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Title:
A Proposal for the Teaching of Online Dictionary
Skills

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1. Introduction

The current technological era has brought with it the development of dictionaries which can be accessed through the Internet. New technologies have a very important role in the teaching of languages. One of the main resources that are highly useful for students is online dictionaries (ODs). We have gone from consulting bulky paper dictionary/print dictionary (PDs) to simply using the Internet in order to access more updated as well as extended information on what is known as online dictionaries (Lew, 2016). Choosing the right dictionary and using it effectively, is, nevertheless, not an easy task.

Online dictionaries, as explained later, offer students many advantages when learning and using a second language. There are various resources that students can access freely. Most students are, however, unaware of such benefits, which implies that they do not exploit all possibilities available to them. There is, therefore, a need to teach dictionary skills, and more specifically, online dictionary skills.

The principal objective of the current research project is to present a proposal for the design of activities that foster the use of ODs among Baccalaureate students and teach them how to use these dictionaries effectively. Online dictionaries have been chosen as the appropriate dictionaries to be used when learning English because of their unrestricted space, capacity of saving time, design and easy and fast access.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Online vs. Printed Dictionaries

The main objective of both printed and online dictionaries is to help learners with any aspect of word knowledge. There is, however, no dictionary that can completely meet

all learners' needs. Both dictionaries have advantages and drawbacks. Lew (2010) remarks that we should not talk about paper versus online dictionaries, "but [...] efficiency will largely depend on the particular solutions adopted" (294). There are nevertheless some affordances of the online medium that make online dictionaries better than printed dictionaries in several aspects. These factors are multimodality, time, speed, unlimited space, design and access.

One of the most important advantages of online dictionaries (OD) is their multimodality. That is, the dictionary's capacity to provide learners with information by means of textual, audio and visual content. According to Lew (2010), paper dictionaries have always used words "for representing meaning" (292). Nonetheless, with advances in technology, online dictionaries make use of more modes to express meaning, e.g. audio, visual mode.

Ooi (as cited in Lew, 2010) explains that sometimes a sound provides a better definition than a simple collection of words. For instance, the sound of a bell will provide more clarity to the definition than the definition itself. Pastor and Alcina (2010) also note that there are some words which cannot be explained with a definition or image as perfectly as "can be explained through a sound" (9). This is the case of the word "whisper". A dictionary which includes these recordings is *Macmillan English Dictionary*. Important information about words provided in online dictionaries through audio files is pronunciation. It is undeniable that the audio helps EFL students be exposed to the "real language"; it can serve, as Nesi (2000) argues, "as a pronunciation model" (842). In line with this, Kent (2001) points out that audio "allow[s] students the experience of listening to a real native speaker, providing an appropriate language learning audio cue" (76). In her study, Liu (2017) explains that in some dictionaries learners can adjust speed (slower or faster); they can choose the gender (male or female

speaker), and also their preferred language variety, British or American (293). She provides instances of ODs that contain audios from “movies, speeches or new programs” such as Youdao English Dictionaries (YED, <http://dict.youdao.com/>) (293)

Pictures are another element in some ODs, and they sometimes co-occur with audio (Lew, 2010; Pastor and Alcina, 2010). Two studies (Gumkowska, 2008; Nesi, 1998) have shown the effectiveness of pictures to convey the meaning of words. However, this option is almost unthinkable in paper dictionaries because of cost and space limitations. Lew (2010) and Liu (2017) found that pictures helped students understand better the meaning of the word. Liu (2017) emphasises that the colour, font as well as symbols “can also be properly used to reinforce the ideational meaning” (293).

The second advantage of online dictionaries is the time saved when using them. Bower and McMillan (2007), Chen (2016) and Deng (2006) concur that online dictionaries are quicker in terms of speed. Therefore, time is a clear drawback for print dictionaries since they are time-consuming (Sharpe, 1995; Tang, 1997; Tono, 2000). Zheng and Wang (2016) assert that when students look up a word in a paper dictionary, their motivation “for learning and study may be decreased” (8). That is, they spend so long searching for a word that they stop making an effort to find the desired word. Zheng and Wang (2016) explain that ODs do not only allow students to have the latest information about new words but also to download the information they need about vocabulary (10). Osaki et al. (2003) observed that ODs helped students spend less time looking for words as well as in comprehension and retention of words.

Another essential factor in this list is unlimited space. When talking about space, two types of space have to be taken into account: a physical space and a metaphorical space. Online dictionaries can always be accessed as long as there is connection to the

Internet. As a result, dictionary users no longer need to carry a heavy and enormous physical dictionary (Lew and de Schryver, 2014). Lew (2011) comments that this advantage helps expand the content, for instance adding more examples, exercises and games (243). Zheng and Wang (2016) go further and explain that ODs are better for “class based activities because they won’t occupy too much space” (151).

When referring to the metaphorical space, ODs are also preferred. As Lew and Schryver (2014) explain, there is no space limit “to compress and condense dictionary content” in order to maintain a controllable size (349). Dziemianko (cited in Lew and Schryver, 2014: 346) also remarks that the necessity to save space in print dictionaries is less noticeable in ODs. McAlpine and Myles (2003) go beyond and observe that no space limitation in online dictionaries is more appropriate for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In her study, Xiqin Liu (2017) noticed that ODs have more white space whereas paper dictionaries “[are] filled with dense texts and [...] amounts of detailed information” (298), resulting in a situation in which that overwhelms students.

