

A Theoretical Approach in Designing Bilingualized Electronic Dictionary and Its Importance in ESP Teaching

Jelena Ranitovic

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia
Email: jelena.ranitovic@sipcoms.org,

Aleksandar Kavgic

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia
Email: sasa.kavgic@gmail.com,

Vesna Nikolic

Faculty of Occupational Safety, University of Nis, Serbia
Email: vesnik08@gmail.com,

Lazar Velimirovic

Mathematical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, Serbia
Email: velimirovic.lazar@gmail.com

Miomir Stankovic

Faculty of Occupational Safety, University of Nis, Serbia
Email: miomir.stankovic@gmail.com

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n13p239

Abstract

This article covers theoretical aspects in the development of a bilingualized electronic dictionary (BED), as well as its pedagogical utilization and effectiveness in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at universities. The aim of the paper is to provide us with information on current skills and habits in complex dictionary use among students of technical sciences. It also investigates implementation of new didactic methods and opportunities that BED design and its application may offer. Since the vocabulary acquisition is essential part of second language learning, teachers should recommend teaching aids that facilitate students' learning. This paper proves that the same is true for dictionary usage as, at least, electronic dictionaries are less time-consuming and user-friendlier than paper-based dictionaries. BED's content can easily be updated which is also of great significance for target students. Some of the results obtained from the empirical research we carried out are discussed in this article.

Keywords: *electronic dictionary; bilingualized; ESP teaching; second language learning; dictionary skills;*

1. Introduction

Education is changing dramatically in the information age. The use of ICT has significantly reshaped everyday classroom activities. Teachers employ it to facilitate language learning, especially vocabulary acquisition by using various online resources such as specialized dictionaries, encyclopaedias, thesauri, terminology databanks, etc. The ESP language instructors, since they teach vocabulary within a specialized field, are required to be familiar with different reference tools, and to be able to use it efficiently in their learning environments. Both electronic and printed sources cover mostly general terminology and the ability to find and evaluate online sources that deal with (bilingual) specialized terminology is essential for ESP teaching (Krajka, 2007).

Dictionaries play an important part in second language learning since they contain not only words with their meanings, but also provide students with more information like pronunciation, part of speech, etymology, its equivalent in a different language, etc. Nowadays, electronic dictionaries are becoming very popular among students, especially among those whose work involves a lot of human-computer interaction. Due to quicker search, fast access to stored data,

and regular content updates, the use of electronic dictionaries is becoming an indispensable part of language learning process of many ESP students (Petrylaitė, Vaškeļienė & Vėžytė, 2008).

The objective of this article is to analyze and discuss the potential of BED development and its implementation in teaching ESP at universities.

2. A Short Overview of Dictionary Features

Dictionary classification may be discussed from the point of view of form, whether they are electronic or printed, or from the viewpoint of content, whether it belongs to the group of scholarly/historical dictionaries or it is a commercial object (Atkins, 2008).

According to B.T. Atkins and Michael Rundell (2008), dictionaries may be classified into two major types – monolingual dictionaries (like the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, and the COBUILD Dictionary), and bilingual / bilingualized dictionaries (like the Oxford English-Serbian Student's Dictionary). Bilingual dictionaries can be unidirectional and bidirectional.

Each dictionary type has its own advantages and disadvantages for second language (L2) learners. Mostly students at the beginner and intermediate level use bilingual dictionaries. They provide instant translation, but the major drawback of using a bilingual dictionary is that students are not getting the habit to think in the target language and remain dependant on the native language (Scholfield, 2002; Martin, 1998). Therefore, teachers should encourage the use of monolingual dictionaries among their students. These dictionaries offer definitions, examples, collocations and other headwords' information in L2 and students are therefore forced to think in a foreign language. Teachers must encourage students to use this type of a dictionary as soon as they feel the students' level of language proficiency allows it. Otherwise, information provided only in English can be difficult to retrieve and may not motivate students to use this type of a dictionary in the future, but make them turn to bilingual dictionaries as they provide L1 translations.

