

The Usages, Problems, and Features of Electronic Dictionaries as Perceived by Korean Students in the Philippines

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Abstract

From the emerging trend in acquiring English language among the EFL learners and the booming population of Koreans in the Philippines, this research project investigates the use of electronic dictionary (e-dictionary) among the 168 Korean students in the Philippines. Since e-dictionary seems to be a trustworthy tool for Korean students in a foreign land, this study presents its three vital facets – the benefits, drawbacks, and features to be enhanced. Providing definitions and ease in doing homework are the two primary benefits; however, several drawbacks are conceded (e.g., incomprehensible transcription, non-existing words, WIFI – zoned wired). Then, the suggested features to be enhanced are that various meanings and more examples must be provided for them to effectively learn the English language.

I. Introduction

Globalization indeed intensifies the relationship of many countries worldwide. It makes emigration, immigration, and migration become possible, easy, and convenient for many people. In fact, there are approximately 88,102 Koreans who are staying in the Philippines as of 2013 and in last three years, South Korean nationals remained the largest foreign group taking up college in the Philippines (Philippine's Bureau Immigration). The possible reasons behind this could be the – geographical location, manageable climate, and low-cost living. In line with this, Korean parents are motivated to have their children study English in the Philippines as they consider the importance of English as an international language. Further, many parents are very much aware of the lavish amount of money they are wasting -- three million won in a year per student in a private school -- for a scanty result of acquiring the English language in Korea (Kim, 2013); hence, the decision to have the English education in the Philippines. This leads to “the phenomenal rise of the Philippines as the prime source of English education for South Koreans” (Hicap, 2009, para. 3).

As Korean students reach the Philippines, they need to cope with the different demands in order to learn and adopt the English language in a country where English is considered to be the second language. Knowing the fact that “Korean students were highly dependent on mobile technology for English translation” (Florida, 2012, p. 991) and that printed dictionary is already replaced by e-dictionary to learn vocabularies (Chen, 2007), it is important to know their dependency on the use of dictionary applications in their gadgets in relation to the development of their English skills. Additionally, with the availability of high technology and the necessity to master the universal language, e-dictionaries become one of the basic and most used tools of any English language learners specifically English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Further, there have been a lot of studies about the importance of electrical devices such as computers, mobile phones, iPhones, smartphones, tablets and more in the effectiveness of teaching and learning English since it could make teaching and learning fun, engaging and interactive.

Numerous studies have been conducted about EFL learners' usage of dictionary. This was initiated by Tomaszczyk (1979) who stated that instructors, translators, and EFL learners in Poland used dictionaries to get translation, synonym, idiom, spelling, pronunciation, grammar, taboo word,

and/or etymology of the words respectively. Then it was followed by Baxter (1980), Béjoint (1981), Bensoussan, Sim, and Weiss (1984), Kharma (1985), Herbst and Stein (1987), Al-Khub (2001), and Cubillo (2002) to name a few. Recently, some researchers looked into the functions and differences of paper dictionaries (PDs) versus pocket e-dictionaries (PEDs) versus mobile dictionaries (MDs) since “students’ advancement in using mobile media for learning was perceived as presenting better academic and study skills” (Phillips, Grosch, & Laosinchai, 2014, p.1).

Ryu (2006) examined the Korean college students' needs and habits in using English dictionaries. This study reveals the favorability of using paper dictionaries over e-dictionaries even though they are bulky and heavy to bring. However, Dashtestani’s (2013) study reveals the positive attitudes of the 126 EFL students and 73 EFL teachers toward the use of e-dictionaries in learning and teaching English. To support this, White and Mills (2014) presented a study towards the usage of smart phone in studying English among EFL learners. This study reveals that the majority of their respondents own smart phones and believe that the use of smart phones in learning language is indeed very helpful. Further, Bae and Nesi (2014) conducted web forums about dictionary-related inquiries in *Yahoo! Answers* and *Knowledge iN* at Naver.com to identify the concerns of the public with regard to using dictionaries. Their study reveals that majority of the public are concerned in choosing the best dictionaries and interpreting dictionary information about word meanings. Also Bae (2011) posited the importance of the teacher’s knowledge and capacity in using and teaching properly dictionary skills to the students.

