about the course. Overall, the subject is indispensable in English majors' curriculum due to the linguistic benefits it brings to students concerning vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing.

Research question 2: How do they deal with the subject during the Morphology course?

What to Learn Morphology as an Academic Subject

All learners mention morphology in their separate courses in the curriculum studies morphemes and word formation process. More specifically, learning morphemes also involves learning related terms, namely inflection, derivation, affixes (prefixes and suffixes), and different processes of word formation like compounding, conversion, backformation, and so on.

Learning Morphology in an Explicit Way through Lectures

All learners reported that they were taught morphology as a separate subject with different complex terminologies concerning morphemes, free morphemes, bound morphemes, inflectional morphemes, derivational morphemes, word formation processes, structures of words with prefixes and suffixes. All of them said that they learned morphology in an explicit way, which is teachers give lectures about the terminologies and let them practice with exercises like identifying morphemes and analyzing morphemes and their meanings.

> S8: […] My lecturer always gave lectures about certain terminologies and let us ask questions as well as discuss complex points […] In each lesson, the lecturer tried to explain the nature of morphology and its related elements concerning morphemes as well as word structures. From this,

we could understand the lesson better.

Vietnamese as a Means of Instruction

All learners suggested that the lesson always take place with Vietnamese instructions. It means that teachers and students spoke Vietnamese instead of English in their morphology class. However, the materials and the lesson notes and slides were in English. To explain the use of Vietnamese, although they were supposed to use English, they affirmed that using their mother tongue made the subject less challenging and easier to understand.

> S5: […] With Vietnamese instructions, we get what is taught at once […] With the complexity of morphological elements, the use of our first language is a must, and we feel it helps us to get the point straight away and find our lesson simpler.

Preference to Use Base-Centric Approach

70% of the learners find it easier to learn morphemes by learning "base" first and then looking for any affixes which can be combined with such "base", while the other 30% prefer to start with affixes and then tries to match these affixes with English words. They mentioned certain advantages to each method.

> S1: […] I think learning the base first, and then looking for different prefixes and suffixes attached to it is easier for me. By this way, I can take control of the number of words I absorb and compare the differences among the affixes.

> S10: […] I would start with prefixes and suffixes to get its meaning, and then I would try to match them with the words I know. I can learn more affixes through this way.

The Importance of Tasks and Activities

For activities used in the morphology class, learners all agreed that having some exercises related to the lesson is important. This is the time when they can review the lesson and get a deeper understanding of morphology. For example, S1, S5, S7, and S10 said that their teachers normally gave them exercises in analyzing morphemes of a certain English word or getting them to work in groups to find out English words with a certain number of morphemes.

> S10: […] We were usually given tasks about analyzing morphemes. One example is the teacher gave us a list of words and asked us to identify the morpheme and figure its meanings. After that, we presented our understanding to the teachers and to other groups […] We could learn from this activity from the teachers' comments and the debates from other groups.

Presentation from Students not Working

Whatever teaching method or activities, nine out of ten interviewees stated that giving presentations by students was not a good way for this subject. They said the fact that students give a presentation helps them to explore the subject, but the exception is applied to morphology. They admitted that the materials given to them were in English and extremely complicated. If they presented their findings to other students, they were afraid they would convey the wrong message or misunderstand the nature of the terminology and waste class time.

S4: […] I think learning by giving presentations could be applied in other subjects, not in morphology. First, the presenters do not understand the concept as well as the teachers do. Second, they cannot explain it well to the audience, which causes distraction and confusion. Third, it wastes time in the classroom because the teacher will have to explain it again.

Overall, students' learning experience was gained explicitly through lecturers, activities, and discussions in the Morphology classroom. Moreover, the means of instruction have to be in the mother tongue, and there is no need for presentations by students.

Research question 3: How do teachers feel about Morphology as a separate academic subject?

Why to Learn Morphology

Four teachers shared the same notion that morphology should be a separate academic subject in the English language curriculum for those whose first language is not English. They confirm the necessity and the benefits the subject brings to students.

The first reason students learn this subject is its close connection to the target language. Particularly, English language students need to know the internal nature of word structures, for this analysis helps reflect their learning and gives background to learning other branches of linguistics, viz. syntax, and semantics.

T1: […] A student of the English language should and must in some cases, learn about linguistics components, one of which is morphology. It is one branch of linguistics, and having an awareness of the subject can assist learners in understanding the internal structure of words and learning other aspects like syntax and semantics.

Another benefit teachers mention is the subject helps students learn better in other skills of English. For example, learning of word structures and its formation means learning some aspects of grammar and increasing a certain amount of vocabulary.

