

Nataliya Bytko
Dmytro Motorny Tavria State
Agrotechnological University
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2545-0289

THE ROLE AND STATUS OF LEARNER'S DICTIONARIES IN EFL EDUCATION: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Abstract. This paper explores the evolving role of learner's dictionaries in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Re-examining their theoretical foundations, typology, and current applications, it highlights their pedagogical value in vocabulary development, grammar awareness, and learner autonomy. A mixed-methods approach – including theoretical, corpus-based, and comparative analyses – is proposed to assess printed and digital formats, emphasizing the need for context-specific, user-oriented works in modern language learning environments.

Key words: learner's dictionaries, English language education, lexicographic typology, vocabulary acquisition.

Modern technological advancements have significantly transformed the landscape of English language teaching and learning (e.g., Lee et al., 2024). Interactive applications, virtual classrooms, and AI-powered platforms have become integral components of modern pedagogical practice. A substantial body of research has already examined the efficacy of these tools in enhancing language acquisition (e.g., Ostanina-Olszewska, 2018; Pikhart et al., 2024; Urbaite, 2024). However, one pedagogical resource continues to hold fundamental importance in vocabulary development and learner autonomy: the learner's dictionary.

This paper aims to re-examine the theoretical foundations underlying the compilation of learner's dictionaries, explore their typological classification, and assess their current role within English language education. To analyze the current status and pedagogical value of learner's dictionaries, a mixed-methods approach is proposed. This employs a theoretical framework to assess the structural, functional, and user-oriented features of existing learner's dictionaries, as well as corpus-based analysis of dictionary entries and comparative review of digital and print editions. Such

methodology allows for a comprehensive evaluation of learner's dictionaries as still evolving didactic tools in the modern educational context.

Learner's dictionaries are vital tools in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, offering simplified definitions, controlled vocabulary, phonetic transcriptions, usage examples, and frequency indicators tailored to non-native speakers. These features promote vocabulary development, learner autonomy, and user-centered comprehension. However, choosing the right dictionary requires an understanding of the theoretical principles behind their design and alignment with specific learning needs.

Learner's dictionaries are designed to support users in both cognitive and communicative situations encountered in foreign-language learning (Tarp, 2008). Cognitive use includes systematic contexts, such as structured classroom instruction, where learners connect linguistic elements, and sporadic contexts, where quick, context-specific information is sought. Communicative use involves four primary functions: language reception, production, translation into the foreign language, and translation from it.

Among the communicative functions of learner's dictionaries, reception and production are the most fundamental, encompassing the core activities of language use. Reception may occur within the target language (L2) or through the learner's mother tongue (L1), depending on proficiency. Beginners often rely on L1, while advanced learners operate more independently in L2. This requires dictionaries to provide either monolingual or bilingual solutions aligned with the learner's developmental stage. In production, learners move from translating from L1 to generating content directly in L2, necessitating lexicographic support for both indirect and direct modes of expression.

Translation, though more context-specific, overlaps with reception and production and consists of three stages: comprehension of the source text, transfer of meaning, and target-language output. Effective dictionaries must therefore go beyond

simple word lists, offering contextualized lexical, grammatical, and cultural information to support accurate and meaningful translation in both directions.

Vocabulary learning requires more than recognition of word forms and meanings; it involves grasping semantic relationships. Beginners benefit from dictionaries with limited vocabulary and simplified explanations, while advanced learners need broader lemma coverage, refined definitions, and structured semantic fields. Similarly, grammar acquisition demands clear presentation of general rules alongside illustrative examples. While beginners rely on general patterns, advanced users require detailed syntactic, morphological, and exception-based information. Cultural competence is equally vital; dictionaries must convey both general norms and vocabulary-specific connotations. Yet many overestimate users' cultural literacy, often assuming shared background knowledge that may not exist.

Therefore, compiling or selecting a learner's dictionary must involve careful consideration of the user's linguistic proficiency, cultural background, learning objectives, and educational setting. These factors ensure alignment with actual learner needs. Given the complexity of linguistic, grammatical, and cultural demands, a fully comprehensive learner's dictionary remains largely a theoretical ideal. In practice, learner's dictionaries are designed to fulfill specific purposes and appear in several functional formats and types.

