



Exploring English Prefix Knowledge focusing on im- and in- of Thai EFL Students

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Abstract

English vocabulary development plays a vital part in language learning in many contexts, which seems to be difficult for learners who study English as a second or foreign language (English as a foreign language; EFL). Vocabulary development also includes knowledge of word-formation. Consequently, understanding current prefix knowledge of second language learners may be beneficial for scholars who are finding a tool for the learners to learn new words. This study aims to investigate the current knowledge of English prefixes focusing on “in- and im-” and the ability of EFL students to distinguish the meaning between them. The participants of this study were 65 third-year students who are studying in the English major at Naresuan University. The researcher used tests adapted from Cook (2016) as an instrument to find out the students’ prefix content knowledge. The results of this study demonstrated that the 3rd year students majoring in English could apply the prefix knowledge that they have learned in the morphology course in doing the tests. Besides, the findings also suggested that students could distinguish the meaning of the same prefixes with different meanings. Finally, the study concluded that teaching prefixes both implicitly and explicitly in the classroom may help improve learners’ vocabulary acquisition. However, teachers or course developers may need to develop additional teaching materials that also promote students’ affix knowledge.

Keywords: *English Prefix Knowledge, EFL Learners*

1. Introduction

In an era where communication is near instantaneous from one end of the globe to the other, English plays an important communication tool in many aspects of life, such as in the economy, education, and especially intercultural communication. As a result, new words are created in many contexts of communication, causing people outside of the community of practice find it difficult to understand them. However, a study conducted by Cook (2016) suggested that knowledge of English prefixes facilitated an understanding of both old and new English words more easily. Therefore, knowledge of vocabulary is an important element in learning a second language, and there could be a strong correlation between prefix and vocabulary knowledge (Tyler & Nagy, 1989). Schmitt and Meara (1997) also explained that studying affixes (prefixes and suffixes) was useful for second language learners’ knowledge of the target language. Nourie and Davidson (1992) also argue that word parts or affixes had a significant influence on improving word knowledge. However, for learners studying English as a second language, the knowledge of affixes may seem difficult to acquire. Meara (1996, p.35) also pointed out that “lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence,” and the affix knowledge can be strengthened through communicative language teaching by having students practice using the affixes through communicative activities (Meara, 1996; Zhang, 2015). As a consequence, understanding the knowledge of prefixes seem to be a great tool for the second language (L2) learners to learn new words. Therefore, the researcher of this study aims to investigate the current knowledge of Thai learners’ English prefix knowledge because the findings may be beneficial to future studies aiming to promote the knowledge of English prefixes to Thai or other EFL learners. In doing so, the researchers limited the study to only prefixes that may be problematic for Thai EFL learners since some prefixes do not have only one meaning, such as the prefixes in-and im-. These two prefixes can also mean both “not” and “into.” Therefore, this study focuses more on investigating the knowledge of third year students majoring in English to find out whether they can distinguish the meaning of the prefixes; in-and im-. The result of this study demonstrates how much third-year English majors who

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studied morphology can apply knowledge from the morphology course and generate awareness of the importance of using prefixes correctly to the students.

This study may benefit the participants and the teachers since they may learn more about the advantages of English prefixes in students' learning of new vocabulary. The findings of this study may also benefit the teachers in determining teaching methodology to help students learning new words in the classroom.

Prior studies provided background contexts and knowledge to this study in the area of prefixes and their relation to learners who study English as a foreign language (EFL). Previous studies also revealed how learning morphology might influence the understanding of students' vocabulary knowledge. For this, the review of past studies was divided into two main parts. The first part provides background context on prefixes and their relation to ESL learners and vocabulary learning problems. The second part examines other empirical studies underpinning the present study.

The Study of Prefixes and EFL Learners

The benefits of affix knowledge have been highlighted in previous studies. These studies emphasized their benefits in vocabulary learning for language learners. Tamura and Shirahata (2017) asserted that it is essential to access second language learners' knowledge of English prefixes because that may help teachers teach better. Teachers do not have to spend much time teaching prefixes, which are easy to acquire; instead, they should spend more time teaching things that are more difficult to acquire (Tamura & Shirahata, 2017, p. 69). Besides, Nourie and Davidson (1992) suggested that affixation consisting of prefixes and suffixes was one of the best ways of creating productive word building. In addition to understanding the vocabulary, word parts could help EFL learners guess and remember new words.