T4: […] Learners can apply morphological knowledge to analyzing word forms and can select correct forms when writing a sentence. They also use a wider range of vocabulary in their writing and speaking, with an attempt to use complex words – words holding affixes.

The final gain from this subject is getting interest from students when they explore new things.

T2: […] My students love to learn the subject, and many of them get interested in it from the very first day. They said that morphology was new to them, and there was a lot to discover from the subject. It is fascinating for them to analyze and explore the internal structures of words and identify the origin and a family of words.

A Barrier to Learning Morphology

Even though Morphology is necessary for learners, teachers still admit that it poses challenges to them. The challenge comes from the complexity of terminologies concerning morphology, the teaching methodology of teachers in charge, and the amount of knowledge students have to absorb in their lessons.

T3: […] Morphology includes different complicated aspects regarding morphemes, derivation, inflection, word formation which are sometimes alien, and these things require students' patience

and high level of concentration on the lesson.

> T1: […] Teachers in charge are the ones who decide on the level of complexity. If she or he had a good teaching methodology, or at least an easy-to-understand method, the subject would be easier.

> T4: […] The amount of knowledge on the subject is also an issue. The subject itself contains a lot of aspects to master in a certain time. Therefore, getting this intensive knowledge can be hard.

Basically, teachers' views on Morphology reflect what students feel in their learning. The inclusion of this linguistic branch in the curriculum is vital thanks to the benefits it brings, even though it is not always simple to deal with the subject.

Research question 4: How do teachers teach Morphology?

Vietnamese as a Means of Instruction

All teachers used Vietnamese as the main instruction in their morphology class. They explained that this saved time and made the lesson more comprehensible.

> T2: […] We had about two hours each lesson, and covering all the content in a limited time was like a race. That's why we spoke Vietnamese instead of English.

> T1: […] I think I spoke Vietnamese in order that my lecture was absorbable, and it was also reasonable not to use English because morphology was a completely new world to students.

Explicit Instructions through Lectures

T1, T2, and T3 conduct the lesson explicitly, giving lectures and explaining the concept to students. After that, the students would be given some exercises to practice for better understanding. The teachers explained this way was better than letting students discover the terms themselves and deducing the rules. T4, however, sometimes conducted the lesson implicitly. He felt learners could learn more from this. So, he offered them the chance to give a presentation about a certain concept of morphology. T4 admitted that this way was not always successful, but he would love his students to be as active and autonomous as possible. T1, T2, T3 never agreed with this, for they did not favor student presentation as an effective way of approaching the concept.

> T3: […] I believe we should be the ones who give the lectures and should never ask students to do research themselves into the concept and present their understanding in class. This is time-consuming, for teachers still have to explain again […] I once offered them the chance to do so, and I was very disappointed with the result.

Activities in the Morphology Classroom

One common technique the four teachers used is discussion. Giving lectures should be followed by a discussion between students and teachers. This can be done through tasks or exercises the lecturers give to students.

> T4: […] Delivering discussion is a good way for students to explore more about our lecture. Sometimes, the discussion can take place through activities like word-class analysis and morpheme identification.

It can be seen that explicit instructions done in Vietnamese were commonly used by teachers of

Morphology. This is accompanied by any tasks or activities assigned to students other than presentations.

Discussion

Learning Morphology: Challenging but Deserving

Auni and Manan (2023) claim that the difficulty in learning a language can be due to different forms among languages, especially the word structures or their internal nature. The difference explains the fact that students find morphology challenging to master at first. However, morphological awareness or knowledge plays a vital role in learners (Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019), so learners still find the attractiveness of the subject. As learners mentioned, they could apply morphological knowledge to improve their vocabulary repertoire and their grammar accuracy, which agrees with K. Yadav and S. Yadav (2021). This is beneficial for learners who may have problems with grammar, especially related to the use of correct inflectional morphemes (Burhansyah, Aziz, & Yusuf, 2020). As a matter of fact, good grammar and vocabulary lead to better performance in reading (Claravall, 2016; Nagy et al., 1993; Templeton, 2012; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019) and writing (K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Templeton, 2012). Furthermore, to students, the mastery of morphology reflects their reading ability thanks to the interpretation of language structures, which is part of morphological awareness. The reflection can be explained by the intercorrelation between the skill and the interpretation process (Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2003). Therefore, Morphology learning in the curriculum is justifiable.

Morphology Learning Practice

Responses from learners reflect the consistency between what morphology includes itself and what is included in the real course. These include morphemes, word structures, and word formation, as mentioned earlier. Specifically, the morphology course includes elements suggested by a large body of researchers, namely Andrew (2002), Anwar and Rosa (2020), Claravall (2016), Ghasemi and Vaez-Dalili (2019), K. Yadav and S. Yadav (2021), Ng et al. (2022), Virpioja et al. (2011), Yousif (2016) and Yule (2020).

