

# Effective ways to teach word affixes in the Chinese junior high school classroom

Shu Zeng

School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work department of Queen's University of Belfast

---

## Abstract

In the topic of second language learning, vocabulary is critical. For a long time, rote memorization of vocabulary was a typical approach for Chinese students to learn terms. Chinese students' vocabulary learning is said to be influenced by their culture, educational background, and traditional Chinese teaching approaches. Many pupils in China are regarded to rely largely on rote memorisation as the only technique of vocabulary learning because of their culture, educational background, and conventional teaching procedures.

Memorizing and learning different types of vocabulary is challenging for most Chinese English learners. Many students have realised how simple and effective it is to learn new words by employing affix knowledge. Knowing the meaning of prefixes and suffixes, as well as word roots, is an important and useful part of vocabulary knowledge because knowing the meaning of prefixes and suffixes, as well as word roots, will enable learners to determine the meaning of a word without having to look it up in a dictionary. It is beneficial to enhance learners' vocabulary by knowing the rules of affixes.

In addition to rote learning, which has proved useful and effective in teaching English in China, this paper suggests that this paper suggests introducing students to vocabulary learning strategies and teaching them how to build vocabulary through other useful learning methods.

---

Key Words: vocabulary learning, affix and teaching English

## 1. Introduction

The foundation of linguistic competency is vocabulary, which is a fundamental component of any language. Vocabulary is an essential part of language production and the growth of language abilities and knowledge (Cameron, 2001). The extent of a learner's vocabulary is a significant measure for determining their English proficiency. The level of vocabulary knowledge, according to Meara and Jones (1987), is a strong predictor of language learning skills. Second language learners will struggle with conversational fluency and reading comprehension if they lack appropriate vocabulary knowledge.

Students who are studying foreign languages recognize that vocabulary plays a substantial role in learning a foreign language, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1996). Over the last few decades, English language instruction in China has seen substantial modifications, notably in terms of English vocabulary standards. The National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) were released by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2001, mandating the introduction of English language teaching at the third-grade level in primary school and setting higher targets for students' vocabulary and reading comprehension achievements at the middle school level (MOE, 2001). For instance, by the end of Primary school, kids must know between 800 and 1,200 vocabulary words and 200 to 300 phrases, and by the end of junior high school, they must understand and enjoy reduced versions of English classics (MOE, 2001). Despite the apparent rise in the significance of vocabulary and understanding, there are few approaches to the method and content of vocabulary and comprehension instruction in China. Teachers continue to teach mechanically, reading from a book, and monotonous misunderstandings lead to students merely memorising words by rote, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm in learning English. However, by using the affix method to teach English vocabulary in

junior high school, teachers can explain the origins of English and the historical and cultural background of root word affixes, which can enable students to memorize based on understanding and deepen the depth and breadth of students' memory of vocabulary.

This article is designed to help Chinese junior high school English teachers suggest feasible ways to teach about word affixes. The author lists four common mistakes that junior high school students make in learning to build vocabulary using word affixes through the process of teaching junior high school English and provides an in-depth analysis of the reasons for these mistakes and how to modify them correctly. This is targeted to help teachers focus more easily and accurately in their teaching. The theoretical background to affixation is presented in the literature review section. The discussion section introduces some ways of teaching vocabulary to make learning easier and more interesting for students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Description of the Affixes Features**

Affixation is a word-creation process that results in a new word with a different meaning or a different form of the original word. The smallest meaningful component in a language is the morpheme, which is utilised to create multiple versions of a word or a new term. An affix is a morpheme that is connected to the stem (root or fundamental) of a word to form a new vocabulary. Words in the English language are formed by affixing morphemes to the roots of words. Affixation, according to Katamba (1994), is the process of attaching affixes such as prefixes, suffixes, and infixes to the stem of a word. For example, according to Clark (2009), such affixes are essential in recognising and interpreting complicated words in terms of their meaning. Since it provided words are utilized as building blocks in a complex term, the affixation examines the internal structure of those words in detail. Furthermore, the addition of prefixes or suffixes to the root or stem of a word or existing lexis is required for the creation of new vocabulary. According to Byrd and Mints (2010), affixation is the most prevalent means of generating new words. Affixation is one of the most essential factors that influence a student's vocabulary and can help them expand it.

Before focusing on affixation, it's critical to analyze the fundamental factors that are most significant in affixation.

