

The Dictionary as an Aid for Teaching English as a Foreign Language “TEFL”

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1. Introduction

Dictionaries for foreign learners of English have increased since the end of the Second World War. Examples of such dictionaries are: the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English and the English Pronouncing Dictionary. This article explores the points of view of dictionary users. The discussion focuses on English- English dictionaries.

Dictionaries should be adapted to the needs of specific categories of users (Householder and Saporta, 1962: 279). Dictionary users can be classified according to various criteria, including their level of proficiency in the language; more precisely, they can be classified according to two criteria proposed by Cowie (1983):

- the user's language needs, their need to have access to lexical information of various kinds, for various purposes,
- the user's reference skills, their capacity to regain and use that information.

The emphasis is on foreign-language (ex. English) teaching in contrary to mother tongue (ex. Arabic) teaching. Nevertheless, even such a fundamental limitation leaves a very superfluous situation, which includes the cultural and educational backgrounds of the various Arabic and English-speaking countries. This means a wide range of available dictionaries for every separate learner groups and purposes.

The present study tackles the historical background of the use of dictionaries in the field of foreign-language teaching

in section one. Section two deals with the foreign language students' needs. The aim is to study the needs of foreign (Arab) students, and that is to be presented in section three. Section four presents the collected data obtained by the questionnaire. Respondents to the questionnaire are students of the second, third and fourth years at the Department of English, College of Arts, University of Basra.

The questionnaire is planned to reveal how Arabic/Iraqi speakers students of English use their monolingual general English dictionaries at Basra University. However, it is important first to attempt a worthy discussion of the needs of Arabic/Iraqi students drawing on the researchers own experience as university teachers, and on the observations of lexicographers and linguists. The last section includes the conclusions of the study.

2. Historical Aspects

Dictionaries first came into being in response to practical needs, and the conventional shape and look of the English dictionary we know today owe much to what users wanted of it in the past. Such are the "Dictionary of Sir Thomas Eliot Knight" published in 1538, the "Abcedarium Anglico Latinum", 1552 and "Nomenclator Omnium Rerum" by Hadrianus Junius in 1567 (Osselton, 1983: 13-15).

At the University of Basra, the use of dictionaries in the field of foreign-language teaching is not at large documented. However, little is still known about the effective development of language teaching and lexicography. There is little evidence for explicit instruction in dictionary reference. Skills tend to be associated with translator training programs. Some undergraduate courses (e.g. those linked to English including translator training) may have small components devoted to the subject of dictionaries, but there is little evidence of deliberate teaching of lexicography or instruction in dictionary reference. Lexicography and terminology are not taught in separate programs, but as a subject linked to such subjects as linguistics

(Hartmann, 1992: 155). At the level of Ph.D studies (courses), there was a subject in a postgraduate course in lexicography, at the University of Basra.

The early dictionaries such as "Henry Cockeram's The English Dictionary, 1623" , "Nathan Bailey's Universal Etymological English Dictionary, 1721" and "Dyche and Pardon's New General English Dictionary, 1735" showed an uncertain timid between the ordinary problems encountered by schoolmasters with their students and the need of synonyms, liberally spread through contemporary writings to "give an air of elegance." Some of such dictionaries seemed to compete with each other in classical terms of ever-incomparable obscurity, so that one lexicographer accuses another of introducing unnecessary equivalents, e.g. dirty words (Dinneen, 1967: 153).

A lexicographer was also tempted to become an encyclopedist, reminding one of the Etymologies of Isidore of Seville. Dictionaries included treatises on classical literature, mythology and biography, gradually turning to the scope of ordinary, as well as learned, words and the explanation of the newest terms in current science, specially Newtonian mathematics. At first the "ordinary words" were given synonyms, at best, and at worst (Dinneen, 1967: 154). There are examples to introduce; by saying:

ABOUT, as about Noon

AKE, as, my head akes

[J.K.'s A New English Dictionary, 1702]

A revised edition of this work (1713) had considerably improved definitions:

A GAD, a measure of 9 or 10 feet , a small bar of steel

A GALLOP, the swiftest pace of a horse....

