# REPORT ON A.S. HORNBY DICTIONARY RESEARCH AWARD PROJECT

**Title:** Dictionary literacy training for EFL teachers

**Country:** Hong Kong, China

**Dates**: July 2021 – October 2023

**Lead researcher**: Chi Man Lai, Amy

## 1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

### 1.1 Aims

This project aims to empower EFL teachers with apt pedagogical lexicographical knowledge and teaching methodology to design dictionary use teaching and learning activities suitable for their students at various language proficiency levels, and subject to different learning environments.

### 1.2 Rationale

When A. S. Hornby first conceived and compiled the *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary* (1942), the dictionary was intended to be an integral part of EFL teaching and learning, and students were to learn how to use the dictionary to support their learning from the English teacher. However, since the development of ESL lexicography and ESL/EFL teaching methodologies have evolved on separate paths in the past few decades, the relationship between the two has become less dynamic and supportive. Such a fractured relationship has seriously impacted EFL students who mostly depend on teachers to impart knowledge and instil the practice of using dictionaries to support their learning. Dictionary use researchers have long advocated a need to bridge the gap between the English language teacher and the pedagogical dictionary. However, if English teachers want to understand and keep abreast of the development of EFL learner's dictionaries with respect to how these

dictionaries can support their students' learning of English, they need to be informed and/or trained since these dictionaries have grown in number and include new features to support English language learning.

## 1.3 What is this project about?

This project set out to produce online autonomous learning materials for EFL teachers to acquire knowledge of, and skill in using, EFL dictionaries to support their teaching in the classroom. The materials target vocabulary teaching and learning.

## 1.4 Statement of research issue

In pedagogical lexicography research, there has been some consensus among researchers regarding the use of English dictionaries in EFL teaching and learning. The following is a summary of the findings:

a) EFL students lack competence (knowledge and practice) in, and are ignorant of, EFL dictionaries.

- Competence: With the teaching focus shifted to a communicative approach, many English language classrooms have been focusing on teaching students to use language to do things in real life in the past few decades, overlooking the importance of teaching the actual language aspects like phonology, lexis and grammar, which are needed to achieve such tasks (Swan, 2010). Many dictionary-use research studies have found students lacking the linguistic know-how to use English dictionaries as reference for language learning. Moreover, many students were found to be unaware of what learner's dictionaries provide and were unskilled in consulting one or more when needed. For example, most students stop their searches after looking up the first sense of a polysemous entry, or heavily depend on the translation equivalents for meaning.

- Use: Students tend to confuse referencing raw English data accessed via search engines like Google with the functions of a learner's dictionary, for example, in learning new words. While it is understandable that the former will offer students some answers, the process of deciphering a vast amount of unstructured data is demanding of one's cognitive ability and language proficiency, not to mention time and patience. Such learning can be slow and unrewarding. Even if students decide to use a digital dictionary offered free-of-charge online, Lew (2011) points out that the information which they obtain with a few clicks can be overwhelming and suggests guidance should be given to students to help them navigate to the best source.

b)  EFL teachers need training in pedagogical lexicography (paper and digital) and dictionary-teaching methodology.

- Training and knowledge: Training on how to teach dictionary use has been rare. Given that dictionaries generally complement language teaching and learning, the linguistic theories that underpin lexicography, and the work of lexicographers are rarely discussed as subjects in EFL teacher training programmes or courses. Even though some dictionary publishers provide help, such as dictionary workbooks and lesson plans for teachers, the materials can be sketchy and are based on the use of a specific dictionary and so may not be applicable to the use of other dictionaries.  Indeed, most teachers' knowledge of the dictionary is from their own personal experience. However, the digitisation of dictionaries has, in many cases, quickly made such experience obsolete. Teachers who want to exploit dictionaries in their own teaching constantly face the need to stay up to date to understand the latest linguistic or lexicographical developments and new features of dictionaries to maximise the benefits to their students' of using a learner's dictionary.

- Attitude: Dictionary use is not always taught explicitly in the EFL classroom for various reasons. Some teachers argue that using a dictionary is just one of many learning strategies students could use and that students should not rely heavily on a dictionary in their learning. Others are of the opinion that students will learn how to use dictionaries while using them and that the skills can be acquired through experience, so there is no need to teach them explicitly. There are also practical constraints such as tight syllabuses, limited lesson time and a lack of dictionary use teaching materials. Teachers who support the need for teaching dictionary skills need to receive training on the use of latest dictionaries (paper and print), teaching methodologies and materials.

