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Research Article

Dictionary Use of Learners Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In foreign language learning, one of the identification strategies involved in vocabulary is to consult a dictionary. Dictionaries, which are reference sources, are not only a source for the meaning of a word contain a lot of information from spelling to pronunciation, grammar to the use of meaning. One of the issues that should be emphasized is the use and user experience for reference dictionaries. The centrality of user experience in the use and design of dictionaries is evident from the recent literature in academic lexicography. From learner needs to dictionary design, user experience offers both lexicographical and educational tools. Ther are two main strategies in lexical learning in the literature. These are discovery and reinforcement strategies. The subject of this study is to focus on the views of learners of Turkish as a foreign language and the use of dictionaries, which is one of the lexical learning strategies within the identification strategies. For this purpose, using a case study design, we asked guestions to 25 learners of Turkish as a foreign language in Turkiye with a semi-structured interview form. We analyzed them using descriptive analysis and then evaluated the data. The findings show that learners of Turkish as a foreign language do not have sufficient knowledge about what information is included in a dictionary and how to use a dictionary.

Keywords: Vocabulary learning, dictionary, dictionary use, teaching Turkish as a foreign language



1. Introduction

In recent years, one of the topics focused as a research area in academic lexicography is the use of dictionaries. In research studies conducted today, the strategies, experience, and dictionary skills that a dictionary user does and will need has increased. The use of dictionaries, especially in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, provides important information about the perspective of learners and users. When Turkish lexicographical literature is considered, the subject has not been adequately studied.

The identities of dictionary users, their qualifications and motivations for consulting a dictionary constitute the fundamental question of user research. For example, the identities, qualifications, and motivations of users who consult a dictionary of terms and those who use a general dictionary or a learners' dictionary are different. Similarly, the purpose of using a printed dictionary, an electronic or a web-based dictionary are also different. The information and findings obtained provide a perspective on vocabulary teaching and lexical tools.

There are two main vocabulary learning strategies, discovery and consolidation strategies (Schimtt, 1997). Finding the meaning of a word that learners encounter for the first time is discovery of a word. The discovery strategy includes "determination and social strategies". Finding the meaning of a word through a dictionary is an example of a determination strategy, while asking a friend or teacher about the meaning of a word is an instance of a social strategy. Determination strategies, which are part of discovery strategies, are the strategies that learners use for a word they encounter for the first time.

While there are various studies on vocabulary learning strategies in the literature, the number of studies conducted on dictionary use is quite low. When it comes to recent studies, Özbay and Melanlıoğlu (2013) collected quantitative data through the "Foreigner Students' Use of Dictionary Questionnaire" in their study to determine the dictionary skills of 144 international students studying A2-level Turkish at Gazi University TÖMER in their vocabulary development. Some of the striking results of the study were that 76.3% of the students first asked their teachers the meaning of a word they did not know, 76.3% of them preferred to guess the meaning of a word they did not know first, 77.2% of them learned more than one meaning of a word they did not know with the help of a dictionary, and 64.9% of them agreed that using pictures, cartoons, etc. in the definitions of words facilitated the comprehension of them.

Kardaş (2016), who emphasizes the importance of the role of dictionaries in language learning for learners of Turkish as a second language, examined the types of dictionaries used by 110 international students (69 at A2 level and 41 at B1 level) learning Turkish at Gazi University, the reasons and frequency of their dictionary use, and their attitudes and habits towards dictionary use, and he investigated whether these issues differed according to gender, level, or age. The research was conducted with the "Personal Information and Dictionary Use Variables" developed by Kardaş (2016) and the "Dictionary Use Attitude Scale" consisting of 25 items with a 5-point Likert scale. The results of the study about the dictionary use

of international students suggested that students used dictionaries while doing homework, occasionally in class, many times in class, and outside the class, respectively. When it comes to the types of dictionaries, it was concluded that students consulted dictionaries which have smartphone applications, printed dictionaries, dictionaries on computers and rarely dictionaries on tablets, respectively. The study determined that students mostly used Google Translate, rarely TDK Online Dictionary and Red House Dictionary among smartphone applications. It determined that international students used dictionaries to look up the meaning of a word, check the spelling of a word, find the equivalent of a word in other languages but rarely to learn the origin of a word, respectively. The study found that students' dictionary use and attitudes did not show a statistically significant change according to language level, age, or gender variables.

