

The pedagogical potential of a bilingual specialized dictionary in tertiary education

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Abstract

Even though specialized dictionaries provide abundant information, research findings indicate that their role in the teaching process has been neglected. Within the context of the current global domination of English and an increased need for linguistic standardization, special emphasis is placed on the use of specialized dictionaries in teaching vocabulary. With this in mind, the purpose of this research is to analyze pedagogical potential of a specialized bilingual dictionary in function of ESP vocabulary learning and knowledge transfer. A questionnaire-based research into dictionary use in ESP acquisition is conducted with 705 students and 21 teachers of non-linguistic faculties of the University of Novi Sad. The findings indicate that dictionaries are seldom used in the classroom, even though both groups of respondents have positive attitudes towards them, especially online dictionaries and other user-friendly applications. However, the findings also indicate students' insufficient knowledge not only of lexicographic conventions but also the criteria for dictionary quality assessment. Building on the hypothesis that well-conceived dictionaries can enhance not only

ESP teaching but also knowledge transfer from English to non-English languages, this research suggests the importance of compiling quality terminological products and their inclusion into the teaching process with systematic training in dictionary use.

Keywords specialized dictionary • pedagogical potential • standardization • ESP • teaching.

Introduction

Building on the latest theoretical advances in the field of specialized lexicography, the main aim of this paper is to provide an enlightening insight into the pedagogical dimension of dictionaries, which is attached special importance in the Anglo-globalized world of today. Under such circumstances an up-to-date and user-friendly bilingual specialized dictionary can be used both for ESP teaching and knowledge transfer from English into a non-English language which is Serbian in this case. Building on a previous pilot research in this field conducted at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education in Novi Sad (Milić, Glušac, & Kardoš 2018), the main aim of this research is to get the big picture of the role of dictionaries in teaching ESP in tertiary education, on the basis of which certain actions could be suggested concerning the form and content of specialized dictionaries and their use in the teaching process. Presentation in this paper is divided into five sections. Following the Introduction, Section 2 outlines the theoretical background, Section 3 presents research method,

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Section 4 elaborates research results, whilst the last, Section 5, summarizes the conclusions.

Theoretical framework

Given that the current source language of many specialized registers in the contemporary anglo-globalized world is English (cf. Furiassi, Pulcini and Rodríguez González, 2012), bilingual dictionaries are in the limelight today, since they are expected to offer well thought out standardized L1-L2 equivalents (cf. Hartman & James 1998; Nation 2001; Nesi 2013). Building on the fact that a university ESP learner in the region is expected to have mastered a B1 level of EFL proficiency (as per Council of Europe 2001), i.e. that s/he has mastered a minimum of 2000 general lexical items (cf. Nation 2001: 15), it is assumed that s/he could use a quality bilingual dictionary for productive and receptive purposes to an equal extent. Accordingly, for a student in tertiary education, a quality bilingual dictionary can be an efficient tool to be used in the educational process and individualized learning alike (cf. Cately 2009). By doing so a dictionary status would be upgraded from the traditional belief that it is just a reference book to the understanding that it is a communicative tool (cf. Yong & Peng 2007), and/or a pedagogical resource (cf. Tarp 2005). Its pedagogical potential is based on function theory, according to which “all theoretical and practical lexicographic work should be based on the dictionary functions which represent the assistance provided by a dictionary by means of its lexicographic data to a specific type of user in solving the specific type of problems related to a specific type of user situation” (Tarp 2005: 8).

However, even though lexicography is about a century old field of research, user-focused studies have only been done during the last two decades. These studies indicate that their role in language teaching is neglected (cf. Augustyn 2013), even though they are beneficial tools for learning a foreign language. From the aspect of dictionary use in language teaching, it turns out that most researchers agree to its positive effect (cf. Béjoint 2010; Chi 1998; Di Zou: 2016; Hayati and Fattahzadeh 2006; Hartmann 2001; Nation 2001; Nesi 2013; Milić, Glušac, & Kardoš 2018; Lew, 2011; Wu & Wang 2004, etc.). Despite ample research in various aspects of pedagogical potential of dictionaries, this matter is still not given proper attention in practice. One of the potential reasons for this may be insufficient knowledge of lexicographic conventions (Akbari 2015; 326; Cattely 2009; Lew 2013; Nesi 1999; Scolfield 1982). However, developing dictionary

skills is not a matter to be dealt with during a single class lecture or a single course. Rather it should be acquired through the educational system (Béjoint 1994: 168; Frankenberg-Garcia 2011) from early school age onwards, by means of introducing the problems and activities that prompt dictionary consultation. Prčić (2018: 22) goes a step forward by advocating the need for developing dictionary culture which is defined as “learned skill of efficient dictionary use and permanent habit of solving uncertainties i.e. filling gaps in linguistic knowledge related to lexis, grammar, orthography, etc. by regular consultation of dictionaries and other linguistic books, and not by mere recourse to one’s own linguistic sense or opinion...”