This use of a whiter background giving an illusion of clarity and simplicity is closely related to the next factor, design. As there are no space limitations, the size of letters is not as small as it is in print dictionaries. Furthermore, all-related information is very well-organised. For instance, we can find hyperlinks (Knowles, 1990; Nesi, 1998). Hyperlinks help learners “find and build semantic connections between words” (Liu, 2017: 296). An example of dictionary which makes an effective use of hyperlinks would be the OALD (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*) (Liu, 2017). This advanced system gives students the possibility to learn synonyms and hence expand their vocabulary.

The last advantage of online dictionaries is access. ODs allow users to access a large quantity of information about a word in a single space and in different ways

(Chen, 2016; Granger, 2012; Lew and Schryver, 2014; McAlpine and Myles, 2003; Nesi, 1998). As Lew and Schryver (2014) argue, the modern era in which we are living has liberated dictionaries “from the rigid constraints of fixed microstructural organization” (350). One effect of this, as Atkins (1996) points out, is that users are released from the “straitjacket of... alphabetical order” (516). Nesi (2000) explains that this alphabetical is “inadequate as a means of grouping and regrouping words according to their semantic and pragmatic similarities” (839). In their study, Lew and Schryver (2014) also point out that ODs are better for learning vocabulary since they link all related words by means of hyperlinks (347). Furthermore, ODs enable quicker searches and include more updated search techniques (Kaalep and Mikk, 2008; Nesi, 2000; Sánchez, 2004). Sobkowiak (1999) mentions the advanced access to corpora ODs have and Nesi (2000) the ability to search in different ODs at the same time. Forget (as cited in Pastor and Alcina, 2010:3) talks about “the possibility to access the most recent entries the user consulted”, that is, the search history in one’s computer (cited in Pastor and Alcina, 2010: 3). Another advantage over paper dictionaries is that ODs can provide users with “inflected forms”, which is something that will surely help foreign speakers (Lew, 2013: 82).

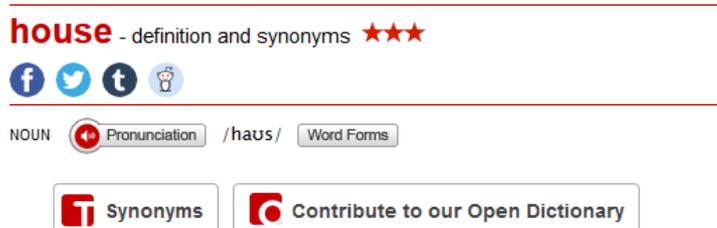
2.2 Word Information Provided by Online Dictionaries

When looking up a word in a dictionary, most students are only interested in its denotation. However, knowing a word involves knowing many more aspects (Nation, 2004). Nation presents the different aspects involved in knowing a word, grouping them into: form, meaning and use. He argues that teachers should focus on all of them. Students must know not only how to pronounce and write the word but also other aspects, such as its parts or words to which it is related. Knowing a word also involves

knowing its grammatical function, the collocations associated to it and “where, when and how often” we would expect to meet it (21).

Entries in online dictionaries include a large variety of information. A dictionary entry “is a set of information that describes a word or phrase” (*Macmillan Dictionary*). A brief analysis on entries in three online dictionaries (*Macmillan Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary and the Oxford Dictionary*) reveals that entries may include all the different types of information discussed by Nation (2004). In order to provide instances of the information found in online dictionaries, the word *house* has been chosen.

In the case of the *Macmillan English Dictionary* (MED), the headword is the first thing that appears as it tends to be at the very beginning of the entry (Figure 1). Next to the headword, the frequency of the word is shown by using stars. Below, the grammatical information about the word is provided, which in this case is a noun. Next to it, there is a pronunciation box as well as the phonetic transcription, using IPA symbols. Another noticeable piece of information that is given is the small table called “synonyms”, which as its name indicates, provides users with several equivalent words. Next to this hyperlink, there is a table called “contribute to our Open Dictionary” which is a hyperlink that serves to add a new word to the dictionary with the purpose of keeping it up to date.



(Figure 1)

The presentation of the different meanings of a word is separated in numbered senses. In each of these senses, the first thing that appears is whether the word is countable or uncountable, followed by a brief definition of the word. With a different colour, there can be one or several instances of the word in order to illustrate the specific meaning and hence help users have a better knowledge of the use of the word. In other words, different aspects of word knowledge mentioned by Nation (2004) are presented; form, definitions (meaning), instances to illustrate the use of the word depending on its context. Below, there is a table titled “Synonyms and related words” and within this table there are several synonyms. Each table contains an “Explore Thesaurus” section (Figure 2). This table includes another hyperlink that takes the user to a page with the previously mentioned synonyms and gives a wide explanation of these words, including its grammatical function followed by a very brief definition of the word. In some instances, there are also labels for dialects register and style (“old-fashioned”) (Figure 3).

1 [COUNTABLE] a building for living in, usually where only one family lives
I'd love a house with a garden.
a three-bedroom house
move house (=go to live in a different house): *We're moving house at the end of the month.*

 Synonyms and related words

Buildings where people live or stay:
adobe, apartment block, apartment building...

[Explore Thesaurus](#)

(Figure 2)

Buildings where people live or stay - thesaurus



Related words

adobe NOUN
a house built using adobe bricks

apartment block NOUN
a block of flats

apartment building NOUN
AMERICAN a block of flats

bach NOUN
NEW ZEALAND INFORMAL a small holiday home

back-to-back NOUN
BRITISH a type of house built in British industrial cities in the 19th century, with a row of houses all joined together, and the walls of one row very close to the walls of the next row

billet NOUN
a place, usually someone's house, that soldiers live in temporarily, especially during a war

boarding house NOUN
OLD-FASHIONED a house in which people pay to live as guests with the family who owns it

bothy NOUN
SCOTTISH a small simple house with one or two rooms

bungalow NOUN
BRITISH a house that is all on one level

bungalow NOUN
AMERICAN a small house that is often all on one level

(Figure 3)

In addition, at the end of some entries, we can find an “additional resources” section. This section contains information about different elements. For instance, there is a section called “Get it Right!” with guides on grammatical information (Figure 4). You can also find the basic differences between American and British English language (Figure 5).

