FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

STRUCTURAL DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGY AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AMONG FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the pedagogical application of structural derivational morphology in enhancing English vocabulary development among first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University. In many Vietnamese tertiary EFL contexts, vocabulary learning still depends heavily on memorization and translation, which limits students' ability to recognize word families, interpret affixes, and use derived forms effectively. Using a qualitative case-study design, the research draws on interviews with 25 students and 05 lecturers, 04 classroom observations, and analysis of 06 instructional documents. The data were coded and analyzed thematically to identify learners' difficulties, current teaching practices, and pedagogical needs. The findings show that students commonly struggle with affix meaning, grammatical shifts across word classes, and semantic relations within word families. The study also suggests that explicit instruction in derivational morphology can enhance morphological awareness, vocabulary retention, inferencing ability, and learner autonomy. A structural derivation framework is therefore proposed as a practical strategy for vocabulary instruction in Vietnamese higher education.

KEY WORDS: Affixation; derivational morphology; morphological awareness; thematic analysis; word formation

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary development remains a cornerstone of second language acquisition; however, it continues to pose persistent challenges for English-major students in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, including Vietnam (Sukying, 2020). While university learners may gradually improve their grammatical knowledge and receptive reading skills, their lexical competence – particularly their ability to recognize, interpret, and produce derived forms – often remains limited (Schmidtke et al., 2022). In English, derivational morphology plays an important role in vocabulary expansion because it allows learners to understand how new words are formed through prefixes and suffixes, how word classes shift, and how meaning changes across related lexical items (Jiang, 2020; Kotowski & Plag, 2023). For this reason, derivational morphology is not only a matter of linguistic structure but also a practical resource for vocabulary growth, inferencing, and long-term retention (Wang, 2023). Recent studies have increasingly emphasized morphological awareness as a strong predictor of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Sukying (2020) found that learners who could analyze morphemic structure acquired and retained vocabulary more effectively, while Nielsen et al. (2022) similarly highlighted the contribution of morphological knowledge to vocabulary growth and meaning inference. In particular, derivational morphology enables learners to identify semantic and grammatical relationships among word families such as educate, education, educator, and educational. Such relationships support a more analytical and generative mode of vocabulary learning, allowing students to move beyond isolated word recognition toward a broader understanding of how lexical systems are organized. Despite its theoretical and pedagogical significance, derivational morphology has often occupied a marginal position in university EFL instruction in Vietnam (Le, 2023; Vo et al., 2022). In many classrooms, vocabulary learning is still

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dominated by translation, rote memorization, and short-term test-oriented practices. As a result, students may know a large number of individual words but still struggle to interpret unfamiliar derivatives, recognize affix meanings, or use appropriate word forms in reading and writing tasks (Tran, 2024; Vo et al., 2022). Morphology, when taught, is often presented as supplementary linguistic knowledge rather than as a systematic strategy for vocabulary development, creating a noticeable gap between linguistic theory and classroom practice. As Yu (2024) argues, vocabulary instruction becomes more effective when morphological insight is integrated with semantic and contextual understanding.

At Hanoi Law University (HLU), this issue is especially relevant for first-year English-major students. As beginning university learners, they are transitioning from general English learning to more academic and discipline-oriented language use. At this stage, vocabulary growth is essential not only for language proficiency but also for academic adaptation (Nielsen et al., 2022; Zeng et al., 2025). However, preliminary classroom observations and teaching experience indicate that many first-year students still depend heavily on surface memorization and have limited awareness of word-family relations, affix functions, and semantic shifts across derived forms. Similar patterns have been reported in Vietnamese tertiary EFL settings, where learners often show limited depth of vocabulary knowledge despite considerable exposure to English instruction (Le, 2023). These difficulties affect their ability to decode unfamiliar vocabulary, expand lexical knowledge independently, and apply vocabulary flexibly in communication. Although previous studies (e.g., Vo et al., 2022; Yu, 2024; Zhang, 2022) have discussed morphological awareness and vocabulary learning in general, fewer studies have examined how structural derivational morphology can be applied to address the actual vocabulary-learning difficulties of first-year English-major students in a specific Vietnamese university context. This is the gap that the present study seeks to address. Rather than restating derivational morphology as a purely theoretical concept, the study begins with a concrete pedagogical problem and explores how a structured morphology-based approach may support vocabulary development in practice (Tran, 2024; Twardzisz, 2020). Therefore, this study investigates the application of structural derivational morphology in enhancing English vocabulary among first-year English-major students at HLU. It aims not only to identify learners' difficulties in dealing with derived forms, but also to propose a structural derivation framework grounded in classroom realities. In doing so, the study contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of morphology-based vocabulary instruction in Vietnamese higher education. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What difficulties do first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University encounter in learning English vocabulary through derivational morphology?

