

Review of EFL Learners' Habits in the Use of Pedagogical Dictionaries

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Abstract

A dictionary is an important device for both: EFL teachers and EFL learners. It is highly needed to conduct effective teaching and learning. Many investigations were carried out to study the foreign language learners' habits in the use of their dictionaries in reading, writing, testing and translating. This paper is shedding light on this issue; by pooling efforts carried out by researchers in forms of papers, articles and theses, on how EFL learners behave towards dictionaries in different learning situations. Different learning techniques have been discussed, to add to other experiences in the pedagogy of foreign languages. The findings of these surveys are collected here to enhance the work of foreign language teachers and learners in their classes, as well as it would be of practical help to textbook designers and lexicographers.

Keywords: EFL, dictionary use, learning habits, language learning, language education

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This is a review of a number of studies on the effective use of pedagogical dictionaries by EFL learners. The focus is on some empirical research carried out to investigate dictionary theory and practice in relation to English language teaching. These studies investigate EFL learner's attitudes and habits regarding dictionary use. As language teachers, we have come to notice the poor presence of dictionary as an integrating part of teaching aids in our classrooms. So this paper is an attempt intended to shed light on this important issue, by making teachers alert to accompany this teaching tool with them in their routine classes. The result is expected to be positive, as a pool of good habits will grow in the learner's unconsciousness to adopt a routine dealing with dictionary.

1.2 The Significance of the Study

This research is intended to reflect the efforts of researchers in investigating habits of foreign language learners' in the use of dictionary; as tool in language education. So the findings of this paper will be of great use to EFL learners in the first place, as they are the targeted audience of this survey. It will also be of great help to foreign language teachers, as it will shed light on the importance of integrating dictionary skills in teaching, in their classes as routine practice. The research also is of significance to textbook designers to embed dictionary skill studies in their textbooks as this will develop intimacy between the dictionary and the user.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aims at:

- 1- Investigating aspects pertaining to EFL dictionaries.
- 2- Emphasising the almost inexhaustible potential of dictionaries for generating and motivating communicative skills.
- 3- Encouraging EFL teachers & learners to integrate dictionaries into their pedagogical resources.

1.4 Method

To realize the objectives of this research; an intensive reading has been made by the researchers in the literature of dictionary education. We have focused on all types of dictionaries, so our research covered monolingual,

bilingual and bilingualised dictionaries as well. Therefore, this effort can be considered as a summing-up of a wide range of reading in the subject and a thorough investigation in the behaviour of learners towards the use of dictionary in their learning.

2. Studies of EFL Students' Attitudes to Dictionaries

Tomaszczyk (1979) was one of the first researchers to investigate the dictionary requirements of non-native speakers of English. His study was to examine the ways learners use dictionaries, their attitudes and expectations. The study depended on a questionnaire containing fifty-seven items concerning personal language learning history, current language use, and use of dictionaries and the evaluation of information contained in them. 449 questionnaires were filled out by foreign language learners at tertiary level, foreign languages instructors and translators. The responses revealed that dictionaries were used most frequently for translation, with writing and reading coming in second and third place. In addition, the dictionary was much less frequently used when speaking and listening. It is also found that all subjects, regardless of their language proficiency, use bilingual dictionaries more (59.9% as opposed to 41% for monolingual dictionaries). From the analysis of responses of 228 subjects who possessed both types of dictionary, Tomaszczyk found that for each of the six language skills the majority chose to consult only their bilingual dictionaries.

But probably the best known and most frequently cited study of non-native speakers dictionary needs is that conducted by Bejoint (1981). Bejoint claimed that his survey was directly influenced by that of Tomaszczyk. The aim was to reveal how French students of English used their monolingual English dictionaries, although his findings have been applied to the dictionary use of learners of English. Bejoint's questionnaire was administered to 122 French students of English at the University of Lyon. Replies revealed that 96% of the students possessed a monolingual dictionary, of whom 45% possessed Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 27% the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and 85% had The Concise Oxford Dictionary. 85% of the respondents chose their dictionary because their tutor had recommended it. The majority of respondents, (87%), placed meaning among the three most sought-after pieces of information, but only 25% mentioned spelling and pronunciation. Etymology was the least frequently mentioned information category. Dictionaries appeared to be used more frequently for decoding than for encoding, and more frequently in the written medium than in the spoken medium.

Respondents seemed satisfied with the dictionary they habitually worked with, naming completeness of coverage as the reason for their preference. Most could not recall the occasions, when the dictionary could not provide the information they were looking for. Expressed causes of dissatisfaction, however, were poor definitions, misleading words, unsatisfactory syntactic guidance, excessively long entries and incomprehensible coding. In response to a final open question inviting comment, one or two subjects complained of insufficient examples and unclear layout.

A very similar survey to that of Bejoint (1981) was carried out by Battenburg (1991). Fewer subjects were involved, and the questionnaire was somewhat shorter. Moreover, Battenburg's survey was the only one to elicit information from informants with a wide variety of first language backgrounds. Battenburg distributed his questionnaire to 60 non-native speakers studying at Ohio University. The subjects were evenly divided across three proficiency levels - elementary, intermediate and advanced. Seven language backgrounds were represented, but the majority of the subjects were speakers of Arabic or Chinese languages. Battenburg claimed that there was no evidence to suggest that difference in language background created significant differences in dictionary-using behavior.

