FORM, MEANING OR USE:
WHAT WORD KNOWLEDGE ASPECT SHOULD L2 LEARNERS FOCUS ON DURING DICTIONARY LOOKUPS?
ALL AT ONCE OR ONE AT A TIME?

Sultan Alhatmi[i]
Department of European Languages,
King Abdulaziz University (KAU),
Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

A twenty-six-item questionnaire featuring 26 various word knowledge *components* (i.e. pieces of information relevant to a word) was handed to 90 Saudi EFL learners in order to a. identify the individual *components* that they were most and least interested in when performing dictionary lookups and b. pinpoint the word knowledge *aspect* (i.e. the strand or category to which individual word knowledge components relate to) to which their lookups were mostly oriented (i.e. *form*, *meaning*, or *use*). The subjects reported an extreme interest in digital pronunciation of words (i.e. pronunciation embedded in digital dictionaries), L1 equivalents, spelling as well as the L2 first and basic meaning of words paralleled with a high negligence towards verb transitiveness, word origin, pronunciation in a paper dictionary, meanings of word affixes as well as stylistic usage of words. In terms of word knowledge *aspects*, their word lookups were reportedly far more oriented towards word *meaning* and word *form* with significantly far less attention paid to the aspect of word *use*. Hence, we believe, L2 learners should be cautioned when performing dictionary lookups against this notable disinterest in the aspect of word use as it would most likely, in the long run, have a negative effect on their communicative competence in the L2 (i.e. their knowledge about how and when to use L2 utterances appropriately). Finally, we suggest that this study be replicated in other contexts and countries of different L1 backgrounds so that we can ascertain whether the learners' L1 background has any relevance to the interest and attention they would pay to the three word knowledge aspects when consulting dictionaries (e.g. would word use be given significantly more attention among EFL Latin learners than Arab learners?).

Keywords: dictionary lookup, word knowledge, word knowledge *aspect*, word knowledge *component*, word form, word meaning, word use

[i] Correspondence: email salhatmi@kau.edu.sa

1. Introduction

An L2 learner's dictionary is virtually a repertoire of word knowledge of different sorts. However, as Roberts (1992: 52) rightly notes, "*the more information is packed into dictionaries, the greater the dilemma of these students, for they are unable to find what they need in the mass of information provided*". In light of this 'dilemma', the current study aims to address this common issue amongst EFL dictionary users particularly in the Saudi context by:

1) identifying the individual word knowledge components (i.e. the pieces of information relevant to a word) that Saudi EFL learners are most and least interested in whenever they consult their dictionaries.
2) pinpointing the word knowledge aspect (i.e. the strand or category to which individual word knowledge components relate to) to which their dictionary word lookups are mostly oriented (i.e. form, meaning, or use).
3) formulating some literature-informed guidance for EFL learners on how word knowledge can best be extracted from their dictionaries.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Lexical knowledge *aspects* and *components*: what does it mean to know a word?

It has been argued by vocabulary researchers that knowing a word means much more than knowing its equivalents in the target language (Yanping, 2005). Nation (2001) neatly details the various types of information involved in knowing a word (see Table 1). He divides word knowledge into three general *aspects*: form, meaning, and use. Each one of these major aspects, in turn, includes three 'sub-aspects' which cover both receptive (R) as well as productive (P) word knowledge. As for word form, information relevant to this aspect includes spoken word form, written word form, and word parts. In terms of word meaning, there exists the 'form and meaning' relationship, the 'concept and referents' relationship as well as word associations. Finally, grammatical functions, word collocations, as well as constraints on word use, are three 'sub-aspects' that are in play when it comes to the aspect of word use. As such, all these nine pieces of word information are available for L2 learners to make use of in their receptive as well as productive uses of dictionaries. However, the availability of all or only some of these pieces of word information in a dictionary is largely governed by the type of dictionary in use by the L2 learner since different types of dictionaries focus on different types of word knowledge.

Table 1: What is involved in knowing a word? (Source: Nation, 2001)

Form	spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?
	word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?

		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	concept and referents	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	constraints on use (register, frequency …)	R	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

Note: In column 3, R = receptive knowledge, P = productive knowledge.

2.2 What word information should be most important when using the dictionary?

It has been argued that learning vocabulary is the greatest source of problems experienced by L2 learners and that many learners face problems in the use of language because of inadequate vocabulary (Savadkouhi et.al, 2013). Learners feel that inadequate vocabulary is the reason for a lot of problems they face in both receptive and productive language use (Nation, 1990). This inadequacy of L2 learners' vocabulary originates from either the low quantity of words known by learners and/or the low quality of word knowledge they have about certain words in their lexicon (i.e. they know some word information that is not useful in terms of using these words receptively or productively).

