

Monolingual, Bilingual Dictionaries and Language Study

DICTIONNAIRES MONOLINGUE ET BILINGUE ET ÉTUDE LINGUISTIQUE

單語詞典、雙語詞典和語言學習

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Abstract: This paper tries to prove that, neither monolingual nor bilingual dictionary can, by themselves satisfy the needs of foreign language learners. Different stages of second language acquisition require different types of dictionaries, and they all have their own unique function in helping the learners to form a new language habit.

This paper makes a review about present and past research and various scholarly points of views. For research approach, a quantitative method is adopted to investigate which kind of dictionary best meets the needs of students in different stages of foreign language acquisition. Finally, results and discussions are shown to conclude the investigation.

Key words: monolingual dictionary, bilingual dictionary, language study

Résumé: Le présent article tente de prouver que, ni le dictionnaire monolingue ni le dictionnaire bilingue ne peut satisfaire les besoins des apprenants de langues étrangères. Les différentes étapes de l'acquisition de la deuxième langue exigent de différents types de dictionnaires, et ils ont tous leur propre fonction pour aider les apprenants à former une nouvelle habitude langagière.

Le présent article met en revue les recherches actuelles et passées ainsi que les points de vues académiques divers. Quant à l'approche de recherches, des méthodes quantitatives sont adoptées pour étudier quel type de dictionnaire répond le mieux aux besoins des étudiants dans les différentes phases de l'acquisition des langues étrangères. Finalement, on montre les résultats et les discussions pour conclure l'investigation.

Mots-Clés: dictionnaire monolingue, dictionnaire bilingue, étude linguistique

摘要: 本文試圖證明無論單語詞典還是雙語詞典都不能獨立地滿足語言學習的需求。不同階段的外語學習需要使用不同的詞典，它們在幫助學習者形成一種新的語言習慣過程中發揮著不同的作用。本文回顧了有關文獻和不同的研究觀點，採用定量和定性的方法來研究哪種詞典能滿足二語習得不同階段的學習要求，最後得出結論。

關鍵詞: 單語詞典；雙語詞典；語言學習

1. INTRODUCTION

In foreign language teaching and studies, dictionaries have always been playing the indispensable role in the process of a new language habit formation. However, with the rapid growth of dictionary industry, huge amount of dictionaries are now available in book markets. Which types of dictionaries could properly meet the needs of foreign language learners at different stages? This question has always been in the interests of dictionary producers, researchers, dictionary users and language teachers alike. Many researches concerning

this question have been conducted, and the results have, in turn, brought about improvements in dictionary compiling and production.

According to the language a dictionary uses, dictionaries, as is known to all, are divided into three categories, namely: monolingual dictionary, bilingual dictionary and bilingualised dictionary (this paper only deals with the first two types of dictionaries). Each of the three types has its own merits and shortcomings. They fulfill different task in language learning and teaching, which is the meaning of their co-existence. None of them is better than the others and they complement each other during foreign language

acquisition. If one type of dictionary can fulfill all the requirements and meet all the needs of learners, then, there is no need to explore and compile other dictionaries, and the dictionary industry will stagnate.

Scholars hold diverse points of view concerning the use of dictionaries in students' foreign language studies. Most of them advocate one kind of dictionary while still acknowledge the necessary use of other dictionaries, others show negative attitude towards the kind of dictionary they are not in favor of. In the second section, this paper makes a review about present and past research and various scholarly points of views. In the third section, a quantitative method is adopted to investigate which kind of dictionary best meets the needs of students in different stages of foreign language acquisition. In the following section, results and discussions are shown to conclude the investigation.

This paper tries to prove that, neither monolingual nor bilingual dictionary can, by themselves satisfy the needs of foreign language learners. Different stages of second language acquisition require different types of dictionaries, and they all have their own unique function in helping the learners to form a new language habit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of the function of dictionary in foreign language teaching and studies is self-evident, and cannot be underestimated. However, scholars have divergent views on the role monolingual and bilingual dictionary plays in the process of foreign language studies.

