

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Layers of Language: Influence of Word Origins on Word Structure

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~ Module 13, Session 1~ Lecture Notes

Both word origin and word structure influence English **orthography**, its spelling system. The **etymology** (historical origin) of most English words is either Anglo-Saxon, Latin, or Greek. Word structure refers to the patterns found in words. This structure varies depending on the country of origin. All words contain **letter-sound correspondences**, the symbols and their related sounds. Teaching the letter-sound correspondences relates to the teaching of phonics. Words of more than one syllable contain typical **syllable patterns**, and/or **morpheme patterns**, the meaning units such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. The *Word Origin by Word Structure Matrix* (Power Point slide) provides a framework for decoding and spelling instruction.

The first English words spoken and read are usually based on Anglo-Saxon origins. These common, everyday words are used most often in both speech and writing in the primary grades. Students learn the consonant and vowel letters and their corresponding sounds. Most words in this category are one or two syllable words such as *run, jump, laugh, cry, want, hope, and eye*. Note that some of these words (e.g., *laugh, want, and eye*) are non-phonetic. (NOTE: About 200 very common short words are non-phonetic (or irregular) in their vowel sounds.) Word expansion takes place by compounding two base words (e.g., *rail + road = railroad*), or by affixing, that is adding prefixes and/or suffixes as in *like, unlike, unlikely*. The Anglo-Saxon base words are considered **free morphemes** as they can stand alone. The prefixes and suffixes are **bound morphemes** as they cannot stand alone.

Latin-based words are polysyllabic as the root is almost always affixed with prefixes and/or suffixes as in *struct, construct, and construction*. Consonant and vowel sounds are the same as in Anglo-Saxon based words, although the schwa (a vowel sound in an unaccented syllable) is common. Words from Latin tend to be used in more formal speech and writing. Many content area words in social studies texts and in literature use words of Latin origin.

The words from Greek origin are used primarily in science and math. These words have several unique letter-sound correspondences such as the *ph* in *photograph*, the *ch* in *chromosome*, and the *y* in *physician*. Two roots, usually called combining forms, often compound to make words. For example *phon* (meaning *sound*) and *ology* (meaning *science or study*) form the word *phonology*; the word *philosophy* combines *philo*

(meaning *love*) and *soph* (meaning *wisdom*). While most Greek-based words are found in science and math texts, many are common such as *atmosphere* and *microphone*.

Students gain strategies for decoding (and for spelling) based on understanding the influence of word origin on the structure of words. They learn each of the common prefixes, suffixes, Latin roots, and Greek combining forms, along with their associated meaning.

Therefore, teachers need to be able to teach the concepts inherent in each cell of the 3 x 3 matrix. They need to know about Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and Greek letter-sound correspondences, syllable patterns, and morpheme patterns. The following sessions will provide a brief introduction to the history of written English, lesson format, and instructional strategies for this word-origin by word-structure framework.