Learner's dictionaries vary by format, purpose, and language orientation. Printed formats offer focused engagement in low-tech settings, while online versions provide interactivity, multimedia features, and real-time updates. Functionally, they may be general-purpose for everyday use or specialized for domains such as idioms, academic writing, or technical vocabulary. Linguistically, they include monolingual (with simplified English definitions), bilingual (with direct translation), and hybrid models combining both approaches to meet diverse learner needs.

Printed learner's dictionaries remain a familiar and trusted format, having played a foundational role in language education for nearly a century. The first modern

example, *The New Method English Dictionary*, published by Longman in 1935, introduced features still central to learner's lexicography today (West, 1935). Offering focused, distraction-free learning and tactile memory support, printed dictionaries are particularly valuable in offline contexts, despite lacking the interactivity and updatability of digital tools. Major publishers such as Oxford, Cambridge, Longman, Macmillan, Collins, and Merriam-Webster have significantly shaped global English teaching through their contributions to this enduring format.

The rise of digital tools has transformed learner's dictionary use in English as a Foreign Language Education, offering fast access, interactivity, and real-time updates. Since the launch of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online* in 2000, followed by platforms from Cambridge, Longman, Macmillan, and Collins, digital dictionaries have introduced features such as audio, video, quizzes, and personalized word lists. While limitations include internet dependency, intrusive ads, and variable content quality, online dictionaries remain vital for vocabulary development and learner autonomy in a dynamic, up-to-date learning environment.

Both printed and online learner's dictionaries exist in monolingual, bilingual, and hybrid forms (e.g. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: English – Chinese), with the latter two particularly useful for beginners bridging L1 and English. Widely spoken languages, including Ukrainian, are well supported by major publishers such as Oxford, Cambridge, Longman, and Collins, who have recently expanded resources with vocabulary lists, thematic content, and digital tools tailored to Ukrainian learners (e.g. Collins Essential – Ukrainian Essential Dictionary).

In addition to general types, specialized learner's dictionaries support specific language domains, such as collocations, academic vocabulary, business English, idioms, phrasal verbs, and common errors (e.g. *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*). These resources enhance accuracy and deepen understanding in targeted communicative and academic contexts.

To maximize the benefits of learner's dictionaries, teachers should integrate them into classroom routines through training sessions, look-up tasks, homework, and assessments. Adapting activities to students' age, proficiency, and goals fosters effective and autonomous dictionary use across formats.

In conclusion, learner's dictionaries function as comprehensive pedagogical tools that support vocabulary acquisition, grammatical competence, reading and writing accuracy, and learner autonomy. When purposefully integrated, they promote metalinguistic awareness and confidence in language use. Rather than standalone resources, they should be seen as components of a broader instructional system, with their type and features aligned to learners' goals, proficiency levels, and educational contexts.

REFERENCES

- Collins Dictionaries. (2022). *Collins Ukrainian dictionary: Essential edition*. Collins. <https://collins.co.uk/products/9780008567903>
- Lee, J. S., Zou, D., & Gu, M. M. (Eds.). (2024). *Technology and English language teaching in a changing world: A practical guide for teachers and teacher educators*. Macmillan.
- Oxford University Press. (2019). *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online* (10th ed.). <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>
- Ostanina-Olszewska, J. (2018). Modern technology in language learning and teaching. *Linguodidactica*, 22, 153–164.
- Pearson Education North Asia Ltd. (2006). *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: English – Chinese* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education North Asia Ltd.
- Pikhart, M., Klimova, B., & Al-Obaydi, L. H. (2024). Exploring university students' preferences and satisfaction in utilizing digital tools for foreign language learning. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1412377. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1412377>
- Tarp, S. (2008). General theory for learner's dictionaries. In *Lexicography in the borderland between knowledge and non-knowledge: General lexicographical theory with particular focus on learner's lexicography* (pp. 125–171). Max Niemeyer Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783484970434.125>
- Urbaite, G. (2024). The role of technology in modern language education. *EuroGlobal Journal of Linguistics and Language Education*, 1(1), 3–10.
- West, M., & Endicott, J. G. (1935). *The New Method English Dictionary: Explaining the meaning of over 24,000 items within a vocabulary of 1,490 words*. Longmans, Green and Co.