Morphological Awareness and Reading Comprehension: Exploring the Effects of direct morphological awareness teaching in the Reading Comprehension Section of TOEIC

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Tesis presentada a la Facultad de Letras de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile para optar al grado de magíster en Lingüística Aplicada al Inglés como lengua extranjera

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Marzo, 2019

Santiago, Chile
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Abstract

As far as reading comprehension is one of the main objectives pursued by any language course, this paper reports on an action-research project conducted with the participation of six subjects who were TOEIC candidates at the time. The purpose behind this AR is to explore the effects of explicit teaching on morphological awareness upon reading comprehension skills. The six participants attended to four training sessions and the effects were assessed through the application of a pre and a post-test. In addition, subjects’ opinions were collected through a survey to provide this research with a qualitative aspect. Results suggest that explicit teaching of morphological awareness is an effective method to improve reading comprehension in EFL and the opinions collected through the survey show that subjects perceived the usefulness of morphological awareness on their learning process.
1. Introduction

Nowadays, many Chilean universities ask their students to pass a standardized international exam in order to complete their professional training. Moreover, in the business context, a great number of companies consider holding an international examination certificate as a pivotal factor for hiring policies. According to Mäkiö “employers today widely expect job applicants to have foreign language skills and it can be considered to be already part of one’s professional knowledge rather than a special skill” (2016, p. 8). Furthermore, in the business context, where English is considered as a lingua franca, the capacity of speaking this language might enhance subjects’ possibilities of being hired.

As a response to the importance that English has in the business world internationally, the School of Economics and Business of Universidad de Chile (FEN) asks its students to hold a Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) certificate at the end of their professional training in order to get their undergraduate degrees. The goal behind this requirement is to be sure that graduates are able to comprehend English written and spoken texts within an international context, particularly business-oriented texts and conversations. It is for that, that students are compelled to demonstrate their reading and listening comprehension skills through the TOEIC certificate. Additionally, it has been proven that people who present a well-developed reading comprehension skill tend to have a vaster repertoire of vocabulary and vice versa (Nation, 2009). Therefore, the importance of developing reading comprehension skills relies not only in the ability to comprehend texts but also in the development of the foreign language itself, because the more vocabulary -and therefore reading comprehension- the better understanding and the more effective communication.

Since I started working as an English teacher in the faculty of Business and Economics, I have observed that, albeit students tend to think their main comprehension problems lie on the receptive skill of listening, their results in exercises that follow the
patterns of an international standardized test - such as TOEIC- report reading comprehension as their main flaw. This erroneous belief has made me pay special attention to reading comprehension problems students present. The difference between students’ perception and the actual results is one of the motivations behind this study. But, this Action Research project’s main motive is the potential contribution to the problem of insufficient reading comprehension skills by establishing a connection between subjects’ morphological awareness and reading comprehension.

According to Zhang and Koda’s study (2013), derivational and compound awareness appear to be independent contributors to EFL reading comprehension. On the one hand, derivational awareness contributes because morphological analysis may help readers to infer the meanings of unknown derived words, enhancing their textual comprehension. On the other hand, they suggest that compound awareness contributes to EFL reading comprehension not only at the lexical level, but it might also help with the inference of meaning of unfamiliar words, making its contribution very similar to derivational awareness, helping to reading comprehension over and above word reading ability and oral vocabulary. To establish and prove an interdependent relationship between the two previously mentioned factors (student’s perception and actual results) may help teachers to plan and design reading comprehension-oriented classes in a way in which more and better results can be achieved.

In this regard, several scholars have suggested the direct teaching and training on morphological awareness and lexical inferencing to enhance students reading comprehension. Morphological awareness was defined by Carlisle as the “awareness of the morphemic structure of words and the ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure” (1995, p.194). Morphological awareness has been identified by the componential view as one of the most important linguistic and cognitive capacities upon which reading comprehension depends. This importance lays in the fact that “morphologically-complex words make up 60-80% of the new words in English academic texts” (Jiang et al, 2015, p.18). Therefore, according to Droop and Verhoeven (2003), who define reading comprehension as “the product of word decoding, vocabulary knowledge, morphosyntactic
processing, and oral text comprehension” (Droop and Verhoeven, 2003, p. 99), the ability to understand the morphemic structure of words is essential to decode a text.

*Lexical inferencing* can be defined as the process in which a learner makes an informed guess of the meaning of a certain word using all the available linguistic cues combined with his/her general knowledge of the lexical item, his/her co-text awareness and his/her relevant linguistic knowledge (Hasstrup, 1991). Several studies (such as Schmitt and Meara, 1997; Paribakht and Wesche, 1999 and Nassaji, 2003) have shown that learners use morphemic knowledge to infer the meaning of words they do not know or of words that are unfamiliar to them. Additionally, Zhang and Koda (2012) showed that the ability to use the morphological knowledge that L2 learners develop is an enormous contribution to lexical inferencing.

According to Schano (2015), direct teaching of morphological awareness is pivotal to help students improve their reading performance because, as she noticed, based on the conclusions of Kern (2002) and Zhang and Koda (2013), to teach unfamiliar vocabulary is insufficient because the acquisition of morphological awareness is not automatic. On the contrary, the most important action is to provide students with “metacognitive strategies and processing rules, including word-formation schemata” (Schano, 2015, p. 69), to help them tackle unknown words by means of using their knowledge of words’ structure. This kind of strategy helps learners in various areas such as meaning inferencing, word recognition and synthesis of the meaning when they face larger segments of texts.

The previously mentioned information can prove itself very useful as far as Carlisle (2010) claims that the importance of morphemes and morphology in the processes of writing and reading does not vary across languages, even when the position of morphemes may change from one language to another. Moreover, in the same article, Carlisle mentioned several studies (e.g., Carlisle and Stone, 2005; Deacon and Kirby, 2004; Fowler and Liberman, 1995; Nunes, Bryant and Bindman, 2006; Singson, Mahoney and Mann, 2000; Templeton and Scarborough-Franks, 1985; Treiman and Cassar, 1996) which prove a direct relationship between morphological awareness and
reading, and spelling performances of school-age students not only in English but in French (e.g., Casalis and Louis-Alexandre, 2000; Sénéchal, 2000), Dutch (e.g., Assink, Vooijs and Knuijt, 2000) and Chinese (e.g., Chung and Hu, 2007; Ku and Andreson, 2003) too.

Furthermore, in 2006, Nagy et al. conducted a cross-sectional study and discovered that morphological awareness had both, direct and indirect influence on reading comprehension because it contributed significantly to vocabulary, and vocabulary itself, in turn, had a positive effect on reading comprehension. Zhang and Koda (2013), on the other hand, wanted to add a new line of enquiry to morphological awareness by conducting a bilingual study in which they found that morphological awareness contributes to English reading comprehension in Chinese EFL learners, and can be used to predict reading comprehension performance even better than grammatical knowledge and vocabulary do.

Following that line, it is important to mention that my FEN colleagues (teachers) claim that students who fail English courses due to TOEIC test results tend to show lack of morphological awareness and parts of speech knowledge because they are incapable of inferring 1) the meaning of words that are morphologically related, such as employee and employment, and 2) the category of a word within a sentence. By following Zhang and Koda’s postulates, bad reading comprehension results could be predicted through teachers’ impressions about students’ morphological awareness (or the lack of it) and this informed prediction can play a pivotal role in the designing and implementation of EFL classes oriented to improve students’ reading comprehension.

In the particular case of FEN, the insufficient comprehension of lexical items impacts their results directly and, logically, their overall comprehension of English language in use. Actually, and even though students take a midterm mock TOEIC test every semester, their results tend to be low, and consequently, the failure rate due to TOEIC test results is high, principally in the third semester of English (Inglés básico). In fact, the total number of students who took this test in the fall 2018 semester was 1,043 and only 135 (12.94%) failed, but due to the fact that from the third semester on students
are required to take the TOEIC exam, the failure rate in this level is the highest among all levels. Actually, from a total of 175 *inglés básico* level students, only 125 (73.10%) passed the exam, so the failure rate in this particular level is of 26.9%, a 13.96% higher than the program average. It is important to notice that students had never been systematically and explicitly trained on *morphological awareness* and *parts of speech*, so they do not know what a word category is and how it can be recognized and differentiated based upon their morphological components. As a consequence of that, students show no knowledge of how words are formed.

The Economy and Business faculty scaffolds their students in the process of getting the TOEIC certificate through the offer of a six-semester-English program. Within this program, four out of the six semesters count with TOEIC test as its reprobatory final exam - that is to say, if they do not reach the required score (the required score is different in each level, but the test students take is the same), they must repeat the course-. Every semester, students must take the TOEIC test and reach a level according to the course they have participated in during the previous last semester in order to advance to the next level. Each level requires a different score for passing onto the next one and the necessary score for graduating is 675 out of 990.

Bearing in mind all the above-mentioned information, the specific purpose behind this action research project is to observe whether a specific training on morphological awareness and word formation processes helps a particular group of students to improve their reading comprehension skills, and therefore, their overall results in the reading comprehension component of a standardized test such as TOEIC.
2 Research questions and objectives

2.1 Research questions

- Does the explicit teaching of word formation processes impact on students’ reading comprehension skills? If so... How?
- Does the explicit teaching of parts of speech help students to improve their reading comprehension skills? If so... How?
- Does the explicit teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech impact on TOEIC reading component results?

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 General objective

- The general objective of this work is to determine the effectiveness/impact of implementing an explicit teaching of morphological awareness intervention program in a particular group of students -TOEIC candidates- in order to assess if this explicit teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech helps them to improve their reading comprehension results in the sections 5 and 6 of TOEIC examination.

2.2.2 Specific objectives

1. To create and apply an explicit teaching of morphological awareness intervention program based on word formation processes and parts of speech.
2. To present participants with parts of speech in order for them to identify the different word functions.
3. To present participants with word formation processes to scaffold lexical inferencing processes.
4. To assess students’ performance in reading comprehension after the intervention through a post-test.
5. To have some insights about students’ perceptions and feelings regarding the intervention, its usefulness and the results they expect after the intervention.

3. **Theoretical framework**

3.1 **Development of morphological awareness**

According to Zhang and Koda (2013), morphological awareness is a multidimensional competence which entails different levels and aspects of insight. Carlisle (2010) claims that morphological awareness is developed gradually, at the time that students understand the complex relations of form and meaning. The levels and aspects behind the awareness of morphology develop differently and need disparate levels of print experience -schooling system as a whole or EFL classroom in the case of EFL learners-. Morphological awareness basically reflects the morphological structure of a language and can be roughly described as “the ability to reflect upon and manipulate morphemes and the morphological structure of words” (Zhang and Koda, 2013, p.901). Morphemes are the smallest meaningful units in a language and can be combined in different ways to fulfill particular grammatical roles. They are divided into two categories: free morphemes or roots and bound morphemes or affixes. Roots serve as freestanding words (e.g. *work*) and affixes are always attached to a free morpheme to modify their initial meaning (e.g. *-er* in *worker*).

