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THE FRAME ‘A LEARNER’ IN THE BRITISH CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Education is a very diverse and arguable subject of study by a number disciplines, such as Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Philosophy, Cultural Studies etc. In current research, based on cognitive linguistics approaches, educational is regarded as a domain built up by frames. One of the frames, ‘A Learner’, is analysed as a linguistic and cultural entity. Basing on cognitive and semantic characteristics, three thematic groups of lexical units representing the frame ‘A Learner’ have been distinguished. In the course of the analysis it has been discovered that these units cooperate and interact within and outside a group on syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, domain of education, thematic group.

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The notion of education brings forth diverse associations among different national, social and cultural groups. When take linguistics and related disciplines such as psycholinguistics, country studies, pedagogy etc., education offers a vast field for exploration, the approaches and methods options varying significantly.

Before touching upon the key point of this article, which is the frame of the person in the process of gaining knowledge, the importance of education in the society on the whole should be taken into consideration. The education vocabulary, especially metaphors, has been gaining interest among academic

community. There is a number of academic sites where you can learn, find explanation and even contribute to the education metaphor. Refer, for instance, to the Annenberg Learner (<https://www.learner.org>), Learning/Teaching Metaphors (<https://www.pinterest.com>), the Oxford University Press Blog (<http://blog.oup.com/2015/02/education-metaphorically-speaking>) as well as a number of individual researches (James Lawley-Penny Tompkins, Dominik Lukes, Susan Wallace 2015 etc.).

The main goal of this survey is to reveal the place of a person, especially the one who learns as opposed to the one who teaches, as it is perceived by the Englishmen. This study adopts the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, standing that encyclopaedic information is congruent with mental perception of concepts within certain entities (Carston, 2013, p. 185; Evans-Green, p.5-6). The mechanisms of verbal and non-verbal interaction between mental entities and their sign characteristics has so far been explored in no other way but through semantic properties of notions.

But to conduct a competent study of a certain group, either non-verbal or verbal, researcher should apply appropriate methodology for classification or/and categorization of the units under study. In cognitive linguistics, the pioneering work ‘Principles of Categorization’ by Eleanor Rosch is taken for the basis (Rosch, 1978). The ideas of Fauconnier, Johnson, Lakoff, Langacker, Talmy, Turner (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Langacker, 2002; Talmy, 2000), and of many other followers have only improved the verification and polished the methods of categorization, inspiring young researches to new discoveries.

2. PRINCIPLES OF CATEGORIZATION OF LEXICAL UNITS OF THE FRAME ‘A LEARNER’

Since ‘A Learner’, on the hand, is viewed as an independent entity, but on the other hand it is one of the components of the education domain, all its linguistic and extralinguistic features will feel the impact of the dominant domain notion.

The first step taken was processing the English Corpora, with further systemic organization of the received data. To classify lexical units into the appropriate groups, their semantic meaning was taken into account as well as the sense relations of synonymy, homonymy, hyponymy between these units. The procedure has been well developed by such linguists as V. Starko, A. Dzioeva, L. Muntian, A. Bieliayeva, N. Pasichnyk and others (Starko, 2007; Dzioeva, 2006; Muntian, 2015; Bieliayeva, 2008; Pasichnyk, 2008). Thus a cognitive-linguistic entity (a frame) of ‘A Learner’ has been defined, among



other conceptual groups of the education domain, encountering 54 lexical units.

Next step was to define linguistic and extralinguistic relations within the entity, in the course of which three thematic subgroups, namely ‘A Beginner’, ‘A Student’ and ‘A Successful Learner’, have been obtained.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE FRAME ‘A LEARNER’

Analysis of the English Corpora data has shown that ‘A Student’ in the British culture is associated with the nouns *bookworm*, *disciple*, *educatee*, *junior*, *learner*, *pupil*, *senior*, *scholar*, *schoolboy*, *schoolgirl*, *sophomore*, *student*, *truant*, *undergraduate*, adjectives *bookish*, *educable*, *undergraduate*, verbs *train*, *studious*, *docile*, *trainable*, *play hooky*. While some of the words bear direct and single-valued meaning, others have a somewhat controversial character, both in the language and culture of the speakers.

Among the latter, the socio-cultural phenomenon of student possesses such extralinguistic characteristics as “a member of socially influential group”, which is confirmed by the expressions *mature student*, *student body*, *student government/council/union*.

