

## **The Dictionary Use at the University of Kufa: A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

It seems self-evident that dictionary consultation constitutes an important stage in the process of language learning. Dictionaries provide students with valuable information in all aspects of language. They include phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantic information in addition to etymological and usage information (Al-salami,1988). Unfortunately, students are unable to make full use of the vast amount of information provided in dictionaries. The reason behind that is the inadequate training of learners in the use of dictionaries (Berwick and Horsfal ,(1996); Wright, (1998); Nesi , (2000). If we want our students to be efficient users of dictionaries we have to know how they use these sources of information. Very little is known about the behaviour and preferences of dictionary users and the complex operation involved in a dictionary consultation(Hartmann and James, (1998).

This paper discusses the results of a questionnaire distributed to a random sample of students of University of Kufa regarding the types of dictionaries used, the frequency of use, the main reason for consultation.....etc.

The final conclusion reached is that our students do not make full use of the riches found in the dictionaries and they are not trained on how to make full use of the dictionary.

We suggest that the reference skill of our students should be developed through the teaching of lexicography at all stages and the training on dictionary use.

## **1.Introduction**

It seems certain that dictionary use is an essential process in language learning. Many studies have been carried out in this field. An important objection to these studies is that they generalize their results. That is a great fallacy. The lexicographic situation is highly complicated and it differs from country to country according to the linguistic background of users and the awareness of dictionary use. Iraq was the matrix of the first lexicographic practice in the world. When the Assyrians came to Babylonia the translated the Sumerian signs into their language (Al-kassimi,1977). The first monolingual dictionary in the world existed in Iraq. Al pharahidi compiled his famous dictionary Al a'ain in which he arranged sounds according to their place of articulation(Haywood, 1960).

Nowadays we are far behind other nations in this field. The awareness of the dictionary use in teaching English as a foreign language is still in its infancy. Students do not know the riches found in the dictionary and how to retrieve them. Lexicography is not taught even at the university level.

In order to change this unsatisfactory situation we have decided to do a series of studies to shed light on this scene. It is important to have empirical evidence for our ideas. Therefore we have distributed a questionnaire to the students of the University of Kufa as a sample of the Iraqi situation.

## **2. The Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to draw the profile of a group of students of all stages at the University of Kufa as dictionary users. We want to know their habit of use. The general goals are the following:

1. To gather information about dictionary use.
2. To know the students attitude toward different types of dictionaries.

3. To know whether the students make use of the information included in dictionaries.
4. To know the reference skill of the students and their training on dictionary use
5. To know the factors that affect dictionary use.

### **3. The Subjects**

It is not an easy task to study all the individual cases of all the students at the University of Kufa. It is beyond our abilities. Therefore we decided to take a random sample of 300 students from three colleges. One hundred students are chosen from each college: 25 students of each level of study. The colleges chosen are College of Arts, College of Education, and College of Engineering. So our subjects are of two types. They are arts-based subjects and science-based subjects.

### **4. The Methodology**

We distributed a questionnaire to students at the University of Kufa. Since this survey of dictionary use was done throughout Europe in the Thematic Network :Project by the most eminent linguists and lexicographers and in order to give our study a similar status and to be in line with that great project, our questionnaire is based on the questionnaire developed by Prof. Hartmann(1999): A Case Study: The Exeter University Survey of Dictionary Use which Prof. Hartmann kindly sent us a copy of and encouraged us to do this study to give a clear picture of the dictionary scene in Iraq. Our questionnaire included 21 questions. We asked our subjects about the types of dictionaries used, the frequency of use, difficulties of use, instructions in dictionary use, knowledge of electronic dictionaries.....etc.

In the first part of the study we discussed the questions of the questionnaire and their aims and the reasons why they were included.

In the second part we analyzed the results. Finally we mentioned the conclusion we had reached and suggested proper suggestions.

### **5. The Need for the Study**

Lexicography and dictionary use have witnessed an increasing awareness during the last decades. Barnhart(1962) was the first to study this field in his famous questionnaire with American college students as his subjects. Quirk(1974) studied the dictionary use by British undergraduate students. Greebaum et al ( 1984) replicated the study of Quirk at an American college . Bejoint(1981) studied the French student's use of dictionaries.

Hoffman(1978) studied the German student's use of the dictionary. Bogaards(1990) studied the Dutch students studying French and their use of dictionaries. Li (1998) studied the reference needs and skills of ESP staff and students in a Chinese technological university setting. Bishop(1998) made a comparative questionnaire survey of the use of bilingual dictionaries among 25 Open University students and 25 A level students taking French courses. Hatakeyama (1998) studied the Japanese student's use of dictionaries.

Finally Hartmann(1999) studied the dictionary use by British university students.

In spite of all the previous studies the scientific committee of the Thematic Network Project in the field of languages recommended that more research is needed in this field:

**Research into dictionary use should provide lexicographic production, and more research will be needed if the level of dictionary awareness is to be raised and the teaching of reference skill to be improved.**

It is worth mentioning that the dictionary scene in Iraq is still in its infancy. So such studies are badly needed in Iraq.

