Using Mobile Bilingual Dictionaries in an EFL Class

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Abstract

Are reference skills of native digital EFL students developed enough to take advantage of having a big bilingual dictionary on their smartphones? To carry out this research a class from an Italian technical high school was observed. Students aged 17 were split into three groups of users and were given different versions of the same bilingual dictionary, the Ragazzini Italian and English dictionary (Zanichelli Bologna 2013 edition). The first group was allowed to use the Android app; the second was given access to the online version on the web portal ubidictionary.zanichelli.it; the third group received paper copies of the dictionary.

Students were asked to answer some questions about their (un)familiarity with Italian monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. Then the three groups carried out the same activities during a two hour-English-lesson.

The case study reports similarities and differences in their performances, showing that linguistic proficiency proved more determinant than access to digital versions. Students were also asked to report on the main difficulties they had to overcome when looking words up in the dictionaries and were invited to suggest possible improvements in the way pieces of information were displayed on the mobile digital version.

Keywords: bilingual dictionary use; mobile dictionary app; advanced CLIL prerequisite

1   Bilingual Dictionaries in EFL Classes

In recent years whether English- L1 bilingual dictionaries should be banned from the EFL classroom has become an issue of debate (cf. Butzkamm 2009). This is the natural consequence of the reassessment of students' use of L1 to check the final results of a reading comprehension dealing with progressively more complex concepts and reasoning. In fact, an increasing number of students with B1 levels of English or higher are being asked to read and understand such texts. It is also the result of a dispute over binding defined as the 'cognitive and affective mental process of linking a meaning to a form' (Terrell 1986: 214) and not to a translation. Studies on language acquisition in learning situations that are at least partially guided have shown that interference from L1 (whether it is the real mother tongue and language used at school) and interference of a L2 studied previously and typologically similar to the foreign language being learned, involves more than the insertion of isolated words

in a foreign language text. Above all, research on learning use of verbs in directed motion events in verb-framed languages such as Spanish or Italian by native speakers of satellite-framed languages such as English are revealing that meaning often has a form in L1 that students carry over into words from L2 (See Cadierno 2008). Quadripartition of a linguistic sign as formulated by Hjelmslev (1961) may be (and has been) neglected in studies on language teaching of beginners and intermediate level students, in which the semiotic triangle "meaning-form-reference" is conveniently considered sufficient. Its inadequacy for structures used to make complex references and needed even by beginners, for example the expression of modes, is bypassed by memorization of conversational routines. At advanced levels, however, learners deal with texts in which they are really confronted with the diverse mode with which natural languages form the substance of content, not only for isolated words, but for morphosyntactic structures as well. At that point, teaching English relies upon learner's dictionaries and their increasing effectiveness, resulting from studies based on learner corpora, usage notes and, more recently, on even more refined and frequent-mistake-based collocation dictionaries for learners of English.

Studies on teaching/learning languages other than English have never shown a rigid refusal to use bilingual dictionaries as a reference tool. The explanations can be found in the typological characteristics of the languages[1] and, therefore, in a teaching tradition that focuses (focused?) more on morphology and less on rote learning of word sequences. Studying them at intermediate and advanced levels has, even recently, been largely based on increasingly more effective bilingual lexicographic tools to describe verb patterns and rich in derivatives and phraseology. They are languages that linguists have dealt with extensively in terms of their collocations later because they provide less fixed, more easily split and variable collocations. Linguists truly appreciated the restrictions of the collocations in Romance languages by examining the concordance of the corpora, which were developed after the corpora of English. Italian lexicographers, for instance, recorded collocations first in bilingual and then in monolingual dictionaries, where today they are still found mainly in the examples, and therefore, do not receive the attention they deserve. In addition to the systematic characteristics a natural language has and the traditions tied to its didactic standards, the position a language holds in the global language market needs to be considered. The English only EFL classroom derives mostly from economic and political reasoning (see Cook 2010): a world market stimulates the creation of reference tools which can be sold everywhere. Attention to the user of a specific L1 is often entrusted to local publishing houses which "bilingualize" products by Anglo-American publishers for foreign learners of any mother tongue.

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1   We do not deal with this topic here because it would lead, among other things, to a discussion on macro- and microlexicographic structures in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of languages morphological- ly poorer – like English – compared to the macro – and microlexicographic structures of morphologically richer languages, like the Romance and Slavic languages: richer due to their visible differentiation of parts of speech as well as word formation with prefixes and suffixes. See, however, below in § 4.1 the reference to the question in regards to the problems encountered by the students when using the dictionary.

If an English learner's dictionary is "bilingualized", however, the different ways the substance of content is organized is not always evident to the learner: the entry's organization into the various meanings and examples retains the style formulated in English by English speakers (see Marello 1998). A bilingual dictionary, however, set up using good monolingual microstructures is more likely to highlight the differences.

For languages used less internationally, often monolingual dictionaries for foreigners are not produced and bilingual dictionaries are recommendable tools, not only for translating, but also for understanding a text in L2. They help to appreciate the different structures and grasp connotations while giving comparative information that the monolingual dictionary, formulated with the native speaker in mind, deemed unnecessary to the user. In addition, bilingual dictionaries for languages with relatively developed markets and a consolidated lexicographical tradition have reached good levels in the last few decades, thanks to the progress of studies on meta-lexicography, the data available in large corpora, dedicated editing software that makes it possible to check word classes and to verify the good quality of reverse translation routes[2].

