

Using dictionaries in teaching English as a foreign language

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Abstract

The article discusses an experiment of using dictionaries in teaching new vocabulary at the English language classes. The brief review of the bilingual English-Albanian printed and electronic Dictionaries used at the practical classes of English for the students of Babe Dude Karbunara High School in the town of Berat, Albania. The method of compiling thematic dictionaries, instructions and practice on dictionaries are what this article is mainly about.

Keywords: Mastering vocabulary, thematic dictionary, teaching English as a foreign language, cognitive activity, communicative act.

Introduction

In this article, in relation and functionality to all the work done, I have been thinking of sharing with you practical aspects from my work as a teacher in Babe Dude Karbunara High School, Berat, Albania. One of the things we need to do is to see clearly and closely the way the role of syntagmatic in the education system. Knowing the variety of meanings of a word in English is of a crucial importance because it makes it possible for learners to bind to other words, or find the exact word whenever required in practical textbooks exercises or in tests of national or international importance.

In addition, this article gives illustrations from my everyday tasks in Babe Dude Karbunara high school in the city of Berat.

I have been teaching English in Babe Dude Karbunara school for 17 years in all levels. The interest of the students in my subject is growing more and more. We have to admit that students are a lot into foreign languages, especially English. There are numerous resources that support students in learning English. However, dictionaries, both hard copies and digital, play a vital role and help tremendously in teaching and learning.

Methods

The first stage of mastering vocabulary is provided by learning of thematically organized lexical units, while the core language picture of the world of the foreign language culture is set in the minds of the students. To form the motivation and to affect language learning it is necessary to have a specific set of tools for language study or, namely, a bilingual dictionary for learners. With the help of this tool a student is able to accomplish difficult tasks. Process of words learning and transmission from passive vocabulary into active vocabulary is facilitated with the dictionary. Tasks based on dictionary usage can be performed not only individually, but also in pairs, or in groups, thereby the new material is reinforced. (Meara 1983, 1987)

The methodological basis of our research is provided by the systematic analysis of printed and electronic bilingual English-Albanian dictionaries that are used by the students of Babe Dude Karbunara school. The aforementioned analysis is accompanied by statistical analysis of the dictionary use, systematization of the use of lexicographic sources, general analysis of the dictionary use technique by learners, approbation of a new method of enhancement of students' command of new lexis – creation of a thematic vocabulary on their own or under the supervision of the teacher and application of the new method in increasing the level of motivation of students for learning English as a foreign language in groups and individually.

Experiment

The approbation of the method of generating a thematic vocabulary and forming it up in a dictionary of the group of students finished in high increase of the interest of the learners to the process of study, effective mastering of lexis and new thematic vocabulary, parallel to the process of lexeme enrichment the grammar rules and forms were learnt, as every dictionary entry is supposed to include basic grammar characteristics, such as morphemic and functional. The task was to compile a thematic dictionary on the material of the unit in writing. The task was individual and was for homework. In class students had an opportunity to compare their results, to discuss them and unite in a group dictionary, joining their efforts. Depending on the learning objectives, tasks given by a teacher can vary. Speaking about the topics of the dictionary, they can comprise wider and narrower concepts and notions of the general themes, such as: - Relationship; - Communication; - Work; - Emotions and feelings; Students of the first and second years would necessarily have to polish their knowledge of the English as a foreign language on the following broad thematic areas:

1. Person;
2. Society;
3. Work, employment;
4. Leisure time, hobbies;
4. Foreign countries, travelling;
5. Environment, etc.

depending on the level of the group and requirements of the program. The dictionaries created through joint efforts of the student and the teacher in the form of communicative and informative activity can follow the example of the existing specialized thematic dictionaries. The compilation activity increases cognitive activity of the learners and develops their mental abilities. The process of working on the English-Albanian dictionary for learners usually involves the following steps:

- 1) determination of the structure of the dictionary;
- 2) determination of the volume of the dictionary
- 3) selection of word units;
- 4) drawing up a list of frequency;
- 5) the location of the most frequent translations words in order.

The selection of units is conducted in accordance with the objectives of learning,

considering the following criteria:

- a) lexical units belonging to the definite branch of knowledge;
- b) their frequency;
- c) word-formation ability.

Ignorance of grammar characteristics of words leads to a wrong understanding of the text a large percentage of errors. That is why in the English-Albanian dictionary for learners the grammatical characteristics of a lexeme is given after each of the word, as a second part of the dictionary entry. It is necessary to focus students' attention on the semantic and causes of a sentence. Sometimes complex relationships between the elements of semantic text cause difficulty for students. The words as still, conversely, while, however, thus, furthermore, as a result, to be more precise, and others are included within the text of the English-Albanian dictionary for learners. They express different logical relationships within the text: explanation, clarification, comparison, the expansion of the concept, the opposition, summing up. Thus, a user is enabled to build a complete statement and to perform the correct translation.

Dictionary Use Skills: Instruction and Practice

Dictionary minimum can significantly save time necessary for looking up the word and optimize the process of reading and writing texts on one's own. One of the advantages of bilingual English-Albanian Dictionaries for learners is close connection with the educational process. Dictionaries of this type offer the units that are to be mastered at a certain stage of learning. Students following their progress, recognize its effectiveness, and are motivated for better results of their work.

English-Albanian Dictionaries for learners make a simple tool for individual work, as they fill the gaps of knowledge of students. Individual work creates a more stable motivation in the process of mastering new knowledge and consolidating the original lexis database. Contemporary studies on methods of teaching make an accent on organization of individual work of students, as it indicates certain mental characteristics of a personality. Work with the dictionary is largely a constituent element of independent work of students.

