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### **Pictures in online dictionaries: Issues of access**

Empirical research shows graphic illustrations in dictionaries to be useful in reception and retention. Yet, their harmful effect on vocabulary learning has been attested, too. Lexicographers thus need to decide whether to include pictures in online dictionaries and how to display them, given the constrained presentation space in hand-held portables and regular computers, on which online dictionaries are often accessed. It seems worthwhile to see whether making pictures instantly visible in entries or hyperlinking them in order to save presentation space is more recommendable. The aim of the paper is to determine if the presence of pictures in online dictionaries and their access path (instant/default visibility vs. hyperlinking) affect meaning reception and retention. An attempt is also made to explore the influence of pictures on the time of decoding. In an online experiment, meaning of English infrequent nouns had to be explained following the consultation of purpose-built, monolingual online dictionary entries. Three test versions were created, depending on access to pictures in the supplied entries: a test where entries contained pictures visible by default, a test with pictures available by clicking hyperlinks in entries, a test without access to any pictures. The results show that meaning reception is the most successful when pictures are either visible by default or hyperlinked. Learning meaning, in turn, is facilitated by pictures visible by default; entries with hyperlinked pictures are no more useful than those without any pictorial support. Hyperlinked pictures also extend comprehension time, while instantly visible ones do not. The study confirms, then, that pictures in online dictionaries are useful for reception, and suggests that they need to be instantly visible if meaning is to be remembered.