It remains to be seen whether the moment has arrived to allow bilingual dictionaries into an EFL class, even though English has very well developed monolingual lexicographical tools.

2   Bilingual Glosses enter EFL Learning through Mobile Devices

In the context of the 'connected' classroom online dictionaries and translation tools are readily available. Even if bilingual paper dictionaries are banned from the classroom, and use of online dictionaries is not practiced, teachers and researchers would have to admit that tablets and smartphones provide access to translation tools everywhere else and young people, in particular, use them frequently. Augustyn (2013) allowed her USA university students engaged in a first-year text-based approach to German to use whatever device they preferred to work with the electronic materials that were made available to them. She noticed that some learners rely entirely on translation because they choose to type every utterance they do not understand in L2, or want to produce in the L2, into a translation tool such as Google Translate (2013: 367-368). Augustyn concludes her paper with the following consideration: "The groundwork for bilingual practice and contrastive analysis for vocabulary acquisition has already been done by lexicographers. Maybe the convergence of a reassessment of translation in the context of SLA theory and foreign language pedagogy, on the one hand, and an i creasing dependence on online learning tools and digital media will introduce the language learner to the bilingual dictionary in digital format?" (Augustyn 2013:381). It is now time, then, for the foreign

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2   In Ragazzini 2013 for Engl. *endeavour* we find It. *sforzo, tentativo,* but in the Italian®English section we do not find *endeavour* as a translation of It. *sforzo* or It. *tentative.* Through this unsuccessful reverse translation the user might conclude that the two Italian words, though precious to roughly understand what *endeavour* means, perhaps should be avoided in a written translation of the passage where the English word appears.

language teacher, and especially for teachers of English which has the most information online, to decide whether the use of L1, at least for comprehension purposes, should continue to be avoided. With the forthcoming introduction of CLIL[3] in Italian secondary schools a decision should be made, because such a form of teaching implies extensive reading and the development of literacy skills in addition to communicative skills. The experiment described in this paper has been carried out to verify if the digital natives are able to use a digital bilingual dictionary covering a vast vocabulary and numerous translations of specialized meanings.

3   The Ideal Class for the Test

A 4th year class was chosen for the experiment from an Italian technical high school, specializing in electronics and made up of 17 year old boys, four of which were not native Italian speakers but had been living in Italy for many years. It was important that learning English had a practical value for the future (professional as well) of the students involved. It was also important that they had no experience consulting reference materials, but were able to judge the pros and cons of having a dictionary online or on their smartphone. The teacher said that she had never used bilingual or monolingual dictionaries for work in the classroom because she did not use translation to teach, but used reading comprehensions and the creation of concept maps in English. Her teaching method focuses on the overall content of the message more than on its form.

About two weeks before the test, the class was given a pre-test to verify the size of vocabulary in reception activities at the B1 level and the ability to produce a derivative with prefixes and suffixes[4].

The instructions for one exercise (see Appendix 1) said "Use the word in the box to form a word that fits in the text" and asked students to use *produce* or *equip* to form the words *product* and *equipment* needed in the context. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the no one in the class wrote *useless* in the 6*th* blank, whose context was defined over two sentences: "The instruction booklets are always (6). They never help me at all". One of the answers given, the word *unuseful,* is particularly interesting because it is used much more rarely than *useless.*

The other exercise was a cloze test with eight blanks. The students could choose the correct word out of the four proposed. The three distractors given for each gap were semantically similar.

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3   Content Language Integrated Learning: teaching a subject in L2, usually English or French, will be implemented in Italian schools in the last year of secondary schools as of 2015; in high schools specialized in foreign language learning it will begin in the third year. It may be noted, however, that experiments with what is also called *dual learning* are widely implemented, especially in private schools, beginning in primary school.

4   For the more interesting parts of the experiment for language learning purposes and reference skills see the contributions in progress by Elisa Corino and Elena Martra.

Based on the results of the pre-test, it was decided that on the day of the test rather simple tasks entailing reference skills would be given5. The teacher divided the class into three groups: 5 that had a smartphone which could download the bilingual Ragazzini dictionary application, 5 who would use a paper copy and the remaining 7 who would consult an online version6. Most of the students (12 of 17) stated they had studied English for over 8 years. Three of the 4 foreign mother tongue students said they had been studying English for less than 8 years. They all owned a dictionary of their mother tongue, except the Philippine student who said he owns a bilingual Philippine-Italian dictionary. From the data taken from the research, 15 students (of which 3 out of the 4 not native Italian speakers) admitted owning a bilingual dictionary; 9 said they used it only for school; 1 student (Italian student B), moreover, indirectly stated that he preferred the online dictionary since he admitted using a paper dictionary only when he did not have an internet connection.

Only 2 students (Philippine student C, Italian student Q) said they had no Italian-English bilingual dictionary; 2 of the 3 non native Italian students who said they owned one, said they did not use it.

4. The Test: a Description

The main objective of the experiment was

a) to verify if students today, digital natives, are able to use the electronic version of a bilingual dictionary for reception activities without being trained to do so and

b) if the online version or app really help them more than a paper dictionary.

