

The Contribution of Morphological Awareness to L2 Vocabulary Knowledge and Text Comprehension

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First language (L1) research has recently documented the unique contribution of morphological awareness to vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension. However, the extent to which morphological awareness contributes to reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge among second language (L2) learners and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in tertiary level is not well understood. This research seeks to identify how the knowledge on derivational affixes that were considered difficult even for L1 readers to acquire, contribute to vocabulary and text comprehension among adult L2/EFL learners and whether vocabulary knowledge mediates the effect of morphological awareness on L2 text comprehension. In this study, our aim was to identify whether there exists a full mediation, partial mediation, or no mediation. Thus, this study, using a reading comprehension test, a breadth of vocabulary knowledge test and a morphological awareness test, investigated the contribution of morphological awareness in L2 text comprehension and receptive vocabulary knowledge among 400 Sri Lankan tertiary level learners of English as a second language. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. The results indicated that morphological awareness made a significant contribution to reading comprehension for Sri Lankan learners when vocabulary knowledge was controlled for. Similarly, morphological awareness made a significant contribution to vocabulary knowledge and a significant partial mediation to L2 text comprehension among Sri Lankan undergraduates through vocabulary knowledge indicating the importance of morphological awareness in both vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension for adult L2 learners. The results also revealed that receptive vocabulary knowledge was identified as the best predictor of text comprehension among Sri Lankan learners of English.

Key words: Morphological awareness, vocabulary, L2 text comprehension, Structural Equation Modeling