In relevance to dictionary use, Scholfield (1982, 1999) makes a distinction between using a dictionary for reception (for listening or reading tasks) and using it for production (for speaking or writing tasks) and stresses that each mode of use involves different types of skills and strategies. Scholfield (1982: 85) argues that "*for reception, the critical information in the entries is the meaning; all other information (pronunciation, part of speech, etc.) is incidental to this one thing that the learner is seeking whereas for production the focus is on all the kinds of information in addition to the meaning which must be supplied to enable the learner to use a word correctly.*" He further asserts that "*a key point to remember is that in the receptive situation an unfamiliar word or phrase has been met. The sole piece of information targeted is the meaning of that item - specifically the meaning relevant to the context where it has been met - not its spelling, grammatical characteristics, etc., which may be sought in 'productive' dictionary use*" (Scholfield, 1999: 13).

Min (2013) stresses that L2 learners need to learn three things in order to fully learn a new word: meaning, pronunciation, and spelling. Likewise, McCarthy (1990) points out that there are three conditions which L2 learners need to satisfy in order for them to be able to say they know a word. These are:

1) knowing which other words it is usually associated with (lexical patterning),
2) knowing what grammatical characteristics it has (grammatical pattering), and
3) knowing how it is pronounced and spelled.

In terms of lexical patterning, Sokmen (1997) and Folse (2004) stress that the most important aspect of knowing a word is the collocational partnerships of the word. Learning chunks and groups of words that go together is a very effective way to expand the learner's vocabulary power (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Lewis, 1993; Sokmen, 1997). In this regard, Min (2013: 65) praises monolingual dictionaries particularly for being helpful for learners in developing *"a more solid awareness of the collocational partnerships of words since meaning and other information are provided in the same language as the target word."*

With regards to grammatical patterning, Min (ibid.) explains that words can be stored in terms of their graphological forms as well as by their meanings and believes that graphological forms can greatly enhance word storage and recall. Nagy and Anderson (1984) estimated that around 60% of the new words encountered by EFL learners can be broken down into parts that aid in determining the meaning of the word. Likewise, McCarthy (1990) notes that there are more words in English that are related by common roots or bases than many other languages. Consequently, knowledge of roots and affixes (i.e. prefixes and suffixes) will help learners unlock the meanings of many English words (Min, ibid.). Learning new words in this way is achieved *"by relating these words to known words or known prefixes and suffixes and it can be used as a way of checking whether an unfamiliar word has been successfully guessed from context"* (Nation, 1990: 168). Moreover, as Min (ibid.: 66) notes, "*learners can also develop inferencing skills*" (i.e. contextual guessing) "*by analyzing the left flank (prefixes), the right flank (suffixes) and the center (roots) which can ultimately lead to better word retention*".

As for pronunciation and spelling, Laufer (1998) and Celce-Murcia (2001) stress that learning the exact pronunciation of the new word is very important for L2 vocabulary acquisition. English is not an easy language to spell and many simple words are misspelled because they are mispronounced (Min, ibid.). In this relevance, McCarthy (1984) and Hennings (2000) suggest that lower-level learners may especially benefit from perceiving acoustic and orthographic similarities in words. As Crystal (2002) points out, the discrepancy in English spelling is the result of the complex linguistic history since English was not created at one time or from one source. Thus, Min (ibid.) stresses that it is quite important for L2 learners to learn the exact pronunciation of the new words they encounter since the relationship of spelling to sound is quite irregular in English. This is because when learners get in the habit of pronouncing words with care and acquire the habit of looking closely at the word as they read it or write it down, their spelling is bound to improve (Min, ibid.).

3. Research Questions

In response to the aims of this study, the following two research questions emerged:

RQ1. What types of word knowledge *components* (i.e. word information) are Saudi EFL learners most and least interested in when looking up words in the dictionary?

RQ2. Based on Nation's (2001) model of word knowledge, what *aspect* of lexical knowledge (i.e. *Form*, *Meaning* or *Use*) are Saudi EFL learners particularly most concerned with when consulting their dictionaries?

4. Method

The participants of this study were ninety English majors from the Department of European Languages at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. A closed-ended questionnaire was designed to gather data for the study. The questionnaire had a total of 26 items investigating how frequently our subjects would look for the various types of word knowledge typically found in an L2 learner's dictionary. The items had a five-point Likert scale format in which there were five possible responses for each item (1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, and 5= Always). As such, for each item, the participants had to circle only one response that best matched their frequency of targeting the word knowledge type at question. It should be noted that a carefully translated Arabic version of the questionnaire was used for collecting the data to avoid any possible ambiguities that may arise from the English version. For the same purpose, the questionnaire filling session was administered wholly in Arabic. As per instrument reliability, the questionnaire was piloted to check for its reliability and it exhibited a high degree of internal item consistency on Cronbach's Alpha scale (reliability coefficient = .814).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data. All the data obtained from the 90 questionnaires filled in by our participants were carefully entered into SPSS. Mean frequency rating was first calculated for each of the 26 word knowledge types in order to measure our subjects' interest in these different types of word knowledge when they look up words in the dictionary (i.e. the statistical procedure for answering RQ1). We then calculated the subjects' mean score on each of the three major word knowledge aspects (i.e. *form*, *meaning*, and *use*) (i.e. the statistical procedure for answering RQ2).

5. Results and Discussion

RQ1. What types of word knowledge *components* (i.e. word information) are Saudi EFL learners most and least interested in when looking up words in the dictionary?