We prepared five English sentences taken and slightly modified from examples contained in the glosses of the entry **to break** in the Ragazzini dictionary. One sentences was constructed in the same way for to serve and another one for the word **fast**. The verb to **break** was chosen because in Italian it gives the form in – **si** for the corresponding use of the English intransitive and has a vast phraseology.

The instructions asked students to do something completely new for them "Translate the following sentences." It also asked them to indicate which part of the gloss they used to identify the correct translation (See Appendix 2)

"Translate the following sentences."

"Which entry and which part of the dictionary entry did you look up to translate the words in bold?"

An example was provided of what had do be done.

In any case, it was necessary to explain to the class what an entry was.

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5   The students with the best results were C, L, N, O, Q . C and L are not native Italian speakers and most of their errors were spelling mistakes, for ex. the suffix –*ful* written with two ll.

6   The publishing house Zanichelli generously provided the class with 5 apps, access to the online dictionary and paper copies of the dictionary.

Despite the bold character and underlining, students often disregarded the second part of the request; however, behind each student was an observer that took notes of the ways they consulted the dictionary. Only the app version, and not the one online, allowed the researcher or teacher to access a type of log file using the "chronology" of the words searched (see fig. 1)
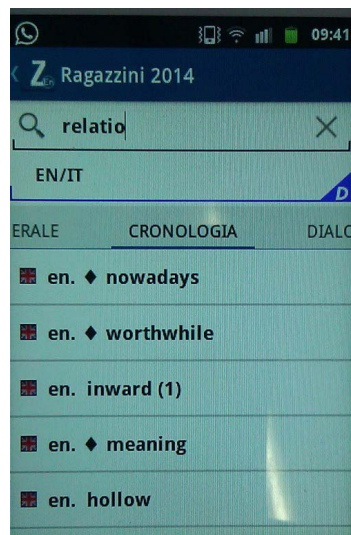

Figure 1: Search Chronology in Ragazzini 2014 app.

The observers were university and Ph. D students from the Torino University Department of Foreign Languages and Literature and Modern Culture trained to observe a series of behaviours (see the observation protocol given to the observers in Italian and reproduced in appendix 3 in an English translation). After the experiment the observers were invited to write a report on their experience and it became clear that many of the tested students were not really able to understand what a headword was and go straight to the entry with the right part of speech. The students' inability to choose the right English entry in the presence of homonymic headwords is widely reported in literature with students of different ages and mother tongues.

Here are two significant excerpts from the observers' reports:

> The student was not able to lemmatize and looked up words as they were written in the text (for ex. He looked up "cheaper", then "cheape"; "broke" etc).

> What probably struck me most was that he checked the lexical entry of the noun "break" as well as the verb "to break" many many times, going back and forth from one to the other.

4.1 Two "Simple" Tasks

Two of the sentences to translate which contained different meanings of the verb *break* were:

The engine broke when he tried to speed up and I need some small change, can you break a 5€ note?

These examples were chosen because they are functionally closer to the type of English students use in a technical high school course and, therefore, easy to translate. This conviction was also based on the fact that the meaning of the verb in the sentences was indicated as a level A2 in the Dictionary of the English Vocabulary Profile.

> **To Break [omission]**
>
> **NOT WORK**
>
> A2 [I or T] If you break a machine, object, etc., or if it breaks, it stops working because it is damaged.
>
> **Dictionary example:**
>
> I think I've broken your camera.

In reality, the first problem was that students looked for **broke** in the search window and found broke /brəʊk/ 🔊

> A pass. di **to break**
>
> B a.*(fam.)* senza soldi; in bolletta; spiantato; rovinato; fallito: **I'm broke,** non ho un soldo; sono in bolletta; **to go broke,** andare in rovina; fallire; (fam.) **flat broke,** completamente al verde
> ● (fam.) **to go for broke,** rischiare il tutto per tutto.

A second problem occurred when they were told to look for **to break:** 5 students out of 17 forgot that it was a past tense and translated it in the present. When indicating the part of the lexicographic entry in which they found the correct translation, student I says to broke v.t. 3, student B more correctly indicates v.i. 1[7], while M and R indicate to break v.t.1.

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7   In fact, in Italian the translation is *si ruppe* or *si è rotto,* therefore, it is an intransitive pronominal verb form. Those students who indicated the intransitive verb 1 paid attention to the meaning *rompere; infrangere; spezzare* and then translated with the *si* needed.

Student N mistook *engine for engineer and translated engineer broke it when he tried to make it go faster*[8] : such a mistake might be explained by the fact that he was using the online version, where if you type *engine* in the search window some other words also appear listed below the word entered. They are words that follow in the alphabetical macrostructure: in this case the words that appear are *engined* and engineer.

For *I need some small change, can you **break** a 5€ note?* We were counting on the fact that in the first part of the sentence there was the very frequent *I need* (A1) and the noun phrase *small change,* which we assumed the students would know: in the English Vocabulary Profile the meaning of the noun chan-ge is B1 and contains the same phrase *small change*

Change [omission]

COINS

> B1 [U] money which is coins rather than notes
>
> **Dictionary examples:**
>
> She gave me £5 in change.
>
> My dad always used to carry a lot of loose/small change in his pocket.

