

E- Morphology – English grammar in practice

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Abstract

The paper deals with e-learning programme called E-Morphology, which has been worked out within the project of the Ministry of Education in Slovakia for university students at the Department of English and American studies at the Faculty of Humanities at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, and for those students at the Faculty of Pedagogy and the Faculty of Arts at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The linguistic subject focussing on the English grammar on upper intermediate - advanced level is essential for future translators and interpreters as well as future teachers studying at both universities. Therefore the e-learning programme has been introduced with the idea to help students practise the English grammar in a modern innovative way. E-Morphology is based on the authentic text material obtained from English newspapers and magazines with the aim to concentrate on those grammar elements which seem to be most difficult for language learners. The team working on the e-learning programme had to compile a large corpus of grammar structures which was used in various exercises of multiple choice, matching, cloze and open exercises and even translation exercises with feedback and percentage achievement. All of them enable students to improve their language skills. Morphemes, word classes, conversion, compounds, grammar categories of nouns, determiners, adjectives, adverbs, verbs and all their categories are the main topics of the e-learning programme which can be used not only by full time students in blended learning, but also by part-time students.

1. Introduction

In the Slovak Republic the 21st century has brought great changes in higher education - electronic form of learning - due to the increase of information and communication technologies. Nowadays in order to make studies more effective Slovak universities have been trying to apply the new form of education in all areas. Teachers involved in various study programmes strive to prepare electronic versions of study materials which could help present course material or practise skills. They participate in international projects, one of them to be mentioned is aimed at legal English called Language4Law. [1] E-learning is now an essential component of education. As stated by Holmes and Gardner [2] it "offers new opportunities for both the educator and the learner to enrich their teaching and learning experiences through virtual environments that support not just the delivery, but also the exploration and application of information." It is an education technology based on exploitation of all technical and didactic methods supported by tutorials which enables autonomous study in students' own free time.

In the paper I will discuss the e-learning programme called E-Morphology which has been worked out within the project KEGA 3/6045/08 subsidized by the Ministry of Education in Slovakia. It is intended for university students at the Department of English and American studies at the Faculty of Humanities at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and those at the Faculty of Pedagogy and the Faculty of Arts at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. The linguistic subject focussing on the English grammar on upper intermediate - advanced level is essential for future translators and interpreters as well as for future teachers studying at both universities. Therefore the e-learning

programme has been introduced with the idea to help students practise the English grammar in a modern innovative way.

2. E-Morphology

English morphology is a linguistic subject dealing with internal structure of words, word classes and their grammatical categories, free and bound morphemes, derivational and inflectional morphemes. It has connections with other linguistic disciplines – phonological, syntactic, lexical or semantic ones. All this has to be taken into account in implementation of the content into individual modules of the e-learning programme. E-Morphology – practical morphology of the English language has been prepared by a team of linguists and experts in information technology from two Slovak universities as we know that e-learning course of the English language is a demanding process which cannot be realized only by linguists. We agree with Davies [3] who claims that it is not necessary for linguists to know the programming language but it is inevitable to co-operate with programmers. It is essential for them to understand the specific particularities when preparing activities and exercises for this type of learning.

Now let me give you a short outline of the activities we were engaged in while preparing E-Morphology. They were divided into three stages.

In the first one we read a great number of articles from newspapers and magazines especially on Internet with the aim to find authentic study material appropriate for exercises which was later selected, analyzed and sorted. We needed to prepare a corpus consisting of sentences with grammar structures in order to prepare various grammar activities which could be used in electronic version of practice book. We tried to choose the best suitable texts on various topics from everyday life and we focused on sentences which could be transferred into various types of exercises based on, e.g.: matching, multiple choice exercises, cloze exercises, substitution, riddles, etc.

In the second stage, the compiled authentic material was turned into grammar exercises of the above mentioned types covering all the issues of English morphology: derivational and inflectional morphemes, conversion, word classes, compounds, grammatical categories of nouns, determiners, adjectives, adverbs and grammatical categories of verbs. In order to avoid interference between English and Slovak, the focus has been on those grammar structures which pose the greatest problems to students. Thus the comparative-contrastive analysis has been frequently used. All these demanding and time-consuming activities resulted in the printed workbook called Practical English Morphology, published in 2009 [4].

The third stage – to prepare the e-learning course to practise English morphology - seems to be the most important one. Though any e-learning course is considered to be attractive, interesting and motivating, yet it has some obstacles and disadvantages [5]. Our endeavour has been to eliminate most of them. We have selected texts for real warm-up exercises and other types of activities in which regular feedback is provided after each assignment so that students can check their responses and revise the study facts. We consider this aid to be the most important for autonomous learning. E-Morphology has a hierarchical structure of modules based on didactic principles using small steps. The content for e-learning course of the given subject is determined by the curriculum of English Morphology, and can be easily modified and innovated by teachers. It enables to incorporate new changing facts and apply them in modules.