> The fast-growing development of digital dictionaries based on computing technology and applied linguistic theories has outpaced language teachers and overtaxed unskilled EFL learners.

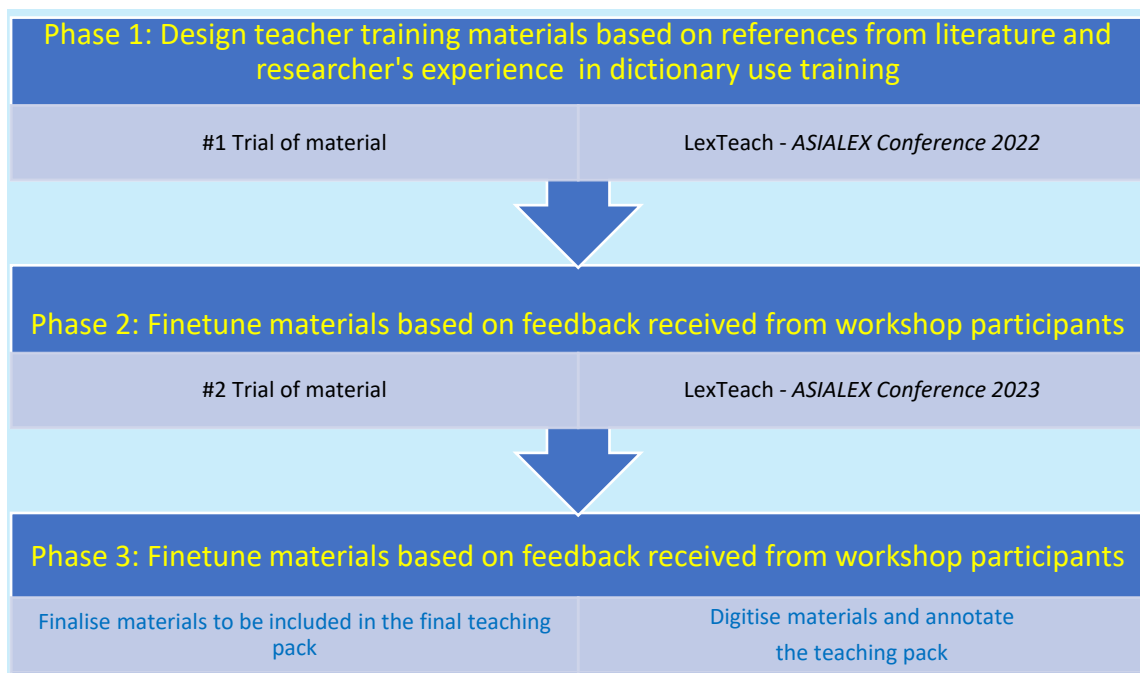c)  EFL lexicography research findings on dictionary use teaching.

- ▪ Teacher-training: The fast-growing development of digital dictionaries based on computing technology and applied linguistic theories has outpaced language teachers and overtaxed unskilled EFL learners. Most researchers of pedagogical lexicography (Nesi, 2003; Chi, 2003, 2020; Béjoint, 2010; Lew, 2011) advocate the need to teach dictionary use explicitly to EFL learners and propose the best trainers being English teachers and the best condition to teach as being during lessons in a structured language course where linguistic needs will arise and ought to be solved (Chi, 2003; Béjoint, 2010; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2011). There have been few attempts to list guidelines for dictionary use teaching and provide training workshops for teachers.

## 2. PROJECT MEMBERS

Amy has been an EAP/ESP teacher at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology for over 30 years with research interest in EFL dictionary use training of the Big five EFL dictionaries[1] for both teachers and students. Her work emphasises partnership between the dictionary and the English teacher being critical in sensitising students to use dictionaries as resources for learning.

## 3. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

### 3.1 Research Methodology

| Phase 1: Design teacher training materials based on references from literature and researcher's experience in dictionary use training | |
| --- | --- |
| #1 Trial of material | LexTeach - *ASIALEX Conference 2022* |

| Phase 2: Finetune materials based on feedback received from workshop participants | |
| --- | --- |
| #2 Trial of material | LexTeach - *ASIALEX Conference 2023* |

| Phase 3: Finetune materials based on feedback received from workshop participants | |
| --- | --- |
| Finalise materials to be included in the final teaching pack | Digitise materials and annotate the teaching pack |

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[1] *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary; Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English; Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

The focus of this research was to prepare apt dictionary use teaching materials to support EFL teachers' autonomous learning and those materials should target EFL vocabulary teaching and learning. A three-phase design was developed to experiment with the teaching materials before they were digitised for free public access. The materials produced would be pilot tested with English language teachers joining the *LexTeach*[2] workshops to be held during the *ASIALEX Conference 2022* and *ASIALEX Conference 2023* respectively for feedback.