Tyler and Nagy (1989) stated that vocabulary is an important element of learning English since second language learning demonstrates that there could be a strong relationship between prefix knowledge and vocabulary knowledge. Schmitt and Meara (1997) further demonstrated that prefix acquisition frequently is useful for EFL students' knowledge of vocabulary, which is in line with the study of Nation (1990) that suggested that the most popular strategy for the second learner in learning vocabulary was using affix knowledge.

Therefore, it may be concluded that if L2 learners gain affix knowledge while learning English, there is a high chance that affix knowledge may facilitate learning new vocabulary.

Vocabulary Learning Problems in EFL Context

According to Saengpakdeejit (2014), although EFL students used English both inside and outside the classroom, they still faced problems learning unfamiliar words because English in a real-life situation is different from the academic English that they found in the classroom. Therefore, when students face English in different contexts that learners could not remember all vocabulary in class. They needed to take responsibility for their own learning (Hasan & Shabdin, 2017; Sökmen, 1997). Also, Adunyarittigun (2002) found that lacking vocabulary was the main cause of students' failure in predicting the meaning of unknown words in reading academic texts.

Empirical Studies

Cook (2016) investigated how English language learners understand the meaning of affixes (prefixes and suffixes). She explored how affixes help students understand the meaning of a word. The participants were nine students in the third grade ELLs. The instruments were prefix and suffix tests. The results showed small gains on their prefixes im-, in-, and un- test scores. Other studies also share commonalities with this one.

Mousavi and Hasani (2014) studied the effect on the number of affixes on vocabulary learning of Iranian advanced EFL students. This study aimed to examine the relationship between the number of affixes and their effect on vocabulary learning. There were 43 participants, all advanced students in Qazvin Province in Iran chosen randomly. The instruments were two tests: a proficiency test and a vocabulary



recognition test. The results showed that advanced students who used word formations were aware of the strategy in their tests.

Fangyi, Yixuan, and Xinru (2017) investigated exploring the affix knowledge of EFL students in Taiwan. The study aimed to investigate EFL students' affix knowledge and attempted to discover the order of affix acquisition in the second language learning process. The instrument used was a test. The participants were high school students who had studied English for at least six years in the middle of Taiwan. All of the students were chosen from random sampling. The findings showed that the average score was 48.8%.

Fotokian and Rahmatipasand (2015), studied the effects of teaching prefixes on the vocabulary learning of intermediate EFL learners. The study investigated the relationship between teaching prefixes and their effect on vocabulary knowledge of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. There were 30 participants in the study. The researcher used testing as an instrument. The results showed that the experimental group was better than the control group. It could be concluded that teaching prefixes had a positive effect on learners' vocabulary knowledge.

However, the studies stated above were not specific regarding the prefixes "in-and im-," and few studies were focusing on the prefixes in-and im-. Therefore, this present study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge and raise learners' awareness of these two prefixes with third-year students who studied morphology.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows;

1. To investigate current knowledge of English prefixes "in- and im-" among third-year English majors at Naresuan University
2. To find out the ability of Naresuan University third-year English majors to distinguish between the meaning of the prefixes "in-and im-."

2.1 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follow;

1. Do the third-year English-major students at Naresuan University who studied morphology know the meaning of the prefixes "in-and im-?"
2. Can the third-year English-major students at Naresuan University who studied morphology distinguish the meanings of the prefixes "not and into"?

3. Materials and Methods

This study was quantitative research that was conducted with third-year students who studied morphology when they were second-year students. The researcher used tests to collect data pertaining to the students' prior knowledge "in-and im-" prefixes. The test was designed to collect numerical data to examine the students' ability to discern the meaning "in-and im- prefixes. The tests were adapted from Cook (2016) for reliability purposes and were also validated by two experts in the fields for validity. The tests required students to choose the meaning which had the same meaning as the given word. Students spent about 20-30 minutes to complete the tests. The research proposal was approved by the University Ethical Committee, and all participants received information handouts and signed the consent forms before they participated in the research.

The participants of this study were 65 third-year English-major students who studied morphology at Naresuan University. The researcher chose this group because they are expected to acquire some knowledge of prefixes from morphology after they have completed the course.

Procedure

First, the researchers explained the tests and the purpose of the study. After that, the researchers told the participants the time allotted to do the tests. The researchers contributed the tests to the participants. When the participants finished the tests, the researchers took back the test papers. Then, the researchers



analyzed the data obtained from the tests. Finally, the data were analyzed by the Microsoft Office Excel program and reported in the following research finding section.