Studies on morphology have shown that even though the position of morphemes can vary across languages -and consequently, the way morphology itself relates to writing and reading-, the pivotal role of morphemes remains equal (Carlisle, 2010). And this central role of morphemes is the first argument in favor of the potential value of

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1 Students’ TOEIC mock test results are used in this investigation as pre-test results.
morphological awareness instruction because to teach morphological awareness may have a positive effect regardless the L1.

According to Zhang and Koda (2013), morphological awareness appears from the spoken language and becomes more sophisticated with the exposure to written language. English language morphological structure presents three processes for forming complex words: inflection, derivation, and compounding. Inflection and derivation consist of the amalgamation of a free morpheme to a root, the difference between those two processes is the nature of the free morphemes. In inflection, the affixes only serve to a grammatical function, while in derivation they can change the meaning and, sometimes, the grammatical category of the free morpheme. Likewise, the morphological structure, English morphological awareness can be inflectional, derivational and compounding.

Inflectional morphological awareness is an early acquired competence, because the number of inflectional affixes is small, and the inflected words have a regular structure and no or limited phonological/orthographic change (e.g. works, working and worked). The awareness of derivational morphology, on the other hand, is relatively late acquired, due to the large number of derivational morphemes in English and also because the derived forms tend to involve changes in meaning, grammatical category, phonology and/or orthography. Finally, the awareness of compounding morphology seems to be acquired when speakers start to create compound words in order to fulfill a semantic gap in their linguistic repertoire. For example, when speakers refer to a person who runs as run-man instead of runner (Zhang and Koda, 2013).

3.2 Contribution of morphological awareness: brief state of the art

Nowadays, there is a growing interest in the effects of morphological awareness instruction supported by the results of many descriptive studies which established a direct relationship between morphological awareness and the development of literacy. According to Carlisle (2010), several studies on literacy development have found that morphological awareness contributes to the reading and spelling performance of school-
age students (e.g., Fowler & Liberman, 1995; Casalis & Louis-Alexandre, 2000; Sénéchal, 2000; Assink, Vooijs, & Knuijt, 2000; Deacon & Kirby, 2004; Carlisle & Stone, 2005; Nunes, Bryant, & Bindman, 2006, among others). Accordingly, Nagy et al. (2006) conducted a cross-sectional study with students from three different grades and found that morphological awareness contributed to reading comprehension not only directly, but also indirectly by improving the vocabulary core of students and, therefore, their overall reading comprehension.

However, the studies mentioned above focused their research on monolingual subjects. That is why Zhang and Koda (2013), observing these monolingual focused studies, decided to conduct a research to find out whether morphological awareness could contribute to English reading comprehension on EFL Learners. In this study, they found a direct correlation between morphological awareness, grammatical knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension in Chinese EFL learners. Additionally, they argue that morphological awareness was able to predict reading comprehension performance in the foreign language (English) even more than other components such as vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.

### 3.3 Morphological awareness and reading comprehension

Reading per se is a complex task and as Alderson (1984) states, reading in a second language can be even more complex because it is not a straightforward process as it is in first language and also because a comprehension problem is not always a reading problem, but it may be a language problem instead. There are multiple factors involved in the difference between learning to read in one’s first language and in one’s second language. According to Koda (2004) second language learners have to make a connection among four lexical elements -symbol, sound, meaning and first language equivalent- to learn a new word, while first language learners only have to connect three -symbol, sound and meaning-. She also points out that in second language reading there is a variation in the exposure length to the second language (Koda, 2004 in Curinga,
In sum, to read in a second language is more complex than in first language basically because the effort needed is greater due to the number of connections required and the amount of exposure to the L2.

According to Kuo and Anderson (2008), morphological awareness is one of the central capacities upon which reading comprehension depends and may play an important role in it, because English academic texts are 60-80% composed by morphologically-complex words (Goodwin et al., 2013, Zhang & Koda, 2012 in Jiang et al, 2015). Moreover, as far as reading comprehension ability involves morphological analysis, morphological awareness contributes to word learning and vocabulary development providing the learners the capacity of decomposing complex unknown words into their morphemes (Zhang and Koda, 2013) so as to infer their meaning.

In that note, according to Nagy (2007), the exceptional morphological awareness contribution to reading comprehension can be explained by three reasons: (1) The mediating effect it has by facilitating inferencing of complex words meaning during reading, additionally, (2) Zhang and Koda (2013) mention that “learners can use the syntactic signals provided by suffixes in derived words to help parse complex sentences” (p. 904) and (3) morphological awareness has a positive effect on the “fluency of decoding morphologically complex words” (Zhang and Koda, 2013, p. 904). These three reasons are more than enough to encourage the explicit teaching of morphological awareness in the quest for reading comprehension improvement.

Explicit teaching of morphological awareness typically consists of directly teaching students how words are formed, what are the components of them (roots, prefixes, and suffixes) and the meanings those components carry (See Stuart Redman’s *English vocabulary in use*, 2003). In addition to this, students have to be taught on creating connections between words that are members of the same family (employ, employee, employer, unemployed, etc.). Nonetheless, according to Curinga (2014), the morphological awareness tasks that have to do with both syntactic and relational
knowledge tend to be better predictors of reading comprehension, because “there is a developmental in morphological awareness where relational knowledge comes earlier than morphosyntactic knowledge” (Tyler & Nagy, 1989 in Curinga, 2014). Here, is where the teaching of parts of speech proves itself very valuable in the use of morphological awareness teaching and training to help on reading comprehension because knowing how to relate words one another can help readers to narrow down their need for meaning before analyzing and decoding the intra-word relations. Good!

This research will follow the same explicit instruction on word formation, components of words and relationships among them, all of this with the purpose of helping students to enhance their reading comprehension skills through morphological awareness. The previously mentioned researches provide a solid base upon which justify the implementation of this particular Action-research project, whose purpose entails the use of the above-mentioned literature and its observations, and findings to contribute to the discipline and to overcome the problems faced by students, particularly in the sections 5, 6 and 7 of TOEIC examination. Sections 5 and 6 correspond to incomplete sentences and text completion, so the understanding of intra-word relationships (morphological awareness), and word categories within a sentence (parts of speech) is expected to contribute to these sections’ results because, as it was mentioned before, this knowledge favors the informed inference of unknown words’ meaning in context. Section 7, on the other hand, corresponds to reading comprehension and the comprehension should increase with the understanding of problematic lexical items.

4. Methodology

4.1 Observation and problem identification

The present study and its related intervention had as their starting point the observed discordance between what students and teachers of the Faculty of Economics and Business of Universidad de Chile thought and manifested as the main problem presented in the
English language comprehension and the actual results obtained in the TOEIC by students at the end of each semester. When discussing this matter with students, they declared that, according to them, their main flaws lie on the receptive skill of listening whereas the results obtained from previous TOEIC mock tests show that students’ main comprehension problems have to do principally with reading comprehension and not listening as students expressed. Additionally, when talking about this situation with my colleagues, most faculty English teachers claim that the fact that students do not comprehend what they read could be a result of their lack of vocabulary and awareness of what they know of and about the English language.

This erroneous belief made me pay special attention to the reading comprehension problems students show. The difference between students’ perception and the actual results was one of the motivations behind this study. But, this Action Research project main motivation was the potential contribution to the problem of insufficient reading comprehension skills and the strong belief that this contribution could be made by showing a connection between subjects’ morphological awareness and reading comprehension abilities. To achieve this objective, the present study was carried out as an action research study in which the researcher’s reflection on possible ways to solve an observed problem, the creation, design and implementation of an intervention, and the necessary theoretical support were put together to provide an answer to the research questions mentioned in section 2.1.

4.2 Context and participants

This Action research was conducted during the second part of the Spring semester 2018-specifically in 31st of October and 7th, 9th and 14th of November, between 14:00 and 14:45 hrs. This specific class time was chosen because the entire faculty has a protected period that goes between 14:00 and 15:20 –Wednesdays and Fridays-- in which they do not have classes, so there was not a schedule impediment for students’ attendance. The dates were chosen taking into consideration the date in which the TOEIC exam was going to be given, so as to help students to remember the intervention.
Twenty people were invited to the intervention, ten attended and six were considered in the results of this study. Those six subjects were chosen because they attended to the four sessions of the intervention and took the pre and the post-test. That is to say that the data was collected from 6 non-probabilistically selected participants and a convenience sampling scheme was used (Dörnyei, 2007). The selected group of participants consisted of 6 students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universidad de Chile. These students come from three different bachelor programs: Business administration, Management information systems, and Accounting. All of them are either: (1) taking the course for the very first time, so they have not taken the TOEIC test before or (2) they are taking the course for at least the second time, so they have failed the TOEIC on receptive skills test once -or more than once- and are part of the English language course again corresponding to the third semester of the faculty English program (A2-B1 according to the CEFR).

4.2.1 Sampling techniques

For this particular Action-Research, a non-probability sample was used because subjects were invited to be part of this intervention based on the convenience their schedules and English courses represented for this study. Additionally, for the qualitative part of this research -the survey-, a purposeful sampling technique was used, that is to say, we only asked students who had taken the pre-test, the post-test and had attended to all sessions to answer the survey, because only the subjects who had met all the requirement named before were going to be considered in the results section of this study.

4.3 Instruments and data collection

In order to gather the necessary information to conduct a trustworthy analysis, a pre and a post-test were considered. As the pre-test, we used the TOEIC mock exam the subjects took during September; the post-test, on the other hand, was the TOEIC exam they had to take at the end of the semester -in November-. Additionally, during the intervention,
several exercises were given to the students in order to make them practice four different -but complementary- sub-areas of morphological awareness. Finally, a survey was conducted at the end of the intervention to have some insights about subjects’ appreciations regarding this action research project.

One integral part of this AR project was the intervention. The intervention itself consisted of four different but complementary sessions which were applied after the pre-test and before the post-test in order to collect the necessary information to see whether there was (or not) a rise in the students’ TOEIC outcomes regarding the topics covered in each and every class.