Get it Right!: afford

Afford is never followed by a verb in the **-ing** form. Use an infinitive:

*X What about people who **cannot afford going** to these kind of centres?*

*✓ What about people who **cannot afford to go** to these kind of centres?*

*X The army **can afford buying** up to 10 tanks a year.*

*✓ The army **can afford to buy** up to 10 tanks a year.*

(Figure 4)

Differences between British and American English: pavement

In the UK, a **pavement** is the hard raised level surface at the side of a road that people can walk on: *I set it down on the pavement by the door of the shop.* American speakers call this a **sidewalk**. In the US, **pavement** means the hard surface of a road: *Cars were skidding on the pavement.*

(Figure 5)

Another type of information provided in the MED, as in most OD, is lists of collocations. It has been shown that collocation, as well as other multi-word components, are basic for a proper use of the language (Daskalovska, 2015; Laufer and Waldman, 2011). There has been a lot of work behind online dictionaries to make collocations available in an order and structured way. Despite all these efforts, Chen (2016) claims that the vast majority of online dictionary users are not aware of how to use them (2). Research into this issue has revealed that one of the factors that prevent the successful use of collections are “the dictionary user’s habits and reference skills [...], the structural features of specific dictionaries, [...] and the presentation mode and position of collocations in entries” (6). Dziemianko (2015) studied dictionary formats when presenting collocations. She found that collocations can be presented in entries (initial or final), in a box, or in bold before or within the examples. Therefore, students must be aware of how information on collocations is provided in online dictionaries.

Another interesting section in this dictionary is the “Crowdsourced content” where users can submit information about words and their respective meanings. Needless to say this section is carefully revised with the purpose of making the MED a reliable source for its users.

The MED, like many other online dictionaries, is a multimodal dictionary that provides users with material that the traditional print dictionaries do not. These materials consist of “language games, pedagogically-oriented videos, downloadable teaching material, a weekly column on new words, and an active blog with regular contributions on a variety of language issues” (Rundell, 2014: 8).

The second dictionary analysed was the *Cambridge Dictionary*. It is worth mentioning that the *Cambridge Dictionary* did not drastically differ from the MED. The first noticeable element that does not appear when searching for the word “house” is the frequency. The elements that do appear are the grammatical function, followed by the British and American pronunciation of the word, and the plural form of the word, including their respective phonetic transcription (Figure 6).

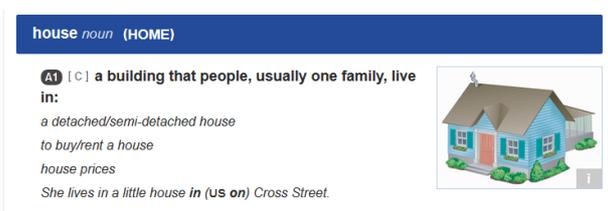
house

noun • UK  /haʊs/ US  /haʊs/ PLURAL houses UK  /'haʊzɪz/ US 

(Figure 6)

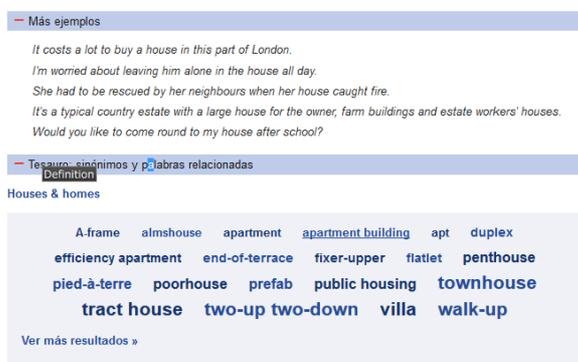
As happens in the MED, the different meanings of the word “house” are presented. In the MED, definitions are numbered so that it is easier for students to distinguish each definition. In the *Cambridge Dictionary*, different meanings are also indicated, but rather than being numbered, they are inserted in a blue box with the following structure: the word + its grammatical function + the synonym of the word. After that, there is an “A1” symbol which suggests that, depending on the definition students make use of, they will show a certain level. The information that follows is similar to the one provided in the MED. There is a [C] symbol which stands for “countable”. This symbol is a hyperlink that takes users to an entry with the

explanation of all these symbols. Following the “countable” symbol, a definition is given, followed by the types of houses one can find. After this, an example is provided. What has been included in the *Cambridge Dictionary* is a picture of a house in order to reinforce the definition of the word (Figure 7).



(Figure 7)

There is, furthermore, a section devoted to more instances of the word “house”. It has been created with the purpose of helping students who do not completely understand the former examples, or want more examples so that they can make sure that have comprehended its meaning (Figure 8).



(Figure 8)

Another dictionary particularly useful for students is the *Oxford Dictionary Online*. According to Rundell (2015: 319), this dictionary is very well “better-adapted to the needs and skills of the general user because the aforesaid option of “more example sentences”, where a link supplies users with “further corpus derived examples” (319). What is especially remarkable about this is that, when a word is polysemous, the

link appears in separated senses and the extra instances “are mapped to the meaning which they instantiate” (319). This can be seen in the Figure 9.