Unfortunately a good 12 out of 17 students took *small change* to mean 'piccolo cambio', mistaking it for an exchange of currencies; this did not invalidate the correct translation "puoi cambiarmi 5€?" in the second part of the sentence.

Only two translated it perfectly: student G and R who is Romanian.

Ho bisogno di spiccioli, puoi cambiarmi una banconota da 5€?

Mi servono delle monete, potresti cambiarmi una banconota da 5€?

And another two got very close (student O and Q who we had already noted as two of the best in the pre-test) translating with:

Ho bisogno di **pezzi piccoli** (literally. small pieces), puoi cambiare un 5€?

Ho bisogno di un **taglio più piccolo** (literally. lower denomination), potrebbe cambiare una banconota da 5€?

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8   The various translations 'accendere', 'velocizzare', ' andare avanti 'of *to speed up* will not be discussed here – the electronic versions often show the headword of phrasal verbs with labels of specialised fields such as *autom(obilismo)*
■ speed up
A v. t. + avv.1 *(autom., ecc.)* accelerare 2 sveltire; velocizzare: **to speed up production,** sveltire la produzione
B v. i. + avv.1 affrettarsi; affrettare il passo 2 *(autom., ecc.)* accelerare.

Student H translated word for word

Io ho bisogno di una piccola variazione, potrei interrompere per 5€ facendo attenzione

Word for word: I need a small variation, I might interrupt for 5€ paying attention

This translation is strikingly similar to the one obtained using the site[9] http://translate.google.it; however, it is clear that a speck of human imagination played its part in constructing something different in the second part[10].

*I need some small change, can you **break** a 5€ note?*

Ho bisogno di qualche piccola modifica, si può rompere una nota di 5 €?

Word for word I need some small adjustments, is it possible to tear a note of 5 €?

The two students that translated well used different formats, the Italian G the app and the Romanian R a paper dictionary and said, correctly, that they took information from meaning 5 of the transitive verb:

> **to break** [omission]
>
> 5 cambiare *(una banconota, spec. pagando qc. e ricevendo un resto);* spicciolare: to break a £50 note, *cambiare un biglietto da 50 sterline*

The students that translated *piccolo cambio* managed, however, to get the translation of the second part of the sentence and they either did not indicate anything or they indicated coherently meaning 4, since they had translated *puoi dividere in valute da 5€? Puoi dividere una banconota da 5 €?*

> **to break** [omission]
>
> 4 suddividere; dividere; frazionare: **to break a word into syllables,** dividere una parola in sillabe

Those who translated *piccolo cambio* used the bilingual dictionary the way you do when, you do not have an overall ideal of the meaning of the sentence so you form a plausible hypothesis and make the rest fit around it.

The Ragazzini bilingual dictionary gave every imaginable form of support possible: under *change* noun meaning 3 is dedicated to the equivalent 'spiccioli' with the expressions *loose* and *small change* translated as *spiccioli;* there is even a USAGE NOTE that, if read carefully, would have helped the student to avoid confusing *change* and *exchange.*

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9   Consulted 19 April 2014

10   *You* is disregarded and continued as an *I; fare attenzione* is the first equivalent of the verb *to note* in Ragazzini 2013

NOTA D'USO

change o **exchange?** Quando si parla del tasso di cambio tra valute non si usa il sostantivo *change,* ma *exchange: What's the exchange rate of the euro against the dollar?* qual è il tasso di cambio tra euro e dollaro? (non *What's the change of euros and dollars?). Change* viene usato in relazione al denaro per indicare il "resto" o gli spiccioli in moneta: *Did the cashier give you the right change?* il cassiere ti ha dato il resto giusto?; *Do you have any change at all?* hai della moneta?

USAGE NOTE

change or **exchange**? When you talk about the exchange rate of currencies you do not use change but exchange: *What's the exchange rate of the euro against the dollar?* qual è il tasso di cambio tra euro e dollaro? (not *What's the change of euros and dollars?). Change* is used for money to indicate what "remains" or coins: *Did the cashier give you the right change?* il cassiere ti ha dato il resto giusto?; *Do you have any change at all?* hai della moneta?

Moreover, it should be noted that the instructions also contributed to the problem since they led students to start with the word **in bold**; we are convinced that had we put *small change* in bold the error would not have occurred, because the processing left to right would have led to the identification of the expression first.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to draw the conclusion from the results of our "easy" tasks that the bilingual dictionaries are not helpful or worse, lead to mistakes: users normally use them for texts on topics they are familiar with. We were interested in whether students could go from the example to the meaning and we wanted them to look up the word **break** many times, also demonstrating that they had identified the correct part of speech called for by the various sentences.

It has been correctly observed that the task of associating meanings in a dictionary to the contexts of use is a complex task and in some ways metalinguistically unnatural. Still more difficult and often impossible to decide is the task of matching concrete examples to the appropriate specific meanings given in a dictionary and this is not because a dictionary is badly arranged, but because it is possible for circumstances to exist in which a combination of families of meanings is applied collectively in a context of use and not necessarily just one isolated meaning. (Chiari 2012: 116)

To translate isolated sentences is unnatural, but the task was important to evidence the problems which occur when consulting a dictionary. The second part of the test, in fact, was based on a much more natural understanding of a rather easy text, and the same students carried out the task correctly, using the dictionary very little or not at all, as we expected, having encouraged them to use it only when needed.