#### **2.1.1 Prefixes**

In order to change the meaning, prefixes are appended before the base word. Prefixes are one or more letters that are added to the start of a root word in order to modify its meaning or grammatical function. Prefixes are stated to be involved at the beginning of the root word (Asiyanbola, 2010).

#### **2.1.2 Suffixes**

Suffixes are one or even more letters that are appended to the end of a root word to modify its meaning or grammatical function. In addition, suffixes are affixes that are added to the end of a root word and can affect the root word's grammatical category (Asiyanbola, 2010).

#### **2.1.3 Infixes**

In addition to being connected to the start or end of the root word, the affixation can also be attached within the root word, a process known as infixes. In English, infixes are fairly uncommon, and they are frequently seen in plural forms. Therefore, it is generally employed as a slang word in casual writing or speech, and it is not utilised in polite circumstances.

### **2.2 Difficulties for Learners**

When learning vocabulary, some students are still unsure about which affixes to use, resulting in situations where they utilise incorrect affixes and cause misconceptions. It is possible that students have issues or difficulties with affixes. According to Lieber and Stekauer (2014), the rules utilised in affixes may be confusing to individuals learning them. In summary, students struggle with vocabulary learning, which makes it difficult for them to grasp and employ affixes since they have a lot of rules that they don't understand. The authors summarise four major issues that students confront during their junior high school

teaching experience, and they discover that secondary school students have some problems employing affixes, particularly in the grammar portion.

### 2.2.1 Use of Inappropriate Negative Prefixes

#### Examples:

She **lacks** lucky to do this thing

Sam does **not** like this book

They are **not** trained worker

#### Explanation:

The word lack not are not affixes, although they both have a negative meaning. Students often confused the concept of negation, with most recognising words with negative meanings as affixes. In these examples, the negation prefix would be dis- for dislike and un- for no luck, no experience.

#### Correction:

She **unluck** to do this thing.

Sam **dislikes** this book.

They are **untrained** worker.

Because of their limited vocabulary, students often consider negative prefixes in terms of inherent stereotypes, such as 'uncomfortable', 'unfair', 'incorrect', 'impossible' all of which are negations of 'comfortable', 'fair', 'correct', 'possible'. But some have affirmative forms formed by removing negative prefixes, but affirmative forms of these words are far less common.

#### Examples:

The little baby smile with **innocent**. (Common)

The little baby smile with nocent. (Less Common)

### 2.2.2 Use of Inappropriate adjective Suffixes

#### Examples:

Humans and **natural** should live in harmony.

#### Explanation:

An adjective describes the noun that comes after it. The addition of the suffix '-al' serves to form an adjective, in 'Humans and natural' are expressed in juxtaposition and should be used in the same noun form, therefore, in this case there is no need to add the suffix '-al', 'Humans and natural' are both used as part of life, not to describe it, i.e. 'natural' is an adjective, instead use 'nature'

#### Correction:

Humans and **nature** should live in harmony.

### 2.2.3 The Erroneous Form of Words Resulted Through the Use of Improper Affixation

#### Examples:

Tommy could **attended** to Sara's birthday party.

#### Explanation:

A fixed grammatical rule in English is that modal words such as could, might, should, would, etc. must be followed by a prototype of the verb. Because of this, it should not be attached to the word 'attend' with any affix. Furthermore, the suffix '-ed' connected to 'attend' is improper, therefore the verb is still grammatically erroneous even if it is not followed by an inflected word.

**Correction:**

Tommy could **attend** to Sara's birthday party.

### 2.2.4 Tense Mistake

**Examples:**

**breed**-breeded-breedded

**arise**- arised- arised

**bend**- bened- bened

**bite**- bited- bited

**Correction:**

**breed** - bred – bred

**arise**- arose- arisen

**bend**- bent- bent

**bite**- bit- bitten

Affixes are sometimes used with certain ordinary verbs to indicate the time of the verb by adding the suffix '-ed' to the end of the original verb, called suffix, for example. 'play' indicates the past form of 'played'. The use of the suffix '-ed' incorrectly might modify the meaning of the tense. Many tense errors related to students' use of inappropriate suffixes were analyzed in the students' writing. As the essay topics given to students were usually based on writing a story, students were indirectly asked to write the text in the past tense. However, most students made errors in using the past tense. At the same time, students habitually think that the verb +ed equals the past tense, thus losing the ability to think about and remember the past of some specific verbs.

