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**First- and Second-Language Dictionaries
as Tools in First- and Second-Language Learning**

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SUMMARY

Whereas our first language is acquired, or simply “picked up”, when very young, not consciously, but naturally, unawares and effortlessly, second languages, acquired later in life, are learnt or studied – consciously, intentionally, cognitively. As such, regardless of its goal, all dictionary use, whether first-language or second-language dictionary use, is a conscious learning activity.

Compilers of native-speakers’ dictionaries should learn from the experience and success enjoyed by the compilers of foreign-language dictionaries, and make L1 dictionaries more user-friendly. Because, when using their dictionaries, native speakers are learning consciously, no less than foreign-language learners are doing when using their FL dictionaries.

FL dictionaries should be taken as a model for L1 dictionaries. The latter can enhance their efficacy by applying some of the tried-and-proved features found in foreign-language-learning dictionaries, such as simplified definitions (simplified linguistically as well as communicatively). Indeed, in the little investigation carried out in this field, such as that by McCreary (2002), it is found that L1 speakers using L2 monolingual dictionaries, achieve better results than those using general monolingual L1 dictionaries.

This talk is based on the hypothesis that our first language is acquired, or simply “picked up”, when very young, not consciously, but naturally, unawares and effortlessly, whereas second languages, being acquired later in life, are learnt or studied – consciously, intentionally, cognitively. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: The manner in which languages are acquired or learnt

FIRST LANGUAGE (L1)

acquired naturally

SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)

learnt cognitively

That is insofar as acquiring the language is concerned. But regarding dictionary use the situation is different. All dictionary use is a cognitive activity,

whether it involves an L2 or an L1 dictionary. Present-day foreign-language learner's (L2) dictionaries are geared to cognitive foreign-language learning. However, a great many native-speakers' (L1) dictionaries, such as American College or desk dictionaries, are NOT geared to cognitive learning. Actually, the activity of L1 dictionary use resembles L2 dictionary use more than most linguists realise. It follows that first-language-dictionary use resembles second-language-dictionary use more than first-language acquisition resembles second-language learning.

Fig. 2: The similarity of L1-dictionary use to L2-dictionary use

FIRST-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION natural, effortless -----	SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING cognitive -----
FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARY USE cognitive	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARY USE cognitive

Figure 2 shows that the same degree of consciousness exists whether using a first-language or a second-language dictionary. Such being the case, why do so many native-speaker dictionary compilers not follow the example of compilers of foreign-language learners' dictionaries? In my opinion, all general-purpose L1 dictionaries should be learner's dictionaries, because when using their dictionaries native speakers are learning consciously, no less than foreign-language learners are when using their FL dictionaries.

When I say that all L1 dictionaries should be learners' dictionaries, I do not mean that they should be similar to L2 dictionaries. They are some differences.

1 Translation

In my view, the need for translation is an absolute necessity in a foreign-language-learning dictionary. To me this need is unquestionable, even though the major publishers of foreign-language learners' dictionaries still cling to the monolingual dictionary. I will not discuss this in detail here, having discussed it so many times in previous lectures. Suffice it to say that every learner of a foreign language has a compelling need to know the equivalent in the mother tongue. From a didactic viewpoint, a translation guarantees correct comprehension and prevents misunderstanding; psychologically it provides reassurance and satisfies a natural desire to know the mother-tongue equivalent. Therefore, every learner's dictionary should be a translating dictionary – not bilingual but semi-bilingual, which is a monolingual learner's dictionary (L1-L1) with a translation into L2 of the headword. (See Laufer (1994) and Kernerman (19--)).

In L1 dictionaries, complete comprehension (and the resulting psychological assurance) are derived from the definition only, without need for translation. (See Figure 3.)

