



Dr Maria Korochkina

The words children and young people encounter when they read for pleasure, and what it means for learning

Research and Practice meeting
27 June 2025



CYP-LEX

The Children and Young People's Books Lexicon

1,200 popular books, 400 books per age band

7-9 years



10-12 years



13-16 years



CYP-LEX

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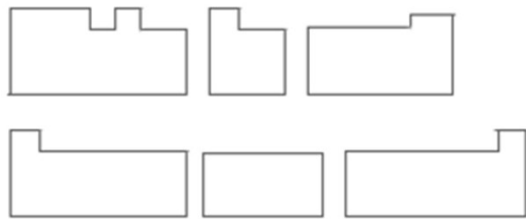


The **lightbulb** moments



Books contain **vast** numbers of words

- Over **70 million words** and **over 100,000** *distinct* words in 1,200 books
- **50,000+** distinct words in the 7-9 age band alone



**This is not
how we read.**



- Memorising words by rote is not an option
- Phonics is key!

Many of these words will be **unfamiliar**

- **40%** of distinct words in books don't appear in children's TV programmes



- **21%** of distinct words in books for children aged 13-16 do not appear on adult TV programmes



Books offer a unique opportunity to build vocabulary...
... but they also present a huge challenge!

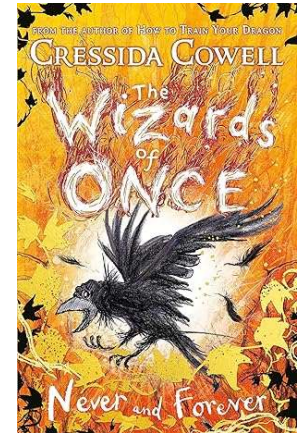
Few words are used repeatedly

The most common 100 words make up about **54%** of the text



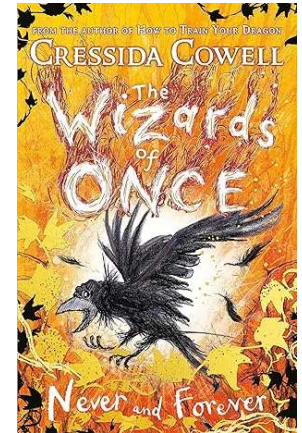
Few words are used repeatedly

“She glared imperiously through the eyeglass at the entire assembly of assorted creatures and humans, giving them all her hardest stare, and through the glass of the monocle the stare actually stung those it landed on, as if they were being pinched by fairies or bitten by midges, in order to make sure they were truly paying attention”.



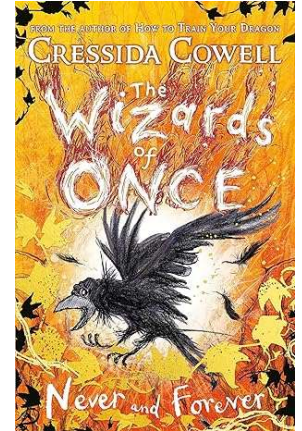
Few words are used repeatedly

"She through the
at the of
and , them all her
, and through the of the
the those it
on, as if they were being by
or by , in to
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Few words are used repeatedly

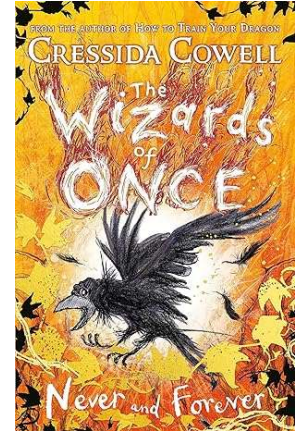
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- Knowing every second word is not enough to read for meaning

