Investigación e innovación en la Enseñanza Superior. Nuevos contextos, nuevas ideas
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The use of morphological analogy and lexical creativity in vocabulary sessions in EFL: A study of advanced students’ attitudes and acceptance

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary teaching, particularly in advanced levels (B2-C1), constitutes a fundamental part of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, the areas of lexical creativity and morphological analogy have not been fully explored as they have been associated with peripheral word stock, i.e. slang, colloquialism as in stardom/unknowndom, sadness/ignorantness. Hence, this study is aimed at exploring the level of motivation of advanced students towards the use of exercises that rely on the properties of lexical creativity and morphological analogy. A group of 66 B2-level students of Translation and Interpreting (University of Alicante) have participated in the study, and the results were based on the observation of the class and the completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire demonstrates that, despite the newness and non-systemic use of vocabulary, students show relatively high levels of motivation and interest. Also, the data suggest that respondents feel that this new approach in vocabulary learning can help them communicate more effectively and decipher cryptic and slangy vocabulary more easily.

KEY WORDS: EFL, vocabulary, slang, analogy, lexical creativity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Slang and colloquial expressions are thought to highlight the features of togetherness and group cohesiveness within a community of speakers (cf. Eble 1996; Allen 1998; Mattiello 2005, 2008; Smith 2011). These ‘peripheral’ or ‘extragrammatical’ units are also expected to comply with systemic word-formation mechanisms: ellipsis + derivation (bestie < best friend), clipping (perf < perfect), clipping + conversion, (to Insta < Instagram), borrowing (chiquita) and acronymy (BFF < best friend forever) (Sánchez 2018: 1). The complexity of colloquialisms lies in their cryptic and mutational nature, i.e. these units are highly ephemeral and their understanding is not necessarily interpreted by non-members of the speech group. Their exclusiveness and peripheral nature (i.e. not accepted in the norm) also represents a problem when using these units as working vocabulary in EFL. The tendency is to employ correction when addictiveness or superficialness is used instead of the normative equivalents addiction and superficiality. As to communication, the words addictiveness and superficialness are understandable by interlocutors although their colloquial property stops them from being used more freely in other registers. Nonetheless, the functionality of -ness as an abstract-noun-forming suffix offers a myriad of possibilities on the level of lexicology. If advanced students understand the so-called functionality, the production of communicatively effective constructs is guaranteed. A notion that underlies the formation of words and extrapolation of meaning is that of analogy, in this case in particular derivational analogy.

The use of analogical strategies in the classroom to learn new vocabulary has been highlighted by previous researchers (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993; Almela & Sánchez 2007; Fernández & Terraza 2012). But this concept of analogy, also known as conceptual analogy, dictates the connection of
words through specific semantic relations (synonymy, hyponymy, etc.), e.g. mouse and pen drive are co-hyponyms under the tag of ‘computer device’. However, the concept of analogy that is discussed here is related to the fundamentals of derivation, whose central notion governs that any new derivative is created provided there is a suitable pattern for it to be formed on (Bauer 2001: 76). In other words, there are intrinsic ways in vocabulary to form paradigmatic patterns of words that make analogical derivatives a useful tool for vocabulary learners because “analogue levelling simplifies the rule system, thus making it easier for subsequent generations to generate forms by rules” (Bauer 2001: 83). Therefore, learners can associate business (< busy + -ness) with bigness or absurdness, and naturally (or analogically) generate new abstract nouns ending in -ness. As to slang word formation, in this study in particular, the concept of analogy is preferred over rules as the lexical creations under scrutiny might result from the so-called ‘rule-changing innovation’ (Chomsky 1964: 22).

As mentioned earlier, this paper centers on the process of derivation, in which either an affix is attached to a base (affixation, e.g. write + -er > writer) or an item is adapted to a new word class without the addition of an affix (zero derivation or conversion, e.g. water > to water) (Quirk et al. 1985: 1558; Alcaraz 1990: 16-20). Also, some units that stand midway between affixation and blending are also used in the analysis, e.g. -aholic. These units, also known as ‘splinters’ (Bauer et al. 2015: 411), are productive units in contemporary English word formation. The idea of using derivational units in this study is based on the premise that affixes and splinters generally convey abstract meaning, which makes their word-formation patterns less discernible by non-native speakers of English. Hence, this paper is intended to examine the degree of motivation of students of English (B2-C1 level) towards the use of morphological analogy and lexical creativity in vocabulary exercises. This global objective is based on the premise that these morphological properties and notions could be resorted to in vocabulary teaching and could develop a sense of self-awareness on how words, regardless of the governing norm, can become useful tools in construing communication.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section is intended to provide more details on the type of participants and the questionnaire used in the study, as well as the analysis that was performed in the data-collection stage. As commented hereafter, the research methods include a survey research (questionnaire) and the participant observation.