The survey revealed that bilingual dictionaries were owned by the largest number of subjects, and native-speaker dictionaries by the smallest number. All the elementary-level subjects owned bilingual dictionaries, and all the advanced learners owned native-speaker dictionaries. Monolingual learner's dictionaries (OALD, LDOC and the Longman Dictionary of American English) were owned by 90% of the elementary students and 70% of the advanced students. Curiously, there were much lower levels of dictionary ownership among the intermediate students; only 50% claimed to own a bilingual dictionary, 35% monolingual learners' dictionaries, and 15% native speaker's dictionaries.

Battenburg (*ibid*) found that in general there was a correlation between dictionary use and ownership. At more advanced levels, bilingual and monolingual learners' dictionaries decreased, and native speaker dictionary use increased. All subjects expressed a strong preference for looking up definitions, and a notable lack of interest in etymological information. Predictably enough, little dictionary consultation was recorded for speaking and listening activities. The greatest dictionary use appeared to occur while reading (for elementary and intermediate students) and while writing (for advanced students). Translation from English into L₁ was also recorded as an

event where considerable dictionary use took place. Elementary users appeared to be the least satisfied with their dictionaries. Puzzlingly, in view of the fact that they owned and used fewer dictionaries than those in the other two groups, intermediate students showed an even higher level of satisfaction than the advanced learners.

Battenburg's (ibid) questionnaire was slightly shorter than Bejoint's (1981) and omitted questions regarding unsuccessful look-ups that had yielded unsatisfactory results in Bejoint's survey. But it should be borne in mind that Bejoint's subjects were all students of language, whereas Battenburg's subjects were apparently studying a range of disciplines, and were learning English simply as an academic tool. More importantly, Bejoint's survey was conducted in the subjects' first language, while Battenburg's was expecting subjects with elementary English to comment on their use of "syntactic patterns" and "derived forms" in the dictionaries.

Much more akin to our goals is the study conducted by the Exeter University on Survey of Dictionary Use, prepared by Hartmann (2004) and collected valuable data about levels of reference provision and reference proficiency in several schools at Exeter University, using a combination of student-based questionnaire and staff-based interviews. The main tool was a 30-item questionnaire evolving from previous studies by Bejoint (1981) and Battenburg (1991), while modifications were based on a Ph.D. thesis by Li (2002) on dictionary use in China. The questionnaire comprised general personal details (questions 1 to 3); foreign languages studies (question 3); level of study and subjects taken at Exeter (questions 4 and 5); start of dictionary use and ownership (questions 6 and 7); types and title of dictionary used most frequently (question 11 to 13); conditions of dictionary purchase (questions 14 and 15); awareness of appendices and user guidance (questions 16 and 17); context and frequency of dictionary use (questions 18 to 21); dissatisfaction with the dictionary (questions 22 and 23); difficulties of use (questions 24 to 27), and instruction in dictionary use (questions 28 to 30). Results show that 72% of the students started to use the dictionary in the primary school. As for dictionary types, 94% said they owned a general English dictionary and 77 a bilingual one, while 65% of the students professed to owning no electronic dictionary. 98% of Exeter students owned at least one dictionary, 48% had more than four and Language and Humanities students on average, owned more than twice as many as science students. Again, it was the general dictionary that is used most frequently by these students, followed by the bilingual type, and of about these types they could provide fairly accurate information regarding the title, editor, year of publication, size and colour.

Results for the "last time you bought a dictionary" show that "recommendation of a tutor" is 30% and it is also "as a result of my own deliberate choice". As expected, foreign students seem to be more aware of back-matter information than English students, and there was a tendency among students of Modern Languages to pick out regular verbs while students of science look up units of measurement. However, there was a general antipathy towards guidance from the dictionary front matter, though awareness tends to be greater among foreign rather than English students, and avoidance more pronounced in Science than Arts students. Concerning occasions for dictionary use, "studying at home" score most (97%), with "studying in the library" 58% coming second and "during class" only 17% (perhaps because of university policies which prohibit use of dictionaries during examinations). Also, "looking up a dictionary for difficult words during reading" is just ahead of the other alternatives including "using contextual cues". Of the four language skills, a dictionary is used most for reading and writing. Encyclopedic information comes foremost as trigger of dictionary reference, with pronunciation and etymology in much less demand than meaning and spelling.

Considering the fact that over 90% of the students are not satisfied with their ability to use a dictionary, it is understandable that 75% consult a dictionary often or sometimes without being able to find the information they needed. Among the difficult information, specialized technical terms account most for students of science (52%) while idioms and phrases made most for Modern Languages and Humanities students. It was interesting to note that students attributed the bulk of their difficulties to the dictionary (e.g. 63% said that there was not enough information in the dictionaries, while 20% blamed the unclear layout of the dictionary) rather than their own limitation in terms of skills or knowledge. The fact that they do not read the instructions tallies with the responses, as 14% relied on themselves on buying a dictionary, 17% felt an aversion to guidance notes and 23% blamed the rarity of admitted search items.