TOEIC receptive skills examination is a standardized test which consists of two separate sections: (1) Listening and Reading, which takes 2.5 hours and consists of 200 questions. 100 questions for listening and 100 questions for reading with a total score of 990 points, and (2) Speaking and Writing section that takes 90 minutes and is only available in some countries. FEN students must pass only Listening and Reading section during their last English course to get their undergraduate degree. Within the listening section of TOEIC there are four sub-sections, and in the reading part there are three subsections as well. For this particular study, we paid special attention to the parts five and six of the comprehension skills test because those parts correspond to incomplete sentences and text completion and can be easily related to morphological awareness.

Part five is called *Incomplete Sentences* and has 40 questions which consist of a sentence with a missing word and four possible answers; Part six is called *Text Completion* and includes four passages, each with three blanks (conforming a total of 12 questions) and four possible answers for each blank. Students must choose the best word or phrase to complete the sentence. The number of questions per section is fixed, so pre and post-tests present the same amount of questions in each section.

The mock test was used to gather information about the problem observed and the final test was used to see whether the intervention helped students to improve their overall TOEIC results. These tests are Universidad de Chile’s instruments and cannot be
attached to this work in the appendix section because they can be reused by the institution.

On the other hand, the exercises contained in the second part of each session—see Students booklet—were used as formative assessment as well. In their formative assessment role, they were done by the students and then corrected with them so as to show them their mistakes and how to correct them in order to improve their reading comprehension results.

Finally, and once the intervention finished, a survey was applied to the students in order to have some insights about their perceptions and feelings regarding the intervention, its usefulness and the results they expect after the intervention. This survey can be seen in the appendices section.

4.3.1 Pre and post-tests

The pre and post-tests showed differences both in the number of intervention topics related questions, and in the proportion of questions by classification.

To begin with, even when the number of questions per section is fixed, their classification varies from test to test. In the pre-test, there were 23 questions which corresponded to the topics seen in the sessions, and in the post-test those related questions were only 22. As a matter of fact, in the pre-test, the questions were classified as follows:

- Suffix: 12 items,
- Verbs and form tenses: 11 items,
- Parts of speech: 0 items,

and in the post-test, the classification was:

- Suffix: 7 items,
- Verbs and form tenses: 14 items,
- Parts of speech: 1 item (See table 5).
To make this difference even plainer, we have analyzed each test separately in the following sub-sections.

### 4.3.1.1 Pre-test

The pre-test used in this research was a TOEIC receptive skills test taken by all the students of the faculty who were taking an English course (from the 3rd to the 6th semester of the English program) during the spring semester 2018. This test is given by all students in the middle of each semester and is the only official practice instance they
have. And, as far as it is not graded, it has a voluntary attendance code, that is why some students did not attend and were left out of the results of this action-research results.

This test consisted of 200 questions of which 100 were for listening comprehension assessment and 100 were for reading comprehension assessment. From the 100 reading comprehension questions, only 23 were considered as pre-test results in this research because only those 23 questions can be completely framed into the contents of the intervention (sentence formation, noun suffixes, adjective suffixes, zero affixation, and verbs and form tenses). The 23 questions mentioned above are part of sections five and six of TOEIC exam.

Parts five and six are made up of 52 questions. Those 52 questions can be classified into three categories: suffixes (12 questions, 23.07%), verbs and form tenses (11 questions, 21.15%) -These are the 23 questions considered as pre-test-, and others, which include prefixes, prepositions, and vocabulary (29 questions, 55.76%) among others (See Figure 1). That 55.76% was not considered in this study because the topics of these questions were not part of the intervention content.

It is important to notice that the total of questions considered in this action-research were 23 which correspond to a 44.23% of the total amount of questions. This means that questions about suffixes and time/tense frame are nearly a half of parts five and six of the exam.
The complete test could not be attached because the university could re-use it, but the following are examples of a question for each classification:

a) **Suffixes:** In this type of question we can observe that all alternatives share a common root and the suffix changes their meaning and/or category. In this particular question *success* and *succession* are nouns; *succeed*, a verb; *and* *successful*, an adjective. Taking into consideration the position of the blank and the order of the elements within the sentence, the only correct alternative could be an adjective and, therefore letter C.

102. The ________ businessperson always dresses appropriately.
   (A) success
   (B) succeed
   (C) successful
   (D) succession

*Figure 1. Pre-test: classification of questions.*
b) **Time/Tense Frame:** In this type of questions, all the alternatives represent a different grammatical tense. Therefore, for answering these questions, students have to recognize that the blank requires a verb in it and choose which tense from the alternatives can be used to complete the sentence correctly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>101. The document you requested is ready and ________ sent to your office as soon as possible.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) have been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) were being</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


c) **Others:** As it was mentioned before, the *others* category includes different kinds of questions. The following is just an example which focus is on prepositions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>110. The bus will leave promptly ________ 8:30.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) until</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.1.2 Post-test

The post-test used in this research was also a TOEIC receptive skills test taken by all the students of the faculty who were taking an English course (from the 3rd to the 6th semester of the English program) during the spring semester 2018. Unlike the pre-test, this exam has a mark which stands for the 50% of students’ average grade and is reprobatory -the score requirement varies from level to level-. As far as this test has a mark and counts as the final exam of English courses from 3rd to 6th semester, its attendance code is compulsory.

This test also consisted of 200 questions of which 100 were for listening comprehension assessment and 100 were for reading comprehension assessment. From the 100 reading comprehension questions, only 22 were considered as post-test results in this research because only those 22 questions can be completely framed into the contents of the intervention (sentence formation, noun suffixes, adjective suffixes, zero affixation, and verbs and form tenses). The 23 questions mentioned above are part of sections five and six of TOEIC exam.

The 52 questions from sections five and six can classified into the following categories: suffixes (7 questions, 13.46%), verbs and form tenses (14 questions, 26.92%), parts of speech (1 question, 1.92%) -These are the 22 questions considered as pre-test-, and others which include prefixes, prepositions, vocabulary among others (30 questions, 57.69%) (See Figure 2). That 57.69% of the questions from sections five and six was not considered in this study because its questions topics were not part of the intervention content.

It is important to notice that the total of questions considered in this action-research were 22 which correspond to a 42.30% of the total amount of questions. This means that questions about suffixes and time/tense frame are nearly a half of parts five and six of the exam.
Figure 2. Post-test: Classification of questions.

The complete test could not be attached because the university could re-use it but the following are examples of a question for each classification:

a) **Suffixes:** In this type of question we can observe that all alternatives share a common root and the suffix changes their meaning and/or category. In this particular question, *effective* is an adjective; *effect* and *effectiveness* are nouns; and *effectively*, an adverb. Taking into consideration the position of the blank and the order of the elements within a sentence, the only correct alternative is represented by the letter A, because it must be an adjective.

108. Using a checklist is an ______ way to make plans.
   
   (A) effective
   (B) effect
   (C) effectiveness
   (D) effectively
b) **Time/Tense Frame:** In this type of questions, all the alternatives represent a different grammatical tense. Therefore, for answering these questions, students have to recognize that the blank requires a verb in it and choose which tense from the alternatives can be used to complete the sentence correctly.

115. The supervisor had Ms. Balla ______ her job responsibilities.
   (A) to write
   (B) wrote
   (C) written
   (D) write

c) **Parts of speech:** For this type of question, the most important is that students can recognize the typical order of an English sentence and choose the alternative according to that. For example, in this particular case options A, B and C contain the same lexical elements but in a different order, so students have to choose which order is correct and for doing so, to know parts of speech is fundamental.

112. A customer service representative ______ at our catalogue number.
   (A) always is available
   (B) is always available
   (C) is available always
   (D) being always available

d) **Others:** As it was mentioned before, the *others* category includes different kinds of questions. The following is just an example which focus is on prepositions.
4.3.2 Survey

As far as reflection has proved to be an essential part of Action Research as such, the main focus of this survey was to gather students’ opinions and insights regarding this intervention. The questions of this survey can be found in the appendices section (See Appendix 4).

This survey was created and applied through an online service called SurveyMonkey and had a mixed nature. It contained three Likert scale questions in which students had to assign a number of stars (being 5 the maximum and 0 the minimum) to each question, one yes/no question with three answer options: (1) Yes, definitely, (2) Maybe, and (3) No, for any reason. And two open ended questions in which students were asked to write at least 15 words for each answer.

Students completed this survey in their own time and anonymously, receiving no further information about what they were supposed to write down.

4.4 Research design

This research had a participatory approach under the scope of an action research design because it sought and emphasized individuals’ participation encouraging their action and reflection (Dick, 1993). In order to systematize the processes followed by this investigation, we used the Anne Burns’ (2009) adapted action research spiral model based on Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) (See Figure 3). The present study consisted
of four four-steps cycles, each one of these had observation, reflection, planning, and action towards the observed phenomenon.

Figure 3. The cyclical AR model. Retrieved from Ann Burns (2009).

4.4.1 Material design explanation

The materials used in every session of this intervention were retrieved and modified from three different sources. The first, and most important one, was a book titled *English Vocabulary in Use*: pre-intermediate & intermediate (1997) written by Stuart Redman. The election of this particular book and author lies on the fact that the book is organized using very concise units (2 pages long each) which contain a page with explanations and another with exercises, making it an easy-to-follow resource. Additionally, it presents an answer key at the back of the book which does not only give “correct answers to exercises with ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ solutions, but also possible
answers and sample answers for exercises which do not have ‘right’ or ‘wrong’
solutions” (Redman, 1997, p. 4). Due to this structure, English vocabulary in use can be
used by students alone or with a teacher guidance encouraging them to continue learning
by themselves once the intervention finished.

The other two resources were internet websites. From those sites, some exercises
were retrieved and modified, principally TOEIC like practice questions which were
chosen because could be classified into the different topics seen in each session.

4.4.2 Intervention procedure

The intervention consisted of four sessions of 45 minutes each. Classes presented
four clearly differentiated parts (For more details about the sessions planning, See
Tables 1, 2, 3, 4): First, the teacher explained the contents and information regarding the
topic of the specific session. It is important to mention that students had the necessary
contents and information in their booklet (see the complete students’ booklet in
appendix 1 and teacher’s booklet in appendix 2) so, if something was not clear enough
only with teacher’s explanation, they could re-read their booklets and make questions.
For this, 15 minutes were used. Then for 20 more minutes, students had to work in pairs
or trios to complete a number of activities (also present in their booklets). The booklet
activities for this intervention were based on the book English Vocabulary in Use: pre-
intermediate & intermediate (1997) written by Stuart Redman and two websites devoted
to TOEIC test preparation. These activities were divided into 4 sessions and consisted of
explanations and exercises regarding:

● Parts of speech: how a sentence is made.
● Noun suffixes: Verb+ suffix (-ment, -ion, -ation, -ing); Adjective + suffix (-ness, -ity), and ‘people or job’ suffix (-er/or, -ist. For example: actor, driver, artist)
● Adjective suffixes: noun or verb + suffix (-ous, -al, -y, -ive), -able (for example: washable); -ful and -less, and Zero affixation.
● Verbs and form tenses: Difference between tense and time frame.
Finally, the activities were checked and discussed in a circle by all students with the teacher guidance for 10 more minutes. The function of the teacher in this specific part of each session was to guide the discussion in order to make students get to the correct answers, answer any question they may have had and guide students to close up the session by highlighting the importance of the contents reviewed.