2.1. A description of the context and participants

The participants in the research study were students of English (B2+) in the degree of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Alicante. A total of 66 students participated in the complete process (workshop and questionnaire), and the duration of the entire session was approximately 90 minutes.

2.2. Research tools

The session was divided into two parts: (1) theory and practice and (2) completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire (see Annex 6.1) consists of four blocks, and it is based on an akin study on vocabulary teaching (cf. Santiago & Sánchez 2018):

i. Motivation/interest: to what extent the students were engaged in the process.

ii. Usefulness/applicability: how useful they found it and how much they think they can use it in the future.
iii. Novelty/content: how innovative the approach is, how easy it is for them to work with it and/or whether it is overwhelming.

iv. Materials/timing: whether they found the materials clear enough to use each of the tools and whether they had enough time to understand and complete tasks.

As this study revolves around slang and vocabulary teaching, it was not possible to find already-published exercises on the topic. Therefore, all the materials used in the first stage of the session (i.e. theory and practice) were created by the authors.

2.3. Procedure

As commented earlier, the two-stage session was aimed at assessing the level of motivation and novelty of this type of the exercises through observation and a questionnaire. A crucial part of the experiment was the workshop, which was carefully planned to be one hour long and to cover all the stages in the learning process (See Annex 2 for more details on the exercises of the workshop). Since the limitation of space in this article does not allow for a full publication of the materials, a summary of their objectives and content is as follows:

(a) reading texts and identifying the colloquial words, and their meanings;
(b) presentation of the main patterns that are discussed in the workshop (-ie, -er, -aholic, -ness, ‘conversion’);
(c) drilling exercises to check if the meaning of these patterns has been understood;
(d) vocabulary-generating exercises, which are intended to have students participate more creatively in the formation of new words.

Once the workshop is finished, the students were asked to complete the questionnaire (See Annex 1). The questions were in Spanish to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity. Besides the four blocks mentioned in section 2.2, the students were asked to grade the workshop (‘global mark’) and to leave their feedback (optional).

3. RESULTS

The participants, on the whole, demonstrated that there was a general feeling of comfort and interest throughout the session. Although the session was brief and limited, the questionnaire responses reveal that a general positive attitude towards the use of this type of methodology was a general trend. This section is intended to provide some detailed information on the responses in the four blocks to have a clear understanding on their attitude. Note that the figures used in the tables and in the questionnaire are proportional to a scale of 10.

As regards the aspects of motivation/interest (see Table 1), the most striking result to emerge from the data is that a majority of poll-takers feel that they were motivated (7.71) and there was a palpable interest towards vocabulary learning (8.35). These two points are relevant in the study as they show that the newness or novelty of this teaching methodology is not incompatible with the aspects of motivation and interest. Interestingly, a vast majority of respondents feel that the organization of the session and the way the content has been introduced have been strong points in the workshop (9.15 and 8.85 respectively). This corroborates Shaughnessy’s claim that motivation is the source of creativity, and that creativity might also be used as an incentive in EFL (1998: 445).
Table 1. Survey Results — section I ‘motivation/interest’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block I: motivation / interest</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have been motivated at all times</td>
<td>7.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I could follow the workshop</td>
<td>9.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I wasted my time</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have been interested in learning the vocabulary</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I liked the way the content was explained</td>
<td>8.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second block being studied (i.e. ‘usefulness/applicability’) is aimed at measuring how students have become aware of the applicability of this methodology and if they feel it is convenient in their learning process (see Table 2). The most surprising aspect from the data is that a high number of respondents (8.85) agree on the communicative functionality of these analogy-based rules, which is in fact the core of the study. This opens a new approach in the way vocabulary should be studied as it has been traditionally argued that a binary tendency has dominated the field: ‘words as elements in a list’ and ‘words within a context’ (cf. Almela & Sánchez 2007). Another important point in this block is that getting to grips with lexical innovation and analogy can be of use to implement or decode slang/colloquial vocabulary.

