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The first two international studies on online dictionaries – background information

Abstract: The present article focuses on background information about the first two international studies on online dictionary use presented in this volume. It includes information regarding the design of the online questionnaires, about the basic structure of the surveys, on the channels of distribution and about the participants.

Keywords: online questionnaire, channels of distribution, participants

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1 Introduction

The first two international studies presented in this volume focus on general questions about the use of online dictionaries, such as the devices used to consult dictionaries, different user demands or the evaluation of different visual representations (views) of the same content.¹ The results of those studies will be presented in detail in the following four chapters. In addition to that, this contribution serves as reference. It documents the general background information on methodical and procedural aspects of the studies:

- information regarding the survey,
- a short summary about the basic structure of the surveys,
- information on the channels of distribution, and
- information about the participants.

2 Survey design

The first two studies were conducted in German and in English because of the intended international target group. Both studies were designed using the online survey software UNIPARK as a web-based survey. The great advantage of online surveys

¹ Some of the key results have been already published in Müller-Spitzer et al. 2012).

is, of course, that this method makes it possible to access many individuals in distant locations without much effort.

Moreover, in a web-based survey, participating is easier than in a printed survey, because the whole filtering can be controlled by the program. To make the participation as convenient as possible, we used various filters to ensure that every respondent only had to answer the questions applicable for her. For example, if a participant in our first survey indicated that s/he had never used an online dictionary, s/he did not have to answer the questions on the use of this type of dictionary, but skipped automatically to the appropriate next set of questions.

Other classical problems of printed surveys, such as order effect and missing answers, can be solved or at least reduced as well. For example, we randomized the order of the questions wherever it was reasonable to minimize question order effects (Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988). As well, if a response was missing, an error message occurred and the participants were forced to add the missing item.

In order to design a survey that was easy for everybody to understand, great emphasis was placed on the implementation of several examples and explanatory transitional paragraphs. For example, all the basic terms were explained fully (cf. Figure 1) and possible features of online dictionaries were illustrated using various screenshots. Whenever it was possible, we used multiple indicators of one construct to increase its reliability and informativeness (cf. Koplenig, this volume, Example 4).

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By **online dictionary**, we mean a dictionary that can be accessed via the internet, as opposed to other electronic dictionaries, such as CD-ROM-based dictionaries or dictionaries which can be used on a pocket PC.

Have you ever used an online dictionary?

Yes No

Next

Fig. 1: Screenshot of the first survey.

Furthermore, an online survey as we designed it allows it to present questions or tasks in a very user-friendly way. For example, one of the main questions of the first questionnaire was to rate ten criteria which make a good online dictionary. The participants could carry out this task by drag & drop the ten items (cf. Figure 2). This form of presentation has several advantages over paper and pencil surveys, e.g., it is very intuitive and it is possible to re-arrange the criteria several times.

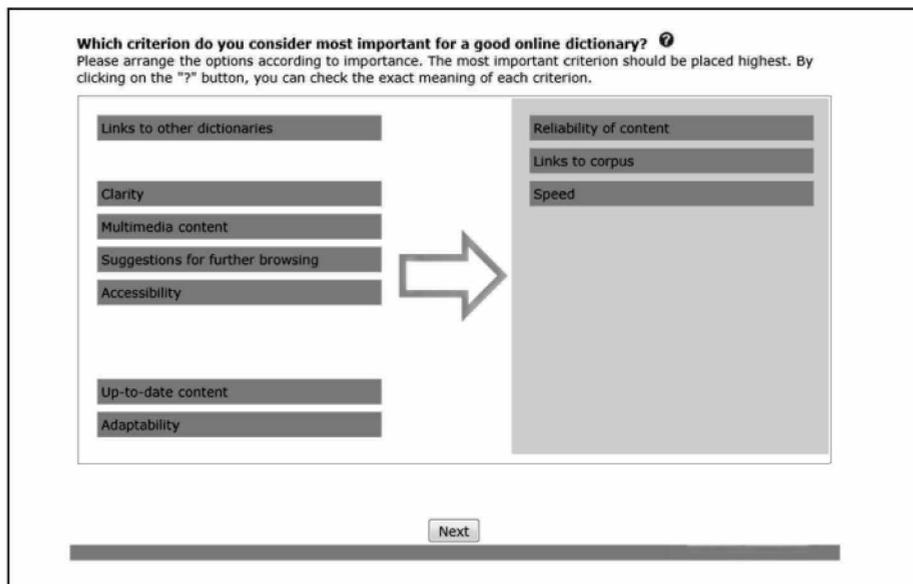


Fig. 2: The ranking task.

