Optimizing the Advantages of Monolingual Dictionary Utilization by Thai EFL Students

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Abstract *The purposes of this research were to 1) investigate the use of dictionary of second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University 2) compare the use of dictionary between the achievers and underachievers. The instruments used for collecting data were a questionnaire and an in-depth interview. The population was 40 English major students from Humanities faculty. The data were statistically analyzed in terms of mean and standard deviation. A t-test analysis was used to find the difference between the achievers and underachievers on the use of dictionary. For the in-depth interview, six achievers and six underachievers are randomized through simple random sampling technique to give their opinions on three questions provided, and the data were collected to assure the results of the study. The results of this study showed that the overall usage of dictionary of Bangkok University students was at a medium level, and significant differences existed in dictionary usage between the achievers and underachievers. The findings of this research would let the teachers know the students' problems and purposes of using dictionary, so that the teachers can train the students to practice using dictionary systematically so as to make the best use of dictionary. Pedagogical implications into reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition were suggested.*

Keywords: *Reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition*

1. Introduction

Hong (2010) claimed that incidental vocabulary learning was regarded as an integral part of L2 vocabulary learning because it includes three vocabulary learning strategies – glossing, guessing from context, using dictionary and so on. Among them, although dictionary gives a wealth of information to learn English and it is one of the mainstays of any language researchers, it is used as a last resort after other vocabulary learning strategies fail (Harmer, 2001). As stated by (Li & Lou, 2012), in the process of English learning, a high-quality dictionary is a good friend and teacher for EFL learners. The study of dictionary use in EFL learning is one of the important areas of applied linguistics research. Likewise, Thornbury (2008) also endorsed that dictionary is unequalled in that it is a source of words and of information about words. As a result, in a dictionary, the students will find information such as the different meanings that words have, how they are pronounced, what other words they collocate with, and when they can be used. It also gives examples of the words in phrases and sentences so that students get a very good idea of how they themselves can use the word (Harmer, 2001). Furthermore, other perspectives of dictionary utilization in terms of advantages, what good dictionary should have, dictionary use strategies, and the argument of how monolingual dictionary outperforms bilingual dictionary, are presented as follows:

1. Nation (2008) points out that dictionary can help the learners in three major ways : 1) They can help learners understand words that they meet in reading and listening. 2) They can help learners find words that they need for speaking and writing. 3) They can help learners remember words. In addition, he also suggested that good dictionary should contain:

- plenty of words
- clear understandable definitions
- many example sentences
- information about grammar and collocations of the word
- the pronunciation of the word
- the spelling of inflected and derived forms
- information about constraints on the use of the word
- frequency information
- information about related words and word parts

2. Nation (1990) wrapped up Scholfield (1982)'s seven-step dictionary use strategy as follows:

- Locate the words or phrases you don't understand.
- If the unknown word is inflected, remove the inflection to find the form to look up
- Search for the unknown word in the alphabetical list.
- If you can't find at least one main entry for the unknown word, try looking in the addendum, look at nearby entries if the unknown word might be an irregular form, look up parts of the word or phrase.
- If there are several senses or homographic entries, reduce them by elimination.
- Understand the definition and integrate it into the context where the unknown word was met.
- If none of the senses or entries seems to fit, attempt to infer one from the sense you have. If more than one fits, see further context clues in the passage to help you choose.

3. Li and Zhon (2001) classified dictionary in a different ways as follows:

1. Contents: philological dictionary, encyclopedic dictionary, and special dictionary.
2. Scope of words collected and the information of the vocabulary provided: general- purposes dictionary and specialized dictionary.
3. Language involved: monolingual dictionary, bilingual dictionary, and multi-lingual dictionary.
4. History periods involved: diachronic dictionary and synchronic dictionary.
5. Size: unabridged dictionary, desk dictionary, and pocket dictionary.
6. Service objects: for foreigners and for natives.
7. Arrangement of entries: systematic dictionary and alphabetical dictionary.
8. Medium: paper dictionary and electronic dictionary. Furthermore, the electronic dictionary can be divided into three kinds: pocket dictionary, CD-ROM dictionary, and online dictionary. The paper dictionary and electronic dictionary (pocket dictionary) are most commonly used by the students in the classroom.