## **6. The Questionnaire: questions**

There were 21 questions to be answered by the students filling in the questionnaire(see appendix 1). We chose to concentrate on the following topics.

### **1. The Personal Details(Q. 1-2)**

Anonymity led us not to ask the subjects for their names. Moreover we do not believe that names are of any practical value of eliciting information. On the contrary, if we ask them for their names they may be cautious and hesitant to give us real information.

We directed our focus to the age and sex of the subject since these factors are significant and have received little attention from researchers. They have not been studied systematically(Hartmann,1999). Few reports have mentioned these factors. Rifle's report on the results of her questionnaire survey of the native speaker users of German dictionaries, concluded that sex and age are not correlated with dictionary ownership to the same extent as level of education.

We wanted to find out whether dictionary use is affected by them or not.

We wanted to know whether these factors affect the dictionary use of our subjects.

### **2. Level of Study and Subject Studied (Q.3-4)**

It is often assumed that the students awareness of the importance of the dictionary increases as they advance in their studies. We wanted to make sure that this assumption is true. We also believe that the subjects studied affect the dictionary use. Quirk(1974) found that there is a difference in dictionary use between arts- based and science- based students. In our questionnaire we wanted to find out whether this result is applicable to Iraqi students.

### **3. Beginning of Dictionary Use (Q.5-6)**

Dictionary use is decided by the need of the user to refer to a dictionary. At the primary school we do not believe that children need dictionaries unless they are in the habit of reading materials other than their textbooks. They often depend on their teachers. Anyhow it is certain that foreign learners start using dictionaries earlier than native speakers. Yet, we have to provide evidence depending on our questionnaire.

Electronic dictionaries are new to Iraqi students. They were introduced to Iraq after the year 2004. We wanted to know the extent of their use supported by some sort of empirical evidence.

### **4. The Number and Types of Dictionaries Used(Q.7-8).**

Hatakeyama (1998) mentions in the results of his questionnaire that 80 percent of his Japanese subjects own two dictionaries and 20 percent own three or more. We wanted to know whether this result is applicable to our subjects or not. The result will shed light on the reason why students tend to own more than one dictionary of the same type. Is it a tendency to own dictionaries? Is there something related to the nature of the languages involved ?

### **5. Which Type of Dictionary is Used most Frequently(Q.9)**

Extensive experience in foreign language teaching has shown us that foreign learners use bilingual dictionaries most frequently but this assumption lacks empirical evidence. Nesi (1999) in her study of dictionary use found out that most foreign language students at the British universities do not use monolingual dictionaries. They use bilingual ones. We wanted to make sure whether this result is applicable to our subjects. Moreover we wanted to know whether our subjects use other types of dictionaries

## **6. Dictionary Purchase(Q. 10)**

The choice of dictionaries by students is an important point. We hope that teachers play an important role in recommending which dictionary to be bought by students.

Ripfel (1989) in her study found out that purchasing a dictionary at the recommendation of the teacher came at the first rank of the priorities of dictionary purchase.

## **7. The Front Matter and the Appendix(Q.11-12)**

It is natural that students cannot use dictionaries efficiently unless they read the front matter and the appendix carefully. Skilled lexicographers usually include guides to the use of their dictionaries and the regularities of the language. Verb patterns, for example, should be included in the front matter with cross reference to them in the entries. It is impossible to include everything in the entries turning the dictionary into a textbook. The entries should be left to the irregularities of the language such as the irregular plural forms, irregular past tense forms....etc. The appendix includes many types of information that are worth reading and save time and space.

We wanted to know whether our subjects make use of the front matters and the appendices of their dictionaries.

## **8. When and in what Activity Dictionaries are Used(Q. 13-14)**

It is really significant to know the behaviour of our student concerning dictionary use. Some students use their dictionaries efficiently. Others may use their dictionaries for playing words games. We agree that a dictionary is a multipurpose reference book but in the case of foreign learners it should be mainly used for pedagogical purposes. Good dictionaries are of help in all aspects of language.

We are greatly interested in knowing when and for what purposes our subjects use their dictionaries.

### **9. The Behaviour of Learners When They Come Across a Difficult Word (Q.15).**

Students usually fail to exploit the immense amount of information provided by dictionaries because they have not received enough training. So they often try to have some alternatives. Some of them try to guess the meaning of a word from the context. Others try to ask other people. What is even worse is that some students go on reading ignoring the difficult word..

We wanted to know the behaviour of our subjects in this field in order to take new steps toward making them use their dictionaries best.

### **10. The Reason for Consulting a Dictionary (Q.16)**

Dictionaries as we have mentioned earlier provide different types of information.

We still do not have enough information and a clear picture of what happens when dictionaries are consulted and why they are consulted( Bogaard,1992, Kernermann,1996, Atkin,1998). We believe that students use their dictionaries for finding meanings of words and sometimes their pronunciation but we need evidence. This point needs further studies to know the reason for the preferences of the students. This will definitely lead to significant changes either in the methods of teaching or the design of dictionaries.

We wanted to know whether the riches that are available are exploited or not and which one of them receives the main focus.