1 A social **gathering** of invited guests, typically involving eating, **drinking**, and entertainment:
*‘an **engagement party**’*

MORE EXAMPLE SENTENCES 

‘Sometimes, caterers serving at parties and social gatherings order large quantities.’

‘The hotel staff encourages the use of this area for social gatherings and parties.’

‘A buffet of finger foods is the perfect way to serve guests at an anniversary party or wedding reception.’

[GET MORE EXAMPLES](#)

(Figure 9)

Examples are extremely useful since they “elucidate meaning, they illustrate contextual references and [...] they provide models for language production” (Atkins and Rundell, 2008: 452-455). This dictionary also includes further information such as: a thesaurus; grammar (spelling, pronunciation, help, usage as well as US English); an explore section where users can discover the origin of words and word list; there is also a “word of the year” section where students can see what word has been used the most; a forum and also a blog (Figure 10).



(Figure 10)

3. Methodology

Since the main aim of this research project is to design activities to help students develop online dictionary skills, it is first necessary to obtain information about how these students are using ODs. A questionnaire was used to analyse student’s actual use

of online dictionaries and determine whether they are taking advantage of all possibilities offered by these dictionaries. A questionnaire was thought to be an appropriate instrument since it is a simple tool for data collection, through which participants can effortlessly choose an answer. In this way, information is easily collected and scored (see Appendix).

This questionnaire was completed by students in the public school I.E.S Bajo Cinca situated in Fraga (Huesca). The sample consisted of twenty female and male students aged between 16 and 17 years old, who were studying their second year of Baccalaureate. This specific class was chosen for two main reasons. It was chosen because the teacher involved was willing and interested in taking part in the study. The other reason is the level of English that these students are supposed to have, which will enable them to take advantage of the potential offered by online dictionaries.

The questionnaire used to collect the data consisted of 11 questions, both multiple-choice and open questions. This questionnaire was designed with the purpose of obtaining information about the following aspects: the use students make of online dictionaries, their preference for online or print dictionaries, the frequency of their OD usage, their preferred ODs, justification of such choices and preferences, the reasons for their use of ODs, the level of familiarity they have with abbreviations used in OD, and the frequency with which the use of OD to get specific information. It is important to point out that this questionnaire was written and expected to be answered in Spanish since it is the student's mother tongue. It was also thought that using their mother tongue would be beneficial as it helped them be more comfortable and express their ideas freely. The results of the questionnaire were used to inform the design of the activities for the development of online dictionary skills.

4. Results

The results of the questionnaire have been grouped according to their main purpose and will be discussed in their respective groups.

Regarding student's preference in the use of dictionaries (questions 1-4), the vast majority of students chose online dictionaries over printed ones. More specifically, in question 1, virtually all students (95%) stated that they invariably used online dictionaries and barely the printed one. Only one person combined both dictionaries. Moreover, when asked about which type of dictionary they preferred (question 2), 95% of the students chose online dictionaries. Only one person said that a small printed dictionary was better if the computer was off. When justifying their answer, most students (15%) used the words "quick" or "fast" to support their choice. 3 students added that online dictionaries were easier to use than a printed one. Other 3 students remarked that it provided them with more examples than a paper one. More interestingly, 4 students (20%) specified that they preferred an OD only because they do not need to carry a paper dictionary with them. When asked about the frequency with which they used English online dictionaries (question 3), over half of the respondents (65%) admitted that they use online dictionary only occasionally. 5% stated that they always used an English OD when doing homework or studying. The remaining 10% admitted that they very rarely used an OD. When asked about their preference for bilingual or monolingual dictionaries, 95% of the students said that they use a bilingual dictionary while 5% use a monolingual one.

Results therefore show that online dictionaries are clearly preferred over printed dictionaries. The reasons given by students for such preference are similar to those given by participants in other studies: speed when looking up a word (Bower and Macmillan, 2007; Chen, 2010; Deng, 2006), the possibility to find many examples

(Lew, 2011; Lew and Schryver, 2014; Rundell, 2015); no need to carry paper dictionaries (Lew and Schryver, 2014). Students have also shown a preference for bilingual dictionaries. This is a very interesting yet predictable result. Taking this into account, they must be taught all the possibilities bilingual dictionaries offer and how to take advantage of them.

Regarding the second group of questions, students had to number the dictionaries provided in the list from the most frequently used to the least frequently used. It is worth mentioning that *Google Translator* and *Linguee*, translation tools, were also incorporated to this list. These results are shown in Table 1.

	1st option	2nd option	3rd option	4th option	Total
Cambridge Dictionary			1/5%	2/10%	3/15%
Macmillan Dictionary	1/5%			1/5%	2/10%
Oxford Dictionary		1/5%	2/10%	1/5%	4/20%
WordReference	14/70%	5/25%			19/95%
Google Translator	5/25%	8/40%	2/10%		15/80%
Linguee	1/5%	3/15%	4/20%		8/40%
Otros (escribe aquí cualquier otro diccionario que uses)					

Table 1. Frequency of use of some online dictionaries

Results have shown a clear preference for *WordReference* (95% of the students chose this dictionary). It was chosen as the first option by 14 students (70%) and the second most frequently used dictionary by 5 students (25%). It is important to highlight that no student chose it as the third, fourth or fifth option. *Google Translator* was the second most listed dictionary (80%). It was chosen as the first option by 5 students (25%), as a second option by 8 students (40%). It was also chosen as the third option by two students (10%). *Linguee* was listed in the third place by 8 students (40%). It was the first option by one student (5%), a second option by 3 students (15%) and a third option

by 4 students (20%). It was not chosen as either fourth or fifth option by any student. In the fourth place, *Oxford Dictionary* was listed by 4 students (20%). This dictionary was nobody's first option, but second option for one student (5%), a third option for two students (10%) and a fourth option for one student (5%). In the fifth place, *Cambridge Dictionary* was listed by 3 students (5%). It was chosen as the third most used by one student (5%) and the fourth option for the remaining two (10%). The last dictionary is the *Macmillan Dictionary*, listed by two students. It was chosen as the first option by one student (5%) and the fourth option by another student (5%). Overall, this shows that they use ODs and online tools to translate. It seems therefore that for most of them knowing a word is equated with knowing its translation.