Another attempt to help the reader understand the meaning of "hard words" was to assign their etymology. The first to do this was Thomas Blount in his Glossographia, patterned on the work of Latin-English dictionaries. Some of these "etymologies," as well as later ones are a bit far-fetched:

SHREW, a kind of Field-Mouse, which if he goes over a beast back will make him lime in the chine; and if he bites, the beast swells to the heart and dyes. From hence came our English phrase, I beshrew thee, when we wish ill: and we call a crust woman, a shrew (Blount, 1656, [.britannica.com](http://britannica.com)).

An earlier method not followed by subsequent dictionaries, was to arrange words in natural meaning groups, such as ship, shipwright, keel, prow, and so on. As the title of Cawdrey's work suggests, later works were alphabetically arranged, though sometimes divided into topical sections (Cawdrey, 1604, R.G. Siemens, University of British, Columbia, December, 1994; @unix-ubc.ca).

Some scholars, for example, Blount in his *Glossographia*, 1656, tried to convey the meaning of the expression by showing its use in the writings of current authors. This practice was not followed with any degree of consistency until the appearance of the work of Benjamin Martin "Lingua Brittanica Reformata, 1749" and Samuel Johnson "A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755".

The task of these early dictionaries was not merely to give the meaning of hard and ordinary words but also to stabilize spelling. The selection of dictionaries which are given above indicates that English habits of spelling were hardly fixed. There were two principal attempts to bring some regularity into English spelling- a statement of preferences by various authors and reform movements led by those who had prestige and influence.

In his *Familiar Letters* James Howell, 1666 (en.wikipedia.org) explained that he would omit the final e in the words like done, some, come because foreigners are deceived into pronouncing the endings as "disillables"; he also preferred the Latin to the French spelling of Latin derivatives, physic to physique, and Afric to Afrique, which also served as a warning that he would omit the "Dutch K" in physick and Africk. Also recommended were the Latin forms honor, favor, and labor

instead of honour, favour, and labour; war and star for warre and starre; pity and piety for pitie and pietie. Christopher Cooper, in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*, allowed a choice between Apricock and abricot, balet and balad, 1685 (.cambridge.org).

Thomas Dyche "A guide to the English Tongue, 1710" (www.oup.co.uk) agreed with Howell on the spelling of honor, humor, "because when the word increases it drops, as humour, humorist, humorsom...". The task of dictionaries seemed in vain, since many had tried, but none had succeeded, in reforming the orthographic ways of English.

Linked to the issue of correct spelling, was that of correct pronunciation, which, during this period, was termed "orthoepy". One reason for the difficulty was a lack of phonetic sophistication. As early as the mid-seventeenth century, instructions were given in an English grammar concerning the production of sounds, but of a quite elementary sort. More or less extended grammatical works on English were published by Harris "1751" (Ling.kgw.tu-berlin.de). Besides their uncertainty about what was and what was not "grammatical", many people were convinced that English had to be refined as well as standardized.

Reading a word's history when students look it up in a dictionary helps student gets familiar with the various routes by which this word has entered English. The more students know about a word, the better their chances of learning its spelling. Sometimes when students read an etymology, they will see that words which begin or end in a certain way are related. Learning the basic meanings of a number of prefixes and suffixes can help students deduce the meanings of the new words they encounter (dictionary.reference.com).

Lowth believed that English has simple rules and that the best authors violated them. He felt that the reason for these offenses is not that English is complex, but that, unlike the ancient languages, it has few formal distinctions. Lowth's

position represented an advance over the idea that in studying Latin one first learned “grammar” pure and simple (Dinneen, 1967: 160). The result of this grammatical work was to settle many of doubtful authenticity points among speakers of English during an unsettled period. Despite the fact that some individual items were reflections of the author’s own usage, those who were so inclined could imitate them with the guarantee that their manner of speaking was “according to the book.”

3. Foreign Language Student’s Needs

The learner usually determines the needs in using a dictionary. The learner who needs a foreign language should realize the use of the dictionary to confirm spelling or meaning. For all intents and purposes, the learner’s dictionary has attracted considerable attention not only among lexicographers themselves, but also among language teachers and linguists (Hartmann, (1992: 153).

The learner should realize the objectives, for which the language is needed, the situation in which the language will be used and the level of proficiency required. The reference needs of foreign language learners fall into two types: receptive, as in aural and reading comprehension and at least to some extent, in L2/L1 translation, and productive, as in speaking and writing, and also in L1/L2 translation (Tomaszczyk, 1983: 42).

The enormous majority of ELF learners consult dictionaries to get over some problems they may meet in comprehension of foreign texts, in looking up meaning of lexical items that are lacking in a communicative context (Jasim, 2001: 58).