3 Research objectives

The first survey took approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete. It consisted of six core elements: an introduction (language selection, general survey conditions), a set of questions on internet usage (e. g. frequency, duration, self-assessment), a questions on contexts of dictionary use (cf. chapter 5, this volume) a set of questions on the use of printed dictionaries (e. g. types of dictionary used), a set of questions on the use of online dictionaries (e. g. types of dictionary used, devices used, activities, usage occasions, user demands) (cf. chapters 6 & 7, this volume), a set of questions on demographics (e. g. sex, age, occupation), and a conclusion (thanks, prize draw details). The survey was activated from 9 February 2010 to March 2010.

Drawing on the results of the first study, the second one examined more closely whether the respondents had differentiated views on individual aspects of the criteria rated in the first study. For example, “reliability of content” was the criterion that the majority of participants in the first study rated as the most important criterion of a good online dictionary. In the second study, we tried to determine precisely what the respondents meant by “reliability of content” (cf. chapter 7, this volume). The purpose of the second survey was mainly to collect empirical data about the respondents’ evaluation of different visual representations (views) of the same content (cf. chapter 8, this volume). It consisted of seven core elements: an introduction (language selection, general survey conditions), a set of questions on the criteria rated as most important for a good online dictionary in the first study, a set of questions on the criteria rated on average as unimportant for a good online dictionary in the first study, a set of questions on different search functions of online dictionaries, a set of questions on different visual representations (views) of the same content, a set of questions on demographics (e.g. sex, age, occupation), and a conclusion (thanks, prize draw details). Using the same methodology as the first study, the second study was designed as an online survey that took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete and was conducted both in German and in English. All other general conditions, such as the construction of the survey and its distribution, were also in accordance with the first study. The survey was activated from 11 August 2010 to 16 September 2010.²

4 Channels of distribution

Both surveys were distributed through multiple channels such as ‘Forschung erleben’ (‘experience research’), which is an online platform for the distribution of empirical surveys run and maintained by the chairs of social psychology at the University of Mannheim and visited by students of various disciplines, mailing lists including the Linguist List (a list for students of linguistics and linguists all over the world hosted by the Eastern Michigan University), the Euralex List (a list from the European Association of Lexicography), and U-Forum (a German mailing list for professional translators), and various disseminators (e.g. lecturers at educational institutions).

² A print version of both questionnaires is available under www.using-dictionaries.info.

Participants

A total of 684 participants completed the first survey and 390 the second survey. For a better understanding of possible user requirements, participants were asked about their academic (yes/no) and professional background (yes/no). Data on demographic characteristics were also collected. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results.

	First survey (N = 684)		Second survey (N = 390)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Linguist	54.82%	45.18%	46.39%	53.61%
Translator	41.96%	58.04%	37.89%	62.11%
Student of linguistics	41.08%	58.92%	37.89%	62.11%
English/German teacher (with English/German as mother tongue)	11.55%	88.45%	11.37%	88.63%
EFL/DAF teacher	16.52%	83.48%	10.82%	89.18%
English/German learner	13.89%	86.11%	9.04%	90.96%

Tab. 1: Demographics – academic and professional background.

	First survey (N = 684)	Second survey (N = 390)
	Language version of the questionnaire	English: 46.35% German: 53.65%
Sex	Female: 63.29% Male: 36.71%	Female: 60.52% Male: 39.48%
Age	Younger than 21: 4.30% 21-25: 17.19% 31-30: 19.59% 31-35: 11.41% 36-45: 18.67% 36-55: 14.67% Older than 55: 14.22%	Younger than 21: 3.90% 21-25: 12.73% 31-30: 20.52% 31-35: 11.95% 36-45: 15.06% 36-55: 18.96% Older than 55: 16.88%
Command of English/German	Mother tongue: 64.33% Very good: 27.78% Good: 6.14% Fair: 1.46% Poor: 0.29% None: 0.00%	Mother tongue: 69.77% Very good: 24.81% Good: 3.62% Fair: 1.81% Poor: 0.00% None: 0.00%

Tab. 2: Demographics – personal background.

A closer look at Table 1 reveals that our sample is biased towards linguists and translators, of course, because we spreaded the invitation to participate on various mailing lists that are mainly frequented by those groups as mentioned in the last section. This bias was intended by us, since it was one of the main goals of our project to find out if different groups of dictionary users have different preferences regarding the use of an online dictionary (cf. Koplenig, this volume, Example 8).

Therefore, we collected these data and used it to analyze which background factors are relevant in this context. With regard to language versions (English/German) as well as male and female participants we had a nearly equal distribution (cf. Table 2). Most of our subjects are native speakers or have a “very good” command over the language of the questionnaire.

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