### **11. The Difficulty of Using a Dictionary and the Reason for it(17-18)**

We believe that students often find it difficult to use a dictionary. The reason may be the lack of knowledge and reference skill on the part of the students. This is an essential

point and the result may lead to a change in the lexicographic tradition and the necessity of teaching lexicography at all stages of study.

## **12. Instruction on Dictionary Use.(Q. 19-20)**

This issue has occupied our minds right from the beginning. Using a dictionary is not an easy task. It is a complex process. The student needs instruction in this field, There are no explicit instructions in our textbooks. We hope that teachers do this job because they are the only people who are able to do so in a practical way(Atkins and Varnatola 1998). If a student is instructed by his friend we cannot guarantee that his friend is not worse than him.

We wanted to elicit data on whether students have received some sort of instruction and by whom.

## **13. What Type of Dictionary is most Useful(Q. 21)**

Students may know exactly which type of dictionary is most useful. But they may not use it because of the difficulty of using that type. This question is intended to know what students have in mind.

## **7. The Questionnaire's Answers**

When we analyzed the results of our questionnaire, we got valuable information about the dictionary use of our subjects. The results provided us with a full picture of the dictionary scene in Iraq.

Here is a brief account of the results obtained.

### **7.1.Age and Sex**

As we have mentioned earlier, these two factors have not been studied systematically, so we focused on them. We obtained the following results:

The College of Education (all subjects were females) we noticed that out of 25 subjects 20 used dictionaries in stage one.

In stage two all the subjects used dictionaries. In stage three 22 out of 25 used dictionaries. While in stage four 23 out of 25 used dictionaries. The final result was 90 percent of the subjects used dictionaries. But this result is not reliable since we found that all the subjects in stage two used dictionaries. Therefore the lower percentage at the College of Education is not due to sex. It might be due to the subjects studied

Stages represented ages of the students since admission to colleges is governed by age in Iraq. All the subjects of other colleges under study, both males and females used dictionaries.

We found that there was no relation between age and sex and dictionary use. So our results agree with Ripfel's results.

|        | PERSONAL DATA |        |
|--------|---------------|--------|
|        | MALE          | FEMALE |
| COES1  | 0             | 25     |
| COES2  | 0             | 25     |
| COES3  | 0             | 25     |
| COES4  | 0             | 25     |
| COAS1  | 8             | 17     |
| COAS2  | 9             | 16     |
| COAS3  | 6             | 19     |
| COAS4  | 12            | 13     |
| COEGS1 | 11            | 7      |
| COEGS2 | 12            | 13     |
| COEGS3 | 13            | 9      |
| COEGS4 | 17            | 4      |
| POGR   | 14            | 0      |

Table 1  
Age and Sex  
COES1 stands for College of Education stage 1  
COAS 1 stands for College of Arts stage 1

## 7.2 . Possessing a dictionary

It seems self-evident that foreigners cannot read or study English without having a dictionary. We got the following results which proved what we expected in advance . We found that all the students had dictionaries with the students of the College of Education as an exception . This is due to the subject studied or the method of teaching, some students depend totally on their teachers in this field.

| Q1     |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> |
| COES1  | 20       | 5        |
| COES2  | 25       | 0        |
| COES3  | 22       | 3        |
| COES4  | 23       | 2        |
| COAS1  | 25       | 0        |
| COAS2  | 25       | 0        |
| COAS3  | 25       | 0        |
| COAS4  | 25       | 0        |
| COEGS1 | 18       | 0        |
| COEGS2 | 25       | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 22       | 1        |
| COEGS4 | 21       | 0        |
| POGR   | 14       | 0        |

Table 2

Possessing a Dictionary

COAS 1 stands for College of Arts stage 1

COEGS 1 stands for College of Engineering

## 7.3.The type of the dictionary owned.

One of our aims is to know the type of dictionary owned by our students. Our results showed that bilingual dictionaries occupied the first rank followed by monolingual dictionaries. There was a relative interest in special subject dictionaries especially in the College of Arts and the College of Engineering.

|        | Q2 |    |   |   |   |
|--------|----|----|---|---|---|
|        | a  | B  | c | d | e |
| COES1  | 10 | 3  | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| COES2  | 21 | 1  | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| COES3  | 22 | 1  | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| COES4  | 20 | 0  | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| COAS1  | 21 | 2  | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| COAS2  | 22 | 1  | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| COAS3  | 7  | 10 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| COAS4  | 12 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| COEGS1 | 9  | 1  | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| COEGS2 | 15 | 1  | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| COEGS3 | 16 | 4  | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| COEGS4 | 12 | 4  | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| POGR   | 4  | 4  | 5 | 3 | 7 |

Table 3  
Types of Dictionary Owned

#### 7.4. Level of Study and Subject Studied

We noticed that the level of study had no significant impact on dictionary use. This is due to the importance of the dictionary in studying English as a foreign language. We rarely find a foreign student studying or using English without a dictionary.

If we consider the results of the College of Education whose students are Arts-based and the College of Engineering whose students are Science-based we find that 10 percent of the students in the College of Education do not use dictionaries while only 1 percent of the students of the College of Engineering do not use dictionaries. All the students of the College of Arts who study English use dictionaries This shows clearly that the subject studied has special impact on dictionary use. Our results agree with the results of Quirk.