The language that the foreign student must read, listen to, speak, write, or translate is likely to be ‘general, non-specialized’ language (Bejoint, 1981: 209). This being established, what kinds of entries will foreign students need to look up in their monolingual dictionaries? First one must distinguish between structural words and lexical words. Among the latter, there are frequent, common, ordinary words (hand,

leg, take...) and rarer, more technical words (mathematics, passport...). The latter have sometimes been called 'encyclopedic' (Sweet, 1964: 142). Because they are difficult for the foreign student, special mention must also be made of culture-specific words, which represent concepts that are peculiar to the culture (bay window, double-decker, etc.).

The problem for the lexicographer is to be determined what categories of words are essential to include in a dictionary for foreign students, as oppose to those, which could be left out. Students will need access to different categories of words according to whether they are encoding or decoding. For their decoding activities, they will have special difficulties with the rarest among encyclopedic, cultural, and slang words, and with the proper names, idioms and abbreviations. The best dictionary for decoding is the one that contains the largest number of entries, all other things being equal.

For encoding activities, structural words and the commonest lexical words are of the ultimate importance, because they are likely to be needed very frequently and because their appropriate use is not always obvious to the foreign student. The best dictionary for encoding is one that provides the most detailed guidance on syntax and collocation, including advice on pitfalls to avoid.

The sort of information that students need for purposes of encoding is very difficult to provide and arrange. Lexicographers have to build in a system of admittance to the variant forms of a lexeme, or to members of a semantic field, through one or several entries, possibly along the lines of Paul Robert's system of analogies (1953) (Bejoint, 1981: 211).

4. The Questionnaire

Since the aim of the current study is to reveal how Arabic students of English use their monolingual general English dictionaries, the use of a questionnaire is believed to be a helpful instrument for this purpose.

The questionnaire used in the present study is designed after Baxter (1980) and Tomaszczyk (1979). It consists of fourteen questions. The version distributed to the students of English at the College of Arts, University of Basra was in Arabic. This has been done for the subjects' convenience to avoid obscurity and to understand the questions of the questionnaire more clearly and better. The Arabic version is provided as an appendix at the end of the paper. The responses of the subjects were brought together question by question and then categorized. Afterwards, the responses of each category were calculated separately. The results were turned into percentages to make comparison easier and to give real insight into the way students of English use dictionaries.

The results are discussed below question by question. The reader can find the questions of the questionnaire in the appendix at the end of the study.

Question 1: Do you have a monolingual English dictionary?

The responses of the students regarding this question show that 92% of them possess a monolingual general English dictionary. This percentage indicates that the majority of the students of English have the possibility for the use of such a type of dictionaries.

Question 2: Which dictionary (or dictionaries) do you have?

For this question, the results are distributed as follows: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary "OALD", 48%, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English "LDOCE", 29%, and Oxford Collocations Dictionary "OCD" 15%. It is clear to notice that the percentage of the ownership of "OCD" is far behind the other two. This indicates that it is the one least used. This case can be interpreted by the possibility that tutors recommend this dictionary only for students of advanced level of English. It also seems that more second-year students have LDOCE than OALD. This shows that they do not know much about monolingual dictionaries.

Question 3: Why did you choose the one(s) you bought?

For 75% of the students, the reason was that the dictionary had been recommended by tutors. This refers to the importance of tutors' recommendation made to students for the possession of monolingual general English dictionaries.

Question 4: What other monolingual general English dictionaries do you know?

There were very few answers to this question, other than the three dictionaries mentioned in Question 1 . This again illustrates the dependence of students on the opinions of their tutors.

Question 5: If you use several dictionaries, is there one that you prefer? Why?

The answers to that question were few in number. A preference for EFL dictionaries, as opposed to dictionaries designed for native speakers appears only obscurely. In fact, most students prefer the dictionary they have bought, or the one they usually work with.

Question 6: Are you satisfied with your monolingual English dictionary more than with your bilingual dictionary?

A majority of students (80%) are satisfied with their dictionaries. Only 12% said that they were not satisfied. 63% said they were more satisfied with their monolingual than with their bilingual dictionary. 29% were of the opposite opinion. Some of the students gave reasons for their satisfaction: the monolingual dictionary is more useful when they need to know the exact meaning of a word, or when they need synonyms.