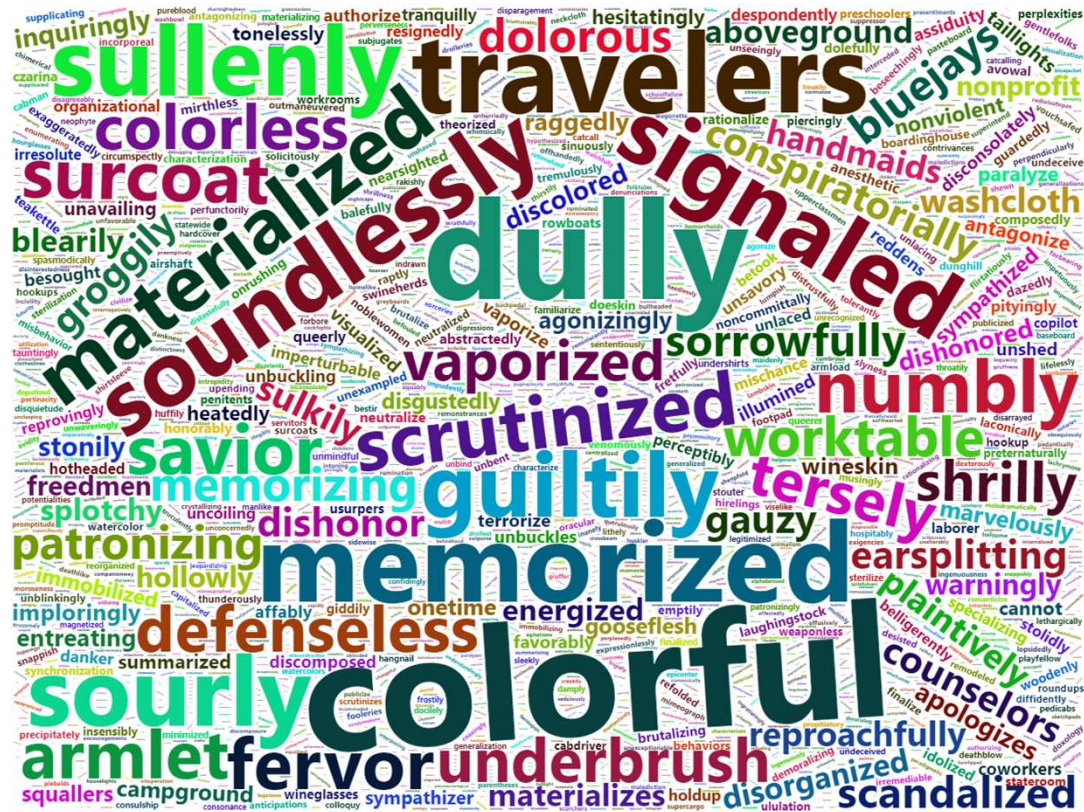
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- **Knowing every second word is not enough to read for meaning**
- **Important to read widely**

Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



Half of distinct words have **complex structure**

soundlessly

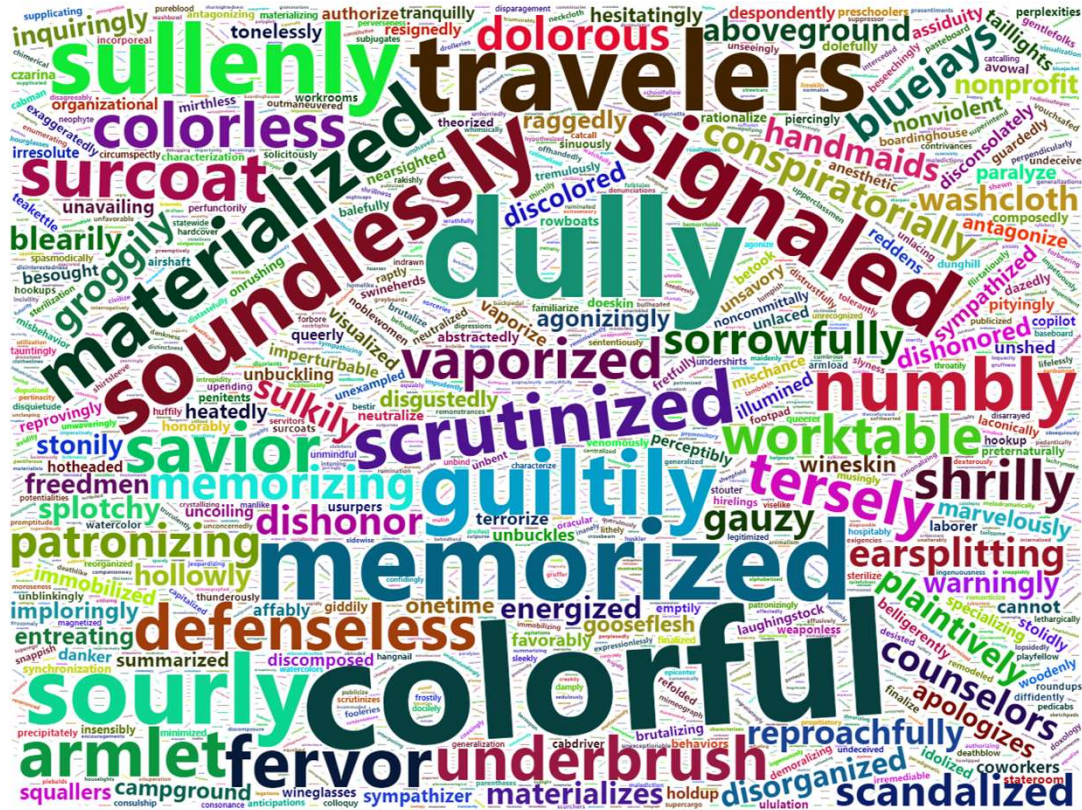


Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



soundlessly

Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



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Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



soundlessly

Half of distinct words have **complex structure**



soundlessly

morphemes



Morpheme knowledge makes reading faster and more efficient

Half of distinct words have **complex structure**

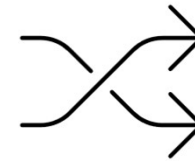
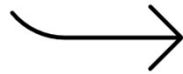


Morphology instruction in schools is patchy



Morpheme knowledge must be acquired through reading!

Simulating a child reader



useful

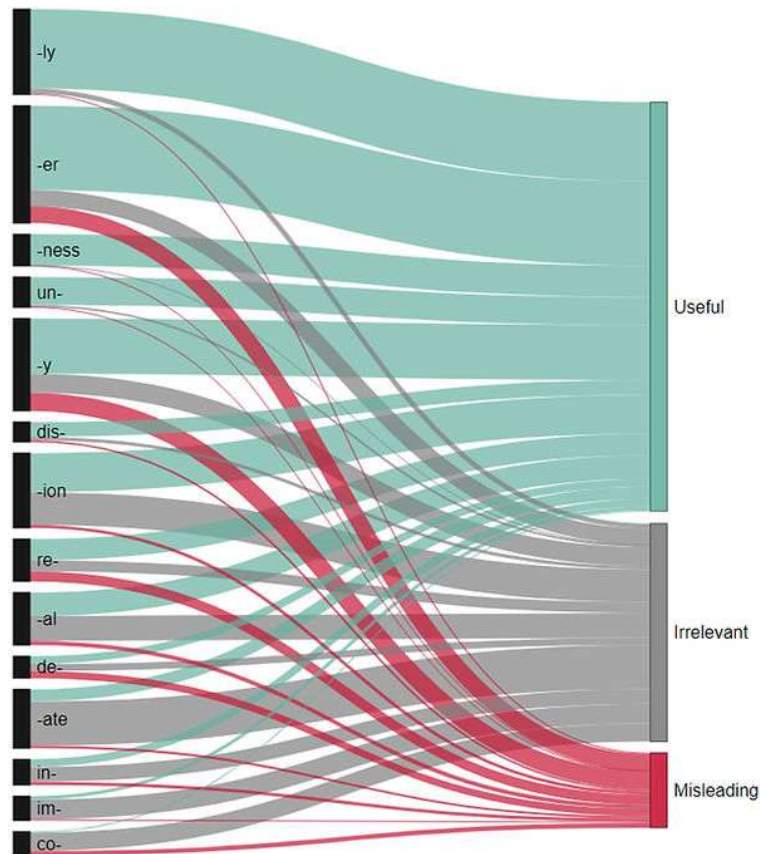


irrelevant



misleading

Words **do not contribute equally** to learning



*Kindly, openly, nicely, teacher, banker,
driver, darkness, sadness, unlock,
unafraid, difficulty, sunny, disobey,
disagree, reassure, decode, relation,
celebration*