### 7.5. Starting to Use Dictionaries

We found the following results:

In the College of Education 6% of the students used dictionaries at the primary school level; 66 % at the secondary school level while 18 % at the university level. It worth mentioning that 10 % of the subjects claim that they do not use dictionaries.

In the College of Engineering 26 % of the subjects used dictionaries at the primary school level; 44 % at the secondary school level while 19 % started using dictionaries at the university level. We found 11 % invalid

In the College of Arts 15 % started using dictionaries at the primary school level; 53 % at the secondary school level; 31 % started using dictionaries at the university level.

The science-based students marked an important point. People interested in science are always searching for facts and scientific analysis. So they are in the habit of reading other materials than their textbooks. So they need dictionaries more than other individual do.

|        | Q5       |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>c</i> |
| COES1  | 0        | 15       | 9        |
| COES2  | 2        | 18       | 3        |
| COES3  | 3        | 17       | 2        |
| COES4  | 1        | 16       | 4        |
| COAS1  | 3        | 8        | 14       |
| COAS2  | 6        | 13       | 4        |
| COAS3  | 3        | 14       | 8        |
| COAS4  | 3        | 18       | 5        |
| COEGS1 | 3        | 8        | 6        |
| COEGS2 | 6        | 5        | 4        |
| COEGS3 | 10       | 6        | 6        |
| COEGS4 | 2        | 16       | 3        |
| POGR   | 5        | 9        | 0        |

Table 4  
Starting to Use Dictionaries

### 7.6. The Use of electronic Dictionaries.

The results showed an increasing awareness of electronic dictionaries though these dictionaries were newly introduced to Iraq. The results should encourage the compilers of such dictionaries to improve them to the best and to be aware of the needs of their users in order to satisfy them. New research is badly needed in this field(see table 5).

|        | Q6       |          |
|--------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> |
| COES1  | 3        | 22       |
| COES2  | 6        | 19       |
| COES3  | 1        | 24       |
| COES4  | 3        | 20       |
| COAS1  | 17       | 8        |
| COAS2  | 9        | 16       |
| COAS3  | 6        | 19       |
| COAS4  | 12       | 13       |
| COEGS1 | 12       | 6        |
| COEGS2 | 9        | 16       |
| COEGS3 | 12       | 8        |
| COEGS4 | 8        | 10       |
| POGR   | 11       | 3        |

Table 5

The Use of electronic Dictionaries

### 7.7. The Number and Type of Dictionaries used.

The results showed the tendency of the students to use more than one dictionary except the students of the College of Education:

The College of Education 25 percent  
 The College of Engineering 52 percent  
 The College of Arts 76 percent

The results reflect an important thing. The students seem not to be satisfied with a certain dictionary since they do not find a dictionary which is well-adapted to their needs. So they keep on searching for that dictionary. This fact draws our attention to an essential point. Dictionaries should be user-oriented and user-friendly. In order to do so the users and their needs should be studied carefully before compiling a dictionary geared at them. Lexicographers should be experts in language learning and teaching. The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary compiled by Hornby is a complete success, perhaps, because its compiler taught English as a foreign language in Japan and knew the needs of foreign learners and did his best to serve them.

As for the types of dictionaries used, the bilingual dictionary was in the lead followed by monolingual dictionaries and multilingual dictionaries (see table 6).

It is worth mentioning that our results agree with the results with Hatakeyama (1998).

|        | Q7       |          |          | Q8       |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 17       | 5        | 17       | 3        | 2        | 0        | 1        |
| COES2  | 14       | 11       | 22       | 1        | 0        | 0        | 2        |
| COES3  | 17       | 5        | 22       | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        |
| COES4  | 16       | 4        | 15       | 4        | 4        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS1  | 7        | 18       | 17       | 3        | 5        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS2  | 7        | 18       | 12       | 8        | 5        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS3  | 2        | 22       | 8        | 13       | 5        | 4        | 3        |
| COAS4  | 7        | 18       | 11       | 11       | 5        | 1        | 1        |
| COEGS1 | 7        | 9        | 8        | 2        | 2        | 2        | 1        |
| COEGS2 | 16       | 9        | 13       | 2        | 5        | 2        | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 8        | 10       | 13       | 5        | 1        | 0        | 2        |
| COEGS4 | 5        | 12       | 6        | 4        | 3        | 2        | 6        |
| POGR   | 2        | 12       | 5        | 5        | 6        | 2        | 6        |

Table 6  
The Number and Type of Dictionaries used

### 7.8. The Dictionary Used most Frequently

Again the bilingual dictionary took the first rank with an increasing interest in monolingual dictionaries especially among science-based students and English language students(see table 7). Our results agree with those of Nesi (1999).

