

A Brief Analysis on the Changes of English Words in US TV Series

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Abstract: The three most important aspects in English study are pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Nevertheless, as the basis of English study, vocabulary hasn't received as much attention as the other two. If morphology can be integrated into English teaching and learning, and word formations can be used more efficiently, the effectiveness of vocabulary study will be increased accordingly. In the American TV series *Friends*, there are lots of intriguing changes of words in the lines. Native speakers use these word changes to make their communication concise and fluent, and sometimes to create an atmosphere of humor. By studying these word changes, this paper aims to summarize practical ways to help English learners better understand word formations through which new English words might be memorized more easily.

Introduction

As we all know, words play a fundamental role in English study. Words are the very basic units of language, which will further form phrases and sentences. Then technically what is a "word"? According to Hu Zhuanglin, three aspects are closely concerned with the definition of word. Words are firstly concerned with meaning. They are not simply a combination of letters that can be pronounced by speakers. Secondly, a word is a semantic unit, which consists of one or more morphemes. Finally, a word can stand alone in the sense of phonology, in terms of its structure, and in terms of its grammatical performance ([1] Hu, 2017: 47-49).

A closely related term is morphology, which is the study of the internal structure, forms, and classes of words ([2] Liu Runqing, 2006: 52). In other words, it studies how morphemes, the minimal unit of language that has its own meaning, are combined to form words. There are two sub-divisions of morphology, derivational morphology and inflectional morphology. In derivational morphology, two significant ways of word changes, derivation and compound, are included. Apart from derivation, compound, and inflection, there are other means of word formation, such as coinage, conversion, blending, abbreviation, analogical creation, back-formation, and borrowing, etc. These are all useful and indispensable in the development of words, thus becoming important in the learning of words.

Nowadays, more and more Chinese people are learning English as a foreign language, and most of them would start from learning new English words. Indeed, learning new words in the process of learning English is just like constructing the foundation in building a new house. As their vocabulary is enlarged, the learners will find that some words are connected with others. For example, *ad* is the abbreviation of *advertisement*, *uncertain* is the opposite of and is also derived from *certain*, and *windmill* is the combination of *wind* and *mill*. By observing and using these ways of word formation,

learners can memorize more words within shorter period of time. Moreover, learning word-formation and morphology is an interesting process itself.

Friends is an American TV sitcom, which centers on six old friends, who live in Manhattan, New York, and describes the ten-year storms they have gone through together. It was broadcast on NBC from September 22, 1994 to May 6, 2004, with a total of 236 episodes in 10 seasons. It is an undeniable truth that David and Marta are very good at using words to shape characters and express characters' feelings. In the series, there are many classic changes of word that can greatly help us with the learning and flexible use of morphology.

Morphology and Word Changes in English

Studying words is one of the most fundamental and most important ways in English learning. The study of words in linguistics is called morphology. Morphology and word building play a very important role in English teaching and learning. Therefore, learning morphology and word building is very significant in English learning process.

Definitions of Some Morphological Terms. Morphology is a basic branch of linguistics. It is concerned with how words are organized internally. Morpheme is the smallest meaningful units in a language, and morphology looks into how the morphemes are arranged to form words. It has two sub-divisions, inflectional morphology and derivational morphology. Derivational morphology can also be called word formation, which is mainly composed of compound and derivation, two critical ways of word formation. Inflectional morphology is concerned with inflection only.

Words are the unit of expression that may be recognized by native speakers by their intuition, no matter in spoken or written forms. Words are the most stable linguistic units in terms of their internal structure. They possess a trait called relative uninterruptibility, which means that new elements are not allowed to be inserted into a word even when it possesses several, and nor is one allowed to use pauses between different parts of a word. Also, word is the smallest unit which can constitute a complete utterance all by itself. ([1] Hu, 2017: 47-49)

Morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language, which cannot be further divided without thoroughly altering or destroying the grammatical or lexical meaning. Morpheme can be divided into free morpheme and bound morpheme.

