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A Study of Behaviour of Medical Students Towards Dictionary Use

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Abstract

People from different fields of life use a dictionary for their linguistic as well as professional enrichment. General purpose as well as specialised dictionaries are compiled on the basis of the needs users. The users decide about the dictionaries according to their academic and professional needs.

The present study aims at finding out dictionary using habits of medical students. The study is quantitative in nature. 100 MBBS students studying at Sharif Medical College, Lahore are selected as a sample of the study. A questionnaire adapted from Hartmann (1999), Nesi (2000), Tono (2001) and Ahmad (2009) is administered among these students.

The analysis reveals that the medical students least use the dictionary for language needs. They do not intend to find out definitions, pronunciations, grammatical usages and phrasal verbs. On the contrary, the students of medical science use the dictionary to find the encyclopaedic information. They just want the explanations of the medical terms. The language information tagged to these terms does not attract their attention though this is provided in the dictionary they claim to be in their use.

It is also found that the medical students are not aware of the diversity of information provided in the dictionaries whether they are language (general purpose) or medical (LSP) dictionaries. The study concludes that the medical students do not pay attention to their language needs. They just use dictionaries as a tool of information.

Key Words: dictionary, professional, language learning, medical, students

Introduction

The dictionaries are an integral part of language. Their use holds great importance in language learning. Jackson, (2002:21) declares that the dictionaries are the “book about language” because they cover the language comprehensively. For this reason, they find prime importance in language teaching and learning. The importance and interference of dictionaries is not limited to the language learning only, the specialized dictionaries have revolutionised the world of learning.

Dealing with Specialized Field

These dictionaries deal with the specialized field of study (Bowker, 2003:154). They are restricted to one specific area and provide information or definitions of the terminology used in this specific field of study. They may be treating one or more language(s), may be giving only the explanations of the lexemes or attaching the related information like pronunciations, derivations, usage notes and so on with the meaning. The specialised dictionary can be alphabetically arranged or thematically organised. They list the headwords of a specialised field with complete explanations. These explanations are quite comprehensive and define the term completely. The information included in these dictionaries is mostly factual and such dictionaries tend to avoid linguistic information on this ground.

Users of Dictionary

The lexicographers are quite curious about the users of the dictionary. The knowledge about the users help the compilers/lexicographers to decide about the features of the dictionary because they will only focus on the features which cater the needs of the users. For this reason, the dictionary use and the habits of the languages users have always been in focus of the researchers in lexicography.

The users’ habits determine the language needs of a user or a specific group of users and the dictionaries in modern lexicography are based on the language needs of the users to bring user friendliness into practice during the dictionary compilation. Bejoint (2000:167) considers the study of “needs and skills of the users” an attempt which will flourish user friendliness in lexicography.

The researchers have largely taken the users’ perspective into research. Nesi (2000, 3-54) has categorised the research in dictionary use as “questionnaire based, test based” and “observation based”. He has enlisted a lot of studies in each category. The user perspective in

specialized lexicography is not new. The modern lexicographical trends base the specialized lexicography on the “user profile” (Berhenholtz & Tarp, 1995:70).

Language Use in Professional Institutions

Language is always a required tool in each teaching and learning process. The students in professional institutes need a special focus on language because they have to use the language in a specialised form to communicate. The medical students always interact with the patients. They have to council, take history, explain disease and many more things like that. Chur-Hasnen (1997) established that the medical students were deficient in language skills. Chur-Hasnen et al. (2007) proposed that the “learning-need analysis” can be helpful in deciding the language needs which will ultimately be resulting in improvement in language proficiency. The proper use of dictionary can be helpful in improving the language skill.

The dictionary use in professional education and the dictionary use by the professionals may be helpful in refining their linguistic abilities. The present study is aimed at finding out the reasons of dictionary use in the medical students. The habits of dictionary using in medical students will specify the needs of the students and professionals in medical professions and the study will play a role of guide for the lexicographer working on specialized lexicography.

Research Methodology

Dictionaries are used during and even after the educational process but the objective of using a dictionary in different fields of education may not be the same. It varies according to the user needs pertaining to the nature of their filed. The objective of the present study was to describe the dictionary use among the students, to investigate the behaviour of students of professional education towards dictionary and to evaluate the skill and training of dictionary users using dictionaries for specific purposes.

