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**THE TERMS “LANGUAGE BEARER” AND “NATIVE SPEAKER”: DIFFERENCES AND ILLUSORY CONFORMITY (COMPARATIVE DEFINITIONAL ANALYSIS OF TERMS)**

**Abstract.** Addressing this problem is caused by the global spread of the English language, the formation of various regional professional linguodidactic cultures, and different interpretations of key linguodidactic terms. In the current political, economic, and sociocultural situation in the world, where English is the language of international communication, many previously seemingly neutral terms of linguodidactics acquire particular relevance and significance. In modern professional linguodidactic discourse, the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker” acquire particular importance in the discussion about the goals (variants of the English language), norm (standard), teaching model, lecturer, and his/her qualifications, as well as teaching methods and techniques that correspond to a certain sociocultural context and social order of the society. The article examines the differences in the use of the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker” in Ukrainian-language linguodidactic discourse and the English-language professional discourse of English-language lecturers. The comparative definitional analysis of the terms based on the material of linguistic and linguodidactic dictionaries and encyclopedias in Ukrainian and English allowed the identification of a common semantic core, as well as several significant differences due to different degrees of resonance of these terms in different professional
sociocultures. As the study has shown, in the Ukrainian-language linguodidactic discourse the term “language bearer” is used in its traditionally established meaning, while in the modern British-American professional discourse of English language lecturers, the term “native speaker” acquires new meanings and leads to a change in the linguodidactic paradigm. As a result of the work done, the authors have come to the conclusion that the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker” cannot be considered absolutely identical, and that this identity is illusory.

Keywords: language bearer, native speaker, comparative analysis, definition, term, linguodidactic discourse, intercultural professional communication.
також методи та прийоми навчання, що відповідають певному соціокультурному контексту, замовленню суспільства. У статті досліджуються відмінності у вживанні термінів «носій мови» та «native speaker» в українськовомовному лінгводидактичному дискурсі та в англомовному професійному дискурсі викладачів англійської мови. Порівняльний дефініційний аналіз термінів на матеріалі лінгвістичних та лінгводидактичних словників та енциклопедій українською та англійською мовами дозволив виявити загальне смислове ядро, а також низку значних відмінностей, обумовлених різним ступенем резонансності даних термінів у різних професійних соціокультурних, як показало проведене дослідження, в українськовомовному лінгводидактичному дискурсі термін «носій мови» вживається в традиційно усталеному значенні, тоді як у сучасному британо-американському професійному дискурсі викладачів англійської мови термін «native speaker» набуває нових смислів і веде до зміни лінгводидактичної парадигми. В результаті виконаної роботи автори дійшли висновку, що терміни «носій мови» та «native speaker» не можна вважати абсолютно тотожними, що ця тотожність є ілюзорною.

**Ключові слова:** носій мови, native speaker, порівняльний аналіз, дефініція, термін, лінгводидактичний дискурс, міжкультурна професійна комунікація.

**The problem statement and its relevance.** It is common knowledge that English is the most widely spoken language in the modern world. This fact is associated with the increase in the geopolitical and socio-economic influence of Britain and the United States, the spread, first of all, of American mass culture, and the development of information technologies. In many countries, English is widely studied and included in educational standards. Accordingly, the number of English language lecturers who form their own local professional discourse in their countries is growing. More and more professional connections are being established between English lecturers from different sociocultural backgrounds.

However, the concepts and ideas on which a certain local professional linguodidactic discourse is based do not always correspond to how they are understood in other local professional linguodidactic discourses and international practice. In this regard, the issue of the comparability of term systems in linguodidactic discourses of different countries is raised. After all the formal coincidence of terms in different languages not only does not facilitate international communication but, on the contrary, complicates it, since it creates for those communicating the appearance of equality, and correspondence, which in fact turns out to be illusory. A striking example of
such “illusory correspondence” are the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker”, traditionally perceived as identical to each other in domestic linguodidactics [1].

**The analysis of recent studies and publications.** The analysis of scientific publications in English-language and Ukrainian-language linguodidactic journals shows the following picture. For example, learning a foreign language with a lecturer-native speaker is considered more effective and is valued higher than learning a language with a lecturer-non-native-speaker [2–5], and the highest goal in language acquisition is considered to be the level of effective functioning (C1–C2), which is equal to the level of an educated native speaker [6–10]. Therefore, it can be concluded that the authority and prestige of native speakers in the Ukrainian teaching methods of English is very high. It is looked up to and imitated.

In modern English-language linguodidactic discourse, a different picture is observed: the high-frequency use of the term “native speaker” with a negative connotation. Let’s take as an example only the titles of articles with the term “native speaker” from scientific journals “TESOL Quarterly”, “ELT Journal” and others over the past 30 years. The most resonant of them say that native speakers do not exist, that there is no longer room for a native speaker in the classroom, and that this term should be replaced by the term “expert user”. The issue is being raised nowadays about who is now a native speaker [11–16]. Many reputable scientists in the field of linguistics and intercultural communication consider the concept of “native speaker” as non-existent, as a linguistic myth [17]. In sociolinguistics, the issue arises of revising the given concept in connection with the awareness of the heterogeneity of the English language and the role in intercultural communication of its successful users who speak it fluently and idiomatically, despite the fact that English is not their native language, but a second one (and sometimes third) the language they have acquired. The above-mentioned has formed the purpose of the study presented.

