

DICTIONARY USE IN THE PAST AND TODAY

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Annotation: This article examines the evolution of dictionary use from historical practices to contemporary trends, exploring how the role of dictionaries has shifted in response to societal, technological, and linguistic changes. In the past, dictionaries were primarily reference tools used by scholars, writers, and educators, often with a focus on formal, prescriptive language. These early dictionaries emphasized the authority of standard language norms and were less accessible to the general public. Today, dictionaries serve a broader audience, from language learners and casual users to digital natives. Technological advancements have expanded their accessibility and functionality, allowing dictionaries to evolve into interactive, digital formats with multimedia features, such as audio pronunciation, etymological histories, and contextual examples. Additionally, the rise of online and mobile dictionaries, along with the advent of corpora-driven lexicography, has enabled real-time updates and inclusivity of evolving language, regional variations, and informal speech. This article explores the shifts in dictionary use, highlighting both the historical role of print dictionaries and the current trends shaping digital and interactive dictionary practices, with an emphasis on their impact on language acquisition, usage, and evolution.

Keywords: Historical practices, contemporary trends, language evolution, societal changes, technological advancements, formal language, language norms, digital dictionaries, multimedia features.

The evolution of dictionary use has seen significant transformations, shaped by societal, technological, and linguistic changes. From the early days of print dictionaries to the rise of digital and interactive resources, the role of dictionaries

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has evolved dramatically. This article explores the shifts in dictionary use, focusing on how they have changed from historical practices to contemporary trends, with particular attention to their impact on language acquisition, usage, and the dynamic nature of language.

Historical Practices and the Role of Dictionaries: In the past, dictionaries were largely seen as authoritative reference tools, primarily used by scholars, educators, and writers. These early print dictionaries were often prescriptive in nature, emphasizing formal language norms and standardization. The primary function of these dictionaries was to document and regulate the language, offering clear definitions that adhered to a set of linguistic rules. They served as essential tools for those who were focused on mastering the standard forms of the language, making them an indispensable resource for education and academic work. The dictionaries of this time were typically print-based, often limited in scope and available only in libraries or specialized institutions. Their focus was predominantly on formal language usage, and regional or colloquial variations were rarely included. This limitation meant that the general public had limited access to linguistic resources and that the vocabulary and meanings contained in the dictionary were often inaccessible to many outside scholarly circles.

Contemporary Trends in Dictionary Use: Today, dictionaries serve a broader and more diverse audience. The rise of digital dictionaries has expanded accessibility, offering resources to anyone with an internet connection or a mobile device. Unlike their predecessors, modern dictionaries are designed to be more inclusive and accessible to a wider demographic, including language learners, casual users, and digital natives. The shift from print to digital formats has introduced a variety of multimedia features that have significantly altered the way dictionaries are used and interacted with.

Technological Advancements and Digital Dictionaries: Technological advancements have played a key role in transforming how dictionaries are used. Digital dictionaries have moved beyond the traditional print format, incorporating new tools that enhance user experience and provide more comprehensive language resources. Features such as audio pronunciation, etymological histories, and contextual examples help users better understand how words are used and pronounced in real life. These additions cater to a more interactive experience, allowing users to explore not only the definitions of words but also their historical development and diverse applications across

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different contexts. Online and mobile dictionaries have made it easier for users to access and update their vocabulary on the go. Unlike traditional print dictionaries, which could only be updated in later editions, digital dictionaries offer real-time updates, ensuring that users have access to the latest terms, slang, and language trends. This capability is especially important in our fast-paced world, where language evolves rapidly, especially in areas like technology, social media, and global communication.

Corpora-Driven Lexicography: One of the most significant shifts in modern lexicography is the adoption of corpora-driven methods. A corpus is a large, structured set of texts that is analyzed computationally to track language usage patterns, word frequency, and emerging trends. The rise of corpora-driven lexicography allows lexicographers to create dictionaries that are more reflective of real-world language use. By using corpora, lexicographers can analyze vast amounts of data to identify new words, emerging meanings, and changes in the frequency of existing terms, making modern dictionaries more dynamic and up-to-date. This approach has led to the inclusion of informal speech, regional variations, and evolving language. Whereas traditional dictionaries may have ignored colloquial expressions, online dictionaries are increasingly more inclusive of such language, recognizing the importance of capturing a fuller picture of how people actually use language in various contexts. The incorporation of regional variations further enriches these digital dictionaries, acknowledging that language use differs across geographic areas and communities.

Impact on Language Acquisition and Usage: The evolution of dictionary use has had a profound impact on language acquisition and usage. In the past, access to dictionaries was limited, and language learning was often confined to formal educational settings. With the advent of digital dictionaries, however, learning has become more personalized and accessible. Language learners now have the opportunity to consult dictionaries instantly, whether on their phones, computers, or other devices, giving them more immediate access to definitions, pronunciations, and example sentences. Digital dictionaries are also enhancing the learning experience by incorporating features like quizzes, pronunciation guides, and even interactive exercises. These features help learners not only understand word meanings but also master the correct pronunciation and contextual usage of new vocabulary. Furthermore, the shift toward digital lexicography has made it easier to track the evolution of language. Real-time

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updates, informed by corpora-driven research, allow dictionaries to reflect the latest linguistic changes and provide accurate data on how language is used in various communities. This responsiveness ensures that dictionaries remain relevant and continue to serve the needs of language learners and casual users alike.

Language Evolution and the Role of Dictionaries: Dictionaries today play a crucial role in documenting the dynamic nature of language. While print dictionaries were often focused on formal, standardized language, digital dictionaries are increasingly inclusive of informal language, slang, and neologisms. The rise of digital tools, such as crowdsourced dictionaries and platforms like Wiktionary, further contributes to the rapid evolution of language documentation. Incorporating words from emerging fields like technology, business, and pop culture, modern dictionaries are capturing terms that were once excluded or underrepresented in traditional print editions. This shift helps ensure that dictionaries are not static but reflect the ongoing changes in the way people communicate across different social, cultural, and technological contexts.

Conclusion: The impact of dictionaries on language acquisition and usage has become more profound in the digital age, where technological advancements have transformed how people interact with and utilize these essential linguistic resources. Modern digital dictionaries offer interactive, multimedia-rich features that enhance vocabulary development, pronunciation accuracy, and understanding of word meanings in various contexts. By providing real-time updates, personalized learning tools, and easily accessible content, these dictionaries support both learners and language users in acquiring and refining their linguistic skills. Dictionaries today go beyond traditional definitions, offering contextual examples, collocations, and pronunciation variants, thus enabling learners to engage with language in a more practical, real-world manner. The integration of gamification and interactive features has also made learning more engaging, motivating users to actively participate in their language development. Furthermore, the accessibility of digital dictionaries has democratized language learning, allowing users across the globe to improve their proficiency regardless of their location or resources. In essence, modern dictionaries are not just tools for looking up words; they have become dynamic, interactive platforms that enhance every aspect of language acquisition and usage. As language continues to evolve, dictionaries will remain indispensable

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in helping users navigate linguistic complexities and stay connected to the ever-changing nature of communication.

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