As noted earlier in our review of the literature, McCarthy (1990) stresses that there are three conditions for learners to be able to say they know a word: knowing

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which words it is usually associated with (lexical patterning); what grammatical characteristics it has (grammatical pattering); and how it is pronounced and spelled. Table 2 and Figure 1 show that whereas our subjects reported high interest when consulting dictionaries in looking for two of these four recommended-to-know pieces of word information (namely pronunciation and spelling), they had extremely far less interest in the other two (i.e. lexical patterning and grammatical pattering).

In relevance to pronunciation, tech-based (digital) dictionaries proved more favorable to our subjects over paper dictionaries when it comes to looking up the pronunciation of words. Whereas pronunciation in a tech-based dictionary was by far the most popular type of word information our subjects reported looking up (mean= 4.00), pronunciation in a paper dictionary was amongst the very least popular and was almost never sought (mean= 1.66). To verify the significance of the mean difference between the two dictionary use choices, the paired samples t-test showed that our subjects were interested in looking up the pronunciation of words in digital dictionaries extremely significantly more than in paper dictionaries (t= 12.272, p= .000). Given the 'friendly' speaking function embedded in tech-based dictionaries and the incredible speed with which it can provide a word's pronunciation, this finding comes as no surprise. Indeed, trying to figure out a word's pronunciation in a paper dictionary is in itself quite a daunting task for any L2 learner, let alone the specialized knowledge of phonetic symbols it requires. It should be noted that this interest by our subjects in the 'live' pronunciation function offered by digital dictionaries surpassed even their interest in looking up the L1 Arabic translation of a target word which although was, as expected, a highly important piece of information for them (mean= 3.82), it came second in ranking. As for spelling, our subjects also showed high interest in this component of word information (mean= 3.54). Indeed, a dictionary, whether a paper or digital one, is a handy place for L2 learners to go and double-check the spelling of a word they have seen or heard before but either do not know or simply do not remember how it is spelled. This is particularly useful when attempting writing tasks whether during the early text composition process or at later stages of editing and proofreading.

As for word meaning, in addition to 'digital pronunciation' and spelling, our subjects similarly showed high interest in two other types of word information that were relevant to word meaning. These included the L1 Arabic translation (mean= 3.82) as well as the 'first and basic English meaning' (mean= 3.42). The high interest shown by our subjects in seeking the L1 translation for the words they look up is undoubtedly associated with a paralleled interest in bilingual (English-Arabic) dictionaries since, needless to say, L1 equivalents can only be found in bilingual dictionaries. In fact, many researchers found that bilingual dictionaries were used by the majority of the students in their studies (Tomaszczyk, 1979; Ahmed, 1988; Schmitt, 1997; Al-Qahtani, 2005; Alhaysony, 2011). Moreover, Piotrowski (1989) concluded that no matter what their level of competence, foreign learners and dictionary users turn to their bilingual dictionaries as long as they use dictionaries at all. In this regard, research highlights the positive effects of bilingual dictionaries on the learners' L2 development, especially on

their reading comprehension abilities (Luppescu & Day, 1993; Knight, 1994; Folse, 2004). As Min (2013: 65) notes, *"bilingual dictionaries help learners quickly grasp the meanings of words, especially for words that are difficult to translate into English"* since *"the immediate semantic association between the L2 word and the L1 word can help learners reinforce the meanings of words and retain them in long-term memory"*. Indeed, although monolingual dictionaries generally include more information about each word than bilingual dictionaries, some studies have suggested that learners acquire vocabulary much more effectively using L2-L1 pairs than through L2-L2 definitions pairs (e.g. Laufer & Shmueli, 1997) and there is much evidence (e.g. Nesi & Meara, 1994) that indicates the difficulties non-native speakers have in understanding the English definition (Nation, 2001).

When it comes to English meanings in particular, our subjects showed significantly more interest in seeking the 'first and basic English meaning' (mean= 3.42) as well as the 'contextual English meaning' (mean= 3.19) of a lookup word than seeking 'all English meanings' of it (mean= 2.72) (p= .002 and .014 respectively). Since they had clearly far less interest in looking at all the English meanings of target lookup words, it may be concluded that most of the words our subjects targeted for dictionary lookup were most likely encountered in original contexts rather than in isolation. As such, whereas looking at every meaning of a target lookup word consumes both more time and effort from the L2 learner as well as hinders reading fluency, seeking only the 'first and basic English meaning' or the meaning that best matches the lookup word original context requires far less effort, is certainly far less time-consuming and as such would cause far less hindrance to reading fluency.