### 3. Discussion

There are many aspects of teaching English in junior schools, but the ultimate goal is for students to achieve the desired results in the examinations. As a result, some English teachers use the content of the exam as a guideline for teaching and do not waste too much time on content that will not be tested in the exam. Some English teachers believe that vocabulary teaching does not require much time because the test is mainly about reading comprehension and writing, and not specifically about mimeographing or reciting words. This has led to a lack of professional guidance in vocabulary memorisation for junior high school students, who rely more on their own memory and comprehension skills to accumulate and expand vocabulary.

Although the value and significance of vocabulary teaching is gradually being emphasized under the background of curriculum reform, the use of the root word affix method in junior high school English vocabulary teaching can effectively improve this situation and help students increase their vocabulary, thus laying a good foundation for English reading teaching and writing teaching. However, some teachers do not have the awareness and experience of teaching vocabulary on the one hand, and on the other hand, they do not have the ability to change the mode and status quo of using the affix method.

By summarising and analysing students' learning using word affixes in the above article, the author suggests 3 effective word affix teaching methods for inexperienced teachers to help students make boring word learning and vocabulary building lively and interesting, and more likely to stimulate students' interest in learning vocabulary.

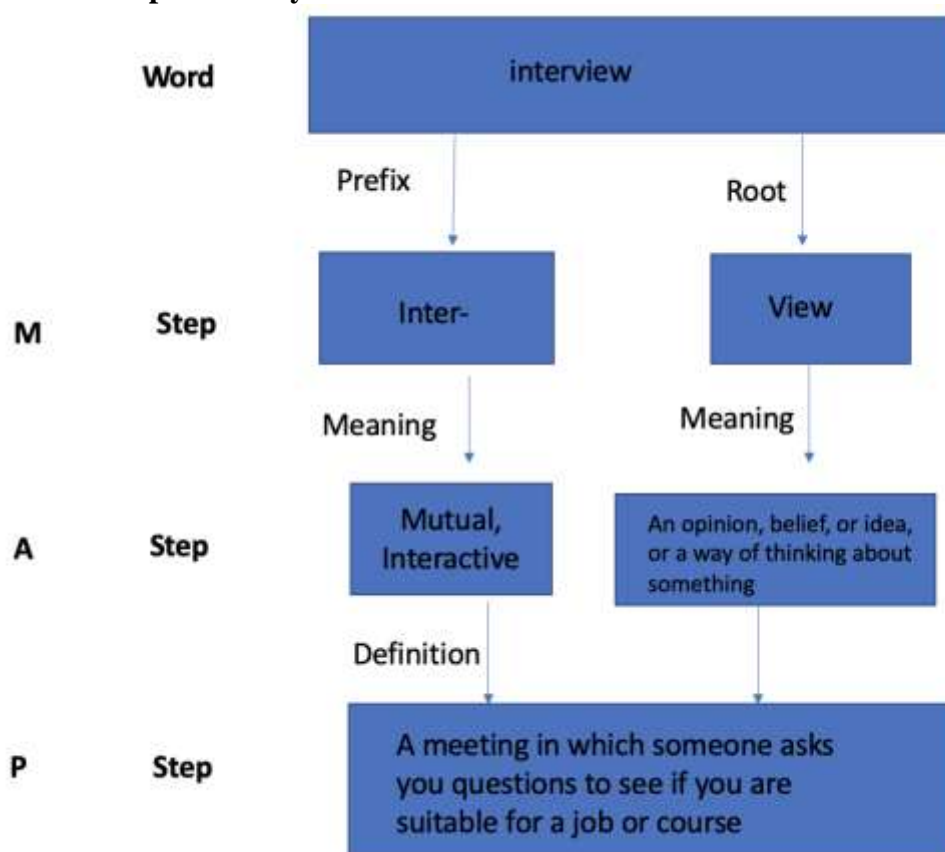
#### 3.1 Use familiar words to introduce new words, inspire and guide students to think

At the beginning students' vocabulary is relatively small, teachers should try to expand on students' known vocabulary, gradually and gradually, and they should use a variety of ways to inspire students to think. Here's a way to help teachers teach better-The Word Mapping Strategy. An approach for expressing knowledge in graphs is word mapping. Knowledge graphs are idea networks. Nodes (points/vertices) and linkages (arcs/edges) make up networks. Concepts are represented by nodes, while relationships between concepts are represented by connections (Qomariyah & Nafisah, 2020).