4. The opinions and discussions of numerous researchers who confirm that monolingual dictionary outperforms bilingual dictionary in the aspects of reading comprehension and vocabulary learning are introduced by Laufer & Aviad (2006) who stated that learners often admit what lexicographers and language teachers have known for a long time that monolingual dictionary provide more detailed and precise information about words looked up than bilingual dictionary. Their idea was supported by Scholfield (2012) claiming that there is the familiar argument that learners need to get into the habit of thinking in the target language. They will not be efficient users of English if they operate always via an extra step of translating into their first language, which the use of bilingual or semi-bilingual dictionaries is likely to encourage. In the same manner, rather than give a definition, bilingual dictionary gives translation. The use of such dictionary hinders the learners in developing the skill of using paraphrase to make up for words they don't know (Nation, 1990).

In addition, Harmer (2001) discussed the disadvantages of bilingual dictionary and suggested the students to use monolingual dictionary. He stated that many students buy themselves bilingual dictionaries or electronic translators because they fervently hope that they will find an instantly usable translation of a word they know in their language. There is every good reason for them to want this since, at least in earlier stages, people tend to translate in their heads when they are learning in a foreign language, and the idea of a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages is immensely attractive. He further claims that there is nothing wrong with bilingual dictionary (or electronic translations) of course. When they work well they provide just what the students are looking for. But all too often they fail to show the students how words are used in the foreign language, providing simple answers for what is , in effect, considerably more complex. Sometimes, for example, a word in L1 may have six or seven equivalencies in the L2; if these equivalencies are just offered as a list of words they provide the students with no information about which one to choose – and when. Sometimes there are restrictions on the use of a word in L1 which do not in L2. Unless these are given, the information is not complete. Many bilingual dictionaries also fail to give sufficient information about grammatical context, appropriateness, and connotation. This does not mean that all bilingual dictionaries are bad or that students should never use them. There are some excellent samples available now and whether we like it or not, students will always use them, especially at low levels. What we can do is show them something different which is just as good - and in many ways better; the monolingual dictionary.

With regard to the use of dictionary in second language, numerous researches whose objectives and findings were significant to reading comprehension and vocabulary learning have been continuously conducted. Five pieces of studies revealed the advantages of using dictionary. Cited in Gu (2003), two researches were concluded as follows: Firstly, Lippescu and Day (1993) experimented with 293 Japanese EFL students who were randomly assigned to a treatment group (using dictionary) and a control group (no dictionary) and were asked to read a short story in class. The treatment

used a bilingual English-Japanese dictionary of their own choice, and the control group were not allowed to use any dictionaries. Neither group were told the multiple-choice vocabulary test that was administered immediately after reading. Result suggested a clear advantage for the dictionary group in vocabulary learning through reading, but the dictionary group took almost twice as long to read the passage as did the control group. Secondly, Summers (1988) carried out the research showing the usefulness of a dictionary for ESL/EFL students and reported the results of three experiments done on the effectiveness of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English both in reading comprehension and in vocabulary learning. The first two experiments focused on reading comprehension and found that comprehension was significantly improved by the use of dictionary. The third experiment asked participants to produce nine of the tested words in sentences. Results suggested that mix of definition plus example in the dictionary entry was the most successful, and that the use of dictionary in all conditions tested was more conductive to the successful production of new words in sentences.

What's more, Garcia (2012) 's study showed that dictionary is an important tool in the solution of lexical problems in writing and that the subjects, regardless of their proficiency level, use "sophisticated" look-up strategies. The findings were also in line with the results of studies of Prichard (2008) and Summers (1988) cited in Li & Lou (2012) confirming that dictionary usage can lead to improved comprehension and vocabulary development.