Narrowing the topic to dictionary use in the tertiary education in the field of sport and physical education in Serbia, the findings (Milić 2015) indicate that specialized vocabulary in Serbian is predominantly created by the adaptation of English terms through transshaping and translation. Under such circumstances standardization work in terminology is mostly focused on contrastive aspects of English and Serbian. In order to give contribution to standardization of extremely English-dependent terminological units in Serbian, the first standardization model for English-based sports terms was constructed in 2004 (Milić 2004), which was updated in 2015 (Milić 2015; Milić, Jonić, & Đurić Mojsilović, 2015). The model was applied in the first English-Serbian dictionary of sports terms (cf. Milić 2006). The first step towards using the dictionary for the pedagogical purposes was realized in 2017 by means of an innovative ESP teaching method (cf. Milić, Glušac, & Kardoš 2018) which focused on dictionary-aided teaching standardization of English-based terms in Serbian at the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education in Novi Sad. The main goal of this innovative ESP course was to develop students’ English-Serbian contact linguistic competence, which is “a type of linguistic knowledge related to the use of elements, i.e., words and names, from English as the nativized foreign language in a non-English language that regularly comes into contact with it” (Prčić 2014: 147). In order to maintain the pedagogical reliability of the above dictionary, the dictionary author (Milić 2006) has monitored feedback from dictionary users in order to update the dictionary content in accordance with new linguistic and specialized requirements. To accomplish the task, the project of a new English-Serbian dictionary of sports terms was initiated in 2016 (cf. Milić, Panić Kavgić, & Kardoš, 2017). The project is based on the

up-to-date principles of compiling specialized dictionaries (cf. Milić 2016), the most important of which are: standardization of English-based terms in Serbian, freely accessible digital form, and the possibility of regular updating according to the professional needs.

Aiming at giving some impulse to the use of dictionaries in the teaching process in tertiary education, research has been undertaken under the title “Using dictionaries in teaching ESP in tertiary education”, which was financially supported by the Provincial Secretariat for Higher Education and Scientific Research. The aims and method of this research are dealt with in the following sections.

Method

The aim of this research was to get an insight into dictionary use in terms of frequency, reasons and manner of using different types of dictionaries as a teaching resource in ESP in tertiary education. The research included 705 students and 21 ESP teachers from eleven faculties of the University of Novi Sad. Research instruments were two questionnaires (compiled from the existing literature (cf. Alhaisoni 2008; Al Homoud 2017; Bejoint 1981; Harvey and Yuill 1997; Li 1998; Nation 2001; Tomaszczyk, 1979): one for teachers and one for students and a semi-structured interview. The values of dependent variables in both questionnaires were expressed by means of two scales: four-point Likert scale (never, seldom, sometimes, always) and dichotomous scale. The former scale with an even number of points was used in order to avoid automatic selection of the mean value (cf. Allen & Seaman, 2007). The analysis was performed using SPSS 20 for the questionnaires and content analysis for the interview results. The students' questionnaire consisted of 61 questions, whereas the one for teachers contained 45. The questions (9 for students and 8 for teachers) of the semi-structured interview were formulated according to the results of the two questionnaires. The survey and interview were performed during the summer semester in 2018. Due to a larger sample, this study is based on the quantitative findings of this research.

Given that the sample included students and teachers, the following analysis is considered from two perspectives (students' and teachers'). However, the analysis only deals with the answers that are directly related to the topic: These are: the type of dictionary, the information most frequently looked

up, and the difficulties in dictionary consultation from the perspective of both groups of respondents, as well as the attitudes towards dictionary use in the classroom from the teacher's point of view.

Results

Concerning the type of dictionary (see Table 1), both groups of respondents (students and teachers) consult electronic lexicographic resources most frequently, i.e. on-line and electronic dictionaries and mobile applications, whereas the printed ones are the least frequently used source. Concerning the number of languages, students give preference to general bilingual dictionaries over the specialized ones, whilst teachers prefer specialized bilingual dictionaries over general bilingual ones. This can be explained by insufficient information on the existing dictionaries, on the one hand, and the extent of a source trustworthiness, on the other. Accordingly, the former is an indicator of uninformedness of students concerning bilingual specialized dictionaries, whereas the latter is due to the fact that teachers have more trust in bilingual lexicography, since it needs to be attuned to the requirements of the increasing need for standardization of the specialized units adapted from English in Serbian.