In a study conducted by Halat and Fırat (2021), a student opinion questionnaire developed by the researchers was used employing a survey model with 332 students learning Turkish as a foreign language at the Turcology Department of Jagiellonian University (Poland), Gazi University TÖMER, and İstanbul Aydın University TÖMER in the academic year 2018-2019. The purposes of the 332 students learning Turkish as a foreign language (4.8% A1, 13.3% A2, 22.9% B1, 13% B2, 44.3% C1, 1.8% other), using a dictionary, and their opinions about the qualities of dictionaries were determined in the study. According to the results, 86.3% of students used dictionaries to learn the meaning of a word, 71.6% to learn the spelling of words, 65% to look up the meanings of commonly used words in daily life, 62.8% to check how a word is used in a sentence, 62.5% to learn the synonyms and antonyms of a word, 54. 8% to learn how a word is used with other words, 48.3% to see visuals of a word, 45.8% to learn the pronunciation of a word, and 44% to learn word classes (nouns, adverbs, etc.). The participants stated that supporting words with visual elements made it easier to comprehend the meaning of a word (72.1%) and that dictionaries which are divided into themes (family, home, work, sports, etc.) made vocabulary learning faster (63.6%) and more permanent (55%).

Koca et al. (2014) conducted a study on the dictionary use habits and attitudes of 40 second and third year EFL students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Korça University in Albania. The study found that students consulted dictionaries most frequently while reading texts (95%), translating from Albanian to English and from English to Albanian (92.5%), and writing (82.5%) whereas they used dictionaries dramatically less frequently during or after listening (37.5%) and while speaking (20%). The study included 11 items about the kinds of information students looked for in a dictionary. It found that students used dictionaries to look up the meaning of a word or phrase (97.5%), see example sentences in which a certain word is used (82.5%), find collocations (80%), learn pronunciation of a word (80%), learn synonyms (77.5%), check spelling (75%), learn antonyms (72. 5%), find out whether a word is commonly used (55%), learn the word class a word belongs to (nouns, adjectives, etc.) and its derivations (50%), learn about the structure and grammatical function of a word (45%), and learn the etymology of a word (35%).

In his master's thesis, Wolter (2015) examined dictionary use and preferences of six beginner, eight intermediate, and six advanced learners of English as a foreign language at Midwestern University. In the study, a 25-item questionnaire was administered to 20 students from China and Saudi Arabia. According to the results of the study, the beginner students' motivations for using a dictionary were definitions (100%), example word usage in sentences (41%) and word classes (41%) respectively while none of them stated that they consulted a dictionary for synonyms, translation, or collocations. Intermediate students used dictionaries for definitions (100%), word classes (46%) and example word usage in sentences (36%) respectively whereas none of the intermediate students, like the beginner students, used dictionaries for synonyms, translation, or collocations. Advanced students used dictionaries for definitions (100%), word classes (78%), example word usage in sentences (30%), translation (17%), and for pronunciation, synonyms, and word families (all 13%). Wolter (2015) suggested that the students in the study group should receive training in how to use the detailed information provided in dictionaries.

In the article "Millennials as Dictionary Users: A Study of Dictionary Use Habits of Serbian EFL Students", Knežević et al. (2021) reported a study they conducted with 705 undergraduate students (350 males and 355 females) between the ages of 18-28, who learned English as a foreign language in the academic year 2017-2018 and examined students' dictionary preferences and dictionary use habits using a questionnaire and interviews. The highest values in the study showed that participants consulted dictionaries to look up the spelling and meaning of a word in a particular context, as well as to see the translation equivalent of a word and examples of how it is used in several contexts. One of the findings was that participants ignored additional information such as collocations, common errors, and differences between British and American English. The qualitative data seemed to be in line with the quantitative findings because none of the participants paid attention to or analyzed additional information while looking up an unfamiliar word according to the information obtained through the interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that students paid much less attention to information except for the meaning, spelling, and pronunciation of an unknown word/term. It was concluded that information about the synonyms, collocational use or grammatical features of a word did not attract the attention of participants. Both the qualitative and quantitative data showed that participants paid the most attention to the context of a word they did not know.

Since this study focuses on both determination strategies for vocabulary learning and dictionary use, which is an example of these strategies, it is also necessary to address what a dictionary contains briefly.

The information and structure of a dictionary is closely related to the type of dictionary. When a general dictionary prepared for native speakers of a language is examined, the dictionary first records the vocabulary of that language. Therefore, a dictionary contains lists of vocabulary first.

