# English Learners' Dictionaries in Sri Lanka – A Semantic Study

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# Abstract

This thesis begins with a discussion of data, theory and method used in the study and followed by a review of research into dictionary use. A number of experimental design problems are discussed, in particular the unreliability of questionnaire responses, and the need for detailed accounts of individual dictionary consultations whilst sampling in numbers sufficient to represent specified populations.

The following chapter contains a general discussion of sense relations including synonymy and hyponymy from the standpoint of contemporary lexicological theory. The study reported in the next chapter analyzes and evaluates various defining strategies and techniques of the four learners' dictionaries which are currently on the Sri Lankan market.

The experiments reported in the subsequent chapter investigate issues raised in the review. The first is a questionnaire-based survey which gives a broad picture of dictionary use in Sri Lanka. The second study finds that dictionary use during a reading comprehension test did not affect completion speed and test scores. The apparent failure of dictionary use to improve comprehension is attributed to the test itself, the dictionaries, and the users' choice of look-up words.

The ability of users to interpret dictionary entries is investigated in two further studies. The findings indicate that there is significant difference between four major EFL dictionaries in terms of speed of consultation but not overall productive success. The last study leads to the conclusion that language and cultural background of the users does affect the success with which learners use EFL dictionaries.

The findings also indicate that dictionary consultation is a process in which users match pre-existing beliefs about word meaning and behavior against segments in the dictionary entry. Where pre-existing belief and dictionary information conflict, dictionary information is sometimes overridden. Finally, the findings suggest that word knowledge will be acquired through modifications to the dictionary entry and the training of users.