Morphs are certain phonological and orthographical forms that are needed to represent morphemes. Some morphemes can be realized by more than one morph depending on the context in which they occur, and each of them is an allomorph of that morpheme. Allomorphs are phonological or orthographic variants of the same morpheme. ([2] Liu Runqing, 2006: 56)

Affix is a collective term describing a type of morpheme which can be used only when added to another morpheme. It has four subtypes, i.e. prefix, suffix, infix, and circumfix. All the affixes are bound morphemes. ([1] Hu, 2017:55-56) Root refers to the base form of a word, and it cannot be further analyzed without destroying its form and meaning ([1] Hu, 2017: 54). A root morpheme is indispensable in all words, and there are bound roots and free roots. Stem refers to a morpheme or a combination of morphemes, to which an inflectional affix can be added. It can be equivalent either to a root, or to a root and a derivational affix. ([1] Hu, 2017: 55)

Morphology in English Teaching and Learning. After Chomsky proposed the difference between linguistic competence and linguistic performance in his theory, transformational generative grammar, we know that vocabulary knowledge is a part of linguistic competence. Vocabulary determines language skills to a large extent. Linguist Wilkins also emphasized the importance of vocabulary: without grammar, we can express very few things, but without vocabulary, we cannot express anything. Vocabulary is the cornerstone of language. Vocabulary learning is the basic skill

in English learning. ([3] Liu Xinqian,2012)

Therefore, how we use morphology in English teaching and learning has been a great issue among English teachers. English majors in most Chinese universities are offered the course of English Lexicology, so they can have a better understanding and mastery of English vocabulary learning. However, the study of lexicology should not be confined to English majors, and other English learners should also have some knowledge of lexicology which can help to improve their English study.

In order to enable students to learn and memorize a large number of words effectively, teachers must be proficient in the basic methods of vocabulary formation, and skillfully design teaching activities to impart relevant words to students so that they can memorize a large number of words in a relatively short time. Thus, even in the vast sea of words, students can take a word as the center, associate all relevant words to it, and find out the connections according to different word-building methods. Teachers should also teach students how to memorize many related words by memorizing one word and learning many words from the basic method of word formation in their daily English vocabulary teaching. They should give full play to students' enthusiasm in the process of memorizing words, improve students' interest in learning and change the traditional boring ways of reciting words.

Approaches of Word Changes in English

There are many ways of word formation in English. For instance, *cola* and *nylon* are created in the recent decades along with the creation of the products. Sometimes a word can have different word classes and mean different things by itself without changing its shape; some relatively short words are the abbreviation of longer words; and some organizations would use a combination of the initial letters of their full name to represent them. Some nouns are derived from the verbs that share the same root with them. Also some words have their historical origin. After learning word formation, learners will find the fun of lexicology and the fun of learning words. Also, it will be easier for them to memorize more words during the same time.

Derivation. Derivation is one of the most basic ways of word formation. In terms of morphology, it refers to the process when a derivational morpheme is attached to a root or a stem. It is otherwise known as affixation when new words are derived from old ones through the adding of affixes. ([4] Wang, 2011:72) The result of the process is a derived word.

There are mainly two types of affixes in English, prefixes and suffixes. Prefixes refer to those morphemes which are attached to the beginning of another morpheme, while suffixes are those attached to the end of another morpheme. Derivational morphemes are very productive in making new words and they usually change the lexical meaning of the words. Derivational morphemes may change the word class or may not, as the relationship between *small* and *smallness* for the former and that between *brother* and *brotherhood* for the latter.

Conversion. Conversion, which can also be called zero derivation, involves no affixes being attached to the root or stem. Conversion involves a change in the word class of a word. The form of the word remains the same, but it realizes a different lexical item. ([4] Wang, 2011: 76)

Compounding. Compounding refers to a process of combining two lexemes, rather than a lexeme and an affix into a new word. The newly formed word is called compound word or compound. The combinations that occur in English are nearly limitless. When the two words which are added together are in the same grammatical category, the compound will be in the same category; otherwise, its meaning is indeterminate. ([4] Wang, 2011:79-80)

Abbreviation. Abbreviation is regarded as one of the minor means in English word formation. It

means to express a word or words in a more concise way. And three highly productive ways of abbreviation, namely, clipping, initialism, and acronym, are summarized below.