2.1 Monolingual Dictionaries

2.1.1 Merits of Monolingual Dictionaries

Firstly, monolingual dictionary, usually compiled by native speakers, in countries where that language is mother tongue, is more updated than bilingual dictionary, which, no matter what source they come from, cannot change the fact that they are the translated version from monolingual ones.

Language is always changing, as Zhang (2002, p.86) states, "...if the naissance of corpus linguistics and the following revolution of dictionaries are considered as the most significant event in linguistics circle in 1990s, then this naissance could only take place first and foremost in the source language, and the revolution can only be generated from the revolution of monolingual dictionaries." This is to say, that, monolingual dictionaries are the first receiver of language changes, since they are compiled by native speakers within the specific language environment. This is a unique advantage for monolingual dictionaries to be distinguished from other dictionaries.

Bilingual dictionaries, concerning the time and effort it takes to translate the original version into the bilingual one, as it is in China, no matter how fast they are said to be updated, cannot catch up with the speed that monolingual dictionaries are revised and renewed. As Zhang (2002, p.86) states, the compilation of bilingual dictionaries (concerning the effort it requires in terms of people and material) are, both theoretically and practically, lagged behind monolingual dictionaries, or mother-tongue dictionaries, so it is inevitable that both the quality and quantity of bilingual dictionaries are not as satisfactory as monolingual ones.

In fact, there is no bilingual dictionary that is not based on source language dictionary. In modern times, if every job is going to start from scratch without reference to other materials, even the simplest dictionary cannot be possibly completed within a short time period. Even it is completed after many years; it will then be outdated and lose its value (Yin, 1997, p.21).

Secondly, in terms of jargons and professional vocabularies, monolingual dictionary is more inclusive in the amount of vocabularies, since some professional jargons do not have counterpart or corresponding translation in the target language. Even the surface meanings of the two words (target language and source language) are identical; the connotations might be somewhat different. Therefore, in explaining and defining the accurate meaning of professional words or jargons, bilingual dictionaries might not be as powerful as monolingual dictionaries.

Thirdly, monolingual dictionaries give detailed and accurate explanation or definition of slang words and expressions. Many slang words and expressions have special meaning or connotations in the source language, some of them never have a chance to be included in bilingual dictionaries. Because although the meaning of slang words and expressions can be translated into target language, their stylistic value tend to be lost, sometimes partially, other times totally; it is difficult to embody the accurate meaning in target language. We could not ascribe this to the dictionary compilers of bilingual dictionaries, for slang words and expressions carry with them such a rich stylistic value and ethnical characteristics, which is not easily transformed into another language. For instance, words like 'fizzbo' 'roof rat' 'gazoonie' 'wallah' 'dead president' 'Mr. Ed.' 'double Chrissie' 'choicea-mundo' and so on are not included in *A New English-Chinese Dictionary* (Zhang, 2002, p.88). As Liu Miqing (1985, p.121) states, for example, in English to Chinese translation, when slang words and expressions need to be translated, it is suggested to look them up in a monolingual dictionary to retrieve their origin. It is necessary to resort to authoritative English-English dictionary for English explanation or definition, in order to grasp the essence of the meaning, instead of stay on the surface meaning.

2.1.2 Monolingual Dictionaries and Language Study

Those who are in favor of monolingual dictionaries believe that, monolingual dictionaries are more beneficial than bilingual dictionaries in terms of foreign language studies. They consider foreign language study as a process of a new language habit formation, independent from mother tongue. They emphasize that, while using monolingual dictionary, language learners are using foreign language itself as a tool to understand foreign language. Using monolingual dictionaries makes students to think in that very target language, thus they can gradually develop an ability of reasoning without the interference of mother tongue. What's more, reading the explanation of target language in monolingual dictionary could improve learners' ability to understand target language, and in the meanwhile identify themselves with the culture of the country (Shen, 2005, p.72)

Of course, beginners of a foreign language may find it difficult to use monolingual dictionaries, but learners should not always rest on using bilingual dictionaries. As Mr. Ding Shengshu states, "We should not always learn English from ABC, we have to push ourselves to use monolingual dictionaries—let's get started from reading the Preface of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*" (Liu, 1997, p.103)

2.2 Bilingual Dictionaries and Language Study

Scholars who favor bilingual dictionaries for language study believe that, although using monolingual dictionaries seems to exclude the interference of mother language, the learners are, in fact, naturally using mother tongue to research in their minds the corresponding expressions to full the task of understanding. As the metaphor Swan writes in his book *Practical English Usage* (Swan,1980), "Bilingual dictionary is providing the learners with a mother tongue peg, to hook on to new vocabulary in foreign language."