2. How can structural derivational morphology be pedagogically applied to support vocabulary development among first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University?

3. How does the proposed structural derivation framework help improve learners' morphological awareness and vocabulary use in this context?

2. Methods and materials

Research design

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to investigate the pedagogical application of structural derivational morphology in enhancing English vocabulary development among first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University. A case-study approach was selected because it allowed the researchers to examine the issue in a specific educational context rather than treating derivational morphology as a purely theoretical topic. Drawing on Lune and Berg's (2016) qualitative perspective, the study combined descriptive and interpretive analysis of interview, observation, and documentary data to explore learners' difficulties with derived forms and to propose a context-sensitive structural derivation framework for vocabulary instruction.

Research instrument

The study employed three research instruments: a semi-structured interview guide, a classroom observation checklist, and a document analysis matrix. The interview guide was designed to elicit

students' and lecturers' perspectives on vocabulary-learning difficulties, word-formation awareness, and the classroom use of derivational morphology. The observation checklist was used to record how vocabulary and derived forms were introduced, explained, and practiced in class. The document analysis matrix was developed to examine the extent to which derivational morphology was represented in instructional materials and assessment tasks. To ensure analytical transparency, the documentary corpus was explicitly identified and coded. Six instructional documents were selected for analysis: D1 = Course syllabus for the first-year English vocabulary course; D2 = *Module outline on vocabulary and word formation*; D3 = *Lesson plan on prefixes and suffixes*; D4 = *Classroom worksheet on word-family analysis*; D5 = *Vocabulary handout on derivational patterns*; and D6 = *Vocabulary test containing derived-word tasks*. In addition, student interview data were coded as S1–S25, lecturer interview data as L1–L5, and classroom observations as O1–O4. Drawing on Flick's (2018) data triangulation framework, these instruments were used to capture learners' understanding of word formation, semantic interpretation, and morphological application from multiple sources. By combining interview, observation, and document data, the study strengthened the reliability, validity, and theoretical grounding of the analysis.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework. First, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were read repeatedly so that the researchers could become familiar with the dataset. Second, initial codes were generated to capture important patterns related to learners' morphological awareness, vocabulary-learning difficulties, affix interpretation, and classroom practices. Third, these codes were grouped into broader themes such as difficulties in recognizing word families, limited understanding of affix meaning, grammatical confusion across derived forms, and insufficient integration of morphology into vocabulary teaching. The themes were then reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to the aims of the study. On the basis of these themes, the researchers developed a structural derivation framework to show how morphological analysis, semantic mapping, and lexical activation could be integrated into vocabulary instruction for first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University.

