On Inflectional Morphemes: Grammatical Competence of College Students

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Abstract - Language proficiency refers to one's ability to use language for a variety of communicative purposes. Proficient users are said to have a good command of the language- they can understand the language without difficulty, express a range of ideas clearly in speech and writing, and interact with other speakers comfortably. This study aimed to determine the grammatical competence of college students. Specifically, it sought to answer the level of grammatical competence of 93 Education English major students of Pangasinan State University (PSU) on inflectional morphemes and difference in the respondents' grammatical competence when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics such as most preferred language for communication and general average in Senior High School (SHS) English subject. The descriptive survey method was utilized as the research described and attempted to interpret the level of grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes of Education English major students and how the grammatical competence of the respondents differs when categorized in terms of the aforementioned demographic characteristics. Survey and written test questionnaires were used as instruments of this study. Findings revealed that majority of the college students were found to have high grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes. Anent this are the demographic characteristics such as most preferred language for communication and general average in SHS English subject which contributed to grammatical competence. Hence, grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes would entail better comprehension in word formation processes among others.

Keywords – *Inflectional Morphemes, Grammatical Competence, College Students*

INTRODUCTION

Every language is in constant need for new words to name new things. Word formation enables the users to create new words, modify the existing ones and see the flexibility of language (Fasold, 2006).

Most English vocabulary arises by making new lexemes out of old ones — either by adding an affix to previously existing forms, altering their word class, or combining them to produce compounds. These processes of construction are of interest to grammarians as well as lexicologists but the importance of word-formation to the development of the lexicon is second to none. After all, almost any lexeme, whether Anglo-Saxon or foreign, can be given an affix, change its word class, or help make a compound. Alongside the Anglo-Saxon root in kingly, for example, we have the French root in royally and the Latin root in regally. There is no elitism here. The processes of affixation, conversion, and compounding are all great levelers (Crystal, 2003).

Ur (2009) describes grammar as the way a language operates and combines words so as to express certain kinds of meaning, some of which cannot be conveyed adequately by vocabulary alone. These include the way ideas are grouped and related, and the purposes of utterances

such as statement, question, request, etc. Grammar may also serve to express time relations, singular or plural distinctions and many other aspects of meaning. There are rules which govern how words have to be manipulated and organized so as to express these meanings such as when a competent speaker of the language will be able to apply these rules so as to convey his or her chosen meaning effectively and acceptably.

On the issue of grammatical competence, Ur (2009) defines grammatical competence as anything the learners are asked to do that produces a clear outcome and that the function of the task is simply to activate the learners in such a way as to get them to engage with the material to be practiced in an interesting and challenging way. Other terms used in relation to grammar tasks are exercise and activity. The term exercise often refers to the conventional textbook procedure, which focuses much on correct forms, and can be done correctly without much understanding and meaning.

The study of Torres and Pillos (2012) determined the Word Choice Proficiency of Third Year Bachelor of Arts in English students of Pangasinan State University. Results showed that the student's level of word choice proficiency such that of inflectional morphemes obtained a description of "very high proficiency." In view of the findings of the said study, the third year Bachelor of Arts in English students are encouraged to read more books that could supply their ideas, words, or expression that would help enhance their vocabulary and further increase their word choice proficiency.

This study aimed to determine the grammatical competence of college students. Specifically, it sought to answer the level of grammatical competence of 93 Education English major students of PSU on inflectional morphemes and difference in the respondents' grammatical competence when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics such as most preferred language for communication and general average in SHS English subject.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive survey method as it described and attempted to interpret the grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes of 93 Education English major students and how the level of grammatical competence of the respondents differ when categorized in terms of demographic characteristics. This study utilized purposive sampling to determine the number of respondents.

The two research instruments used in this study were the survey and written test questionnaires. The survey questionnaire dealt with the demographic characteristics of the students which includes the most preferred language for communication and general average in SHS English subject. The written test was on morphology. This instrument measured the level of grammatical competence of the respondents on inflectional morphemes.

