URN etd-0407109-183723-1883
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Statistics This thesis had been viewed 45 times. Download 17 times.
Department
Year 2004
Semester 1
Degree Master
Type of Document Master's Thesis
Language English
Title English Dictionary Use in EFL Writing Tasks
Date of Defense 0000-00-00
Page Count 108
Keyword
EFL writing
dictionary use strategies
dictionary use contexts
English proficiency

Abstract
In the context of learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan, English dictionaries as one of the necessary learning aids play a crucial role in Taiwanese EFL learners' different stages of English learning. The grammar-translation method also has a profound influence on learners' beliefs about English learning. As a result, Taiwanese EFL learners rely heavily on dictionaries to seek translation assistance as well as vocabulary learning. Despite prior reports of negative associations between dictionary use and English writing, our understanding as to how learners use dictionaries in different learning tasks, particularly in writing, and why and in what contexts they use dictionaries is still very insufficient. This study, therefore, attempts to investigate Taiwanese EFL learners' dictionary use in writing; in particular, the differences of dictionary use strategies and contexts between proficient and less proficient learners in the process of English writing.
Dictionary use being a highly individualized activity, a qualitative research approach was employed to understand students' dictionary use in writing tasks. Five graduates of a university of technology participated in the study. Two primary research instruments, interviews and observations were conducted with the five participants to understand their difference in dictionary use strategies and contexts while writing English. Document analysis was also performed as a secondary instrument to garner additional information and further triangulate the interview and observation data.
The results of the study suggested that (1) the proficient learners tended to employ metacognitive, general cognitive, and memory strategies; whereas the less proficient participants were more likely to use task-bound cognitive strategies in writing tasks, (2) the proficient learners tended to look up sentence-level dictionary information, while the less proficient learners were prone to search for word-level dictionary information, and (3) both the proficient and less proficient learners would primarily use electronic dictionaries in writing, but the proficient learners would also tend to cross-refer paper dictionaries.
Advisory Committee Da-Fu Huang - advisor

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Date of Submission 0000-00-00