Firstly, compared with monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries are much more concise in the expression of definitions and explanations. On the one hand, for example, for the English-Chinese dictionary, the number of Chinese words used to explain an English word is less than that of the monolingual dictionary. On the other hand, it is concise and to the point. As is known to all, since bilingual dictionary provides a corresponding words or expressions for the learners, its definition must be "straight and accurate". However, in monolingual dictionaries, definition and explanation are usually complicated and prolix, which leads to more search in target language. In this way, learners will feel more burdens in looking up a new word in a monolingual dictionary. As Ellis (1995, p.409-441) pointed out, simple definitions is helpful for vocabulary

study. His research findings indicated that, complicated definition will not do well to learners, and the more exhaustive a definition is, the more distractive the learners become. Nation also came to the conclusion that, for the majority of learners, if the meaning of the words is provided in a form of translated version of mother tongue, they tend to speed up in vocabulary learning (Nation, 1982). Nation's research also indicated that, in the primary stage of learning vocabulary, define the new words and expressions by learners mother tongue is the most concise and accurate way. If the learner has no knowledge about the word, in most circumstances, monolingual dictionary will not help much. This is why many students have the habit of do a second check in bilingual dictionary after they see the definition in monolingual dictionary. Therefore, in the beginning of foreign language study, when learners come up with a new word for the first time, it is better to use bilingual dictionaries to assist studies.

Secondly, bilingual dictionaries are the major tool for translation work. Since translation is meaning transfer between two languages, its major task is to achieve meaning equivalence. Vocabulary is the basis of paragraphs; therefore, translation needs bilingual dictionaries. Nowadays, with the rapid growth of technology, booming Internet and globalization, huge vocabulary concerning science and technology come to the fore. Thus the translation of technological works cannot be properly done without bilingual dictionaries.

2.3 Dictionaries and Three Stages in Foreign Language Learning

The debate of whether to use monolingual or bilingual dictionaries as the major tool to assist language learning has never stopped. However, the author thinks, it is better to use appropriate ones in different learning stages.

L.G. Alexander, author of *New Concept English* proposes four periods for English learning—beginning, intermediate, advanced and fluent, and compiled the teaching material according to this theory. In China in 1980s, a series of books called *Students English Books Library* were published, and in the preface of the series, Chinese scholars also proposed a penetrating point of view that, Chinese learners of English generally go through three stages in English learning—in the first stage, Chinese is used to assist English study, in the form of explanation, notes, verbal, mind or paper translation. English to Chinese dictionaries and Chinese reference books are the major assistance during this period; in the second stage, learners develop the ability of learning English through English, in the form of reading English notes, listening to English explanation, consulting English-English dictionaries, reading original English works or reference books extra. In the third stage, learners no longer treat the two languages as independent entity with each words and its equivalence

in the other language, they develop and ability of connecting the two language and can transform freely and smoothly from one language to the other (*Students English Books Library*, 1988). The second stage can be considered as “advanced” in Alexander’s theory, and the third stage, “fluent”.

With these theories of different stages in mind, we could conduct research to investigate which type of dictionary is the appropriate one in different stages of language learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. A Quantitative Research—Questionnaire

A quantitative research is conducted in order to collect data about dictionary use among college students.

Participants are all college English majors, altogether there are 30 participants, 10 of them are freshmen undergraduates; 10 of them are junior undergraduates, and the other 10 of them are graduate students, grade one. Information like their gender, age, family background and so on will not be considered during the research.