These result showed that bilingual dictionaries are widely owned and used by students. Pedagogically speaking, monolingual dictionaries are superior to bilingual ones in learning English as a foreign language( Underhill ,1985). Unfortunately we find our students refer to bilingual dictionaries more than monolingual ones. It is not a matter of the lack of advice given by teachers. We practiced advising students to use monolingual dictionaries but in vain. It seems that they used them secretly at home. The only way out is to improve the bilingual dictionary and to minimize the use of the mother tongue as much as possible. The mother tongue should not be used unless it saves time and energy.

|        | Q9       |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 22       | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        |
| COES2  | 22       | 0        | 0        | 2        | 1        |
| COES3  | 22       | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        |
| COES4  | 15       | 4        | 0        | 0        | 4        |
| COAS1  | 21       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 2        |
| COAS2  | 18       | 3        | 0        | 0        | 4        |
| COAS3  | 7        | 7        | 1        | 4        | 7        |
| COAS4  | 9        | 2        | 1        | 2        | 11       |
| COEGS1 | 9        | 3        | 1        | 1        | 1        |
| COEGS2 | 19       | 4        | 0        | 0        | 2        |
| COEGS3 | 15       | 0        | 1        | 3        | 3        |
| COEGS4 | 7        | 2        | 2        | 6        | 4        |
| POGR   | 4        | 4        | 2        | 8        | 4        |

Table 7  
The Dictionary Used most Frequently

### 7.9. The Dictionary Purchase

The results show that teachers are ignorant about advising their students on which dictionary to buy.

In the College of Education only 13 percent of the students were advised by their teachers on which dictionary to buy.

In the College of Engineering 24 percent of the students depended on the advice of their teachers.

Unfortunately in the College of Arts where students study English only 14 percent were advised by their teachers.

Among the choices offered , buying dictionaries as a result of the students deliberate choice occupied the first rank.

| Q10    |          |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 2        | 1        | 14       | 1        | 8        |
| COES2  | 3        | 1        | 13       | 0        | 7        |
| COES3  | 0        | 0        | 17       | 1        | 2        |
| COES4  | 8        | 0        | 10       | 0        | 4        |
| COAS1  | 5        | 4        | 13       | 0        | 3        |
| COAS2  | 2        | 0        | 22       | 1        | 0        |
| COAS3  | 4        | 0        | 15       | 3        | 2        |
| COAS4  | 3        | 0        | 9        | 1        | 5        |
| COEGS1 | 2        | 0        | 10       | 0        | 2        |
| COEGS2 | 5        | 0        | 10       | 0        | 4        |
| COEGS3 | 4        | 4        | 8        | 0        | 3        |
| COEGS4 | 8        | 2        | 8        | 0        | 2        |
| POGR   | 5        | 0        | 5        | 2        | 3        |

Table 8  
The Dictionary Purchase

### 7.10. Consulting the Front Matter and the Appendix

A lot of information is needed from the dictionary. The front matter and the appendix of the dictionary include useful information such as the guide to the use of the dictionary, verb patterns of language, usage, phonological information and all types of knowledge that might be governed by rules. That is to

say the regularities of the language. Much work is spent to compose the front matter and the appendix of good dictionaries.

The results show increasing awareness of the importance of the information included in the front matter and the appendix.

In the College of Education 48 percent of the subjects consult the front matter and the appendix.

In the College of Engineering 54 percent of the subjects consult them

In the College of Arts 73 percent of the subjects consult them.

Lexicographers should exploit that interest and take much care of the front matters and appendices of their dictionaries.

|        |          |          | Q11      |          |          | Q12      |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> |
| COES1  | 0        | 2        | 0        | 1        | 18       | 14       | 11       |
| COES2  | 3        | 3        | 0        | 0        | 19       | 16       | 9        |
| COES3  | 0        | 0        | 0        | 2        | 19       | 10       | 14       |
| COES4  | 4        | 8        | 0        | 0        | 8        | 6        | 18       |
| COAS1  | 14       | 14       | 1        | 4        | 5        | 17       | 8        |
| COAS2  | 0        | 5        | 1        | 1        | 18       | 17       | 8        |
| COAS3  | 14       | 18       | 3        | 7        | 3        | 17       | 6        |
| COAS4  | 10       | 16       | 3        | 6        | 3        | 20       | 5        |
| COEGS1 | 4        | 8        | 2        | 2        | 2        | 10       | 8        |
| COEGS2 | 4        | 2        | 5        | 1        | 7        | 19       | 6        |
| COEGS3 | 2        | 5        | 5        | 3        | 4        | 9        | 13       |
| COEGS4 | 2        | 2        | 8        | 4        | 5        | 9        | 12       |
| POGR   | 8        | 3        | 3        | 1        | 2        | 7        | 7        |

Table 9  
Consulting the Front Matter and the Appendix

### 7.11. When a Dictionary Is Used

The results show that dictionaries are used by both science-based and arts- based students for different activities.

The main activity where our subjects used their dictionaries was reading followed by writing and the written

assignments. We noticed also that our subjects referred to dictionaries in translating texts into other languages.