Although Bae's (2011) study shows a significant effect on the teachers' skills in teaching how to use dictionaries, it is still vital to consider the user-friendliness of every e-dictionary and the learners independence and productivity in using this kind of dictionary. This means that every learner must be able to properly acquire vocabularies and correctly use the dictionaries even without the guidance from the teacher. A perfect kind of e-dictionary must give the learner some sense of self-learning mode. The learner must be able to take positive control of his gadget in accordance with the knowledge that he needs and gets.

From the emerging trend in acquiring English language among the EFL learners in a foreign land, this research project would like to investigate the usefulness of e-dictionary among Korean students in the Philippines, the problems they encountered in using this dictionary application, and

the features to be added to better aide their learners' needs. Thereby, the specific purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. What kind of help does using an e-dictionary provide to Korean English learners?
2. What are the problems do they encounter in using e-dictionaries?
3. What features should be enhanced and added to better aide them in learning the English language?

II. Research Design

Participants

The participants for this study involve 190 Korean students who are studying and residing in Manila, Philippines. Most of them are college students who are studying to where the researchers are affiliated with. All of them have e-dictionary in their Smartphone. However, 22 of them was not included anymore because some answers in their questionnaires were unclear/uninterpretable. Hence, only 168 Korean students who are studying in the Philippines became part of this study.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a 14-item survey questionnaire (See Appendix).

Procedure

It was pretty easy to collect data from the 190 Korean students since they were always around the universities. During their free time, they were randomly approached and requested to answer the paper-and-pen survey. While they were answering, the researchers were at their side to assist them for any clarifications or translations. All of them answered the survey questionnaires and 50 of them were interviewed to further explain their choices. To make things easier for the surveyees, all the possible answers were listed down in the options and they were asked to rank them accordingly (1 as the top choice and 8 as their least choice). This was done for some survey questions that can answer research questions one and two. To make sure that the researchers were able to cover their experience with the use of e-dictionary, they were asked if there were any other

options that were not stipulated in the questionnaire. This was noted accordingly. After which, all surveyees were given a small token of appreciation for participating in this study.

The survey questionnaires were then tallied and computed using excel sheets. The interview were encoded accordingly.

III. Data Analysis

It is high time that software analysts and makers create a mobile dictionary that would really maximize the experience of EFL learners. In order to achieve the “customize dictionaries according to user profiles” (Varantola, 2002, p.30), the users must feel confident that they understand the meaning of the words they are searching. This will only be confirmed if there is retention, recall, and correct application of the words. To attain this, e-dictionary must be user-friendly – simple, fast, and interactive. Therefore, the researchers are hoping to address the on-going problem with regard to the “emotional love-hate relationship” (p.30) between the e-dictionaries and the users especially the EFL learners by answering the three essential research questions.

To answer the first research question, the respondents were asked two survey questions – usages and reasons for using e-dictionaries.

A. The Usages of and Reasons for Using E-Dictionaries

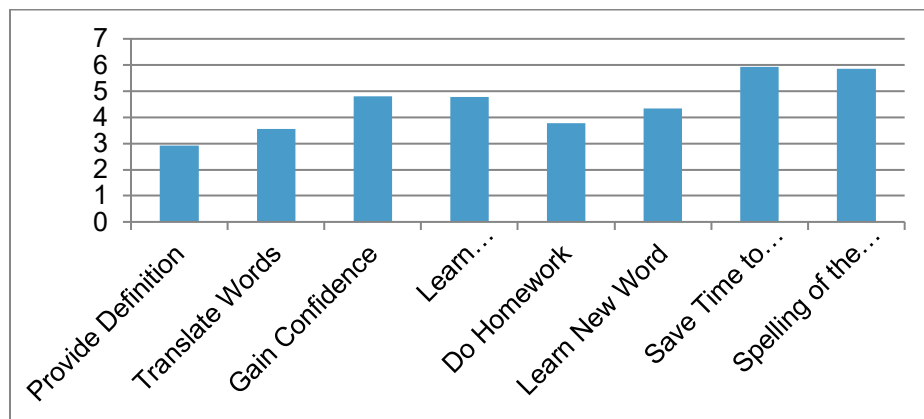


Figure 1. The Usages of E-Dictionaries

Figure 1 presents the Korean students' reasons for using the e-dictionaries. As can be seen, the top three choices are providing definitions, translating words, and doing homework. Evidently, they use e-dictionaries to get the meanings of unfamiliar words. Korean students recognize the help e-dictionaries provide when they consult them. Fageeh's (2014) study also presented the same reason for using e-dictionary.

