

Curricular Materials — Morphology

The final step in basic-skills instruction is to have students extend their understanding of the phonological structure of words to include an understanding of the morphological structure. It is arguably the easiest step for students to take, because it builds on having learned the fundamental features of English (as described previously in the program) and can be facilitated through spelling. The step is essential because the economy of English at advanced levels rests upon morphologically complex words being “worth” whole phrases of simpler words.

Learning begins with students spelling words with morphological components of words already known such as *action*, *vacation*, *animation*; they extend their knowledge by examining morphemes, prefixes, other suffixes, and derivations. Instruction and learning of words with morphological components are possible as soon as students grasp the system of ending patterns (possible as early as the end of second grade). In the graphic representation, the depiction of the morphemes as they appear in words at Levels 4, 5, and 6 conveys that, as morphemes become more numerous, acquiring words to support higher-level language learning is straightforward.

The Words of English

Analyzing and categorizing the word knowledge of proficient readers and spellers led the authors to the conclusion that the fundamental element around which the instruction of the alphabetic principle should be organized was “the words of English mastered by accomplished students.”

As shown in the graphic representation below, approximately 100 words are expected to be learned by beginning readers. Roughly, one-fourth of those words have one-to-one sound/letter correspondences, one-fourth have two-to-one sound/letter correspondences, and half are phonetically irregular. If those words are known or learned using the alphabetic principle, their patterns are key to learning all words. By the time students have mastered the next two hundred words, they have been exposed to all the phonetic features of English; they are prepared to learn inflected endings and other affixes as extensions of what they already know, rather than as new, separate entries in their mental lexicons. Consequently, taking on the huge number of words expected to be learned at the third-grade level is

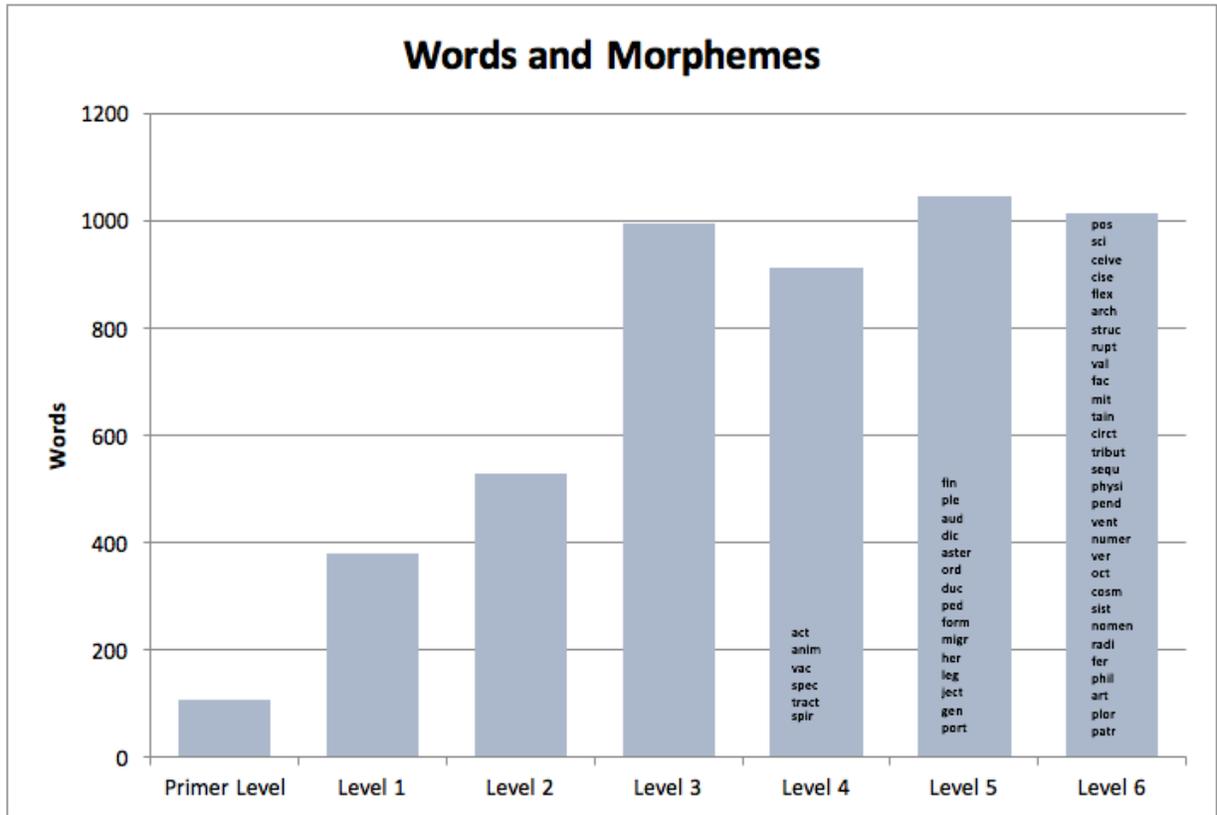


Table 1 – The number of words in each spelling level along with the morphemes introduced in that level.

possible because mental energy is unimpeded when learning vocabulary and accurate spelling representations.

The corpus of words came from Robert Marzano’s research and from the publishers, Houghton-Mifflin and Steck-Vaughn. The words were analyzed phonetically and grouped both according to grade-levels at which they are expected to be known and according to phonological patterns. Surprisingly, there existed fewer phonological patterns than expected; furthermore, they are repeated across grade levels.

Ironically, polysyllabic English is easier to teach than beginning English as will be seen in the instructional material below.