These results prove that a dictionary is a multipurpose tool.

|        | Q13      |          |          |          |          | Q14      |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 0        | 0        | 24       | 1        | 0        | 10       | 2        | 6        | 10       | 0        |
| COES2  | 1        | 0        | 23       | 0        | 1        | 14       | 3        | 6        | 6        | 0        |
| COES3  | 1        | 1        | 20       | 0        | 1        | 15       | 4        | 2        | 0        | 0        |
| COES4  | 4        | 0        | 15       | 4        | 1        | 13       | 14       | 15       | 3        | 0        |
| COAS1  | 2        | 2        | 24       | 1        | 2        | 22       | 8        | 3        | 2        | 2        |
| COAS2  | 0        | 0        | 20       | 0        | 3        | 19       | 5        | 2        | 3        | 0        |
| COAS3  | 0        | 0        | 24       | 2        | 1        | 15       | 5        | 9        | 10       | 0        |
| COAS4  | 3        | 2        | 21       | 2        | 4        | 17       | 6        | 2        | 14       | 4        |
| COEGS1 | 0        | 0        | 13       | 0        | 1        | 16       | 4        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS2 | 0        | 0        | 16       | 4        | 0        | 20       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 0        | 0        | 16       | 3        | 3        | 16       | 4        | 3        | 1        | 1        |
| COEGS4 | 0        | 3        | 12       | 2        | 3        | 10       | 2        | 3        | 3        | 0        |
| POGR   | 0        | 1        | 11       | 3        | 2        | 13       | 4        | 1        | 4        | 1        |

Table 10  
When a Dictionary Is Used

### 7.12. What to Do When You Come Across a Difficult Word

The first rank in the priorities is to look up the difficult word in the dictionary. Another important result is that there is a chance for guessing in the process of looking for meaning. An important objection to this process is that we cannot guarantee that the student guessing is always correct. This process is really dangerous and leading to many pitfalls.

Some students asked their friends for help. But we cannot guarantee that their friends are not worse than them.

Some students ignore the difficult words and go on reading. Though the percentage of these subjects was relatively low but this may lead to misunderstanding. We do not expect redundant words to exist in a scholarly text. Each word has its

duty in forming the picture or the concept of the subject in the mind of the reader. So ignoring any word may leave a gap in our understanding of the subject at hand.

| Q15    |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> |
| COES1  | 20       | 3        | 1        | 1        |
| COES2  | 20       | 2        | 3        | 1        |
| COES3  | 16       | 4        | 4        | 2        |
| COES4  | 14       | 3        | 3        | 1        |
| COAS1  | 21       | 2        | 2        | 0        |
| COAS2  | 23       | 1        | 0        | 1        |
| COAS3  | 24       | 3        | 1        | 0        |
| COAS4  | 24       | 4        | 3        | 0        |
| COEGS1 | 10       | 2        | 4        | 2        |
| COEGS2 | 5        | 1        | 15       | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 11       | 6        | 2        | 0        |
| COEGS4 | 14       | 3        | 2        | 1        |
| POGR   | 11       | 3        | 0        | 0        |

Table 11  
What to Do When You Come Across a Difficult Word

### 7.13. The Reason for Referring to Dictionaries

We obtained many results worth reflecting on:

The majority of our subjects refer to dictionaries to find meaning.

In the College of Arts 96 percent of the students used their dictionaries to find meaning.

In the College of Engineering 83 percent of the students used their dictionaries for the same purpose.

The students of the College of Education came far behind other students. Only 65 percent of them looked for meaning.

A surprising result was that students rarely referred to dictionaries for pronunciation . This is a dangerous situation. We, foreigners, should know the pronunciation of a word before

knowing its meaning since we want to be understood by our listeners. There is no use knowing the meaning of a word without knowing its pronunciation since the main duty of language-communication will be greatly affected.

Another dangerous situation is that dictionaries are not consulted for grammatical information.

Grammar is badly needed by foreign learners because they need it for synthesis. Good dictionaries provide significant grammatical information . But it seems that students are not aware of the riches found in dictionaries.

Usage constitutes a formidable problem for foreign learners in their attempt to produce natural English but we found that dictionaries were rarely consulted for it.

| Q16    |          |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 14       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 4        |
| COES2  | 14       | 3        | 1        | 1        | 5        |
| COES3  | 16       | 2        | 1        | 2        | 6        |
| COES4  | 21       | 3        | 0        | 0        | 3        |
| COAS1  | 22       | 4        | 2        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS2  | 25       | 16       | 1        | 1        | 1        |
| COAS3  | 24       | 9        | 3        | 3        | 3        |
| COAS4  | 25       | 25       | 9        | 8        | 9        |
| COEGS1 | 14       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS2 | 22       | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 14       | 4        | 4        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS4 | 19       | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| POGR   | 14       | 3        | 1        | 2        | 1        |

Table 12  
The Reason for Referring to Dictionaries

#### 7.14. The Difficulty of Using Dictionaries

The majority of our subjects state that dictionary use is not a difficult process. This is an unsatisfactory result. There is a wide agreement among researchers that dictionary use is a

complicated process and that it needs training on reference skills. The results we obtained showed the users little knowledge of dictionary use and the riches included in a dictionary. It seems that dictionary use for them is no more than following the alphabetical order of words to find their meanings.