Besides, some researches find out the obstacles and problems in using dictionary. Rao (2012) implemented the study with the purpose to find out the extent to which the students of electrical engineering of University of Management and Technology in Pakistan possess the necessary skills to be able to use the EFL learner dictionary efficiently in situations of linguistic and pragmatic failure. The findings of the study suggested that most of the students lack the necessary dictionary using skills to make the most of the information provided in the dictionary which, of course, underscores the need to teach the students on how to use the dictionary, the kind of dictionary most suitable for them and integrating the dictionary with the language class. Such a measure is expected to improve the linguistic and communicative competence of the learners and will make them confident and self reliant in their study. Similarly, Al-Zubaidi & Manan (2011) suggested the results of their study that: the respondents were poor users of monolingual dictionary, they rarely consulted the monolingual dictionary, their knowledge of the language learning resources in the monolingual dictionary is limited, most perceived their monolingual skill as average, and there was no instruction in monolingual dictionary when they were at tertiary education and previously when they were at school. The last research which illustrated the obstacles and problems in using dictionary was reported by Alhaysony (2011) who examines the difficulties that female Saudi EFL students at the university level in Saudi Arabia face while using dictionary. The participants in this study were 132 fourth-year students majoring in English. Analysis of the data showed the difficulties that the students reported facing when they use dictionary. The results suggested that failure to locate the right entry is a common problem among the students. In addition, low proficiency students failed many times to determine the part of speech of the word to look up. This led to incorrect expectations at the sentence and word level and problems with other words in the definitions. Furthermore, not finding the entry, despite it being there, was the most common reason for unsuccessful look up.

The last group of researches explained the habit, purpose and preference of the students to use dictionary. Laufer (1992-1993) cited in Nation (2006) compared example sentences made by lexicographers with those chosen from a corpus. She found that lexicographers' examples were better for comprehension, similar to corpus based examples for production. Her study also suggested that understanding corpus based examples required a larger vocabulary size. Later, in 1993 she found that examples alone did not provide as much help for comprehension as a definition. A definition plus examples gave greater help than either of these sources alone.

Nation (2006) concluded the study of Cumming, Cropp and Sussex (1994). In the experiment, they compared the effect of phrasal definition, sentence definitions, phrasal definitions with an example sentence, and sentence definitions with an example sentence. No difference was found on a production measure (write a sentence using the word) and a comprehension measure (which of six sentences using the word are correct). Students indicated a clear preference for having examples with definitions and they favored the sentence definition format.

Neubach and Cohen (1988) cited in Gu (2003) studied how six EFL students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem used the dictionary while reading. Verbal report protocols and interview data were obtained from these students. They listed a number of interesting strategies these students used, and concluded that generally advanced students do not need the dictionary so much, while weak ones cannot use it to their advantage. Specifically, high proficiency students went into their dictionaries with correct expectations at both the sentence and the word levels, while the intermediate learners did not always determine the part of speech of the word being looked up, had frequently wrong expectations of the word as well as problems with other words in the definition when a monolingual dictionary was used. And the low proficiency students were frustrated for not being able to get the right definition from dictionary and refrained from using it.

Dynamic trends of dictionary using was investigated by Li & Lou (2012) who surveyed the diachronic trends of English major seniors in their choice of dictionary in the course of English learning and reported that the most-often-used dictionaries are paper dictionary and electronic one.

To sum up, according to extensive literature review involving the advantages of dictionary, the obstacles and problems in using dictionary, and habit, purposes and preference of the students to use dictionary, it is obvious that dictionary usage is instrumental in reading comprehension and lexis acquisition if the students gain an insight into dictionary usage.

Therefore, this research would like to investigate what dictionary use strategies and how frequently the students employ as well as whether or not different groups of students (achievers and underachievers) affect the usage of dictionary. The findings of this research would let the teachers know the students' problems and purposes of using dictionary, so that the teachers can train the students to practice using dictionary systematically so as to make the best use of dictionary. Pedagogical implications into reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition were suggested as well.