Concerning the type of information looked up in a dictionary (see Table 2) it seems that students are predominantly interested in the following: meaning, translation equivalents, the use in context and pronunciation. The information on meaning and translation equivalents reflects the receptive dictionary skills, whereas the use in context and pronunciation point to the productive ones. However, the mere fact that the mean values generally account for the scale level *rarely* suggests that dictionaries are not used sufficiently in ESP learning. Taking into account the teachers' answers, it can be noticed that the mean values are closer to the category *sometimes*, which means that they rely on dictionaries more than their students do. Shifting the focus to the least frequently looked up dictionary information one can see that it is grammatical information for both groups of respondents. Considering students, this can be explained either by the lack of knowledge of lexicographic conventions or selectivity of their search. When teachers are concerned, this may be due to their reluctance to waste time on dictionary consultation in terms of grammar, since it is traditionally done through lecturing on grammar during the class.

Table 1. The frequency of use in terms of dictionary type

Dictionary type	Min.	Max.	Students		Teachers	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Printed	1	4	1.85	0.90	1.71	0.85
Electronic	1	4	2.51	1.12	2.71	0.90
On-line	1	4	3.12	0.88	2.43	0.93
Mobile application	1	4	2.13	1.11	2.40	0.99
General monoling.	1	4	1.70	0.83	2.29	1.06
General bilingual	1	4	2.27	0.95	2.38	1.12
Specialized monoling.	1	4	1.51	0.75	2.71	1.15
Specialized bilingual	1	4	1.65	0.80	1.71	0.85

Table 2. The frequency of use of dictionary information

Information	Min.	Max.	Students		Teachers	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Grammatical informat.	1	4	1.77	0.88	2.33	0.80
Meaning	1	4	2.43	0.86	3.24	0.70
Pronunciation	1	4	2.01	0.91	2.57	0.81
Translation equivalent	1	4	2.13	0.89	2.76	1.04
Use in context	1	4	2.10	0.90	2.90	0.83

With reference to difficulties in dictionary consultation, the findings (see Table 3) indicate that the matter viewed from the students' perspective is rather positive. Accordingly, the results show that students have had some training on the use of dictionaries during their university education. It also turns out that they do not find it difficult to understand dictionary information, so that one can get an impression that they successfully consult a dictionary for receptive and productive purposes alike. However, the mere fact that the average value related to difficulties in dictionary consultation falls within the range from 55.53% (Yes) to 44.48% (No) indicates that the use of dictionaries in ESP is not satisfactory. This is further confirmed by the fact that students are not confident in their own dictionary use skills, since the negative answer to the statement *I cannot assess whether a dictionary is good or bad* passes beyond 50% (53.61%).

The teachers' views of the problems in dictionary use (see Table 4) are also rather encouraging, since most of them do not agree with the statement that

dictionary use consumes a lot of time during the class, which may be an indicator of their positive attitudes towards dictionary use even though they do not realize it in practice. According to the findings it seems that the greatest problem in dictionary use in class is the accessibility of dictionaries in educational institutions. It is interesting to note here that teachers believe that there are bilingual specialized dictionaries in their particular field, even though four respondents rightly observe that there are not enough quality specialized dictionaries.

Finally, the issue of the pedagogical potential of a dictionary is closely related with the teachers' attitudes towards the use of dictionaries in ESP teaching (see Table 5). The findings indicate that most surveyed teachers believe that students should not necessarily be taught how to use a dictionary before enrolling university, as well as that teaching dictionary use is not necessary in a digital world. However, all of them agree that higher frequency of dictionary use does not necessarily require its digital form, as well as that dictionary use skills could enable

autonomous learning. The former is neither in accordance with the students' view nor with the contemporary principles of dictionary compilation (cf. Prčić 2018), but the latter proves the assumption that dictionaries can be pedagogical resources both in the classroom and outside it.

Table 3. Difficulties in dictionary consultation from the students' perspective

Statement	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
I was taught how to use a dictionary at university.	459	65.95	237	34.05
I do not understand definition of meaning in English, because my English is not	198	28.49	497	71.51
I do not understand the abbreviations in a dictionary (e.g. [N], [infml], etc.).	396	56.98	299	43.02
I cannot use the word in the context by means of dictionary information.	100	14.41	594	85.59
I do not understand phonetic symbols.	303	43.60	392	56.40
The fact that I can use a dictionary enables me to use it frequently.	428	61.67	266	38.33
I can use different types of dictionaries without any difficulty.	425	61.33	268	38.67
I can understand all information in a dictionary without any difficulty.	359	51.73	335	48.27
The use of dictionaries is very complicated.	99	14.22	597	85.78
I can assess whether a dictionary is good or not.	321	46.39	371	53.61

Table 4. Problems related to the use of dictionaries from the teachers' perspective

