

Listening (Script)

- Interviewer:** Today I'm talking to Dr James Harvey, an expert on language learning. Dr Harvey, what are the advantages of using a dictionary to help with language learning.
- Dr Harvey:** Well, of course the most important thing you can use a dictionary for is to check the meanings of words, say when you're reading a text. Dictionaries have a lot more in them than just definitions of words, too. You can find out, for example, if a word is an acronym and what the letters stand for. You can also learn about the grammar of words. For example, if you look up a noun, you can find out if it's countable or uncountable.
- Interviewer:** Is there any difference between a traditional dictionary and an online dictionary?
- Dr Harvey:** In some ways an online dictionary is better. For example, an online dictionary is better for pronunciation, because you can actually hear the word being spoken. Also, some online dictionaries have links between words, so you can look up one word, then click on links to words with similar meanings. That's much more difficult in a book, because you have to find each word individually, in a different part of the dictionary.
- Interviewer:** Are there any problems with dictionaries?
- Dr Harvey:** Oh, yes. The biggest problem is that you can't look up a word if you don't know what it is. For example, if I want to know the word for the part of a suitcase that you hold when you carry it, I can't find that in a dictionary, because I don't know what to look up. I need to already know the word 'handle' before I can look it up! This happened to me, with French. I found out the French word by asking someone.
- Interviewer:** That's true.
- Dr Harvey:** And if I've heard the word, I may not be able to find it because I can't spell it. English is particularly difficult in this way. For example, if I hear someone say: 'he's wearing khaki trousers', and I want to look up the word 'khaki' – where do I start? Do I go to 'c' or 'k'? And what's the next letter? How long would it take me to find k-h-a-k-i?
- Interviewer:** I see. Yes, that is a problem.
- Dr Harvey:** But I think the biggest problem with dictionaries is when people think that they can actually learn language from them. Some people think that if they just read a dictionary and learn everything in it, then they'll be able to speak the language. Of course, that isn't true. There is a lot more to language than just words – there's grammar, and everyday expressions. There's also learning to listen, which is a very important skill that you can't learn from a dictionary. But most important of all, language is about communicating with people – speaking, using the language. In my experience, the people who learn languages most easily aren't the ones who spend hours studying books, or looking up words online. It's the people who open their mouths and speak, and use the language, without worrying about making mistakes – these are the people who become really fluent.