During the stages, the following very important factors had to be discussed and finally checked. We examined:

- whether the study material fulfils the goals of individual modules;
- whether it follows the curriculum;



- whether it has a logical structure;
- whether the exercises are appropriate for autonomous learning;
- whether students are properly motivated using warm-up activities;
- whether the instructions and assignments on the display are clear and short;
- whether the feedback is applied after each step;
- whether all possible correct responses have been loaded;
- whether the grammar and spelling is correct;
- whether the exercises will be attractive and interesting for students.

To illustrate the e-learning programme, we can describe a few of the activities.

In the first modules students are expected to work with derivational and inflectional morphemes, word classes, compounds and conversion. The goal is to make students understand the differences between classes of morphemes, to acquire the terminology of word classes and conversion. In the warm-up activity, e. g. sentences by famous personalities (artists, writers, politicians, sportsmen) appear on the display followed by their names below. Students can match the personality to the sentence and check their responses by feedback. The following assignment is to choose free morphemes from the sentences, then analyze bound derivational morphemes using prefixes and suffixes.

Ex.: *un - truth - ful*
un - doubt - ed - ly
free - dom

The third exercise is based on selection and matching. Lexemes are numbered and suffixes are marked by alphabetic characters. The task is to create more words from one root by picking the appropriate alphabetic characters and matching them to numbers of nouns and adjectives:

Ex.: 1. *hero*, 2. *human*, 3. *thick*, 4. *child*
A. *-ize*, B. *-ic*, C. *-ine*, D. *-ity*, E. *-in*, F. *-en*, G. *-ish*, H. *-ly*, I. *-hood*, J. *-less*

In the response students choose 1.B, 1.C, 1.E, in the feedback they can see 1.B heroic, 1.C heroine, 1.E heroin.

The programme has to cover all possible responses (lexemes with derivational morphemes) in the feedback so that the students doing the exercise may check their correct answers.

Another task is also based on matching, here on the upper part of the screen the text is displayed and below students can see the scale of word classes (N - noun, A - adjective, D - determiner, V - verb, P - pronoun, B - adverb, C - conjunction). Their task is to match the lexeme to the letters.

Ex.: *The **fundamental** purpose of language is to make sense.*
A – adjective

Other exercises are based on derivation of nouns from verbs, and adjectives from nouns and verbs. On the display the part for presentation is covered with sentences containing verbs in bold type, these are followed by clauses requiring to be completed by another word class by means of word formation processes – conversion and derivation.

Ex.: *Supply a noun corresponding to the verb in bold.*
1. A scientist **observes**. - He makes

2. He **notices** facts. - He takes of facts.

3. He **solves** problems. - He finds to problems.

Riddles are also very popular and can be a good alternative to traditional exercises. In practising compounding students can see the hint Guess what it is. They complete the sentences with the correct answers and check their responses in the feedback.

Ex.: 1. A place where buses start and finish their journeys is

2. A set of shelves for keeping books on is

3. A large piece of wood or plastic that you cut meat on is

4. *The act of having a baby is*

As can be seen from the few examples given, E-Morphology has been worked out following the specific functions which are essential for e-learning.

The interactive function between a student and a computer is realized by the given task and response checked by feedback.

The audio-visual function has impact upon sense-perception. The size of letters, types of fonts, colour scheme and contrast have a considerable effect on concentration on study and practice.

The function of directed autonomous study helps to configure individual modules according to the organization structure so that students can proceed step by step in a directed way though they can make a choice and do any activity and even do the same exercise a few times.

This is connected with the function of autonomous learning which implies student's individual planning and schedule. The advantage is that he can study in his free time and at his own pace, he can consult any grammar book, even on-line study material to be able to respond successfully.

The interdisciplinary function rests in combination of morphology and methodology and the competitive or evaluative function enables students to see their success in feedback.

In order to eliminate the negative feeling of failure we suggest gradation of evaluation according to points achieved in practising, i.e. written encouragement after each exercise, e. g. "Very good. Keep practising.", or "Look at the theoretical part once more and keep practising.", and after all exercises of the particular module which were successfully accomplished, we suggest written praise "Excellent! You are a diligent student."

All these functions have been incorporated in the e-learning modules and we hope they will make E-Morphology effective and popular with students.

3. Conclusion

E-learning offers unique opportunities, we have tried to explore and apply them in E-Morphology, which has been completed and now is being piloted at both universities to see what is to be corrected or reformulated. The preliminary results show that the electronic version of practical morphology will serve both full and part-time students in distance learning and contribute to the acquisition of language skills which are essential for future translators and interpreters as well as teachers.

References

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