

Inside and Outside the Changing World of EFL Lexicography

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EFL dictionaries have a history of about 80 years. Minamide (1998) divides the development of the dictionaries into four phases and characterizes them as follows: “Genesis” (1940’s-1960’s), “The age of information condensation and codification” (1970’s), “The age of easy information retrieval and corpus” (1980’s and early 1990’s), and “The age of corpus-based lexicography” (1995 onward). In the mid-1990’s, EFL dictionaries uniformly turned to corpus basis and ease of use. The selection of headword items, the identification of collocations, and the identification and ordering of senses are determined by frequency. Examples are mainly taken from the corpus. Accurate corpus-based information is presented in an accessible way. However, this is not without its problems.

The environment surrounding EFL dictionaries, English language learning, and information search is changing. While there is a shift from paper to electronic media, EFL dictionaries are increasingly facing competition from free services such as reference works, translation software, and generative AI available through smart devices. Against this backdrop, Macmillan closed its dictionary website and withdrew from the market at the end of June 2023. While the situation is expected to remain tough for EFL dictionaries, education in dictionary use will become even more important to prevent dictionaries from becoming obsolete, to make students realize the true value of dictionaries, and to get the students to use the dictionaries fully.

References

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