Another interesting observation concerns the role of a scholar in the English-speaking society. On the one hand, we recognise scholar as giant of learning, learned man, a man of wisdom, a scientist, the one who has made a bright academic career. But scholar may also name the person who is just on his way to obtain some knowledge, the one who studies; and is associated with *amateur*, *dilettante*, *educatee*, *student*, *trainee*, *undergraduate*.

For example*: (1) *Of course, a literary scholar may not be satisfied with such an incomplete understanding of a text, but the ordinary reader often will be.*

As to the words *docile* and *trainable*, they are used to denote people mentally able and psychologically predetermined for the process of training, learning, usually result-oriented.

For example: (2) *But practically everyone is trainable, which is why colleges and universities, as enrollment has increased, have turned themselves more and more into training schools.* (3) *While this opportunity of educating and training a docile people was in the main neglected, savage abuse of power by their chiefs was prevented.*

Another thematic group, ‘A Successful Learner’ is composed of 10 lexical units: nouns *alumna / alumnus*, *bachelor*, *class*, *diplomate*, *examinee*, *graduate*, *master*, *postgraduate*, and words-forms to *graduate*, *n – postgraduate*, *adj* and *graduate*, *v*. In the British culture, nouns *bachelor*, *master* and



graduate characterize a person who has achieved a certain position in the society by obtaining a degree. Besides, British university graduates refer themselves to one of the three groups, or classes, ‘into which candidates for honors degrees are divided according to merit on the basis of final examinations’ (Dictionary.com). The notion of diplomate in this case concerns the holder of a diploma, as synonym to graduate. The word graduate itself as the representative of the cultural phenomenon, has a widely developed structure. Besides it can act as a verb, a noun and an adjective, thus naming a person, the action done by this person and characterizing this person, it also serves the root to the derivatives *postgraduate, n, postgraduate, v, undergraduate, n, and undergraduate, v*, indicating the degree of reaching/failing to reach academic success.

Here are some sentences to illustrate ‘A Successful Learner’ group: (4) *A survey presented at the meeting showed that half of undergraduate and graduate science students think lecture notes and photocopies are enough to pass their course examinations.* (5) *Women still made up a small proportion of postgraduate IT students in 1983–84 — just 13 per cent.*

The group ‘A Beginner’ in the process of learning is the most versatile. Apart from a number of nouns coined in English to describe a beginner learner, such as *neophyte, novice, trainee, tyro, beginner, freshman/fresher, abecedarian, apprentice, amateur, catechumen*, there are a lot of metaphors for the person beginning to study or learn something new, for instance *babe (in the woods), callow, colt, (not) dry / wet behind the ears, fish, fledgeling, greenhorn, in embryo, in its infancy, in the bud, hayseed, nestling, new kid on the block, raw recruit, tenderfoot*.

Curious, however it may seem to a linguist, but the words beginner, abecedarian, amateur, neophyte, novice, tyro are defined as synonyms on the denotative level, bear very little if no differentiating features; on cognitive level they may be assumed as representative of one and the same notion, precisely the person at the initial stage of learning. Compare the specific features each of these synonymy-related concepts adds to the following sentences: (6) *You are never too young or old to learn and the skills you need to learn as a beginner are the same no matter what your reason for taking lessons.* (7) *That made it easier for Perry and abecedarian to put together a skilled, committed team.* (8) *Both institutions — for what else is the Patrick Moore show? — have their roots in the tradition of the Victorian gentleman amateur scientist.* (9) *He must understand how these are taught to the neophyte and inculcated into the consciousness to be transmitted across time.* (10) *The system used is not particularly user friendly for novices or inexperienced staff: this could be improved with more modern software facilities.* (11) *Both the tyro and the more*



experienced should be able to select their electronics with ease and obtain better and more reliable use from them.

The differing features between *beginner*, *abecedarian*, *amateur*, *neophyte*, *novice*, *tyro* are rather intricate, even obscure. This variety of lexical units denoting a man eager to obtain new knowledge may signify the importance of learning something new, the appreciation of a person who is striving for personal development, in the English-speaking society.

