

Using Mobile Bilingual Dictionaries in an EFL Class

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Abstract

Are reference skills of native digital EFL students developed enough to take advantage of having a big bilingual dictionary on their smartphones? What would happen if they were not used to looking up words in a bilingual dictionary or they were not trained to?

To carry out this research a class from an Italian technical high school was observed. Students aged 17 were split into three groups of users and were given different versions of the same bilingual dictionary, the Ragazzini Italian and English dictionary (Zanichelli Bologna last edition 2013). The first group was allowed to use the Android app, the second was given access to the online version on the web portal ubidictionary.zanichelli.it, the third group received paper copies of the same dictionary.

First students were asked to answer some questions about their (un)familiarity with Italian monolingual dictionaries, English monolingual learner dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries. Then the three groups of users faced the same activities during a two hour-English-lesson. Students' self-confidence in what they thought to be right was encouraged in order to avoid too much test-induced dictionary referral.

Participants were observed while performing the activities and finally interviewed about their experience.

The case study will report similarities and differences in their performances, trying to check whether different supports and access to digital versions was determinant for success and rapidity in answering questions. Linguistic proficiency proved more determinant.

Students were also asked to report on the main difficulties they had to overcome when they looked words up in the dictionaries and were invited to suggest possible improvements in the way pieces of information were displayed on the mobile digital version.

Language of Presentation: English