With relevance to the grammatical characteristics of a lookup word (i.e. grammatical patterning) as well as its associations/collocations with other words (i.e. lexical patterning), our subjects showed extremely far less interest in these two kinds of word information compared to pronunciation and spelling. Whereas our subjects reported that they occasionally looked for the part of speech of a lookup word (mean= 2.68) or the grammatical patterns it may have (mean= 2.67), they rarely sought the word's collocations (mean= 2.27). As such, in relevance to Nation's (2001) aspects of knowing a word reviewed earlier, meaning and pronunciation (i.e. Meaning and Form) seems to have occupied the attention of our subjects and this ought not to be the case. Rather, to achieve a fuller knowledge of new words, equal interest should be given to grammatical characteristics of words as well as word collocations (i.e. Use). In this regard, as noted earlier, Sokmen (1997) and Folse (2004) consider the collocational partnerships of the word as the most important aspect of knowing a word. Indeed, learning chunks and groups of words that go together is a very effective way to expand the learner's vocabulary power (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Lewis, 1993; Sokmen, 1997). For this purpose, a monolingual dictionary, in particular, can be very useful in providing learners with *"a more solid awareness of the collocational partnerships of words since meaning and other information are provided in the same language as the target word"* (Min 2013: 65).

Also relevant to grammatical patterning, our subjects had an extremely low interest in looking up word parts. This is evident in the very low mean scores of looking up how a word is broken into syllables (mean= 2.18) as well as looking up the meanings of prefixes or suffixes (mean= 2.00). This lack of interest by our subjects in word parts is contrary to what the research on L2 vocabulary learning advocates for. For instance, as noted earlier, Nagy and Anderson (1984) estimated that around 60% of the new words encountered by students are able to be broken down into parts that aid in determining the meaning of the word. Moreover, McCarthy (1990) notes that there are even more words in English that are related by common roots or bases than many other languages. Consequently, knowledge of roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) will help learners unlock the meanings of many English words (Min, 2013). Therefore, As Min (2013, ibid.) stresses, L2 learners should be aware of the importance of learning word formation especially those whose L1 is not of the Greco-Latin family group. It is indeed crucial for ESL students to study Greco-Latin affixes and roots because such knowledge will help them learn many new words "*by relating these words to known words or known prefixes and suffixes, and it can be used as a way of checking whether an unfamiliar word has been successfully guessed from context*" (Nation, 1990: 168). Min (ibid.: 66) neatly sums up the benefit of root prediction in learning new vocabulary:

"*Learners can also develop inferencing skills by analyzing the left flank (prefixes), the right flank (suffixes), and the center (roots), which can ultimately lead to better word retention. By learning the common Greek and Latin roots and affixes, learners can recognize, analyze, build, and use many related words more easily and quickly. Although root prediction does not work all the time, this method will help learners make fewer trips to the dictionary both for a new word and for words they have looked up before and will help them expand their vocabulary knowledge*".

Finally, it should be noted that our subjects had the least interest in looking up the origins of words (e.g. the word *croissant* is French) in the dictionary as they almost never sought this piece of word information (mean= 1.64). This is most likely due to the absence of any contribution that knowledge of such piece of word information could add towards knowledge of the most commonly sought and cherished piece of information about a new word by L2 learners, that is, its meaning.

Table 2: Types of word information looked for in the dictionary

Rank	Type of word information	Mean	SD
1	Pronunciation in a tech-based dictionary (🔊 or 🗣)	4.00	1.30
2	L1 translation (equivalent)	3.82	1.31
3	Spelling	3.54	1.20
4	First and basic English meaning	3.42	1.34
5	Contextual English meaning	3.19	1.26
6	Given example sentences	3.04	1.25
7	English abbreviations stand for what	2.98	1.38
8	Conjugation (for verbs)	2.76	1.30