## Phase 1 - Design teacher training materials based on references from literature and researcher's experience in dictionary use training

Training materials were designed and prepared by the principal researcher based on pedagogical lexicographical theories and her own teaching experience on the topic of more than two decades. The three major teaching foci and justifications are as follows:

(i)   Legitimise dictionary use in the communicative EFL classroom.

Within the framework of the Communicative Approach, the dictionary should be re-introduced with an aim to regain its position in the EFL classroom. For example, EFL teachers would be shown how to take advantage of explicit vocabulary teaching lessons to integrate the teaching of dictionary use. Moreover, while implicit vocabulary learning is the core channel for learning new words, the workshop would demonstrate how EFL teachers could help students consolidate their understanding of such words through additional linguistic tasks that require the use of the dictionary. It is when the dictionary is used regularly that students can practise and familiarise themselves with the learned functions and discover new functions and uses of the resource.

(ii)  Illustrate how dictionary information and technology can facilitate learning of vocabulary.

Dictionary-use-integrated English language teaching syllabuses, methodologies, materials, and lesson plans would be shown to and discussed with English teachers to illustrate the rationale and potential of such teaching. Teachers need to be convinced that dictionary use teaching is possible, rewarding, and beneficial to their students' vocabulary learning.

(iii) Teach linguistic, lexicographical, and digital knowledge that support modern pedagogical lexicography and EFL teaching.

A good understanding of some specific linguistic, lexicographic, and digital learning concepts and terminologies, and dictionary information retrieval skills, especially

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[2]*LexTeach* (Let-us-teach/Lexicographers teach) refers to dictionary literacy workshops and lectures, which target EFL teachers and aim at promoting English lexicography, particularly the use of EFL dictionaries.

search techniques in digital dictionaries, will equip teachers to plan and teach lessons which integrate the use of dictionaries. The teaching of such concepts and terminologies should focus on their operational aspects instead of theories. Furthermore, a good grasp of such knowledge would help teachers master some core benefits of learner's dictionaries and this builds confidence in promoting the use of the tool.

With these three foci, teaching materials, including PowerPoint slides and exercises, were prepared. Some teaching materials were test-trialled to solicit comments from practising English teachers at the Center for Language Education of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology before Trial #1 at the *LexTeach* workshop, which was held during the *ASIALEX conference 2022*.

### Trial #1 plan

*ASIALEX 2022* changed from a physical face-to-face conference to via Zoom due to Covid. As a result, Trial #1 had to be adapted into an online workshop open to targeted participants from all over the world (see poster below), instead of to ESL teachers of the designated conference host country as planned. An invitation (see below) was sent to various social media platforms and universities to recruit participants.
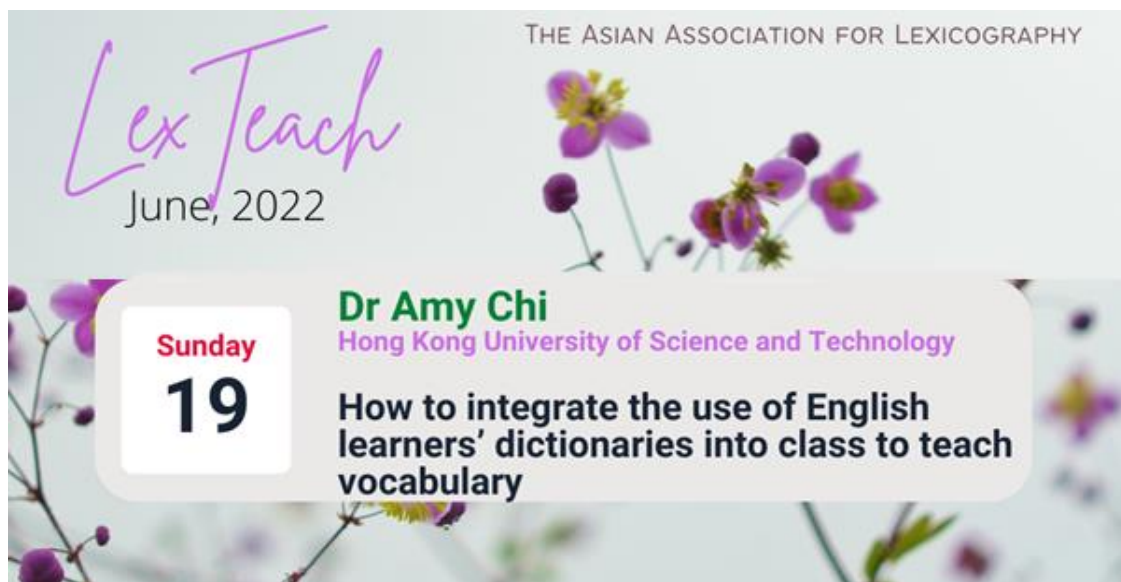
# LexTeach June 2022, workshop registration