4.2   A Difficult Task

Students were given a clearly more difficult task when asked to translate the sentence

*In a **fast break**, a team attempts to move the ball up court and into scoring position as quickly as possible*

because it was a matter of a) – understanding how to translate technical terminology that was not entered as a multi-word headword, and b) – clarifying that under **fast** and under **break** not much would be found. Even if the sentence was itself a definition of *fast break,* in the Ragazzini 2013 under **fast (2) adjective**[11] there is nothing very useful, under **break** noun you need to go to the end of the list of meanings to find something useful, but not decisive, because just the equivalents of *break* are given.

> **Break [omission]**
>
> 23 *(calcio, ecc.)* incursione; penetrazione; discesa
>
> 24 *(basket)* break ; sfondamento; vantaggio (o svantaggio) incolmabile .

Real answers are given by the *full text*[12] search mode of both words: when the expression is searched, two entries come up, in English **to stop** and in Italian **contropiede.** Clicking on **to stop** the app automatically brings it up exactly where it appears in the phraseology of the very long entry of the word,

> *(basket, calcio, ecc.)* **to stop a fast break,** stoppare un contropiede

fast break is highlighted in yellow in the app version, framed in red online. Whoever knows something about sports understands that *contropiede* is the correct translation; clicking on **contropiede,** noun, masculine, the first meaning comes up:

> *(sport:calcio)* counter-attack, fast break

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11   The lexicographic norms always list the homonym that has part of speech noun first, followed by the adjective and by the verb.
      In this case **fast (1)** is the noun that we translate as *digiuno*

12   It should be noted that the only suggestion given to students before the test was "Remember that in the app and online versions in addition to the word search there is a full text search". In this specific case an observer gave the student misleading advice suggesting that he look for the "words in bold" separately, while the student had initially looked for the two words.

With the equivalent *fast break* highlighted in yellow in the app version and framed in red online, the observers recorded that

The exercise that wasted the most time was the one containing the expression "fast break", as well as the exercise containing the idiom "break a leg" (I believe they were the exercises that took the student the longest time, about 16 and 34 minutes).

Only three students, F, L, Q out of 17 were able to translate *in un contropiede* and they all were using the online site. One did not indicate the part of the entry that helped him and the other two indicated the useful parts of the entry *fast break v.i. 1* fast *break 4* and that, if referred to the verb **to break,** they did not make sense. As for the other students, three did not translate, six opted for 'pausa veloce' ("fast pause"), one for 'azione veloce' ("fast action") and one for the most sensible 'sfondamento veloce' ("fast smashing")[13], indicating meaning 24 as his source of information. It can be concluded that a third of the class attributed the meaning 'pausa' to *break*, familiar to them because the word is used in Italian as a loan from English with this meaning and the meaning in tennis.
In this exercise having a paper dictionary was a handicap because only with the full text search can the equivalent be found and as De Schryver (2003: 146) observed only the implementation of fully integrated hypermedia access structures makes electronic dictionaries really different from their paper counterparts.[14]

5   Full Text Search is not like a "Google Search"

The full text search is not like a "google search", as emerged from the students' translations of the sentence
It ***served*** him ***right*** to fail the exam: he had never studied hard
When a few of the 7 that had translated well indicate "to serve 10" as part of the dictionary lexicographic article that helped them to translate, they really meant to indicate the phraseology which follows meaning 10.

> **to serve** /sɜːv/ ◀
>
> v. t. e i. [omission]
>
> 10 (naut.: della marea) essere favorevole

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13   Also the translation of *to move the ball up court* caused significant problems, but we won't discuss them here.

14   In regards to hypermedia access structures, it should be noted that in the online version every word of the gloss can be clicked on, bringing up the entry that word belongs to, but in the app version this mode was not implemented, probably to use less memory space in the smartphone.

● (mil.) **to serve as an officer,** prestare servizio come ufficiale; **to serve as a reminder [as a spoon],** servire da promemoria [da cucchiaio]; **to serve at table,** servire ai tavoli; **to serve behind the counter,** servire (o stare) al banco (in un negozio, ecc.); (mil.) **to serve a gun,** servire un pezzo; caricare un cannone; (fig. fam.) **to serve sb. hand and foot,** servire q. di barba e di capelli [...]; **to serve a purpose,** servire a uno scopo; **to serve sb.'s purpose,** servire a q.; andare bene (lo stesso): *I haven't got a screwdriver, but a knife will serve my purpose,* non ho un cacciavite, ma un coltello va bene lo stesso; **to serve sb. right,** trattare q. come si merita; (impers.) meritarsi: *It served him right to lose his job: he was always taking time off for no reason,* il licenziamento se l'è meritato: faceva sempre assenze ingiustificate (omissis)

What can be noticed is how they make the example fit: *il licenziamento becomes il fallimento dell'esame* in a good three students.

Il fallimento dell'esame se l'è meritato: non ha mai studiato

In this way the Italian in the translation is not wrong but rather unlikely. Another four, the same group L, N, O, Q as before, plus A, F, L, choose a more appropriate Italian translation *Si è meritato/ se lo è meritato di fallire l'esame; non ha mai studiato (duramente, bene, abbastanza)*

Student A translates *it served* in the present but is not the only one to forget it is in the past.

