



A STUDY OF DICTIONARY USE BY YEMENI EFL STUDENT-TEACHERS & TEACHERS AT AL-BAIDA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The study comes primarily under the influence of a similar study conducted by Hamouda (2013) who investigated the dictionary use by Saudi learners, however, the subjects of this study are students who are majoring in English language as well as their teachers. Thus, the present study aims at comparing/contrasting the findings with those of the Yemeni EFL student-teachers and teachers at Al-Baida University. Furthermore, it sheds some light on unknown aspects of various dictionaries. The subjects of the study were the student-teachers and teachers at English Department – College of Education in Al-Baida. The instruments used were a questionnaire to student-teachers, classroom observation and interviews with the teachers of English. The analyses of data obtained showed that a lot of teachers at English Department tend to use L1 (Arabic) while teaching English but with variation in the use. Furthermore, it is found that a majority of student-teachers prefer using bilingual electronic dictionaries whereas most of their teachers recommend using monolingual paper English ones. It is also revealed that looking up the meaning of words is the prime purpose of dictionary use. In contrast, looking up the pronunciation of words is the main purpose of the dictionary use by teachers.

Key words: paper dictionary electronic dictionary monolingual bilingual

INTRODUCTION

In studying English as a foreign language, students need dictionaries to assist them. Dictionaries are of great help as they provide the learners with different information such as meaning, spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, definition, synonyms, etc. According to Hamouda (2013), dictionaries are considered good companions to language learners, especially to second or foreign language learners, because they can provide a quick and direct



access to the meaning of an unknown word. Li (1998 cited in Hamouda, 2013) stated that dictionaries are among the most successful and predominant books related to language because they play an important role not only in native language acquisition but also in foreign language learning. In context of Yemen, English is looked at as a foreign language which is taught as a part of curriculum. It is observed that the teachers' over-reliance on Grammar Translation Method leads, to a great extent, leads to the rare use of dictionaries. Consequently, lack of exposure to the different types of dictionaries and ignorance of their various uses are the salient features among Yemeni students. With the advent of technology means such as smart phones and electronic books (e-books), it becomes possible to install any electronic dictionary and use it easily. Surprisingly, many students enrolled at Level 1 (freshman) of English Department do not know what a dictionary is rather than the ability to use it. In addition, teachers of English themselves can identify only names of three English dictionaries, i.e. Oxford Dictionary, Longman Dictionary, and Cambridge Dictionary. As a result, the scope of this study expands to include introducing types of dictionaries and distinction between dictionaries.

The term "dictionary" has been defined in different ways. According to (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2002), dictionary is "collection of words in one or more specific languages, often listed alphabetically (or by radical and stroke for ideographic languages), with usage of information, definitions, etymologies, phonetics, pronunciations, translation, and other information". Another definition to the same source is "a book of words in one language with their equivalents in another language". A dictionary is "a lexicographical product designed for utility and function, presented in a way that shows inter- relationships among the data", (Sandro,2008). Also a dictionary is "a book that contains a list of words in alphabetical order and that explains their meanings, or gives a word for them in another language"(Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary & Thesaurus,2015). Another definition of a dictionary is" a book containing the words of a language, with their meanings, arranged in alphabetical order", (Oxford learners' dictionary, 2008). Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines a dictionary as "a book that gives a list of words in alphabetical order and explains their meanings in the same language, or another language"; for instant," a German - English dictionary." Also, it is "a book that explains the words and phrases used in a particular subject"; for example, "a science dictionary,"(Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2005).

A broad distinction is made by Sterkenburg (2003) between general and specialized dictionaries. Specialized dictionaries do not contain information about words that are used in language for general purposes. Lexical items that describe concepts in specific fields are usually called terms instead of words, although there is no consensus whether lexicology and terminology are two different fields of study. In theory, general dictionaries are supposed to be semasiological, mapping word to definition while specialized dictionaries are supposed to be onomasiological, first identifying concepts and then establishing the terms used to

designate them. In practice, the two approaches are used for both types. There are other types of dictionaries that don't fit neatly in the above distinction, for instance bilingual (translation) dictionaries, dictionaries of synonyms (thesauri), or rhyming dictionaries. The word dictionary (unqualified) is usually understood to refer to a monolingual general-purpose dictionary (Sterkenburg, 2003). A different dimension on which dictionaries (usually just general-purpose ones) are sometimes distinguished is whether they are prescriptive or descriptive, the latter being in theory largely based on linguistic corpus studies. However, this distinction cannot be upheld in the strictest sense. The choice of headwords is considered itself of prescriptive nature; for instance, dictionaries avoid having too many taboo words in that position. Stylistic indications (e.g. 'informal' or 'vulgar') present in many modern dictionaries is considered less than objectively descriptive as well (Sterkenburg, 2003).