**DAY 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To recognize parts of speech and their particular functions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contents</strong></td>
<td>Parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, determiner, adverb, verb, preposition, conjunction and interjection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the different parts of speech (15 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Day 1: Class plan.*
### DAY 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To understand what a suffix is, how noun suffixes function and form words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Noun suffixes (verb+suffixed, adjective+suffixed, -er/-or and -ist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the different noun suffixes (15 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Day 2: Class plan.*

### DAY 3:

| Objective | To understand how adjective suffixes function and form words.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To comprehend the existence and use of zero affixation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Contents  | Adjective suffixes (noun or verb+suffixed, -able (-ible), -ful and -less)  
|           | Zero affixation                                                  |
| Class     | The teacher explains and exemplifies the different adjective suffixes and what zero affixation is (15 minutes). | The students work in pairs or in trios on the exercises present in the booklet (15 minutes). | The teacher goes group by group answering questions and the students check their own activities with the help of the teacher (10 minutes). | The teacher gives a general feedback (5 minutes). |

*Table 4. Day 3: Class plan.*
DAY 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To understand how verbs, time frames and tenses function and form words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Verb tenses and time frames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the difference between verb tenses and time frames. The teacher also explains when each tense must be used in terms of meaning (25 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Day 4: Class plan.

4.5 Ethical considerations

At the beginning of the intervention (first session), students were informed that they were part of a research and they signed a consent letter (appendix 3). This consent letter is in Spanish and clearly states that:

- their participation in the research will not have any effect on their regular English course activities or evaluations,
- they are free to participate,
- they are free to leave the intervention in any moment they want. The only thing they have to do for doing so is to inform their reasons through a written letter.
- They can recover all their information if they decide to leave the study,
- they will not pay or receive money for this study,
- there is strict confidentiality, so students’ names or personal information will not be revealed and
- they agreed to answer an anonymous online survey at the end of the intervention.
5. Data analysis and Discussion

This work was an action research that considered mixed methods to answer its three research questions. In other words, qualitative and quantitative data analyses were conducted.

A descriptive analysis was carried out in order to get the most relevant information regarding results, processes (intervention itself and testing) and students’ self-perception. In order to answer the three research questions, the analyses consisted of a correlation data analysis for seeing whether there was an improvement in the number of correct answers students got in two different levels: total of questions from sections five and six (52 questions)\(^2\), and questions framed into the intervention topics\(^3\) (23 in the pre-test and 22 in the post-test). Additionally, an analysis in which the questions were divided into morphological awareness -mainly suffixes and word formation- related and parts-of-speech related was conducted in order to differentiate how those two contents influenced the subjects’ reading comprehension skills.

Finally, the answers obtained from the survey students answered were categorized depending on their nature. The Likert scale questions were grouped according to the number of stars subjects assigned to each item and the open-ended questions were transcribed and divided into three categories: (1) negative opinion, (2) neutral opinion and (3) positive opinion.

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\(^2\) Sections five and six were considered because the questions directly framed into the intervention topics were part of these particular sections.

\(^3\) Parts of speech: how a sentence is made; Noun suffixes: verb+ suffix, adjective + suffix, and ‘people or job’ suffix; Adjective suffixes: noun or verb + suffix, -able, -ful and -less, and zero affixation; And verbs and form tenses: difference between tense and time frame.
5.1 Quantitative data analysis: Pre and Post-test

Comparing the data obtained from the pre and post-tests, we could observe an improvement in the results, because the number of wrong answers decreased while the number of right answers increased. In the following section you will find a detailed analysis of the previously mentioned results.

5.1.1 Sections Five and Six answers analysis

5.1.1.1 Average results

For this analysis, 52 questions were considered. Those 52 questions correspond to the *Incomplete Sentences* and *Text Completion* sections of the receptive skills TOEIC test. In these two previously mentioned sections of the pre-test, the average number of correct and incorrect answers was very similar, having a difference of only 2%. In other words, the average number of correct answers corresponded to 51% and the average number of incorrect responses corresponded to 49% (See Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Pre-test: Percentage of right and wrong answers.](image)
The results obtained in the post-test for the same sections showed an increment of 4% in the correct answers compared to the pre-test results, giving a total of 55% of correct answers and a 45% of mistaken responses (See Figure 5).

![Post-test results](image)

*Figure 5. Percentage of right and wrong answers.*

### 5.1.1.2 Subject by subject results

For conducting this analysis, sections five and six of the TOEIC listening and reading paper were considered and the total number of questions analyzed was 52. Those 52 questions correspond to the total number of items present in the above-mentioned sections.

The results of the pre-test showed that 50% of the subjects had higher number of correct answers (more than 50% of achievement) and the same amount of students got more incorrect ones (less than 50% of achievement). To illustrate this, Figure 6 shows

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4 Sections five and six (Incomplete Sentences -40 questions- and Text Completion -12 questions-).
the achievement percentage obtained by each subject in the previously mentioned sections.

Figure 6. Pre-test: Achievement percentage of sections 5 and 6.

Regarding the post test, the results show that 66.66% of subjects answered mostly correctly (more than 50% of achievement) and 33.33% of students got more incorrect than correct responses (less than 50% of achievement). In order to present this in a clearer fashion, Figure 7 illustrates the attainment percentage obtained by each subject.
It is fundamental to pay attention to the fact that, even when the percentage of subjects who obtained more than 50% of achievement increased only in 16.66%, 83.33% of subjects showed an increment in their particular attainment percentage and the other 16.66% maintained their results. Some people may argue that the percentage of increment is low, but we need to consider that these results include more than 50% of question which were unrelated to the intervention topics. The results obtained from the analysis of the question which were directly related to the intervention topics are presented in the next section.

5.1.2 Intervention related answers analysis

5.1.2.1 Average results

The first analysis considered only the questions directly related to the topics taught and practiced during the intervention. In this regard, we can observe that in the pre-test an

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*Figure 7. Post-test: Achievement percentage of sections 5 and 6.*

---

5 29 questions in the pre-test and 30 questions in the post-test. 6 23 questions for the pre-test and 22 for the post-test.
average subject got 51% of correct answers and 49% of incorrect responses. That is to say that the percentage of correct and incorrect answers was very similar, having a difference of only 2% in favor of correct responses (See Figure 8).

![Pie Chart: Pre-test: Total of Intervention Related Answers](image)

*Figure 8. Pre-test: Percentage of right and wrong intervention related answers.*

On the other hand, in the post-test, the difference between the total of correct and incorrect answers increased favoring the number of right ones. The average difference between right and wrong answers was of 16%, 14% more than the difference observed in the pre-test (See Figure 9). In other words, the post-test average number of correct answers corresponded to 58% while the percentage of incorrect answers was only 42%, showing a decrease of 7% compared to the percentage of wrong answers obtained in the pre-test.

---

An average subject presented 11.83 correct answers and 11.16 incorrect answers of a total of 23 questions.
5.1.2.2 Subject by subject results

Following the path of the previous section, the correct/incorrect answers per subject also showed differences between pre and post-tests. In the pre-test, 50% of the subjects had a higher number of incorrect answers, and the other 50% obtained a higher number of correct responses. In order to illustrate this difference, in Figure 10 we can observe the achievement percentage of each subject in the pre-test.

Figure 9. Post-test: Percentage of right and wrong intervention related answers.
In the post-test, on the other hand, 83.33% of subjects presented a higher number of correct answers and only a 16.66% of students got more incorrect than correct responses. To show this in a clearer way, Figure 11 presents the average percentage of achievement subject by subject.

Figure 10. Pre-test: Subject by subject achievement percentage

Figure 11. Post-test: Subject by subject achievement percentage.
It is important to notice that even though 2 subjects showed a negative change in their percentage of achievement between the pre and post-tests, this decrease represented less than a 2%. While the students who increased their achievement, did it in a percentage which went from a 2.95% up to a 15, 41%. This increase ment could be due to the explicit instruction received by students regarding the specific topics assessed in these 23/22 questions, and the fact that during the intervention they were presented with techniques to decompose unknown words into smaller units so as to infer their meaning and word category (Zhang and Koda, 2013).

5.1.2.3 Analysis per type of question

5.1.2.3.1 Verbs and form tenses: Tense/time questions

To fully understand this analysis, it is important to bear in mind that the total number of verb and form tenses related questions in the pre-test was 11.

The results showed that from those 11 above-mentioned questions, only 3 got an achievement percentage higher than 50%, the same number of items reported equal number of right and wrong responses, and the remaining 5 questions showed and achievement percentage lower than 50%. In other words, 27.27% of questions were answered correctly, the same percentage got equal number of right/wrong answers and 45.45% got mostly incorrect responses. To illustrate this, Figure 12 displays the achievement percentage per question framed into this particular topics.

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8 Verbs and form tenses related questions.
In the post-test, the total number of verb and form tenses related questions was 14. From those 14 questions, 8 reported an achievement percentage higher than 50%, 3 questions had the same amount of correct and incorrect answers, and the remaining 5 presented an attainment percentage lower than 50% (See Figure 13).

Figure 12. Pre-test: Achievement percentage of verb and form tenses related questions.

Figure 13. Post-test: Achievement percentage of verb and form tenses related questions.
Considering the two previously mentioned itemized analyses, we can say that the average achievement percentage in the pre-test represented a 46.97%, meanwhile the post-test reached an achievement percentage of 59.52%. So, comparing the pre and post-test results in this matter, we could observe that there was a noticeable increasement in the difference of correct and incorrect questions. For the pre-test, the difference between correct and incorrect responses was 6.06%, while in the post-test, this difference rose a 19.04% (See Figure 14).

![Figure 14. Pre and post-tests: Average percentage of right and wrong answers.](image)

This 12.55% of increasement in the achievement percentage could be explained by two factors: First, the influence of explicit instruction on morphological awareness, because as Nagy (2007) mentioned, morphological awareness has a mediating effect in the process of making an informed guess of the meanings of complex words while reading and therefore, may help students decide which alternative is the correct for a specific context. Secondly, it is important to remember that tense/time questions are closer to inflectional than to derivational morphological awareness, and inflectional
morphological awareness is acquired earlier than derivational one (Zhang and Koda, 2013).