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed by the researchers to check for the accuracy of the participants' answers. The researchers considered the scores of each participant and examined their wrong and correct answers. The data was double checked by other experts for reliability purposes. The researchers transformed the numeral scores into percentages by using Microsoft Office Excel in forms of the percentage of accuracy and Mean and Standard Deviation. The results show the participants' competency in distinguishing between in- and im- prefixes.

4. Results and Discussion

This part highlighted the results of the thirty-word test, which consisted of fifteen im- and in- prefix words. The total scores are presented in the tables below, and the researcher has interpreted the finding of the study.

Table 1 and Table 2 answer the first research question regarding "Do the third-year English-major students who studied morphology at Naresuan University know the meaning of "in-and im- prefixes?"

Table 1 Results of Prefix Im- Test

Words	Subject = 65		Percentage of Accuracy
	Correct	Incorrect	
1. Impossible	61	4	93.80%
2. Impolite	64	1	98.50%
3. Impatient	63	2	96.90%
4. Improvident	39	26	60.00%
5. Imprison	23	42	64.60%
6. Imbalance	61	4	93.80%
7. Implicate	49	16	75.40%
8. Impress	52	13	80.00%
9. Immoral	55	10	84.60%
10. Immobilize	41	24	63.10%
11. Immature	44	21	67.70%
12. Immortal	41	24	63.10%
13. Immaterial	53	12	81.50%
14. Immigrate	26	39	40.00%
15. Imprecise	35	30	53.80%
Total			74.45%

The results of the prefix im- are shown in table 1. The percentage of correct answers from all 15 words of the prefix was 74.45%, which one can infer that the students knew the meaning of the im- prefixes in English. Also, it was found that the word in which the student got the correct answer the most was 'impolite' (98.5%), followed by 'impatient' (96.9%), 'impossible, and imbalance' (93.8%). In contrast to the positive results, students also showed difficulty in understanding im- prefixes in immigrate (40.0%), imprecise (53.8%), and improvident (60.0%), respectively.

**Table 2** Results of Prefix In- Test

Words	Subject= 65		Percentage of Accuracy
	Correct	Incorrect	
1. Incomplete	65	0	100.00%
2. Inactive	62	3	95.40%
3. Indispensable	17	48	26.20%
4. Indoor	60	5	92.30%
5. Incomparable	33	32	50.80%
6. Incorporate	19	46	29.20%
7. Insert	56	9	86.20%
8. Intend	44	21	67.70%
9. Invade	52	13	80.00%
10. Indelicate	29	36	44.60%
11. Insane	60	5	92.30%
12. Inaccurate	61	4	93.80%
13. Incapable	45	20	69.20%
14. Indecent	39	26	60.00%
15. Inanimate	46	19	70.80%
Total			70.57%

The results of the prefix in- in table 2 indicated that students got an average of 70.57% correct. The table revealed that all learners knew the meaning of 'incomplete' at 100%, followed by 'inactive' (95.4%) and 'inaccurate' (93.8%). In contrast, students got incorrect answers for 'indispensable' (26.2%), 'incorporate' (29.2%) and 'indelicate' (44.6%) respectively. Therefore, it can be inferred that the students also did quite well on the in- prefix test as well.

To answer the second research question, "Can the third-year English-major students at Naresuan University who studied morphology distinguish the meaning of the prefixes "in-and im-"? Tables 3 and 4 below show the answer to the question.

Table 3 Results of Im/In Prefixes Meaning "Not"

Words	Percentage of Accuracy
1. Impossible	93.80%
2. Impolite	98.50%
3. Impatient	96.90%
4. Improvident	60.00%
5. Imbalance	93.80%
6. Immoral	84.60%
7. Immobilize	63.10%
8. Immature	67.70%
9. Immortal	63.10%
10. Immaterial	81.50%
11. Imprecise	53.80%



Words	Percentage of Accuracy
12. Incomplete	100.00%
13. Inactive	95.40%
14. Indispensable	26.20%
15. Incomparable	44.60%
16. Indelicate	44.60%
17. Inaccurate	93.80%
18. Incapable	69.20%
19. Indecent	60.00%
20. Inanimate	70.80%
Total	73.07%

According to table 3, the prefix im- meaning “not” indicated that most of the students understood the meanings, considering the percentages presented in the table such as impolite (98.5%), impatient (96.9%) or impossible and imbalance (93.8%). For the prefix in- meaning “not,” all students could understand the meaning of incomplete (100%). However, some words confused many students, as shown by their low scores in Table 4, such as indispensable (26.2%), incomparable and indelicate (44.6%). The overall results of Table 3 were 73.07 %, which can suggest that the students could distinguish between the meaning of the prefixes in- and im- meaning not.