In order to change this unsatisfactory situation, we have to teach students lexicography.

| Q17    | Q18      |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>e</i> |
| COES1  | 7        | 18       | 0        | 0        | 2        | 1        | 4        |
| COES2  | 9        | 16       | 4        | 0        | 2        | 0        | 2        |
| COES3  | 10       | 15       | 3        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 5        |
| COES4  | 7        | 18       | 1        | 0        | 3        | 0        | 3        |
| COAS1  | 4        | 21       | 3        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS2  | 2        | 23       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS3  | 3        | 22       | 0        | 1        | 2        | 0        | 0        |
| COAS4  | 3        | 22       | 0        | 0        | 2        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS1 | 2        | 16       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS2 | 9        | 16       | 2        | 2        | 0        | 4        | 0        |
| COEGS3 | 2        | 20       | 0        | 1        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| COEGS4 | 3        | 18       | 1        | 0        | 2        | 0        | 0        |
| POGR   | 3        | 11       | 1        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |

Table 13  
The Difficulty of Using Dictionaries

### 7.15. Teaching Dictionary Use

As we stated earlier dictionary use is a complicated process if and only if the dictionary is used as it should be used and if the riches included in it are exploited by users. This complicated process needs teaching.

With the students of the College of Arts as an exception, all the students did not receive any teaching in this field. We expected teachers to play a significant role in teaching their students how to use dictionaries. Unfortunately, teachers did not

play that role. A relatively high percentage of our subjects were taught how to use dictionaries by their friends and not their teachers. Their friends were definitely ill-trained owing to the poor results of the trainees.

|        | Q19      |          | Q20      |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|        | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>B</i> |
| COES1  | 4        | 6        | 15       | 7        | 8        |
| COES2  | 6        | 8        | 11       | 9        | 4        |
| COES3  | 8        | 9        | 6        | 9        | 9        |
| COES4  | 5        | 7        | 13       | 5        | 5        |
| COAS1  | 13       | 5        | 5        | 17       | 8        |
| COAS2  | 9        | 10       | 15       | 19       | 4        |
| COAS3  | 15       | 6        | 3        | 16       | 9        |
| COAS4  | 6        | 8        | 11       | 16       | 7        |
| COEGS1 | 5        | 2        | 9        | 5        | 8        |
| COEGS2 | 8        | 3        | 12       | 3        | 8        |
| COEGS3 | 2        | 10       | 10       | 6        | 7        |
| COEGS4 | 3        | 10       | 8        | 6        | 8        |
| POGR   | 3        | 2        | 9        | 6        | 3        |

Table 14  
Teaching Dictionary Use

### 7.16. The most Useful Type

Again the bilingual dictionary took the lead in this field. Anyhow there was an increasing awareness of the usefulness of monolingual dictionaries. In the College of Arts 39 percent of the subjects used monolingual dictionaries.

The results obtained showed little knowledge of the value of monolingual dictionaries.

One important reason for that situation is the method of teaching used and the textbooks implemented. We still suffer from the effect of the old translation method where the main focus is on meaning and there is a wide ignorance of other aspects of language. If the communicative approach is used

learners will look for dictionaries which serve their needs for all aspects of language specially the phonological and grammatical aspect and usage. There is little awareness of other types of dictionaries

|               | Q21      |          |          |          |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|               | <i>a</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>c</i> | <i>d</i> |
| <i>COES1</i>  | 16       | 5        | 4        | 0        |
| <i>COES2</i>  | 14       | 5        | 4        | 2        |
| <i>COES3</i>  | 19       | 2        | 1        | 0        |
| <i>COES4</i>  | 16       | 0        | 3        | 4        |
| <i>COAS1</i>  | 16       | 4        | 5        | 0        |
| <i>COAS2</i>  | 12       | 7        | 6        | 0        |
| <i>COAS3</i>  | 4        | 13       | 7        | 5        |
| <i>COAS4</i>  | 8        | 15       | 5        | 1        |
| <i>COEGS1</i> | 10       | 2        | 2        | 4        |
| <i>COEGS2</i> | 20       | 4        | 0        | 0        |
| <i>COEGS3</i> | 12       | 2        | 2        | 1        |
| <i>COEGS4</i> | 7        | 4        | 2        | 2        |
| <i>POGR</i>   | 6        | 3        | 7        | 4        |

Table 15

The most Useful Type

## **Conclusions**

This study has centered upon the analysis of the information retrieved through the distribution of the adopted questionnaire among a sample of the students at the University of Kufa with the intent of giving a picture of the dictionary scene in Iraq. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the work, the most outstanding of which are the following:

1. There is a wide recognition of the importance of the dictionary in learning and reading English as a foreign language. Some subjects have been using dictionaries since their primary school.
2. Students do not know the real role that the dictionary can play and the riches included in the dictionary.
3. Age and sex do not affect dictionary use.
4. The subject studied deeply affects the use of the dictionaries.
5. The subjects use many types of dictionaries. There is a tendency among the subjects to use more than one dictionary. But the bilingual dictionary is more widely used than the other types of the dictionaries used by the students followed by the monolingual dictionary. The subjects believe that the bilingual dictionary is the most useful dictionary. There is also a relative interest in special subject dictionaries.
6. There is an increasing awareness of the electronic dictionary.
7. The majority of the subjects use their dictionaries for finding meaning only. There is a clear ignorance of other information such as pronunciation, grammar, and usage. This is a dangerous situation. It proves that there is something wrong in the way we approach language.
8. Teachers do not take their expected role in recommending which dictionary to be bought by their students.
9. Our students need knowledge of lexicography and training on dictionary use

10. Lexicography is not taught even at the university level and there is no training on dictionary use whatsoever.

The researchers suggest that lexicography should be taught in all stages of language learning. Lexicographers should make their dictionaries user-oriented.