| 9	All English meanings	2.72	1.26
10	Part of speech	2.68	1.37
11	Grammatical patterns	2.67	1.31
12	Arabic equivalent of English idioms or proverbs	2.66	1.36
13	Appropriate usage (i.e. formal or informal)	2.61	1.43
14	Frequency	2.54	1.42
15	English meaning of English idioms or proverbs	2.51	1.24
16	Synonyms and antonyms	2.47	1.19
17	Derived forms (derivations)	2.43	1.24
18	Irregular plurals of some English nouns	2.30	1.27
19	Collocations	2.27	1.14
20	English equivalent of Arabic idioms or proverbs	2.27	1.33
21	How it is broken into syllables (e.g. beau-ti-ful)	2.18	1.29
22	Stylistic usage (i.e. standard, colloquial, slang, literary, etc.)	2.08	1.28
23	Meanings of prefixes or suffixes	2.00	1.23
24	Pronunciation in a paper dictionary	1.66	1.18
25	Origin (e.g. French)	1.64	1.00
26	Transitive or intransitive (for verbs)	1.62	.93
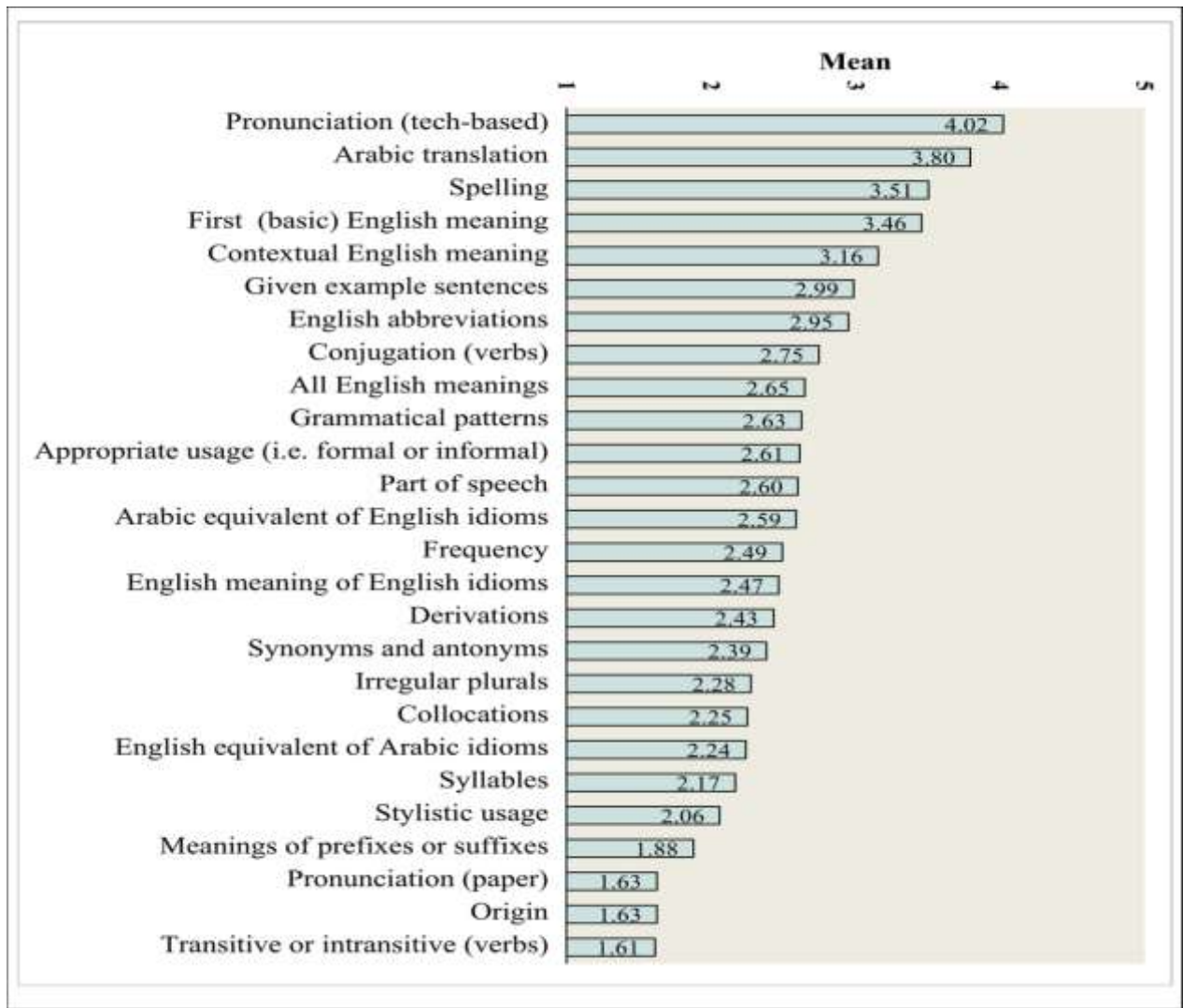
Figure 1: Types of word knowledge looked for in the dictionary

RQ2. Based on Nation's (2001) model of word knowledge, what *aspect* of lexical knowledge (i.e. *Form*, *Meaning* or *Use*) are Saudi EFL learners particularly most concerned with when consulting their dictionaries?

To answer this question, we calculated the subjects' mean score on each of the three major word knowledge aspects (i.e. *form*, *meaning*, and *use*). To do this, we first assigned each of the twenty-six individual word knowledge components presented in our questionnaire to the word knowledge aspect it corresponds to excluding 'pronunciation in a paper dictionary' since it already had a 'digital' counterpart (i.e. 'pronunciation in a tech-based dictionary (◀» or ◀») which featured as the most popular word knowledge component over all three word aspects (mean= 4.00). As such, as shown in Table 3, whereas five of the word knowledge components in our questionnaire corresponded to word *Form*, ten components were related to word *Meaning*, and the remaining ten were relevant to word *Use*. Using SPSS, we then computed our subjects' total mean score on each of the three word knowledge aspects. Whereas the subjects' total mean score on the meaning-related word knowledge components was the highest of all three word knowledge aspects (mean= 2.81), their total mean scores on the form-related as well as the use-related components were lower with 2.77 and 2.47 respectively.