Si merita di non passare l'esame: perché non ha mai studiato

At the same time, however, he is the only one who does not fall into the trap *to fail the exam = fallire l'esame* , a translation that the students did not check in the Ragazzini that gives under **exam** " **to fail an exam,** non passare un esame" and under

to fail v.t.

[omissis]

2 non superare (un esame); essere respinto (o bocciato) in: to fail one's driving test, non superare l'esame di guida; *I failed maths,* sono stato bocciato (o mi hanno bocciato) in matematica

Reading quickly through the other ten translations of to serve and then right, it becomes clear that the translation task was not so banal. We cite them here:

Esso ha suggerito correttamente a lui per fallire l'esame: lui non ha mai studiato duramente.

L'ha aiutato in modo corretto per non essere bocciato all'esame: non ha studiato molto.

Ha fatto il suo esame giusto ma lo ha sbagliato: non aveva studiato bene.

Ha servito di lei la cosa giusta per farlo fallire all'esame, non ha mai studiato tanto.

L'ha aiutato correttamente per fare l'esame, lui non ha mai studiato tanto.

Gli bastava a lui giusto a fallire l'esame: lui non aveva mai studiato intensamente

Gli sta bene di fallire l'esame: non ha mai studiato tanto.

The last translation uses the final indication in the Ragazzini phraseology:

(fam.) **Serves you right!,** *ben ti sta!*

which is – very inappropriately – detached from **to serve sb. right.** And it is translated by a student using the paper version, acting almost as a confirmation of the experiment by Tono (2011), which concludes that we read the first and the last parts of a gloss.[15] The user of the app does not skim through other parts once he has found the example.

Student O used the paper version and the other six, the one online. In this case the app seems to penalize the students, if the search starts with the entry **to serve,** because the visualization on the limited display implies having enough patience to skim through the gloss many times to get to the phraseology; on the other hand, the entire entry fits on the computer screen (see fig. 2).
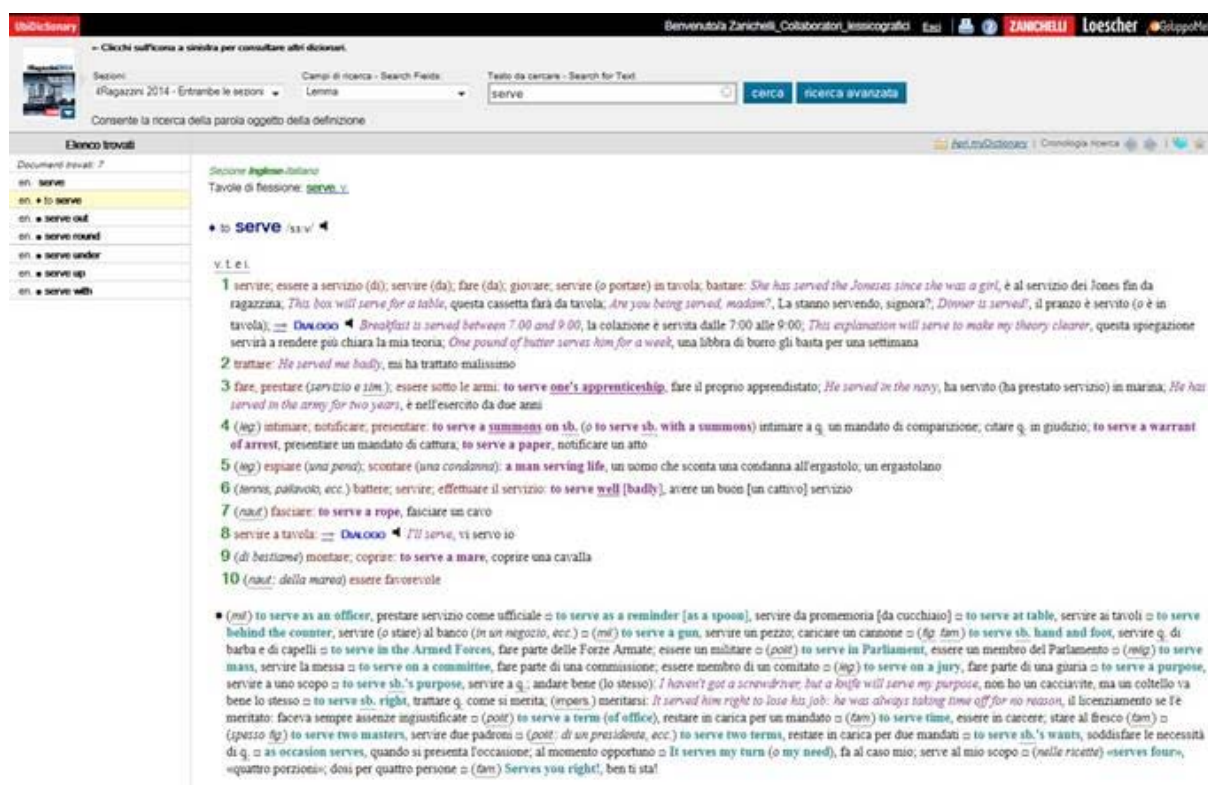

Figure 2: Entry to serve Ragazzini 2014 on line.