Word families are groups of words which have a common feature or pattern. These word groups have some common letter combinations and a similar sound. For example, 'cat, hat, fat' are a word family with a similar sound and letter combination, and 'help, helper, helpful' are another example of a word family.

The second type of information is spelling. Although consulting a dictionary to check the spelling of a word does not seem to be an indispensable strategy for Turkish, it is the opposite for some languages, English for example (Jackson, 2016). The third type of information is the pronunciation of a word and grammatical information. We can see pronunciation information in Turkish dictionaries. Likewise, we can see that pronunciation information is provided with a speaker icon in the online dictionary of the Turkish Language Association; however, it is not included in the online version of Misalli Büyük Türkçe Sözlük. Grammatical information, on the other hand, usually manifests itself in the form of word classes. The fourth type of information is usage labels. Dictionaries include subject labels (such as anatomy, religion, history, architecture, etc.) to show technical uses with ways of determining meaning, such as slang, informality, and metaphors. The fifth type of information is definitions and meanings, and it is one of the main purposes of consulting a dictionary. It appears in the form of discovering or checking meaning. The sixth type of information is the use of a word in context, in other words, information in the collection of examples. Issues such as the accuracy and adequacy of these types of information are related to dictionary criticism, which is another research area of academic lexicography. The purpose of mentioning the information types contained in a dictionary here is related to the preparation of the questions in the semi-structured interview forms in the case study. This review is related to the aim of determining which of the information types are accessed by users through a dictionary. The aim of this study is to examine how learners of Turkish as a foreign language consult dictionaries, which is a type of the determination strategies for vocabulary learning. The research questions of the study are as follows:

- What do learners use to learn the meaning, spelling, pronunciation, and grammatical category of a word?
 - Do learners consult a printed or electronic/web-based dictionary?
 - Which type of dictionary do learners prefer more?
 - With which tools do learners consult electronic/web-based dictionaries?

Method

Research Design

Since the study aims to determine learners' views about dictionary consultation, which is one of the vocabulary learning strategies, a case study, one of the qualitative research designs, was conducted. A case study is a design suitable for applied research to describe the present situation in depth (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). A case study focuses on the 'how' and 'why' questions and describes the causes and consequences of the present situation through observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Participants

In the study, interviews were conducted with 25 B2 level learners of Turkish as a foreign language from the Istanbul University Language Center using convenience sampling. The study group was created using the criterion sampling model, which is one of the purposive sampling models and is used to determine cases that meet certain criteria (Baltacı, 2018). Fifteen native speakers of Arabic, four native speakers of Persian, four native speakers of Russian and two native speakers of French participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Semi-structured interview forms were prepared to obtain data. The main purpose of the interviews was to encourage the participants to give correct answers and to eliminate biases. An interview is conducted to create a social environment which enables the free exchange of information between two people for the purpose of revealing the relationship between the opinions, knowledge, and behaviors of individuals about various issues and their causes (Balcı, 2011). In an interview, a researcher can also find opportunities to ask spontaneous questions about unclear issues. The researcher can also find clues about what is implied as well as what is said during the interview (Karasar, 2015, p.166). The questions in the interview forms were sent to two academics from Yıldız Technical University for their assessment to ensure content validity, and they were revised according to the feedback. Each interview was completed in 20-30 minutes. The following questions were used to determine the participants' views in the interviews:

- When you encounter a word you do not know, what do you do first to find out its meaning?
- What do you do to learn or check the pronunciation of a word?
- What do you do to learn or check the spelling of a word?
- What do you do to learn or check the grammatical category (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc.) of a word?
- How often do you consult dictionaries while learning Turkish?
- Do you have a monolingual or bilingual printed dictionary created for Turkish? If yes, which one is it?
- Do you use an electronic/web-based dictionary for Turkish words? If so, which one(s) do you use?
- When you compare electronic/web-based dictionaries to printed dictionaries, which one do you think facilitates learning?
- With which tools do you use electronic/web-based dictionaries (tablets, mobiles, desktop, or laptop computers)?
- Do the printed or electronic/web-based dictionaries you use for Turkish words meet your expectations?

Data Analysis

The data obtained in face-to-face interviews conducted with semi-structured interview forms were analyzed using descriptive content analysis. In this analysis method, data are summarized and interpreted according to themes, direct quotations are used from participants, the findings obtained are explained within a logical framework, and the researcher strengthens his/her interpretations with cause-effect relationships among findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). For data obtained from participants, each participant was assigned codes such as P1-P2-P3-P25, and the collected data were presented to participants for approval.

