UNDERSTANDING WORD FORMATION IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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RATIONALE

According to Tanaka (2006), among 3000 languages supposed to exist on the Earth, English is the only language labeled "an international language". Therefore, the position of English in the map of world languages remains unique. However, learning English is definitely not an easy task to fulfill as there are so many things to learn. Besides the skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading; vocabulary also plays an important role. The more vocabulary we have, the clearer and more accurate ideas we can express and the shorter the process of learning English becomes. However, people often describe learning new words as a never-ending process. What we can do is to make this seemingly difficult and boring process easier and more interesting to complete. As a consequence, a mini research is conducted to provide insight into the word formation in English and Vietnamese.

OBJECTIVES

The research aims at comparing and contrasting the similarity and difference between English and Vietnamese word formation process. After that, the researcher will discuss some common problems students may face when using English and suggest some remedial ways to overcome these problems.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the similarity and difference between English and Vietnamese word formation?
What are some problems of learners concerning to using vocabulary?
What should be done to overcome these problems?

SIGNIFICANCE

Hopefully, this paper can contribute to the knowledge of word formation in English and Vietnamese, find out the learners' common mistakes, the reasons as well as the remedies, and then enhance the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

METHODOLOGY

Generalization and synthesis are the ways of carrying out this research. Some reading is done to collect relevant data from English and Vietnamese word formation process to perform the analysis. There are some several steps:

- Collect the data from books, articles, journals, and other materials relating the issue.

- Select the suitable data and typical examples to support the topic.

- Perform the analysis based on the relevant data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English word formation: A new word in English is created by three predominant processes: conversion, affixation, and compounding.

Conversion consists of two subcategories: complete conversion, and approximate conversion. Complete conversion is the process of shifting a word from one word class to another without adding an affix. Approximate conversion is the process by which a word, in the course of changing its grammatical function, may undergo a slight change of pronunciation or spelling. Here are some examples: the voicing of final consonant in *advice and advise*, *sheath and sheathe*; the shift of stress when verbs of two syllables are converted into nouns as in *conduct, conflict, convert, import, export* (Thanh, 2007).

Affixation, as stated by Zapata (2007), consists in adding derivational affixes (ex: prefixes, infixes and suffixes) to roots and stems to form new words. Talking about derivational affixes, Stageberg (1965, as cited in Thanh, 2007) has claimed that derivational affixes have a lexical function and create new words. There are two kinds of derivational affixes: class changing derivational affixes change the word class of the word to which they are attached and class maintaining derivational affixes do not change the word class of the word to which they are attached. As for Thanh (2007), affixation is the process by which an affix is added to a base to form a new word. In English, this process can be subdivided into prefixation and suffixation. Prefixation is the addition of a prefix in front of a base as in *pro-life, recycle, deselect…* while suffixation is the addition of a suffix at the end of a base as in *ageism, marginalize, additive…* And suffixes can be divided into some common types as verb-forming suffixes (*-fy, -ify, -ise, -ize*), adjective-forming suffixes (*-able, -ible, -al, -ial, -ed, -ing*), adverb-forming suffix *(-ly)*, suffixes of concrete nouns (*-ant, -ent, -ee, -er, -ery, -ry*), suffixes of abstract nouns (*-age, -al, -*

dom, -ery, -ry). The noticeable argument held by Thanh (2007) is that "affixation resembles conversion in that they may change the grammatical potential of a word, but unlike conversion, affixation involves a change of form".

Compounding is the process of combining two or more existing words to form a new world. Compounds are found in all word classes such as noun (*pop group*), adjective (*heart breaking*), verb (*highlight*), adverb (*nowadays*), pronoun (*everything*), numeral (*sixty three*), preposition (*because of*), semi-auxiliary (*had better*), conjunction (*rather than*) (Thanh, 2007).

Other word forming processes in English discussed by Thanh (2007) are: **coinage** (the creation of totally new words as in *nylon, aspirin*…), **borrowing** (the process by which words in a language are borrowed from another as in *champagne* from French, *kindergarten* from German, *opera* from Italian…), **blending** (the fusion off two words into one, usually the first part of one word and the last part of another as in *motel* from motor and hotel, *brunch* from breakfast and lunch, breathalyzer from breath and analyzer…), **clipping** (the process of cutting the beginning or the end of a word, or both, leaving a part to stand for the whole as in *ad* from advertisement, *bus* from omnibus, *flu* from influenza…), **acronymy** (the process whereby a word is formed from the initials or beginning segments of a succession of words as in *WHO* from World Health Organization, *NATO* from North Atlantic Treaty Organization…), **back formation** (the process of deriving words by removing what is thought to be a suffix from an existing word. For example, *peddle, edit, baby-sit, team-teach* came into the language as back-formations of *peddler, editor, baby-sitter, team-teacher*). The last one is **reduplication** which is also called as "repetitive compounding". Arnold (1986, as cited in Thanh, 2007) subcategorized this process into 3 types: reduplicative compounds (the second element is the proper repetition of the first one as in *blah-blah, drip-drip, hush-hush*…, ablaut compounds (one basic morpheme is repeated in the other constituent with a different vowel as in *chit-chat, tittle-tattle*…), rhythm compounds (twin forms of two elements, which are conjoined to rhythm as in *boogie-woogie, helter-skelter*…).

