

THE TESL TEACHER AND ENGLISH SUFFIXES

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In teaching English as a foreign or second language, suffixes should receive special attention on the part of teacher and learners, particularly in advanced TESL or TEFL stages. The reasons for this special attention to suffixes are several:

1. Suffixes frequently appear at the end of English words. In fact, the words that end with suffixes are about 37% of all words, according to the writer's analysis of some samples of written English. If we exclude function or grammatical words (such as conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliaries) because of their usual static form, the percentage of words with suffixes goes up to 56% of all content words. Of course, these percentages do fluctuate depending on the nature of the analyzed material.

2. Some of these suffixes mark the morphological class of the root word. Such suffixes are called inflectional suffixes, which are quite limited in number: the plurality suffix and the possessive suffix that mark the noun class; the past, past participle and -ing suffixes that mark the verb class; the comparative and superlative suffixes that mark the adjective class.

3. Most suffixes are used to derive a word from another and usually with a change in class. Such suffixes are called derivative ones. As a matter of fact, 14% of the words in analyzed texts end with inflectional suffixes and 23% of the words end with derivational suffixes. In other words, 38% of the used suffixes are inflectional whereas 62% of them are derivational.

4. As a result of the high frequency of suffixes, learners' mistakes related to them are also frequent. Such mistakes could be in spelling, pronunciation, and understanding meaning or function. If the teacher emphasizes suffixes, such mistakes can be decreased.

5. Learners are to be taught how to derive several words from one word by adding suitable derivational suffixes. This will enrich the learners' vocabulary and develop their ability to comprehend unfamiliar

words derived from familiar ones.

Therefore, it may be helpful and useful to list the most common derivational suffixes in English: (1)

1. *-able (-ible)* = can be, having the quality of
V + able = Adj

N + ible

Examples: *eatable, comfortable, digestible.*

2. *-al* = related to.

N + al = Adj

Examples: *national, natural, conditional.*

3. *-an* = related to.

N + a (n) = Adj

N

Examples: *African, American, Syrian.*

4. *-ence (-ance)* = act of.

V + ence = N

ance

Examples: *annoyance, disturbance, dependence.*

5. *-ant (-ent)* = a person who does V, tending to.

V + ant = N

ent = Adj

Examples: *applicant, president, persistent.*

6. *-ary (ory)* = tending to, a thing or person that does V.

V + ary = Adj

ory N

Examples: *explanatory, supplementary, boundary.*

7. *-dom* = state of being, land of.

Adj + dom = N

N

Examples: *freedom, martyrdom, kingdom.*

8. *-ed* = having the quality of.

N + (e)d = Adj

Examples: *aged, lighthearted, cold-blooded.*

1. V = verb Adj = adjective N = noun
Adv = adverb Prep = preposition

9. *-en* = give N to, make.
N + en = V
Adj
Examples: *strengthen, widen, blacken.*
10. *-en* = made of.
N + en = Adj
Examples: *wooden, golden, woollen.*
11. *-er* = a person who does or belongs to.
V + er = N
N or
Examples: *learner, teacher, villager.*
12. *-ery* = place for, class of, state of being.
N + ery = N
Examples: *refinery, jewelery, slavery.*
13. *-ese* = inhabitant or language of.
N + ese = N
Adj
Examples: *Chinese, Japanese.*
14. *-ess* = a female of.
N + ess = N
Examples: *lioness, tigress, poetess.*
15. *-ful* = full of, a quantity that fills, who does.
N + ful = Adj
V N
Examples: *hopeful, handful, forgetful.*
16. *-hood* = time or group of.
N + hood = N
Examples: *manhood, childhood, neighborhood.*
17. *-ic (-ical)* = having the qualities of.
N + ic = Adj
Examples: *geometrical, historical, artistic.*
18. *-ify* = make or become.
N + ify = V
Adj
Examples: *glorify, solidify, simplify.*
19. *-ing* = action of.
V + ing = Adj
N
Examples: *speaking, running, amusing.*
20. *-ish* = somewhat, rather, like.
N + ish = Adj
Adj
Examples: *childish, greenish, foolish.*
21. *-ism* = quality, doctrine.
N + ism = N
Adj
Examples: *realism, heroism, socialism.*
22. *-ist* = a specialist in, a player of.
N + ist = N
Examples: *biologist, linguist, pianist.*
23. *-itis* = inflammation in.
N + itis = N
Examples: *appendicitis, bronchitis.*
24. *-ize* = make or become.
N + ize = V
Adj
Examples: *harmonize, idealize, nationalize, nationalize.*
25. *-less* = without, that does not.
N + less = Adj V
V
Examples: *useless, harmless, ceaseless.*
26. *-ly* = in the manner of being, every, of.
Adj + ly = Adj
N Adj
Examples: *weekly, quickly, brotherly.*
27. *-ment* = act or state of being.
V + ment = N
Examples: *enjoyment, movement, improvement.*
28. *-most* = to make a superlative adjective.
Prep + most = Adj
N
Examples: *inmost, topmost.*
29. *-ness* = condition of being.
Adj + ness = N
Examples: *whiteness, smallness, largeness.*
30. *-ous* = having.
N + ous = Adj
Examples: *courageous, advantageous, dangerous.*
31. *-ship* = state of being, rank, skill.
N + ship = N
Examples: *friendship, governorship, horsemanship.*
32. *-tion (-ssion)* = act or condition of.
V + tion = N
ssion
Examples: *dictation, admission, translation.*
33. *-y* = like, having, covered with.
N + y = Adj
Examples: *funny, windy, muddy.*

34. *-wise* = in the direction of.

N + wise = Adj

Examples: *clockwise*, *coastwise*.

35. *-ty* (*-ety*, *-ity*) = state of being.

Adj + ty = N

Examples: *regularity*, *probability*, *locality*.

36. *-tude* = state of being, distance of.

Adj + tude = N

Examples: *gratitude*, *altitude*, *longitude*.

As has been shown in the previous thirty-six suffixes, each one has one meaning or more. Besides, each suffix is added to a certain class or classes of words to derive a new word that usually belongs to a different class.

If the teacher can bring these suffixes to the students' attention in the right manner and in the proper doses, this will enhance their ability to build up new words from familiar ones. Besides, they will be able to correctly guess the meanings of unfamiliar words derived from familiar stems. Further,

comprehension of word meaning may occur not by addition only, but by subtraction also: one can guess the meaning of "activity" if one knows "active" and one can guess the meaning of "active" if one knows "activity."

In other words, teaching suffixes to EFL or ESL learners does the following:

1. It summarizes some facts about word formation and about what goes with what.

2. It makes fairly regular learning material.

3. It decreases the learning load of the TESL student by showing the relations among words of a common stem.

4. It develops the TESL learner's comprehension ability through developing the ability of correct inference.

5. It increases the learner's reading speed as a result of increase of comprehension ability.

6. It gives learners more insight into the nature of ESL by showing them that a suffix is a unit with its own meaning and function.