**Activity**

For example: 'interview' is a familiar word to students, so teachers can tell students that the prefix 'inter-' has the meaning of 'mutual, interactive', 'in' and 'in between, in. within'. The teacher can explain the meaning of the prefix 'inter-' and the root word 'view' separately to give students a better understanding of the prefix 'inter-'.

**Interview-MAP Example Activity**



The teacher can then allow students to freely associate words that contain the prefix 'inter-' Teachers can also help students think by giving them the meaning in Chinese. For example, teachers can ask students how to express the word 'international'. This will give students a better understanding of the prefix 'inter-' on the one hand and help reinforce the meaning of "nation" on the other. This way students have a better understanding of the prefix 'inter-' and can help reinforce the meaning of 'nation'. Once students have a firm grasp of this prefix, teachers can continue to extend the vocabulary with more difficult words such as interpose, intervene, interval, interlock, etc. After the students have mastered some of the prefixes, the teacher can also guide them to write out other variations of these words. The teacher can also guide the students to write out other variants of these words.

**3.2 From Specific to General, Lead Students to Summarize**

After a period of time (one or two months or one or two weeks, depending on the students' vocabulary), teachers can lead students to classify and summarise the root words they have mastered. The teacher can then take the students through a process of sorting and summarising the root words they have mastered.

**Activities**

For example, teachers can divide suffixes into noun suffixes, verb suffixes, adjective suffixes and adverbial suffixes from a lexical point of view (grammar). Guide students to list the affixes they say they know well.

**Noun Suffixes Example- Activity**

Suffixes Forming Nouns	Meaning	Examples
-ant/-ent	someone who performs a certain task or has a specific role	student, president
-ism	a belief, a behaviour, an idea, or a deed	journalism, vegetarianism,
-ist	a person who is related to, a person who believes in	violinist, pianist
-ship	condition or qualities	friendship, leadership
-ment	the formation of abstract nouns	government, enjoyment
....	...	...

**Verb Suffixes Example Activity**

Suffixes Forming Verb	Meaning	Examples
-ate	to bring about a condition	Demonstrate, communicate
-en	To become	Shorten, thicken
-ify	to create something, to develop	Clarify, identify
-ise	To do something, to become	modernise, optimise
....	...	...
....	...	...

**Adjective Suffixes Example Activity**

Suffixes Forming adjectives	Meaning	Examples
-able, -ible	Able to be done alone, capable of being	washable, suitable
-ful	possessing the quality of	Joyful, cheerful
-less	Without	Homeless, worthless
-ous	Having the characteristic	dangerous, enormous
....	....	....
....	...	...

The teacher can look at it from a semantic point of view, there are various classifications and guide students to summarize them.

### Example Activity

Prefixes	Meaning	Examples
un-, dis-, il-, im-, non-...	negative	unfortunate, disagree, illegal, impossible
arch-, extra-, maxi-, mini-...	indicate size/degree	archbishop, extraordinary, maximum, minimum
post-, pro, fore...	direction	posterior, propel, forefront
Mono-, bi-, <u>twi-</u> , tri-...	Indicate quantitative relation	Monologue, bilingual, twin, triple
....	..	...

Finally, the teacher can give students the task of reviewing their own vocabulary, or they can review their vocabulary in class with the class. This can be done in a variety of ways. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as purely Chinese-to-English translation, giving students root words or affixes to associate with the vocabulary, categorising and summarising the vocabulary, analysing the meaning of words and putting the vocabulary into context to test students' mastery.