Table 4 Results of Im/In Prefixes Meaning “Into”

Words	Percentage of Accuracy
1. Imprison	64.60%
2. Implicate	75.40%
3. Impress	80.00%
4. Immigrate	40.00%
5. Indoor	92.30%
6. Incorporate	29.20%
7. Insert	86.20%
8. Intend	67.70%
9. Invade	80.00%
10. Insane	92.30%
Total	70.77%

The results of the prefix im- and in- meaning into were presented in Table 4. In this table, there were also some the highest and lowest scores, which were insane and indoor (92.3%) and 29.2%. The finding revealed that EFL students could distinguish the meaning of the prefixes in- and im- meaning “into.”

**Table 5** Mean and Standard Deviation

Prefix	Mean	S.D.
Im / In	46.5	14.19
Not / Into	47	13.7

This table showed the mean and standard deviation. The results of the prefixes in- and im- had the mean of 46.5 with a standard deviation of 14.19. In contrast, the results of the prefixes in- and im- which means “not” and “into” had the mean of 47.0 with a standard deviation of 13.7.

After analyzing the data, the findings of the study suggested that 3rd year English majors could apply prefix knowledge after they completed morphology. From Tables 1 and 2, it can be observed that over 70% of the participants did very well with the prefix im- of the test. It was suggested that the students could apply prefix knowledge practically.

In distinguishing the meaning of the prefixes in- and im- meaning not and into, the results can be examined in Tables 3 and 4. 73.07% of the students can identify the meaning of im- and in- that means “not”. Likewise, students could also identify the meanings of im- and in- that means “into” by the score of 70.77%. Having a high score on the test indicated that students could distinguish the meanings accurately. They can consider the root words. Knowing the root of the words allows them to guess the meaning of the words that were added; im- and in- for instance. Additionally, if they find prefixes they understand and have heard in the past, they will be able to understand clearly and precisely. Apart from memorizing the only vocabulary, a good way to understand new words the students will face is to apply prefix knowledge. Studies on affix knowledge (Hasan & Shabdin, 2017; Nation, 1990) have confirmed that students can develop vocabulary knowledge in many ways, but the most popular strategies in learning vocabulary are using affix knowledge. However, the researchers suggested that instructors may consider findings ways to adjust textbooks, teaching materials, or classroom activities in order to help students apply English more practically in their daily lives.

5. Conclusion

According to the findings, EFL third-year English-major students could understand the use and meaning of some of the prefixes that they have learned from the curriculum. Therefore, it may be concluded that teaching prefixes improved learners’ vocabulary comprehension. Prefix knowledge benefits vocabulary learning, and it is crucial for EFL students because vocabulary is one of the essential parts of learning a second language. If learners practice prefix knowledge more, then they will learn vocabulary well. However, teaching prefixes should increase the number of vocabulary words in class or a textbook. Some learners face problems as some prefixes have more than one meaning, namely the prefixes im- and in- mentioned in this study. Also, learners may have difficulty understanding the correct meaning. Learning a second language for EFL learners is not easy, so in closing, instructors should promote teaching prefixes, and learners should find appropriate ways to use this knowledge. Future studies may consider conducting survey research of teachers’ teaching affix knowledge to their students or a comparison of affix knowledge teaching methods to investigate the most effective way of teaching affix knowledge to Thai EFL students.

6. Appendix

Direction: Choose the correct choices that give the meaning as the underlined word above.

1. The test was impossible to read.
 - a. The test was new.
 - b. The test was super hard to read. (very)
 - c. The test was super easy to read. (very)
2. My homework is incomplete.