Question 7: How often do you use a monolingual English dictionary?

32% use a monolingual English dictionary at least once a day, and 60% at least once a week. These results show a frequent use of the dictionary by Arabic students.

Question 8: Which type of information do you look for most often in your dictionary?

Six types were suggested in the questionnaire; they are arranged in decreasing order of frequency of mention. The results are as follows:

1. Meaning: 97% of the students placed meaning among the three most often sought-after pieces of information.
2. Syntactic information: 49%
3. Synonyms: 63%
4. Spelling 21%
5. pronunciation: 17%
6. Etymology: 6%

The interest in meaning suggests that for students the dictionary is basically an item of words with glosses. It also suggests that the dictionary is essentially used for decoding, since dictionary meanings are unlikely to be used for encoding activities.

Question 9: Do you ever use the information contained in the appendices?

A few suggestions were made in the questionnaire, but only four types of information seem to be steadily used:

1. Abbreviations: 30%
2. Irregular verbs: 20%
3. Units of measurement: 17%
4. Proper names: 9%. It is not quite clear what students included in this category: place names, forenames, etc. There were variations according to the year of the students: fourth-year students did not generally make reference to the list of irregular verbs. This result applied only to existing appendices. It should not be taken to mean that other information would not be used if it was given in dictionaries.

Question 10: Do you use the codes that indicate how a word should be used?

The result is very disappointing to lexicographers, especially when compared with the amount of work that the arrangement

of such coding systems necessitates. (54%) of the students state that they do not use this information at all.

Question 11: Can you recall occasions when you could not find what you were looking for?

Many students could not remember such occasions, which explains why the percentages given below are rather low:

1. Unsatisfactory definitions: 30%. They were judged either too difficult or unspecific.
2. Words missing: 19%.
3. Unsatisfactory syntactic guidance: 24%.
4. Excessively long entries: 18%.
5. Incomprehensible coding: 11%.
6. Pronunciation not indicated or not clear: 10%.

Question 12: What kinds of words do you look up most often in the dictionary?

Students were given nine categories of words, and asked to put a mark against each category in one of the three columns (very) often ___ sometimes ___ (practically) never. The following results show only the highest percentages of the three columns:

- 59% look for idioms very often
- 46% look for encyclopedic words sometimes
- 64% look for culture-specific words sometimes
- 50% look for abbreviations sometimes
- 39% look for slang words sometimes

In contrast

- 75% never look up common words
- 40% never look up structural words
- 35% never look up taboo words
- 41% never look up proper names.

The words that are looked up most often are those which typically cause difficulty when coding.

Question 13: Under which headword would you look up the following compounds?

1. Aerial ladder: 90% would look it up at aerial.

2. Blue chip: 79% would look it up at blue.
3. Compound leaf: 80% would look it up at leaf.
4. Economic sanction: 78% would look it up at economic.
5. Newspaper: 71% would look it up at paper.
6. Power station: 66% would look it up at station.
7. Run over: 62% would look it up at run.
8. Self treatment: 59% would look it up at money.
9. Time saver: 55% would look it up at time.
10. Visual aid: 53% would look it up at visual.

The results are given in decreasing order of agreement of response to individual items. The results show that students are not of one mind in any given case, but it seems reasonable to draw the following points:

- 1- They refuse the notion of separate main entries for compounds.
- 2- They have a marked tendency to look for nominal compounds in the entry for the headword, which is almost always the last word in English.
- 3- For verbal compounds, the picture is more complicated. In the case of a verb + adverb / preposition compound, the first choice for purposes of regaining is always the verb. When there is also a noun, it would seem that the first choice is this noun, but the evidence is less conclusive. The results seem to be influenced by the mother tongue of the students, and it might be argued that the compounds had been chosen were not representative.

Question 14: this was a question about dictionaries in general.

Among the remarks that were made, the most common were:

1. There are not enough examples.
2. There are not enough idioms.
3. There are no proper names.
4. All dictionaries should use the same phonetic transcription.
5. Typography, lay-out, and illustrations are not always clear.