The study used survey type of approach to probe the determined objectives. A questionnaire was administered among the students for data collection. This questionnaire was analysed quantitatively. The results were calculated on the basis of simple percentages computed manually. The Population of the study included graduate students engaged in medical education. The students of MBBS at Sharif Medical College Lahore were selected as the sample of the study. 100 students of the two different classes participated in the survey.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Hartmann (1999), Nesi (2000), Tono (2001), and Ahmad (2009). Thirty eight questions were asked form the students. The questionnaire was divided into four sections.

In first section, the questions about the start of dictionary use and dictionary ownership were asked. The questions were asked to know whether the students had any training or habit of using general purpose dictionaries during early education. Furthermore, the questions were asked to know whether they had their own dictionaries or not. If a learner owns a dictionary,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

124

11 : 4 April 2011

Ali Ahmad, PhD Scholar, Hafiz Mansoor-ul-Haq, MBBS, FCPS and Zafar Iqbal, PhD
A Study of Behaviour of Medical Students Towards Dictionary Use

his ratio of look up will increase automatically which will be helpful to improve his/her habit of dictionary use.

The second section was about the training of dictionary use. The questions about the training or education of dictionary use during high school education were asked. The proper training can be a source of maturing the habits of dictionary use.

The questions about the habits of dictionary use and extent of dictionary use were asked in the third section.

The fourth section was about the purpose of dictionary use in the students of professional education.

Results

The section wise results of the analysis of the questionnaire are discussed below.

Start of dictionary use and ownership

Table 1: Start of dictionary use and ownership

Q #	Statement		Always	Nearly Always	Half of the time	Rarely	Never
1	I used a dictionary in my early education.	%	12	11	18	29	30
2	I used a monolingual dictionary.	%	08	12	10	25	45
3	I used a bilingual dictionary.	%	23	12	10	29	26
4	I started using the dictionary at school first	%	02	18	16	14	50
5	I starting using a dictionary at home first	%	21	16	13	12	38
6	I have my own dictionary/dictionaries at home	%	56	24	12	04	04
7	I have my own general dictionary/dictionaries.	%	12	13	20	19	26
8	I have my own medical dictionaries.	%	65	08	17	06	04
9	I use electronic dictionary.	%	07	10	19	19	55
10	I use medical electronic dictionary	%	01	10	00	09	80
11	I use online dictionaries.	%	15	08	17	18	42
12	I use online medical dictionary	%	14	09	16	19	42

Table 1 contains the analysis of 12 questions asked to evaluate the habits of dictionary use at early stage of the participants' education. The analysis shows that only 12% of the respondents claimed to use a dictionary always during early education. 59% of the respondents never or rarely used a dictionary which is very high percentage. It shows that the culture of dictionary use does not develop during early education in Pakistan.

Moreover, the tendency of using bilingual dictionary is higher (23% always and 12% nearly always) than using a monolingual dictionary (08% always and 12% nearly always).

The users mostly used the dictionaries while at home (21% always and 16% nearly always).

Mostly students (50% never and 14% rarely) claimed that they did not use a dictionary at school. This shows that the habit of dictionary use at the institute is minimal.

Most of the respondents (56% always and 24% nearly always) claimed that they owned a dictionary. But the ratio of having general purpose dictionaries (21% always and 16% nearly always) is quite low than the ownership of medical dictionary (65% always and 08% nearly always.).

The use of electronic dictionary is very low (07% always and 10% nearly always) and 80% of the respondents have never used an electronic medical dictionary. The online dictionaries are used more than electronic dictionaries but the ratio itself is very low (15% always and 10 5 nearly always) which illustrates that the awareness of e-dictionaries is very low. Same is the treatment of the medical students with online medical dictionaries.