- a. My homework is too easy.
- b. My homework is finished.
- c. My homework is not finished.
3. The boy was inactive.
 - a. He was active.
 - b. He was funny.
 - c. He was not active.
4. The students were impolite.
 - a. They said, "thank you."
 - b. They said, "What time is it?"
 - c. They did not say please or thank you.
5. The people were impatient.
 - a. The people were patient.
 - b. The people were not patient.
 - c. The people were poor.
6. These reading materials are indispensable.
 - a. These materials are not necessary at all.
 - b. These materials are a bit necessary.
 - c. These materials are highly necessary.
7. I love playing the indoor sport.
 - a. I want to play sports only in the place covered by shade.
 - b. I want to play sports in playground in the sunshine.
 - c. I want to play sports that use the wide space to play.
8. The quality of their products is incomparable.
 - a. The quality of their products is inferior to other products.
 - b. The quality of their products is unparalleled.
 - c. The quality of their products is the same as other products.
9. He always forgets the important stuff, so he is considered as the most improvident man in our class.
 - a. The circumspectly prepares the important stuff as always.
 - b. He is not reckless as always.
 - c. He carelessly takes the important stuff as always.
10. She was imprisoned for the mass murder. (for murder)
 - a. She was confined in a jail owing to killing her stepsister.
 - b. She was punished with a fine owing to killing her stepsister.
 - c. She was no longer the prisoner.
11. This company was incorporated by a famous investor in 1981.
 - a. This company was formed into a corporate in 1981
 - b. This company was demolished in 1981.
 - c. This company was and established and owned by only one investor in 1981.
12. Publisher inserted an advertisement in the newspaper
 - a. Publisher did not place an advertisement inside the newspaper.
 - b. Publisher duplicated the newspaper that had an advertisement.
 - c. Publisher added an advertisement to the newspaper.
13. Jack intended to be in Bangkok for 3 months.
 - a. He aimed to be in Bangkok for 3 months.
 - b. He did not to want to be in Bangkok for 3 months.
 - c. He prolonged to be in Bangkok for 3 months.
14. Female hormone imbalance is a major cause infertility.
 - a. The hormone of women is balance.



- b. The hormone of women is unbalance.
c. The hormone of women is always still.
15. The kingdom was invaded by the enemy.
a. The enemy attacked the kingdom.
b. The enemy did not attack the kingdom.
c. The kingdom encroached by the enemy.
16. Those indelicate garlands were definitely made by Lita.
a. Lita made those garland so graceful.
b. Garlands were made without elaborateness.
c. Beautiful Garlands were made with Lita's full effort.
17. The evidence implicated our teacher in a big murder.
a. Evidence showed that our teacher is a good person.
b. Evidence showed that our teacher is not involved in a big murder.
c. Evidence showed that our teacher is involved in a big murder.
18. I was deeply impressed by this movie.
a. This movie is so notable.
b. This movie is so boring.
c. This movie is not superb at all.
19. Susan is often insane, and this can be noxious to others around her.
a. Susan has the normal mind as usual.
b. Susan frequently goes crazy.
c. Susan feels tranquil all the time.
20. Jacky is an immoral man.
a. He is a person who likes to go to the temple.
b. He is a person who is sinful.
c. He is a morality person.
21. The data is often inaccurate.
a. The data is often faulty.
b. The data is often exact.
c. The data is often correct.
22. The troops were immobilized by the enemy.
a. The troops were moved easily by the enemy.
b. The troops were fixed in placed by the enemy.
c. The troops were immoveable by the enemy.
23. Dawin is a person who is immature to his mother.
a. His mother thinks that her son is a childish boy.
b. His mother thinks that her son is not a young boy.
c. His mother thinks that her son has a lot of experiences.
24. She is incapable of deceit.
a. She is capable of trickiness.
b. She is a strong woman.
c. She is unable to sham.
25. Our mortal bodies are inhabited by immortal souls.
a. Our mortal bodies are inhabited by deathful souls.
b. Our mortal bodies are inhabited by souls that live living forever.
c. Our mortal bodies are inhabited by ending souls.
26. She accused him of making indecent suggestions to her.
a. She blamed him of making good suggestions to her.
b. She accused him of making usable suggestions to her.
c. She condemned him of making inappropriate suggestions to her.



27. This data is immaterial to the argument.
 - a. The argument has to have material in this data.
 - b. The data is not important to the argument.
 - c. The data is important to the argument.
28. The Mennonites immigrated to western Canada in the 1870s.
 - a. The Mennonites migrated to western Canada in the 1870s.
 - b. The Mennonites have leaved in western Canada since 1870s.
 - c. The Mennonites have not migrated to western Canada in the 1870s.
29. The translation of this original sentence is imprecise.
 - a. The translation is absolutely correct.
 - b. The translation lacks exactness.
 - c. The translation is not incorrect.
30. Every stuff thing that is created by human is an inanimate object.
 - a. It is the lifeless things.
 - b. It is not cartoon characters.
 - c. It is the same as animal or human.

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