5.1.2.3.2 Suffix questions

To successfully establish a contrast between the pre and post-test suffix questions results, it is important to mention that the total number of suffix related questions was different from test to test. The pre-test presented 12 suffix related items, while the post-test had only 7. In other words, the post-test presented 41.66% less suffix questions than the pre-test.

As it was pointed out before, the total number of suffix questions in the pre-test was of 12. From those 12 questions, only 33.33% obtained more than 50% of achievement, 50% obtained the same amount of correct and incorrect responses, and only 16.66% reported less than 50% of attainment. In order to illustrate this, Figure 15 displays the achievement percentage of each suffix related question.

![Figure 15. Pre-test: Suffix related question by question achievement percentage.](image-url)
The post-test, on the other hand, presented only 7 suffix related questions. From that total number of items, the 57.14% reported more correct than incorrect answers, 14.28% got equal number of correct and incorrect responses, the remaining 28.57% obtained a higher number of incorrect answers (See Figure 16).

![Figure 16. Post-test: Suffix related question by question achievement percentage.](image)

In the light of the two above-mentioned itemized analyses, it can be stated that the average attainment percentage in the pre-test reached a 56.94%, while in the post-test it was 59.52%. So as to illustrate this, Figure number 17 shows the achievement percentage obtained in each test.
Therefore, comparing the pre and post-tests results in this matter, we could observe an increase of 2.58%. This 2.58% is an increase not as noticeable as the one occurred with the questions framed into verb and form tenses and could be explained by the fact that the awareness of derivational morphology is acquired relatively late as the derived forms involve changes in meaning and grammatical category (Zhang and Koda, 2013). Additionally, it is important to remember the difference in the number of suffix questions displayed by each test.

5.2 Qualitative data analysis: Survey

A survey was applied in order to enquire about subjects’ opinions and insights about this intervention. The Survey was in Spanish and its questions were divided into three types: 4 Likert scale questions, in which students had to rank the topic of the questions from 1 to 5 stars; 1 multiple choice question in which students had three options to answer the question, and 2 open-ended questions in which students were asked to write about 15 words to answer.
5.2.1 Likert scale questions

The survey contained 4 Likert scale questions:

(1) En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan útil ha
sido esta intervención para su comprensión lectora?

(2) En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan útil le ha
sido esta intervención para inferir vocabulario en contexto?

(3) En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tanto
recomendaría este método de estudio a sus compañeros?

(4) En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan
apropiado le parece este método de estudio para preparación del TOEIC en
particular?

And the results obtained from those four questions suggest that students
considered that the intervention was valuable (See Figure 16) because:

● 100% of subjects gave the maximum punctuation to the question number 1,
which asked whether they thought the intervention was useful for their reading
comprehension. Therefore, we can conclude that apart from the quantitative
results (that students do not know yet), students think this Action Research has
been positive for them.

● The second question was the only one with less punctuation as far as two
students gave it 4 out of 5 stars. That means that 60% of students think this
intervention has successfully helped them to infer vocabulary in context and 40%
of students think that, even though it helped them with the inference of
vocabulary in context, it could have helped them more.

● Questions 3 and 4 results suggest that 100% subjects think that to study and
know about morphological awareness, parts of speech and time/tense frames is
highly useful for preparing the TOEIC exam and that they would definitely
recommend their classmates this study method.
5.2.2 Multiple choice question

The objective behind this multiple-choice question was to see whether the subjects would take a course based on the teaching of morphological awareness -intraword level-, parts of speech, and verbs and form tenses if it was offered to them as a regular class in the University. 100% of students said they would definitely take the course (See Figure 17). This result makes us think they valued the intervention as something useful to them and their learning process.
5.2.3 Open-ended questions

As far as this research was carried out under the scope of Action-Research, reflection plays a fundamental role. It cannot be left aside or neglected so as to improve the action for the next cycle, and also to raise awareness in students (and teacher) after each session.

Open-ended questions aimed to give students the opportunity to express their personal opinions regarding the intervention and its potential. These opinions are fundamental for the process of reflection upon the intervention itself and to see if the subjects’ opinions and the quantitative results go along the same path.

The answers collected for the first open-ended question (sixth question of the survey) suggest that subjects found this intervention very useful, because there were neither neutral nor negative opinions. Students mention that the intervention and its methodology helped them to answer their questions and clarify certain doubts they had. Students also mentioned that it helped them to strengthen and canalize their previous knowledge, making clear that some of the contents were already known by them but
indirectly (See Table 6). This was something that was also noticed during the sessions because, even though they tend to say they did not know the contents when they had to practice with the exercises, I could notice that most of time they had knowledge, but they did not know it.

A negative aspect of the answers that must be considered is that 3 out of the 5 subjects’ responses suggest they perceive this action-research as only aimed to improve their TOEIC results and not their overall reading comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6</th>
<th>¿Cuál es su opinión con respecto a esta intervención y su metodología en general? Escriba, por favor, al menos 15 palabras.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>❑ “Me parece buena, y me gustaría que se implementara en la fren, porque al ser pocas personas, es en cierta manera particular, esto ayuda también a que las dudas queden aclaradas y a la comprensión del contenido que se está pasando”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ “Creo que fue muy útil, la verdad no sabía cómo estudiar para el TOEIC y esto fue una muy buena forma de hacerlo”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ “Excelente método de estudio para preparar el TOEIC. Muy completo y muy importante los tips que enseñan para tener un buen desempeño en el TOEIC”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ “Creo que contribuyó y aclaró bastante mis dudas, asimismo fortaleció y canalizó mis conocimientos nuevos y previos”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ “Creo que es una metodología muy adecuada para la evaluación. La escuela debería incorporar la enseñanza de la metodología,”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nunca se trabaja en el TOEIC y creo que es necesario para los alumnos”

☐ “Me pareció muy buena, me permitió aclarar dudas y ampliar mis conocimientos”

Table 6. Open-ended question 6 results.

Regarding the second open-ended question, the answers expressed a multiplicity of opinions, but all those opinions are positive again. In the first place, it is important to mention that all subjects stated their inference of vocabulary improved due to the intervention, some of them answered very broadly saying that their improvement was because now they can recognize what they are being asked and its possible answers. Others say that now they know how a sentence is made and how words are formed, including verbs. Finally, some other students went more deeply and mentioned suffixes, morphology and specific vocabulary used during the intervention (See Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7</th>
<th>Según su opinión. ¿Siente usted que su inferencia de vocabulario en contexto ha mejorado gracias a esta intervención? Elabore, por favor, al menos en 15 palabras.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>☐ “Sí, porque ahora puedo entender mejor con ver una oración, si hay alguna palabra que esté modificando el sentido, agregando información”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐ “Creo que sí, aprender cómo se forman las oraciones y los tipos de palabras sirve para inferir de mejor manera el vocabulario”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Sí, siento que hubo mejoría, el saber bien las estructuras de los distintos tiempos, así como los sufijos ayuda a poder deducir las palabras”

“Sí, pues ahora entiendo de manera segura la morfología y sintaxis de las palabras, cuándo y cómo utilizarlas, por lo tanto ahora puedo entender el sentido de las lecturas de manera más respaldada”

“Sí, me hizo notar algo tan básico como relacionarlo al español”

“Sí, creo que ahora consigo reconocer lo que me preguntan y sus posibles respuestas”

Table 7. Open-ended question 7 results.

5.3 Discussion

This action-research study focused primarily on the importance of the explicit instruction of morphological awareness -particularly suffixes, verbs and form tenses- and parts of speech- to help increasing the lexical inferencing capacities and reading comprehension skills of ESL students. To ascertain whether the intervention had been successful or not, a series of analyses were conducted. The findings after those analyses are going to be summarized in the following paragraphs:

On the one hand, and regarding the general objective of this Action-Research: To determine the effectiveness/impact of explicit teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech on reading comprehension skills in a group of Business and Economics students at FEN, it can be stated that:
a. The intervention, with its explicit teaching of word formation processes - including suffixes and verb forms and tenses - had a positive impact on the overall results of sections five and six of the TOEIC examination. In those two sections, candidates are asked to fill the blanks with the correct lexical item - or phrase - they choose among four alternatives. As it was mentioned before in section 5.1.1, the average achievement percentage obtained by the subjects in the exercises framed into the two above-mentioned sections reported an increment of 4% between the pre and post-test. This rise in the achievement percentage proves that morphological knowledge plays an important role when choosing among the alternatives offered by TOEIC exam. Morphological knowledge - and the awareness of it - acts as a mediator between those complex words - or phrases - and their meaning, facilitating the inferencing process (Nagy, 2007), and therefore, the choice among the alternatives presented.

It is important to remember that from sections five and six, less than a half of the total number of questions corresponded to the topics worked during the intervention sessions. Therefore, more than 50% of the items considered in the calculation of the average achievement percentage of the above-mentioned sections, were not considered in the training offered by this intervention. This difference between the topics seen in sessions and the ones which were left out, could explain the increase in percentage. Additionally, we must bear in mind that morphological awareness is a non-automatic process and requires time to provide students with processing rules and metacognitive strategies so as to help them tackle unknown words through the use of their morphological knowledge (Schano, 2015).

b. The average achievement percentage increment is higher when we consider only the questions framed into the intervention topics. These items reported a growth of 7% in the post-test compared to the pre-test results. The average percentage of

---

9 This 4% of increase leads to a difference of 10% between right and wrong answers (45% incorrect and 55% correct) in the post-test. This difference was only 2% in the pre-test (49% incorrect and 51% correct).
correct answers obtained in the post test was of 58%, while the pre-test showed
only 51% of right responses. Therefore, the difference between right and wrong
answers went from 2% up to 16%. Besides, the number of subjects who obtained
an achievement percentage higher than 50% went up from 50% to 83.33%.
Another pivotal result to be considered is that the increase in the
achievement percentage is higher in the set of questions considered in the Verb
and form tenses category (See Figure 14) than in the set classified as Suffix (See
Figure 17). This noticeable difference can be explained by the fact that, as Zhang
and Koda (2013) mention, inflectional morphological awareness is acquired
earlier than derivational one. It is true that the pre and post-test presented
differences in the distribution of type of questions, but the number of Verb and
form tenses items increased along with the Others plus parts of speech type of
questions, so even though this could have had an influence over the overall
results, this influence should be minimal. Nonetheless, it would be remarkable to
replicate this study with tests which present the same amount of questions per
type.