Regarding question number six, students had to choose one OD and justify their choice. As expected, the vast majority of students (90%) chose *WordReference* as the first option. Two out of these 18 students chose *WordReference* together with *Google Translator*. These students justified their answer by means of words such as: "quick", "easy" and "reliable". Another student admitted that it is the first option that appears in Google. Four students said that they used it because it was a recommendation: three of the students by a teacher, and the fourth student did not specify. Other students who chose *WordReference* and *Google Translator* justified that they also prefer the latter as it is "comfortable, easy and quick", "it translates not only words" but also complete sentences. It is worth noting that a student who chose *WordReference* stated that, if he or she has to quickly find a word, *Google Translator* is used. *Lingue* was chosen by one student for specific words because more instances are provided and also how to use them. The remaining people (5%) did not answer anything in this question.

When asked about their preference using an online dictionary, *WordReference* was by far the most voted online dictionary. In second position was *Google Translator*.

Linguee followed *Google Translator*. It is worth noting that *Oxford Dictionary*, *Cambridge Dictionary* and *Macmillan Dictionary* were rated as the last three ones. That is, the three dictionaries that provided more complete and reliable information about a word were the least voted here. They have been labelled as “reliable” because they are created by established dictionary publishing houses. The fact that these students voted the least “reliable” dictionaries as the most used ones shows that students need to be taught not only the differences between ODs but also to detect which tools provide more reliable and complete information. This lack of knowledge is also reflected in their justifications given in question number six. They use *WordReference* because it is “quick”, “easy” and “reliable”. The fact that a dictionary provides users with 16 different languages, however, does not mean that it is a reliable dictionary. Moreover, three students admitted that they use *WordReference* because teachers have recommended it. This makes us think that we should teach both students and teachers which ODs are the best tools to get specific word information.

When it comes to the third group of questions (7 and 8) students are asked about their purpose when using online dictionaries. Question number 7 was intended to find out whether students used online dictionaries for receptive purposes (understanding a text) or productive purposes (producing a text). In this question in particular, students were allowed to choose both options, if appropriate. The two options were given: to know the words that appear in a text, and the second one, to use the words correctly when writing a text in English. Results have shown that 13 students (65%) chose both options. 2 students (10%) have only chosen the first answer whereas 5 students (25%) have chosen the second one.

In question number 8, however, students were provided with 7 specific options and were asked to choose between three levels of frequency: frequently; hardly ever; and never.

	Frequently	Hardly ever	Never
to find the meaning of a word	15/75%	5/25%	
to listen to the pronunciation in American or British English	1/5%	7/35%	12/60%
to find the different forms of a word	3/15%	6/30%	11/55%
to find either synonyms or antonyms	10/50%	8/40%	2/10%
grammatical use	2/10%	11/55%	7/35%
to translate	15/75%	5/25%	
formal or informal	1/5%	5/25%	12/60%

In the first option, 15 students (75%) voted frequently and the remaining 5 (25%) hardly ever. It is noticeable that no one voted the option of never. In the second option, only 1 student (5%) chose frequently whereas 7 (35%) chose hardly ever and 12 students (60%) voted never. This clearly shows that they do not use it to get information on pronunciation. In the third option, 3 (15%) students chose frequently while 6 students (30%) chose the option of hardly ever; 11 students (55%) admitted that they never use it for this. This demonstrates their disinterest in knowing the forms of a word. In the fourth option, 10 students (50%) chose frequently whereas 8 (40%) hardly ever. The remaining 2 (10%) admitted that they never use it for this specific option. This is a very interesting result because half of the student argued that they tend to look for synonyms and/or synonyms whereas the other half of the class showed that this is not the case, they do not usually use with that objective. Option number five was to see the grammatical use. Only 2 students (10%) chose frequently whereas 11 students (55%) chose that they hardly ever use an OD for this. 7 students (35%) chose never. Option number 6 was to translate. 15 students (75%) chose frequently, 5 students (25%) hardly ever and no student chose never. The last option was to see if the word was formal or informal. Only one student (5%) chose frequently. 5 students (25%) chose hardly ever

and the vast majority (60%) said that they never use it for this specific purpose. Once again, results are predictable yet interesting.

In the next pair of questions (7 and 8) students were asked about their main aim when using an OD. Responses show that over half of the students (65%) use them for both, receptive and productive purposes. This means that they use ODs not only to comprehend the words but also to use them and produce a text (Atkins and Rundell, 2008). Online dictionaries help them learn more vocabulary and thus get a better level of English. Regarding the eighth question, results have shown that the vast majority of students use ODs to find the meaning of a word; half of the class also use them to search for synonyms; and also that they hardly ever use them for pronunciation and grammatical purposes. These results lead to conclude that students do not exploit all possibilities that ODs offer them.