Explicit instructions used in morphology courses with Vietnamese instructions as a means and lectures as a teaching method are similar to those suggested by Claravall (2016). This way of instruction has been proven effective (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Cao & A. Nguyen, 2018; Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019). However, this approach also needs to consider the opportunity for language analysis (Pham & X. Nguyen, 2022).

The study found that learners prefer the base-centric matrix more than the affix-centric matrix, which supports Ng et al.'s model of teaching and learning morphology (2022). Learners love learning, memorizing, and analyzing morphemes from the base first and then combining them with related affixes. This is similar to the learning of the word family.

The research explores some other new Morphology learning beliefs and practices. The first is the means of instruction used in the morphology class, which is the learners' mother tongue. As they mentioned, this can help them understand the terms easily and saves time. Another is the

addition of activities or tasks to the lesson. This is the time for students or learners to apply what they have learned to real analysis and gain new insights into the language. Finally, presentations from learners should be avoided to reduce confusion and increase efficiency in terms of time, convenience, and effort.

Teaching Morphology: From Necessity to Reality

The fact that teachers praise the necessity of teaching and learning Morphology as an academic subject agrees with students' views. It also supports previous researchers on the critical role of morphological awareness (Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019). Accordingly, teachers link learners' performance in other areas of language skills with morphology, which also confirms the learners' positivity towards the subject. Some areas include vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, writing skills, and reading skills. Obviously, their view reflects exactly the positive correlation between skills of language and knowledge of morphology, which was empirically confirmed by different researchers (Claravall, 2016; K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Nagy et al., 1993; Templeton, 2012; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019).

Teachers share the same view as learners' when they all state that it is really important for English majors to deeply analyze the internal structure of the target language when they learn it academically. This can be done even though the involvement in the process of interpreting the target language is challenging due to the differences in the first language (Auni & Manan, 2023; Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2003).

There is one new finding from the study where teachers believe the learning of morphology also sets the background for studying other aspects of linguistics components: syntax and semantics. Their view is reasonable and supports learners. First, for morphology, it has something to deal with affixes (Andrew, 2002) which shows the part of speech of a word, and using correct word class to form phrases and sentences with meaningful arrangements is what syntax covers (Yule, 2020). Second, to semantics which deals with meanings (Yule, 2020), morphology has something to do with morphemes that have the smallest unit of meaning (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Claravall, 2016; K. Yadav & S. Yadav, 2021; Ng et al., 2022).

Morphology Teaching Practice

Teachers' teaching methods are found to be explicit. Explicit instructions are a necessity for teaching morphology (Anwar & Rosa, 2020; Ghasemi & Vaez-Dalili, 2019; T. Nguyen, 2018; Washburn & Mulcahy, 2019). The fact that teachers use Vietnamese instructions is also one way to show the explicit nature of their teaching. It is undeniable that teachers and learners share a similarity in their views on the teaching and learning method of the subject. The teaching process must start with lectures, proceeds with tasks and activities, and ends with a discussion. There is also a consideration towards using student presentation to approach and analyze Morphology. In fact, teachers do not favor this way, and they save time for lectures and tasks in the classroom, which is in line with learners' expectations. However, this study neither finds the emphasis on the center of learners who are expected to play an active role, which would not support T. Nguyen (2018), nor shares the finding that learners should be taught in a dynamic classroom with the application of mobile-based games as suggested by C. Nguyen et al. (2021).

Conclusion

It is found that there are positive perceptions towards teaching and learning morphology as a separate academic subject for both learners and teachers. To them, morphology is difficult due to differences between their mother tongue and the target language, but it is interesting and deserving of exploration. Indeed, they regard it as vital in the curriculum of English majors. Therefore, syllabus developers should include this subject in the English language curriculum.

The study concludes that teaching and learning morphology should take place explicitly, in which clear instructions in the first language and lectures are made. This finding raises the importance of careful consideration in task designs and explicit instructions in a linguistics class where its knowledge is a new world to learners. In order for the course to be effectively conducted, it should consist of tasks and activities as well as discussions but not allow for student presentation.

The research has a limitation which lies in the sample the author chose. The student participants are the ones who have just completed the course recently, so they can describe the subject clearly and share their excitement right after completion. There should have been an inclusion of learners who had completed the course for a longer period in order to explore whether their feelings have changed much and to see what kind of applications of the subject they have. For future research, this problem should be considered.

The findings add to the literature review on students' and learners' perceptions of Morphology – one of the branches of linguistics- and their teaching and learning practices in the context of a separate academic subject for English-major students in Vietnam.

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