2. Definitions of Terms

2.1 Achievers refer to the second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University who got grade A, B+, and B in Fundamental English II in the academic year of 2012.

*2.2 Underachiever*s refer to the second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University who got grade C+, C, D+ and D in Fundamental English II in the academic year of 2012.

2.3 *Purposes of Dictionary Use* were based on Nation (2006) and Harvey & Yuill (1997). The purposes of dictionary use are to:

1. confirm the meaning and see example sentences.
2. check spelling, inflection, and derived form.
3. find out about grammar of the word and check grammatical correctness.
4. consider pronunciation.
5. find collocation and expression.
6. check etymology and word parts.
7. confirm guessing from context.
8. check the constraints or register of the word.
9. look for related word.
10. look up frequency information.

3. Purposes of the Study

This study aims to:
- investigate the usage of dictionary of the second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University.
- compare the usage of dictioanry between the achievers and underachievers.

4. Research Questions

1. What is a dictionary usage of the second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University?
2. Do the achievers and underachievers have different dictionary usage?

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This research is a survey design. The population of this study was 40 second-year students majoring in English and enrolling in intermediate English course at Bangkok University. In this study, the independent variable is two groups of the students (achievers and underachievers) while the dependent variable is dictionary use.

5.2 Instrument

The instruments used for collecting data were a questionnaire and an in-depth interview. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is about the respondent's background and the second part is about purposes of dictionary use proposed by Nation (2006) and Harvey & Yuill (1997). This part consists of 10 items in the form of Likert rating scales ranging from very frequently, frequently, sometimes, rarely, to never. The congruence index of the questionnaire was 0.91 and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire. It was found that the reliability of this questionnaire was 0.96. Besides, the in-depth interview was conducted to elicit the further information about dictionary use.

5.3 Data Analysis

5.3.1 Percentage was used to demonstrate the background information of the students and mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the level of dictionary use. The computed weighted means of dictionary use were interpreted in the form of range as shown below.

Mean range	Level of dictionary use	Meaning
4.50-5.00	very extensive	using dictionary with most frequency
3.50-4.49	extensive	using dictionary with much frequency
2.50-3.49	medium	using dictionary with medium frequency
1.50-2.49	little	using dictionary with little frequency
1.00-1.49	very little	using dictionary with very little frequency

5.3.2 A t-Test analysis was used to compare the mean scores of the opinions on dictionary use of the achievers and underachievers.

6. Result

Table 1: The result of dictionary use by Bangkok University students

Dictionary Use Purposes	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Level
1. confirm the meaning and see example sentences.	3.25	.954	medium
2. check spelling, inflection, and derived form.	3.28	.987	medium
3. find out about grammar of the word and check grammatical correctness.	3.08	1.095	medium
4. consider pronunciation.	3.00	1.132	medium
5. find collocation and expression.	3.18	1.059	medium
6. check etymology and word parts.	3.08	1.118	medium
7. confirm guessing from context.	3.13	1.017	medium
8. check the constraints or register of the word.	3.18	.931	medium
9. look for related word.	3.28	1.062	medium
10. look up frequency information.	3.00	1.177	medium
Total	3.14	1.049	medium

Table 1 shows that the overall use of dictionary was ($\overline{X}$ = 3.14) which could be interpreted that the students use dictionary moderately. The three most frequently used items were check spelling, inflection, and derived form ($\overline{X}$ = 3.28), look for related word ($\overline{X}$ = 3.28), and confirm the meaning and see example sentences ($\overline{X}$ = 3.25) respectively. These items were at a medium level.