Fig. 3: The Function of Translation

<p>FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES</p> <p>Monolingual (L1-L1)</p> <p>Comprehension is conveyed by means of definitions.</p>	<p>SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES</p> <p>Semi-bilingual (L1-L1-L2)</p> <p>Comprehension is conveyed by means of definitions and translations. (But in the case of monolingual dictionaries, comprehension is conveyed by means of definitions only.)</p>
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2 Definitions

Since L2 dictionaries have (or should have) translations of the headwords, that cover the full meaning of the L2 item, and since many authorities already claim that nothing can be better and more satisfying than a translation into one's mother tongue, it follows that definitions in such dictionaries are superfluous, as they add no lexicographic information to the translated meaning. (They even get in the way when the user wants to know only the meaning.) Nevertheless, we include definitions in L2 dictionaries for another – not a lexicographic – reason. We include definitions for a didactic-linguistic reason. By reading the definition the user gets practice in how to describe and explain things in that language – what linguists call strategic competence and performance. The definitions may be short, (since there are translations anyway), and in language that the user can understand at that particular level, without the need to be bound by a fixed, limited vocabulary. Sometimes it is advisable even to introduce into the definition a word or expression that the user might not know, if the words go together naturally, and if the combination is worth knowing. If the definition can be descriptive and not analytical, all the better. (It should be pointed out that in elementary learners' dictionaries definitions may be excluded entirely, as learners are as yet unable to benefit from them, and just ignore them. Besides, there are a great many words that are virtually impossible to explain satisfactorily in L2 at that stage or level.)

Definitions in native-language dictionaries should also be in easy language – not abstract concepts but readily tangible explanations. Naturally, they may utilize more complicated grammatical structures and a more extensive vocabulary than definitions in a foreign-language dictionary, because one is dealing now with the mother tongue.

I recall how I suffered as a student when using my school dictionary, by having to cross-reference so much, that is, to look up the meanings of unfamiliar words used in the definitions. At that time, our high-school dictionaries had exceedingly abstract definitions. Today, L1 high-school dictionaries are more user-friendly than when I went to school, but the large American desk dictionaries seem to be just as hard to understand as they always were. Dictionaries of this type are frequently quoted in courts of law, and in order to be considered reliable and authoritative, they have extremely comprehensive and often technical definitions. This makes dictionaries of this type no more user-friendly than legal contracts.

As said, a meaning acquired by reading a definition is acquired cognitively, whether it is in one's own native-language dictionary or in a second-language dictionary. As a result, L1 dictionary use resembles the process of foreign-language learning more than it resembles first-language acquisition. (See Figure 4.)

Fig. 4: Definitions

FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
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<p>Definitions are the key to cognitive comprehension, so they should be easy to understand.</p>	<p>Definitions fulfill no lexicographic function, but they are useful for foreign-language learning.</p>
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3 Examples of Use

Most looking-up-of-words, whether in L1 or L2 dictionaries, is done in order to find out meanings. However, often language learners, such as students who are engaging in writing in the new language, need to know how to use these words. They need examples of typical use that can serve as models for them. These examples should illustrate the most frequent uses of that particular meaning of the word or expression, using common collocations, and even reinforcing the explanatory element by being descriptive whenever possible. For FL learning, made-up examples may be more relevant and practical than genuine corpora-derived examples. The current focus on, and popularity of, corpora-derived examples, often demands extensive knowledge of the cultural context, sometimes baffling to the L2 learner, which could be avoided if the examples were made up by skilled lexicographers, experienced teachers, and descriptive linguists. A specialized learner's corpus, if there were one, would be more relevant than the general corpora presently being used by lexicographers.

On the other hand, since people using their native-language dictionaries seem to have a natural knack for being able to use new words correctly in their own language once their meanings are grasped, examples, though useful, are less important, and can appear less frequently in L1 dictionaries. They are usually excluded from them, except for exceptional cases, such as Encarta or New Oxford Dictionary. L1 dictionaries should follow the L2 dictionary practice,

albeit in modified form, of providing examples of use, especially collocations, on the well-known grounds that meaning lies in the context, that meaning is context-sensitive. This dictum applies to L1 acquisition as well as to L2 learning. (See Figure 5.)

Fig. 5: Examples of Use

FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
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Examples are of marginal importance whether encoding or decoding.

Examples are of major importance when encoding.

4 Grammatical and other Information

Dictionary publishers must satisfy the needs of a very broad public. They must be able to answer satisfactorily several seemingly contradictory questions: What do dictionary users want? What do language teachers think that dictionary users should have? What do lexicographers think that dictionary users should have?