Question number 9 was aimed at knowing the level of familiarity students had concerning dictionary labels and symbols, e.g. [C] for countable and [U] for uncountable. These symbols provide information like the grammar category of the word or register (e.g. formal, informal). Results have shown that 15 students (75%) are not familiar with them whereas 4 students (20%) affirmed that they know some of them. A student provided instances of the familiar symbols he or she knows: [Avd] and [V]. Only one student confessed to not knowing the majority of the labels and symbols.

The last two questions are related to their practices when looking up words in online dictionaries. Question number 10 asked students whether they read all definitions when searching for a word or only the first one. 18 students (90%) agreed that they read all definitions, 1 student (5%) remarked that most of the time and the remaining 5% recognised that only if the word has more than one definition. In the last question, students were asked about the frequency with which they read examples. 12 students

(60%) stated that they tend to read all examples to see how the word is used correctly. 2 students (10%) coincided that they do not tend to do it. 5 students (25%) agreed that sometimes they do it whereas only one student declared that he hardly ever does that.

These results show that the vast majority of students make a proper use of ODs when consulting something. They make sure that they really understand that the word means in that specific context by reading all definitions provided. In addition to this, over half of them (60%) read all examples to see how the word is used properly. This means that they not only want to understand how the word is used but also to see its contexts.

5. Proposal for Activities

Results have shown that students prefer online dictionaries over printed ones. Focusing on online dictionaries and other tools, their first choice has been bilingual dictionaries because they use them to translate. They have also shown a preference towards translation tools rather than proper online dictionaries. These results lead to conclude that they do not take advantage of all the features that ODs provide. Thus, it is necessary to teach students to get the most of online dictionaries, in particular monolingual dictionaries. For this purpose, I propose here a workshop consisting of various activities aimed at helping students to develop online dictionary skills. This workshop lasting approximately 2 hours, is intended for students in their second year of Baccalaureate and about to begin university. At the end of the workshop, students will be able to make an effective use of ODs. It is important to mention that a B2 level was thought to be an appropriate one as it is the level required from them prior to university studies. In this section the different activities are presented and discussed. For each activity students are asked to use a specific dictionary.

Activity 1. Exploring online dictionaries

Dictionary to use:

Cambridge Monolingual Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

Instructions. Read the text below and complete the information in the table for each of the words in bold.

Early in her career, the psychologist Carol Dweck of Stanford University gave a group of ten-year-olds problems that were slightly too hard for them. One group reacted positively, said they loved challenge and understood that their abilities could be developed. She says they had a 'growth **mindset**' and are focused on what they can achieve in the future. But another group of children felt that their intelligence was being judged and they had failed. They had a 'fixed mindset' and were unable to imagine improving. Some of these children said they might cheat in the future; others looked for someone who had done worse than them to **boost** their self-esteem.

Taken from:

<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading/advanced-c1-reading/do-you-have-right-mindset>

mindset	
Meaning in text	
Examples of use	
Grammatical function	
Synonyms	
Formal/informal	
Pronunciation	

Boost	
Meaning in text	
Examples of use	
Grammatical function	
Synonyms	
Formal/informal	
Pronunciation	

The first activity is intended to help students explore online dictionaries in general. Students are asked to read the provided text and complete the tables for the

words in bold. They are asked to use the *Cambridge Monolingual Dictionary*. Results from the questionnaire have shown that students do not exploit ODs. They do not use them to look for synonyms, antonyms, or the formality of the words but rather to translate. Hence, this activity aims to make them aware of and acquainted with all the possibilities that online dictionaries can offer. After completing the activity, students will know that ODs contain all information needed for receptive and productive purposes. They will also understand that translation tools such as *Google Translator* are more limited than these dictionaries.

Activity 2. Lexical variety: synonyms

Dictionary to use:

Wordsmyth net (<https://www.wordsmyth.net/>)

Instructions. Read the text below and find equivalent words to replace the words in bold without changing the meaning.

The **notion** of a gadget that can **sense** emotions isn't too **far-fetched**, as there are a number of measurable biomarkers that can suggest states like agitation. Research into all the information contained in the way people speak also bolsters Amazon's case for an emotionally sensitive device. **Achieving** an **accurate**, or at least generally reliable, picture of a person's emotional state, however, still seems like a hugely ambitious undertaking.

This is definitely one of those things that hasn't yet been done because of how **hard** it is to do. Today's report does conclude by saying that it's not immediately obvious how far along Amazon's project is or whether it'll **result in** any sort of commercial product. So we should probably keep our emotions in check for now.

Taken from:

<https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2019/5/23/18636839/amazon-wearable-emotions-report>

WORD	SYNONYM
Notion (noun)	
Sense (verb)	
Far-fetched (adjective)	
Achieving (verb)	

Accurate (adjective)	
Hard (adjective)	
Result in (verb)	

The second activity deals with synonyms. The dictionary used is the thesaurus *Wordsmyth* net. Students are asked to read the text carefully and find equivalent words for the ones in bold without changing the meaning of the word. They have been given the grammatical function of such words so that they can easily find them. Results from the questionnaire have revealed that students do not use online dictionaries to find synonyms and antonyms. As they are not familiar with online dictionaries, this exercise forces them to find synonyms within the context of the word, raising awareness and making them understand that not all synonyms will be correct since the context is extremely important.

Activity 3. Collocations

Dictionary to use: *Oxford Online Collocation Dictionary*
(<http://www.freecollocation.com/>).

Instructions. Complete the sentences with the appropriate word. Provide as many answers as possible.

