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# Terminology of Higher Education: Towards International Harmonization

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## Abstract

The paper describes the evolution of dictionary of education since the first special dictionary of this kind was compiled in 1945. With the spread of globalization and the Bologna process the problem of harmonization of terminology is up-to-date. In particular, the terminology used by teachers, students, and educators in European higher educational institutions is of great interest to those who are not native speakers of English. This paper describes the new project of compiling an English-Russian Dictionary of Higher Education. The paper also highlights the results obtained from experiments, which have proven that educational terminology in English is difficult to understand due to the differences in educational systems. To fill this void, and compile the bilingual dictionary of higher education it was necessary to identify three dimensions of terminology development: the cognitive, linguistic and communicative. The last part of the paper describes the methodology based on the three dimensions and the tools of the project, which is aimed at harmonizing the terminology used within higher education on an international level, and the compilation of bi- and multilingual dictionaries of higher education, which are few at the moment.

The project will benefit further developments of the European higher education sphere, creating a mutually beneficial cooperation between countries and stimulating collaborative university partnerships. It will also favor both international understanding and multiculturalism and hopefully contribute not only to enrichment of lexicography but science, research, and technology.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decades educators, officials, and international students studying in English have faced the problem of misunderstanding terms used in higher education.

With the spread of globalization in different spheres such as economics, politics, research, culture, etc. There is a great demand placed upon highly qualified employees to be competitive within the international market. With this foremost in mind, higher education institutions all over the world have to make significant changes to programs, and training activities, which they offer. As higher education plays a major role in any society, creating new knowledge attuned to the fast-changing needs, are to be impressed upon students. According to European Commission's Higher Education Modernization Agenda (available at [www.ec.europa.eu](http://www.ec.europa.eu)) the main areas for reform are:

- To increase the number of higher education graduates.
- To improve the quality and relevance of teaching and researcher training.
- To equip graduates with the knowledge and core transferable competences they need to succeed in high-skill occupations.
- To strengthen the "knowledge triangle", linking education, research, and business creating effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence.

To support national efforts, the European commission has launched a number of European programs to promote cooperation in higher education with countries beyond the European Union, including Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. The commission also actively supports the Bologna Process, which is aimed at promoting reforms in higher education with forty seven countries, all of which will lead to establishing a European Higher Education Area.

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Some new forms of education have emerged, like lifelong learning and distance learning, etc. Russia joined the Bologna Process in 2003, and since then, many Russian students and researchers have been participating in these external cooperative initiatives in higher education, of which all have and still do, encourage the use of harmonized terminology. For this purpose the compilation of *English-Russian Dictionary of Higher Education* was initiated and is now in progress.

## 2. Objective

The aim of the project is to develop internationally harmonized terms used in higher education, which will help to ease the mutual use and acceptance of this terminology between countries. The project will also facilitate the integration process for Russia, saving resources for both governments and higher educational institutions. The target groups for the *English-Russian Dictionary of Higher Education* are educators, governors, students, and researchers studying abroad, or participating in numerous mobility programs. The harmonized terms may also be used as a basis in compilation of multilingual dictionaries, preparing publications aimed at further development of the European higher education area, mutually beneficial cooperation between countries, enrichment of science and research.

According to Dr Ceusters (1999: 165), 'it is mandatory that the work is undertaken by a multidisciplinary team composed of skilled terminologists, linguists, and domain specialists'.

## 3. Background

To initiate the process of harmonization on an international level, terminology must be formalized on the national level or within one language. Oscar Wilde once remarked that Great Britain and the USA were divided only by a common language. It is nonetheless true that his epigram will lend itself to American and British educators whenever they study each other's educational systems. For this reason, educators have recognized the need for some kind of systematic international dictionary containing educational terms, which form the greater part of comparative education.

The first in a series of *World Surveys of Education* (1995) was the *Glossary of Educational Institutions*, after which came a more comprehensive glossary of general educational terms, which was the first serious step towards the process of harmonization. On the UNESCO site, it is still possible to find a glossary of educational terms. The terms are English, Arabic, Spanish, and French, of which no Russian equivalents are given.

The first explanatory dictionary of education was one by C. Good (1945). Later, there were some monolingual dictionaries published in Great Britain and the USA (Guthrie 1971, Page et al 1977, Collins and O'Brien 2003, Ravitch 2007, etc.).

The subsequent results of harmonization of educational terminology on an international level are captured within a number of EURYDICE glossaries of education, such as *Decision-making, Advisory, Operational and Regulatory Bodies in Higher Education; Educational Institutions; Examinations, Qualifications and Titles; Management, Monitoring and Support Staff* (available at [www.eacea.ec.europa.eu](http://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu)). These glossaries of education include those terms that are officially adopted within the EU, and are specific to a particular national system of education.