Secondly, they want to check the translation of those words to their own language. In fact, some Korean students who were interviewed mentioned that there was a thin line separating providing definition and translating words because most of the time they wanted to know the definition of the word by finding out the equivalent word in their own language. Since they are EFL learners in the ESL world, all of the respondents who were interviewed heavily rely on translating words to know their definitions.

For their third top choice, in doing homework, they take longer time using the e-dictionaries to further understand their homework and to make sure that they were doing the right thing. They exert much effort and spend more time using e-dictionaries because macro skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are most of the time involved in doing their homeworks. Additionally when they are doing their homework, they are usually alone. This will support the answers they provide in the next survey question - the top three reasons for using the dictionary are the instances when they are studying alone, reading written texts, and writing school papers as presented in Figure 2.

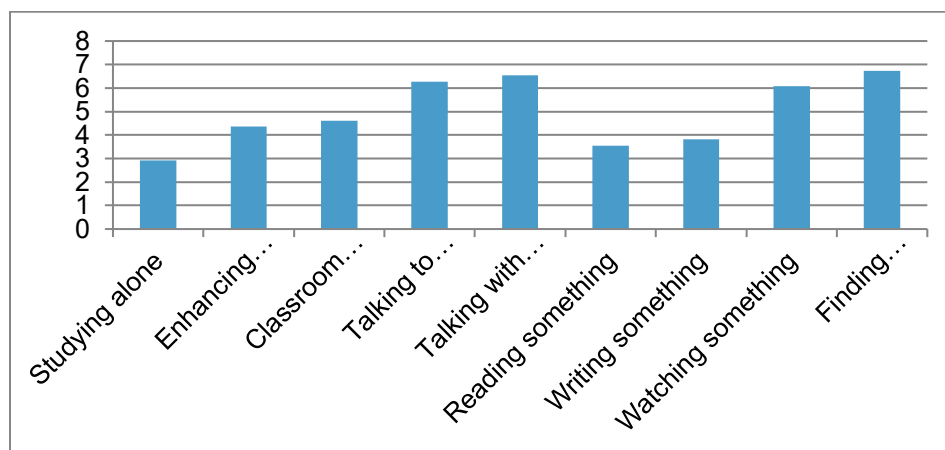


Figure 2. The Reasons for Using E-Dictionaries

B. The Problems Encountered in Using E-Dictionaries

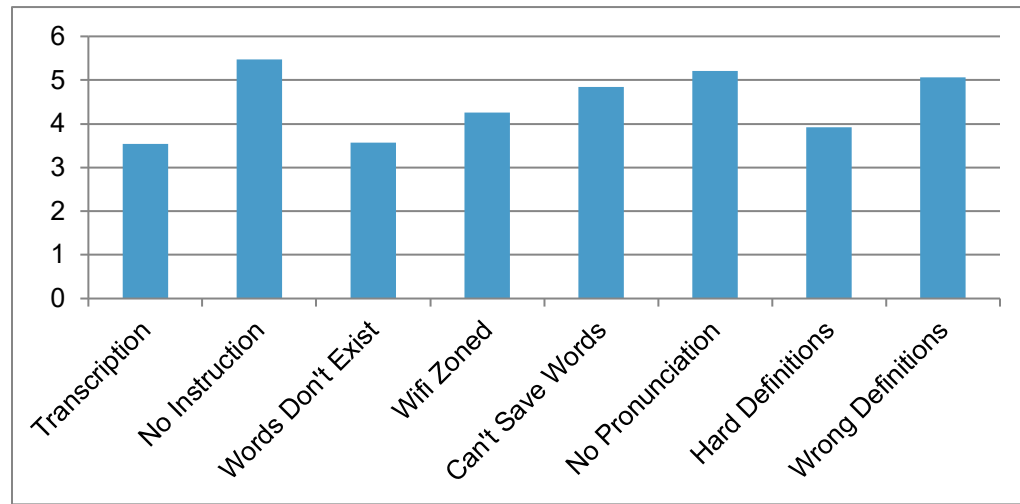


Figure 3. The Problems Encountered in Using E-Dictionaries

Although e-dictionaries have useful functions among the Korean students, there are also some nuisances.