Clipping is a way of word formation in which a longer word is shortened by cutting a part of it to become a shorter form which has the same meaning with the original one. In general, we use the longer word in more formal occasions and use the clipped one in less formal conversations. Sometimes, the clipped word would become more and more popular and replace the original one.

Initialism refers to a way of word formation in which a new word is made by the initial letters of a word or a string of words and is pronounced by saying each letter one by one. For example, *WTO* is the initialism of *World Trade Organization*. This type of word-formation is frequently used in bureaucracies and organizations.

Acronym, like initialism, is a way of shortening that the word is composed of the initial letters of a phrase. What is different from initialism is that the word formed is pronounced as a single word. For example, *TOFEL* is the acronym of *Test of English as a Foreign Language*.

Some Other Minor Approaches. **Blending** is also a type of word-formation, in which joining part of one word and part of another word to form a new word. Words formed by this way are called blends. Borrowing, also called loan, refers to a process in word formation where words are borrowed from other languages. Inflection is one of the most basic ways of word formation. It does not give rise to a different lexeme, but just creates different forms of the same lexeme. For the definitions of clipping, initialism, acronym, blending, borrowing and inflection, one may consult Liu Runqing (2006), Wang Rongpei (2011) and Hu Zhuanglin (2017) for reference.

Applications of Word Changes in *Friends*

Since it is based on some situations in real life, the lines of *Friends* are authentic, especially to English learners. When the characters in the show want to express something but they cannot find a proper word in English, they sometimes create a new one according to the situation where they are. So the language of this TV series is also flexible. Moreover, *Friends* is a classic and humorous TV series, loved by many people. There are lots of typical examples of word changes in *Friends*. Some of them use one kind of means at one time; also some words are formed by more than one means simultaneously. With these situational examples, different means of word formations will be better understood and grasped.

Application of Derivation

Example 1:

Rachel: But see, it was a plan. You know, it was clear, and everything was figured out. And now everything is just kinda like...

Phoebe: Floopy?

Rachel: Yeah.

Monica: So what, you're not the only one. I mean, half the time we don't know where we're going. You've just gotta figure at some point it's all gonna come together, and it's just gonna be...*un-floopy*.

Phoebe: Oh, like that's a word.

This is a scene where Rachel was complaining about life. Monica tries to comfort her and in her words she skillfully uses a prefix *un-* to change Phoebe's adjective *floopy* into its opposite *unfloopy* to suggest Rachel that life will go well finally.

Example 2:

Rachel: But, uh, did you guys wrestle?

Monica & Ross: Oh-oh, yeah.

Rachel: Well, I met Danny's sister yesterday, and uh that was actually the girl on the subway. Yeah, they were very, y'know...*wrestley*.

Wrestle is a verb, and Rachel added a -y after it to make it an adjective.

Example 3:

Ross: What is Chandler Bing's job?

Monica: It has something to do with numbers! And processing!

Rachel: He carries a briefcase!

Monica: Something to do with transponding.

Rachel: He's a transponster!

Monica: That's not even a word!

Rachel, Monica, Joey, and Chandler were playing games to see whether the girls or boys know much more about the others. And Chandler's job is ironic throughout the show because no one knows what it exactly is. Here Rachel made a word by herself in the way of derivation.

Application of Conversion

Example 4:

Rachel(Reading a newspaper): Oh, my God! It's Barry and Mindy!

Monica: Barry, who you almost...

Rachel: Barry, who I almost

Monica: And Mindy, your maid of...

Rachel: Mindy, my maid of

Monica (taking the newspaper): Let me see. That's Mindy? She *ispretty*! (With Rachel glaring at her) lucky...to have a friend like you!