In Russia some explanatory dictionaries of education have been published but the only bilingual dictionary of education that has been compiled to date is *The Learner's English-Russian dictionary of education* by M. Fedorova and V. Lapchinskaya (1998). This dictionary

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covers terms used in primary and secondary schools, psychology, higher education, extra-curricular activities, etc. It was published more than ten years ago and therefore does not include any terms used in the Bologna process and other up-to-date terminological units of higher education.

If any, publications on harmonization of educational terms are used they are rarely available. Despite this, there are some research papers available containing such subjects as toxicology, nursery, mineral resources, risk management terminology harmonization, etc.

The countries within the European Higher Education Area face the problem of misunderstanding even though they have much in common concerning their systems of education. The Russian education system is very different and this is supposedly the main reason why terminology is so difficult to acquire. An experiment was conducted where twenty Russian teachers of English and more than fifty students taking courses of Upper-Intermediate and Advanced English, were asked to translate fifty educational terms from Russian into English. Among the correct answers expected from the participants whom already had very high level of English were: *academic weight, course handbook, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, module, extra-curricular activities, pass/fail exam, learning outcomes*, etc. It was a concern that the number of correct answers was less than 20%, whilst the number of correct answers to the questions on economics, culture, and politics stood at about 80-90%. These results added weight to our concerns, and in turn illustrated them to be sound.

In addition to this, the incompetence of some printed and some on-line dictionaries appeared to be failing to adequately translate the words taking into account the differences in national systems of education. For example, one popular on-line dictionary used by professional translators enables them to make notes in dictionary entries translate the word 'зачем' (e.g. *zachet*) which is very close to the English expression *pass/fail exam* in the following way:

- Pass/fail exam (The term is advised by the native-speaker (from the USA) (N) (from now on the letters given in brackets are referring to the names of the translators).
- If he lives in New York's shantytowns (no offence), is not correct. It's better not to listen to such advisors (S).
- You are not right. It is a typical form of examination in Russia and former Soviet republics and the expression 'pass/fail exam' used in the USA and Great Britain seems to have the closest meaning (D).
- This native-speaker is well educated and aware of educational terminology and systems of education (N).

Thereinafter the discussion, other ways of translations, which are quite far from reality such as test, examination, etc., are given.

#### 4. Dimensions

Following Dr Ceusters (1999: 165), we are able to single out three dimensions, which are relevant, and to be considered when developing terminologies: the cognitive dimension, the linguistic dimension, and the communicative dimensions.

In the cognitive dimension, the terms are related to their conceptual contents, and their meaning is fixed. In the linguistic dimension, the existing and potential forms of the terms are examined. Finally, the communicative dimension looks at the use of terminology and justifies the way in which it works. According to Ceusters (1999: 165), we started the compilation of *English-Russian Dictionary of Higher Education* by defining the area of usage, the

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application domain, the intended purpose, the source and target languages. A large quantity of documents were collated, and it was followed by the semi-automatic extraction of relevant terminology and citations from sources such as university prospectus, course handbooks, bilingual dictionaries of education, university web pages, etc. This approach is justified when it is assumed that if a term is found in a document (the linguistic dimension), there must be a concept that it denotes (the cognitive dimension). On the basis of this material, classifications of the terms were set up, i.e. identifying generic relationships between them.

The terms included are generic terms (both words and phrases, original and loaned); acronyms, eponyms, etc. apply to educational research, theory and practice.

The elements that may appear in a complete entry of the dictionary are:

1. The English *headword* in bold.
2. *Variants of spelling* in parentheses.
3. The *pronunciation* in International Phonetic Alphabet characters in square brackets.
4. The *status label*, abbreviated immediately after the IPA characters, indicating the level of formality.
5. The *subject label* supplied where necessary immediately after the *status label*, e.g. [tertiary level].
6. The territorial label supplied where necessary immediately after the *subject label*, e.g. (USA).
7. The Russian *definition*.
8. The English *citation*, illustrating the use of the headword in context taken from a written context.

There are also *See* and *Syn* (Synonym) entries as well as the label *Compare*. The headwords are arranged alphabetically and numbered. The latter will enable the user to translate backwards. The list of Russian headwords is given in *Appendix*.

Equivalences at national and international levels have also been analyzed and compared in order to elaborate harmonization proposal, which will be submitted later to domain specialists and lexicographers for review and final validation. They will be asked to identify or provide preferred definition for each term, where terms considered as synonyms, key documents or sources would be omitted. The changes will be made to improve consistency, coherence and comprehension of related terms.

Taking into account the amount of efforts and the high priority of the project which are aimed at the harmonization of terminology of higher education on the international level and compilation of bi- and multilingual dictionaries of education, the input is welcomed from international research communities to assist with the further development of the terminology and its description as the project nears the first half of its development.

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