Taylor (1991) made an investigation into the dictionary use by 122 students in an EFL context in Malaysia concentrating on tertiary institutions. The survey employed a questionnaire to find out the dictionaries used, the reasons for dictionary choice, the problems of dictionary use and factors discouraging dictionary use. It was found that 50% of the students used a bilingual dictionary and that their dictionary choice was influenced by school. It was also discovered that the most frequent use of dictionaries was finding out word meaning and the least frequent use was looking up grammatical information. The major problems of dictionary use were pronunciation symbols and identifying the right meaning of words. Finally, that the overriding factor which

discouraged dictionary use was the amount of time taken to consult a dictionary.

In a larger study of the recent phenomenon of bilingualised dictionaries in another EFL context, Hong Kong, Fan (2007) focuses particularly on the frequency of use of the various types of information in a bilingualised dictionary and how useful they are perceived by students. Also, a comparison is made between the students with bigger and smaller vocabulary size to identify the dictionary behavior which is related to L₂ vocabulary proficiency. Focusing on a representative sample of 1000 students who had just been admitted to the 7 tertiary institutions of Hong Kong, the study seeks to answer the following questions: How frequently students use bilingualised dictionaries and to what extent do they find them useful; what type of information they use more often and how useful they perceive them; the relationship between the uses of the various kinds of information in the bilingualised dictionary, and if there are any differences in dictionary use between students.

Results show that the students under study used a bilingualised dictionary quite often. Only 108 (about 10%) of the students reported that they "never" or "seldom" used the bilingualised dictionary. They often used the dictionary to look up the context meaning of words. They sometimes look up the Chinese equivalents, the part of speech, the derived forms, the grammatical usages, the English definition, and they seldom look up information concerning collocations, pronunciation, frequency and appropriateness of words.

Kharmas (1985) study of 284 students enrolled in the English Department at Kuwait University resembles Baxter's (1980) work in many ways in terms of the scope of the questionnaire and the profile of subjects. Although all language learners possessed both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, bilingual works were commonly preferred. Students reported receiving little instruction in dictionary use. Particular dissatisfaction with monolingual dictionaries was noted in two areas: the vocabulary employed in definitions was difficult to understand, and an insufficient number of illustrative sentences were used. Kharma also developed a series of tests to determine how well the users understood various types of information in dictionary entries. While almost all students were able to interpret phonetic symbols two-thirds could employ information dealing with derived work forms, grammatical features, definitions, and synonyms. Kharma concludes from his study that dictionaries which combine features of monolingual and bilingual works are needed in order for language learners to be best served.

Iqbal's (1987) exhaustive examination of 700 Pakistani advanced learners of English is the most relevant study cited here, because particular attention was paid to English monolingual dictionaries. The 54-item with respect to the studies of learners' dictionary use in Sudan, we have scanned two studies, the first, was an M.A. thesis by Yahya (1996) which was an attempt to investigate the Sudanese learners' awareness of the information in a monolingual learner's dictionary. In so doing the study first examines whether the sample of forty-five first-year students in the Faculty of Science, Sudan University for Science and Technology ever used a dictionary, and then the type of that dictionary. The aspects of a lexical item lookup in the dictionary are taken as an index of the learner's awareness. For the aspects of meaning, learner's awareness of six strategies (in addition to using a dictionary) that can be employed so as to know the word meaning is discussed. But for the other aspects i.e. spelling, pronunciation, grammatical information, collection, stylistic overtones and fixed expressions, the study reports the subjects' awareness of them in the dictionary.

The findings show that 91% of the subjects use a dictionary, of whom 55% use bilingual dictionaries, while 45% use monolingual ones. The findings also show that the majority of the subjects are aware of the sources of information for meaning and the aspects of lexical items contained in the dictionary as well.

A larger, though not so optimistic, study of dictionary was by Ahmed (1999). He investigated the lexical learning strategies used by Sudanese learners of English. One of the strategies investigated was dictionary use which Ahmed classified as a macro-strategy. The types of information which his subjects reported ~ they looked up in the dictionary, were then termed micro-strategies. The researcher randomly selected three hundred Sudanese learners of English language ranging from intermediate pupils to first-year university students. The occurrences of the use for each type of information were calculated.

Although pronunciation seems to be one of the problems facing Sudanese learners of English, it came far behind meaning, word derivations, grammatical classes of words and examples demonstrating word usage. Ahmed (1999) puts this down to the fact that English language was not used for communication outside the classroom in Sudan.

3. EFL Dictionaries Use in Comprehension and Vocabulary Tests

One of the earliest papers to report a test-based investigation into learner dictionary use for comprehension was that by Benoussan, Sim and Weiss (1984). The situation which gave rise to the study was one of conflict between

examination administrators and teachers. Examination administrators, as authors say, are against the use of dictionaries in the examination room because they think that dictionaries might help the candidates too much, encourage cheating and cause candidates to waste time. In contrast, the authors claim that many EFL teachers would like learners to be able to use dictionaries in the examination room, as tests should test the candidate's ability to function in a *natural* reading situation—outside the examination room. Learners usually have the opportunity to consult a dictionary. The researchers also reflect on the other side of the argument, namely that some EFL teachers, are against dictionary use in class, preferring their students to rely on contextual guessing techniques as an alternative to dictionary use. The opinion of the authors support the view that context is ineffectual as a means to teach vocabulary, because if the reader lacks the appropriate background knowledge, hence the text will probably remain inaccessible to him whether he consults a dictionary or not. Conversely, only learners who are capable of making hypotheses, and who can recognize the context of association will benefit from access to dictionary while reading. The experiment of Benoussan, Sim and Weiss was designed primarily to determine two things:

1- To what extent the use of monolingual and/or bilingual affects reading examination performance (i.e. test scores).