Bilingualized dictionaries may be the best option as they have characteristics of a monolingual dictionary - they provide definitions, examples, and other information in L2, and also offer an L1 equivalent or "key" (Winkler, 2001). The user should go through information provided in L2 first, and if the meaning is still not understood then there is an option to look up for the key. The problematic part is that the user may skip the definitions and examples and turn to the translation immediately.

Students will easier acquire language if they are advised to use dictionaries that are level-appropriate. By helping students to choose the dictionary according to their language proficiency, teachers will instruct students to be in control of the tools they use. In time, students will become less dependent and their language acquisition more autonomous (Taylor, 2004).

It is obvious that none of these dictionary types escapes criticism. Atkins and Rundell (2008) point out that regarding language coverage:

"All dictionaries are incomplete, and come under the heading 'work in progress'.

They also state that with respect to form, type and content:

"...there is no such thing as a perfect dictionary".

3. ESP Learner Dictionary Skills

3.1 Research methodology

The important part when making a dictionary is to understand who the target audience is and to react in accordance with the information gathered in the pre-lexicography phase. A dictionary made for market should serve its purpose (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). Therefore, at the beginning of a dictionary project, a thorough user profiling should be performed (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). A survey among five hundred Serbian students of technical sciences was conducted in order to understand their pre-existing dictionary skills and habits. The respondents were mostly bachelor and master students in the 20-25 age range. The participants are native speakers of Serbian with average proficiency in English language.

Our questionnaire was designed based on the questionnaire used in Jian, H.L., Sandnes, F.E., Law, K.M.Y., Huang Y.P., & Huang, Y.M. (2009). The first part of the questionnaire is consisted of questions regarding students' demographic information - gender, age, level of study, etc. The second part was related to dictionary type students own and use, why and how often they consult dictionaries, ranking of dictionary characteristics, etc. Questions were mostly

designed as multiple choice ones.

3.2 Findings and discussion

In this article only the results regarding dictionary medium students use and prefer, and important dictionary features are shown.

According to the findings, the majority of respondents – 60.6% own a bilingual dictionary. Some students selected two answers because they own more dictionaries. Only 27.2% own monolingual dictionaries. The percentage of the students who use specialized terminology dictionaries is very close to the percentage of those who use monolingual ones (Figure 1). This shows that respondents with higher L2 proficiency use either monolingual or specialized dictionaries, or both.

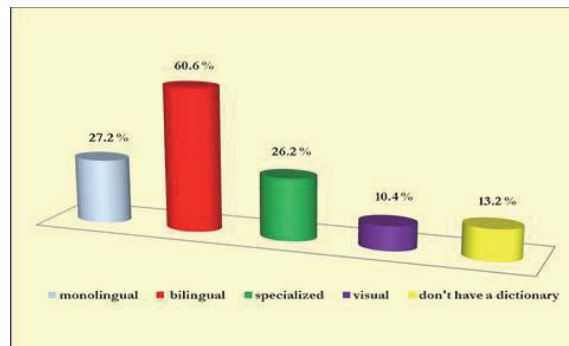


Figure 1. Which dictionary do you own?

It is important to point out that students, who own printed dictionaries, mostly use online dictionaries because they are not as time-consuming as paper-based and are much easier to use (Figure 2).

Out of 60.6% students who own bilingual paper-based dictionary, 78.88% consult web-based dictionary. From the total number of students who own monolingual paper-based dictionary, 81.62% use web-based dictionary. It can be noticed that over 80% of students who own monolingual or specialized paper-based dictionary, rather use web-based dictionary (Table 1).

Table 1. Students who own different types of paper-based dictionaries but rather use web-based.