**Workshop**
**"How to integrate the use of English learners' dictionaries in class into teach vocabulary"**
Facilitator: Dr Amy Chi, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Date: June 19, 2022
Time: 14:30-16:30 (Hong Kong Time)
#120 mins total
Language of delivery: English

**To empower English language teachers with apt pedagogical lexicographical knowledge and teaching methodology to design dictionary use teaching and learning activities suitable for their students who are at various language proficiency levels, and subject to different learning environments.**

**Delivery format**: Participants will be actively involved in small group discussions and activities. They need to unmute to talk and turn on their videos for effective interaction. The workshop will NOT be recorded.

*Registration is on a first-come-first-served basis.*
*ONLY the first 30 successful applicants will be sent a zoom link on or before June 17th (Friday).*

The proposed teaching materials for the workshop needed some changes because of the change in mode of delivery:

| Original plan for the workshop | Adapted plan for a zoom delivery |
|---|---|
| Time: A total of 5 hours | Time: A total of 2 hours |
| ▪ First 2.5 hours in the morning will focus on giving input on knowledge and skills as described in the teaching foci previously mentioned through explicit teaching, participants' reflection on their own teaching experiences, and working on interactive tasks.<br>▪ Second 2.5 hours will focus on participants designing a vocabulary lesson with the integration or teaching of dictionary use based on what they have learned in the first part of the workshop. Participants will be given time to present their ideas to solicit feedback from each other.<br><br>▪ Feedback will be collected on a voluntary basis from the participants through questionnaires and interviews. | ▪ The total time was reduced from 5 to 2 hours, anticipating difficulty in attracting enrolment, and in sustaining participants' concentration in such an online event. There were also potential problems related to participants' knowledge of Zoom features and stability of internet connections.<br>▪ The first 2.5 hours of teaching and activities were reduced to 2 hours, reducing time on discussion and interactive activities. The second 2.5 hours of hands-on work and sharing were cancelled; instead, three sample lessons conducted by the project leader in the past on integrating dictionary use to EAP classes were given to participants as references in PowerPoint files.<br>▪ Feedback on the workshop was only collected via an online survey on a voluntary basis. |

Results from Trial #1

176 people signed up for the workshop. Their ages ranged widely, with the majority within the range of 20-29. All, except two, indicated their education as college/ university level. Of the 47 people who identified themselves as teachers teaching English as a subject, most were currently teaching at tertiary level. Most people who signed up for the workshop reported to be EFL speakers. Since the number of people registered for the workshop exceeded by five-fold the expected number, the project leader had to decide how many she could admit to ensure the smooth running of the workshop. In the end, 50 places were offered to participants, 20 more than the original plan. The first 50 participants were sent a link three days before the workshop. On the day of the workshop, however, only 19 attended.

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to offer feedback on the workshop online, and 12 completed the form (data attached in Appendix II). Feedback collected indicated that most participants were satisfied with the content delivered and discussed in the workshop (see below). Suggestions for improvement were mainly to do with the logistics. Indeed, the workshop overran by 30 minutes.

1. I am satisfied with the content of the workshop.

More Details    Insights

| | |
|---|---|
| ● Highly agreed | 10 |
| ● Agreed | 2 |
| ● Disagreed | 0 |
| ● Highly disagreed | 0 |
| ● No comment | 0 |

2. I have learned something new about the learners' dictionaries.
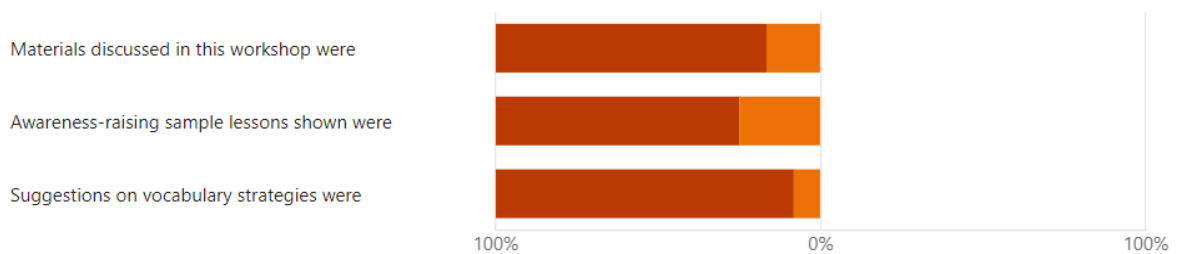
More Details   ☼ Insights

