

ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' USE OF ONLINE DICTIONARY IN TRANSLATION STUDY: A SURVEY AT A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

Ngan-Giang Dang¹

Abstract: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse impacts, classes were moved online, facilitating the use of computerized learning assistant tools. Online dictionaries, thus, have become even more widely used even though they were already popular in this digital era. This study aims to shed light on how English majors at a public universities in Hanoi used web-based dictionaries during Translation study as well as how they perceive their advantages and disadvantages. An online questionnaire survey was delivered to 182 third-year and fourth-year students who participated in Translation courses. The findings show that most students employed online dictionary with great frequency, mostly for checking lexical meanings and finding collocations, and expected a great number of examples of word use in contexts. The paper also reveals the students' perceptions of the effects of online dictionaries on their Translation study. On that basis, some recommendations for using web-based dictionary in teaching and learning Translation are put forward with a hope to allow instructors and learners to make the best use of the available resources. It is also hoped that the research results can provide a foundation for integrating a training course on using computer-aided translation tools in the curriculum.

Keywords: online dictionary, web-based dictionary, translation training, tertiary education

¹Hanoi University, Email: giangdn@hanu.edu.vn.

1. Introduction

The last decades have observed an evolution of dictionary formats, ranging from paper-based, pocket electronic, CD-ROM to online dictionary (Asswachaipaisan, 2014). It is undeniable that the digital era has contributed to boosting the popularity of online learning tools, making online dictionary more widely used than printed dictionary. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning as a result of health measures in response to it have also added to the preference for web-based dictionary. In fact, to adapt to the new use trend, almost all major traditional dictionaries have had digital versions to be used on personal computers, laptops, smartphones and other electronic devices, whether partial or full, paid or free, in form of a website or mobile phone application, as an attempt to provide language reference products and services. In recent years, the quality of online dictionaries has gradually been improved with more detailed lexicographic information and higher speed.

Dictionary has been broadly recognized as an indispensable means of reference for foreign language learners and users in general and translation learners in particular (Lew, 2016; Kobayashi, 2006; Ramos, 2005). According to Altuwairesh (2022), given the advent of technology and the popularity of electronic dictionaries among users, there is a need to examine how students of translation specialization perceive the use of this type of dictionary. Thus, this research was carried out as an effort to identify the role of digital dictionary in translation from learners' perspectives as well as to provide a more thorough understanding of its contributions to translation teaching and learning. On that basis, recommendations for translation pedagogy and suggestions for translation students as users of online dictionary can be drawn.

2. Literature review

2.1. Dictionary use

On the basis of its design, dictionary can be categorized into paper-based dictionary and digital dictionary, which can be in the

form of a website or application. Since dictionary is supposed to facilitate foreign language learners' vocabulary acquisition and expansion for both reception and production, fundamental elements of a dictionary, whether online or in print form, normally include "the meanings of words, their pronunciation, examples of usage, usage notes, and the like" (Lan, 2005, p. 18). Recently, with more emphasis on learners' communicative competence, digital dictionary has also aimed towards becoming a consultation tool for effective communication. According to Lan (2005), online dictionaries outshine its printed counterparts by providing a detailed look at various aspects of core vocabulary, including grammar, style, diction, word formation, gender, social groups and scientific forms, and even etymological information, synonym paragraphs, and regional notes, to explore the language in both breadth and depth. Some of them are even linked to language corpora, allowing users to draw inferences from authentic usage of a word (Lew, 2016).

It is observed that learners of translation study often use two types of dictionary, categorized on a language basis (Mustika, 2021), during their translation tasks: monolingual dictionary and bilingual dictionary. Monolingual dictionary is a type of reference work that provides an explanation of a word in its language, helping the learners better understand how to use it in a sentence and specific contexts. Bilingual dictionary, meanwhile, facilitates users' understanding of a word in source language by providing its equivalents in target language. Bilingual dictionary seems to play a more important role in the study of translation as users tend to give more weight to the use of bilingual dictionary than monolingual dictionary as a tool of reference for seeking equivalents of the words they do not know during the translation process (Altuwairesh, 2022; Mahmoud, 2017).