Table 2. The result of the dictionary use between the achievers and underachievers

Dictionary Use Purposes	Achievers		Underachievers		Statistical test	
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	p	t
1. confirm the meaning and see example sentences.	4.18	.405	2.9	.860	.000	4.735
2. check spelling, inflection, and derived form.	4.36	.809	2.86	.693	.000	5.846
3. find out about grammar of the word and check grammatical correctness.	4.27	.467	2.62	.903	.000	7.846
4. consider pronunciation.	4.36	.674	2.48	.785	.000	7.015
5. find collocation and expression.	4.45	.522	2.69	.761	.000	7.061
6. check etymology and word parts.	4.55	.522	2.52	.688	.000	8.836
7. confirm guessing from context.	4.27	.647	2.69	.761	.000	6.103
8. check the constraints or register of the word.	4.36	.505	2.72	.591	.000	8.125
9. look for related word.	4.64	.505	2.76	.689	.000	8.209
10. look up frequency information.	4.36	.924	2.48	.785	.000	6.448
Total	4.38	.325	2.67	.551	.000	9.627

Table 2 shows that achievers and underachievers had different levels of dictionary usage. That is, the achievers had an extensive level of dictionary usage ($\overline{X}$ =4.38) while underachievers had a medium level of dictionary usage ($\overline{X}$ =2.67). It was also found that there was a statistically significant difference between achievers and underachievers in the overall dictionary usage at the level of .05. In general, the mean of the achievers was higher than that of the underachievers.

7. Discussion of the Findings

7.1 Discussion of research question 1: What is a dictionary usage of the second-year students majoring in English at Bangkok University?

According to table 1, the overall use of dictionary was ($\overline{X}$ = 3.14) which could be interpreted that the students use dictionary moderately. The three most frequently used items were check spelling, inflection, and derived form ($\overline{X}$ = 3.28), look for related word ($\overline{X}$ = 3.28), and confirm the meaning and see example sentences ($\overline{X}$ = 3.25) respectively. These items were at a medium level whereas the least frequently used strategies were consider pronunciation, look up frequency information, find out about grammar of the word and check grammatical correctness, and check etymology and word parts.

As stated in the result, the three dictionary use strategies which were used most by the students are discussed accordingly. The students always used dictionary to check spelling, inflection, and derived form because they knew that poor spelling can affect their writing and the readers will interpret poor spelling as a sign of lack of knowledge Nation (2006). In addition, Moseley (1994) cited in Nation (2006) claiming that even the learners of English as the first language found the irregularity in the English spelling system difficult.

In terms of looking for related word which was placed the top two used dictionary strategies, the students are on the right track because this dictionary strategy is in consistent with (Nation, 2008) in that the students realized that if the related word is a known word, then this will make learning the new form and meaning much easier. Here are some related words (divide, division, divisive), (dictate, dictation, dictator, diction, dictum). He further stated that looking for related words help vocabulary learning because it relates unknown words to known words and draws attention to word parts.

Regarding to the strategy of confirming the meaning and see example sentences, the students use this strategy frequently because they knew that reading example sentences in a dictionary will increase knowledge about the word, and forming a visual picture in their mind of the meaning of the sentence will help that word and its meaning be remembered. The visual picture helps because it means that the information about the word will be stored both linguistically and pictorially and these two ways will be linked (Nation, 2008).

On the other hand, four dictionary use strategies which the students use least are consider pronunciation, look up frequency information, find out about grammar of the word and grammar correctness, and check etymology and word parts. For the strategy of considering pronunciation, the students use this item less because they have to read phonetic script which is difficult and unfamiliar to the students. In addition, this skill requires considerable practice (Nation, 2006). Another item which is used least by the students is checking frequency information. The possible explanation is because the students have never been introduced before, so they don't know the benefit of the word frequency as explained by Collin Cobuild English Dictionary (2006): frequency information will help the students immediately see how significant the word is. Word frequency is of immense importance to learners because it makes up of 95% of all spoken and written English. This frequency information therefore will be an invaluable aid to the students to use natural English.