c. Even though we could see a noticeable positive change in the percentages of
Verbs and form tense, and Suffix questions when we analyzed them separately,
we could not establish a parallel comparison due to the difference in the amount
and distribution of type of questions between the pre and post-test. Nevertheless,
the findings suggest that the teaching of verbs and form tenses had a greater
impact in the results than the teaching of suffixes, so the improvement
percentage was higher. This difference may be explained by two facts: (1)
Suffixes in general tend to change the category of words, presenting a number of
variations in meaning and form10, while inflected words tend to have a regular
structure and maintain their grammatical category. And, also because (2) the

10 Suffixes can also provoke changes in phonology and/or orthography, but those changes are not
particularly relevant for this study.
number of inflectional affixes is small, while the number of derivational morphemes in English is large and presents several categories within (Zhang and Koda 2013).

d. According to the results obtained in the survey, especially in question number 6, we can state that all subjects considered the intervention as a helpful instance to improve their reading comprehension. The only point that was not that clear to them was that the intervention aimed to improve their general reading comprehension skills, by providing them with morphological knowledge and tools to infer meaning of complex words in every context they need, because morphology is present in every aspect of language even if we do not notice it, and not only their TOEIC performance. Even though the exercises tended to be TOEIC like, the abilities they had to apply to solve them are transversal and transferable, and as Alderson (1984) stated, a reading comprehension problem could be a language issue and not a comprehension problem itself. Maybe this point should have been explicitly clarified to them. Additionally, it is important to mention that all subjects said they would attend and recommend a course based on morphological awareness, that lead us to think they really appreciate an instance of morphological training within their English learning process.

e. Additionally, the subjects’ opinions gathered in the question number 7 of the survey suggest that the teaching of morphological awareness helped them to infer vocabulary in context, improving their reading comprehension result. These findings prove themselves valuable because, they follow the line of Carlisle

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11 There are 8 inflectional affixes in English: -s (third person singular present/plural marker), -ed (past tense marker), -en (past participle marker), -ing (continuous marker), -’s (possessive marker), -er (comparative) and -est (superlative).
12 ¿Cuál es su opinión con respecto a esta intervención y su metodología en general? Escriba, por favor, al menos 15 palabras.
13 Según su opinión, ¿Siente usted que su inferencia de vocabulario en contexto ha mejorado gracias a esta intervención? Elabore, por favor, al menos en 15 palabras.
(2010) findings, where he claims the importance of morphology and morphemes in reading does not vary across languages and that there is a direct relation between morphological awareness and reading performance, even if subjects do not notice it. Additionally, these finding go along the same line of FEN teachers’ observations, because they assert that students’ lack of reading comprehension and consequent bad results in tests could be a result of their limited vocabulary and awareness of their own knowledge about the English language. So, the fact that students themselves consider the intervention improved their vocabulary inference may have direct consequences in their future development as readers/writers.

6. Conclusions

This action-research responded to three general research questions:

Does the explicit teaching of word formation processes impact on students’ reading comprehension skills? If so… How?

According to the findings of this research, the explicit teaching of word formation has a positive effect on the reading comprehension skills of students. These positive results can be seen both in the achievement percentage increasement reported by the quantitative part of this research and in the opinions and reflections of students present in the last two questions of the survey. Achievement percentage showed an increment in the specific questions related to the topics developed in the intervention, and also in the entire group of questions considered in the investigation, showing that the influence of morphological awareness is reflected not only in the questions directly related to the intervention topics, but also over the entire reading comprehension items considered for this study.
Besides, teaching explicitly about the language—in this case, inflectional and derivational morphology, and parts of speech—makes students be aware of what they learn and how to use it regardless the context. Moreover, the students themselves pointed out in the survey answers that the use of syntactic clues helped them to parse complex sentences and decoding words (Zhang and Koda, 2013), improving in that way, their overall reading comprehension (Nagy, 2007). One example of the positive impact that the explicit teaching of morphological awareness has upon reading skills is the opinion of one student who said that knowing the structure of sentences (parts of speech) and suffixes helped her/him to guess the meaning of words and sentences (See Table 7). Additionally, 100% of students gave the maximum punctuation to the survey question which asked whether they considered that the intervention had helped them in their reading comprehension. The above-mentioned punctuation given by the students to the intervention and their opinions are pivotal to evaluate and reflect upon this particular intervention, so as to try to improve the plan for an eventual re-application.

The fact that students make their learning process conscious is one more step in the ladder of learning a second language, because morphological awareness is developed gradually along with the understanding of form and meaning (Carlisle, 2010). Therefore, to be aware of morphology and how it works may make an important contribution to the vocabulary by helping students to make an informed inference of meaning and relative position of a lexical item within a standard English language.
b. Does the explicit teaching of parts of speech help students to improve their reading comprehension skills? If so...How?

In this regard, on the one hand, we cannot categorically state that the explicit teaching of parts of speech improves reading comprehension skills directly, because the number of questions classified under the scope of parts of speech in pre and post-test was too small to establish any kind of comparison (See Table 5). On the other hand, through the survey answers we could notice that students mentioned that knowing the structure of sentences and how words can be modified -in category and meaning- through suffixes or inflections, helped them to better understand what they read by making easier to cope with and infer the meanings of unknown words. Additionally, and as Curinga (2014) reports, relational knowledge awareness comes earlier than morphosyntactic one. So, the teaching of parts of speech plays an important role in the development of morphological awareness. Therefore, we can argue that the explicit teaching of parts of speech helps subjects indirectly to improve their reading comprehension by providing them with the necessary categorizations to comprehend the usefulness and characteristics of each word within a sentence and the processes involved in the possible category change led by affixation.

c. Does the explicit teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech impact on TOEIC reading component results?

As it was discussed before, the fact that the comparison of the results of the pre and post-tests reports an increment in the average and individual achievement percentage is a clear sign that the teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech has a positive effect on the results of the reading comprehension component of the TOEIC examination. The positive effect can be seen not only in number but also in the opinions of the subjects regarding this intervention.
In sum, we can argue that the explicit teaching of morphological awareness has a positive impact on reading skills and that it should be taught, because standardized tests assess morphological awareness related competences, but it is not a commonly taught area in the EFL classrooms and textbooks. This intervention evidences the necessity of explicitly teaching morphology -mainly inflectional and derivational- to help students in their vocabulary acquisition through the inferencing of unknown words meaning by decomposing their structure into morphological components to make an informed guess of not only the meaning, but also the grammatical category of those lexical items. Additionally, this AR proves that better results can be achieved when approaching subjects as active participants in their own learning process, because materials and sessions are designed specifically to meet their needs and they can notice it.

Finally, it is important to mention that this research can be considered as a contribution to Applied Linguistics as far as this discipline consists on “using what we know about language, how it is learned, and how it is used, in order to achieve some purpose or solve some problem in the real world” (Schmitt and Celse-Murcia, 2002, p.1), and we used the morphological knowledge about the language to try to solve a vocabulary inference problem -and its consequent reading comprehension issues- in a particular group of students.

7. Strengths, limitations and projections

The main objective behind this Action-research project was to shed some light on the effects of morphological awareness explicit teaching upon reading comprehension skills to meet the need of a specific group of TOEIC candidates. This objective was fulfilled with a positive change in the results obtained by the subjects in the particular sections of the exam considered here. In addition, the opinions of subjects about the intervention reported a positive impact on them and what they think about morphological awareness as a tool for improving their reading comprehension.
Limitations, on the other hand, were encountered during the process and also in the reflection step of the AR cycle. Firstly, the results suggest that better outcomes could be expected if we implement a more particular intervention—for example, to create an intervention focused only in derivational morphological awareness—, but this particular intervention was useful to carefully plan a more specific following up research. Nevertheless, the positive increasement in the achievement percentage obtained after four 45-minute sessions, suggests that a longer morphological awareness program can impact considerably on students reading comprehension skills, and therefore in their potential results in a standardized test.

Another limitation of this study was that, as far as we used a standardized test as pre and post-test, we could not have access to the instruments beforehand, which did not allow us to plan the intervention having in mind the differences in the quantity and type of questions related to each topic, complicating the extraction and interpretation of data. Nevertheless, this limitation is also an opportunity to pay attention to standardized tests and report real outcomes, because standardized tests are the most common way to measure English knowledge and proficiency level and are used as instruments worldwide.

After all the above-mentioned, we claim that in order to obtain better results, further research could focus on one component of morphological awareness at a time—for example, one project focused only on inflectional morphology, another one focused only on derivational morphology, etcetera-.
8. References


Morphological Awareness and Reading Comprehension Practice

In the Reading section of TOEIC you will find a sub-section of incomplete sentences. In this sub-section you will see sentences with a missing word and four possible answers for each sentence. Knowing how English sentences and words are formed will help you to choose the correct answer using just the necessary and available time.

This material has been prepared to be used in 4 sessions, this is why it is divided into the following sections: Day 1, day 2, day 3, and day 4.

**DAY 1: PARTS OF SPEECH**

A *Part of speech* is a particular grammatical type of word. The main parts of speech in English are NOUN, PRONOUN, ADJECTIVE, DETERMINER, ADVERB, VERB, PREPOSITION, CONJUNCTION AND INTERJECTION.

- A **NOUN** is the name of a person, place, thing or idea.
- A **PRONOUN** replaces a NOUN or *NOUN phrase*.
- An **ADJECTIVE** describes, modifies or adds information about a NOUN or PRONOUN.
- A **DETERMINER** comes at the beginning of a *NOUN phrase* and tells us if the *NOUN phrase* is specific or general.
- An **ADVERB** modifies a VERB, ADJECTIVE or another ADVERB. It answers to the question how, where and when.
- A **VERB** shows an action or a state of being.
- A **PREPOSITION** shows us the relationship of a NOUN or PRONOUN to another word.
- A **CONJUNCTION** connects two ideas, words or phrases and shows the way in which they are connected.
- An **INTERJECTION** is a short exclamation which expresses an emotion.
EXERCISE 1: Put each word into the correct box.

Pedro- she- he- hot- sad- be- speak- Andrea- Temuco- Ahh!- because- on- above- the- red- tall- but- and- pencil- whiteboard- we- from- pretty- Chile- cat- learn- Wow- Softly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>PRONOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DETERMINER</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
<th>VERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPOSITION</th>
<th>CONJUNCTION</th>
<th>INTERJECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXERCISE 2: Decompose these three sentences into their components. Follow your teacher’s example.

1. The blue rose is more expensive.
2. Pedro lives in Chile.
3. Ouch! I unexpectedly fell and broke a finger.

EXERCISE 3: Write the different form of these words to create a WORD FAMILY. You can use a dictionary if you need it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apply</td>
<td>attraction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehend</td>
<td></td>
<td>excessively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>succeed</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 2: NOUN SUFFIXES

A **Suffix** is a group of letters that you place at the end of a word to create another word with a different meaning. Suffixes can be classified into two main groups: *Noun suffixes* and *Adjective suffixes*. Today we are focusing on **NOUN SUFFIXES**.