If the student had looked for the full text he wouldn't have found anything because it is one of the cases in which the user needs to substitute the variable part with placeholder pronouns. In other words, he needs to know how to go from *to serve him right* > **to serve sb. right.** Only this precise mode of set-

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15   An observer reported that the his student began to realize that he had to read the whole lexicographic article and not just the beginning and the end of the big articles only after three exercises. Three weeks later, a post-test revealed that the lesson had been learned; students continued to read the entire entry even though it was a comprehension test and not translation.

ting up the full text search will bring up to serve, but it does not place it at exactly the right point of the article, nor is there the yellow highlighting or red framing that there were for **fast break.**

The same problem emerged while trying to do the first exercise in the second part of the test reproduced below.[16]

> Massive and unreliable, the first computers of thirty years ago are as dead as the dinosaur. **Today, computers which are 30,000 times smaller and 10,000 times cheaper can beat them hollow**
>
> What does **the part in bold mean?** It means
>
>> a) today computers have less hollow space in their cases
>>
>> b) modern computers can beat easily thirty year old computers
>>
>> c) thirty year old computers are as dead as the dinosaur.
>>
>> d) thirty year old computers can still beat modern computers
>
> Was context enough to understand the meaning? ☐ Yes ☐ No
>
> Which dictionary item helped you in answering the question?

In this exercise the bold print was much longer than the idiomatic expression, therefore the student should have identified the limits of the idiomatic expression and substitute them with the placeholder sb.; looking for **beat sb. hollow** in Full text brought up both **to beat** and **hollow** and it is found in their phraseology.

In the second part of the text, the task was not translating but choosing the right answer from four distractors; a clearly easier task and in fact a good 12 out of 17 gave answer b; three chose a) " today computers have less hollow space in their cases" and another two chose d). Only one student answered no to the first question, but identified the right answer. Seven said that consulting the entry **hollow** helped them, two found help in **beat**

Seven did not indicate anything, perhaps because they answered Yes to the question "Was context enough to understand the meaning? " and did not use their dictionaries.

The fact that in an electronic dictionary or apps typing in sequences of idioms with variables produces the response "no results found" rather upset the students who were expecting it to work the same way Google[17] does, where *them* automatically leads back to *somebody* and typing in *beat them hollow* brings up as the first site http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/beat+hollow

> **beat somebody hollow** (British & Australian)

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16   The passage used in the first multiple choice exercise was taken from a B1 level English text formed by 432 words.

17   Typing *beat them hollow* in http://translate.google.it/#en/it/beat%20them%20hollow (19/04/2014) brought up the translation *batterli cava,* literally *beat them empty* adj. feminine singular or n. *quarry*

to defeat someone easily and by a large amount We played my brother's school at football and beat them hollow.

See also: beat, hollow

Essentially students would like something more than an electronic dictionary; they would like what Tarp (2008:123) called a leximat "a lexicographical tool consisting of a search engine with access to a database and/or the internet, enabling users with a specific type of communicative or cognitive need to gain access via active or passive searching to lexicographical data".

Here we have not dealt with tasks of consultation tied to production activities, but a leximat would be even more welcome when producing a text in L2.

6   Conclusions

The experiment has shown that without knowing how to consult a dictionary the user does not take full advantage of the electronic dictionary and, on the other hand, that a knowledgeable user is able to get the information needed from a paper dictionary just as well.

Compared to searching an electronic dictionary, consulting a paper version is slower, but penalizes the user only when looking up idioms or multiword units.

Regardless of the lexicographic tradition in lemmatization, the first 3000 most frequent English words are characterised by a peculiar morphological poverty in part of speech markers which makes homonymy abundant in the macrostructure. Students should at least be aware of this before using a handheld dictionary.

To deal with the polysemy, when opening long lexicographic article in the app an index, a menu of the microstructure -including signposts- should be adopted, similar to the ones already found in English learners dictionaries (see Medal), Latin and Greek dictionaries (see Montanari) and in the VanDale and Sansoni bilingual dictionaries published in the 1980s (see Marello 1989: 77-98)

Specialized field labels abound in Italian monolingual and bilingual lexicography but are not used enough by unskilled users, whether they are in paper or electronic versions.

Searches using jolly characters were not tested. Jolly characters are available only in the electronic dictionaries for purchase and not in the ones free on the Internet. Our observers, however, reported that students used a similar type of search, not based on morpheme boundaries and without jolly characters, taking advantage of the list of alphabetically near headwords which comes up on the electronic dictionary when the first letter are typed.[18]

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18   For example, when typing *common* commonable, *commonage, commonality, commonalty, commoner, common-hold, commonly, commonness, commonplace, commonplaceness, commonweal, commonwealth* come up on the screen.

Observers reported that students gradually understand how an electronic dictionary works and they do not need a lot of training: they need practice, as noted previously, with the homonymy in the core English lexicon, also because in the so-called collaborative bottom-up dictionaries, produced by volunteers, like Wictionary and Wikizionario, homographs are not separated. As Chiari observes (2012: 108-109) this difference significantly changes the very idea that Wikizionario gives of a headword, which ends up matching the form keyed in and is strongly influenced by the user's need for a keypad search, so that it even includes some inflected forms. For now dictionaries are not considering the option "perhaps you were looking for…" but only give cross references similar to the one seen for broke in § 4.1. This is another "defect" our students accuse the dictionaries of, whether, apps or even more rightly so, online on computers, because it represents a valid aid especially for languages with complex spelling like English.