Dictionaries are of different types and can be classified on the basis of several criteria agreed up on by many researchers Shcherba (1940), Sebeok (1962), Malkiel (1959, 1967), Zgusta (1971), Al- Kasimi (1977, 1980), Singh (1982), Svensen (1993) and Fairchild (2001) (cited in Hawel, 2007). The criteria is as follows:

- (1) Density of entries: whether the word list is general or restricted and special? Does it also cover regional and social dialects, jargons and slangs and archaisms?
- (2) The number of languages involved: monolingual, bilingual, multilingual etc.
- (3) The nature of entries: whether lexical only or also encyclopedic, the degree of concentration on strictly lexical data.
- (4) Axis of time: whether diachronic (dynamic) or synchronic (static).
- (5) Arrangement of entries: alphabetical or semantic or causal.
- (6) Purpose: whether normative or referential.
- (7) The prospective user: whether meant for the general reader to find out general linguistic information or for special users to know some special aspects of the lexical unit say etymology etc.?

Based on the above criteria, dictionaries can be of the following types:

- a- General dictionaries.
- b- Specialized dictionaries.
- c- Defining dictionaries.
- d- Prescriptive vs. descriptive dictionaries.
- e- Dictionaries for natural language processing.



As this study deals with English dictionaries and as a result of Yemeni students' and teachers' ignorance of such dictionaries, it is crucial to list some of them as follows:

- A Dictionary of the English Language by Samuel Johnson.
- The American College Dictionary by Clarence L. Barnhart.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.
- Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable.
- Collins English Dictionary.
- Concise Oxford English Dictionary.
- Longman Dictionary.
- Macmillan Dictionary.
- Merriam-Webster, a dictionary of American English.
- New Oxford Dictionary of English.
- Oxford Dictionary of English.
- Oxford English Dictionary (descriptive)
- Random House Dictionary of the English Language.

The age of the Internet brought online dictionaries to the desktop and, more recently, to the smart phone. David Skinner (2013) noted that, "Among the top ten lookups on Merriam-Webster Online at this moment are 'holistic, pragmatic, caveat, esoteric' and 'bourgeois.' Teaching users about words they don't already know has been, historically, an aim of lexicography, and modern dictionaries do this well'. Some of the more notable examples of websites which operate as online dictionaries include:

- Double-Tongued Dictionary
- Free On-line Dictionary of Computing
- Dictionary.com
- Wiktionary (multilingual dictionary, a Wikipedia project)
- Word Net.

The study

There has been a notable research that tackled the various issues related to dictionaries. Some researchers such as Bing (2003), Rashid and Omar (2012), Rebdawi, et al (2009), Lynch (2005), Erdmann (2008), Winchester (1998), Austin (2005) have attempted to identify the origin of dictionaries and follow them historically. Other researchers looked at classification of dictionaries include Shcherba (1940), Sebeok (1962), Malkiel (1959, 1967), Zgusta (1971), Al- Kasimi (1977, 1980), Singh (1982), Svensen (1993) and Fairchild (2001), Devapala (2004), Hawel (2007) (cited in Hawel, 2007). Studies conducted by Ryu (2006), Hartmann (1999), Sánchez (2005), Li (1998), Al Osier (2012), Hartmann (2009), Fan (2003),

Kobayashi (2000), Schmitt (1997), Scholfield (1997), Baxter (1980), Bèjoint (1981), Tomaszczyk (1979), Laufer & Hill (2000), Nesi and Hail (2002), Pousi (2010), Knight (1994), Tomaszczyk (1979), Loucky (2001), Baxter (1980), Fan (2000), Hamouda (2013) (cited in Hamouda, 2013) are examples of research work dealing with dictionary use in different contexts. However, as the use of the electronic dictionary is a relatively recent phenomenon, related studies are few. Representative studies in this respect include Dashtestani,(2013), Taylor and Chan (1994), Huang (2003), Koga (1995), Diab and Hamdan (1999), Winkler (2001), Chang (2002), Aust, Kelley & Roby's (1993).