Whether L1 or L2 users, dictionary users are not usually interested in the grammatical functions of the words they are looking up – over and above the basic necessities for understanding their meanings, such as their parts of speech. For active use, more information, such as number, can be useful. Actually, most dictionary use is passive. Nevertheless, for the sake of the less frequent active use, dictionary compilers must provide all of the information that might be potentially useful – even though most of the information that appears in learners' dictionaries is ignored most of the time. Thus, we have the situation whereby lexicographers must be maximalists, while their hosts, the dictionary users, tend to be minimalists.

Much progress has been made in recent decades with supplementary material for comprehension and use in learners' dictionaries. We all know how fascinating some of it is, and how well presented. This material must be a blessing to the small number of "serious" L2 students. It would be no less a blessing to L1 dictionary-using students, who have just as much need for it. (See Figure 6.)

Fig. 6: Additional and Supplementary Material

FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
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The additional material is necessary for encoding.

The additional material is necessary for encoding.

5 Phonetic Transcriptions and Pronunciation

Phonetic transcriptions have always been the least regarded of the additional material found in the entries in learners' dictionaries, even though they follow each headword. And, indeed, representing sound in print in a way that it can be readily interpreted is not an easy matter; deciphering printed aural codes by dictionary users is even more difficult. In Israel, for example, it was found to be completely ineffective. As a result, the phonetic transcriptions were deleted from their learners' dictionaries 17 years ago. The natural alternative to printed sound representation is recorded pronunciation. This is dealt with in the next section.

In most cases native speakers of a language seem to know instinctively how to pronounce most words they encounter, without ever having heard them spoken. L1 dictionaries also contain phonetic transcriptions or pronunciation indications of some kind, but native speakers of English, for example, are unlikely to be familiar with the phonetic alphabet, and therefore more likely to ignore transcriptions. (See Figure 7.)

Fig. 7: Pronunciation in Dictionaries

FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
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There is less need for pronunciation indication.

There is a greater need for appropriate pronunciation indication.

6 Electronic Dictionaries

Electronic dictionaries exist for both L1 and L2 dictionary use – in a great many forms: on CD ROMs, built into various software programs, in hand-held sets, in hand-held computers, and soon even in mobile telephones. They have many advantages over printed dictionaries, such as instant access and retrieval, more space for entries and information (even encyclopedic information), model recordings of pronunciation, often with the possibility of practicing the pronunciation and getting feedback - and other advantages. They also have disadvantages, mainly centered round the fact that the storage of information is formless and invisible, frustrating to many, and lacking the tangible and visible assurance of a printed book. They have a smaller display area. And the function of scrolling cannot compare with the convenience of flipping pages.

With the spread of electronic devices, phonetic transcriptions will disappear from printed dictionaries. And since learners' dictionaries are used mainly for decoding, there will be a tendency to transfer to the electronic media, functions related to encoding, in order to save time and space in the use of printed dictionaries. A CD ROM will eventually accompany every serious printed dictionary. The printed version will be used mainly for decoding (as an aid in reading) while the electronic version, where space is not a problem, will be a tool for writing and speaking.

Future dictionaries – whether L1 or L2 dictionaries - will exist side-by-side in two forms – one that is printed on paper and the other electronic. They will be sold and bought as a package, indivisible, each providing what it can do best, and together comprising a kind of completeness or comprehensiveness. (See Figure 8.)

Fig. 8: Electronic Dictionaries

FIRST-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES	SECOND-LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES
Electronic means provide facility in access and retrieval, unlimited space for additional material, and aid in pronunciation.	Electronic means provide facility in access and retrieval, unlimited space for additional material, and aid in pronunciation.

Ladies and gentlemen, paper dictionaries are here to stay. Their use will even increase. Electronic dictionaries can enrich the use of paper dictionaries, but they will not replace them. WHAT WILL BE REPLACED IS PAPER DICTIONARIES THAT ARE NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ELECTRONIC VERSIONS.

7. Conclusions

All dictionary use is conscious learning activity, regardless of its goal. Therefore, learner-friendly FL dictionaries should be taken as a model for L1 dictionaries. The latter can enhance their efficacy by applying some of the tried-and-proved features found in foreign-language-learning dictionaries, such as simplified, less abstract definitions. Indeed, in the little investigation already carried out in this field, such as that by McCreary (IJL, Vol.15, No. 3), it is found that L1 speakers using L2 monolingual dictionaries achieve better results than those using general monolingual L1 dictionaries.

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