If students had been trained beforehand and given a common basis of elementary knowledge of dictionary use, the difference in the time of execution for online users and app users might have emerged. The difference between users of the paper version and of electronic versions are only indirectly revealing in our experiment, because 2 out of 5 students with paper dictionaries were non native speakers of Italian and another 2 were among the best students in the class. The latter two finished before the others both the test section requiring dictionary use and the comprehension in which they used the dictionary considerably less than the others while achieving a very good score. Students' proficiency influenced both score and speed in completing the test, more than the lexicographic tool.[19]

The convenience of having a dictionary on a smartphone is sufficient to justify allowing its use in the classroom: an expert user practices his/her ability to use a dictionary and a weaker one carries out a (meta)linguistic activity that, in any case, has important repercussions on his/her knowledge and ability to search more complex databases. However, interviewed on whether or not they would purchase or suggest purchasing the app for a bilingual dictionary to use on their own smartphones, the students in the class seemed perplexed since they were basically convinced that the translation programs and dictionaries free online were good enough for their extra-scholastic needs. As for their scholastic needs, so far they have been limited, but that could change with the introduction of teaching methods based on Content Language Integrated Learning. We hope to repeat the experiment in types of secondary schools where teachers are preparing students of the same age for university studies, and we dare say that having a good bilingual dictionary at hand - on a smartphone or tablet – and knowing how to use it might increase these students' understanding of important details in texts as well.

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19   Their English teacher probably meant to help the two non native speakers giving them the paper dictionary and knew that for the best students a paper version would not be a handicap. See the contributions in progress by Elisa Corino and Elena Martra on these aspects. Of course, if we had performed the test in a lab we might have selected the coupling tool-testee differently, in order to obtain more telling results, but when an experiment is performed in a true class, the research has to respect the teacher's educational concern.

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Appendix 1

Use the word in the box to form a word that fits in the text
How does the video work?

When I was young, I always dreamed of becoming a
famous (1) When I was at school I decided to study
engineering, and then become a millionaire by inventing
a wonderful new (2) which would make the world
a better place. Unfortunately, I wasn't very good at technical
subjects. Any time I operate any kind of (3) ,
something terrible happens. Machines which use (4) ,
such as computers or televisions, always seem to give me a
(5) shock. The instruction booklets are always
(6) They never help me at all. Nowadays you need
to have specialised knowledge just to turn on the video. To
my great embarassment it is always a child of six who helps me
out of my (7) .

1 SCIENCE ....
2 PRODUCE ....
3 EQUIP ....
4 ELECTRIC ....
5 POWER ....
6 USE ....
7 DIFFICULT ....

From: Michael Vince, First Certificate Language Practice, Heinemann, Oxford, 1996, pag. 235

Appendix 2

Translate the following sentences. **Which entry and which part of the dictionary entry** did you
look up <u>to translate the words in bold?</u>

*Ex. Her bones **break** easily*
Le sue ossa si rompono facilmente
Entry and part of the dictionary entry   to break   B   v.i. 1

*The engine **broke** when he tried to speed up*

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

*The news **broke** and everybody knew the truth*

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

*Well-wishers typically say "**Break a leg**" to actors and musicians before they go on stage*

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

I need some small change, can you **break** a 5€ note?

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

In a **fast break**, a team attempts to move the ball up court and into scoring position as quickly as possible

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

It **served** him **right** to fail the exam: he had never studied hard

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

You can put it in the washing machine, it's a **fast**-colour T-shirt

Entry and part of the dictionary entry

Appendix 3

Observation Protocol for 5 March 2014

Objectives of the Experiment

(1) Establish the class's ability to use dictionaries

(2) Establish whether students are aware of the pros and cons of a paper dictionary compared to the electronic versions

(3) Establish whether students are aware of the pros and cons of an online dictionary compared to an app(lication).

(4) Exercises were prepared which explicitly required the use of a dictionary to verify if students were able to trace a statement back to the schematization of microstructures in the dictionary (profile

of the gloss in a bilingual dictionary) or to use the examples to find the correct translations (semantic equivalents).

(5) Reading comprehension exercises were prepared which could be done without a dictionary, if students believed they knew how to answer.

Your job is to observe how students work

(1) The time they spend on each exercise

(2) If they look up words other than the ones in bold in the exercise.

Ex. in *We have to accept the microchip, or face the alternative of leaving off the free world market* they look up **face** as well as **leave off**

(3) If they check the translations (equivalents) by looking them up in the section in which they are entries.

N.B. online all the words can be clicked on the smartphone no.

(4) If the students with electronic versions use the **full text search**

(5) If they know how to lemmatize (broke → break) or they get help from the online references

(6) If they go to the entry with **the right part of speech** without hesitating

(7) If, for idioms, they realize they are idiomatic or go to the phraseology section to look for it.

You need pen and paper to write down what they look up and the order they look things up for those that have paper copies. **Stop those with online access and smartphones BEFORE they close the session.** In this way we can take a picture of the list of entries looked up.