To answer research question two, the top three problems that Korean students encountered in using e-dictionaries are transcriptions that are difficult to understand, some words do not exist, and some definitions are hard to understand respectively. As they explained during the interview, they find transcription the number one problem in using the e-dictionaries because most of them cannot read International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Therefore, it makes this particular part futile for them. While there are some respondents who can understand transcription, their problems boils down on insufficient or lack of translation due to their chosen e-dictionary application.

In line with this, there are some words that do not exist in their chosen e-dictionaries, for example, jargons (e.g., names of germs - tireklla, tlactomye), slang words (e.g., buck which is equivalent to one dollar) and idioms (e.g., bite the bullet which means to endure the difficulties). The respondents know that jargons and slang words are important part of English communication as one of them said, “we cannot ignore these words because there are differences between watching American news, documentary clips and talking to native speakers”. Getting the meaning of idiomatic expression is another problem because the dictionary translated word per word not by

context. One interviewee said, “It’s easy [to confirm the correct meaning] if teacher is beside us. [It’s] a big problem if we are studying alone”. This could justify the result in Figure 2, they heavily depend on e-dictionaries when studying by themselves.

Lastly, there are also some words that are difficult to understand because the definition or translated word that is provided is also another unfamiliar word. For example, (ravine=glen=narrow alley = 고살 – 좁은골목길,골목사이/// taletelling=쏘개질 – 있는일 없는일 없어서 일러바치는짓).

To answer research question three, the respondents were asked two survey questions – features to enhance and features to add in an ideal e-dictionary.

C. Features to Enhance in E-Dictionaries

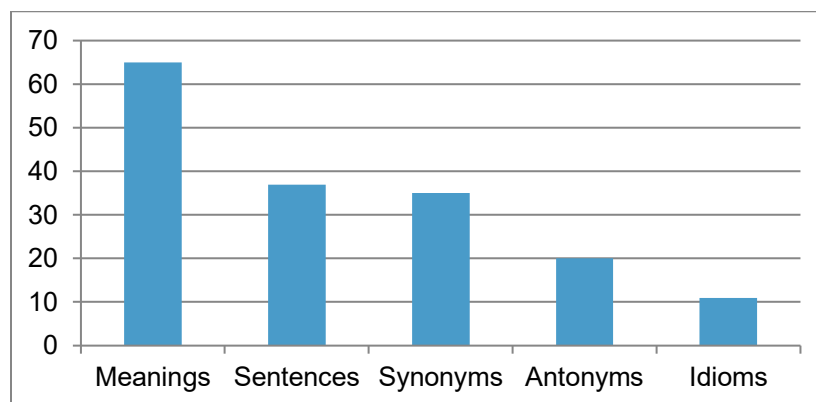


Figure 4. The Features to Enhance in E-Dictionaries

As shown, meanings, sentences, and synonyms are the features that need to be improved in e-dictionaries. These three major points chosen by the respondents are interconnected with each other. The primary aspect that Korean students aspire for their e-dictionary to be enhanced is the various meanings provided by it . This is line with the top three problem that they encountered as seen in Figure 3 – some definitions are hard to understand. For instance, in using English-Korean dictionary, when they check for a definition of a particular word, there are various meanings in Korean words that may not be related with each other, same meaning but different usage (example book, get, hard, set, to, and so on), or the meaning of the word may be different according to the different subject areas that the word belongs to. Because of this, the second option which is

providing more examples used in sentences is ranked as the top two feature that should be enhanced.

Most e-dictionaries either provide IPA or meanings only. Thereby, Korean students feel the need of searched words to be used in sentences, too. This way they can further understand the meaning and context of the word especially that most of the time they use their e-dictionary when studying alone. They also mentioned that they can use those sentences as patterns when they create their own sentences.