Table 3: Total mean score for each of the three aspects of word knowledge

Word knowledge aspect	Rank	Word knowledge component	Mean	SD
Form	**1**	Pronunciation in a tech-based dictionary (◀» or ◀»)	4.00	1.30
	2	Spelling	3.54	1.20
	3	Derived forms (derivations)	2.43	1.24
	4	How it is broken into syllables (e.g. beau-ti-ful)	2.18	1.29
	5	Origin (e.g. French)	1.64	1.00
Total			**2.77**	**.68**
Meaning	**1**	L1 translation (equivalent)	3.82	1.31
	2	First and basic English meaning	3.42	1.34
	3	Contextual English meaning	3.19	1.26
	4	English abbreviations stand for what	2.98	1.38
	5	All English meanings	2.72	1.26
	6	Arabic equivalent of English idioms or proverbs	2.66	1.36
	7	English meaning of English idioms or proverbs	2.51	1.24
	8	Synonyms and antonyms	2.47	1.19
	9	English equivalent of Arabic idioms or proverbs	2.27	1.33
	10	Meanings of prefixes or suffixes	2.00	1.23
Total			**2.81**	**.59**
Use	**1**	Given example sentences	3.04	1.25
	2	Conjugation (for verbs)	2.76	1.30
	3	Part of speech	2.68	1.37
	4	Grammatical patterns	2.67	1.31
	5	Appropriate usage (i.e. formal or informal)	2.61	1.43
	6	Frequency	2.54	1.42
	7	Irregular plurals of some English nouns	2.30	1.27

	8	Collocations	2.27	1.14
	9	Stylistic usage (i.e. standard, colloquial, slang, literary, etc.)	2.08	1.28
	10	Transitive or intransitive (for verbs)	1.62	.93
Total			**2.47**	**.76**

To verify the statistical significance of the mean differences between the three word knowledge aspects, we ran the paired samples t-test to make pairs of comparisons between the three aspects. As can be seen from Table 4 and Figure 2, the results of these paired comparisons show that the reported higher inclination of our subjects when consulting dictionaries towards the meaning-related word knowledge components as opposed to those related to word use was extremely significant (p= .000). That is, our subjects were indeed significantly more interested in the meaning aspect of word knowledge than in the use aspect. Similarly, they had highly significantly more interest in the aspect of word form as opposed to that of word use (p= .000). However, although the subjects' interest in the aspect of word meaning was relatively higher than that of word form, the mean differences between the two aspects turned statistically not significant (p= .593) indicating that their interest in both these word knowledge aspects was extremely close.

Table 4: Paired samples t-test of the mean differences between
the three word knowledge aspects

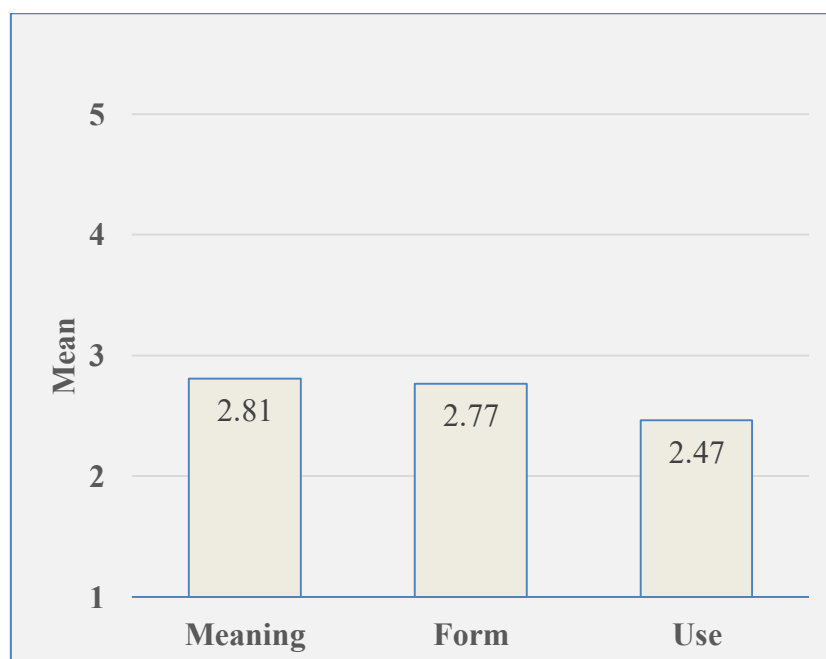| Pairs of word knowledge aspects	Paired differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD			
Meaning vs Form	.04059	.71863	.536	89	.593
Meaning vs Use	.34152	.61840	5.239	89	.000
Form vs Use	.30093	.67392	4.236	89	.000

Figure 2: Mean score differences between the three word knowledge aspects

As evident from Table 5, as per the literature on word knowledge learning we reviewed earlier, it is clear that the word knowledge aspects of meaning and form are far more advocated by scholars over the aspect of word use when learning new words. As for word meaning, scholars, experts and researchers on vocabulary learning unanimously agree on the priority and vitality of this aspect of word knowledge when learning new words since communication in the L2 (whether spoken or written) simply cannot be made without it. Indeed, knowledge of word meanings represents the cornerstone for everyday communication in any human language. In relevance to word form, many scholars stressed the importance of learning pronunciation, spelling as well as word parts which are form-related components. As for word use, researchers' advocacy in the literature for this aspect is only cantered around collocations with almost a complete negligence of other components of word use (e.g. example sentences, verb conjugations, part of speech, grammatical patterns, appropriate usage (i.e. formal or informal), word frequency, irregular plurals of some English nouns, stylistic usage (i.e. standard, colloquial, slang, literary, etc.), transitive or intransitive verbs). Astonishingly, the findings of our current study (see tables 2, 3 and 4) clearly indicate that our subjects' choices of word knowledge components when digging into their dictionaries for word information were in line with this prevalent advocacy found in the literature (i.e. word **meaning** and **form** should be more prior to word **use** when learning new words). As such, it is clear that our subjects have missed the most when it comes to learning word knowledge relevant to word use since the aspect of word use significantly received the least attention by them when looking for word knowledge in their dictionaries.