Table 1. *Coding scheme for data sources used in the study*

Code	Data source	Description	Quantity
S1-S25	Student interviews	Semi-structured interview transcripts with first-year English-major students at Hanoi Law University	25
L1-L5	Lecturer interviews	Semi-structured interview transcripts with lecturers teaching vocabulary, morphology, or language-skills courses	05
O1-O4	Classroom observations	Observation notes from first-year English classes focusing on vocabulary teaching and the use of derivational morphology	04
D1	Course syllabus	Syllabus of the first-year English vocabulary course	1
D2	Module outline	Outline of the vocabulary or word-formation module	1
D3	Lesson plan 1	Lesson plan on prefixes and suffixes	1
D4	Worksheet 1	Classroom worksheet on word-family analysis	1
D5	Vocabulary handout	Handout introducing derivational patterns and affixes	1
D6	Assessment task	Vocabulary quiz or test containing derived-word items	1

Note. The coding system was designed to ensure analytical transparency and facilitate triangulation across interviews, classroom observations, and documentary materials. Student participants were anonymized as S1-S25, lecturers as L1-L5, observations as O1-O4, and instructional documents as D1-D6.

3. Results and Discussion

The qualitative dataset comprised 25 first-year English-major students (S1–S25), 05 lecturers (L1–L5), 04 classroom observations (O1-O4), and 06 instructional documents (D1–D6). Thematic analysis of the dataset generated four major themes: (1) students' continued reliance on rote memorization and fragmented vocabulary knowledge; (2) limited awareness of affix meaning and grammatical shifts across derived forms; (3) insufficiently systematic integration of derivational morphology in current classroom practice; and (4) the pedagogical value of a structural derivation framework for enhancing vocabulary learning in the HLU context. These themes are discussed below in relation to the research questions.

3.1. Students' current difficulties in learning derived vocabulary

The first major finding concerns the difficulties first-year English-major students experienced when dealing with derived vocabulary. Across student interviews and classroom observations, many learners appeared able to recognize familiar base words, but they often encountered problems when those words were presented in derived forms. Their understanding tended to remain item-based rather than word-family based. In other words, students often learned words separately instead of recognizing the structural and semantic relationships linking them. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that EFL learners frequently develop vocabulary breadth without corresponding depth in morphological awareness (Sukying, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2022). The interview data revealed that many students still relied heavily on rote memorization when learning vocabulary. Their knowledge tended to remain fragmented, with limited awareness of how words were related structurally and semantically. As one student admitted, "I usually learn new words one by one, so when I see another form of the same word, I often do not realize they are related" (S3). Another student similarly noted that "I can remember a word when I study it in a list, but when it appears in a different form in reading, I get confused" (S11). From the lecturers' perspective, this tendency was also clearly observable. As L2 commented, "Many first-year students still learn vocabulary as separate items rather than as members of the same word family." These comments suggest that students' difficulty lies not only in vocabulary size, but also in their limited morphological awareness. Similar patterns were reported by Le (2023) and Vo et al. (2022), who found that Vietnamese EFL learners often rely on memorization and dictionary consultation rather than analytical strategies when learning new vocabulary.

A recurring difficulty involved affix meaning. Many students could identify that a word contained a prefix or suffix, yet they were less certain about the function of that affix or the meaning shift it introduced. This was especially visible when students encountered less familiar academic vocabulary or multiple derived forms built from the same base. In such cases, learners frequently relied on guessing from the surrounding sentence or consulted dictionaries, rather than analyzing the internal structure of the word itself. This suggests that their vocabulary knowledge was still largely dependent on external support rather than on morphological reasoning. This finding is in line with Kotowski and Plag (2023), who argue that recognizing affix form does not necessarily entail understanding derivational meaning or grammatical consequences. This pattern is reflected in the interview comments. One student explained, "Sometimes I know the root word, but when a prefix or suffix is added, I am not sure what the new word means" (S7). Another student stated, "I often confuse noun forms and adjective forms because they look similar, but I do not know how their functions change in a sentence" (S15). From the lecturers' viewpoint, this problem was also recurrent. As L4 observed, "Students may recognize common suffixes such as -tion or -ment, but they do not always understand how these suffixes change meaning and grammatical role." These comments indicate that students'

difficulty is not limited to recognizing form but extends to interpreting semantic and grammatical transformation within derived words. In this respect, the present findings support Nielsen et al. (2022), who emphasize that effective vocabulary development depends not only on word recognition but also on learners' ability to map morphology onto syntax and meaning.