Additionally, synonymous words is their preferred top three answer. They affirmed that this particular area of e-dictionaries should be enhanced so that they will be guided accordingly when they write their paper works. They require that synonymous words should be easier to understand. Knowing synonymous words will make them avoid any possible redundancy that can make their paper dull.

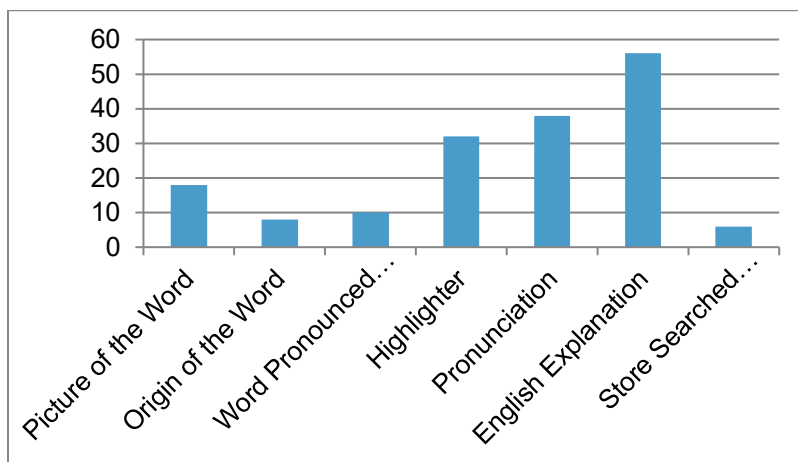


Figure 5. The Features to Add in E-Dictionaries

Another interesting angle to look at is the features that could be added to further help them in understanding meanings and retaining them in their vocabulary bank. As shown in Figure 5, the top three features that should be added in e-dictionaries for their convenience are the explanation in English, pronunciation, and highlighter. In their class, some Korean students find it tasking to look for the definition of the word and translate in English what they perceived as the definition.

Consequently, they want to easily see the definition and the explanation in English on the same page. This way learning English words will definitely be convenient and economical for them.

Most e-dictionaries that Korean students have in their Smartphones only provide transcription but do not provide a pronunciation of the word. By and large, English pronunciation (a stress-timed language) is greatly different with Korean pronunciation (a syllable-timed language). Because of this, most of them find the pronunciation new and difficult. It is then practical for them to clamor for an application that can make them hear the right pronunciation of the searched words.

Lastly, they want to add a highlighter as one of the features to further help them gain and understand words. This way, it makes their learning a little interactive because of its visual impact. In order for them not to forget and instead be reminded of the words that they already searched, they suggest to have a highlighter in their e-dictionaries. 40% of the respondents are studying TOIEC as a Korean requirement of most of the companies; so in order for them to record the words they searched, a highlighter can be a good help. In this case, they do not need to manually write and record the words they already searched, encountered, or studied.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

Indeed, e-dictionary is a very important tool among Korean students studying in the Philippines. All 168 Korean students have their own e-dictionary in their Smartphone. They make it handy because of the need to understand the activity they are accomplishing. However, Korean students admitted that they do not get to maximize the use of e-dictionaries and their potentials as English language learners because of the incomprehensible transcription, non-existing words, and hard definitions. Therefore, they suggested that more appropriate meanings, sentences, and synonyms be provided. Lastly, explanation in English, pronunciation and highlighter can further assist them in their learning pursuit.

Therefore this study would like to recommend the following:

1. For e-dictionaries content developers: It would be much useful for them to review the definitions they provided, to update the terminologies they included, and to enhance the features they

provided, such as providing possible context that the word could be used. If it is possible to collaborate with language experts, it would be a great advantage for them;

2. For EFL teachers: They can provide several activities that their EFL learners can confidently do contextual clues so that EFL learners will not heavily rely on using any types of dictionaries. This can also help them to be independent thinkers; and

3. For EFL learners: Every application or software will always have their limitations. While a more interactive and efficient e-dictionary is not yet available, it is advisable for them to exhaust the possible ways to understand the unfamiliar word prior to using the gadget. For example, they can try to guess the meaning of the word before searching for the meaning, and to apply the word in their everyday conversation as much as possible. They can also try find ways and reasons to use the current or most recent word(s) they know.

Reference list and appendix are subject access request.