1. Mum asked me to _____ the WASHING and IRONING. (Verb)
2. Don't _____ any NOISE. My parents are sleeping. (Verb)
3. This essay CONSISTS _____ summarising the novel. (Preposition)
4. I am extremely tired; I think I will _____ (a) TAXI. (Verb/ phrasal verb)
5. If you want to go to Mexico, you should start by _____ some MONEY. (Verb)

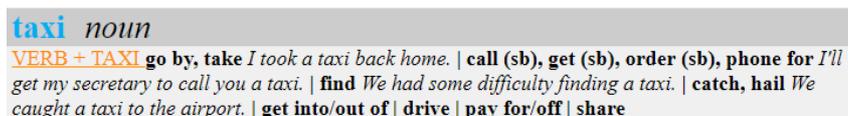
The third activity deals with collocations. As it is supposed to be a B2 level of English, it is assumed that students will be acquainted with collocations. Therefore, they are given independent sentences omitting part of the collocation and are asked to fill in the gaps. The *Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary* will be used as it helps them to

understand that, for instance, the verb “make” cannot be used in sentence 1 as it is not a word used when talking about washing or ironing. The result of the first search is as follows:



(Figure 11)

This dictionary also helps students understand that there can be several possibilities, as happens in the fourth sentence. “Taxi” can be used with: get, go by, take, call, order, among others (See Figure 12).



(Figure 12).

At the end of the exercise, students will get to know that not all words can be put together. There are words that collocate with each other, but this is not the case with all of them, and this information is not available in dictionaries like *WordReference* cannot teach them.

Activity 4. Finding information on grammar patterns

Dictionary to use: *Macmillan Dictionary* (<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>).

Instructions. Read the sentences below and complete them with the correct option.

1. I cannot afford _____ another phone. (To buy/buying/ buy)
2. She helped me _____ the essay for the teacher. (To write/ writing/write)
3. If you eat too much, you run the risk _____ health problems. (To get/ get/ of getting)
4. We should avoid _____ there because we do not have parental permission. (Go/to go/ going).

This activity is intended to teach students how to find information on grammar patterns, as the questionnaire has revealed that only two students frequently consulted the grammatical information of a word. They are given various sentences with several choices and are asked to choose the correct one. The dictionary used for this activity is the *Macmillan Dictionary*. It is expected that, after completing this activity, students will make use of ODs when they have doubts regarding grammar.

Students can easily find grammatical information in ODs. For instance, when we type the word “afford”, the grammatical pattern of the verb is explicitly presented in bold (as seen in Figure 13, the structure is as follows: can/can’t afford to do something) and there is an example to illustrate the pattern. Some verbs might pose some difficulty for L2 learners. Some entries in this dictionary have a “Get it Right!” section to help students with problematic words (Figure 14).

The image shows a screenshot of the Macmillan Dictionary entry for the word "afford". At the top, the word "afford" is written in red, followed by "- definition and synonyms" and three red stars. Below this are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and a speech bubble icon. A horizontal line separates this from the main entry. Below the line, the word "VERB [TRANSITIVE]" is shown, followed by a "Pronunciation" button with a speaker icon and the phonetic transcription "/ə'fɔ:(r)d/". To the right is a "Word Forms" button. Below these are two buttons: "Synonyms" and "Contribute to our Open Dictionary". The main definition is numbered "1" and reads: "if you can afford something, you have enough money to be able to pay for it. This word usually follows 'can', 'could', or 'be able to'". Two example sentences are provided in blue italicized text: "I'm not sure how they are able to afford such expensive holidays." and "We need a bigger house, but we just can't afford the rent." Below the examples, the phrase "can/can't afford to do something" is bolded, followed by another example sentence in blue italicized text: "The company simply cannot afford to pay overtime." At the bottom, there is a "Synonyms and related words" section with a red icon, and a grey box containing the text: "To have just enough money: afford, eke out, subsist..."

(Figure 13)

Get It Right!: afford

Afford is never followed by a verb in the **-ing** form. Use an infinitive:

X What about people who **cannot afford going** to these kind of centres?

✓ What about people who **cannot afford to go** to these kind of centres?

X The army **can afford buying** up to 10 tanks a year.

✓ The army **can afford to buy** up to 10 tanks a year.

(Figure 14)

Activity 5. Codes in online dictionaries

Dictionary to use: *Cambridge Dictionary* (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

Instructions. Look for the following words in the dictionary and explain the meaning of the code (in bold). Provide other examples.

WORD	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
Familiar (adjective) [C]		
Water (noun) [U]		
State (noun) [T]		

This activity is concerned with codes and abbreviations. Students are given a list of words and are asked to look for the meaning of the abbreviations and provide examples. The *Cambridge Dictionary* was thought to be an appropriate dictionary since it provides students with hyperlinks in which they can find the explanation of the abbreviations employed in this exercise. Since results showed that the vast majority of students (75%) are not acquainted with abbreviations in ODs, this exercise will help them not only to take the word's grammatical function into consideration when writing but also to know if the word they want to use is the appropriate one.

Activity 6. Word with multiple meanings

Dictionary to use: Macmillan Dictionary (<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>).

Instructions. Read the following sentences and choose the correct answer. Use the Macmillan Dictionary to decide the correct option.

- You can **set** the iPhone so that it does an automatic backup:
 1. give someone something to do
 2. make something happen
 3. make equipment ready
 4. when sun goes down
- After years as an amateur dancer, she **turned** professional:
 1. change direction
 2. change to something different
 3. change position
 4. change profession
- When the news first **broke**, he was nowhere to be found:
 1. become publicly known
 2. stop for a period of time
 3. break the law
 4. separate into pieces
- The bus company **runs** a regular weekend service:
 1. machine: work
 2. move quickly
 3. manage to
 4. offer a service

The sixth activity is an exercise about multiple meaning words. This exercise asks students to choose the correct answer. The verbs used in this exercise have several meanings and not all of them can be used in the chosen sentence. Students have to use the *Macmillan Dictionary* to find the correct meaning depending on the context.