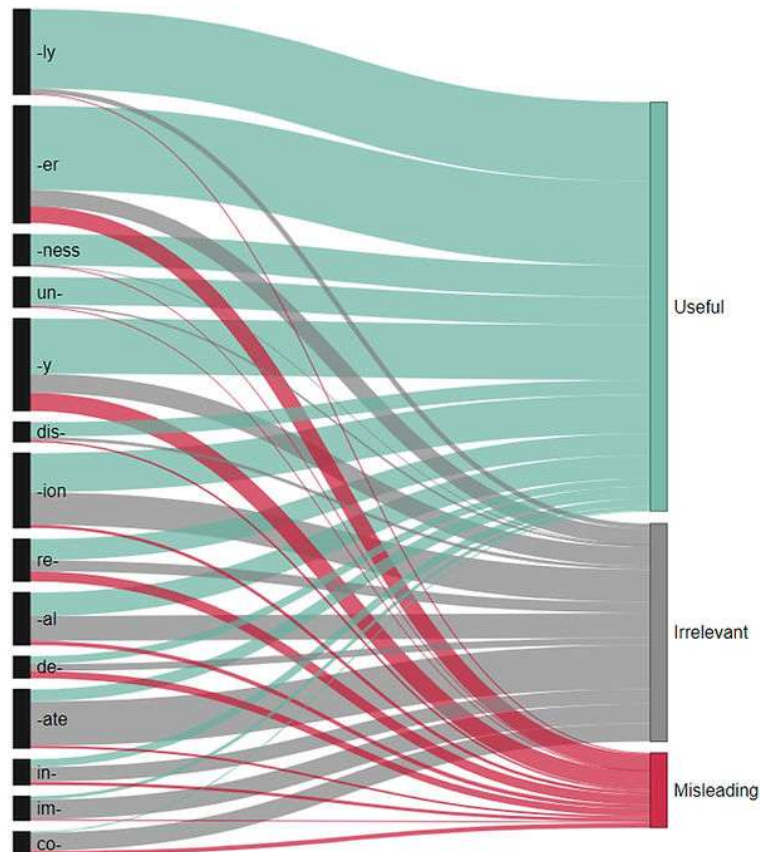
*Recognise, resume, reflect, demand,
deduce, involve, insist, sorcerer, inquisitive,
generate, appreciate, compensate,
corrupt, contain, journal, abysmal*



*Brother, army, brandy, forty, deliver,
detail, record, retired, comedian*



Some words are **useful** for learning morphemes



*Kindly, openly, nicely, teacher, banker,
driver, darkness, sadness, unlock,
unafraid, difficulty, sunny, disobey,
disagree, reassure, decode, relation,
celebration*