Table 2. Survey Results — section II ‘usefulness/applicability’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block II: usefulness / applicability</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. It has been useful</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I will use this when I don’t know a word</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It will be useful although the new words are incorrect</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. It can help me in informal conversations</td>
<td>8.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. It might lead me to mistakes in the use of the language</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the clarity of the explanation and exercises (9.42), Table 3 shows that students are in agreement with the aspect of novelty that characterizes the exercises in both item 11 (7.9) and item 13 (7.35). However, one of the lowest grades in this part of the study corresponds to the type of exercise implemented. A grade of 6.61 (item 14) suggests that the session should have included more collaborative tasks. In fact, having more interactive exercises was initially considered in the session planning but the number of 66 students in class was a counterproductive factor. Although the number of respondents could shed more light on the individual attitudes towards this exercise, this is also a problem for the development of specific activities. Ideally, several briefer sessions, in which students could interact more, would certainly be a more accurate choice.
Table 3. Survey Results — section III ‘novelty/contents’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block III: novelty / content</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. the exercises were new</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. the professor’s explanation was clear</td>
<td>9.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. it is the first time I see this type of exercises</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I could interact with my classmates</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. There is too much information</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last block assessed in the questionnaire concerns the general perception of respondents towards the materials and the timing of the session (see Table 4). The item 18 shows that the overall response to this question was rather positive (4.74), which implies that there was no generalized need for more practice materials. Yet, the number indicates that the opinion is divided, and thus, it should be taken into consideration in future sessions. What we gather from this part of the questionnaire is that students might need further practice to develop their sense of self-awareness: the limited time span devoted to consolidation would require more than one hour.

Table 4. Survey Results — section IV ‘materials/timing’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block IV: materials / timing</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. I found the handouts useful</td>
<td>8.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. the PowerPoint presentation was clear</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. more exercises would have been useful</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. we were given enough time to understand the content</td>
<td>9.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I would have preferred to work on my own</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, respondents were requested to provide a global grade, which is intended to have a general idea of the session as a whole. The grade of 8.4 corroborates some of the aforementioned aspects: the students enjoyed the session and the feeling of motivation, interest and learning was reflected. The additional comments were really helpful as they show some individual perception of the session and some critical feedback was in fact significant. The use of productive vocabulary, as implemented here, should be highly motivational, and our study corroborates that by Fernández & Terraza (2012) on the relevant and demanding nature of productive vocabulary in EFL. These authors, alongside with Nation (2001: 28), argue that motivation is key in word production and coinage as the recognition of vocabulary is not as demanding or challenging as they generate new words. Besides the strong aspects of the session (applicability and novelty), some of the students’ comments on the weak points can be summarized in two ideas: the need for drilling exercises, and the use of authentic dialogues (e.g. video or sound) to check day-to-day interactions in informal English.
4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The most relevant conclusion of the study is that the use of morphological analogy and lexical creativity in vocabulary sessions is motivational and ‘interest-provoking’. Although some of the exercises are novel and they deal with peripheral vocabulary (slang, colloquial, etc.), students seem to value the importance of communication over normative rules. Also, surprisingly, the levels of acceptance are also paralleled by those of applicability, in which respondents identify the importance of learning these word-formation patterns in spoken communication, particularly in informal one.

Although the study is not intended to test the adequacy of lexical creativity in the production of new vocabulary, this could be a seminal step in the description of the processes of word coinage and lexical innovation in EFL. The traditional assumption that mainstreamed vocabulary should only be used in the training denies the evidence that creating nonexistent vocabulary in class for the sake of communication and self-awareness is also a useful tool.

5. REFERENCES

6. ANNEXES

Annex 1

Responde el siguiente cuestionario marcando la puntuación que consideres pertinente entre 0 (nada) y 10 (mucho)

### Bloque I Motivación / Interés

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En el taller de vocabulario que acabamos de realizar:</th>
<th>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Me he sentido motivad@ todo el tiempo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. He podido seguir el taller con facilidad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. He perdido el tiempo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. He sentido interés por el aprendizaje del vocabulario.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Me ha gustado la forma en la que se ha explicado el contenido.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bloque II Utilidad /Aplicabilidad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lo aprendido en el taller de vocabulario que acabamos de realizar:</th>
<th>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Ha sido útil.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lo usaré cuando desconozca alguna palabra.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Me servirá aunque el nuevo vocabulario es incorrecto.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Me puede ayudar a entender conversaciones informales.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Me puede provocar errores de uso en la lengua.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bloque III Novedad / Contenidos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En el taller que acabamos de realizar:</th>
<th>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Los ejercicios han sido novedosos.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. La explicación del profesor ha sido clara.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Es la primera vez que veo este tipo de ejercicios.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. He podido interactuar con mis compañeros.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Hay demasiada información.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bloque IV Materiales / Temporalización