Training of Dictionary Use

Table 2: Training of dictionary Use

Q #	Statement		Always	Nearly Always	Half of the time	Rarely	Never
13	I got a training of dictionary use.	%	00	11	12	15	62
14	I was trained to use it in primary school	%	00	03	17	14	66
15	I was trained to use a dictionary in high school	%	02	04	05	13	76
16	The teachers used a dictionary in language class rooms.	%	00	00	00	00	100
17	The language teacher asked us to use dictionary in the class room.	%	00	00	00	00	100
18	There was a chapter in the book of language about dictionary use	%	00	00	00	00	100
19	Dictionary skill was tested in the examinations.	%	00	00	00	00	100
20	The teachers asked to find some information from the dictionary	%	00	00	00	19	81

Table 2 shows the analysis of the questions asked regarding the training of dictionary use. The results are very hopeless as they demonstrate that the students were not trained to use a dictionary during their early education.

Only 11% of the students claimed that they were nearly always trained to use a dictionary. 62% of the respondents were never provided with a training and 15% were rarely provided with a training.

The teachers of language neither used a dictionary in the class room (100%) nor demanded the same from the students. At the same time, the curriculum of language did not contain any

element which could guide/persuade the students to use a dictionary. 100% students agreed that there was neither any such chapter in language books nor any skill was tested in the examinations. Perhaps, that was the prime reason that the teachers almost always avoided (81%) to guide the students towards using a dictionary.

Contexts and Frequencies of Dictionary Use

Table 3: Contents and frequencies of dictionary use

Q #	Statement		Always	Nearly Always	Half of the Time	Rarely	Never
21	I am in habit of using a dictionary.	%	08	13	11	18	50
22	I use a dictionary in class room	%	02	03	01	12	82
23	I use a dictionary in library.	%	14	12	14	19	41
24	I use a dictionary at home.	%	18	17	29	16	20
25	I use a dictionary whenever I am stuck with a word.	%	06	11	23	15	45
26	I find it helpful to use a dictionary whenever needed	%	26	27	17	12	18
27	Dictionary use bothers me.	%	55	18	07	11	09
28	I easily locate useful information from a dictionary.	%	22	15	13	11	39

Table 3 shows the results of the questions about the contexts and frequencies of dictionary use.

The analysis shows that the students are least in habit of using a dictionary (08% always and 13% nearly always). The ratio for those who have never been in a habit of using a dictionary is very high (50%).

The results show the clear relation to the results in table 2 where we found that the students were neither trained nor motivated to use a dictionary. As we found in table 1, most of the students started using a dictionary at home, this habit continued till they reached in professional education. 18% of the students claimed that they always used a dictionary at home, while 14% claimed that they used it at library and only 02% in a class room.

A very low percentage of the students (06%) always looked up a word in the dictionary when s/he was stuck with it.

On the contrary, those who did not bother to pick up a dictionary to find out the exact meaning were in high percentage (45%). Most of students claimed that they always (26%) or nearly always (27%) found a dictionary helpful and they also claimed the use of a dictionary did not bother them (55% always and 18% nearly always).

The ratio for those students who claimed to locate the required information in the dictionary is lower (22% always and 15% nearly always) than those who thought they failed to reach the useful information (39% never and 11% rarely).

Purpose of Dictionary use

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 4 April 2011

Ali Ahmad, PhD Scholar, Hafiz Mansoor-ul-Haq, MBBS, FCPS and Zafar Iqbal, PhD

A Study of Behaviour of Medical Students Towards Dictionary Use

Table 4: Purpose of dictionary use

Q #	Statement		Always	Nearly Always	Half of the time	Rarely	Never
29	I use a dictionary to find a meaning.	%	32	24	14	12	18
30	I read the grammatical information given with the word.	%	02	04	11	14	69
31	I use a dictionary to find out pronunciation of the words.	%	00	06	12	15	67
32	I read the user's guide given in dictionary.	%	00	00	00	00	100
33	I prefer to use a medical dictionary.	%	85	11	03	00	00
34	If a word is not available in medical dictionary, I consult general dictionary.	%	02	04	09	65	20
35	Medical dictionary suffices my needs.	%	86	10	03	00	00
36	Medical dictionary defines properly.	%	89	07	04	00	00
37	I avoid going into the details given against a word in the dictionary. It saves my time.	%	91	05	03	01	00
38	Dictionary use an enjoyable activity	%	45	27	18	09	01

The table 4 shows the results of the questions regarding their purpose of dictionary use.