They are divided into 3 groups according to their grade: Group1: freshmen, Group2: juniors, Group3: graduates. Participants in Group1 are college freshmen, they had passed National College Entrance Examination and have got a relatively high mark in English. Participants in Group2 are junior students, they had passed TEM4 (Test for English Majors Band 4) when they were sophomores. Participants in Group3 are first-year graduate students, they had passed National Postgraduate Entrance Examination, and also TEM8 (Test for English Majors Band 8) when they were seniors. The teaching syllabus of English major for higher education states some basic requirements about using dictionaries:

表1 《高等學校英語專業英語教學大綱》對英語工具書的專門要求

項目	入學要求	二級要求	四級要求	六級要求	八級要求
工具書使用	能比較熟練地使用中小型英漢詞典,掌握詞語的正確發音、意義和基本用法。	能熟練地使用《英漢大詞典》等英漢詞典和簡易的英英詞典(如 Oxford Advanced English Dictionary 以及 Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English),獨立解決語言問題。	能熟練地使用各種英漢詞典和部分英英詞典(如 Collins Cobuild College English Dictionary 及 Random House College Dictionary),獨立解決語言問題和部分知識方面的問題。	能熟練地使用各種英英詞典以及大型百科全書(如 Encyclopedia Britannica 以及 Encyclo2 pedia America),獨立解決語言問題和部分知識方面的疑難問題。	能獨立使用各類英語工具書和參考書,並有效地通過計算機網路查閱資料,獲得知識,獨立從事某些簡單課題的研究。

Before answering the questionnaire, the participants are asked to do a cloze test (appendix1) to make sure that they belong to the assumed level of English competence. The time limit for the cloze test is 15 minutes. However, the participants will not be regrouped according to their results of the cloze test. After doing the cloze test, the participants are asked to answering the questionnaire (appendix 2). The questionnaire takes about 15 minutes. Each participant is asked to complete the entire task required for this research individually without discussion or consultation among them. The results of the task will be recorded for further analysis but the participants’ name and personal status will not be revealed for the sake of privacy. The participants agree to cooperate on condition that all the data that gather from them is only used for the purpose of academic research with no other intention.

3.2. A Qualitative Research—Interview

A qualitative method is adopted to analyze the nature and status of students’ use of dictionaries. An interview is conducted after the questionnaire. The participants are 6 students from each group, 2 for every group, they are chosen randomly without beforehand selection. Each interview lasts about 20 minutes. The process of interview are recorded and transformed into paper version.

Participants are asked questions like, how long have you been studying English; have your teachers ever talked about how to use dictionaries and what type of dictionaries did s/he recommend; under what circumstances do you use monolingual dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries; do you think monolingual or bilingual dictionaries can solve your problems alone, if not, why, and what other dictionaries are you going to consult. Finally participants are asked to tell the names

and types of dictionaries they have, and which one is the most frequently used one.

Each participant is interviewed individually without the present of other students. The results of the task will be recorded for further analysis but the participants' name and personal status will not be revealed for the sake of privacy. The participants agree to be interviewed on condition that all the data that gather from this interview is only used for the purpose of academic research with no other intention.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings about Quantitative Research

In terms of the dictionaries students have, according to

the results of the questionnaire, most of the participants in Group1, which are in the beginning stage of language learning have a bilingual dictionary, and it is the bilingual one that they refer to most frequently. Apart from the bilingual one, most of them have an electronic dictionary, which is easy to carry with them and quick in word searching. No one has a monolingual dictionary. Although most of them get an Oxford bilingualised dictionary, which is likely to be recommended by the teachers, few of them really go and consult this dictionary in language study. No one has a Chinese-English dictionary, since most of the time the translation work is done with the assistance of the electronic dictionary.