Table 5: The direction of scholars' emphasis on the three word
knowledge aspects and their relevant components

Word knowledge aspect			Word knowledge component	Who says this is important
Form	spoken	R	What does the word sound like?	Min (2013)
		P	How is the word pronounced?	McCarthy (1990) Laufer (1998) Celce-Murcia (2001) McCarthy (1984) Hennings (2000)
	written	R	What does the word look like?	Min (2013)
		P	How is the word written and spelled?	McCarthy (1990) McCarthy (1984) Hennings (2000)
	word parts	R	What parts are recognizable in this word?	Nagy and Anderson (1984)
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?	McCarthy (1990) Min (2013) Nation, 1990
Meaning	form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?	All scholars
		P	What word form can be used to	

			express this meaning?	
	concept and referents	R	What is included in the concept?	All scholars
		P	What items can the concept refer to?	
	associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?	McCarthy (1990)
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?	
Use	grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does the word occur?	McCarthy (1990)
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?	
	collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?	McCarthy (1990) Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992) Lewis (1993) Sokmen (1997) Folse (2004)
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?	
	constraints on use (register, frequency ...)	R	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?	None
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?	

To the researcher, the reported extremely low interest of our subjects in the word use related information when consulting their dictionaries is not a good practice but rather an alarming one. This is because, we believe, this low interest in the aspect of word use when attempting to learn new words is most likely one major reason behind Saudi EFL learners' noticeable low proficiency levels of communicative competence (i.e. the ability to communicate in the L2 via both speech and writing). Consequently, to improve their communicative competence, L2 learners are advised when performing dictionary consultations not to completely ignore the aspect of word use with its various related information simply seeking only word-meaning and/or word-form relevant information. This is particularly more urgent when the task at hand is of a productive nature (i.e. it involves speaking or writing) in which case knowledge of word-use related information is apparently indispensable. Needless to say, as much as the above advice applies when learners are employing the strategy of dictionary use, it also applies when they are using other vocabulary learning strategies such as asking teachers or classmates for word information, taking vocabulary notes as well as interacting with native speakers (see Schmitt's 1997 VLS taxonomy). In short, to improve their speech and writing performance in an L2, learners need to give the aspect of word use enough interest when learning new words at least equal to the instinctive interest they have in the aspect of word meaning.

Scholfield's (1982, 1999) valuable distinction on dictionary use (i.e. receptive vs. productive dictionary use) reviewed earlier which differentiates between using a dictionary for reception (for listening or reading tasks) and using it for production (for speaking or writing tasks) is crucial when it comes to making judgments as to which word knowledge aspect should be given more attention by L2 learners when looking

up words in their dictionaries. As Scholfield (1982: 85) puts it, "*for reception, the critical information in the entries is the meaning; all other information (pronunciation, part of speech, etc.) is incidental to this one thing that the learner is seeking whereas for production the focus is on all the kinds of information in addition to the meaning which must be supplied to enable the learner to use a word correctly.*" In another study, he also asserts that "*a key point to remember is that in the receptive situation an unfamiliar word or phrase has been met. The sole piece of information targeted is the meaning of that item - specifically the meaning relevant to the context where it has been met - not its spelling, grammatical characteristics, etc., which may be sought in 'productive' dictionary use*" (Scholfield, 1999: 13). As such, comparing our findings with this distinction of Scholfield's on dictionary use, it is obvious that our subjects reserved the use of their dictionaries overwhelmingly for receptive purposes. To the researcher, this significantly higher interest of our subjects when consulting dictionary in meaning-related as well as form-related components of word knowledge over use-related components largely explain the noticeable discrepancy in Saudi EFL learners' receptive versus productive ability in the foreign language (they would often score high at school on English reading or listening tests (i.e. receptive tests), but very low on writing and speaking tests (i.e. productive tests)).