Mostly the students claimed that they used a dictionary only to find out a meaning (32% always and 24% nearly always). The respondents claimed that they never (69%) or rarely (14%) went through the grammatical information in a dictionary, never (67%) or rarely (15%) found out the pronunciation of a word in the dictionary. It shows the tendency of the users who mainly focus on the meaning of the words only. They do not pay attention to the other information provided for these words in the dictionary.

Moreover, the respondents claimed that they never read the note for the guidance provided in the dictionary as user's guide. This also shows that users are not serious about the dictionary use and they feel that they have enough information which can help them in finding meaning which they need. Furthermore, this also show that they do not have the training of dictionary use.

The medical students claimed that they preferred to use medical dictionary and they were satisfied (86%) with the medical dictionary. That is the reason that they never (20%) or rarely (65%) used a general purpose dictionary when a word was not provided in a medical dictionary.

Most of the respondents (89% always and 07% nearly always) have faith in the definitions of the medical dictionaries. Since they are just in need of finding out meaning, it really suffices their needs. The purpose of their dictionary use is purely finding out encyclopaedic information (meanings), they avoid (91%) to go into details that are attached to a word in the dictionary. They limit to the meaning only. Most of the respondents claimed that the use of a dictionary was an enjoyable task for them (45% always and 27% nearly always).

Discussion

It is found through the analysis that the students in Pakistan start using a dictionary very late in the course of their early education. Most of the students start using dictionary when they reach high school level. It is also obvious from the analysis that the tendency of using bilingual dictionary is higher than using a monolingual dictionary.

The reason behind this approach is the teaching of language through grammar translation method. The students do not or rarely use a dictionary at an institute. They use a dictionary preferably at home. The apparent reason of this behaviour is the lack of tendency of the dictionary use as well as attitude of the teachers towards dictionary teaching. More than half of the medical students own a dictionary. They are having more specialised dictionaries than medical dictionaries. Their attitude towards using online and electronic dictionaries is also negative.

The results in table 2 reveal that the training of using a dictionary is not in practice in Pakistan. The students are neither asked to use a dictionary nor they are advised to look up a word in a dictionary with the objective of training. Moreover, the text books do not help the students learn the dictionary use. Their dictionary skill is not tested at any level of language education. They learn to use a dictionary with hit and trial method. Absence of training results in least habit of dictionary use in the students during language learning and as a result, this behaviour continues in professional education. As a result, we find students with claims that the use of a dictionary is not fruitful for them as they fail to obtain the required information most of the times.

The table 4 reveals that the dictionary is considered only a source to find out the meaning by the medical students. They claimed that they do not look up a dictionary for finding out grammatical information, pronunciation, or any other information provided with the words in a dictionary. They also claimed that they have never read the outside matter. It is a big proof of their claim that they are not trained to use a dictionary. Had they been trained to use a dictionary, they would have consulted all the outside matter to know about the dictionary. The medical students claimed that they preferred to use a medical dictionary. They found this specialised dictionary enough for them as it provided them with the meanings or definitions which they required in medical profession. Their behaviour towards the use of general purpose dictionary is found quite negative as they do not consult a general purpose dictionary when they fail to find out a word in a medical dictionary.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the medical students have least habits of using a dictionary. The reasons may be the absence of training for dictionary use, no motivations by the teachers, no tendencies in the curriculum to encourage the learners to use a dictionary for problems of language, and possibly many other reasons. The analysis of the questionnaire administered among them shows that the medical students show tendencies to find out meaning of the words only. They do not give importance to the other linguistic information attached to the words like pronunciation of the words, grammatical information, etymology, origin of the words and other information like that. They just want the encyclopaedic information collected as the meaning of the word. Moreover, the study manifests the fact that the use of

general purpose dictionary is very low in professional education. The medical students claimed to avoid the use of a general purpose dictionary.

The study recommends that the students should be trained to use a dictionary during early education. It will improve the dictionary using habits of the students and they will not limit themselves to the search of meaning only. The practice will be helpful in improvement of linguistic abilities of the students.

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