**NOUN SUFFIXES** transform different **parts of speech** into **NOUNS**. Noun suffixes can be classified into three types:

1. **VERB+ SUFFIX**: Many nouns are formed by adding a suffix to a verb.

*E.g*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>SUFFIX</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Similarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. ADJECTIVE+SUFFIX: Many nouns are also formed by adding a suffix to an adjective. Two very common suffixes used to form nouns are: -ness and -ity.

E.g:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>SUFFIX</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>-ity</td>
<td>Similarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. -er/-or and -ist: they are common suffixes and can be added to nouns or verbs. They describe people and their jobs.

E.g:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-er</th>
<th>-or</th>
<th>-ist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dancer</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singer</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Translator</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Operator</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murderer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXERCISE 1: Complete the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell</td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXERCISE 2: write the name of the person who does these things.

1. Act
2. Employ
3. Football
4. Sing
5. Murder
6. Psychology
7. Economics
8. Translate
9. Manage
EXERCISE 3: Combine the suffixes on the right with the verbs or adjectives on the left, and then complete the text below.

improve  televise  elect  educate  weak  manage  govern  stupid
-ment  -ity  -ion  -ation  -ness

In his first broadcast on (1)_________ last month, the Prime Minister promised to make health and (3)_________ two of his top priorities. And in a strong attack on the previous (4)_________, he said that the present (5)_________ of the British economy was caused entirely by their (6)_________ and bad (7)_________. He said he would act immediately and he hoped the British people would be able to see clear signs of an (8)_________ in the economy by the end of the year.

NOW... LET’S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

1. The _________ of the Board of Directors is scheduled for Monday.
   (A) election
   (B) elected
   (C) elects
   (D) electable

2. Both financial advisors recommend investing in pharmaceutical companies, although Paul Laurinen is suggesting a wider __________ of stocks.
   (A) select
   (B) selected
   (C) selection
   (D) selective
DAY 3: ADJECTIVE SUFFIXES AND ZERO AFFIXATION

ADJECTIVE SUFFIXES transform different parts of speech into ADJECTIVES. Adjective suffixes can be classified into three types:

1. NOUN or VERB+SUFFIX:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN or VERB</th>
<th>SUFFIX</th>
<th>ADJECTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>-ous</td>
<td>Dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fame</td>
<td>-ous</td>
<td>Famous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>-al</td>
<td>Musical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>-al</td>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>-al</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>-al</td>
<td>Economical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>Cloudy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fog</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>Foggy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>Sunny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirt</td>
<td>-y</td>
<td>Dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attract</td>
<td>-ive</td>
<td>Attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>-ive</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sometimes there is a spelling change. Here are common examples:
double the consonant, e.g. sun/sunny, fog/foggy
leave out the final ‘e’, e.g. create/creative, fame/famous
leave out the final ‘s’ before ‘al’, e.g. politics/political; economics/economical
change ‘y’ to ‘i’ before ‘al’, e.g. industry/industrial

2. -able (sometimes -ible): this suffix is used to form many adjectives from nouns or verbs.
   E.g.: enjoyable, comfortable, suitable.

Quite often -able (and -ible) has the meaning ‘can be done’. E.g.: something that is
washable ‘can be washed’. Other examples: drinkable, unreliable, unbreakable,
unsuitable, uncomfortable.

   • Words ending -ible add the prefix in-: inflexible, incomprehensible, inedible
   (=cannot be eaten)
3. **-ful and -less:**

The suffix **-ful** often means ‘full of’ + the meaning of the adjective: if you are **careful**, you are **full of care**, if you are **helpful** you are **full of help**. Other examples are: **painful, useful, thoughtful** (=someone who is thoughtful is kind and always thinks about others).

The suffix **-less** means ‘without’ + the meaning of the adjective: if you are **careless**, you do something **without care**. Other examples are: **painless, useless, jobless, homeless**.

*Note:* You can see that **-ful** and **-less** are often used with the same words to form opposites. This is not always true: a person with a home is **not homeful**.

**ZERO AFFIXIATION** occurs when a word can function as a **noun and verb**, or **noun and adjective**, or **verb and adjective**, with no change in form.

E.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We stayed in Paris for a short time.</td>
<td>We had a short stay in Paris.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We rested for a while.</td>
<td>We had a short rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She braked quickly.</td>
<td>She put on the brakes quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He needs to diet.</td>
<td>He needs to go on a diet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm going to ring him.</td>
<td>I'm going to give him a ring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I looked in the paper.</td>
<td>I had a look in the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He pushed me.</td>
<td>He gave me a push.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I dreamt about you last night.</td>
<td>I had a dream about you last night.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What's the answer? | I must clean my room. |
| Answer the question. | It's a clean room. |
| I don't like the cold. | I didn't reply to the letter. |
| I don't like cold weather. | I wrote a reply to the letter. |
EXERCISE 1: Write an adjective (or adjectives) formed from these nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Dirt</th>
<th>Pain</th>
<th>Comfort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attract</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Fame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Rely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>suit</td>
<td>Wash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Enjoy</td>
<td>music</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXERCISE 2: Fill the gaps with adjectives

1. You must be very ____________ when you drive in rainy days.
2. Everybody knows her, she is very ____________.
3. It was very ____________ when I broke my arm.
4. It seems terrible to me that there are so many ____________ people living in Santiago.
5. My new bed is very ____________. I sleep like a child there.

EXERCISE 3: Rewrite these sentences using the underlined noun as verbs. The meaning must be the same.
E.g.: There was a lot of rain yesterday. It rained a lot yesterday.

a. We had a long wait __________________________________________

b. I wrote a reply to his email. ____________________________________

c. The cost of the food was $10.000 ________________________________
NOW... LET'S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

Choose the most appropriate answer: (A), (B), (C), or (D), to complete each sentence.

1. The decision not to approve the airport expansion was purely a -------- one.
   (A) politics
   (B) politician
   (C) politically
   (D) political

2. Despite the cost, management agreed with the -------- to replace laptops with tablets.
   (A) suggestive
   (B) suggesting
   (C) suggestion
   (D) suggested

3. HM Construction has proved itself as the most -------- company we have ever worked with.
   (A) dependable
   (B) dependent
   (C) depending
   (D) dependably

4. According to our senior advisors, this investment presents no serious -------- risk.
   (A) finances
   (B) financial
   (C) financially
   (D) financier

5. The new chairman was -------- offered a salary in excess of $1 million.
   (A) reportedly
   (B) reported
   (C) reporting
   (D) reporter

6. As for shipping the goods to Australia, we do not have a -------- international carrier.
   (A) preference
   (B) preferred
   (C) preferably
   (D) prefer

7. Ms. Ishihara is the most -------- and hard-working employee in the section.
   (A) efficient
   (B) efficiently
   (C) efficiency
   (D) efficacy

8. These chemicals are highly toxic, so anyone handling them must be closely --------.
   (A) supervision
   (B) supervisor
   (C) supervised
   (D) supervises

9. There are many technical reports -------- each stage in the development of this turbine.
   (A) documents
   (B) documented
   (C) documentary
   (D) documenting

10. Of all the applicants for the post, Mrs. Walters seems to be by far the strongest --------.
    (A) candidacy
    (B) candidate
    (C) candidature
    (D) candidates
DAY 4: VERBS AND FORM TENSES

In English there is a difference between **TENSE** and **TIME FRAMES**. There are two simple **tenses**: present and past. **Time frames** include: Past, present and future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
<th>TENSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **PRESENT TIME FRAME** | Simple present  
  - She *watches* TV everyday
  Present progressive  
  - She *is watching* TV at the moment
  Present perfect  
  - She *has watched* TV today
  Present perfect progressive  
  - She *has been watching* TV since 9 am. |
| **PAST TIME FRAME** | Simple past  
  - She *watched* TV yesterday
  Past progressive  
  - She *was watching* TV when the phone rang
  Past perfect  
  - She *had watched* TV before I arrived
  Past perfect progressive  
  - She *had been watching* TV all day long |
| **FUTURE TIME FRAME** | Future simple  
  - She *will watch* TV tonight
  Future progressive  
  - She *will be watching* TV when we arrive
  Future perfect  
  - She *will have watched* TV by tomorrow
  Future perfect progressive  
  - She *will have been watching* TV for one hour by 12. |
"To talk about future, we can also use GOING TO, SIMPLE PRESENT and PRESENT CONTINUOUS.

NOW... LET’S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

Choose the most appropriate answer: (A), (B), (C), or (D), to complete each sentence.

1. Please could you see Mr. Thomson as soon as your performance review meeting ________?
   (A) will end
   (B) ends
   (C) will be ending
   (D) will have ended

2. Carl apologizes for not being available when you called, but he ________ an important client.
   (A) had visited
   (B) visited
   (C) was visiting
   (D) had been visiting

3. The service in the hotel restaurant was so bad that I ________ to complain to the manager.
   (A) am deciding
   (B) decide
   (C) decided
   (D) was decided

4. The new packaging machine we bought recently ________ down three times already.
   (A) was breaking
   (B) had broken
   (C) is breaking
   (D) has broken

5. The meeting ________ at three o’clock, so we must hurry if we want to be there in time.
   (A) starts
   (B) started
   (C) was starting
   (D) has started

6. Exactly how long ________ worked as a senior accounting clerk for this company?
   (A) have you
   (B) did you
   (C) are you
   (D) will you

7. After being discharged from the hospital, our president Mr. Liu ________ taking a long break.
   (A) will
   (B) is going to
   (C) will be
   (D) will have

8. ________ sign for the package that arrived this morning?
   (A) Have you
   (B) Did you
   (C) Were you
   (D) Are you

9. We felt excited about the trip to Mexico, as we had never ________ to Latin America.
   (A) been
   (B) went
   (C) gone
   (D) to go

10. By the time the shareholders read the annual report, our sales ________ by one-third.
    (A) will fall
    (B) will have fallen
    (C) is falling
    (D) had fallen
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9.2 Appendix 2: Teacher’s booklet

Booklet for teachers

Before teaching:

This material was created to be used in an Action-Research project. The lesson plans are meant to be used in four different sessions of 45 minutes each but can be adapted to the different time necessities of any group of students. The main objective of the project was to determine the effectiveness/impact of explicit teaching of word formation processes and parts of speech on reading comprehension skills in a group of university students who have out of the lesson so as they do not use teaching and practicing time.