2- To what extent the use of monolingual and/or bilingual dictionaries affects the amount of time taken to complete the examination.

Four experiments were carried out, each with a large number of subjects. The first was the simplest. 900 first-year students answered multiple-choice questions on ten reading passages. Half of the students used monolingual dictionaries, while the other did not have dictionaries at all. There was no significant difference in test scores. The authors note that they found the results surprising and were thus prompted to conduct further studies.

In the first study, 670 first-year students took part at a two-hour reading test and could choose to consult a monolingual dictionary, a bilingual dictionary, or none at all. In the third study there was a replication of the second one with 740 subjects. In both studies the type of dictionary chosen by each subject was noted, and scores were compared against dictionary type and the number of minutes taken to complete each test.

It was found that 59% of the subjects (the first study) and 58% (the second study) chose to use a bilingual dictionary, and about 20% chose to use a monolingual dictionary, and the remainder chose not to use a dictionary. Little difference was found between the test scores of the different groups of subjects. There was a little correspondence between dictionary use and the time taken to finish the test. Moreover, there was a slight tendency for users of bilingual dictionaries to be slower and weaker in taking reading comprehension test in English and, by extension, in reading English texts.

However, Benoussan, Sim, and Weiss'(1984) pessimistic results about the usefulness of dictionary use on language task performance, specifically reading comprehension tests, were not shared by many later researchers. Nesi and Meara (1991) attempted to replicate the conditions of the earlier study on a population of 84 overseas ESP students at Warwick University. All students had previously taken the British Council ELTS test, with scores ranging from 4.5 to 8.0 (mean score 5.5). Each student took the same test, which consisted of two texts both taken unabated from the New Scientist.

The 84 students were divided into two groups of 44 and the first group took the test without access to dictionaries. The remaining students were allowed to use their own monolingual dictionaries (e.g. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, etc.). All subjects took the test in the same examination room and were allotted a maximum of 60 minutes. Those students who had been given permission to use their dictionaries were asked to draw a circle round any words on the test paper which they looked up. As in the studies by Benoussan, Sim and Weiss, monolingual, bilingual and bilingualised dictionary use was related to test score and the amount of time the subjects took to complete the test. Also, test score was compared with the quantity of dictionary use (i.e. the number of words looked up), and noted which words subjects had chosen to look up.

Unlike Benoussan's study, there was a moderate difference between non-dictionary and dictionary users in favour of the latter (10.7 to 8.2). But like Benoussan's test, Nesi and Meara (1991) found no difference between high and low scorers in the number of words looked up (6.3 to 6.0). Also, like the earlier study, a correlation was reported between speed of completion and score achieved, with faster candidates gaining a higher average score than their slower counterparts and so proving a close correspondence between dictionary use and time taken to finish the test.

The controversial results led Tono (1998) to design a test concerned with receptive dictionary use. Tono's study had three objectives:

- 1- To determine if there was any significant difference in the subjects' performance between reading with the help of a dictionary and that without this help.
- 2- To identify what kind of reference skills were most relevant to better performance in reading comprehension tasks.
- 3- To identify possible measures of dictionary reference skills.

Special training in dictionary skills was given to the 32 junior high-school students who took part in the study. The subjects were asked to take two tests, the first was to assess their ability to use a dictionary, and the second was designed to assess their reading comprehension. Tono devised a Dictionary Reference Skills Test Battery (DRSTB) to test the subject's dictionary, and two reading comprehension tests consisting of two passages, each followed by 10 multiple-choice questions. Subjects had no access to a dictionary in the first test (RC1) whereas they could use their bilingual English -Japanese dictionary in the second test (RC2).

The results of these tests showed that subjects with dictionaries performed better in reading comprehension than those without dictionaries. They made a significantly higher proportion of errors when they did not use dictionaries than when they used them. Tono suggests that the "primary reason" for the difference between these results and those of Benoussan et al., is that his subjects had received special training in dictionary use.

In a context close to our own, namely Iran, Hayati and Mohamadi (2006) attempted to compare the effect of the dictionary as a pedagogical tool on the various process of language learning, including reading. Their contribution was to specifically find out the impact of monolingual and bilingualised dictionary as opposed to non-use of dictionary on reading comprehension of intermediate EFL learners. Their population consisted of 45 EFL students studying at Shahid Chamran University who were screened from a larger population by means of a proficiency test. Their scores ranged from 38 to 49 out of 70. They were both male and female students majoring in Translation and English Language. They were divided into three equal groups - monolingual group, bilingualised group and control group which could take advantage of guessing ability and contextual cues but no dictionary.