表 2 Results for Questionnaire (調查問卷結果)

調查對象 調查專案		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
擁有率	牛津高階雙解	70%	80%	80%
	朗文雙解	30%	50%	60%
	新英漢詞典(上海譯文)	90%	90%	100%
	新時代漢英大詞典(商務)	0%	10%	30%
	柯林斯英英	0%	20%	30%
	電子詞典	70%	80%	80%
常用詞典	英漢詞典	70%	80%	90%
	電子詞典	70%	80%	40%
	牛津雙解	20%	60%	80%
	柯林斯英英	0%	0%	10%
	朗文雙解	10%	10%	30%
何時使用	閱讀	80%	30%	20%
	寫作	20%	30%	30%
	翻譯	80%	80%	90%
	聽力	30%	10%	0%
	口語	0%	0%	0%
購買詞典 考慮的因 素	收詞量多少	70%	60%	60%
	例句及用法	50%	70%	90%
	名聲大小	70%	50%	60%
	英語本族人編寫	10%	50%	70%

In Group 2, few of them begin to have monolingual dictionaries, for the purpose of more idiomatic English use. And with higher translation accuracy in this period, some of them get a Chinese-English dictionary. However, the number of students having and using electronic dictionaries is not at all decrease. Although the majority of them have a bilingualised dictionary, the most frequently dictionary they consult is still bilingual

dictionary.

In Group 3, all of them have at least one bilingual dictionary and it is still the relatively frequent one they consult. The number of students using electronic dictionary shows a great decrease. On this level electronic ones are far from meeting their language learning needs. Quite a few students begin to realize the importance of having and using a monolingual

dictionary. However, this type of dictionary is not the most frequently used one by the participants. What they consult most frequently are bilingual and bilingualised dictionaries. The number of participants who have a Chinese-English dictionary also increase.

In term of the circumstances they use dictionary, participants in Group1 use dictionary most frequently during reading, while the degree of frequency decrease when they become juniors and graduates, since their vocabulary is gradually expanding. The degree of using dictionaries while writing is relatively the same across the three groups. All the three group show high frequency of using dictionary while doing translation work. The degree of using dictionaries while listening gradually decrease since students' listening comprehension competence gradually increase. None of the participants use dictionary while talking.

In terms of what factors they are concerned when choosing or buying a dictionary, the three groups show great differences. Most freshmen in Group 1 concerned about the amount of vocabulary a dictionary includes, which is relatively the same as Group2 and Group3. However, the higher a student's grade is, the more s/he is concerned about the examples and usage of words in dictionary, and the more s/he is concerned about whether the author is native speaker or not. The degree of students' concern about a dictionary's reputation is largely the same. So we can see that, a good reputation is of great importance for a dictionary.

4.2 Findings about Qualitative Research—Interview

Most of the participants began to study English in junior middle school. Some of the teachers in high school did recommend certain dictionaries to the student, while most of the college teachers did recommend the type of dictionary but did not go into detail about how to use a dictionary. Most college teachers recommend monolingual dictionaries for the reason that they are more precise in meaning definition and it is good for developing a kind of thinking method in English.

Most students never give up the habit of using bilingual dictionaries. This can be traced back to their high school times and until they are graduates. Bilingual ones are all the time the most frequently consulted dictionary throughout their study.

Most students acknowledged that they are aware of the importance and benefits of monolingual dictionary, the English-English dictionary. They began to use monolingual ones when as early as the second year in college and no later than the third year. But none of them agree that they understand each word perfectly after using monolingual ones. Usually they do a second check using bilingual dictionary before they get a better understanding. Most of them explain that, for some unfamiliar objects or abstract concepts, it is better to look it up in bilingual ones lest monolingual ones should make them confused about the meaning. Even if they consult monolingual ones in the first place, usually they have to check again in bilingual dictionaries.

For the only one most frequently used dictionary they are required to tell, 90 percent of the participants says—bilingual, English-Chinese ones.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, in terms of the information dictionaries provide with us, different language learning task requires different types of dictionaries. In terms of the different stages of learning process, each stage requires the most appropriate dictionaries to be used. Although research in this paper found that bilingual dictionaries are the most frequently used dictionaries by college students, the fact that monolingual dictionaries play a crucial role in new language habit formation cannot be minimized or denied.

A neutral attitude towards the use of dictionary might be, in the primary stage of language study, bilingual dictionary plays a dominant role in a learner's vocabulary building and meaning comprehension. As learner's linguistic competence begins to accumulate, monolingual dictionary begin to take a leading role without replacing bilingual dictionary. The relation of monolingual and bilingual dictionary should be complementary to one another instead of contradictory, so is our attitude towards using the two types of dictionary.