Here Monica was very smart to change the word pretty from an adjective to an adverb. In this way, who she complimented is Rachel rather than Mindy.

Example 5:

Rachel: I'm a chef at a restaurant uptown. Mostly because I get to boss people around, which I just love to do.

We use boss as a noun in most circumstances. But boss can be either a noun or a verb. Here in the phrase boss around, boss is used as a verb.

Example 6:

Phoebe: Here's Joseph Francis!

Joey: Wait, what are you middle-naming me for?

Name is also a word can be either noun or verb. Here is an example that it is used as a verb. And middle-name is also a compound.

Example 7:

The girl who works at the copy shop: He comes in with stuff, he wants to blow up 400%. We say we don't do that. He says, "You gotta." You know what? We did it. And now anytime anybody wants 400, we just say, "Let's Ross it."

The girl told the story with a conversion of *Ross* from a noun to a verb. From this process of word formation, we can imagine a lot of words created after a person.

Application of Compounding

Example 8:

Ross: About that bump on his head...

Rachel: No offense. But I've always thought of Ben as a fairly bumpy-headed child.

Here bumpy-headed is a synthetic compound, which involves not only the process of derivation (from the noun *bump* to the adjective *bumpy*) and the process of compounding. Also, it is an

endocentric or attributive compound with headed as its center.

Example 9:

Colleen: Well, actually, I think this might help. It's pretty much... all the information you need. Everything is broken into categories, and then cross-referenced. Then color-coded to correspond with the forms in the back.

This monologue appears in the scene in which Monica and Chandler went to Phoebe's friends Bill and Colleen's home to ask some information about adoption and Colleen brought Monica a pile. Here cross-referenced and color-coded are both endocentric/attributive compounds.

Example 10:

Tag: I haven't worked in an office before. I don't have much experience...but I'm a goal-oriented person, eager to learn...

At last Tag was hired but we know that it wasn't because he is a goal-oriented person but because he is an attractive guy. Here goal-oriented is also an endocentric or attributive compound.

Example 11:

Monica: I don't think you could keep it a secret.

Chandler: What? I am an excellent secret-keeper. I have kept all our secrets.

In the process of forming the compound secret-keeper, it involves not only compounding, but also derivation in which a suffix -er is added to the word keep and it turns to keeper, so it is a synthetic compound. Moreover, it is an endocentric/attributive compound.

Application of Abbreviation. There are three sub-categories under this type of word formation, but here we will mainly discuss two of them.

Application of Initialism

Example 12:

Phoebe: According to her high school yearbook, they were *BFF*.

(Others being confused)

Phoebe: *Best Friends Forever*.

BFF is the initialism of *Best Friends Forever*. Maybe it is because back then that the other five do not know its meaning, but with the development of Internet and other technologies, *BFF* is more frequently used nowadays.

Example 13:

Rachel: Might I suggest watching a little more ESPN...and a little less E!

Here is a scene where Rachel helped Chandler with his wedding suit, and Chandler knew a lot of movie stars but few sports stars. So Rachel suggested him watching Entertainment Sports Programming Network more.

Application of Acronym

Example 14:

Rachel: I wiped table for it. I steamed milk for it, and it was totally...not worth it. Who's FICA? Why's he getting all my money?

Here FICA is the acronym of Federal Insurance Contributions Act. We all know that Rachel comes from a rich family with her father as a doctor, and she just started her own life without supporting from her father. So it's reasonable that she doesn't know what FICA is.

Example 15:

Joey: I talked to one of the DOOL writers...

Chandler: What is DOOL?

Joey: Days of Our Lives.

In this example, DOOL is an acronym created by Joey in order to conveniently call the show he

is in. From this we can see that those native speakers use English very flexibly.

Application of Blending

Example 16:

Joey: Wouldn't it be cool if our duck and our chick had a baby? We could call it Chuck.

Joey is the most childish one among the six protagonists. Here he had a funny but ignorant idea that duck and chick could mate. Chuck is a blend of the beginning of the word chick and the end of the word duck.

