

THE USING OF ELECTRONIC DICTIONARIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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In the Presidential decree “On measures of further improvement of foreign language learning system” on December 10, 2012 it is stated that we must improve the system of teaching of foreign languages to the younger generation and training specialists who can speak them fluently through the introduction of innovative teaching methods with the use of modern teaching and information and communication technologies and on this basis to create the conditions and opportunities for wider access to the achievements of world civilization and world information resources, international cooperation and communication.

Nobody denies the importance of learning an international language. There is also little doubt that without vocabulary, the story of language learning is hardly worth telling. Until recently, the only available dictionary in the market was the traditional paper dictionary which was huge, fragile and limited in the number of vocabulary. Nowadays, these bulky paper dictionaries are being replaced with the small, light, stylish and hi-tech electronic dictionaries. They include millions of words which can be renewed by linking to the internet free of charge. Modern learners, instead of being bewildered by browsing among papers of an old paper dictionary, just bear the insertion of an unknown word in the special slot through keyboard and then navigate in clear and colorful LCD to find the word's meaning, part of speech, synonym, antonym, as well as its pronunciation and much more.

Generally, dictionaries are classified into paper and electronic dictionaries. This article is an attempt to assess their advantages and disadvantages in the field of second/foreign language learning. The present study seeks to answer the following question: Is there any significant difference between the effect of electronic dictionaries and paper dictionaries on the learning of new vocabulary in EFL context?

There are special dictionaries for whatever subject imaginable, but can we rely on each one we choose to use? In other words, how do we know which one to choose to give us as much information as we need? Are all dictionaries useful for our purposes? Why are there so many of them? As the dictionaries get more difficult, you should also get more information to help you more fully understand the word you are looking up. The ideal dictionary would communicate all the information you need to know to fully understand the usage and use of the very few words and symbols that you have to look up.

Generally dictionaries are categorized into two general types of printed and electronic ones. It needs be mentioned that the former manifested in different types such as monolingual, bilingual, bilingualized, glossary, hyper-reference text and picture dictionary; and the latter is divided into three types: on-line dictionaries on the internet, hand-held ones and those on the CD-ROM.

The term electronic dictionary (or ED) can be used to refer to any reference material stored in electronic form that gives information about the spelling, meaning, or use of words. Before the advent of electronic science and the development of electronic dictionaries, traditional paper dictionaries were prevailing. Special advantages of paper dictionaries have encouraged publishers to continue using them then and now. To name some of the specifications of paper dictionaries, reference can be made to the following:

Advantages of paper dictionaries (P-D)

- § They are easy to browse; you just flip the papers alphabetically and look the word up.
- § They are easy to buy; cheaper than some usual book.
- § They are easy to replicate in different size and word volumes.

- § They are easy to use; all you require is the power of vision and knowledge of the order of alphabet.
- § Concise ones are durable; you can put them in your backpack and carry them everywhere with yourself.
- § You can touch them, write on them, and when we pay for them we acquire something very tangible in return.

These features cause learners to keep using paper dictionaries. However using paper dictionaries may have a number of downsides. Some of disadvantages of paper dictionaries include the following:

Disadvantages of P-D

- § Abridged paper dictionaries are not comprehensive.
- § Comprehensive ones are bulky.
- § Bulky ones tear off easily.
- § Weight makes them difficult to handle.
- § Difficult to make them more than bilingual.
- § Addition of context is expensive.
- § Users must know the exact spelling to refer to.
- § After publication, a paper dictionary becomes dated whereas the concerned language is ever-evolving.
- § Size restriction hampers the coverage.
- § Working on two models at a time is difficult.
- § Working with bilingual is also time-consuming for translators.

Electronic dictionaries (E-D) do not have a long history. They have been invented a few years ago but due to their remarkable facilities and particular abilities they have become popular very fast. The first electronic dictionary was released in

the Japanese market in 1979 under the name of 'Pocket Electronic Translation Machine'. It was like those of today. Through the 1980s to 1990s paper dictionaries' market was damaged due to the mass production of electronic dictionaries. Mass production of electronic dictionaries and human inclination towards convenience has urged students to use electronic dictionaries more than ever before. In short, the advantages and disadvantages of E-D are listed below.

Advantages of E-D

- § Many volumes get compressed into one electronic dictionary.
- § Storage and retrieval become quick and easy.
- § They are light, compact and faster than any paper dictionary.
- § One can easily update some of the brands by using internet and software.
- § They have certain unique functions, such as error tolerant input which helps users to look up words with wrong spelling.
- § They have cross-referencing as well as colorful pictures word and spelling games.
- § They encourage cooperative attitude among users because a view of the screen is more easily shared than a view of the page.
- § You can easily change them from one dictionary to another, for example from law to mechanics.
- § They provide users with authentic recorded voice facilities for better pronunciation.
- § Psychologically, they are prestigious and stylish.
- § They can provide access to large amounts of data, and they are interactive.

Disadvantages of E-D

Electronic dictionary is fragile; you should take good care of it, you can't put them in your backpack as you do with your paper dictionary.

- § You need to prepare extra battery; no power means the electronic dictionary is useless so you have to spend some money every time.
- § They are far more expensive than their paper counterpart and so they are subject to theft.
- § They cause users to forget alphabetical order gradually.
- § They decrease student ability in pronunciation and spelling because machine does this for them.
- § LCD can be hard to read in some lighting conditions.
- § Working with e-dictionary on computer requires that users have some computer abilities.
- § It takes time to learn how to use the functions of an e-dictionary.
- § Using internet dictionaries are too costly and time-consuming and computer facilities are not available everywhere.
- § Nobody takes responsibility for the accuracy of the information Internet dictionaries provide.

Taking into account students' interest in the use of electronic dictionaries and their benefits for EFL learning, the use of electronic dictionaries would improve students' motivation to learn EFL. EFL teachers can play a considerable role in raising students' awareness of the appropriate use of electronic dictionaries in order to maximize the effects of the affordances which were perceived by the EFL students. Definitely, it is the efficient and wise use of technology which helps language teachers and students to achieve their educational goals effectively.