THE ROLE OF PAPER DICTIONARIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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1. Introduction

In the digital age, where the internet is readily available at our fingertips, it's no surprise that many believe paper dictionaries have met their demise. With the abundance of online dictionaries, translation tools, and language learning apps, the perception persists that traditional paper dictionaries have become obsolete. However, recent studies have revealed intriguing findings that challenge this notion, shedding light on the enduring relevance and advantages of paper dictionaries in certain contexts. It is worth noting that despite the rise of digital reading materials, in Europe a staggering **95% of reading is still done on paper**, emphasizing the continued prevalence of paper as the primary medium for accessing written content.

In this text, we explore the evidence supporting the continued existence and unique benefits of paper dictionaries for language learners and enthusiasts.

2. The User-Friendliness Advantage

One of the most significant factors favoring print dictionaries is their perceived user-friendliness. A study conducted by the esteemed Pasqualina Sorrentino and Massimo Salgaro compared the user experience of print dictionaries and online dictionaries, revealing that participants preferred dictionaries in regard to user-friendliness compared to their digital counterparts. The tangible nature of flipping through pages and the ease of navigation in a print dictionary provide a sense of comfort and familiarity for learners, promoting a smoother and more enjoyable experience. .

Furthermore, the study also observed that participants who used print dictionaries outperformed the control group in spelling-related tasks immediately after the reading session. This indicates that the cognitive process of physically engaging with a print dictionary aids memory retention and enhances the ability to apply learned information [1].

3. Balancing Meaning and Comprehension

Contrary to the notion that online dictionaries surpass their print counterparts in delivering meanings of unknown words, the study conducted by Pasqualina Sorrentino and Massimo Salgaro found no significant differences between the two mediums in terms of word meanings, memory, and comprehension of the reading text. Both print and online dictionaries **proved equally efficient in facilitating understanding and retaining information.**

Additionally, long-term vocabulary retention, an essential aspect of language learning, was found to be equally effective across print dictionary users and digital dictionary users. This demonstrates that the format in which one accesses lexical information does not hinder their ability to maintain a robust vocabulary over time [1].

4. Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition

The research of many experts, such as the esteemed Professor Yamada Shigeru of Waseda University, has concluded that print-based dictionaries enhance learners' understanding of related words through browsability and their holistic presentation, contributing to a more comprehensive vocabulary acquisition process.

By integrating crucial physical and spatial dimensions into learning, a learner not only retains the word but also subconsciously encodes ancillary information such as its contextual placement on the page, its precise location within the dictionary (e.g., towards the bottom, in the middle), and even the environmental conditions like the location and intensity of light at the time of reading. This holistic engagement with material and environment forms an essential component of effective memorization strategies.

Expanding upon these intrinsic merits of traditional modes of language acquisition, it is pertinent to acknowledge the multifaceted cognitive engagement practices of physical reading and writing stimulate. The act of writing, for instance, transcends mere textual creation; it encompasses a myriad of subconscious elements, such as the tactile sensation produced by the friction of a pencil gliding across a paper surface, the physicality of grasping the pencil, and the spatial orientation of one's arm.

These components can collectively enhance memory retention. This assertion is corroborated by experiential observations and is a subject warranting further exploration and acknowledgment in the realm of educational methodologies.

While mobile dictionaries may offer a more engaging interface, their constrained screen sizes can hinder quick access to comprehensive or related information, limiting their effectiveness in supporting incidental learning [2].

5. Superiority in Reading Comprehension

Beyond language learning, print-based reading comprehension appears to hold an advantage over screen-based reading across all age groups. A study published in the renowned scientific journal, ScienceDirect, revealed that individuals consistently exhibited statistically higher reading comprehension scores when reading from print compared to screens. While the difference between the two mediums reduced as reading comprehension skills improved, the data suggests that print-based reading remains superior for fostering deeper understanding and engagement with the text [3]. Furthermore, the benefits of print-based reading appear to grow year on year, contradicting the hypothesis that so-called digital natives exhibit superior reading comprehension with screen-based reading [4].

6. The Affinity of University Students

Even in the digital era, the preference for print-based reading remains strong among university students. A study featured in the esteemed journal, PLOS ONE, indicated that students self-reported a marked preference for print-based reading over screen-based reading. [5] Moreover, in a print published by Naho Kawamoto and Yukio Tono, it was found that print dictionary use holds a special appeal for mid-level language learners. Approximately 8% of the participants in their study reported frequent usage of print dictionaries [6].

7. Summary

To summarize the advantages of the print medium, particularly regarding print dictionaries, the following can be said:

- Print dictionaries were found to be more user-friendly.

- Participants using print dictionaries performed significantly better in spelling-related tasks.

- No significant differences were found between paper and online dictionaries for acquiring unknown words, memory, and reading comprehension.

- Long-term vocabulary retention showed no significant differences between paper dictionary users, online dictionary users, and the control group.

- *Incidental learning* occurs at a higher frequency in paper-based dictionaries.

- University students self-report a preference for paper-based reading over screen-based reading.

As we navigate the digital landscape, let us not forget the profound impact of these eminent artifacts in our journey towards linguistic proficiency and a deeper understanding of language.

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