Another common difficulty related to word-class transformation. Students often found it challenging to distinguish how a base word changed grammatically when different suffixes were added. They showed hesitation in moving from verb to noun, adjective to noun, or noun to adjective, especially when the derived form also involved a shift in meaning or syntactic role. This difficulty is significant because grammatical awareness is central to productive vocabulary use in university contexts, where students must not only understand vocabulary in reading but also use appropriate forms in writing and speaking. Similar difficulties have been noted by Schmidtke et al. (2022) and Zeng et al. (2025), who argue that insufficient awareness of derivational relations can hinder both lexical processing and productive language use. This finding directly answers the first research question. The data indicate that first-year English-major students at HLU do not merely face a problem of limited vocabulary size; rather, they face a deeper problem of limited morphological awareness. Their difficulties lie in identifying word-family relations, interpreting affix meanings, and applying derived forms accurately in context. This confirms that derivational morphology is relevant not as an abstract linguistic topic, but as a practical area of need in vocabulary instruction. Compared with earlier studies that addressed morphological awareness in broader terms (e.g., Sukying, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2022), the present study highlights more specifically the pedagogical importance of structural derivational morphology in a Vietnamese university context.

3.2. Current instructional practices and their limitations

The second theme concerns the way vocabulary and morphology were represented in the current teaching context. Data from lecturer interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis consistently showed that derivational morphology was present in the curriculum, but not in a sufficiently systematic or pedagogically central way. Morphology-related content was typically introduced as supplementary knowledge, brief explanation, or isolated exercises rather than as a sustained vocabulary-learning strategy. This finding echoes Le (2023) and Tran (2024), both of whom observed that vocabulary teaching in Vietnamese tertiary EFL settings often remains dominated by translation and form-focused exercises. Document analysis showed that the six instructional materials included some attention to affixes, word formation, and vocabulary extension, but these components were often fragmented. In several materials, derived forms appeared mainly in exercises that required students to choose the correct form of a word, rather than in tasks that helped them understand semantic relationships across word families. As a result, students were asked to produce correct answers, but were not always guided to analyze why a particular form was appropriate or how it related to other members of the same lexical family. In comparison with the more explicit morphology-based approaches recommended by Afri and Putra (2021) and Yu (2024), the instructional materials in the present context appeared limited in both depth and systematicity. Classroom observations revealed a similar pattern. Vocabulary instruction tended to emphasize meaning explanation, translation, and immediate task completion. In this process, teachers occasionally pointed out prefixes or suffixes, but morphology was not consistently developed into an explicit analytical strategy. Learners were rarely guided through a sequence of identifying a base word, examining the affix, tracing the semantic shift, and applying the new form in a broader communicative context. Consequently, morphology remained peripheral rather than foundational in vocabulary teaching. This is comparable to Zhang's (2022) argument that in many EFL classrooms, morphology is acknowledged but not sufficiently operationalized as a tool for lexical development.

Both student and lecturer comments supported this finding. One student remarked, "Teachers sometimes explain prefixes and suffixes, but usually only very quickly, so I do not have enough practice to remember them" (S20). A lecturer similarly noted, "Morphology is included in teaching,

but in many lessons, it is treated as supporting knowledge rather than as a central vocabulary-learning strategy" (L1). Another lecturer added, "Because of time pressure, we often move directly to exercise completion instead of guiding students to analyze the internal structure of words" (L5). These comments suggest that although derivational morphology is not absent from classroom instruction, it is still not integrated in a sufficiently systematic or pedagogically sustained way. Similar instructional constraints, especially time pressure and curriculum coverage, have also been mentioned in earlier Vietnamese studies (Le, 2023; Vo et al., 2022). Lecturer interviews further suggested that teachers generally recognized the value of morphology, yet faced practical constraints in implementing it more systematically. These constraints included limited class time, the pressure of completing textbook content, and students' existing habit of learning vocabulary through memorization. This gap between teachers' awareness and classroom practice is important. It indicates that the issue is not a complete absence of morphological content, but rather an absence of instructional organization around that content. In this regard, the present findings refine earlier observations by Tran (2024), showing that the problem lies not only in what is taught, but also in how morphology is pedagogically sequenced and contextualized. This finding helps explain why students' morphological difficulties persist. If derivational morphology is introduced only briefly or incidentally, students may develop partial familiarity with affixes without gaining the deeper awareness needed for independent vocabulary growth. Thus, the problem identified in the first theme is closely linked to the instructional conditions identified in the second. This relationship is broadly consistent with Nielsen et al. (2022), who argue that morphological knowledge develops more effectively when instruction is explicit, cumulative, and meaning-oriented.