With regard to the strategy of finding out about grammar of the word and check grammar correctness. When interviewed, the students responded that their grammar knowledge is limited, so they are not interested in this benefit of the dictionary. Nation (1990) suggested that grammar in dictionary can help the students to correct errors in writing and eventually prevent such errors. Collin Cobuild English Dictionary (2006) explained that three types of grammar information are normally given in its dictionary:

1.   The word class of the word: e.g. VERB, N-COUNT, ADJ, QUANT
2.   Restrictions or extensions to its behavior, compared to other words of that word class: e.g. usu passive, usu sing, also no determiner
3.   The pattern that the word most frequently occurs in: e.g. Vn, N of n, ADJ that, ADV with v

For the strategy of checking etymology and word parts, the students gave an opinion that they do not want to spend time to see history of a word in a dictionary. In this case, the students miss the benefits of this strategy as recommended by Nist & Simpson (2001). They claim that etymology or history of word will provide interesting and useful information to help the students understand and remember new words encountered in reading. Furthermore, Nation (2006) presented that the value of etymology for the learners is that it is interesting subject in its own right, but more interestingly, it can help make some words more memorable.

The last dictionary use strategy which is least frequently used by the students is confirming guessing from context. This is due to the fact that the students will use dictionary to find the common underlying meaning of the word as the first priority. However, they don't use the technique of guessing the word from context very often although it is the most important of all vocabulary learning strategies (Nation, 2008). As a result, the dictionary is not needed to confirm their guessing.

7.2   Discussion of research question 2: Do the achievers and underachievers have different dictionary usage?

Based on the findings, it was also found that there was a statistically significant difference the between achievers and underachievers in the overall dictionary usage at the level of .05. In general, the mean of the achievers was higher than that of the underachievers. This may be explained by the fact that the characteristic of the underachievers was hardly to use any language learning strategies at all, including never using any sort of dictionary while the achievers had gone from using bilingual dictionary to using monolingual dictionary and made some use of information in such dictionary beyond just the definitions (Scholfield, 2012). This is also confirmed by Garcia (2012) stating that the most linguistically proficient users will use dictionary more competently. However, some researches' findings were in contrast with those of this research. Neubach and Cohen (1988) cited in Gu (2003) argued that advanced students do not need the dictionary so much, while the weak ones cannot use it to their advantage. High proficiency students use dictionary to correct expectations at both sentence and the word levels while the low proficiency students were frustrated for not being able to get the right definition from the dictionary and refrained from using it. In the same manner, Prichard (2008) claimed that more proficient learners get less from dictionary use because they thought that it takes long time to read when using dictionary.

8. Implication for Teaching Dictionary Use to the Students

Dictionary is an essential resource for language learners. If the learners get some systematic guidance and practice in its use, they can get maximum benefits from it (Nation, 2008). As a result, what the teacher should do are:
1) Since now there are a number of Internet, CD-ROM, DVD-based dictionaries – still the wealth of information can be extremely daunting to some students, the teacher should put dictionary training into lesson sequences, so that the students will see how to use them and what the benefits of such use are (Harmer, 2001).

2) To put the dictionary use strategies into practice, the teacher should provide easy access to good dictionary to the students. That is, the teacher should suggest how to select good dictionary which should contain the good following advantages stated by Nation (2008).

- Plenty of words
- Clear understandable definitions
- Many example sentences
- Information about grammar and collocations of the word
- The pronunciation of the word
- The spelling of inflected and derived forms
- Information about constraints on the use of the word
- Frequency information
- Information about related words and word parts

3) As the consultation of dictionary has a positive impact on vocabulary learning and reading comprehension (Xu, 2010), the teacher should motivate and train the students from other majors other than English major to use monolingual dictionary because most monolingual dictionaries use a controlled defining vocabulary of around 2,000 words (Nation, 2008). In fact, those students will have no difficulty in understanding the definitions in monolingual dictionary as their vocabulary size exceeds 2,000 words.

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