Statement	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Students do not want to bring dictionaries to the class	11	52.4	10	47.6
The number of dictionaries in an institution is insufficient.	9	42.9	12	57.1
Students do not know how to use a dictionary.	18	85.7	3	14.3
The use of dictionaries is time consuming	14	66.7	7	33.3
Inferential meaning in the context is preferred to the use of a dictionary.	12	57.1	9	42.9
There is no adequate online dictionary.	15	71.4	6	28.6
There is no specialized dictionary in a particular field.	20	95.2	1	4.8
There is no quality specialized dictionary in a particular field.	17	81.0	4	19.0
The use of dictionaries would encourage students to use mobile phones for other purposes.	20	95.2	1	4.8

Table 5. Teachers' attitudes towards the use of dictionaries

Statement	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Students should have been taught how to use a dictionary before enrolling in	7	33.3	14	66.7
Due to information accessibility today, it is not necessary to know how to use a dictionary.	19	90.5	2	9.5
Dictionaries should be compiled in electronic form, so that students could use	21	100.00	0	0.00
Dictionary use skill enables autonomous learning.	0	0.00	21	100.00

Discussion

Generally speaking, the findings of the above research concerning the use of dictionaries for pedagogical purposes are encouraging from the aspect of both groups of respondents, even though dictionaries are not used to a satisfactory extent in ESP teaching and learning, since the mean values of dictionary consultation account for the category *rarely* (for students) and *sometimes* (for teachers) (see Tables 1 and 2). Another indicator of an unsatisfactory extent of dictionary use is the fact that the average value related to difficulties in dictionary consultation (see Table 3) falls within the range of 55.53% (Yes) to 44.48% (No). This may be due to two reasons: firstly, the ESP teaching method is predominantly teacher-centered and secondly, quality dictionaries are either missing or inaccessible. Given that the latter is especially applicable to specialized English-Serbian dictionaries, the only possible solution is to put more effort into their compilation in accordance with the proposal of Prčić (2018). In addition, it is also highly desirable to channel all compilation efforts towards electronic sources since both types of users (students and teachers) give preference to freely accessible electronic dictionaries.

Having in mind the fact that most non-linguistic faculties of the University of Novi Sad have an ESP course which is focused on the language for specific purposes and the particular register in English and Serbian, two issues come to foreground. Firstly, it is the fact that this course is expected to build on the knowledge of English acquired during previous education, which implies a certain extent of productive and receptive skills in the field of the general English language. This means that a bilingual specialized dictionary is expected to provide information for productive and receptive purposes alike (see Table 2). However, the findings indicate that ESP students tend to be more interested in

general bilingual dictionaries whereas teachers are more interested in bilingual specialized dictionaries than students (See Table 1). The students' answers might be due to the lack of information on specialized dictionaries, whereas ESP teachers could have found such information during their practical work in the teaching process. Be that as it may, a quality English-Serbian specialized dictionary can provide valuable pedagogical benefits provided it is in accordance with up-to-date principles for the compilation of specialized dictionaries, which include: the latest (contact) linguistic knowledge, consolidated productive and receptive dictionary function, user-centeredness, user-friendliness, as well as constant monitoring and updating of dictionary content (cf. Milić 2016). Accordingly, previous results suggest that an up-to-date English-Serbian dictionary could be used as an ESP teaching resource for teaching standardization of English-based sports terms in Serbian (cf. Milić, Glušac & Kardoš 2018). However, due to the fact that students do not use full dictionary information (see Table 2), it must be stressed that the efficient use of dictionaries is heavily dependent on the knowledge of lexicographic conventions that should be acquired through constant practice in the classroom by means of the task-based activities that subsume dictionary consultation. And even more importantly, more effort should be made in the educational process in terms of the development of dictionary culture of users (cf. Prčić 2018), even though this seems to be in opposition to the findings of the teachers' beliefs (see Table 5).

Developing the idea further, it could be said that a quality bilingual dictionary could be an extremely useful tool in knowledge transfer from English to Serbian under the circumstances of anglo-globalized world of today, since bachelor students are increasingly directed towards English reference sources in a particular field. This further broadens pedagogical horizons of a specialized English-Serbian dictionary in terms of its potential use as a

reference source for teaching non-linguistic courses too. However, in order to fulfill this function more successfully, a pedagogically-focused specialized English-Serbian dictionary should preferably include a number of encyclopedic and specialized information on the register not only in the wordlist but also in subject-field sections. To this end, all future efforts should be directed to electronic resources taking an innovative online dictionary of football terms entitled Kicktionary as an example of good practice.

To sum up, in order to utilize the pedagogical potential of a bilingual specialized dictionary, it is necessary to: intensify effort in compiling quality terminological products; foster dictionary culture; provide timely information on new quality dictionaries; organize systematic training in dictionary use through the process of education; and integrate dictionaries in task-based class activities.

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