5. Conclusions

In the present study the researchers have noticed certain differences between second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students. In the meantime, a few conclusions can be considerable:

1. It has been found that the greater number of foreign language learners and speakers use dictionaries.
2. It has been found that monolingual dictionaries are altogether considered satisfactory and useful, more than bilingual dictionaries.
3. It seems that monolingual dictionaries are not used as fully as they should be : their introductions are not commonly referred to, and neither are the coding systems for syntactic patterns. Many students are not aware of the riches that their monolingual dictionaries contain.
4. The students still use their monolingual dictionaries fundamentally for decoding activities. This is certainly discouraging for lexicographers and teachers alike. It is for encoding that students need the most information; it is encoding information which is the most difficult to supply; and this is the information which students use. Students need to be taught how to use the

- monolingual dictionaries, which they possess so as to get the most out of them.
5. Dictionaries contemplated for native speakers would regret seem to be as useful to our students as EFL dictionaries.
 6. Our informants regretted the absence from their dictionaries of words that they come upon in their studies: slang, technical words, etc. It is understandable that they should not be aware of the practical problems of space and as a whole cost which limit wider coverage.
 7. By contrast, there was not much determination on the inclusion of proper names. This probably stems from the fact that students are too much characteristic to their dictionaries in their existing form to imagine anything else.
 8. There was not much demand for information concerning the frequency, preferred contexts, situations of use, etc., of vocabulary items.

It might be taken to mean that there are certain general patterns in dictionary use among foreign students.

However, with all these qualifications, the researchers hope to have made a sufficiently effective case for users' research. What the users' viewpoint have demonstrated is that different users vary greatly in their reference skills. But when all the available methods have been clarified and applied, and all necessary studies of likely and actual users have been done, we can then also improve the teaching of the necessary skills in order to a greater extent improve the quality and effectiveness of dictionaries and dictionary users alike.

Moreover, For English learners to succeed, they should dominate not only English vocabulary and grammar, but also the way English is used in kernel content classes. This 'school English' or 'academic English' includes semantics and

syntactic knowledge in addition to functional language use. Essentially, English language learners should draw together their issuing knowledge of English with the content knowledge they are studying in order to complete the academic tasks associated with the content area.

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أستبيان ألى طلبة قسم اللغة الأنكليزية (المرحلة الثانية و الثالثة و الرابعة)

ارجو الاجابة على هذه الاسئلة حسب المطلوب مع الشكر.

- 1 - هل لديك معجم أحادي اللغة (باللغة الأنكليزية) ؟
- 2 - ما نوع المعجم (المعجم) الذي تعتمد عليه ؟
- 3 - لماذا اخترت هذا المعجم ؟
- 4 - هل تعرف معجم اخرى احادية اللغة ؟
- 5 - عند استخدامك المعجم ، ايهم تفضل ؟ السبب ؟
- 6 - هل انت مقتنع بمعجمك الأحادي اللغة اكثر من المعجم الثنائي اللغة ؟
- 7 - ماهي عدد المرات التي تستخدم فيها المعجم احادي اللغة ؟
- 8 - ما نوع المعلومات التي تبحث عنها مرارا في معجمك ؟ هل هي البحث عن
1- المعنى ، 2- بناء الجملة (الأعراب) ، 3- المترادفات ،
4- الأملاء، 5- التلفظ، 6- أصل الكلمة و تاريخها.
- 9 - هل تستخدم المعلومات الموجودة في ملاحق المعجم ؟
- 10 - هل تستعين بمجموعة المبادئ و القواعد التي توضح استخدام الكلمة ؟
- 11 - هل هناك مرة لم تستطع فيها العثور على ما تبحث عنه ؟
- 12 - مانوع الكلمات التي تبحث عنها باستمرار ؟
1- عبارات، 2- كلمات شاملة (موسوعية) ، 3- كلمات خاصة بثقافة أو حضارة معينة ، 4- مختصرات ، 5- كلمات لهجة عامية .

- 13 - تحت أي تركيب أو كلمة تبحث عن الكلمات المركبة الآتية :
- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1-blue chip , | 2- aerial ladder , |
| 3- compound leaf , | 4- economic sanction |
| 5- newspaper , | 6- power station |
| 7- run over , | 8- self treatment |
| 9- time save , | 10- visual aid |
- 14 - سؤال يخص المعاجم بصورة عامة
- 1 - الامثلة غير كافية
 - 2 - العبارات غامضة
 - 3 - لاتوجد أسماء أعلام
 - 4 - على جميع المعاجم الاتفاق على استخدام الرموز الصوتية بصورة متماثلة
 - 5 - عدم وضوح الطباعة و التوضيحات الأخرى .