
Dictionaries as Effective Tools of English Language Education

For the time being, English pedagogical lexicography has changed dramatically. It is now a field of study that has been developing in the recent three decades for three reasons. First, there has been a growing interest in the concept of the lexicon and vocabulary learning, features that are linked to dictionaries (e.g. Lewis, 1993; 1997; Nation, 2001; Koya, 2005; Nesselhauf, 2003; Sessink, 2007, as cited in AL-Sayed, 2013).

Second, simultaneously with the interest in vocabulary, there has been a huge advance in compilation and analysis of written and spoken corpora through the tools of computational linguistics which has eased the tools of traditional lexicographers and enabled them to produce dictionaries based on new insights.

Thirdly, according to Crystal (1997) and Graddol (2000, as cited in AL-Sayed, 2013), English has been playing the role of an international language and a lingua-franca for writing and speaking. As a result, since learning language seems inevitable, EFL dictionaries as indispensable tools to learn English vocabulary explicitly came to the picture.

Dictionaries are practical for learning accurate pronunciation and having comprehension. It serves numerous activities; we consult a dictionary to understand peoples' utterances and reading texts and to say what we intend to say. In other words, dictionary is a means of perception (EL-Sayed, 2013).

However, native and non-native English speakers have different reasons for consulting a dictionary. Cowie (1993, as cited in EL-Sayed, 2013) mentions the expectations of both groups as below:

1. The EFL learners are more in favor of knowing about common vocabulary, while a native speaker looks up uncommon words having no compounds.
2. The list of words in EFL dictionaries includes neologisms and technicalities in a balanced way, while a dictionary for native speakers has a variety of technicalities, neologisms, etc.
3. Dictionaries for native speakers are concerned with decoding activities like reading and spelling, while EFL dictionaries pertain to encoding activities like writing.
4. Due to the fact that EFL learners are still acquiring the language, the definitions of vocabulary in EFL dictionaries are simpler than definitions of native dictionaries which

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are completely developed.

5. EFL and native dictionaries might be different concerning pronunciation. In the native dictionaries, pronunciation is demonstrated either by a respelling or by symbols of the international phonetic system. EFL dictionaries use the international phonetic system only.
6. To assist the EFL learners to learn the right stylistic level, EFL dictionaries include more explicit reference to language use. This is possible by making the use of usage labels and notes.
7. To aid learners even more, EFL dictionaries supply plenty of example phrases and sentences showing the real use of those phrases.

Dictionaries can also be employed regarding decoding and encoding functions. The most prominent one was suggested by Schofield (1982, EL-Sayed, 2013) which mostly considers those strategies employed by users for decoding purposes. He proposes that to look up and understand information, this process should be broken down into steps as following:

1. Look up words or phrases that you do not perceive
2. If there is an inflectional unknown word, the inflection should be omitted and then the word should be looked up
3. Searching should be done in an alphabetical order
4. If you do not understand one entry for the unfamiliar word, follow this procedure as below:
5. If the unfamiliar word is a phrase, idiom, or compound noun, then look up every single component
6. If the unfamiliar word is a suffix, then look up the stem
7. If the unfamiliar word is an irregular inflected form or a spelling variant, then look up the entries:
8. If there is an addendum, search there.
9. If there are various senses, or homographic entries, lower them by removing.
10. Try to perceive the definition and incorporate it into the context where the unfamiliar was come across.
11. If no senses entered seems to fit, try to infer one that does from the senses you have. If more than one fits, search more contextual hints in the source text to disambiguate.

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