Two tests were administered: Test A was English Language Proficiency Test by which 45 intermediate level individuals have been selected. Their proficiency test contained multiple-choice items which aimed to assess test-taker's general knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension. Test B was Nelson Reading Comprehension Test. It contained four passages followed by a total of thirty-two multiple-choice items (eight items for each passage). The questions mostly required the participants to draw in inferences. The results of this study indicated that the bilingualised group scored the highest (Mean=16.86), followed by the monolingual group (M=16.11) with the control group doing the lowest (Mean = 12.73). The fact that the scores of the first and second categories findings prove that using whatever dictionary during reading as an aid can help intermediate EFL students comprehend a text more efficiently. Other researchers were concerned with the effect of dictionary use on vocabulary acquisition while reading. A well-known study of this type is done Luppescu and Day (1993) attempted to test two hypotheses using an experiment:

- 1- There would be no significant difference in the measurement of vocabulary learnt by bilingual dictionary users and that of vocabulary learnt by those who did not use a dictionary.
- 2- Those dictionary users would take significantly longer non-users to read a text.

The subjects were 293 first-and second-year Japanese University students. In the first phase of the experiment they were required to read a 1,853 word story, this story was judged to be at an appropriate level, but it contained at least seventeen words previously identified as being unknown or difficult for college-level Japanese EFL students. 145 subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group and were allowed to use their bilingual dictionaries while reading. The remaining 148 students were assigned to the control group and were not allowed to use their bilingual dictionaries.

In the second phase of the experiment all the subjects were tested on their knowledge of vocabulary occurring in the story. The original story had 27 items, but only the responses for 17 items identified as "target" words were considered. The test had a multiple-choice format with three distracters and a "don't know" option. Access to dictionaries was not permitted during the test. The mean score of subjects in the group which had access to dictionaries was found to be significantly higher than that of control group [$P < .001$]. This result appears to disprove the author's first hypothesis, which relates to earlier views by Benoussan et al., (1984) namely that there would be no significant difference in scores between the two groups. It was also found that the experimental

group took on average almost twice as long to read the passage. However, there was almost zero correlation between the time taken to read the passage and performance in the test.

Lupescu and Day did not monitor either the amount of use made of dictionaries by the experimental group, or which words they looked up. They explain that their study "was not able to consider how or even if dictionaries were actually used by the students". The whole experiment rested on the assumption that members of the experimental group did use their dictionaries, and that they looked up the words that were to be featured in the subsequent test. The story which was used in this experiment had, however been edited to provide opportunities for the difficult words to occur with ample frequencies and in sufficient contexts to allow the subjects to make reasonable guesses about their meaning. It therefore seems likely that some of the experimental group would have chosen to guess unknown words from context. But the researchers assumed that the members of the experimental group actually looked up the meaning of the target words. The experimental results indicated that certain words actually proved more difficult for subjects in the dictionary -user group than for subjects in the control group. Lupescu and Day hypothesize that dictionary users were confused by the multiple entries for polysemous words, and hence dictionary use is misleading or confusing.

The test, which appeared in the reading passage, was supposedly designed to test knowledge of words that were previously unknown to the subjects and were looked up by subjects in the experimental group. However, Lupescu and Day do not establish whether these words were really previously unknown neither do we know whether they were looked up. An equally important criticism of the experimental design is that the test itself was written in such a way that subjects with full understanding of the target words could still give incorrect answers. Although instructions, for the test were given in Japanese, all multiple - choice words were in English. Thus the subjects were in fact tested on their understanding of the words presented, not simply the seventeen test' items. Despite defects in the test and in the experimental procedure, which prevent us from gaining a very precise picture of the extent and value of dictionary use, it seems reasonable to reject Lupescu and Day's first hypothesis and accept their conclusion that dictionary use must have been responsible for the highly significant difference in scores between the two groups.

Knight's (1997) experiment involving the use of a computerized bilingualised dictionary addressed similar questions to that of Lupescu and Day, but also compared the behavior of users at two different levels of ability. Knight employed 105 second year students of Spanish at Central Michigan University as subjects, and divided them into "high" and "low" groups depending on their verbal ability as measured by the American College Tests (ACT). Prior testing eliminated potential subjects who already knew the vocabulary items Knight intends to target.

Four Spanish magazine articles of no more than 250 words each were used in the experiment. In each text twelve words that the subjects did not know were identified as target words. Each subject read two texts, and so was exposed to twenty -four target words while reading. The text and vocabulary tests were stored on computer disks; half of which was programmed to permit access to a bilingualised computerized dictionary. Equal numbers of subjects in each of the ability groups were assigned to dictionary and no dictionary condition. Subjects were asked to complete a recall protocol after reading each text online. This entailed recalled (in English), everything they could remember about the text. After this the subject's knowledge of the target words was assessed; subjects were asked to supply their own written English definitions for the words, and select definitions provide in multiple-choice format.

The time taken to read the text, the words looked up and the test results were all recorded by the computer. Two weeks later the subjects were required to take the same vocabulary test again, this time using pens and paper.

The subjects who had access to the dictionary achieved significantly higher scores on the immediate vocabulary test ($p < .001$) and the delayed vocabulary test [$p = .012$]. They also gained significantly higher mean comprehension (as measured by the number and type of propositions recalled in the written protocol [$p = .001$]). Subjects with high verbal ability looked up slightly more words than low ability subjects, but were also found to learn more words from context. Thus, when considered separately, this group's reading comprehension scores were found not to be significantly affected by dictionary access.