The data were subjected to statistical treatment such as frequency counts, percentage distribution and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On the basis of statistical analyses, this study presented the following salient findings:

Grammatical Competence of Education English Major Students of PSU on Inflectional Morphemes

Level	Score Range	Inflectional Morphemes (Mean=23.52)	
		Frequency	Percentage
Very High	25 – 30	36	38.7
High	19 – 24	50	53.8
Average	13 – 18	7	7.5
Low	7 – 12	0	0.0
Very Low	0 – 6	0	0.0
TOTAL		93	100%

The respondents' level of grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes posted a mean of 23.52 which is interpreted as high. Among the 93 respondents, 36 or 38.7% obtained scores ranging from 25-30 with very high level of grammatical competence. These data signified that the respondents scored well on inflectional morphemes that indicate plurality and possession like in the case of the inflectional morpheme –s for the base words *flower, university,* and *lady* and –'s for the base words *Mary, San Manuel, and laptop* respectively. Meanwhile, 50 or 53.8% who obtained scores ranging from 19-24 with high level of grammatical competence properly comprehended the affixes –d and –ed when used in sentences that include base words *bake, contradict, cover,* and *develop* to show the past tense of the verbs. On the other hand, 7 or 7.5% had scores ranging from 13-18 and was described with average level of grammatical competence hence none of the respondents exhibited low and very low level of grammatical competence respectively. The results manifest that the respondents exemplify a good grasp on the concepts of inflectional morphemes to indicate plurality, possession, and verb tenses when used in sentences.

The above mentioned findings have positive implication on the future academic performance of the respondents because as pointed out by Soifer (2015), awareness of morphology has been shown to be a strong indicator of good vocabulary and positive influence on reading comprehension. This means that students with good reading comprehension learn faster.

Most Preferred Language for Communication

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Inflectional Morphemes	
		Mean Score	DE

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Mean	DE
Most Preferred Language for Communication	Filipino (n=63)	23.57	H
	English (n=22)	23.27	H
	Pangasinan (n=7)	24.00	H
	Iloco (n=1)	22.00	H

It can also be gleaned from the table that on inflectional morphemes, respondents who prefer Pangasinan as language for communication were more grammatically competent with a mean score of 24.00 interpreted as high as compared to respondents who prefer Filipino with a mean score of 23.57 interpreted as high, English with a mean score of 23.27 interpreted as high, and Iloco with a mean score of 22.00 interpreted as high respectively.

Genesee (2012) emphasized that bilingual student, as in the case of Filipino students, exhibit significant cognitive advantages compared to monolingual learners. Genesee further explained that students who are learning to read in a second language are able to transfer many skills and knowledge from their first language to facilitate their acquisition of reading skills in the second language. He also pointed out that students with good language competence using the preferred language, such as one that is used at home, also have language skills in their second language.

General Average in SHS English Subject

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Inflectional Morphemes	
		Mean Score	DE
General Average in SHS English subject (*Mean = 88.87*)	90-100 (n=37)	24.38	H
	85-89 (n=55)	22.96	H
	80-84 (n=1)	22.00	H

On inflectional morphemes, respondents whose general average range from 90-100 with a mean score of 24.38 interpreted as high demonstrate notable grammatical competence as compared to

respondents whose general average range from 85-89 with a mean score of 22.96 interpreted as high, and 80-84 with a mean score of 22.00 interpreted as high respectively.

Further, it has been long believed and thus, researched, that there is a strong connection between one's performance in college and high school performance. Along this point, Maitre (2014) stated that high school grades matter. Citing a result of a certain study, Maitre emphasized that students' performance in college closely mirrors performance in high school. Students with strong grade points in high school are able to maintain similar GPAs in college. Similarly, Nagaoka et.al. (2009) pointed out that low GPAs in high school results in low achievement in college, which includes language performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the salient findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

Most of the college students - the Education English major students were revealed to have high grammatical competence on inflectional morphemes. Anent this are the demographic characteristics which contribute to grammatical competence such as most preferred language for communication and general average in SHS English subject. Grammatical competence must be given much attention to ensure better academic performance of students relative to their chosen career path.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the salient findings of this study and conclusions drawn, the following are recommended:

1. For the school administrators to approve the development of learning enrichment materials in morphology specifically focused on inflectional morphemes to be used by the Languages Education faculty as an instructional material in order to enhance the grammatical competence of Education English major students of PSU.

2. The conduct of further studies on pedagogical strategies and styles towards the enhancement of the grammatical competence of Education English major students.

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