

Using of Bilingual dictionaries to enhance Meaning Determination among Sudanese EFL Students

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Abstract

This paper attempts to identify the role of English- Arabic bilingual dictionaries in enhancing Sudanese EFL learners' meaning determination skills , and it is an endeavour to pinpoint the causes of weakness and find the best methods to promote the students' performance and enhance their lexicographic tasks such as finding collocations, definitions, example sentences. Moreover, this paper seeks to enable Sudanese EFL learners to be better able to use the dictionary effectively to determine the closest meaning of words based on the contextual clues. Therefore, EFL students should be taught to be more critical in their use of dictionaries, when selecting definitions and or examples as models of meaning determination, they should be alerted to the fact that a word's semantic interpretation may depend on its syntactic environments (Chan 2012d), and meaning does not just reside in typical combinations of lexical choices but also in typical combinations of grammatical choices (Hunston 2001). Learners' dictionary skills and their abilities to extract relevant information from a dictionary were more important than the choice of dictionaries. Knowing how to use the dictionary probably and making the best out of it leads to a successful learning process.

Key words: Lexicography, Contextualization, Dictionary Exploitation, Dictionary Consultation.

1-1 INTRODUCTION:

Language is at the heart of human life. Without it, many of our most important activities are inconceivable. Try to imagine

relating to your family, making friends, learning, falling in love, forming a relationship, being a parent, holding- or rejecting- a religious faith, having political ideas, or taking a political action, without using words (Guy Cook, Applied Linguistics, 2003:1). In Guy's opinion, It is quite clear that language encircles almost every activity of our life.

We rely on dictionaries to provide us with definitions of words, and to tell us how to spell them correctly. They are used at home and at school, cited in law courts, sermons and parliament, and referred to by crossword addicts and scrabble players alike. (Howard Jackson Lexicography, 2002). Dictionaries are reference books containing the words of a language usually alphabetically arranged, with information on their forms, pronunciations, functions, meanings, etymologies, spelling and idiomatic uses.

1-2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Sudanese EFL students are supposed to be competent in decoding the closest sense of polysemous words. Mastering dictionary skills acts as a cornerstone for learners' success in their university studies. However, university students are incapable of using dictionaries probably. They cannot determine the meaning of polysemous words to a number of reasons, one of which, they ignore the Contextual clues of some words.

The research attempts to examine the main lexicographic skills problems for Sudanese EFL university students, in general, and B.A First Year students of English at Sudan University of Science & Technology, college of languages in particular for the use of paper English-Arabic bilingual Dictionaries for Meaning Determination with reference to Oxford Word Power Learner's Dictionary.

1-3 AIMS OF THE STUDY:

- 1- Helping students develop their overall knowledge and understanding of English dictionary skills.
- 2- Developing students' understanding to be better able to determine multiple meanings of single word.

1-4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This paper seeks to nourish a love for and fascination with English lexicography.

1-5 QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY:

In tackling the research problem, the researcher is specifically going to answer the following question:

- 1- To what degree are EFL Students capable of decoding the most appropriate meaning of a polysemous word in a dictionary?

1-6 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:

In order to answer questions of the study, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

- 1- EFL Students are not capable of decoding the most appropriate meaning of a polysemous word in a dictionary.

1-7 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The researcher designs and conducts a test to compile data for the Investigation of using bilingual dictionaries to enhance meaning determination among Sudanese EFL Students. The main sources of information are students . The data is analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results of the qualitative analysis is tabulated into charts, graphs and diagrams.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

English Learners' Dictionaries are the most popular self-learning tools for second and foreign English language students. Different learners' dictionaries are available on the market, including multilingual dictionaries, trilingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries and monolingual dictionaries. Dictionaries are seen as indispensable for home and academic study (Abecassis 2007), and in this regard the researcher firmly believes that learners' dictionary enables the students to be more independent as it increases the students' autonomy from the teachers. Moreover, no one could deny the importance of learners' dictionaries in the process of learning and teaching, but unluckily on the other hand not all students can make full use of such vital resources, and many students ignore or misread useful dictionary information. Some learners even locate a wrong dictionary entry, resulting in miscomprehension (Bogaards 1998, Luppescu and Day 1993, Tang 1997), so a number of dictionary consultation problems have been attributed to students' deficient dictionary skills (Al-Ajmi 2002). Although it is true that deficient dictionary skills may be a major cause of some dictionary consultation problems, the usefulness and comprehensiveness of dictionary information may also be at issue, as many dictionaries fail to provide the range and subtlety of information needed for effective use (Rundell 1999).