- ● Yes     12
- ● No     0
- ● Not sure     0

3. With reference to your own situation, what do you think of the materials discussed in this workshop?

More Details

■ Very useful    ■ Useful    ■ Not useful    ■ Not sure

| | 100% | 0% | 100% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Materials discussed in this workshop were | | | |
| Awareness-raising sample lessons shown were | | | |
| Suggestions on vocabulary strategies were | | | |

## Self-evaluation of Trial #1:

1)     Delivery medium

The online mode of the workshop allowed overseas participants from countries like India, Brazil, and Poland to join, which was gratifying. However, some participants experienced problems with their internet connection – some were disconnected and had to be re-connected, while some had poor audio and visual quality; some participants were not able to turn on the videos to show their faces during the workshop, which was supposed to be a requirement. All these might have affected the quality of discussion or participant involvement.

2)     Date, time, and length of the workshop

The workshop was scheduled for the Sunday afternoon of 19th June for 2 hours after the closing of the *ASIALEX Conference 2022*. Such an arrangement facilitated both local and overseas participants, taking into consideration time differences. The original workshop design included a presentation in the later part of the workshop for peer feedback. This was not included in this online workshop and without this activity, it is hard now to gauge how much

participants learned from the workshop except for what they stated in the post-workshop questionnaire.

3)      Participants

The project leader experienced first-hand how social media can be of value to help disseminate news about the *LexTeach* workshop, and possibly, the final teaching pack of this project.

Although the enrolment was only open online at the last minute to the public, the response was good with 176 registered within a few days. Also, the workshop advertisement successfully attracted the target participants – teachers and students. In retrospect, however, the decision to accept only 50 participants from a total of 176 enrolled was wrong. The project leader was inexperienced in gauging the commitment of people who sign up for free online courses; instead, she based the decision on pedagogical concerns and anxiety over Zoom connection capability.

**Trial #2 Plan**

Based on the feedback collected from the questionnaire and comments from this project's external moderator, Professor Xu Hai, the teaching materials appeared to be appropriate in terms of difficulty and relevance in meeting the needs of the participants. It was decided that the workshop would be extended from 2 hours to 2.5 hours, as the original plan, to allow time for teaching and discussion. Other changes in the plan for the second trial were made to overcome the major limitation of trial #1, which was that participants did not have a chance to practise what they had learned from the workshop.

To address this issue, it was decided that some teaching content in the second trial would be imparted through digitised materials to make time for presentations during the workshop. To accomplish this, it was necessary to, first, identify concepts that could be imparted to participants through videos and then to adapt the materials. The content on these topics was reoriented as stand-alone teaching materials and digitised as videos. Registered participants received the videos with instructions before the workshop. The identified topics were:

   a.  The concept of collocation and common errors found among EFL learners.
   b.  Corpus evidence and how it supports vocabulary learning and dictionary compilation.
   c.  The English learner's dictionary: compilation and characteristics.

The second change was to provide participants with a sample video demonstrating how to integrate dictionary use knowledge and skills into an existing ESL curriculum. This meant that participants were fully informed of what would be expected of them in the presentation they

would be asked to give during the workshop. The project leader decided to adapt a group project video submitted by students of a program offered by the Center for Language Education at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in 2023, Master of International Language Education. The students were approached, and they granted permission to adapt their video as the sample video to be used for this project.



The following is a sample teaching unit demonstrating how an EFL dictionary could be integrated into an existing English course to support vocabulary teaching.