Example 17:

Monica: Oh gush, it would be perfect. We get to see Joey, plus we get to start our anniversary celebration on the plane. We can call it out plane-aversary. Think of how excited he'll be when we go out and surprise him! Plus we get to have our own, ani-Vegas-ary!

In this paragraph of Monica's exciting monologue to Chandler, she used blending twice, plane-aversary and ani-Vegas-ary. The former is formed by joining the word plane to the end of the word anniversary, and the latter blends the word Vegas into the word anniversary.

Example 18:

Joey: How about this? I vamp a little till they get there.

Monica: You'll "vamp"?

Joey: Yeah, like warm up the crowd. Ask where they're from. Because in Joey Tribbiani, you get a minister and you get an entertainer. I'm a 'ministainer', all right?

This is a scene where Joey was prepared to be the minister in Monica and Chandler's wedding. He wanted to entertain the guests till his parents got to the wedding then he started the ceremony. Here ministainer is a blend formed by the beginning of the word minister and the end of the word entertainer.

Example 19:

Joey: We could talk and play games. This could be our chance to, like, renew our friendship.

Phoebe: Are you asking me to have a frienaissance?

Here Phoebe put joins the beginning of the word friend and the end of the word renaissance together to form a new word *frienaissance*, which means bring something refresh to a friendship.

Application of Borrowing

Example 20:

Chandler: We can play a new game. A new game, it's fun!

Joey: What's it called?

Chandler: Cups.

This is a scene where Chandler was moving to live with Monica and he wanted to give Joey some money but also to be unnoticed by Joey. So he played soccer with him, but Joey lost accidentally. So he has to make up this fake game Cups. The word Cups is not borrowed, but in this situation they are playing games with poker, though not in the regular rule of Bridge. Chinese people just borrowed the word Bridge from English and called it “桥牌”. In the same sense, the word Cups here is translated as “杯牌”.

Application of Inflection

The following is an example that is more like an example of conversion, but it does have something to do with the plural form of noun.

Example 21:

Joey: You said you were gonna wear a thong. Where's the thong?

Charlie: I didn't mean a thong. I mean thongs.

Isn't it funny that when the word *thong* is used in singular form, it means a kind of underwear;

while when it is used in plural form, it means a kind of slippers.

Conclusion

In English learning, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are the three most important aspects. Not as pronunciation and grammar, vocabulary receives less attention. And there are few theses in morphology. Fortunately, more and more teachers and learners in second language teaching and learning are paying more attention to vocabulary in recent days.

The relationship between lexicology and vocabulary teaching and learning lies in teaching and learning vocabulary systematically instead of reciting words one by one. When learning new words, we should dig deeper to find its related forms and memorize them together. In this way, we can learn several words using almost the same time with that used when learning one word. Moreover, memorizing words by word-formation can intensify our memory. Related words can fortify each other in people's brain.

As English majors, watching English and American TV series is not only entertaining but also necessary. They can help us improve our pronunciation, enlarge our vocabulary, and modify our grammar. If we pay more attention to the subtitles, we can find many intriguing word changes and they are very authentic because they are used by native speakers. However, watching English TV series is not exclusive for English majors. Anyone who learns and loves English can perfect his or her English in this way. *Friends* is a classic American TV series, and it includes many word changes, which the audiences would notice if they pay more attention to the lines. After going through a brief word change process in their mind, they can remember a couple of words at one time. Moreover, those lines in *Friends* are authentic materials, which are indeed helpful for English learning. At the same time, learners can feel the fun of lexicology.

To sum up, memorizing English words with the help of lexicology is a useful way. We should pay more attention to it and help students use this means as early as possible instead of till high school or even university. In the future research and study, we need to learn the relationship between lexicology and vocabulary learning more and help English learners build their vocabulary basis better.

This thesis is a preliminary exploration, and I hope that this thesis could bring the influence that people could have more opportunities to do more research about the topic.

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