3.3. Pedagogical value of structural derivational morphology

The third theme concerns the pedagogical potential of structural derivational morphology as a response to the difficulties identified above. Across the dataset, both lecturers and students showed positive orientation toward a more explicit and structured approach to word formation. Students indicated that when vocabulary was grouped into word families and explained through affix-root relationships, it became easier for them to remember, compare, and use related forms. Lecturers similarly noted that morphology-based explanation could help students move beyond memorizing isolated words and toward understanding patterns. This is in line with Afri and Putra (2021), who found that morphology-based instruction can improve learners' vocabulary organization and semantic processing. This positive perception emerged clearly in the interview data. One student shared, "When the teacher groups words into families, I can understand and remember them better than when I only learn single words" (S9). Another student stated, "Learning prefixes and suffixes helps me guess the meaning of unfamiliar words without checking the dictionary immediately" (S18). From the teachers' perspective, L3 commented that "A more structured approach to derivational morphology could help students become more active and independent in vocabulary learning." These responses indicate that both learners and lecturers see explicit morphological instruction as pedagogically beneficial rather than merely supplementary. Similar learner benefits, particularly in vocabulary inferencing and lexical confidence, have been noted by Yu (2024) and Babatuan and Permangil (2025).

One major pedagogical value of this approach lies in its support for inferencing. When students understand that affixes can signal recurring meanings or functions, they become better equipped to interpret unfamiliar vocabulary. Rather than depending solely on translation, they can use internal word structure as an additional source of meaning. This is particularly useful in university learning, where students increasingly encounter abstract, academic, and discipline-related vocabulary. For first-year English-major students at HLU, this inferential ability is important because they are transitioning toward more advanced academic language use. This finding supports Wang's (2023) view that semantic awareness in derivation enhances learners' ability to process unfamiliar lexical items more strategically. A second value lies in retention. The data suggest that words learned within

semantic and morphological families are easier to retain than words learned in isolation. When students recognize connections among forms such as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb, vocabulary becomes part of an organized network rather than a disconnected list. This relational understanding supports deeper processing and makes recall more sustainable over time. In a similar vein, Schmidtke et al. (2022) suggest that structured morphological processing contributes to stronger lexical storage and retrieval.

A third value concerns learner autonomy. One of the most promising findings from the data is that morphology-based instruction can help students become less dependent on teachers, dictionaries, and one-to-one vocabulary explanation. When learners are trained to analyze structure, they gain a strategy they can apply independently to new words. This has direct relevance for higher education, where autonomous learning is a central expectation. Comparable conclusions were drawn by Zhang (2022) and Yu (2024), who emphasize that morphology-based approaches can support a shift from teacher-dependent learning to more self-regulated lexical development. Overall, these findings answer the second research question. Structural derivational morphology can support vocabulary development not simply by adding more content to the curriculum, but by changing the way vocabulary is organized and taught. It turns vocabulary learning into a process of analysis, connection, and application. Compared with earlier research that focused primarily on general morphological awareness (e.g., Sukying, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2022), the present study places stronger emphasis on the pedagogical usefulness of structural derivational morphology as a classroom-based strategy.