This video is produced by:

FU Yao
GAN Yizi
LI Jialin
LIANG Xiaolin
MA Qianhua
TAN Fei
WU Tianyu

Graduates of Master of International Language Education  2023
Center for Language Education, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
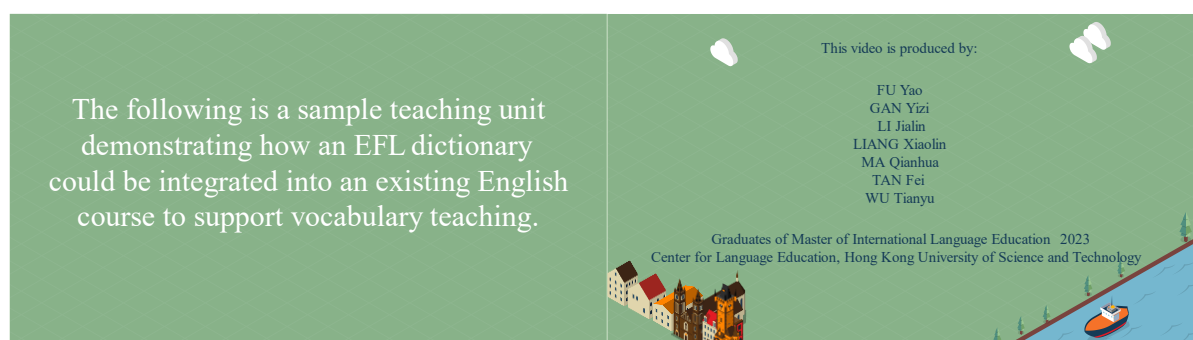
## Phase 3: Fine-tune materials based on feedback received from workshop participants

### Results and evaluation of Trial #2

There were several obstacles in organising and running the second workshop at the *ASIALEX Conference 2023* held in Seoul. As in trial #1, the conference organiser could not help in enrolling participants for the workshop.

Although the project leader emailed all the relevant universities and associations in Seoul a month ahead of the workshop to promote it, only 6 individuals signed up and only 3 attended the workshop. They were not ESL teachers but professors of various disciplines. In discussing the low attendance with the conference organisers, they suggested that the distance to travel to the venue, the timing of the conference, and the fact that people were less willing to travel long distances for a workshop after three years of Covid lockdown, could have been the major reasons for low attendance. With only 6 advanced sign-ups, the project leader abandoned her original plan to send content materials ahead of the workshop. Instead, it was decided that all the teaching content would be delivered during the workshop with the hope that there would be some walk-in participants.

It was unfortunate that the materials could not be tested according to the plan as much time and effort had been put into preparing the two core videos, ascertaining that they were interesting, clear, and relevant for blended learning. Fortunately, since the workshop was arranged as a parallel conference session, a number of conference participants joined the workshop on the day together with the 3 individuals who had signed up earlier on. Some walk-in participants were experienced lexicographers while some were professors of the Korean

language. In view of this, the orientation of the workshop was changed. Participants were invited to watch both the teaching videos, followed the teaching content, and completed the tasks as planned. Participants were then asked to reflect on how they learned to use dictionaries and provide comments on the relevance of the tasks and the videos in disseminating dictionary knowledge. Verbal exchanges of ideas during the workshop provided the feedback from this trial.

## Finalising the materials

No further changes were made after the second trial since the workshop was well-received. However, the broad range of participants in this second trial alerted the project leader to the importance of giving clear instructions and annotations on the materials when the final 'teaching pack' is designed to be used by teachers or users from different backgrounds, geographically and linguistically. Also, some participants commented that the narration in the two core videos might have been too fast for average EFL learners should teachers use them as supplementary teaching materials for students. The project leader suggested adding subtitles in English or the students' own language as an option and this could be achieved easily with existing software available in the market. Indeed, one Korean teacher took the suggestion and asked for a copy of both the videos to prepare Korean subtitles for her students.


## 3.2 Research Outcome

A Teaching Pack (refer to Appendix I for details) was produced with informative and training videos targeting EFL teachers. All the materials in this Teaching Pack are free to be used for educational purposes and with appropriate acknowledgement.

Content and format:

- 5 videos in English, supplemented with the PowerPoint slides used in making the videos.
- 3 sets of PowerPoint slides on sample lessons targeting raising students' awareness of dictionary use.

All the video files are self-explanatory and can be viewed independently. All the PowerPoint slides have been given access for editing to facilitate teachers adapting them for own use. Here is a summary of the files:

Core video 1 and 2 are 'teaching' videos:

- Core Video 1 raises some linguistic concepts which are characteristics of EFL dictionaries and core to second language vocabulary teaching. The video aims to invite English teachers to become dictionary use trainers for their students.
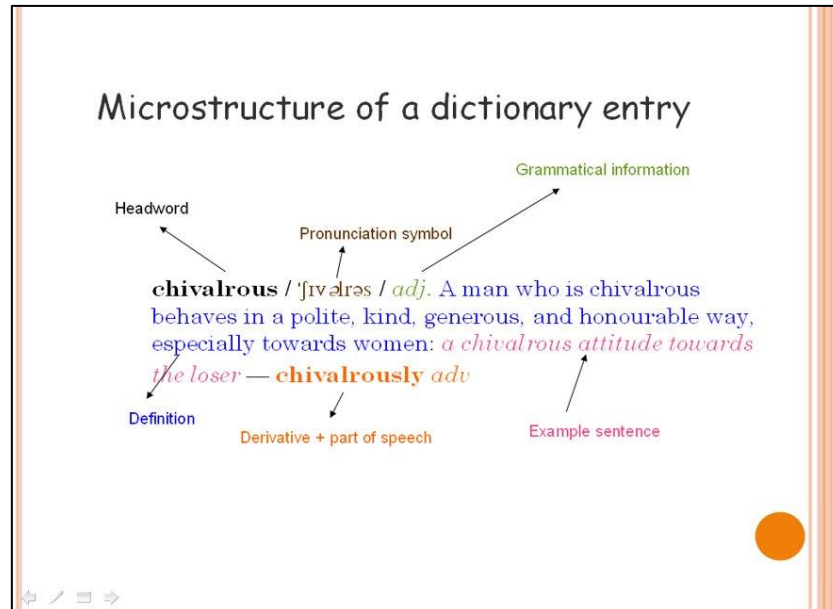


A slide from video 1 showing the structure of a learner's dictionary entry.

- Core Video 2 discusses some basic principles of integrating dictionary use into English classes with a special focus on vocabulary teaching. It also includes three sample lessons targeting EAP students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These three sample lessons demonstrate how dictionary use can be integrated in existing English curricula or lessons.
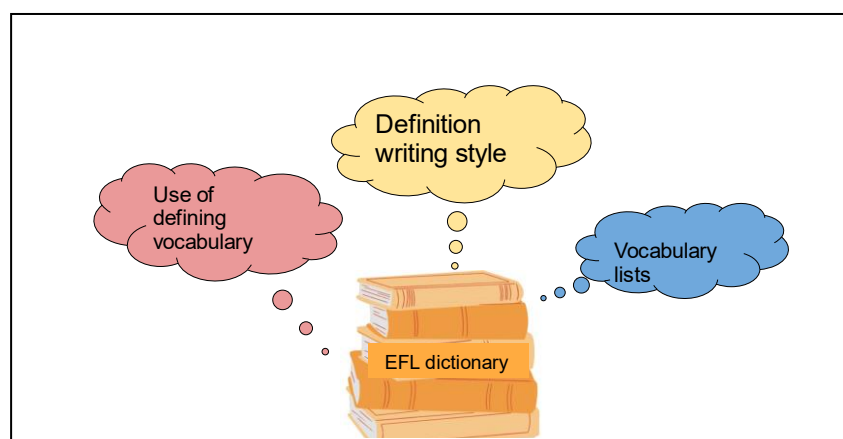


A slide from video 2 showing special features that make EFL dictionaries special for foreign learners of English.

- Videos 3 and 4 offer explanation of the concept of 'collocation' and how corpus evidence has supported the study of vocabulary. Animations are used in the videos to make them entertaining, and to ease the burden in the overuse of jargon. Teachers may consider using these videos as blended learning material for advanced students. A good understanding of these selected items is essential for teachers to convince students to use EFL dictionaries in their learning.
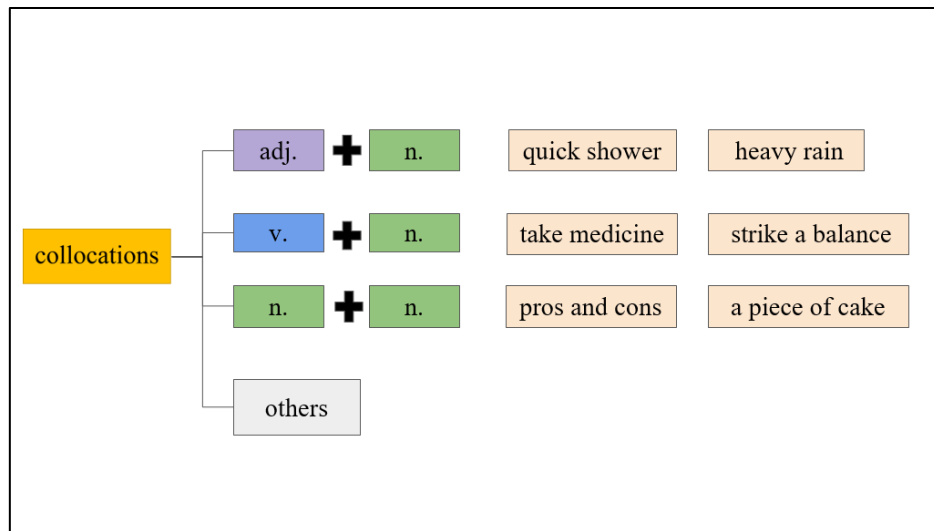