LEXICOGRAPHY:

Lexicography is commonly understood in a narrow sense as the theory and practice, or the 'art and craft' (Landau 1984), of dictionary-making, the compilation and preparation of reference texts for publication.

Lexicography falls out into two branches: Practical Lexicography and Theoretical Lexicography. While Practical **lexicography** involves writing and editing

dictionaries, Theoretical lexicography focuses on the study of language and its vocabulary in the context of the culture and develops the best method to compile dictionaries. The concern of Theoretical **lexicography** is to develop theories of the semantic and structural relationship of words used in the lexicon. A lexicon includes *lexemes* or word stems which are the minimal units, linking related forms of words in a language. Thus the lexicon deals with the semantics of word meanings and also structural information regarding the etymology of a word.

TYPES OF DICTIONARIES:

Dictionaries are limited in their purpose and scope. There are general and specialized dictionaries. The general dictionary comes closer to the ideal dictionary (the one that represents the whole lexicon). The data that it is based on commonly take the form of a general-purpose corpus. Its most general functions are the following:

- The dictionary provides information on parts and aspects of the lexicon of one language. This is a monolingual dictionary.
- The dictionary provides help in translating between two languages. This is a bilingual dictionary.
- The dictionary provides help in translating between many languages. This is a multilingual dictionary.

Specialized dictionaries are dictionaries that cover a relatively restricted set of phenomena. Dictionaries of:

- synonyms
- pronunciations
- names (place names and personal names)
- phrases and idioms
- dialect terms
- slang
- quotations

- etymologies

MONOLINGUALS VS. BILINGUALS:

Bilingual and monolingual dictionaries are the most used dictionaries by Sudanese EFL learners. Generally, language students like to use bilingual dictionaries because they bring instant satisfaction, while language teachers prefer to use monolingual dictionaries for their long term benefits, and this question of choice leads us to the difficult question “ which dictionary serves the learner best?” bilingual dictionaries are normally employed in the initial stages of learning a language and may help the learner solve their terminological problems unless the unfamiliar word has numerous entries. Many bilingual dictionaries give only single word translations, as a result of which learners are bound to make mistakes. Koc and Bamber (1997:64) state that “ as the meaning of a word tends to change according to the context in which it is used, the chances of getting the wrong meaning with this type of dictionary are fairly high.”

On the other hand, while in using a monolingual dictionary students had to think in English and meanings have to be understood in terms of other English words. Therefore, the choice of selecting which dictionary to use depends on the students’ needs and decision.

DICTIONARY INFORMATION:

Students have to be aware of the information that a dictionary contains. A dictionary generally contains at least the following information about each word which can be used by the foreign languages learners.

- 1- Its spelling
- 2- Standard pronunciation
- 3- Definitions to represent the word’s one or more meanings

- 4- Parts of speech , such as noun, verb, or preposition
- 5- Example sentence in which the word is used
- 6- Synonym
- 7- Antonym

Some other advanced dictionaries present further information about words, such as etymology or history of the word and whether the word is non-standard or archaic. The history of a word is usually given at the beginning of the entry and often give information about the way the word has developed its current meaning. Placing a word's etymology before its definitions enables the reader to see where the first meaning of the word come from. On the other hand, some other dictionaries place the etymology at the end of each entry. In conclusion, a dictionary may be more than a reference book about a word; it can contain biographical and geographical knowledge as well as lists of weights, measures, symbols and so on.

DICTIONARY CONSULTATION SKILLS:

Researcher's unshakable belief is that words are immensely powerful and useful units of meaning, but they can sometimes seem problematic. Many words have more than one meaning and sometimes defining exactly what a word means can look complex. When thinking about or looking up the meaning of English words in dictionary, we often need to consider different aspects of meaning. The first thing to think about is what the word means. In other words, what is a simple definition of the word as we would find in a dictionary. This is called the semantic meaning.

We might also need to think about how we would typically use this word. The dictionary should show you clearly, is it a formal word, a neutral word or a less formal and more colloquial? For example, the word "*energated*" is a more formal

word than tired and sounds strange in an everyday conversation. This is what is called the register of the word.

Furthermore, when consulting a good dictionary, with some words it is important to think about whether the word has a positive or negative meaning. For example, the word “*pretentious*” has a more negative meaning than the word clever. This is what we call connotation.

Finally, it is sometimes useful to think about words go together with other words. Such as the word “*high*” does not go together with people. It is more typically used with buildings. It is better to use the word tall when talking about people. This is technically known as collocation.