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En el taller que acabamos de realizar:</th>
<th>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Las fotocopias me han ayudado.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. La presentación en Power Point ha sido clara.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Más ejercicios de práctica hubiesen ayudado.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Se nos ha dado tiempo para entender el contenido.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Hubiera preferido trabajar solo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nota global**

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Annex 2

CONVENTIONAL WORD FORMATION

-IE
Aunt →
Bag →
Brown →
Food →
Group →

-NESS
Happy →
Sad →
Dark →
Extreme →
Careful →

-ER
Work →
Sing →
Love →
Teach →
Write →

-AHOLIC
Book →
Sex →
Talk →
Life →
Sport →

CONVERSION
Water the plants!
But me no buts!
We are going to paper the front room.
I should frame this photo.
Professor Smith will chair the meeting.

CONSOLIDATION

EXERCISE 1 Match the following words to their possible definitions:

a. partier
b. holidayer
c. motherness
d. exhaustie
e. complainter
f. to instagram

1. to constantly post photos and check other people’s post on social media.
2. a person who is frequently planning trips and is aware of the different flight offers, accommodation tips and other travel related issues.
3. someone who is frequently tired and often refuses to join plans as they need to rest.
4. the condition/quality that characterizes a woman who is very dedicated to their child who comes second to none or nothing else.
5. the soul of every gathering who talks to everyone, knows a lot about music and tends to be the last to go home.
6. someone who doesn’t seem to be happy about anything and lets everyone know about it.
EXERCISE 2
Fill in the gaps with one of the words given:
motherness complainer partier exhaustie instagramming holidayer

1. A: I am sick and tired of Tom, he is never happy with anything we suggest, nothing seems to please him.
   B: Don’t take him seriously, you know he is a ___________________.
2. A: Jane has just called to say she won’t come to the races!
   B: Is there anything wrong with her? Is she not feeling well?
   A: Not at all, she just wants to rest, she is an ___________________.
3. A: I can’t decide where to go with our campervan next summer, there are so many options!
   B: Why don’t you ask Bob? He seems to have been everywhere, He is such a _____________!
   A: You are right! I will call him!
4. I can’t believe you are taking another selfie! Why are you always _________________? You miss a lot of things while you do that.
5. A: I haven’t seen Sally for weeks, she used to be the party animal and now she never leaves the house!
   B: You are right! She is all the time with Jimmy, as if she had created _________________.
6. A: Will I see you at Ali’s 40th?
   B: I wouldn’t miss it!
   A: I heard Katie is going too, she will bring her own music and will be playing it.
   B: So I heard, it will defo be a success, she is such a _________________, she’ll make everyone join and feel great.

EXERCISE 3 Creation exercises (produce a new word from the given root):
1. You know, I can’t stand his position towards Brexit, he’s always saying he wants to leave the EU and be totally out. He calls himself an _______ (out).
2. Can you believe my neighbour? She is obsessed with cats; no wonder she is still single. She should visit her doctor because she is _____________ (cat).
3. Gosh! I wish you would put down your phone at once. Your _____________ (addictive) is killing me, and sadly no-one can help you but yourself.
4. By the way, have you met Brian? You know, this tall guy who is always indecisive about everything, always in two minds. He is definitely a __________ (mind).
5. Spring is always the right time to __________ (closet) the winter clothes and shoes until the following year.
6. So sorry! I forgot our appointment this morning. The trouble is that if I don’t _________ (calendar) my appointments on my phone, there will be no chance of remembering them.
7. I love clubs, particularly dancing clubs, but I am not exactly __________ (dance), but it’s always nice to go into one of these places and make a few moves on the dancing floor after some drinks.
8. Hey, you don’t have to say that. That is really impolite of you. You know, the fact that you are wrong does not mean that you have to make excuses to deny so. Your _________________ (wrong) is human, and you’ve got to get away with it.