Consequently, in relevance to the three word knowledge aspects we identified in this study (i.e. **form**, **meaning**, and **use**), and in response to Scholfield's above distinction on dictionary use, L2 learners should alternatively be called upon to use their dictionaries systematically based on the type of task at hand. To achieve this systematicity in dictionary use, learners should be fully aware of what particular word knowledge *aspect* should be the focus during a certain dictionary lookup as well as what particular word knowledge *component(s)* are most needed to fulfill that lookup. As such, when using the dictionary for receptive purposes (i.e. for listening or reading tasks), they are highly encouraged to focus their dictionary searches on word knowledge components associated solely with the aspect of word **meaning** (e.g. L1 equivalent, English meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and meanings of word affixes). On the contrary, when using the dictionary for productive purposes (i.e. for speaking or writing tasks), learners' dictionary consultations must go beyond the aspect of word meaning to also include word knowledge components associated with the other two aspects, i.e. word **use** (e.g. example sentences, verb conjugations, appropriate usage (i.e. formal or informal), word frequency, stylistic usage (i.e. standard, colloquial, slang, literary, etc.), as well as word **form** (e.g. pronunciation, spelling, word derivations). Using the dictionary in such a systematic approach is very useful for L2 learners in two particular ways, namely in terms of task success and learning burden. First and foremost, it helps learners confront the task at hand whether it be receptive or productive using just the right 'weapons', so to speak, resulting presumably in a more successful outcome than if other unnecessary weapons were used (i.e. task-success wise). Moreover, it helps them save more time and effort when dealing with their various everyday L2 learning tasks thus resulting in considerably less learning burden on their shoulders (i.e. learning-burden wise).

6. Implications for EFL learners

As far as the researcher is concerned, the subjects' notable disinterest in the word use aspect when performing dictionary lookups calls for caution from the learners' part as it would most likely get reflected on their communicative competence in the L2 (i.e. their knowledge about how and when to use L2 utterances appropriately). That is, we believe, L2 learners' communicative ability in the foreign language is bound to weaken if no or only little interest is given to the word use aspect of word knowledge whenever they dig into their dictionaries for word information. As such, responding to the dilemma earlier noted by Roberts (1992: 52) which L2 learners often face when consulting their dictionaries, i.e. "*the more information is packed into dictionaries, the greater the dilemma of these students, for they are unable to find what they need in the mass of information provided*", we suggest two dictionary lookup routes which L2 learners can take based on their motivation and aptitude for L2 learning:

1) The free unguided lookup route (suitable for highly-motivated learners):
   With every dictionary consultation, as much intuitive interest is normally given by L2 learners when performing a dictionary lookup to word knowledge components relevant to word *meaning* and *form*, equal interest should also be given to components relevant to word *use*. Although less systematic (learners don't really have clear steps to take during a dictionary lookup and may well easily indulge in focusing on only one word aspect at the middle of their lookup) as well as time and effort consuming, this route is more ideal as learners taking it may virtually learn almost 'everything' about a lookup word all in one 'go'. However, this route seems only suitable for highly-motivated learners who are eager for learning the foreign language and are always willing as such to spend more time learning it.

2) The guided lookup route (suitable for low-motivated learners):
   The type of task at hand which originally called for the L2 learner to perform a dictionary lookup should direct that lookup. Thus, based on the type of task they are involved in, learners should be fully aware of what particular word knowledge *aspect* should be the focus during a dictionary lookup as well as what particular word knowledge *component(s)* are mostly needed to fulfill that lookup. This route is more systematic (learners have clear steps to take every time they look up the dictionary) as well as time and effort saving and is hence suitable for low-motivated learners who are often unwilling to spend much time and effort in their L2 learning endeavors.

7. Conclusion

L2 learners' dictionaries are rich with word knowledge of different types. Although most learners tend to focus on the *aspect* of word *meaning* as their favorable quest when performing dictionary lookups for their target words, it is often easy for some learners to get distracted during a lookup and hence not know what *aspect* of word knowledge (i.e. *meaning*, *form* or *use*) they should be after. This distraction may be attributed to the learners' lack of focus during some of their dictionary lookups which is apparently often caused by the numerous word information stored in dictionaries. To this end, the purpose of this study was threefold:

a) identifying the individual word knowledge components (i.e. the pieces of information relevant to a word) that Saudi EFL learners are most and least interested in whenever they consult their dictionaries.

b) pinpointing the word knowledge aspect (i.e. the strand or category to which individual word knowledge components relate to) to which their dictionary word lookups are mostly oriented (i.e. form, meaning, or use).

c) formulating some literature-informed guidance for EFL learners on how word knowledge can best be extracted from their dictionaries.

Ninety Saudi EFL university learners of English major took part in the study in which they responded to a closed-ended questionnaire that investigated their most and least targeted word knowledge components during dictionary lookups. The findings show an immense interest of our subjects in digital pronunciation of words (i.e. pronunciation embedded in digital dictionaries), L1 equivalents, spelling as well as the L2 first and basic meaning of words paralleled with a high negligence towards verb transitiveness, word origin, pronunciation in a paper dictionary, meanings of word affixes as well as stylistic usage of words. In terms of word knowledge *aspects*, it was found that the subjects were far more oriented towards word *meaning* and word *form* with significantly far less attention paid to word *use* when looking for word knowledge in their dictionaries.

Finally, the researcher calls for this study to be replicated in other contexts and countries of different L1 backgrounds. This will enable us to find out if there are any discrepancies between EFL learners of different L1 backgrounds in terms of interest and attention paid to the three word knowledge aspects when consulting dictionaries (e.g. is word use given significantly more attention amongst EFL Latin learners than amongst Arab learners?).

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