Subjects in the dictionary conditions also spent considerably more time reading the passage than subjects without access to the dictionary. Those with low verbal ability took 44% longer to read the passage, while those with high verbal ability took 41 % longer. Test scores for the low verbal ability subjects showed a similar or greater increase, but the scores of the high verbal ability group did not rise proportionately. For the low verbal ability group there was also a high correlation (0.68) between reading comprehension scores and the number of words they looked up. For the high verbal ability group the correlation was low (0.17). Knight's experiment was

well-designed, and managed to avoid some of the problems of Luppescu and Day's studies by pre-testing Subjects to ensure that the target words are unknown, and recording the number of dictionary consultations each subject made.

The final study is by Bogaards (1998) who set out to investigate the usefulness of a bilingual dictionary and two types of monolingual dictionary for the language learner, in terms of both task performance and Vocabulary retention. The Subjects used in this study were Dutch-speaking first-year university students of French, 44 took part in the first stage of the experiment, and 55 in the second stage. In the first stage of the experiment, the Subjects were given 45 minutes to translate a 150-word Dutch text into French. The text was grammatically simple, but contained words which were judged to be difficult because they were not in the productive Vocabulary of the Subjects. The Subjects were divided into four groups: Using: a bilingual dictionary (not named), *dictonarie du Francais langue Etrangere Larousse* (a learner's dictionary), *Petit Robert* (a dictionary for native-speakers of France), no dictionary.

The Subjects were also asked to underline those words in the Dutch text which they had looked up. The second stage of the experiment took place fifteen days later when, without advance warning, Subjects were asked to translate into French the 17 difficult words from the translation passage. On this occasion some of the original Subjects were missing. Also a fifth group was formed, consisted of 14 students who had not undertaken the original translation task. Bogaard found that users of bilingual dictionaries chose to look up the most words and produced the most successful translation. The least successful translations were made by subjects in group (4), who did not have access to any dictionary.

In the vocabulary translation test 15 days later the success of the learners' and the bilingual dictionary was reversed, however. Users of the *dictonarie du Francais Langue Etrangere Larousse* made the most correct translation-51.6% and the bilingual dictionary users came second-48%, followed by the users of *Petit Robert*-44.7%. Subjects who had not had access to dictionaries for the translation performed less well-41.8%, and subjects who had not carried out the translation performed the worst -29.4%. In this study, Bogaards suggests that these results indicate that the use of any kind of dictionary leads to better results in vocabulary acquisition and translation. As mentioned earlier this is consistent with other studies, particularly Luppescu and Day (1993) and Knight (1997) who recorded higher vocabulary test scores for (bilingual) dictionary users than for subjects who had not used dictionaries. Yet, the overall findings of studies on dictionary relation to reading comprehension and vocabulary is that bilingualised dictionaries is more effective than bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, with bilingual dictionaries coming somewhere between the two.

4. EFL Dictionaries Users' Skills in Reading & Writing

This part will discuss studies relating to the productive use of dictionary in the different language skills, (e.g. reading, writing), the look-up behavior and processes involved and types of mistakes committed and their possible explanations.

The first study is by Li (2004) who starts by acknowledging the facilitating effect the dictionary has on vocabulary learning, writing and reading comprehension. However, for her not all dictionary users can benefit from the use of these references, perhaps because of lack of instruction in dictionary use. The purpose of Li's research was to carry out dictionary skills instruction in English classrooms and to assess the effects of dictionary skills instruction on reading comprehension of junior high EFL students in Taiwan,

The subjects in the study were 40 second-year junior high students of two classes from Tainan Junior High School. Each class was randomly assigned to the experimental group or the control group. The experiment group received dictionary skills in English classes, and the control group did not. The 40 subjects were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their dictionary use background. Then they were asked to take a pre-test on their dictionary skills and local reading comprehension. After the pre-test the experiment group received dictionary skills instruction during each class time for about 20 minutes. The instruction lasted about three weeks in the beginning of the second semester. Finally, the 40 subjects were asked to take a post-test on their dictionary skills and local reading comprehension.

The major findings of this study summarized as follows:

- 1- Junior EFL students in Taiwan face the problems of understanding short labels, grammar codes, making use of guidewords, scanning the dictionary, removing inflections and affixes, recognizing compounds or idioms and finding right meanings.
- 2- They tend to apply the "kid rule strategy". They pick the Chinese fragment near the target word.

3- Instruction can reduce these problems, where practice can make a significant difference in the performance of reading comprehension tasks.

The aims of Atkin's study (1998) for the EUROLEX Association were as follows:

1. How foreign learners of English used their dictionaries,
2. How effective these dictionaries were in helping learners encode, decode and translate,
3. Whether monolingual and bilingual dictionaries were equally effective, and,
4. How dictionaries failed students and how they might be improved.

Data was collected by means of a questionnaire (the dictionary user-profile form) and two tests: a placement test and dictionary research test. French, German, Italian and Spanish speaking learners took parts in the project. The definitive data set comprised 723 complete responses including data for the questionnaire, the placement test and the dictionary research test. The results of the dictionary user profile form revealed that the great majority of respondents (69%) received more than half their instruction in English, but 60% had never been taught how to use a dictionary and 14% had had precise and systematic instruction in dictionary use. Also, a distinct overall preference for bilingual dictionary use was reported by all types of respondents, for all types of language tasks. Subjects with A grades results in the placement test, however, said that they would prefer to use a learner's monolingual dictionary to look up words in an English text, and both grade A and grade B students said that they would prefer a learner's monolingual dictionary when checking information about an English word they already knew.