A slide from video 3 exploring different types of collocation.
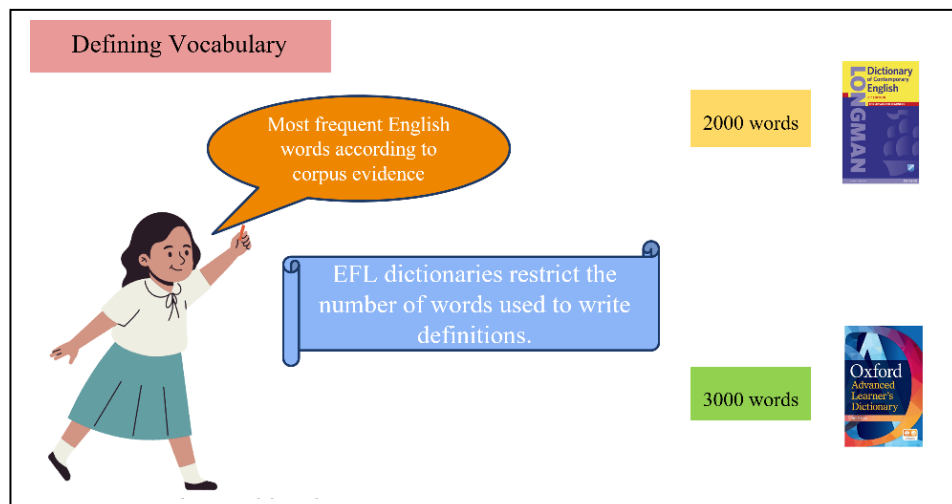


A slide from video 4 explaining the concept of a defining vocabulary used by most English learner's dictionaries.

- Video 5 is a sample teaching unit completed by a group of MAILE[3] 2023 students. In the video, they demonstrate how and what dictionary information English teachers could integrate into teaching of a unit from a prescribed English coursebook. The focus of their teaching was vocabulary learning.



A slide from video 5 illustrating how to integrate dictionary use in a proofreading task.

- 3 sample lessons with PowerPoint slides offer teachers ideas on how to integrate dictionary use knowledge in the real classroom, following designated EAP curricula or teaching objectives.



A slide from a sample lesson exploring how to use a collocations dictionary to correct a collocational error in a student text.

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[3] MAILE – Master of Arts program in International Language Education offered by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

## 4. IMPACT AND REFLECTIONS

I argue earlier in this report that dictionary use training for EFL teachers has been sporadic, if not rare. This Teaching Pack aims to fill this gap by providing self-explanatory videos and digitised materials to show teachers the knowledge and skills needed to integrate EFL dictionaries into their teaching. PowerPoint slides used to produce the videos are also available for interested teachers to adapt for their own lessons. All the materials offered in the pack are free to use and adapt for educational purposes with appropriate acknowledgement.

> With this Teaching Pack, I hope to convince EFL teachers to equip their students with dictionary use awareness and skills by showing that when students acquire such effective vocabulary learning strategies, they will potentially be more successful and capable of learning independently.

As a teacher myself, I fully understand the heavy teaching workload and various classroom constraints English teachers face. With this Teaching Pack, I hope to convince EFL teachers to equip their students with dictionary use awareness and skills by showing that when students acquire such effective vocabulary learning strategies, they will potentially be more successful and capable of learning independently. From experience, the best way to teach dictionary use effectively and without adding to workload is to integrate it into existing classroom teaching or teaching plans.

I consider this Teaching Pack as 'lexicographical outreach' to EFL English teachers who value the use of English dictionaries in their own teaching. To this end, I hope this Teaching Pack offers some practical suggestions and materials to support their teaching. I also would like to regard this project as a link between pedagogical lexicography and EFL teaching. Such a relationship was close when Mr. Hornby first conceived and compiled the *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary* (1942). I hope dictionary projects like this one could help re-establish or strengthen the bond between the EFL dictionary and teaching practitioners.

Through a free digital format online, beneficiaries of the Teaching Pack will include also EFL students who are motivated to learn about how to use a dictionary independently, and parents who are interested in learning dictionary use skills to help their children with language study.

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