As L2 students often consult dictionaries, either paper-based or web-based, for hints to get them through the text they have to translate (Mustika, 2021), they can often be benefitted in various ways. Online dictionary, in comparison to paper one, can better support students' vocabulary acquisition due to a greater range of lexical information,

such as thesaurus, corpus, and lexical relationship information available in a dictionary entry (Barham, 2017; Ramos, 2005). Besides, the electronic features of web-based dictionary also allow faster search results, helping learners save time during their usage (Asswachaipaisan, 2014). Since dictionaries are unquestionably a valuable source for translation, it is the use of learners that decides how effective dictionaries can be. Given that more learners used dictionary apps and online dictionaries rather than traditional paper dictionaries (Altuwairesh, 2022), more research into online dictionary users' preferences and behaviors should be conducted in the context of technological development.

2.2. Existing studies on use of online dictionary in translation study

A great number of studies have been carried out on L2 learners' use of online dictionary, yet they mainly focus on its role in a language classroom in general and vocabulary comprehension and acquisition in particular (Barham, 2017; Chen, 2012; Knežević et al, 2021). A fewer number has shed light on students of translation and their dictionary use. Kodura (2016) identified the use of different types of dictionary by Polish students of translation specialization. Similarly, Altuwairesh (2021) also adopted a quantitative approach to examine Arabian students' use. However, these results could not be generalized due to small samples of single site studies. Adopting a different research approach, Tulgar (2017) conducted observations and interviews to explore Turkish students' use of both printed and online dictionary as well as their perceptions of their advantages and disadvantages. However, the subjects of the study are not limited to translation majors. Similarly, Liang and Xu (2018), through recordings and interviews, explored Chinese students' dictionary use behaviors in a L1-L2 translation task. Nevertheless, their findings were based chiefly on an observation, thus there remains room for further research with other approaches.

A gap in research on learners' use of online dictionary as a tool in Translation study can still be spotted, especially in the Vietnamese

context and at tertiary level. Le and Dao (2019) seem to be among the few researchers to investigate English majors' perception of utilizing online dictionaries in translation and interpretation. The findings, acquired from a mixed-methods approach, showed that university students whose major is Translation and Interpretation appeared to perceive online dictionaries as beneficial, particularly thanks to their fast speed and convenience. However, merely a relatively limited sample at one university from southern Vietnam was examined.

On the basis of these pioneers, this study was conducted with the aim to void the research gap and shed more light on Vietnamese users' use of online dictionary, particularly those from a similar setting from regions of Vietnam.

3. Research question

The aim of the current study is to examine English majors' use of online dictionary during learning Translation and their opinions on this type of dictionary. In order to achieve this aim, this research was conducted in attempt to answer two research questions:

- *In what way do English majors use online dictionaries when learning Translation?*
- *What are English majors' opinions on online dictionary?*

4. Methodology

4.1. Design of the study

Survey research design was adopted to answer the research questions. This design, as a procedure in quantitative research, was appropriate to the current study because it aims to describe trends in students' practices and record their viewpoints rather than to provide explanations, relate variables or predict outcomes (Creswell, 2015), which matches the aim of this study. In particular, this study used a cross-sectional design in which quantitative data were collected at one

point in time, and then analyzed statistically. Creswell (2015) highlighted the advantages of this design in measuring current opinions or practices as well as providing information in a short period of time.

