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Course: Study skills

Level: First year LMD

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Using dictionary

Objectives of the Lesson: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the accurate meaning of dictionary.
- Make a clear distinction between the different types of dictionaries.
- Determine some helpful usages of dictionary.
- Highlight the importance of using dictionary

Prerequisites

-Students should have a good command of English

-Students should be at least at a lower-intermediate level in English.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental part of learning any language. Therefore, FLLs and SLLs always need to nurture it to be able to act correctly. Nonetheless, learners may come across different unfamiliar structures during learning. Thus, they tend to use different strategies to learn those new words such as ignoring words, asking others for help or inferring using a context. Sometimes, learners may find the meaning of a compound word through breaking it down into small parts. But most of the time, students do not find the desirable results from their guesses. After these exhausting possibilities, students need to choose other ways to decipher meaning such as using dictionary.

1. Definitions of dictionary

Tarp (2009, p. 29) states that dictionary is a handy tool which is, or should be, designed to satisfy certain human needs. Dictionaries are ways for autonomous learning. The dictionary is a device or a strategy which enables language learners to check their own knowledge, and to eliminate weaknesses in spelling. The traditional way in paper dictionary has explained words with words, using either a definition (typically in the language of the headword) or an equivalent (typically in another language). Jackson in Adriana and Ovidiu (2009) states that the dictionary as alphabetical lists of words followed by pronunciation information, definitions, and etymology. A dictionary is a reference book about words. It is a book about language. People consult them to find out information about words pronunciation, grammar and meaning (as cited in, Rohmatillah 2016, pp. 187-188).

Dictionaries provide accurate meanings of words and in different situations which consolidate vocabulary learning (Huang & Eslami, 2013, p. 2). More

importantly , dictionaries make students feel independent from teachers since they are considered as a source of vocabulary (Gu, 2003, p. 107).

2.Types of Dictionary

Dictionary can be classified by many criteria. One way of categorizing dictionary is by number of languages contained in a dictionary. Dictionaries can contain different pieces of information and in different languages.

According to Huang & Eslami (2013, p. 2), there are two types of dictionaries which are bilingual and monolingual dictionaries

2.1.Bilingual dictionary

This kind of dictionary has two different languages and it follows the alphabetical order. It focuses on providing explanations with helpful examples to vague words in a clear and simple way. Wei (2007) said that learners of English are likely to use a bilingual dictionary to look out equivalents in their L1. However, the bilingual dictionary has negative points. Among its disadvantages, learners are likely to rely on translation rather than definitions (Baxter, 1980; Nation, 2001). Moreover, Baxter (1980) believed that using a bilingual dictionary makes students less active in oral tasks. He added that sometimes a bilingual dictionary may mislead learners when it provides one to one correspondence or match between L1 and L2.

2.2.Monolingual dictionary

It uses only one language. A monolingual dictionary put the emphasis on providing deep explanations based on vocabulary function in context i.e. it gives definitions which are commonly used in conversation (Albus et al., 2005, pp. 246-248). In

addition to that, this dictionary tends to focus on grammatical knowledge. Therefore, poor learners of vocabulary may face lots of problems in understanding explanations. Thornbury (2002, p. 61) added that we should distinguish between native speakers' dictionaries and learners' dictionaries. Learners' dictionaries use specific terms for their simple and easy definitions that meet the learners' need. They provide them also with grammatical information such as word class and how to pronounce it. Moreover, the best learners' dictionaries are those which give tips to avoid making mistakes.

Based on what has been said, using a dictionary is good way to learn vocabulary (Slimani, 2005, pp. 87-88). Language users can refer to it as a tool that helps them reach their goal and meet their needs. In addition to that, learners need to understand that the main objective of reading a text is not to get definitions of words. It is to understand the thoughts presented there (Prichard, 2008, p. 217). Teachers as well as learners need to realize that definitions of a dictionary can differ from one dictionary to another. That is, dictionaries are not alike. For instance, the native speakers' dictionary is more complex in providing definitions compared to learners' dictionary where suitable definitions can be understood from average students (Thornbury, 2002; Huang & Eslami, 2013).

In short, a dictionary can be a fascinating book to read and to discover different cultures and languages. According to Slimani (2005, p. 86), a dictionary should be used only as a last resort. He proved that by saying that using dictionary is time-consuming, and instead of wasting time looking for words in dictionary, readers should employ that time to understand the text.

Homework

- Look for other types of dictionary ?

➤ Why do we use dictionary ?

Dictionaries can be classified according to format. Al-Bulushy (2012) states that there are other types of dictionaries which are

a. Printed (paper) dictionary.

Printed or paper dictionaries are the mostly used dictionaries. They vary from tiny pocket-sized versions which are not heavy to carry.

b. Handheld electronic dictionary

Electronic dictionary are small devices that works by pressing on a little keyboard, voice

recognition or a scanning device that reads printed text and shows the meaning and the translation on a small screen or speaks the translation by voice telling the accurate pronunciation.

c.Dictionary programs

These refer to computer software that allocates words or phrases to be entered and translated on a computer monitor.

d.Online

Online or web-based dictionary are similar to dictionary programs, fast and easy to be used, when there is net. These are often uncomplicated to search.

e.Visual

A visual dictionary is a printed dictionary that depends mainly on illustrations (images) to show the users how to identify the correct meaning.

3.The importance and purposes of using dictionary

According to Slimani (2005, pp. 87-88), most students rely on dictionary to find definitions that they need in comprehending a passage or a speech. Only few

students use it to get other information related to certain words. Teachers need to help learners to be aware of the great deal of information that a dictionary may contain. According to Nation (2000,p. 446), among the purposes that lead learners to use dictionary there are :

- Pronunciation rules: this means how a word sounds correctly in speaking.
- Division of words into syllables: how many syllables there are in a word including the stress.
- The correct spelling: language users can check the correct written by from using dictionary.
- The grammatical class of a word: learners can determine the function of a word in particular sentence .i.e. is it a noun, a verb, an adverb...etc.
- Synonyms and antonyms: dictionaries may present the words that have close or the same or the opposite meaning.
- The etymology of a word: this includes the origin of that word including its changes throughout the history. The etymology may also contain the derived words.
- The meaning of idiomatic expressions: dictionaries present the implied meaning of phrases and expressions that is not clear for beginners.
- The different registers of a word: such as formal, informal, slang...etc.
- The multiple forms of a word: this includes mentioning the past tense of a word, the past participle, the plural...etc.
- Helpful information about people and places: usually at the back of a dictionary, we find helpful instructions about, for example, the nationalities of different countries and flags.
- Pictures, maps and tables: a dictionary can carry many helpful images that are used as an aid to help learners with understanding new words.

□ Abbreviations: learners can find the common abbreviations of a certain language.

For example in an English pocket dictionary we can find the explanation of SOS.

□ Rules for spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

4. Criteria of good dictionary

Nation (1987,p.68) states that research findings on vocabulary have shown that there are some criteria of good dictionary that should contain the following information

*Information about the usefulness of words.

*Contexts for the words

*Helpful etymology

*Definition that relate to word parts

*Keywords

*Underlying concepts

*The format of entries

*Computer use

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