As a matter of fact, in spite of the bulky literature mentioned above, the present study comes primarily under the influence of a similar study conducted by Hamouda (2013) who investigated the dictionary use by Saudi learners. However, there are significant differences with respect of background, participants, sampling, instruments, and statistics used in data analysis. Based on Hamouda's scope for further research, this study comes to explore dictionary use in a different context either to confirm or contrast his findings. In Yemeni context, it can be assumed that dictionaries are not used completely at Basic Education stage, rarely used at Secondary Education stage, and occasionally used at college stage. The teachers' over-reliance on Grammar Translation Method leads ,to a great extent, leads to the rare use of dictionaries and makes the teachers the only source of information. Consequently, lack of exposure to the different types of dictionaries and ignorance of their various uses and even how to use them effectively are the salient features among Yemeni students. As a result, the present study significantly benefits Yemeni EFL student-teachers and teachers at Al-Baida University, as well as educators and researchers in the field of EFL learning. The objectives of this study can be listed as follows:

- To account for types of dictionaries used by Yemeni EFL student-teachers and teachers at Al-Baida University.
- To find out what, when and how dictionaries are used.
- To find out the Yemeni EFL teachers' role in training their students to use dictionaries.
- To investigate the Yemeni EFL teachers' habits in using English dictionaries.
- To compare/contrast the findings of this study with that of Hamouda (2013).

To fulfill the objectives of this study, the following research questions need to be answered in the study:

- 1) - Do the Yemeni EFL student-teachers and teachers at Al-Baida University use dictionaries?
- 2) - What kind of dictionaries do they use?
- 3) - What is the Yemeni EFL teachers' role in training their students to use dictionaries?

- 4) - What are the Yemeni EFL teachers' habits in using English dictionaries ?
- 5) - To what extent the findings of this study correspond with that of Hamouda (2013)?

The following hypotheses are set to be examined:

- a- the neglect of using dictionaries by Yemeni EFL student-teachers at Al-Baida University is due to the continuous use of Grammar Translation Method of teaching by their teachers in the first place.
- b- The Yemeni EFL student-teachers at Al-Baida University are unaware of the various uses of English.
- c- The Yemeni teachers at Al-Baida University do not use dictionaries themselves rather than training their students to do so.
- d- There is a strong correlation between the findings of the present study and with that of Hamouda (2013).

The subjects of the study were the student-teachers and teachers at English Department – College of Education in Al-Baida. Sixty-five student-teachers were randomly selected from the four levels in the Department of English language at Al-Baida University to be the subjects of this study. They were [n (32) 49.3%] females and [n (33) 50.7%] males. They were asked to respond to a mixed questionnaire. In addition, six of the teaching staff, in the Department of English language at College of Education in Al-Baida were randomly selected and interviewed. The questionnaire covers different areas like dictionary use, the various types of dictionaries used, frequency of using these types of dictionaries, interaction with the dictionary selected, training that student-teachers have on the use of the dictionary. Also, it gives an overview about the respondents' previous experience with dictionaries. Additionally, the questionnaire tries to find out when and how do the student-teachers use their dictionaries and their favorite dictionary type. The main purpose of the interviews was to measure the probability of the hypothesis that the neglect of using dictionaries by Yemeni EFL student-teachers at Al-Baida University is due to over-reliance on Grammar Translation Method in the first place. In addition, the interviews were conducted to find out the Yemeni EFL teachers' role in enhancing dictionary use habits of their students as well as the Yemeni EFL teachers' habits in using English dictionaries. The aim of classroom observation was to find out the correspondence between student-teachers' responses to the questionnaire and the data obtained from the interviews as well as exploring other related issues. A check list was used to record the desired information.

In analyzing the student-teachers' and teachers' responses, the responses were classified into categories according to their frequency of occurrence. Then, a percentage was given to each category. The responses of student-teachers fall under the following categories:

1. Dictionary use.
2. Frequency of using a dictionary.
3. Preference of using Paper/Electronic dictionary.
4. Preference of using Monolingual/Bilingual dictionary.
5. Experience with using dictionaries at school level.
6. Type of information looked up.
7. When to use a dictionary?

The responses of the subjects are shown in the following tables:

(Table 1) Dictionary use

Dictionary use	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	65	100
No	0	0
Total	65	100

(Table 2) Frequency of using a dictionary

Frequency of using a dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
Always	19	29.2 %
Sometimes	46	70.8%
Never	0	0%
Total	65	100%

(Table 3) Preference of using Paper/Electronic dictionary.

