The problem of terminographic semantization in education

Akhmetbekova Assel *

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 Al-Farabi Avenue, Almaty, 050040, Kazakhstan

Abstract

This article is devoted to the problem of terminographic semantization in education as in the process of scientific and educational communication the role of terminological culture of people is also increasing which favours the most effective result of the research. An accurately formulated definition fixing a term has a great scientific importance. In the article definitions and interpretations of educational terms in English, Russian and Kazakh are studied to define the difference between the concepts “definition” and “interpretation” which fix and identify terms in the terminological dictionaries. Analyzing dictionary entries it is found that these terms are often mutually substituted.

1. Problem statement

At the present time within the educational process the role of educational and scientific communication between a lecturer and a student is increasing in the research of any scientific project. In turn, in the process of scientific and educational communication the role of terminological culture of people is also increasing which favours the most effective result of the research. An accurately formulated definition fixing a term has a great scientific importance. An accurate term semantization and its identification help students not only to go deep into a particular special field of knowledge but also to avoid an inaccurate use of terms in the process of scientific communication and research.

Terminological lexicography as a new specialized branch of lexicography considers the problems connected with the identification of concepts of special vocabulary (terms), its hierarchy and making an accurate definition of each concept. “For students definitions are organized logically according to the proportion and complexity of items where the special language is contained. Special knowledge is built with the help of a successful definition and substitution of the common language elements by special elements to the limit appropriate to every level of education established by society which then becomes the basic level for different types of information. This process repeats every time expanding a certain field and developing new concepts” (Sager, 1980, p. 68).

This follows that semantization of term is a process and result of information of necessary data about the content of the language unit (term). Identification of term meaning is implemented by several ways of verbal communication among of which the definition takes the central place. However, of the many problems of terminography in the identification of special vocabulary concepts is the problem of establishing differentiations between concepts “definition” and “interpretation” in the aspect of semantization of terminological dictionary units. The analysis of entries in terminological dictionaries indicates that such linguistic expressions as “definition” and “interpretation” are often substituted creating some confusion.

* Corresponding Author: Akhmetbekova Assel. Tel.: +7-701-965-6685
E-mail address: assel_am@mail.ru
2. Purpose of study

Semantic research of terminology applies to the study of definitions of concepts expressed by terms which fix the content of the term by more natural and obvious way. The use of terminological dictionaries helps students to understand deeply the teaching material, systematize and structure own knowledge favouring the independent research in a certain sphere of knowledge. Logically accurate definition creates conditions for right understanding the meaning of special vocabulary which is often used in scientific texts.

The main aim of the research is to define the difference between the concepts “definition” and “interpretation” which fix and identify terms in the terminological dictionaries. Semantization in terminography is defined as a semantic, logical and conceptual analysis which includes all possible methods of identification of the term meaning in the specialized dictionary. Analyzing dictionary entries it is found that these terms are often mutually substituted. “In non-normative terminological dictionaries both definitions are actively used in the restricted sense and wide one including interpretations. What is the role of interpretations in the definiens? As a rule, basic knowledge of any field of knowledge can be represented conceptually between the terms of this field of knowledge. Much of this knowledge is contained in the definition or interpretation of terms” (Shelov, 2001, p. 3).

3. Methods

Problems related to the terminographic semantization in education demanded the use of a descriptive method on the basis of which the description of concepts “definition” and “interpretation” used in non-normative dictionaries is carried out; and the use of a comparative method to define common and special between definitions and interpretations in English, Russian and Kazakh.

4. Findings and results

Concepts “definition” and “interpretation” within the terminographic semantization are differentiated from different points of views:

1. Interpretation is a broad concept and can cover several means of semantization and is usually used for description in common explanatory dictionaries.

The definition in terminological dictionaries must be focused on the logical category of definition. Dictionary definitions in monolingual terminological dictionaries should be understood as constructed phrases, the structure and construction method of which can be specified on the basis of requirements of logic (Tabanakova, 2001). For example: alternative assessment – any form of measuring what students know and are able to do other than traditional tests. Examples are: oral reports, projects, performances, experiments, portfolios (collections of student’s work), and class participation; university – an institution of higher education and research, which grants academic degrees in a variety of subjects in both undergraduate and postgraduate education (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2010-2011). The meaning of term alternative assessment, which includes examples, characterizes loosely the given definiendum. Definition of term university from the linguistic point of view is clear, accurate and concise, i.e. consists of one logically finished sentence and does not contain redundant information. Therefore, within the terminographic semantization the definiens of term alternative assessment is an interpretation and the definiens of term university applies to the definition.

2. A maximum exhaustive definition is called an interpretation, and a definition is only an incomplete disclosure where it is possible to understand the unmarked features or distinguish one concept from another with the help of definition. This implies that the function of the definition tends to the creation of “terms of a definitive type” with such names that identify at least some essential characteristics of the phenomenon reflected in the concept and, therefore, can be considered as incomplete but definitions and in this sense they are related to a number of “the right oriented terms” (Melnikov, 1991). For example: native language – the language normally used by someone, or, in the case of a student, the language normally used by the parents of the student in their home or learning environment. For an individual with deafness or blindness, or for an individual with no written language, the mode of communication is that normally used by the individual, such as sign language, Braille, or oral communication; objectives – measurable steps toward the achievement of a goal [Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2010-2011].
Comparing these definitions of terms it should be noted that the definition of term native language, as opposed to the definition of term objectives, describes its meaning in detail. The definiens points to the ways when the native language is really used as native. The definiens of term objectives defines it concisely and accurately. In this case unmarked features are possible to be guessed, notably what measurable steps are undertaken to achieve a goal. Thus, the first more detailed definition can be related to the interpretation and the second one – to the definition.