🔸 **Vietnamese word formation:** A new word in Vietnamese is created by three predominant processes: conversion, compounding, and reduplication.

As mentioned by Châu (2004), **conversion** is the method used to change the meaning of a word without changing its form. The new word and the original word have the same spelling and

pronunciation but they have completely different meaning. For example, the word "ốc" can either be understood as snail – a kind of animal or a nut in technical field.

As for **compounding**, Bình (2001) claimed that there are three types of compounds in Vietnamese. The first one is coordinate compounds which are formed by two morphemes, neither of which modifies the other one, such as *quần áo* (*clothes*), *mua bán* (*purchase and sell*). The second type is subordinate compounds which are formed by two morphemes, one of which modifies the other one, such as *xe đạp* (*bicycle*), *xe máy* (*motorbike*). Many morphemes in this type may be regarded as affixes. Vietnamese has very limited affixation. Only prefixation and suffixation are attested. Some examples of prefixes are *bán* (*half*) as in *bán kính* (*radius*), *bán đảo* (*peninsula*), *bán thời gian* (*part-time*); *siêu* (*better, super*) as in *siêu thị* (*supermarket*), *siêu nhân* (*superman*), *siêu phàm* (*superordinary*)… Some examples of affixes are *gia* (*profession*) as in *chính trị gia* (*politician*), *triết gia* (*philosopher*), *sử gia* (*historian*); *học* (*a field of study*) as in *động vật học* (*zoology*), *ngôn ngữ học* (*linguistics*), *tâm lý học* (*psychology*)… The third type – isolated compounds do not form systems. Such compounds as *mè nheo* (*bother with requests*), *tai hồng* (*a part of bicycle*), *(tre) pheo, (dai) nhách, (đường) sá*… belong to the isolated type of compounds. As discussed by Chử et al (2009), in this type of compound, the meanings of one or sometimes both elements are unclear. However, their presence in the whole word will much affect the meaning and this kind of compound may be the result of desemantic.

Reduplication is a specific type of word-formation in Vietnamese and Vietnamese is also among the languages in the world which most frequently use reduplication (Bình, 2001). In the opinion of Sophana (2002), there are two types of reduplication in Vietnamese: full reduplication (*cào cào, ba ba*) and partial reduplication (*thơ thẩn, ngơ ngác*). These two reduplications can occur with both monosyllabic and disyllabic words, and Sophana then subdivided them into smaller categories, which is, in my opinion, not clear enough. For that reason, the researcher would like to introduce the subdivision of Chử et al. (2009). From their perspective, the longest reduplicative word may have two, three or four syllables. The monosyllabic full reduplication has three sub-types: 1st type (only different intensity) (*lù lù, hây hây*), 2nd type (different tone) (*đo đỏ, háu háu*), 3rd type (different tone and final according to specific rules as m-p, ng-c, n-t, nh-ch) (*ăm ắp, khang khác, chan chát, đành đạch*). The monosyllabic partial reduplication has two sub-types: 1st type (same initial, different vowel, final or tone) (*làm lụng, vồ vập*), 2nd type (different initial, same vowel, final and tone) (*hấp tấp, lập cập*). The disyllabic full/ partial

reduplication are developed from the monosyllabic full/partial reduplication. The disyllabic full reduplication follows AABB pattern (*hùng hùng hổ hổ, vội vội vàng vàng*). The disyllabic partial reduplication follows many different patterns such as ABB (*nhũn nhùn nhùn*), ABC (*xốp xồm xộp, khét lèn lẹt*), ABAC (*vớ va vớ vẩn*), ABCD (*lơ thơ lẩn thẩn*).

Chừ et al. (2009) also pointed out some other word forming processes in Vietnamese as **borrowing**, **clipping**, and **blending**. As for **borrowing**, Vietnamese vocabulary has borrowed from other countries including Chinese, French, and English. **Clipping** is defined as the process of changing a long complicated structure to a short simple one. For example, we often say "*ki lô*" instead of "*ki lô gram*", "*(ông) cử*" instead of "*(ông) cử nhân*"… This trend is not obligatory for every word and the main purpose is for saving in language. Unlike English in which blending is the process of making words from parts of two existing words, **blending** in Vietnamese is defined as breaking the structure of the existing words and adding some more words in. For example, people may say "*lo khổ lo sở*" instead of "*khổ sở*", "*cười ngặt cười nghẽo*" instead of "*ngặt nghẽo*". This formation varies depending on the word play purpose of the speakers.