One of the tasks of the teacher is to show the students to use and work with a bilingual dictionary to develop the learning ability of a student. The following operations are to be demonstrated and practiced under the supervision of a teacher: search for words in alphabetical order; plural form of nouns; meanings of ambiguous words; same-rooted words; conversed words; collocations; idioms, etc.

At the contemporary stage of teaching English as a foreign language at the preference is given to printed versions of dictionaries as it reassures that the user knows the alphabet, has an idea about the structure of the dictionary. Working with traditional printed form dictionary requires concentration and logical thinking. Translation made with the help of a printed bilingual dictionary is neither downloaded, nor copied, it is a product of intellectual labor of the author. Therefore, for the secondary school students it is recommended to use a paper dictionary. An important role in the development of speech and vocabulary is played by literature. The expansion of the vocabulary of the students can be achieved through reading pieces of fiction

presented in textbooks, or selected by a teacher.

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that to achieve this challenging goal as mastering a foreign language it is necessary to use all means available to students; in particular, books, printed and electronic dictionaries. Their combined use and assistance of a teacher will help students to achieve their objectives.

Electronic dictionaries versus printed dictionaries

Teaching English as a foreign language has to deal with the impact of electronic dictionaries on the process of study, and learners tend to apply them more often than printed version. Is it necessary to abandon the traditional printed dictionaries, and turn to electronic ones?

When you open a dictionary to any two-page spread, you are usually looking up a word. It is usually the case, though, that your eye wanders. Words are tantalizing, and a dictionary page holds so much information that it is easy to see something else interesting on the page. Print dictionaries allow for serendipity.

In a print dictionary, the senses/definitions of the words are not on separate lines as in an online dictionary. In print, a word's entry is presented in a wraparound paragraph form. Finding the sense and the information you are looking for is a great way of making the brain exercise. If you are reading the entry for the pronunciation, the brain exercise extends by requiring you to either already understand the dictionary's pronunciation system or find the table for it so you are sure you understand the pronunciation symbols. The same happens for the etymology — or word history. There are a lot of symbols and abbreviations used, so you will have to familiarize yourself with them in order to completely understand the word history and be able to explain it to others at the water cooler on coffee break or over dinner that evening. Another brain exercise is simply finding the word in an alphabetical book, which keeps your spelling gene working. If you are great at spelling, you are keeping your skill up. If you struggle with spelling, this exercise improves your spelling IQ. Enjoy the illustrations — at this point, they are still more prevalent in print than online. Online, you are likely to be presented with a photograph of the entry word. In a print dictionary, you may see an intricate line drawing, a colorful illustration, a photograph, or even a reproduction of a painting or statue

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In spite of the advantages of printed versions students tend to like E-dictionaries more. The reasons vary when students were surveyed for the purpose of compiling this article. However, it is worth mentioning some of them. E-dictionaries are regarded as more convenient as they are more portable and flexible compared to printed dictionaries. The participants stated that they no longer need to carry the bulky printed dictionary and they could use it anywhere and anytime inside and outside of the classroom. They also mentioned that printed dictionaries require them to have perseverance in flipping through the pages to get to the targeted word definition. Besides, Lew (2010) supported that the use of e-dictionaries offers an interactive alternative in searching for word meanings of which printed dictionaries

could not. Learners can bring it along to almost everywhere and anywhere as it is stored in their mobile phones and is proven to be more convenient to use, speeds up access to a particular word in search, and is available free of charge compared to the printed dictionaries. Users could easily type the targeted word in the type-ahead search and in a few seconds a list of definitions are given.

Although both versions of dictionaries have advantages and disadvantages students find them resourceful and a great weapon in use in the battle of learning and teachers consider them a loyal ally.

Results

The results of the research under discussion can be divided in theoretic and practical. The main achievement in the pedagogical approach is the renewed method of application dictionary in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. The practical application of the method actually enhanced the motivation of the students, which added to the effectiveness of their work and statistically showed the better results of mastering the vocabulary of such topics as Science, Sightseeing, Teaching, and Cooking.

Thematic vocabulary systematizes the acquired knowledge. The mechanism of organization of lexis can be worked out on the example of a dictionary making. That mechanism can be successfully applied by a learner in individual study. The process of making up a dictionary should start with a theme, well known to the learners, as the more acquainted they are with the material, the easier is the task for the students and the more positive emotions accompany process. The initial step is to include concrete objects within the thesaurus, and gradually switch to abstract notions that require more elaborate explanation. The first steps for the students in dictionary making were made with the help of electronic dictionaries, though prior to the practical part a teacher should introduce a dictionary entry from any of printed dictionaries that are used in classroom for everyday practical tasks.

As a rule, printed dictionaries have more complicated, but more detailed and fundamental structure of a dictionary entry. The entry starts with the head word itself, is followed by pronunciation, then with the basic grammar characteristics of a headword, then the numerous translations come, in order of importance and frequency. This basic logical organization will be of great use for learners to systematize all the knowledge about a lexeme on all levels: phonetic, morphological, and semantic. Collocations and idioms can be introduced on the later stages, when the learners will show good results of the performed tasks.

Conclusion

There are various methodologies of teaching English, and all of them are applied to some extent. It is required by a teacher to apply different methods in teaching various aspects of a language, lexis and learning a new vocabulary represents a serious and basic part of studying the language. One of the interesting forms of methods renewal is the reform of one of the simplest and most fundamental skills that is taught at the

initial stage, which is the use of a dictionary. The suggested version of the method is compilation of a thematic dictionary by students either individually or in groups under the supervision of the teacher. The method has proved to be very effective in putting into practice the principles of communicative and informative learning.

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