3. The definition in the restricted sense does not allow several qualitatively different interpretations (within selected undefined concepts). With a broader understanding the definition captures also the interpretation which allows more than one interpretation. A verbal definition of the term is an utterance of the performative type which attributes the term to its conceptual content by specifying the place of this terminological concept among other concepts of this field. Consequently, the qualitatively polymorphous definiens is considered as an interpretation that differs from the strict definition by the possibility of several different interpretations which change the appropriate conceptual apparatus (Shelov, 2003). For example: team teaching – an arrangement by which two or more teachers teach the same group of students; curriculum – the subject matter that is to be learned [Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2010-2011]. The definition of term team teaching uses the expression more teachers which allows different interpretation and so the definiendum has a “soft” conceptual semantics. The definition of term curriculum leaves no room for different interpretations. Therefore, the first terminological definition is a definition including the interpretation in the wide sense as it is qualitatively polymorphous and the second one is a strict definition in the restricted sense as it does not allow different interpretations.

It follows that the terminological semantization of terms is expressed in the form of definitions and interpretations. However, the definition of the term can be an interpretation but not every interpretation can be a definition but only that the degree of polymorphism of which does not go beyond the scope. As a rule, the definition in the terminological dictionaries focuses on the logical category and does not allow several qualitatively different interpretations as opposed to the interpretation. The definition involves an incomplete disclosure of the concept where unmarked features are possible to be guessed. Such definitions are related to a number of “the right oriented terms”. The structure of the terminological definition is based on the clear formulated logical and terminological requirements the observance of which contributes to the strict fixation of the term in a particular sphere of knowledge. The interpretation allows more than one interpretation that is inadmissible for a strict definition of the term. Especially, if the given terminology enters the normative terminological dictionary.

Comparative analysis of educational terminological definitions in three languages helps to understand the difference between the definition and the interpretation. For example: scholarship – a type of financial aid that consists of an amount of free money given to a student by a school, individual, organization, company, charity, or federal or state government. “Scholarship” is often used interchangeably with “grant” (U.S. News, 2011); стипендия – регулярно выплачиваемое денежное пособие, предоставляемое обычно аспирантам и хорошо успевающим студентам очной формы обучения государственных образовательных учреждений высшего и среднего профессионального образования, а также лицам, проходящим специальный курс обучения с отрывом от производства (Azaryeva et al., 2006); стипендия – оку орындарындағы студенттерге акылай берілетін жеңілді (Лүгат қазақ тілінің сөздіктер кешені). Comparing the definitions of term scholarship in three languages, it should be noted that the definition in Russian is qualitatively polymorphous and, consequently, it contains the interpretation as the expression обычно (usually) in the given definiens allows different interpretations. It means that денежное пособие (monetary allowance) may or may not be granted to postgraduate students. Definitions in English and Kazakh are related to the definitions with “hard” conceptual semantics as they are clear and accurate. Though, the definition in English does not follow the requirement of conciseness.

Dissertation – an in-depth, formal writing requirement on an original topic of research that is typically submitted in the final stages before earning a doctorate (Ph.D.) (U.S. News, 2011); диссертация – квалификационная работа, служащая основанием для присуждения ученой степени кандидата или доктора наук по определенной специальности (Азарыева et al., 2006); диссертация – ғылымы дәреже алу ушин қошшілік алдына қорғайтын ғылымы зерттеу жұмысы (Лүгат қазақ тілінің сөздіктер кешені). Definitions of term dissertation in English and Kazakh are related to the strict definitions as according to the logical and linguistic requirements these definitions do not contain the double meaning and circularity, are proportional and composed of one logically finished sentence and do not contain the redundant information. Despite of strict definitions in English
and Kazakh the definition of term in Russian includes the interpretation as the expression или (or) in the definiens allows different interpretations. In spite of its softness, this interpretation of term is also clear and accurate.

Diploma – a certificate conferred by a high school, college, university or other educational institution as official recognition for the completion of a program of studies (U.S. News, 2011); диплом – официальный документ, удостоверяющий завершение высшего профессионального образования (Азарьева et al., 2006); диплом – арналы оқу орнын бітіргенді тұралы бірлестің куәлік (Лугат казақ тілінің сөздіктер кешені). In the given examples the definition of term diploma in English includes the interpretation as the expression or other educational institution gives this concept polymorphism (softness). Definitions of the same term in Russian and Kazakh are related to the strict definitions as they do not contain different interpretations.

The interpretation can only enter in the composition of the definiens in the form of a qualitative polymorphism but separately the interpretation cannot be a definition of a scientific concept according to fact. In this case it is appropriate the understanding of the definition both in the restricted and broad senses.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Terminological semantization of terms in education distinguishes strict definitions excluding the possibility of some interpretations from interpretations which are qualitatively polymorphous. Terminological dictionaries which are non-normative can actively use the definition both in the restricted and broad senses including interpretations which are more effective in education. Within the educational aims both normative and non-normative terminological dictionaries are used. Their use depends on the direction and field of science. Among the humanities non-normative terminological dictionaries containing both the definitions and interpretations got the wide spread.

To avoid misuse of the terms in the process of the scientific communication and research, students who study the sciences are recommended to use normative terminological dictionaries containing strictly monomorphic definitions. For the humanities non-normative definitions are more optimal. Within the humanities the use of definitions in the broad sense is more effective for semantization of knowledge in the study of any research project as the qualitatively polymorphic interpretations are often important to preserve the unity of science, integrity and continuity of its basic conceptual apparatus.

References