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

The similarity and difference between the word formation process in English and Vietnamese: according to Bình (2001), Vietnamese is among the languages in the world which most frequently use reduplicatives. Learners should be taught reduplicatives from the beginning through the advanced levels of instruction. Besides, conversion and compounding are also popular processes in Vietnamese. As for English, the most frequently used process should be affixation. Besides, the others are conversion, compounding, and others as blending, clipping, borrowing, coinage… It is these differences that bring about many mistakes and errors for students when learning English. Among those the researcher would like to discuss the most three common errors, and then suggest some remedial ways for teachers and students to overcome the problems.

1. The first one concerns to **affixation**. We can not but agree that affixation helps the students guess the meaning, learn new words, and remember them for a long time. However, there are also some disadvantages. First of all, not every affix has a clear meaning. Sometimes, it is not easy to identify the meaning of some prefixes such as "circum-, contra-, intra-…", especially

when two or more affixes appear in one word such as in the case of *loosen, unloose, unloosen*. And even with the suffixes which have clear meaning, another problem arises as many prefixes share quite the same meaning and the learners are confused which one goes with which words. For example, prefixes "in-, im-, il-, ir-, dis-, un-" all mean "not, or lack of". However, we must use *insecure, impossible, illegal, irregular, dishonest, uninteresting*. Sometimes, two or more affixes can go with one word with different meaning and this causes problems to students such as *misuse* and *disuse*, *invaluable* and *valuable*, *inflammable* and *flammable*. One more thing is about the word stress. Students should know suffixes carry primary stress themselves such as -ee (in *refugee, evacuee*), -eer (in *mountaineer, volunteer*), -esque (in *picturesque*); suffixes that do not affect stress placement such as -able (in *comfortable*), -age (in *anchorage*), -en (in *widen*), -ing (in *amazing*); and suffixes that influence stress in the stem such as -eous (in *advantageous*), -graphy (in *photography*), -ial (in *proverbial*). To overcome these problems, teachers should be careful when introducing the new words and spend time on explaining the meanings when it comes to exceptions.

2. The next one is about **compounding**. Vietnamese learners often make mistakes with compound words. Why? The reason is because compound words in English have a different order from that of Vietnamese. For example, Vietnamese often say "*bãi đậu xe hơi*" (*park car*), "*ban nhạc rock*" (*rock band*), "*nhớ nhà*" (*sick home*) while in English, the proper orders should be the other way around: *car park, rock band,* and *homesick*. Besides, some students cannot tell the difference between a compound word and a grammatical structure. For example: *greenhouse* in "*greenhouse* effect" with *green house* in "we buy a *green house*", *sweetheart* in "she is my *sweetheart*" with *sweet heart* in "she has a *sweet heart*". This problem can be solved provided that the teachers tell the students clearly about the features of compounding. As for the phonological feature, the primary-secondary stress can enable us to contrast compound nouns with grammatical structures. As for syntactic feature, compound words are considered as solid blocks as they cannot be divided by the insertion of any other elements. On the contrary, grammatical structures can be so divided. As for semantic feature, compound words have specialized meanings. Accordingly, knowing the meaning of each element of a compound word does not make it possible to figure out the meaning of the whole combination. For example, the meaning of "egghead" is by no means related to that of "egg" and "head".

3. As for my students, **conversion** is also a big trouble for them. The word classes in Vietnamese are spontaneous and flexible. For that reason, if we apply the same rules when making English sentences, these sentences may be nonsense or grammatically wrong. For example, in Vietnamese, some adjectives can play the role of verbs and nouns as in the sentences "*anh ấy cao*" or "*thông minh là một lợi thế*". These sentences will be translated as "*he tall*, *intelligent is an advantage*". What we should learn is that in Vietnamese, it is quite loose to combine the words while English words are combined by specific rules and collocations. Since there will always be the difference between these two vocabulary systems, it is the teacher's duty to master and anticipate problems the students may meet and help them correct the mistake and enhance their language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

In short, this paper has shown a compare and contrast analysis of word formation between English and Vietnamese. From the mini research, what we can see is that there are both similarities and differences between the word formation processes of two languages. The most visible difference is that affixation is the most popular process in English word formation while in Vietnamese; it is reduplication, compounding, and conversion. Besides, there are still other techniques such as blending, clipping, borrowing… To conclude, it is important to compare, contrast, then master how the words are formed and used in different sentences and contexts. This is one of the key elements to be successful learners. I hope this paper will be of good help for the teachers and students to overcome the very first difficulties when working with this international language and be a good foundation for their language acquisition in the future.

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