Paper-based dictionary students own	Monolingual	Bilingual	Specialized
Web-based	81.62%	78.88%	84.73%

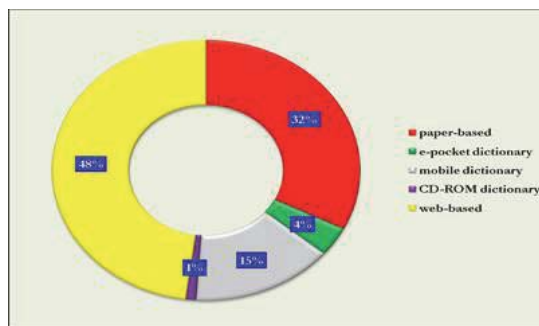


Figure 2. Which dictionary type do you use?

Electronic dictionary skills resemble basic computer literacy skills and therefore some special training in complex

dictionary use is not necessary (Koren, 1997).

The analysis of the findings also shows that the most important dictionary characteristic is the speed of use. Students find exhausting and difficult looking up words alphabetically ordered in the traditional printed dictionaries. Sometimes, the word they are searching could not be found due to the fact that the great majority of dictionaries, electronic or printed, cover general language only. Many popular online dictionaries provide only common meanings, not detailed explanation of terminology that is not frequently used in everyday communication. Therefore, the respondents perceived the content as the second important characteristic.

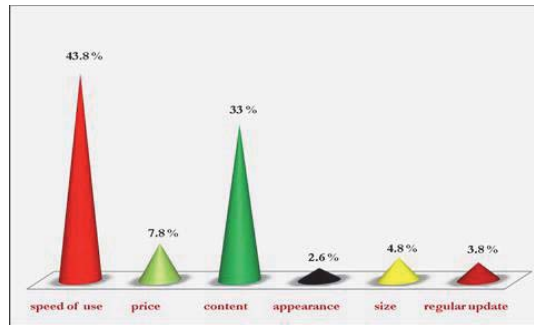


Figure 3. Ranking of dictionary characteristics

Surprisingly, regular content update was not considered to be beneficial for the respondents according to the findings. This issue is going to be further researched in the future, since it is evident that Serbian students have never worked with the dictionary which content can be updated on a regular basis, and therefore lack the awareness of this important advantage. We are witnessing technology boom everywhere we look, and the English language, as being the dominant language of business, science and technology, is evolving in parallel. Possibility to have an updated content is essential in the digital era we live in, especially for the students of technical sciences. Teachers are strongly recommended to introduce their students with the positive aspect of this feature (Figure 3).

Based on the empirical evidence presented in this article, it can be noticed that students express the need for BED design. The fact that the use of this dictionary will not be connected to students' language proficiency is of great importance. Both low and high L2 proficiency students can use it since it contains L2 headword information and offers L1 equivalent.

Students think paper-based dictionaries are deficient with respect to speed of access and entry search. These fully electronic dictionaries, which are not adaptations of paper-based ones, are more flexible to use, since entry search is very similar to the basic internet search (Pastor & Alcina, 2010). All of these factors are very motivating and encourage dictionary use.

4. Conclusion

This article analyzes perceptions on electronic dictionary use among ESP students in Serbia. Taking into account the results obtained, several conclusions can be given. Despite the fact that students own printed dictionaries, they mostly consult online dictionaries. Electronic dictionaries are perceived as more advantageous over the paper-based ones due to quicker and easier search. The speed of use and content are considered to be the main benefits of electronic dictionaries.

Content update was not perceived as nearly important as the two previously mentioned characteristics. This topic will be thoroughly researched and discussed in some of our future works.

BED development would greatly contribute to ESP teaching at Serbian universities since it does not only cover specialized terminology and offers Serbian equivalents, but it is the design that will allow its users to navigate easily, promote autonomous learning, and motivate them to use the dictionary on a regular basis.

5. Acknowledgement

This work is supported by Serbian Ministry of Education and Science through Mathematical Institute of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Project III44006).

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