Preference of using Paper / Electronic dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
Paper dictionary	13	20%
Electronic dictionary	50	77.6%
Both	2	3.1%
Total	65	100%

(Table 4) Preference of using Monolingual/Bilingual dictionary.

Preference of using Monolingual / Bilingual dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
Monolingual dictionary	51	78.5%
Bilingual dictionary	11	16.9%
Both	3	4.6%
Total	65	100%

(Table 5) Experience with using dictionaries at school level.

Using dictionary at school level	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	23.1 %
No	50	76.9%
Total	65	100%

(Table 6) Type of information looked up

Type of information looked up	Frequency	Percentage
Meaning	52	80%
Pronunciation	9	13.8%
Spelling	4	6.2%
Total	65	100%

(Table 7) When to use a dictionary

When to use a dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
When I find a new word	40	61.5%
During English classes	18	27.7%
When I read in English	5	7.7%
When I write in English	2	3.1%
Total	65	100%

The data analysis mentioned above reveal the following findings:

1. All the participants state that they use dictionaries.
2. Regarding dictionary use, a significant percentage of the responses (70.8%) was for the answer 'Sometimes' as shown in table 2. This clarifies the responses in table 1 as it might be understood that the Yemeni student-teachers are aware of the value of dictionary use and do not neglect its use which contradicts the first hypothesis. On the contrary, this finding confirms the hypothesis. The respondents use dictionaries only "sometimes" because of their teachers' over-reliance on Grammar Translation Method while teaching.
3. A high percentage of the Yemeni student-teachers (76.9%) prefer using electronic dictionaries to paper dictionaries because they:
 - a- help with pronunciation.
 - b- can be installed and used anytime and anywhere.
 - c- don't need effort or time to get the information.

d- Don't cost a lot of money as you can install several dictionaries unlike buying paper dictionaries.

4. More than three quarters of the participants (78.5%) prefer using bilingual dictionaries. This finding also indicates that Yemeni students are accustomed to Grammar Translation Method which depends on translation from the target language to the student's mother tongue and vice versa.

5. Most of the Yemeni student-teachers (76.9%) hadn't received any form of training regarding dictionary use neither at school level nor at college level. In an EFL setting such as Yemen, English is taught from Grade 7 to Grade 12(3rd secondary class) in the government schools and from Grade 4 in the private schools. Though, no lesson in the curriculum contains or focuses on dictionary or dictionary use.

6. In looking information up in dictionaries, the concern of the respondents is restricted to meaning (86.2%), pronunciation (40%), and spelling (20%). The findings reflect that the Yemeni student-teachers are not aware of the other uses of a dictionary such as grammar, usage, spelling, synonyms and antonyms, examples, collocation, etc.

The data analysis obtained from interviews reveal the following findings:

1. All the teachers state that they use different dictionaries but never use them during classes.
2. Unlike student-teachers, the main concern of teachers is looking up pronunciation (30%) followed by meaning, , definition, collocation, idioms, and spelling.
3. 83.4% of the teachers respond that they recommend their students to use monolingual dictionaries. However, it is noticed that the teachers in answering a previous question stated that they use various types of dictionaries (finding 1).
4. 66.7% use L1 (Arabic) while teaching English but with variation in the use. This finding indicates the dominance of Grammar Translation Method and supports the first hypothesis. The other major findings obtained from classroom observation and comparing the findings of the present study with that of Hamouda (2013) are listed below:

1. A very few number of students use monolingual dictionaries (at junior and senior level), some use bilingual ones but a huge number of students do not use any dictionary. Teachers do not use dictionaries of any type during lectures and use L1 repeatedly instead.
2. Most of the dictionaries used are bilingual electronic ones. They are used only when students are asked to perform certain activities/tasks.



3. Students mostly use their mother tongue while interacting and participating in group work activities/tasks.

4. there is no correspondence between the responses of the student-teachers and the teachers regarding certain questions such as training students to use dictionaries, recommending using monolingual dictionaries, etc.

5. The similarities between the findings of this study and the study conducted by Hamouda (2013) in the KSA are:

- Both Yemeni and Saudi students do not take full advantage of dictionaries.
- The preference of electronic dictionary to the other types of dictionaries.
- The preference of bilingual dictionary to monolingual dictionaries.

To conclude, it can be claimed that if the concerned people make use of the findings, suggestions, and recommendations of the present study, they will be able to use the various dictionaries more effectively. In addition, this study significantly contributes to the research in this field by supporting some previous researchers and can be a base for further research.

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