2. Results

2.1. Learners' strategies for learning the meaning of a word

Dictionaries are one of the main reference sources to learn and discover the meaning of a word. Looking closely at the answers given to this question, learners coded as P17; P18; P21; P25 said that they asked their teachers; learners P7; P8; P10 said that they checked their cell phones; learners P3; P11; P13; P20 and P22 said that they used the Google search engine. The learners P7 and P27, whose native language is Persian, said that they consulted English-Persian dictionaries. The participant P2 stated that he used "Google translate" and the learner P5 stated that he used the internet and if he could not find it on the internet, he asked his native Turkish-speaking friend. Participants P4, P6 and P23 stated that they guessed the meaning of the word from the context. The views of the learner P5 on this subject are as follows:

"In the books we use in the courses, there is a small list of words in each chapter. That's why I don't have too many problems in the lessons, but outside the lesson I encounter many words whose meaning I don't know. If I have a Turkish speaker friend with me, I first ask him/her the meaning of the word."

The participant P23 stated the following: "If there is a word whose meaning I do not know in a text I read, I can guess it by looking at the other words next to that word, but if I hear it in conversation, it is difficult for me to guess."

When the findings were analyzed, about half of the participants stated that they use "Google and Google's translation tool". Apart from this, the participants were more inclined to prefer social strategies such as asking the teacher or a native speaker friend.

2.2. Learners' strategies for learning or checking the pronunciation of a word

Printed dictionaries can give the pronunciation of a word with the International Phonetic Alphabet. However, when we look at Turkish printed dictionaries, we see that this method is not preferred and limited pronunciation information is given. Electronic / Web-based dictionaries, on the other hand, can provide complete pronunciation information. When we look at the findings in this strategy, participants P3, P5, P8, P11, P14, P17 stated that they

asked the teacher; participants P1, P2, P4, P8, P16, P21, P23, P24 stated that they checked it on "Google's translation tool". Only two participants, P2 and P6, stated that they checked it from the Turkish Dictionary platform of the Turkish Language Institution on the internet. The views of the participant coded P8 on this subject are as follows: "I don't know if there is a place other than Google to check how Turkish words are pronounced. I never asked the teacher about this, and the teacher did not give us any information about this." The participant P21 stated, "It is very easy to access this information from Google, so I always prefer it."

2.3. Learners' strategies for learning or checking the spelling of a word

Except for participants P11 and P16, who checked the spelling in dictionaries, the learners did not resort to dictionaries. Twelve participants stated that they checked the spelling on Google's translation tool. It is also noteworthy that participants did not fully realize the distinction between learning the spelling of the word and learning the meaning of the word in their answers. The views of the participant P12 on this issue are as follows: "I first learn the correct spelling of words. I also write them on paper and hang them on the wall to learn the words. When I wake up, I see these writings in front of my eyes. The participant coded P9 said: "When I write, I try to see if I can write correctly myself, I find reading or speaking easier than writing. But I rewrite every new word I learn, this way I start to memorize words and spelling rules."

2.4. Learners' strategies for learning or checking the grammatical category of a word

In the grammatical category, which is one of the pieces of information provided by dictionaries, most of the participants stated that they consulted dictionaries to learn the lexical type of a word. Apart from this, learners coded P3, P7, P8, P14, P22 prefer to ask the instructor rather than get it from social strategies. Another social strategy, consulting a native speaker, was preferred by participants coded P20 and P24.

2.5. Learners' strategies regarding the frequency of dictionary consultation

The frequency of dictionary consultation varies among participants. About half of the participants stated that they frequently consulted dictionaries while learning Turkish, while the remaining participants stated that they rarely or never consulted dictionaries. The views of the learner P18 on this subject are as follows: "I don't use dictionaries much. Maybe this is due to the fact that the texts used in the lessons are quite understandable. Outside the lesson, if I need, I learn from Google." The learner P15 stated that "The word list at the end of the reading texts in the textbooks is sufficient for me, so I do not use a dictionary."

2.6. Learners' views on whether they have a printed dictionary

Twenty-one out of 25 participants stated that they do not have a dictionary in printed format, while four participants stated that they have bilingual dictionaries prepared in their native

language. In this regard, participant P15 said the following: "I don't need a printed dictionary because I can access everything by phone." The learner P18 stated "the Turkish dictionary is too big, I cannot carry it with me, so I did not buy it."