4.2. Settings and participants

The current study was carried out at the English Department of a public university in Vietnam. This setting was chosen as it was one of the most prestigious educational institutes in Vietnam regarding training foreign language majors. Also, it was convenient for the researcher to be present at the setting during the research. The participants in this study were 182 students, both third-year and fourth-year, majoring in Translation and Interpreting during the academic year 2021-2022. Over 80% of them were female and their age ranged between 20 and 22. They were all supposed to be at C1 level of English proficiency (CEFR) to register in Translation courses. As required by the institution, third-year students of foreign languages had to take compulsory courses on Basic Translation and Intermediate Translation, while fourth-year students had to acquire credits on Advanced Translation. The Translation classes attended by the participants in this study met both in person and online due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding health measures at the time of the study. Table 1 demonstrates the detailed demographic information of the participants, which was gathered from the first section of the research instrument.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

	Academic school year		Gender	
	3 rd year	4 th year	Male	Female
Number of students	106	76	28	154
Percentage	58.2%	41.8%	15.4%	84.6%

4.3. Data collection

In order to collect data, the current study adapted a questionnaire from a recent research study by Le and Dao (2019). As their research shared similar aims and was conducted in a similar setting with this study, using their questionnaire as a basis to develop a research instrument for this study can help ensure its validity and reliability. The questionnaire consists of three sections with a total number of 13 items in slightly different formats. The first section includes two closed-ended items seeking background information about the participants, including their gender and current school year. The second section contains nine closed- and semi-ended items along with two open-ended questions. These closed- and semi-ended items investigate the respondents' preferences and habits of using online dictionary, the purposes of their use, their opinions about the benefits and drawbacks of online dictionary. The two open-ended items aim to collect the participants' strategies in using online dictionary and their perceptions of the effects of online dictionary on their Translation study. The questionnaire was in English as the participants were at the C1 level of English proficiency (CEFR), which can help avoid misunderstanding of the questionnaire contents.

Before the data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with a sample of 20 English majors, including 10 third-year students and 10 fourth-year students. The pilot results were used to make some minor adjustments to the wording of the questionnaire to make it more concise and straight-to-the-point, which helps improve its validity. The Cronbach alpha of the scale was not calculated as the pilot sample was limited. However, the reliability of the questionnaire was ensured as it was adapted from the questionnaire by Le and Dao (2019), whose internal consistency was already tested. Once the questionnaire was finalized, the data collection was started by sending an email to all third-year and fourth-year English majors to inform them of the

research aims as well as their rights for voluntary participation and anonymity.

A Google Form link to the questionnaire was also attached in this email. After one week, another email was sent to the students to remind them of filling out the questionnaire. 182 responses were recorded, resulting in a response rate of 61%. The findings were extracted from Google Form, and then analyzed using descriptive analysis. In particular, frequencies and percentages were tabulated and interpreted to present the quantitative data of the closed-ended items in the questionnaire. The findings generated from the open-ended items were also quantitatively processed to draw a conclusion on students' use of online dictionary and their perceptions.

5. Findings and discussions

5.1. Students' varied use of online dictionaries when learning Translation

This section reports the findings of the current study and discusses them in relation to existing literature. To begin with, the students' habits of using online dictionary were examined in the first three items of the questionnaire and demonstrated in Table 2. It can be seen from Table 2 that all participants used online dictionaries on a regular basis while learning Translation. Over half of them (53.3%) hardly performed translation without an online dictionary, probably because most of them were in the basic level of translation studies. Besides, laptops were the most popular gadget used to access web-based dictionaries, which accounts for 86.8%, followed by smartphones with merely 13.2%. This result is not in agreement with Le and Dao's (2019) study which found that smartphones were most often used as a device for electronic dictionaries. It might be explained by the fact that the participants in the current research had to take classes online during the translation course, thus, using laptops was more convenient.