Also, a learner should develop his/her own habit of using proper dictionary for different kinds of tasks. To know the most appropriate use of dictionary instead of the more correct use advocated by teachers and scholars, is of crucial importance for every language learner.

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APPENDIX 1:

CLOZE TEST

Directions : There are 20 blanks in the following passage . For each blank there are four choices marked A) , B) , C) and D) on the right side of the paper . You should choose the ONE that best fits into the passage . Then mark the corresponding letter on the Answer sheet with a single line through the centre .

When women do become managers, do they bring a different style and different skills to the job? Are they better, or worse, managers than men? Are women more highly motivated and (71) than male managers?

Some research (72) the idea that women bring different attitudes and skills to management jobs, such as greater (73) an emphasis on affiliation and attachment, and a (74) to bring emotional factors to bear (75) making workplace decisions . These differences are (76) to carry advantages for companies, (77) they expand the range of techniques that can be used to (78) the company manage its workforce (79) .

A study commissioned by the international Women's Forum (80) a management style used by some women managers (and also by some men) that (81) from the command and control style (82) used by male managers Using this "interactive leadership" approach," women (83) participation, share power and information, (84) other people's self-worth, and get others excited about their work . All these (85) reflect their belief that allowing (86) to contribute and to feel (87) and important is a win-win (88) -good for the employees and the organization . "The study's director (89) that "interactive leadership may emerge (90) the management style of choice for many organizations."

- 71 · A) committed B) confronted C) confined D) commanded
- 72 · A) despises B) supports C) opposes D) argues
- 73 · A) coherence B) correlation C) combination D) cooperativeness
- 74 · A) sensitivity B) willingness C) virtue D) loyalty
- 75 · A) by B) with C) in D) at
- 76 · A) seen B) revised C) watched D) disclosed
- 77 · A) because B) whereas C) nonetheless D) therefore
- 78 · A) direct B) enable C) help D) support
- 79 · A) effectively B) evidently C) precisely D) aggressively
- 80 · A) developed B) discovered C) located D) invented
- 81 · A) derives B) detaches C) descends D) differs
- 82 · A) traditionally B) conditionally C) inherently D) occasionally
- 83 · A) engage B) dismiss C) encourage D) disapprove
- 84 · A) enlarge B) ignore C) degrade D) enhance
- 85 · A) things B) themes C) researches D) subjects

- 86 · A) males B) women C) managers D) employees
87 · A) skillful B) powerful C) thoughtful D) faithful
88 · A) circumstance B) status C) situation D) position
89 · A) defied B) predicted C) diagnosed D) proclaimed
90 · A) as B) for C) into D) from

APPENDIX 2:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

你學習英語多久了？

你的英語老師是否在課堂上講授過如何使用詞典？以及使用何種詞典

在中學階段你經常使用英漢詞典麼？現在你經常使用英漢詞典麼？

你使用英英詞典麼？如果是，是從什麼時候開始使用的？

你一般在什麼情況下查閱英漢詞典？一般在什麼情況下查閱英英詞典？

你覺得英英詞典或英漢詞典能獨立解決你的單詞學習與理解問題麼？如果不能，爲什麼，你還要查閱哪些詞典？

請列出你擁有或者使用的詞典

你最常用的字典是什麼詞典？（只限一本）

APPENDIX 3:

QUESTIONNAIRE

可選多項

你擁有以下哪些詞典（ ）

A 牛津高階雙解

B 朗文雙解

C 新英漢詞典（上海譯文）

D 新時代漢英大詞典（商務）

E 柯林斯英英

F 電子詞典

以下哪些詞典是你學習中常用的（ ）

A 英漢詞典

B 電子詞典

C 牛津雙解

D 柯林斯英英

E 朗文雙解

你通常在以下哪些情況下使用詞典（ ）

A 閱讀

B 寫作

C 翻譯

D 聽力

E 口語

你購買詞典時考慮的因素有哪些（ ）

A 收詞量多少

B 例句及用法

C 名聲大小

D 英語本族人編寫

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