Activity 7. Words and connotations

Dictionary to use:

Oxford Dictionary (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/english>).

Wordreference (<https://www.wordreference.com/>).

Instructions. Read the following sentences and choose the correct option. First, use the *Oxford Dictionary* to find the connotations of the words. Once you have found them, use *Wordreference*. Can you see any difference? Which dictionary do you think will help better in terms of accuracy when producing a text?

He was very tall and **slim**, with long arms and legs.

1- slender	2-skinny	3-thin
------------	----------	--------

The **adolescent** stage of life is an awkward one, there's no denying it.

1- immature	2-juvenile	3 innocent
-------------	------------	------------

3. I love meeting **conversational** people. You can always learn something new!

1-Talkative	2-chatty	3-jabbering
-------------	----------	-------------

The last activity addresses words and connotations. There are some words that have either negative or positive connotations associated to them. In this activity, students are asked to use the *Oxford Dictionary* to choose the words that better replaces the word in bold. This exercise has been created to show students that most bilingual online dictionaries provide information about the connotation of words that is not frequently provided in *WordReference*.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this work has been to design activities that help students develop their online dictionary skills and make effective use of this tool. ODs have been selected since the affordances of the medium (e.g. multimodality, hypertextuality) are of great help when understanding and producing texts in English. There are several factors that make online dictionaries better than paper dictionaries. These include time (they help students spend less time when looking for a word); their unrestricted space (users no longer need to hold a paper dictionary and, when talking about metaphorical space, there are no longer restrictions concerning the expansion of instances, exercises, etc.); and their access (the alphabetical order used in print dictionaries is no longer essential in online dictionaries).

In order to design dictionary activities that could be helpful for the intended students I analysed their use of ODs. Results from the questionnaire revealed that students prefer ODs, but they mostly use bilingual ODs such as *WordReference* or *Linguee*. They hardly ever use online dictionaries like the *Oxford Dictionary* or the

Macmillan Dictionary. This is because their aims when using them are to find the meaning of a word and to translate. Students barely use them for grammatical purpose or to find synonyms or antonyms. Moreover, they never use them to consult the formality or the pronunciation of the word. Taking into account these results, we reach the conclusion that students do not exploit all possibilities that OD have.

Taking into consideration these results, various activities were created with the purpose of helping students to develop their online dictionary skills as well as becoming more acquainted with ODs. There are various activities intended to cover all information provided by ODs. There is an activity aimed at making students aware that translation tools such as *Google Translator* are much more limited than ODs. Other activities help students find synonyms and antonyms; collocations; how to find grammatical information; and the connotations of words.

It has been shown that there is a necessity to make the most of the information and communication technologies in English language teaching classes. Online dictionaries offer plenty of possibilities that are still underexploited. It is assumed that students know how to use ODs, but results have revealed that this is not the case. There is, then, a need to include these type of activities with the purpose of teaching an appropriate use of online dictionaries in English language teaching classes.

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8. Appendix

CUESTIONARIO:

Este cuestionario es completamente anónimo. Responde a las preguntas de manera sincera, clara y en español.

1) ¿Usas diccionarios de inglés online?

Siempre. Ya no uso diccionarios en papel	
A veces. Lo combino con diccionarios en papel.	
Nunca.	

2) ¿Prefieres los diccionarios online o los impresos? ¿Por qué?

3) ¿Con qué frecuencia usas diccionarios de inglés online?

Siempre que estudio inglés o hago deberes de inglés	
A veces	
Muy pocas veces	
Nunca	

4) ¿Qué diccionario usas? (elige una o dos opciones)

Bilingüe	
Monolingüe	

5) ¿Qué diccionarios has usado? Ordénalos teniendo en cuenta la frecuencia con los que los usas (Usa "1" para el que uses con más frecuencia). Pon una X en los que no has usado nunca.

Cambridge Dictionary	
Macmillan Dictionary	
Oxford Dictionary	
WordReference	
Google Translator	
Linguee	
Otros (escribe aquí cualquier otro diccionario que uses)	

6) De todos los diccionarios online que usas, ¿cuál prefieres? ¿Por qué?

7) ¿Para qué usas los diccionarios? (Elige todas las opciones apropiadas)

Para comprender palabras que me aparecen en los textos en inglés	
Para utilizar las palabras correctamente cuando estás escribiendo un texto en inglés	

8) ¿Para qué usas los diccionarios online? (Si no los usas, ¿para qué crees que los podrías usar?) (elige todas las opciones apropiadas)

	Con frecuencia	Pocas veces	Nunca
Para encontrar el significado de una palabra			
Para escuchar la pronunciación en inglés Americano o Británico.			
Para ver las diferentes forma de la palabra (formas irregulares o un verbo)			
Para encontrar sinónimos o antónimos			
Para ver el uso gramatical de la palabra (e.g. si un verbo va seguido de infinito o gerundio)			
Para traducir			
Para ver si una palabra e formal o coloquial			
Si lo usas para otros motivos, por favor especifica debajo:			

9) ¿Conoces el significado de las abreviaciones usadas en los diccionarios online? Por ejemplo [C]

10) Cuando buscas la definición de una palabra, ¿solo lees la primera definición o todas ellas para saber qué significado quieres usar exactamente?

11) Cuando buscas el significado de una palabra, ¿consultas los ejemplos para ver cómo usar la palabra adecuadamente?