Table 2:Students' habits of using online dictionary

		Frequency	Percentage
Frequency of use	Never	0	0%
	Rarely	0	0%
	Sometimes	0	0%
	Often	85	46.7%
	Always	97	53.3%
Electronic devices	Smartphone	24	13.2%
	Laptop	158	86.8%
	Tablet	0	0%
Number of online dictionary in use for a word	1	8	4.4%
	2-3	171	94%
	≥4	3	1.6%

Table 2 also demonstrates that most of the respondents referred to two or three online resources to look up a word. As stated in the open-ended item in the questionnaire, the respondents tend to check a monolingual dictionary first then a bilingual dictionary for equivalence when performing English-Vietnamese translation. For Vietnamese-English translation, a bilingual dictionary is often used primarily to “seek equivalents of a word in the target language”, and then a monolingual dictionary is referred to in order to “double check the appropriateness of their meanings”. Most students revealed that they check two or three dictionaries at a time to “gain a more variety of examples and contexts where the word is used”. Some of them also referred to various dictionaries to “choose the most appropriate and natural expressions”. To ensure the accuracy of an online dictionary was another reason provided by some respondents, which confirmed the implication drawn by Le and Dao (2019).

The students' preferences for the type of online dictionary are illustrated in Table 3. It shows that English monolingual dictionaries seemed more preferred than bilingual ones with prevailing numbers of participants in most monolingual dictionaries. This finding is different

from existing studies (Altuwairesh, 2021; Le & Dao, 2019), which found that students of translation studies tended to favor bilingual dictionaries over monolingual ones. In particular, the majority of the participants used trusted and established digital sources such as Cambridge (92.31%) and Oxford (69.23%). Meanwhile, Google Translate turned out to be the most commonly used bilingual dictionary website, which is similar to the results reached by Altuwairesh (2021) and Le and Dao (2019), despite its “somehow questioned accuracy of translation” as mentioned by a student in the open-ended item. Apart from these online resources, many respondents also used the online thesaurus and collocation dictionaries, which account for 42.86% and 36.26%, respectively. This finding affirms Ramos (2005)’s argument that thesaurus, corpus, and lexical relationship information is also often searched for during the use of a dictionary.

Table 3: Students’ preferences for online dictionary

Type of dictionary		Frequency	Percentage
Bilingual dictionary	Google Translate	115	63.19%
	tratu.soha.vn	54	29.67%
	vtudien.com/viet-anh	24	13.19%
	dict.laban.vn (La bàn)	12	6.59%
	vdic.com	11	6.04%
Monolingual dictionary	dictionary.cambridge.org (Cambridge)	168	92.31%
	www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com (Oxford)	126	69.23%
	www.thesaurus.com/	78	42.86%
	www.freecollocation.com/ (Oxford)	66	36.26%
	ozdic.com/	35	19.23%
	www.macmillandictionary.com (Macmillan)	30	16.48%

Type of dictionary		Frequency	Percentage
	www.merriam-webster.com (Merriam-Webster)	28	15.38%
	www.ldoceonline.com (Longman)	24	13.19%
	www.urbandictionary.com	21	11.54%

The questionnaire also identified the students' purposes for using an online dictionary. As can be seen from Table 4, students used different sources for various purposes, among which searching for meanings and for equivalents of a new word account for the largest proportions. These findings are in line with the results found by Le and Dao (2019), as students need to attain the goals of translation tasks. However, over half of the participants also used a dictionary for finding collocations and examples of word usage. This may imply that the students viewed online dictionary as a useful source of references for word combinations. Only 6.5% of the participants used an online dictionary to check word spelling, probably because it is not a major issue in translation courses.

Table 4: Students' purposes of online dictionary use

Purpose of use	Frequency	Percentage
Checking word meanings	177	97.25%
Finding equivalents	168	92.31%
Finding collocations	144	79.12%
Finding synonyms or antonyms	127	69.78%
Finding examples of word usage	117	64.28%
Identifying certain meanings in different contexts	114	62.64%
Checking grammatical features	72	39.56%
Checking word spellings	12	6.5%

5.2. Students' mixed opinions on online dictionary

The next sections identify the students' attitudes towards online dictionary. Their opinions on the benefits of online dictionary are illustrated in Table 5. Most participants viewed "convenient" and "time-saving" as the most prominent strengths of online dictionary. According to Le and Dao (2019), a few clicks are obviously more beneficial compared to bringing a printed dictionary around. However, the reliability of the online dictionary did not seem to be appreciated as much as other aspects since fewer than half of the participants chose it as an advantage.