2.7. Learners' strategies for using electronic/web-based dictionaries

The striking point in the responses to this question, which we asked to identify the electronic/web-based dictionary platforms preferred by Turkish language learners, was that the participants did not know the difference between dictionaries and translation tools. More than half of the participants answered as "Google Translate" or "Yandex Translate". However, participants P5, P8, P21 stated that they use GlosbeDictionary. Other participants' answers are as follows: P12 and P19, Naver dicConary; P24, Audio Dictionary; P11, abadis.ir; P15 and P20, b. amooz; P4, sozluk.gov.tr.

2.8. Learners' views on the comparison between electronic/web-based dictionaries and printed dictionaries

All the participants think that electronic/web-based dictionaries facilitate learning as opposed to printed dictionaries. In this regard, learner P8 said the following: "I think it is easier to use online dictionaries because I always have them with me". On the other hand, the participant coded P14 stated that "Printed dictionaries may be more useful, but electronic / web-based dictionaries are easier to use". Participant P1 said, "The easiest way for me is the internet dictionary. But I also have Turkish story books with a mini dictionary after each text. I find such books very useful."

2.9. Learners' strategies regarding the means of access to electronic/web-based dictionaries

It was determined that all participants used smart phones. However, participant P8 stated that he used a tablet in addition to the phone. Participants P11 and P22 stated that they used desktop computers in addition to the phone. Participants P6, P8 and P25 stated that they used laptops in addition to the phone.

2.10. Learners' views on whether the dictionaries they use for Turkish words meet their expectations

70% of the participants stated that the dictionaries met their expectations. However, it is not possible to come to a clear conclusion on this issue, given that they confuse dictionaries with translation tools. According to the participants, the disadvantages of the dictionaries they use are lack of detailed explanations, lack of lists of the most frequently used words, difficulty in finding the correct meaning among the meanings of polysemous words, lack of clarity and comprehensibility of the information provided, lack of examples of words in sentences. In

this regard, participant P8 said "When I look at the definition, sometimes I don't understand anything, because the definition is very short.". Participant P14 said "It is bad that some definitions do not include any examples". Participant P15 said "It is difficult to understand the words used in the examples."

3. Conclusions and Suggestions

In this case study on Turkish learners' use of dictionary as a cognitive vocabulary learning strategy, the following conclusions were reached:

- Turkish learners do not frequently consult a dictionary to learn the meaning of a word. They consider it sufficient to benefit from the word lists provided to learners in the educational materials they use in the lessons. However, google translation tools are frequently used to reach the meaning. Learners also tend to use social strategies by asking their friends and teachers who are native speakers.
- In terms of learning and controlling pronunciation, using Google's translation tool is again the most common way of learning. Social strategies are also preferred by asking the teacher and native speakers. Users do not know that dictionaries can be used for pronunciation. This shows that learners are not given enough information about the use of dictionaries.
- The results of learning or checking spelling are close to the results on pronunciation. Learners tend to use translation tools instead of dictionaries.
- When it comes to learning or checking grammatical categories, learners turn to dictionaries. Apart from this, there is also a tendency to consult the teacher as a social strategy.
- Regarding the frequency of consulting a dictionary, two different tendencies, which can be considered equal, stand out. While half of the participants prefer to consult a dictionary, the other half either do not consult a dictionary at all or consult it very rarely.
- Only four of the participants have a printed bilingual dictionary in their own language, while none of the participants have a printed Turkish dictionary. Printed dictionaries were not preferred due to the issue of carrying and keeping them.
- Electronic/print dictionaries are clearly preferred over printed dictionaries. However, participants do not know the difference between electronic/web-based dictionaries and translation tools provided by search engines such as Google or Yandex. Mobile devices are the most common means of accessing dictionaries or translation platforms. Apart from this, laptops are the secondary means of reference.
- Participants emphasized some deficiencies in existing printed or electronic/web-based dictionaries, such as lack of descriptive definitions, insufficient or poorly written examples, and inability to reach the target meaning.

In the light of these results, the following suggestions can be made:

- A Turkish learners dictionary should be prepared for Turkish learners. Considering that the most common access tool for dictionaries is mobile phones, a web-based and mobile-friendly platform should be prepared rather than a printed dictionary.

- Learners do not have enough information about what information is included in a dictionary. For this reason, learners should be educated about dictionaries and dictionary reference in Turkish language teaching. Dictionaries should be used by the instructors in the lessons and this issue should be explained in vocabulary teaching.

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