Ard's (1990) study of bilingual dictionaries aimed at determining why and how successfully students actually use bilingual dictionaries. His subjects were students in a high intermediate ESL writing class at the University of Michigan. Data was collected in a variety of ways, the sources being introspection by students, students' oral protocols while writing, and in-class compositions, in which bilingual dictionaries were consulted. No mention is made of monolingual dictionaries though Ard admits that some of his students were using them.

Data from students' compositions was collected by asking students who were in the process of writing to circle words they had looked up in bilingual dictionaries and subsequently used. Ard cites excerpts from composition, written by Japanese and Spanish-speaking students. The main findings seem to be that, despite overall ability of the Spanish-speaking students, they used their bilingual dictionaries more successfully than the Japanese students. He ascribes this to the fact that Spanish and English are much more closely related to each other in terms of lexical typology than are English and Japanese. The Spanish speakers' use of bilingual dictionaries was not entirely error-free; their strategy of choosing English words morphologically close to a Spanish word suitable in the context whenever such choice was available was usually a successful one, but could cause problems by directing users a way from a more appropriate non-cognate word. As an example of this, Ard cites a Spanish students' rejection of the best choice – "hopeless" to express the meaning of "desperado", and his inappropriate choice of a "despairing" which looked more like Spanish.

L₁ influence was observable in the product of both subjects in cases where dictionaries were not consulted. The Arabic speaker made explicit reference to Arabic when thinking aloud; he appeared to translate directly from Arabic when writing FINALLY and EVEN THOUGH, and to reflect upon IN ORDER TO, which was a direct translation from Arabic, before deciding to write TO KEEP FROM instead: The Japanese speaker made no reference to Japanese in her protocol, but chose without consulting her dictionary the clause the SALARY MAN rather than WHITE COLLAR WORKER: Ard cites this behavior as evidence that prohibiting bilingual dictionaries does not eliminate L₁ influence.

Ard also cites the Japanese speaker's protocol to reinforce the point he made when analyzing the effect of dictionary use in class compositions. As was the case with these compositions, the composition written in the think-aloud experiment contains errors resulting directly from bilingual dictionary consultation – the Japanese speaker used her dictionary three times during the experiment, to produce MISTAKES OF TEETH TREATED (an error described as a paronym, STEP OF LIVING (a collocation and errors) and LIVING COMFORTABLY (acceptable in English). However, both of the experimental subjects also made similar lexical errors on occasions when they did not consult a dictionary. In his concluding section, Ard points out that it has not been proved that the use of a bilingual leads to errors where no errors would otherwise occur, especially in view of the fact, that the learner turn to the dictionary when in ignorance about the correct word to use, and it is unlikely that the desired concept could be expressed in English without the use of a bilingual dictionary.

Neubach and Cohen (1988) investigated dictionary look-up behavior using oral think-aloud reports and post-task interviews. They were also interested in variation of look-up across levels of proficiency, so they used two

subjects at as a high level of English language proficiency, two at intermediate and two at low level. The subjects were enrolled in an EAP reading course at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Three dictionaries were used: Longman Active Study Dictionary (for the low-level subjects), Collins English Learner's Dictionary (for the intermediate and advanced subjects) and a bilingual English - Hebrew Dictionary.

In their findings, Neubach, Ceubach and Cohen report a series of problems, faced by their six subjects: during the Macro stage, the gravest of which is formulating an incorrect expectation as to the possible meaning of the word, because this decision may influence the final decision during or at the end of the search. The reported problems were: (1) reading only the first definition in the monolingual dictionary, (2) encountering a problem with vocabulary in a definition, (3) encountering a problem with terminology, (4) encountering an alphabet order problem specially internal to the word being searched, (5) encountering a problem with the monolingual or bilingual dictionary entry itself, such as not finding the sought word and, (6) arriving at the word meaning but being uncertain about it, whether with a bilingual or monolingual dictionary.

Neubach and Cohen believe that the above list of problems show how wrong decision during early stages of the dictionary search may lead to further problems. For example, it is very likely that problems (2) and (3) are the consequences of the subject using the wrong reference work (e.g. a monolingual instead of a bilingual learner's dictionary). It also shows that many of the problems the user faces are related to his or her lack of reference skills, rather than to shortcomings in the reference works.

In a more recent study Harvey and Yuill (1997) examine dictionary use while writing, and aimed to establish why learners use the dictionary COBUILD during writing as an aid to composition, and how successful it was as an information source. Harvey and Yuill's subjects were 211 intermediate level English language learners studying in Europe. They were given four essay topics to choose from, and were asked to fill in forms (a table and two flow charts) each time they consulted COBUILD while writing. 86.8% of the data derived by this means was deemed to be processable (582 look-ups) the remaining data was incomplete or incomprehensible. The table to be filled in prior to dictionary consultation required subjects to choose one or more reasons for look-up from a selection of eight reasons provided by the researchers. 679 responses to this question were processed.