kind + **ly**
dark + **ness**

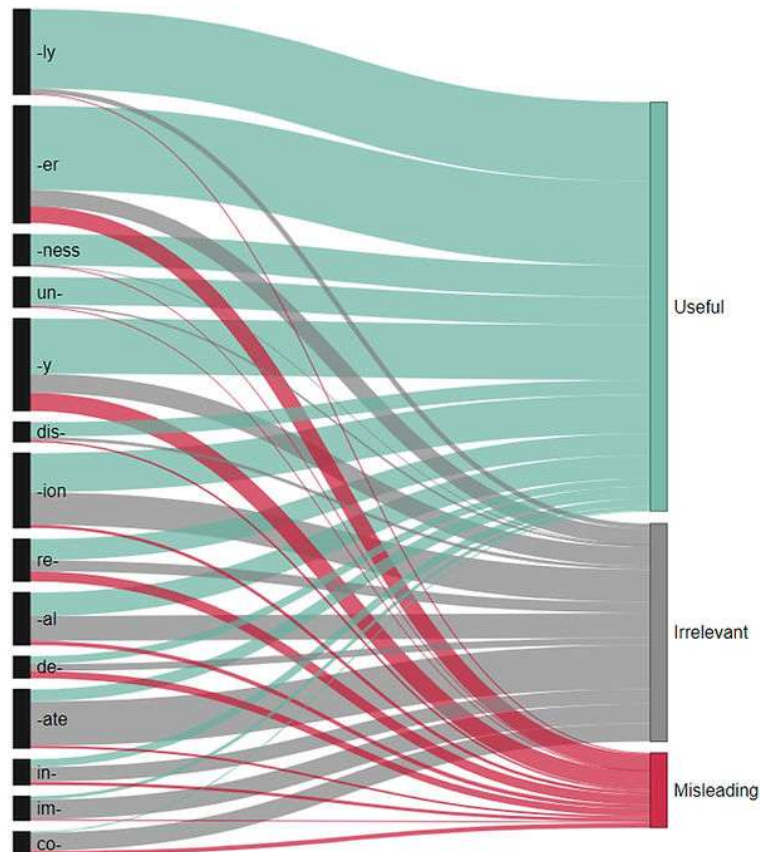
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In many words, morphemes **can't be identified**



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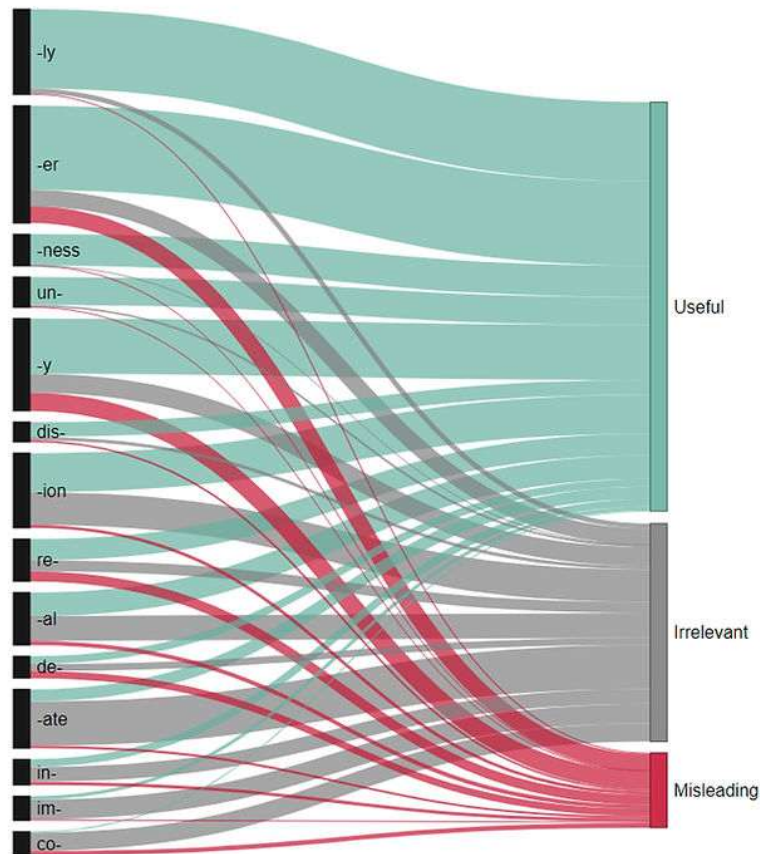