3.4. Proposing a structural derivation framework for morphological and lexical growth

Grounded in the linguistic foundations of derivational morphology, this study proposes a Structural Derivation Framework (SDF) that formalizes how English major students can systematically generate and interpret new words through structured morphological analysis. Drawing conceptually from Lune and Berg's (2016) interpretive structural approach, the SDF positions derivation not merely as a mechanical process but as a cognitive and semantic operation that reveals the interdependence between form and meaning. Within this framework, learners engage with morphology as a dynamic system of word formation, semantic expansion, and grammatical transformation – each contributing to sustainable lexical growth. The framework rests on the premise that derivational affixes interact predictably with base words, enabling learners to trace the logical pathways through which meaning evolves. As shown in *Figure 1*, the process begins when a base word enters a *derivation block*, a conceptual space where several word-formation parameters are active. New words are created by combining the base with one or more morphological operations – prefixation, suffixation, infixation, conversion, or compounding. Each operation follows a definable rule that shapes both structure and meaning, forming what may be called *the five derivation rules*.

Rule 1: *base word* + *suffix* = *new word*

Rule 2: *base word* + *prefix* = *new word*

Rule 3: *base word* + *infix* = *new word* (The infix does not introduce a separate lexeme but alters internal structure, as in phonological deformation within certain roots.)

Rule 4: *base word* + *conversion* = *new word* (e.g., verb → noun)

Rule 5: *base word* + *compound* = *new word* (compounding may include one or more bases).

Through these five parameters, the derivation block functions as a structural generator of vocabulary, producing predictable patterns of lexical expansion. When applied in instructional contexts, these rules allow students to deconstruct unfamiliar words and reconstruct meaning based on form–function correlation, reinforcing both comprehension and creativity in language use. The first layer of the framework involves affixal derivation, where prefixes and suffixes extend or alter the meaning of a base. For example, *re* + *establish* produces *re-establish*, while the addition of *-ment* yields *re-establishment*, converting a verb into a noun that denotes the result of an action. Similarly, *consist* + *-ent* → *consistent* and *write* + *-er* → *writer* illustrate how derivational suffixes generate

adjectives and nouns from verbal roots. Such transformations demonstrate that derivational morphology simultaneously expands the lexicon and reshapes grammatical categories - a process essential to vocabulary flexibility in advanced English learning.

Beyond surface combination, derivation also activates semantic innovation. Learners recognize that morphological changes encode conceptual shifts - an agentive meaning in *writer*, a qualitative meaning in *consistent*, or a processual meaning in *re-establishment*. As Kotowski and Plag (2023) observe, this analogical awareness allows learners to infer meaning even from unseen derivatives, fostering autonomy in vocabulary acquisition. By mastering these patterns, students begin to interpret derivation as a *semantic architecture* - a network of relationships linking roots and affixed forms. The directionality of affixation represents another vital component of the SDF. Prefixes typically modify the lexical meaning without altering grammatical class (e.g., *re-assess* → *reassess*), whereas suffixes often reshape both semantics and category (e.g., *re-assess* + *-ment* → *reassessment*). When both are applied, learners encounter layered derivation, as meaning refinement and grammatical transformation occur concurrently. This structured layering aligns with cognitive models of incremental word growth (Schmidtke et al., 2022), supporting progressive understanding rather than isolated memorization.

The Derivation Block model (*Fig. 1*) visualizes these interactions. The base word passes through a block containing morphological parameters - prefix, suffix, infix, conversion, and compounding - any of which may act independently or in combination. The output is a set of *new words* whose meanings remain traceable to their base through identifiable rules. This visual representation transforms morphological theory into a tangible learning scaffold: learners can visualize how each affixation pathway contributes to meaning, enabling them to reconstruct lexical forms with greater accuracy.

