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Professional and Non-professional Knowledge in Educational Discourse

The modern informational community pays special attention to knowledge investigation and the ways of its getting, processing, transmitting and keeping, and the main tool for these operations is the language. Cognitive Linguistics studies languages in their interaction with humans and their activity, the processes of thinking and perception. So such notions as text, discourse and concept are becoming the subject of special interest. Concept – the implication of all kinds of knowledge on the definite problem is formed in discourse which is verbally-mediated activity in special sphere. Concept is verbalised in text.

The study is dedicated to revealing the peculiarities of professional and non-professional knowledge representation. The choice of educational discourse is caused by the fact that cognitive linguistics is interested in studying dynamic objects, which leads to the constant development of the concept and, therefore, provides extensive material for research. One of dynamically developing objects in the international school education is International Baccalaureate.

The objective of the study is to reveal the peculiarities of mental and verbal representation of the concept International Baccalaureate in two types of knowledge: special and non-special. The official internet site of IBO provides its visitors with the professional knowledge about the organisation, its programmes and other issues, while the press is regarded as the presenter of non-professional knowledge considering the reading audience is very much varied.

The materials of the research are articles about the International Baccalaureate from the British newspapers and the official site of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) presenting 2087 contexts which represent the concept International Baccalaureate. A context is a unit of the analyses.


The choice of the research methods is caused by the aim of the research, so the methods of cognitive and discourse analyses, contextual and interpretation (analyses), component and definition analyses have been used.

So the main notions of the research are discourse and concept. Discourse is “verbally-mediated activity in special sphere” (Alekseeva/Mishlanova 2002). Concept is the implication of all kinds of knowledge on the definite problem.

The difference of the knowledge representation may be observed on mental and verbal level. Mental level is illustrated by the frame structure. So, in studying the concept International Bac-
calaureate in scientific discourse, the frame of four slots has been built: Education, Participants, Organisation and Programme.

In this frame slots Education and Organisation are almost equally represented. The following examples illustrate the basic slots:

Slot Organisation:

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is committed to support the ongoing development of a worldwide professional learning community.

Slot Education:

IB examiners are experienced and well-qualified educational practitioners who play an important role in maintaining the quality of assessment for which the recent IB is known worldwide.

Slot Participants:

The IB coordinators at your school are your best resource for information about the IB programmes.

Slot Participants has more sub-slots, because the site informs its visitors about those involved in the process of education in a more detailed way. For instance, sub-slot Coordinators counts 2.3% and could be illustrated in the given example:

The IB coordinators at your school are your best resource for information about the IB programmes.

In the frames of professional knowledge representation, there’s a separate slot Programmes including the three programmes of the International Baccalaureate. It is the least frequent slot, which is represented as a sub-slot in the ordinary discourse. Probably this difference is caused by the objective of the IBO site - not only to inform its visitors about the organisation, but also to involve them into its activity which is mainly focused on presenting three school programmes.

While analysing the concept in the ordinary discourse, which is represented by the whole of contexts from the British newspapers, we’ve constructed a frame consisting of three slots: Education, Participants and Organisation.

The most frequent in slot Education is subslot Qualification:

The International Baccalaureate is a demanding qualification, increasingly popular among educational establishments (The Times. 2003. 18 July).

Slot Participants counts 9.3% and is represented by the subslots Students, Staff and Schools with the subslot Students as predominant:

I would expect top universities to welcome more IB students (The Sunday Times. 2006. 9 July).

Slot Organisation is also presented by three subslots: Organisation, Prestige, and Interest:

The survey was conducted by the International Baccalaureate Organisation, which runs the IB (The Independent. 2003. 10 October).

So far we’ve observed the difference of the two types of knowledge on the mental level. As for the verbal level, the difference could be illustrated by the term variation, for instance by the use of metaphors in the ordinary discourse:

While welcoming more British schools aboard the IB ship, I do hope they won’t be slowing it down (The Times. 2000. 16 October).

The IB, he says, is a better discriminator of the best and brightest. (The Sunday Times. 2007. 14 October).
So it could be concluded that professional knowledge is characterised by more detailed representation – there are 4 slots in special and 3 in the ordinary discourse. Non-professional knowledge representation is specified by the use of metaphors.

References