*Brother, army, brandy, forty, deliver,
detail, record, retired, comedian*



resume
demand

Some words only **appear** complex



*Kindly, openly, nicely, teacher, banker,
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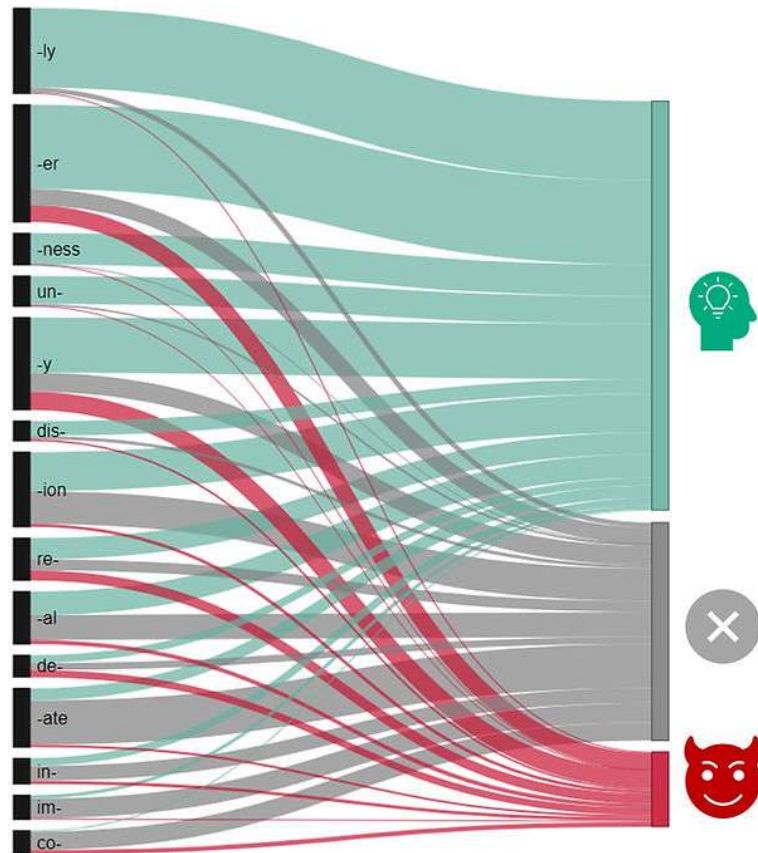


*Brother, army, brandy, forty, deliver,
detail, record, retired, comedian*



brother
deliver

Learning morphemes is **challenging**



Reading alone is unlikely to be enough to learn the meanings of many individual morphemes



Time to rethink morphology instruction?

Where does this leave us?

- 💡 Books offer a wonderful **opportunity** to build vocabulary
- 💡 Yet, book vocabulary is **challenging** from the get-go
- 💡 Children **need strong phonics skills** to access popular books
- 💡 **Plenty of morphology**, but likely **not enough** to support morpheme **learning**
- 💡 Children need to **read widely** to build reading proficiency
- 💡 **Virtuous cycle** between reading skills and reading motivation

Further reading

Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology
Volume 77, Issue 12, December 2024, Pages 2418–2438
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<https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218241229694>

Sage Journals

Original Article



The Children and Young People's Books Lexicon (CYP-LEX): A large-scale lexical database of books read by children and young people in the United Kingdom

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Article

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<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-025-00313-6>

Morphology in children's books, and what it means for learning

 Check for updates

Maria Korochkina ✉ & Kathleen Rastle



Maria Korochkina & Kathy Rastle
Mar 12, 2024 · 5 min read



What Words do Children Encounter When They Read for Pleasure?

The ability to read opens up worlds. Reading enables children to progress into post-primary education and provides the basis for lifelong...

<https://www.rastlelab.com/blog>



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What can children learn about morphology from reading for fun?

<https://cyp-lex.rastlelab.com/>

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Korochkina, M., Marelli, M., Brysbaert, M., & Rastle, K. (2024). The Children and Young People's Books Lexicon (CYP-LEX): A large-scale lexical database of books read by children and young people in the United Kingdom. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 77(12), 2418–2438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218241229694>

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Thank you!



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<https://mariakna.github.io/>