The etymology of the word *catechumen* reaches the times when it denoted a person who was starting to learn church dogmas, but in the course of time the initial meaning got eliminated, naming thus in modern society a novice, that is a person who has just taken up an activity. Cf: (12) *She wore the expression of a catechumen, raw and as yet uninitiated, who dimly sees the advantages of the otherwise disagreeable course before her.*

'A Beginner' metaphors are also an interesting subject for a socio-linguistic analysis. Among its associative threads, references to 'green' = 'unexperienced', or 'raw' = 'unexperienced' are found (like *greenhorn*, *raw recruit*): (13) *One hundred and twelve days before, the nine of us greenhorns, just out of training schools, took our first combat crew training flight together at Dyersburg Army Air Base, Tennessee.* Also, certain groups of 'A Beginner' metaphors may be distinguished, accumulating around key concepts containing:

1) somatic elements: *babe (in the woods), (not) dry / wet behind the ears, in embryo, tenderfoot*, as in the following sentences: (14) *I'm not a babe in the woods, and I know very well that saying these things is taboo in American political culture.* (15) *Tell me son have you ever cut turf before, following up with, it's just that you look a bit wet behind the ears for this job.* (16) *Not a change that he worked up himself, but rather one that has seen in embryo on all sides of himself, and has picked it up, reported it, added to it and polished it.* (17) *Glassie leads tenderfoot readers through this virtual sierra of story in the only way humanly possible, that is, by following his heart.*

2) zoomorphic and flora elements: *callow, colt, fish, fledgeling, greenhorn, nestling, in the bud, hayseed*, as can be viewed from the following examples: (18) *Merritt Wever is adorable and believable as Zoey, a nervous first-year nursing student so callow she has bunnies on her smock.* (19) *Both are products of the Ilkley mini, junior and colts sections.* (20) *It was kind of bad for awhile till we got to know people and speak the language and quit being called greenhorns.* (21) *At hockey he's still a fledgling and needs to work on his basic skating skills.* (22) *a Shakespeare in the bud.* (23) *Tom Parsons, a "hayseed," makes good on the scrub team of Randall College.*

Here should be added, that describing a person like a fish not only his lack of experience, but also the lack of aptitude is explicated: (24) *The guy’s a fish. He can’t do anything right.*

Thus once again it has been proved that metaphor is the means of expression of the hidden knowledge, identifying cultural thinking, mental landscape and leading us deep into national cognition (Carston, 2013, p.183; Lakoff, Johnson, 2003, p.4). Actually, metaphorical expressiveness seems to perform several functions. It serves the tool of extension of meaning (Cruise, 2000, p.202), contributing much to the emotional characteristics of the expression, but it also shows the way the speakers perceive the world, bringing about the diversity of associations. Metaphorical expressiveness extends the range of ways to name a concept; conversely, if a concept is named by a number of lexical units, it is important in the culture of native speakers. Thus the frame ‘A Beginner’, expressed via various lexical units, takes a significant place in the British culture as a component of the domain of education.

There is one more peculiar characteristics of ‘A Learner’ who studies at university. As far as we know, there are names for students from their first to fourth years in English, *freshman - sophomore - junior - senior*. While freshman coincides with the notion of beginner, and thus refers to the corresponding thematic group, the other three, constituting the group ‘A Student’, denote the student who is gradually improving his knowledge, going up the stairs of education. Among these four lexical units, sophomore is interesting as to the coinage of its meaning. The word, and correspondingly the notion it represents, consists of two stems, *sophos* “wise” + *moros* “foolish, dull.” The original reference might be to the dialectic exercises that formed a large part of education in the middle years. At Oxford and Cambridge, a *sophister* (from sophist with spurious -er as in philosopher) was a second- or third-year student (OED). Thus *sophomore* in the British culture has the intermediate value between *a beginner (freshman)* and a more *experienced (junior to senior) student*. The process of transition to a higher level is not easy, sometimes students fail in gaining next grade: (25) *As a result students were having trouble making the transition from sophomore to junior year, and some were leaving school.*

4. CONCLUSION

Cultural worldview of a national entity is caused by a specific way of thinking and attitude to the surrounding. This extra-linguistic layer has significant impact on its lexical equivalents in the language. Thus lexical units tend to possess both, non-linguistic and linguistic properties. In the



British culture, great attention is paid to education. That is why the domain of education, as it is perceived in the British culture and language, presents a great interest for researches. It can be studied either on the whole, or in particular segments. Current article reveals the role of a person who is eager to gain new knowledge on the both linguistic and cultural levels.

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