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## Considering a socio-cognitive approach in the compiling of a linguistics dictionary

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### Abstract

The paper presents research into multilingual students' needs that may as well determine the design of a linguistics dictionary. The underlying research question is what degree of linguistic awareness of the linguistics metalanguage resides in the minds of future EFL professionals. The data are interpreted through the notion of interlingual equivalence. The respondents of an experimental questionnaire are Slovak freshmen majoring in EFL. The results suggest a hybrid approach (bilingual and encyclopedic) to presenting linguistics terminology so that multicompetence is promoted as a system in its own right, rather than the exact equivalent of either monolingual system.

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*Keywords:* Conceptual fluency, salience, prejudice, terminology, linguistics, dictionary, multicompetence

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### 1. Introduction

In the professional usage of a foreign language, a command of linguistics metalanguage is necessary. As a matter of fact, linguistics metalanguage mirrors the distinctiveness of that particular language. This is so because languages may well differ not only in lexical-semantic counterparts but also, we dare venture primarily, due to differing associated declarative knowledge, multimodal mental representation, and culturally based schemas (cf Kecskes and Papp, 2000). When a person is exposed to a different world's view of a foreign language and/or culture, what used to be self-evident, or almost trivial, is not necessarily so anymore. We are forced to learn new social reality, hence the

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mind of a multilingual speaker is set to a new way of thinking, evaluating, or conceptualizing, moreover, this is so in both directions (SL/FL to L1 and L1 to SL/FL). Once triggered, this quality is ever changing, never ceasing to evolve (Bilá, Kačmárová and Vaňková, 2015).

Assigning meaning to the segmented extralinguistic reality means being able to conceptualize it and being endowed with the competence that can be tagged as conceptual fluency (on the term, see Danesi, 1992). It is defined “... as the ease of processing the meaning of a stimulus, or the fluency of conceptually driven processing” (Lee, Yoon, and Mitchell, 2005, p. 6). In order to achieve conceptual fluency via understanding a linguistics term and its scope, function and significance in academic studies of English, it is necessary to explore the hermeneutic process of understanding in terms of non-conscious pre-understanding (on the term see Ricoeur, 2004; Gadamer, 1994, 1999; Vaňková, 2013, 2014) of a linguistic term either in a percipient’s mother tongue or through the exposure to the term usage in EFL classes. Hence, our starting point is that the basis of metalinguistic competence is conceptual fluency.

The anecdotal evidence shows that mastering metalinguistic vocabulary of a foreign language by pre-service EFL professionals undergoes several stages. The first stage is unconscious interrelating of a mother tongue and a foreign language – terms representing particular concepts in the mother tongue are automatically applied to a foreign language as they are thought to represent the same concepts. The intuitive knowledge is foregrounded and serves as a blocking factor during the necessary stage of reconstructing the conceptual system of an L1. In the later stages, two systems merge and a learner possesses unique knowledge, neither the knowledge identical with that of a monolingual nor the sum of two separate systems (Kecskes and Papp, 2000). The transition from an intuitive user of a foreign language system to a linguistically competent professional requires a systematic instruction and learning. This can be enhanced by a dictionary-type tool combining bilingual and encyclopedic information. Our intention is to produce a learning aid that would provide the information “not as a formal stock of facts, but as a communicative fruitful system which makes the user of the dictionary a member of the whole process by giving the possibility to draw out knowledge from the suggested information” (Alekseeva and Karpova, 2010, p. 133).

Conceptual fluency can be achieved only through conscious learning, and a bilingual-encyclopedic dictionary may prove purposeful in this endeavor. In order to provide such a tool, a few issues need to be addressed through adopting a socio-cognitive approach, i.e. interrelating social and cognitive properties during the compilation of a dictionary. Considering this, the following questions arise: What terms cause an interlingual problem and why? In what form does the metalanguage become stored information in the target users – as a result of mere translation or as an explanation? Is linguistic pre-understanding present (and hopefully prevalent) in students of EFL (future professionals); for instance, in the case of polysemous words, are the salient meanings related to linguistics? It follows that the underlying question is what degree of linguistic awareness of target metalanguage resides in the minds of the respondents. Learning about the student’s needs in this respect is the necessary prerequisite in determining the design of a dictionary of linguistics metalanguage. For this reason a research study has been conducted. The method of experimental questionnaire provides the data on what meanings are processed first when students come across the terminology that is (not) identical in their first language (Slovak) and English as a foreign language. The aim is to test the amount and type of stored information and the respondents’ ability to activate relevant knowledge.

## **2. Methodology of the study**

### *2.1. The research design*

In order to delineate the procedure to be taken in compiling a dictionary, we conducted a needs analysis in the form of an experimental questionnaire. In examining the aspects influencing the compiling of a dictionary, it is important to consider how metalanguage terminology becomes stored information in the target users. This can be done through learning about the outcomes of hermeneutic non-conscious experience of the object of cognition and understanding. Consistent with the stated aim, it was necessary to select terms that students “had been and had not been familiar with” in the target foreign language. In this case, the quotation marks are used purposely, because being and not being familiar with linguistic terminology stands for the prior hermeneutic non-conscious experience of selected linguistic terms. Hermeneutic non-conscious experience means that students had come across the terminology before without having been exposed to their explicit conceptual and terminological explanation.

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