### 3.3 Adopt Vocabulary Lincing Routine (LINC)s Method Accumulate Word

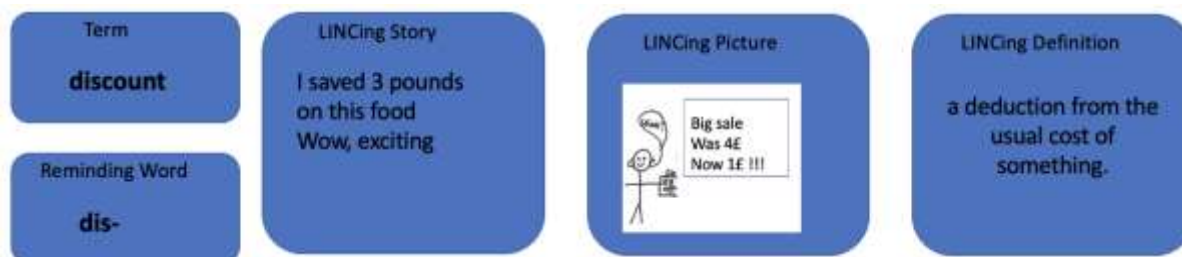
Learning affixes can enrich vocabulary and conversely, lack of vocabulary can make learning affixes difficult. Through my teaching experience, I have concluded that the main reason why learning affixes is difficult is that they lack vocabulary, so they have difficulty identifying the words connected by an affix. In China, students often give up using root words to break down and guess the meaning of words because they find the words too long or simply do not know them. This is replaced by a vicious cycle of mechanical memorisation and teachers' lack of attention to teaching vocabulary often leads to students consistently memorising words in the wrong way. This approach to vocabulary learning can easily lead to students becoming bored with the whole learning process.

Teachers can use the Vocabulary Lincing Routine (LINC)s method. The Vocabulary Lincing Routine (LINC)s is a potent memory improvement approach that students may use when learning aspects of the language and definitions (Wong, 2004). A connection, picture, notation, construct, and self-interest strategy are characterised as a vocabulary LINC)s strategy. The Lincing Routine strategy is a memory device-based method for learning new words and their meanings. Students are taught to develop link words as a recall



phrase that sounds similar to the new word in the Lincing routine. The reminder words should then be connected to a short tale that uses aspects from the definition to describe the target words. Students then create a picture that recounts the tale and relates to the definition of the new word. Then, after applying the LINC's approach, students test themselves to see if they retain the word meaning (Farstrup & Samuels, 2008). The Lincing Routine includes of instruments that can assist children in comprehending the meaning of new words and memorising meanings using visual memory and aural technologies (Ellis, 2001).

### Example LINC'S Table Activity



### 4. Conclusion

The importance of vocabulary in English learning cannot be overstated. Affixes, prefixes, and suffixes are regarded to be one of the most effective strategies for student to expand their vocabulary. As a result, acquiring affixes is extremely beneficial to Chinese English learners in terms of expanding their vocabulary. Students will be more inclined to employ affixes to build new words if they grasp their functions. Furthermore, it encourages students to be more inventive with their English abilities. Acquiring a sufficient vocabulary is necessary for continued use of a second or foreign language, since a student will not be able to communicate properly utilising the structures and functions that has acquired if they do not have a large vocabulary. At the same time, the exercises supplied in this research focus on how to memorise word affixes in detail and successfully, which may assist junior high school English instructors in using the right way of teaching word affixes.

### References

1. Asiyanbola, A. A. (2010). A study of affixation in selected HIV-AIDS related papers written in English. *The International Journal of Language, Society and Culture*, 31, 29-35.
2. Byrd, D. & Mints, T.H. (2010). *Discovering speech, words, and mind*. United Kingdom: A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication.
3. Cameron, L. (2001) *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Clark, E.V. (2009). *First language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Cortazzi, M. & Jin, L. (1996b) *Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China*. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169–206.
6. Ellis, E. S., (2001). *The Vocabulary LINCing Routine*. Lawrence: Edge Enterprises.
7. Farstrup, A. E. & Samuels, S. J. (2008). *What research has to say about vocabulary instruction*. Newark: International Reading Association
8. Katamba, F. (1994). *English Words*. Routledge, London
9. *Language Learner. Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(5), 290-294.
10. Lieber, R. & Stekauer, P. (Eds.). (2014). *The Oxford handbook of derivational morphology*.
11. Meara, P., & Jones, G. (1987). Tests of vocabulary size in English as a foreign language. *Potyglot*, 8(1), 1-40
12. Ministry of Education (2001). *Quanrizhi yifu jiaoyu putong gaoji zhongxue yingyu kecheng biao zhun (shiyangao)*. (National English Curriculum Standard – Experimental version). Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
13. Qomariyah, S.S. and Nafisah, Bq.Z. (2020). Word Mapping in Students' Vocabulary Mastery. *Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP*, 7(1), p.31.
14. Swanson, E. A., & Hawerton, D. (2007). *Influence Vocabulary Acquisition for English*



15. Wong, B. (2004). Learning about learning disabilities (3rded). Oxford: Elsevier Academic Press.