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### الخلاصة

يبدو من المسلم به إن استشارة القاموس تشكل مرحلة مهمة من مراحل تعلم اللغة الأجنبية حيث تقدم القواميس معلومات قيمة في كل مجالات اللغة مثل الصوت والقواعد و علم المعاني و تتعدى ذلك إلى تقديم معلومات عن تاريخ الكلمة و أمثلة الاستخدام في مجتمع اللغة .

ولكن و مع الأسف الشديد نجد إن طلبتنا غير قادرين على الاستخدام الأمثل للمعلومات الكثيرة التي يقدمها القاموس و يشكل نقص التدريس و التدريب السبب الرئيس لهذه الحالة .

إذا أردنا إن يكون طلبتنا مستخدمين كفؤ للقواميس علينا إن نتعرف على كيفية استخدامهم لهذه المصادر المعلوماتية حيث إن هناك قلة في المعلومات المتوفرة في

هذا المجال. و في مجال ما يطمح إليه الطلبة و العملية المعقدة التي يتضمنها استخدام القاموس.

يناقش هذا البحث نتائج الاستبيان الذي تم توزيعه على عينة عشوائية من طلبة جامعة الكوفة فيما يخص نوع القواميس التي يستخدمون ومدى استخدامها ومتى تستخدم و لأي غرض.....الخ.

النتيجة النهائية التي توصل إليها البحث هي إن طلبتنا لا يستخدمون المعلومات و الثروات الموجودة في القاموس بشكل كامل بسبب عدم التدريب على ذلك و عدم معرفتهم بوجودها أصلاً.

يقترح الباحثان إن تقوم المؤسسات التعليمية و خاصة الجامعات بتدريس مادة القواميس في جميع المراحل أسوة بالجامعات العالمية.

## **Appendix 1**

### **The adopted Questionnaire**

Gender:

Male

Female

Age:

Q1. Do you own a dictionary?

a. yes

b. no

Q2. If the answer is yes, what type of dictionary?

a. bilingual

b. monolingual

c. multilingual

d. encyclopedic

e. special subject dictionary

Q3. Please indicate which level of study you are in?

a. 1<sup>st</sup> year

b. 2<sup>nd</sup> year

c. 3<sup>rd</sup> year

d. 4<sup>th</sup> year

e. Master

- f. Ph.D
- g. Others

Q4. Which subject are you studying at the University of Kufa ?

- a. English
- b. Education
- c. Engineering

Q5. When did you start to use a dictionary?

- a. at primary school
- b. at secondary school
- c. at university

Q6. Do you own an electronic dictionary?

- a. yes
- b. no

Q7. How many dictionaries do you own?

- a. one
- b. more than one

Q8. Mention their types.

- a. bilingual
- b. monolingual
- c. multilingual
- d. encyclopedic
- e. special subject dictionary

Q9. Which type of dictionary do you use most frequently?

- a. bilingual
- b. monolingual
- c. multilingual
- d. encyclopedic
- e. special subject dictionary

Q10. Why did you buy the dictionary (s) you own?

- a. because a teacher or a tutor recommended it.
- b. because a friend or relative suggested it

- c. as a result of your own deliberate choice
- d. as a result of an advertisement
- e. I cannot remember

Q11. Do you ever use information contained in the appendices?

- a. list of abbreviations
- b. list of irregular verbs
- c. units of measurement
- d. proper names
- e. others ( to be specified)

Q12. Have you read the front matter of the dictionary in order to know how to use it?

- a. yes
- b. no

Q13. When do you use a dictionary?

- a. during a class
- b. during an exam
- c. studying at home
- d. studying in the library
- e. others (to be specified)

Q14. Do you use a dictionary while you are:

- a. reading
- b. writing
- c. working on a written assignment
- d. working on a translation exercise
- e. playing word games

Q15. What do you do when you notice a new or difficult word while reading?

- a. look it up in a dictionary
- b. guess the meaning
- c. ask other people what it means
- d. ignore it and go on reading

Q16 Why do you refer to a dictionary?

- a. to find meaning
- b. to find pronunciation
- c. to find grammatical points
- d. to find usage
- e. to find examples of use

Q17. Do you find it difficult to use a dictionary?

- a. yes
- b. no

Q18. If the answer is yes, what do you think are the causes of these difficulties?

- a. lack of dictionary skill
- b. lack of dictionary knowledge
- c. not enough information in the dictionary
- d. unclear layout of the dictionary
- e. I do not read the instructions to the user

Q19. have you ever been taught how to use the dictionary

- a. Yes
- b. A little
- c. Never

Q20. Who taught you to use a dictionary

- a. a teacher
- b. a friend

Q21. In your opinion what type of dictionary is most useful?

- a. bilingual dictionary
- b. monolingual dictionary
- c. multilingual dictionary
- d. encyclopedic dictionary

## Appendix 2

Q2/COE





