CONTEXTUAL CLUES:

Another important factor students need to take into consideration when consulting bilingual English- Arabic dictionary is the contextual clues; as context is well-known as the king. Thus, knowing how to look up a word or expression in the dictionaries is key especially when several meanings are defined in the given context, for instance, we can identify many senses i.e. multiple meanings of the word “see” by means of a dictionary exploitation as illustrated below.

- 1- I can't see Lydia anywhere.(perceive with the eye)
- 2- The security guard asked to see our passports.(inspect)
- 3- Can you see what I mean?(understand)
- 4- We are going to see a film tonight.(be a spectator at)
- 5- I could see that you were having an argument with him.(perceive with the eye)
- 6- I'd like to see the manager please. I have a complaint(have a meeting with)

When the above dictionary definitions and examples sentences are examined, it is proven that each sentence can be interpreted differently because of the contextual clues and the

different dictionary definitions for the same word and this facts gives credence to the notion that a word has no meaning in isolation, it should be contextualized so as to give sense . As it is well-known, many English words are polysemous with more than one sense related by extension (Yule 2010).

Therefore, having the profound knowledge of the proper use of a dictionary will be of a tremendous help in selecting the meaning that is appropriate to a given context.

METHODOLOGY:

The descriptive analytical method has been followed in this study to realize the objectives set by the researcher. As this study investigates some lexicographic skills of undergraduate EFL students in using bilingual dictionaries for meaning determination.

The researcher has adopted a test for data collection and to accurately observe, describe and analyze the real performance of the students in terms of meaning determination.

Population of the Study:

The population of this study are B.A first year students of English at Sudan University of Science & technology, college of languages. It is regarded as a convenient sample because those students are studying in their second semester at the time of the test that means they have been exposed to use English dictionaries quite many times. A group of 40 students participated in the study, it is significant to mention that they are males and females, their ages are between 18-19 and they have studied 11 years Arabic Secondary School Medium, all of them were bilinguals with Arabic as their mother tongue and in view of their English learning backgrounds, they could all be regarded as upper-intermediate learners of English.

Meaning Determination Task:

The participants were given Four sentences for meaning determination. For each sentence, a group of words containing the target lexical item was italicized. In this part, the participants had to determine the most appropriate meaning of the italicized expression by circling the correct answer from a list of five choices (including the choice I don't know if they could not determine the appropriate meaning).

The target words chosen for the task were common words familiar to upper-intermediate Sudanese ESL learners, but the meanings and the associated syntactic structures were less familiar to this group of learners. It worth mentioning that, the participants had to complete the requirements with the use of Oxford Wordpower learner's dictionary

- i) the preposition after (meaning trying to find or catch somebody or something)
- e.g. John was after the money in the locker;
- ii) the word save used as a conjunction (meaning except)
- e.g. They did not know anything more save that she was divorced;
- iii) the phrasal verb bank on (meaning rely on)
- e.g. The country banks on its youth to generate hope;
- iv) the verb regret used with a that-clause (meaning feel sorry about something)
- e.g. We regret that we cannot accept your proposal;

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The researchers introduce and discuss the results of the study according to its hypothesis. EFL Students are not capable of decoding the most appropriate meaning of a polysemous word in a dictionary. After tabulating and analyzing the data of hypothesis the results are shown in the following tables.

Table No. (1): Analysis of Meaning Determination Students' Test:

Questions	Correct		Wrong		Decision
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
1-John was after the money in the locker.	16	40%	24	60%	Accepted
2-They did not know anything more save that she was divorced.	13	32.5%	27	67.5%	Accepted
3-The country banks on its youth to generate hope.	6	15%	34	85%	Accepted
4-We regret that we cannot accept your proposal.	7	17.5%	33	82.5%	Accepted

From these tables No. (1) It is shown the summery of the results. For the test it is clear that the number of students who are having the wrong answers is greater than the number of correct answers so we can say the hypothesis is accepted and the test will support these results.

CONCLUSION:

In the light of the results reported in table (1) above, this paper can arrive at a number of conclusions: First, it can be said that the benefits of dictionaries to Sudanese language learners should not be ignored in language classes. Unfortunately, in most classrooms, very little time is dedicated for dictionary use. Secondly, Knowing how to use the dictionary probably enables the students to be more independent from teachers as it increases the students' autonomy from the teachers . Moreover, a learner who makes good use of a dictionary will be able to continue learning outside the classroom. Last but by no means least, I would like to conclude by asking all relevant academic institutions to objectively consider dictionary training and lexicography course into syllabus.

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