Table 5: Students' opinions on benefits of online dictionary

Benefits of online dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
Convenient	181	99.45%
Time-saving	178	97.80%
Informative	121	66.48%
Free-of-charge	93	51.10%
Reliable	75	41.21%
Space-saving	52	28.57%

Besides the benefits, the students also provided their views on the drawbacks of online dictionary as demonstrated in Table 6. The impossibility for use during examinations was viewed as a disadvantage of digital dictionary by most participants. According to Altuwaresh (2021), the reliance on and familiarity with electronic dictionary may pose discomfort for students when going back to paper-based dictionary. Moreover, Internet connection was also viewed as a hindrance to students' use. Some students also added a couple of drawbacks of online dictionary, one of which is the overdependence on online dictionary. However, this is a general concern of dictionary use regardless of its design. Unlike in Le and

Dao (2019) study, most of the respondents in this research did not consider advertisements as a downside of online dictionary as it received slightly over one fifth of the responses (22.53%).

Table 6:Students' opinions on drawbacks of online dictionary

Drawbacks of online dictionary	Frequency	Percentage
Online dictionaries sometimes are not allowed in examinations.	110	60.44%
Internet access is a must.	93	51.10%
Users cannot make notes or highlight important details.	75	41.21%
Eye strain can happen.	70	38.46%
Users can be distracted by advertisements or other websites.	41	22.53%
Other: Users may depend too much on online dictionary without translating the words themselves.	9	4.95%
Other: It is easy to forget the information.	3	1.65%

Table 7 shows the features that the students viewed as important for an online dictionary. Most students paid more attention to the contents of this source of reference than its design. Over 80% of them considered examples of word usage and explanations for word meanings as crucial factors. This is understandable as the primary purposes of their online dictionary use during Translation exercises were reported to be seeking meanings and usage. Apart from content-related elements, over half of the participants in this study also paid attention to technical features of the digital dictionary such as website design. This finding contradicts what was found by Le and Dao (2019), probably due to the difference in participants' preferences during the pandemic with frequent exposure to online platforms. Besides, since most students were not distracted by advertisements, only about one fifth of them felt the need for limiting advertisements on dictionary websites.

Table 7: Students' opinion on features of an online dictionary

Features	Frequency	Percentage
Different examples of word usage for different contexts	157	86%
Detailed explanations of word meanings	147	81%
Available links between an entry of one word and other related words	116	64%
User-friendly website design	111	61%
Practice activities	53	29%
Few advertisements	35	19%

The last item in the questionnaire examines how the participants perceive the role of web-based dictionary in their Translation learning. As illustrated in Figure 4, all of the respondents viewed online dictionaries as an important tool which assists their study as nearly two thirds of them believed that it is of a high degree of significance. This finding is not only consistent with the great frequency of their use demonstrated in Table 2 but also in line with the results obtained by Le and Dao (2019) and Altuwairesh (2021).

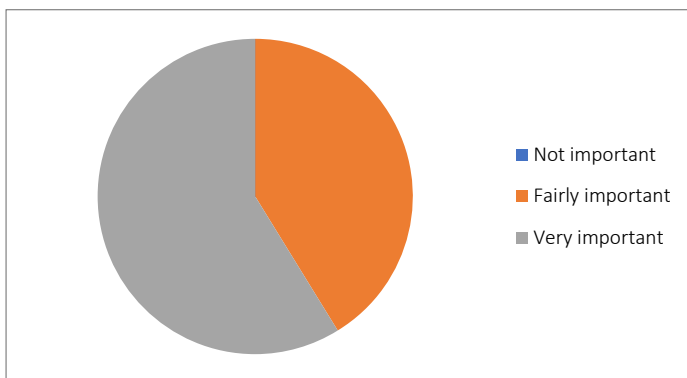


Figure 1: Students' opinions on the role of online dictionary in Translation study