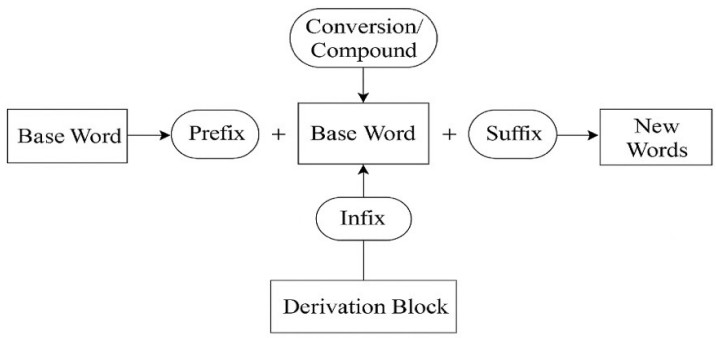

Figure 1. *Structural approach of derivation method*

To demonstrate the framework's practical operation, *Figure 2* applies the derivation block to the base word *break*. This example illustrates how each parameter generates distinct derivatives and meanings:

- Suffixation: Following morphological rules such as *-age*, *-er*, and *-able*, new forms emerge (*breakage, breakable, breaker*).

- Prefixation: The addition of *un-* reverses the meaning (*unbreak*).

- Infixation: Though rare in English, internal change (vowel alternation) produces variants like *broke*, representing morphological deformation.

- Conversion: Shifting grammatical class transforms the verb into a noun, as in *a break in his life*.

- Compounding: Combining bases generates new semantic entities such as *breaking news* or *breakfast*.

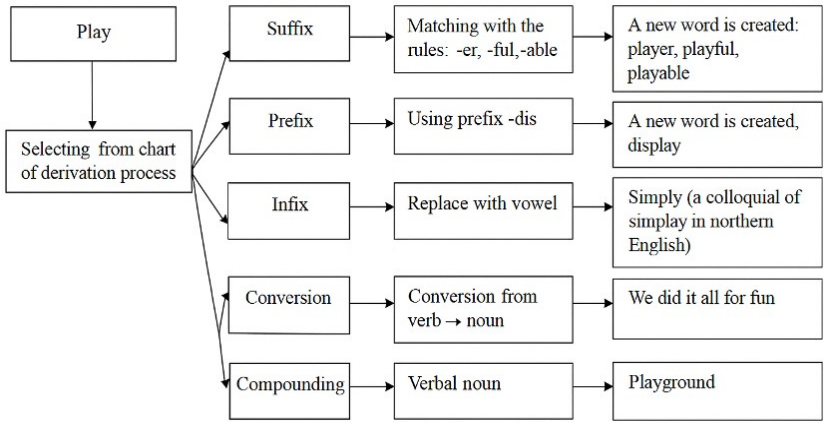

***Figure 2**. Example of the structural deprivation process using the word "play"*

This example encapsulates the generative power of the SDF: a single lexical root can yield multiple derived forms through systematic interaction with structural parameters. For learners, this process demonstrates that word formation is not arbitrary but guided by consistent, replicable principles. Such insight enhances not only morphological knowledge but also overall linguistic intuition, empowering students to predict, decode, and construct vocabulary autonomously. Pedagogically, the Structural Derivation Framework offers a three-phase learning sequence aligned with cognitive and communicative objectives. In the *structural-recognition phase*, learners identify and classify morphemes according to their function; in the *semantic-mapping phase*, they analyze how affixation modifies conceptual meaning; and in the *lexical-activation phase*, they apply derived forms in authentic communicative contexts – reading, writing, and conversation. This cyclical process promotes depth of processing and long-term retention, aligning with contemporary theories of morphological awareness in vocabulary learning. Practically, the framework is particularly suitable for first-year English-major students at HLU because it aligns with their transitional learning stage. They still need explicit guidance, yet they are also ready to develop higher-order analytical skills. Moreover, the framework is flexible enough to be integrated into existing vocabulary, reading, and writing lessons without requiring a completely separate course on morphology. Unlike broader theoretical discussions of morphology, the present framework is directly grounded in the local dataset and is therefore more context-sensitive in addressing the needs of Vietnamese first-year university learners.