Lesson plans

DAY 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To recognize parts of speech and their particular functions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, determiner, adverb, verb, preposition, conjunction and interjection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the different parts of speech (15 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To understand what a suffix is, how noun suffixes function and form words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Noun suffixes (verb+suffix, adjective+suffix, -er/-or and -ist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the different noun suffixes (15 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DAY 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To understand how adjective suffixes function and form words. To comprehend the existence and use of zero affixation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Adjective suffixes (noun or verb+suffix, -able (-ible), -ful and -less) Zero affixation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the different adjective suffixes and what zero affixation is (15 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To understand how verbs, time frames and tenses function and form words.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Verb tenses and time frames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>The teacher explains and exemplifies the difference between verb tenses and time frames. The teacher also explains when each tense must be used in terms of meaning (25 minutes). The students work in pairs or in trios on the TOEIC like questions present in the booklet (10 minutes). The teacher goes group by group answering questions and the students check their own activities with the help of the teacher (5 minutes). The teacher gives a general feedback (5 minutes).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercises with answers**

**DAY 1: EXERCISE 1:** Put each word into the correct box.

Pedro- she- he- hot- sad- be- speak- Andrea- Temuco- Ahh!- because- on- above- the- red- tall- but- and- pencil- whiteboard- we- from- pretty- Chile- cat- learn- Wow- Softly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>PRONOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>She</td>
<td>Hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temuco</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pretty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DETERMINER</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
<th>VERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The</td>
<td>Softly</td>
<td>Be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPOSITION</th>
<th>CONJUNCTION</th>
<th>INTERJECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On</td>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Ahhh!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXERCISE 2: Decompose these three sentences into their components. Follow your teacher’s example.


EXERCISE 3: Write the different form of these words to create a WORD FAMILY. You can use a dictionary if you need it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>ADVERB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apply</td>
<td>Application/applicability</td>
<td>Applicable</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attract</td>
<td>attraction</td>
<td>attractive</td>
<td>attractively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehend</td>
<td>comprehension</td>
<td>comprehensible</td>
<td>comprehensibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exceed</td>
<td>excess</td>
<td>excessive</td>
<td>excessively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persuade</td>
<td>persuasion</td>
<td>persuasive</td>
<td>persuasively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>succeed</td>
<td>success</td>
<td>successful</td>
<td>successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innovate</td>
<td>innovation</td>
<td>innovative</td>
<td>innovatively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAY 2: EXERCISE 1: Complete the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
<th>ADJECTIVE</th>
<th>NOUN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>Stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve</td>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>Punctuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrange</td>
<td>Arrangement</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Saddness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXERCISE 2: write the name of the person who does these things.

1. Act ______actor_____
2. Employ ______employer_____
3. Football ______footballer_____
4. Sing ______singer_____
5. Murder ______murderer_____
6. Psychology ______psychologist_____
7. Economics ______economist_____
8. Translate ______translator_____
9. Manage ______manager_____

EXERCISE 3: Combine the suffixes on the right with the verbs or adjectives on the left, and then complete the text below.

In his first broadcast on (1) television since he won the (2) election last month, the Prime Minister promised to make health and (3) education two of his top priorities. And in a strong attack on the previous (4) government, he said that the present (5) weakness of the British economy was caused entirely by their (6) stupidity and bad (7) management.He said he would act immediately and he hoped the British people would be able to see clear signs of an (8) improvement in the economy by the end of the year.

(1) television
(2) election
(3) education
(4) government
(5) weakness
(6) stupidity
(7) management
(8) improvement
NOW... LET'S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

1. The __________ of the Board of Directors is scheduled for Monday.
   (A) election  (B) elected  (C) elects  (D) electable
   1. A, 2. C

DAY 3: EXERCISE 1: Write an adjective (or adjectives) formed from these nouns

| Thought | Attract | Create | Home | Use  | Thoughtful | Attractive | Creative | Homey | useful | Dirty | Care | Danger | Careful | Dangerous | Politics | Enjoy | Enjoyable | Pain | Knowledge | Sun | Political | Suit | Music | Musical | Painful | Knowledgeable | Sunny | Suitable | Musical |
|---------|---------|--------|------|-----|----------|-----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|------|----------|------|-----------|------|-------|---------|-------|---------------|-------|----------|---------|

EXERCISE 2: Fill the gaps with adjectives (many possible answers)

a. You must be very __________ when you drive in rainy days.

b. Everybody knows her, she is very __________.

c. It was very __________ when I broke my arm.

d. It seems terrible to me that there are so many __________ people living in Santiago.

e. My new bed is very __________. I sleep like a child there.

EXERCISE 3: Rewrite these sentences using the underlined noun as verbs. The meaning must be the same.

E.g.: There was a lot of rain yesterday. It rained a lot yesterday.

a. We had a long wait. We waited a long time.

b. I wrote a reply to his email. I replied to his e-mail

c. The cost of the food was $10,000. The food cost $10,000
NOW... LET'S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

Choose the most appropriate answer: (A), (B), (C), or (D), to complete each sentence.

1. The decision not to approve the airport expansion was purely a _________ one.
   (A) politics
   (B) politician
   (C) politically
   (D) political

2. Despite the cost, management agreed with the _________ to replace laptops with tablets.
   (A) suggestive
   (B) suggesting
   (C) suggestion
   (D) suggested

3. HM Construction has proved itself as the most _________ company we have ever worked with.
   (A) dependable
   (B) dependent
   (C) depending
   (D) dependably

4. According to our senior advisors, this investment presents no serious _________ risk.
   (A) finances
   (B) financial
   (C) financially
   (D) financier

5. The new chairman was _________ offered a salary in excess of $1 million.
   (A) reportedly
   (B) reported
   (C) reporting
   (D) reporter

6. As for shipping the goods to Australia, we do not have a _________ international carrier.
   (A) preference
   (B) preferred
   (C) preferably
   (D) prefer

7. Ms. Ishihara is the most _________ and hardworking employee in the section.
   (A) efficient
   (B) efficiently
   (C) efficiency
   (D) efficacy

8. These chemicals are highly toxic, so anyone handling them must be closely _________.
   (A) supervision
   (B) supervisor
   (C) supervised
   (D) supervises

9. There are many technical reports _________ each stage in the development of this turbine.
   (A) documents
   (B) documented
   (C) documentary
   (D) documenting

10. Of all the applicants for the post, Mrs. Walters seems to be by far the strongest _________.
    (A) candidacy
    (B) candidate
    (C) candidature
    (D) candidates

DAY 4: NOW... LET'S PRACTICE USING TOEIC QUESTIONS

Choose the most appropriate answer: (A), (B), (C), or (D), to complete each sentence.

1. Please could you see Mr. Thomson as soon as your performance review meeting -------?
   (A) will end
   (B) ends
   (C) will be ending
   (D) will have ended

2. Carl apologizes for not being available when you called, but he --------- an important client.
   (A) had visited
   (B) visited
   (C) was visiting
   (D) had been visiting

3. The service in the hotel restaurant was so bad that I --------- to complain to the manager.
   (A) am deciding
   (B) decide
   (C) decided
   (D) was decided

4. The new packaging machine we bought recently --------- down three times already.
   (A) was breaking
   (B) had broken
   (C) is breaking
   (D) has broken

5. The meeting --------- at three o'clock, so we must hurry if we want to be there in time.
   (A) starts
   (B) started
   (C) was starting
   (D) has started

6. Exactly how long --------- worked as a senior accounting clerk for this company?
   (A) have you
   (B) did you
   (C) are you
   (D) will you

7. After being discharged from the hospital, our president Mr. Liu --------- taking a long break.
   (A) will
   (B) is going to
   (C) will be
   (D) will have

8. --------- sign for the package that arrived this morning?
   (A) Have you
   (B) Did you
   (C) Were you
   (D) Are you

9. We felt excited about the trip to Mexico, as we had never --------- to Latin America.
   (A) been
   (B) went
   (C) gone
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10. By the time the shareholders read the annual report, our sales --------- by one-third.
    (A) will fall
    (B) will have fallen
    (C) is falling
    (D) had fallen

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9.3 Appendix 3: Consent letter

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO PARA PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EDUCATIVA

Yo ____________________________, alumno participante en el curso de mejora en las áreas de morfología y comprensión lectora, de _____ años de edad, acepto de manera voluntaria que se me incluya como sujeto de estudio en el proyecto de investigación denominado: Morphological Awareness and Reading Comprehension: Exploring the Effects of direct morphological awareness teaching in the Reading Comprehension Section of TOEIC, entendido de que:

· Mi participación como alumno no repercutirá en mis actividades ni evaluaciones programadas en el curso, o en mi condición de profesor, no repercutirá en mis relaciones con mi institución de adscripción.

· No habrá ninguna sanción para mí en caso de no aceptar la invitación.

· Puedo retirarme del proyecto si lo considero conveniente a mis intereses, aún cuando las investigadoras responsables no lo soliciten, informando mis razones para tal decisión en la Carta de Revocación respectiva si lo considero pertinente; pudiendo si así lo deseo, recuperar toda la información obtenida de mi participación.

· No haré ningún gasto, ni recibiré remuneración alguna por la participación en el estudio.

· Se guardará estricta confidencialidad sobre los datos obtenidos producto de mi participación, con un número de clave que ocultará mi identidad.

· Si en los resultados de mi participación como alumno o profesor se hiciera evidente algún problema relacionado con mi proceso de enseñanza – aprendizaje, se me brindará orientación al respecto.

· Contestaré una encuesta online al final de esta intervención, en la cual, nuevamente seré sujeto anónimo

· Puedo solicitar, en el transcurso del estudio información actualizada sobre el mismo, a cualquiera de las investigadoras responsables.

Lugar y Fecha:

________________________________________________________________________

Nombre y firma del participante:

________________________________________________________________________
9.4 Appendix 4: Survey

1. En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan útil ha sido esta intervención para su comprensión lectora?

2. En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan útil le ha sido esta intervención para inferir vocabulario en contexto?

3. En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tanto recomendaría este método de estudio a sus compañeros?

4. En una escala de 1 a 5, siendo 1 el mínimo y 5 el máximo. ¿Qué tan apropiado le parece este método de estudio para preparación del TOEIC en particular?

5. Si la Universidad ofreciera un curso basado en esta metodología, ¿usted lo tomaría?
   - Sí, definitivamente.
   - Tal vez.
   - Por ningún motivo.

6. ¿Cuál es su opinión con respecto a esta intervención y su metodología en general? Escriba, por favor, al menos 15 palabras.

7. Según su opinión. ¿Siente usted que su inferencia de vocabulario en contexto ha mejorado gracias a esta intervención? Elabore, por favor, al menos en 15 palabras.