Specifically, in the open-ended item in the questionnaire, many students shared that online dictionary exerts positive effects on their translation performance, such as assisting in “having appropriate

choice of words”, “diversifying the writing patterns”, thus helping them “save time during the translation process” and “uplift the quality of the translation” for “the most polished and natural products”. The main themes identified from the participants’ responses regarding the contributions of online dictionary to students’ translation process including: improving students’ understanding of word meanings in different contexts, providing a wider choice of word usage, facilitating the translation of equivalents and suggesting collocation and phrases for a more natural combination of words. Moreover, thanks to its quick and easy access, an online dictionary also helps students to “translate faster and more accurately”, as found in half of the responses. Online dictionary was also reported to be helpful in group work activities during the translation classes, which can be best illustrated in the following response:

“These dictionaries help me share proof of my thoughts to friends easily when we discuss in groups as it contains almost everything I need, such as collocation, synonyms, and contexts of words.”

All in all, the contributions of particular online dictionaries to assisting their translation performance can be summarized in a student’s response stated below:

“Google Translate helps me to translate text fast, though not the best outcomes but somewhat time-saving. Oxford Dictionary is where I learn the most natural collocations, sometimes I even base on their examples to devise a translation for my work. These two are a must whenever I learn Translation. Other dictionaries may come in handy mostly when I want to see the definition of a word in a different view.”

These perceived contributions to vocabulary expansion and translation speed and quality confirmed previous findings attained by Mahmoud (2017), Le and Dao (2019) and Altuwairesh (2021). However, some students also expressed their concern about the

negative impacts of online dictionary on their translation skills. In detail, they mentioned the overreliance on this type of dictionary due to its convenience and quick access. A student also revealed that they tended to become somewhat “lazy thinkers” and depend on these online references even for translating basic equivalence. According to Altuwairesh (2021), the overreliance of students seems to be a common problem among online dictionary users, thus, tends to be considered one of its drawbacks.

6. Conclusion and Implication

The current study employed a 13-item questionnaire survey to investigate the use and perceptions of online dictionary of 182 English majors during their translation study in a public university in Vietnam. The findings revealed that the students use various sources of online dictionary on a regular basis and considered them as a crucial translation assistance tool. These results were generally in line with limited existing literature on web-based dictionary use by tertiary students of translation specialization.

Since many students revealed their concern about being over-dependent on online dictionary during the translation process, there is a need to improve translation students’ skills of dictionary consultation and use. Indeed, Roberts (1992) proposes that “the training on what dictionaries to use, how to get the most out of dictionaries and how to use dictionaries efficiently in the translation process are integral components of translation pedagogy” (p.68). This would equip them with proper exploitation of both bilingual and monolingual web-based dictionaries to maximize their benefits. At the same time, common concerns about dictionary skills found by Chen (2012) such as how to distinguish different forms of phrases or collocations or how to make use of examples can be addressed.

Lew (2015), thus, suggested an integration of training e-dictionary skills in an online learning platform and a translation curriculum. A list of credible sources of online dictionary should be introduced to the students to familiarize them with different types of dictionaries and help them avoid unnecessary access to low quality ones. Practice exercises for dictionary use with different kinds of lexical items should also be provided to help the students experience different facets of dictionary entries, thus, becoming more aware of what they should look at when checking word meanings and equivalence. The importance of students' self-discipline to avoid distraction and too much reliance on these reference sources should also be highlighted during the training. This would also help students develop as independent and lifelong learners. All in all, e-dictionary use skills should be considered a sub-competence of a translator (Lew, 2015).

The current study is limited by some factors that arise from circumstances and procedural conduct, leaving some space for further research. Due to a relatively modest sample size of 182 participants, it is difficult to use the data obtained to make a firm generalization about Vietnamese university students of translation-interpreting with regards to their use and perceptions of digital dictionary. Therefore, a congregation of data from a larger sample of learners from multiple universities in a similar setting would be beneficial to improving the generalization of the data. Besides, since this study adopted a quantitative approach, it is worth gathering qualitative data to have a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions on the use of online dictionary.

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