In 88.4% of cases users were satisfied that the dictionary answered their query and hence the author's interpretation of COBUILD as user-friendly: Comprehension of dictionary entry did not seem to be a main source of difficulty for Harvey and Yuill's (1997) subjects. Those who made difficult but successful searches reported that the length of entries, or the need to look up an item in more than one place, contributed particularly to their problems—subjects who had made unsuccessful searches, mostly ascribed their lack of success to absent or inadequate dictionary information.

Although the subjects were completing a writing task, they did not search very frequently for grammatical and collocation information. Harvey and Yuill argued also that the "extra column" feature of COBUILD did not seem to be a help to learners. Although 63.9% of synonymy searches were successful, according to respondents, only 34.2% of these successful searches actually resulted in the subjects going on to use the synonymy in their own writing. Moreover, subjects who used the synonym they had found often produced communicatively unsuccessful text.

Also, Harvey and Yuill make some suggestions to improve the design of COBUILD, such as increasing the quantity of cross-references, and placing natural synonymy by marked words. They also identify some aspects of user behaviour that seem similar to the "kid rule strategy", in particular the habit of looking in the entry for familiar near-synonymy, and being discouraged by long entries.

Hathedral (1994) relied on written rather than oral protocols and direct observation which he believed to be time-consuming to permit the study of a sample large enough to be representative, and it is also difficult for subjects there to behave naturally while being

Hathedral recommends that in future studies adopting this method of data collection, subjects should not be given free access to a variety of types of reference works but should instead be allotted on type of dictionary only or two for the purpose of comparison. He also recommends that subjects should form a homogenous group, at the same level of language proficiency. He also considers it important to set a time limit for the experiment, because the care and speed with which information can be accessed from a dictionary is an important consideration.

Meara and English (2005) conducted a large-scale investigation of learners' errors and their ways of handling them in the Longman Active Study Dictionary. The research examined the effectiveness of English dictionaries in correcting errors made by the beginning ESL learners. Lexical errors made in the exam essays were collected

as well as coded by type and the usefulness of the Longman Active Study Dictionary designed to help correct the errors was analyzed. The results of this study unveiled systematic discrepancies in error genres produced by student; some errors could be ascribed to the confusion of one-word synonyms in the dictionary definitions (e.g. **dress** as a synonym of clothes...), others were caused by the lack of explanation by the dictionary of the fundamental differences between easily confused words, such as “**cry/weep**”, and “**afire/ablaze**”.

Nesi and Meara (1994) scrutinized the errors EFL learners produced while making use of learners' dictionaries to write sentences with unfamiliar vocabulary included. The research had its interest in understanding whether or not the kid rule strategy of Miller and Gidea (1986) elaborated the errors the adult L2 students made when they consulted dictionaries and what other patterns of look-up behaviours were also involved in the way students consulted dictionaries. 52 EFL adults were provided with pairs of words (one high proficiency word that most of the subjects would have known; the other unfamiliar to all of the subjects) instead of a single-target word, and were requested to use both words in a single sentence. The participants were divided into three groups based upon three on-line dictionary options (i.e. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Contemporary English and Collins COBUILD English Dictionary) to which they had access.

In addition, statistical procedures were carried out to examine the different mean scores of the three groups the attention was focused on the 712 collection look ups and analysis of the corpus of errors generally made by the participants. The corpus of errors in fact indicated that they were adopting the “kid rule strategy” – choosing the first definition in an entry—which is composed of four steps:

- (1) reading the definition.
- (2) choosing short familiar segments.
- (3) choosing a sentence containing that segment and.
- (4) substituting the target word for the chosen segment.

It was discovered that the errors originated in the learners' understanding of the dictionary definition superficially without genuinely appreciating how it was connected to the word they were checking up, or because the dictionary entries were misleading or defective in the first place.

5. Conclusion

The above reviews were efforts of some related research in the educational use of dictionaries in the context of both native and non-native speakers. The three types of empirical studies, which have been conducted, described research on underlying beliefs and daily practice of dictionaries, especially for non-native learners of English; the integration of dictionary use by students in natural and experimental conditions in various language skills, and the problems encountered in the above processes. Different findings have been obtained, the first of which is the importance of dictionaries to language learners and the immense potential they have in semantic, phonological and lexical information that is scarcely tapped by students who conceive dictionaries as *only* reservoirs of meaning. The second class of findings pertains to the overall beneficial effect of dictionary use on comprehension and vocabulary tests. The third class is the numerous errors accompanying dictionary use by EFL students, stemming from lack of training or awareness of students. The general tendency indicates a strong correlation between dictionary competence and overall language proficiency. Hence a great attention should be allotted to dictionary research through means of questionnaires, surveys, diagnostic dictionary tests while accomplishing tasks, and the importance of investigating and minimizing the mistakes made. But the most important finding is that: learners, teachers and textbooks designers should be aware of the importance of the dictionary as an important learning device. A dictionary is a reference, an authority for language teachers and learners with highly confidential help in teaching and learning in EFL contexts. It is not for decoding meaning but encoding is another function of a dictionary. We recommend teachers to accompany dictionaries with them in their classes as a routine practice. This behaviour will boost up the importance of this tool and encourage EFL learners to develop warm intimacy with dictionaries.

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