

Assessing derivative skills: EFL learners and English word-formation

Lexical awareness and knowledge of e.g. word-formation can greatly enhance vocabulary learning and expand vocabulary. Although general L2 vocabulary knowledge has been widely studied, word-formation and SLA is still a grey area, possibly because there are no established tools to assess word-formation skills. Our paper evaluates three different methods of assessing EFL learners' derivative skills and relates these skills to their general language proficiency.

The study is part of the CEFLING project that looks at how L2 proficiency develops across Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels (www.jyu.fi/cefling). The participants (n=250) were Finnish 7 – 9th graders who had studied English for 4 – 6 years. They completed a three-part word-formation test that included receptive and productive tasks and made use of both real and invented English words. Each participant also completed four writing tasks that were assessed using the CEFR-scale.

We first report on how students' word-formation skills were related to their writing ability. We then focus on the evaluation of the three word-formation tests methods as measures of word-formation skills. We pay special attention to the non-word test because a similar test has not to our knowledge been used before for this purpose. We discuss such general factors as familiarity of the test method and the role of general word knowledge, as well as such test-specific factors as the frequency of the words / affixes used in a particular test, and the suitability of the tests for learners at different proficiency levels.