4. Conclusion

The study reaffirms the central role of derivational morphology as a catalyst for lexical growth and semantic expansion in English language acquisition. By situating morphology within a structured derivation framework, it demonstrates that vocabulary development is neither incidental nor mechanical but the outcome of deliberate interaction between linguistic form and meaning. The proposed SDF provides a systematic model through which learners - particularly those in EFL contexts - can internalize the generative logic underlying English word formation. It unites structural and cognitive dimensions, enabling learners to perceive words as dynamic systems governed by predictable morphological principles rather than as isolated items to be memorized. Through its five core operations - prefixation, suffixation, infixation, conversion, and compounding - the framework offers a coherent pedagogical mechanism for fostering morphological awareness and productive word formation skills. Furthermore, the SDF foregrounds pattern recognition and analogical reasoning as key cognitive processes in vocabulary acquisition. By encouraging learners to infer meaning from form and to extend derivational rules across lexical networks, it promotes both accuracy and creative flexibility. When semantic mapping and grammatical transformation are

incorporated into a recursive learning cycle, the framework moves beyond traditional form-focused pedagogy toward deeper conceptual engagement. This progression – from morphological recognition to semantic mapping and lexical activation – mirrors natural cognitive pathways, thereby enhancing both retention and transfer of vocabulary across communicative contexts. Equally significant is the framework's potential to bridge theoretical linguistics and classroom practice. Embedding morphological instruction within authentic communicative tasks positions learners as active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of lexical input. This alignment between linguistic theory and pedagogy redefines morphology as an interpretive act that supports conceptual and functional fluency. In EFL settings such as Vietnam, where vocabulary instruction often relies heavily on memorization, the SDF introduces a transformative, learner-centered approach that cultivates analytical thinking, autonomy, and creative language use. Ultimately, it underscores the principle that language mastery develops through recognizing structure as a system of meaning-making. By integrating morphological form, grammatical function, and semantic intent, the framework provides a theoretically grounded and pedagogically robust model for vocabulary development—one that transforms word learning from mechanical accumulation into conceptual insight.

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Hình thái học phái sinh theo cấu trúc và sự phát triển từ vựng ở sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh năm nhất

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này xem xét việc ứng dụng sư phạm của hình thái học phái sinh theo hướng cấu trúc nhằm nâng cao năng lực phát triển từ vựng tiếng Anh cho sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Luật Hà Nội. Trong nhiều bối cảnh dạy và học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ ở bậc đại học tại Việt Nam, việc học từ vựng vẫn chủ yếu dựa vào ghi nhớ máy móc và dịch nghĩa, qua đó hạn chế khả năng của sinh viên trong việc nhận diện họ từ, giải thích ý nghĩa của phụ tố và sử dụng hiệu quả các từ phái sinh. Sử dụng thiết kế nghiên cứu tình huống định tính, nghiên cứu khai thác dữ liệu từ phỏng vấn 25 sinh viên và 05 giảng viên, 04 đợt quan sát lớp học, cùng với việc phân tích 06 tài liệu giảng dạy. Dữ liệu được mã hóa và phân tích theo chủ đề nhằm xác định những khó khăn của người học, thực trạng giảng dạy hiện hành và các nhu cầu sư phạm đặt ra. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên thường gặp khó khăn trong việc hiểu ý nghĩa của phụ tố, nhận diện sự chuyển đổi ngữ pháp giữa các từ loại và xác lập mối quan hệ ngữ nghĩa trong các họ từ. Nghiên cứu đồng thời chỉ ra rằng việc giảng dạy tường minh về hình thái học phái sinh có thể góp phần nâng cao nhận thức hình thái, khả năng ghi nhớ từ vựng, năng lực suy đoán nghĩa từ và tính tự chủ trong học tập của người học. Trên cơ sở đó, nghiên cứu đề xuất một khung phái sinh cấu trúc như một chiến lược thực tiễn cho việc giảng dạy từ vựng trong giáo dục đại học ở Việt Nam.

Từ khoá: Hậu tố; hình thái học phái sinh từ; nhận thức hình thái; phân tích chủ đề; cấu tạo từ.