**The purpose of the article.** To increase the effectiveness of intercultural professional communication, it is necessary and urgent to consider the current situation through a comparative definitional analysis of the Ukrainian term “language bearer” and the English term “native speaker” based on linguistic and linguodidactic dictionaries and encyclopedias in Ukrainian and English.

**Presentation of the basic material.** It should be noted that the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker” are relatively new. As an analysis of the Google Books Ngram Viewer service (Google’s online search service, which allows one to build graphs of the frequency of linguistic units based on
a huge number of printed sources published since the 16th century and collected in the Google Books service) shows, the English term “native speaker” began to be used in the second half of the 19th—early 20th centuries. However, the frequency of use of this term has increased significantly since the 1970s. The Ukrainian term “language bearer” came into use in the mid-20th century, and since the 1960s its frequency has been continuously growing. Interestingly, the frequency of use of the Ukrainian term is not much lower than the English one, although the number of materials in English is much higher.

The high frequency of the term “language bearer” in Ukrainian-language sources is apparently explained by the fact that this concept is key and is present in the definitions of many linguodidactic categories. For example, in V. Karachun’s dictionary, the term “language bearer” appears 69 times in the definitions of various terms (2.7% of the total number of articles) [18]. At the same time, the very definition of the term “language bearer” in the dictionary is very laconic and takes up only a few lines. The scope of the definition of this term is typical for most Ukrainian-language linguistic and linguodidactic reference books and textbooks. The average length of the Ukrainian definition is 30 words, “Language bearer is a representative of some sociocultural and linguistic community, who knows the norms of the language, actively uses this language (usually his/her native language) in various everyday, sociocultural, professional and other spheres of communication” [19]. The English definition is much longer, “A native speaker is a person who learns a language as a child and continues to use it fluently as a dominant language. Native speakers are said to use a language grammatically, fluently, and appropriately, to identify with a community where it is spoken, and to have clear intuitions about what is considered grammatical or ungrammatical in the language. One of the goals of linguistics is to account for the intuitions the native speaker has about his/her language. Dictionaries, reference grammars, and grammatical descriptions are usually based on the language use of the native speaker of a dominant or standard variety. In some contexts, it is taken as a basic assumption that the goal of learning a second or foreign language is to approximate as closely as possible to the standards set by native speakers; in other teaching and learning contexts, this assumption is increasingly being questioned and native speakers no longer have the privileged status they used to have” [20].

Speaking about the definition of the term “native speaker” in the Anglo-American language didactic discourse, it is important to note the fact that the scope of the English dictionary article significantly exceeds the volume of the Ukrainian dictionary article. The average volume of the English definition is 120 words.
Undoubtedly, the English term “native speaker”, like the Ukrainian term, is key and is also used to explain other methodical terms, but in smaller quantities. For example, in the well-known dictionary of the publishing house Longman [20], this term is used in 47 definitions (1.3% of the total number of articles). Thus, the quantitative analysis confirms our assumption about the non-identity of these terms in the Ukrainian-language and English-language professional linguistic didactic discourse.

The definitional analysis carried out has made it possible to identify both several common (core) features and a number of distinctive features of the terms “language bearer” and “native speaker”. The common features are: 1) the level of language proficiency (speaks the language as a native language, knows the norms of the language and has an intuitive understanding of them, has a high level of linguistic competence, has a high level of speech skills, is able to handle the language creatively); 2) primacy in language acquisition (language acquisition in childhood, language acquisition in communication with adults, language acquisition by the mother).

In addition to the above nuclear features, the difference between dictionary articles in English linguodidactic dictionaries and reference books is the presence of pragmatic information. In English-language sources there is a widespread explanation of modern problems in the use of the term “native speaker”, which arise in connection with the new status of English as a language of international communication, with new approaches to teaching English as an international language and as an intermediary language, as well as a new paradigm, according to which there is not one English language, but many English languages (World Englishes Paradigm) [15; 21; 22].

It should be dwelt upon in more detail on the pragmatics of dictionary definitions of the English term. Traditionally, native speakers have provided linguists with a reliable source of data about a language [23; 24]. In linguodidactics, it was native speakers who served as models in teaching foreign languages; the student was compared with them to determine the degree of language acquisition, and they were used to guide the determination of the language standard to be taught [14]. However, in the second half of the 20th century, this approach was no longer suitable for teaching English due to its rapid spread throughout the world. In the 1980s, the criteria defining native speakers of English were subject to criticism and doubt, and this, in turn, led to a paradigm shift in British-American linguodidactics, which undermined the seemingly unshakable position of the English term “native speaker”. Articles have regularly appeared in the “ELT Journal”, “TESOL Quarterly” and other journals since the 1980s calling for the reduction of the importance of the native speaker in teaching English as a second or foreign language [25; 15; 13; 14; 11; 16].
The term “native speaker” has given rise to several branches of heated discussions. One of the branches is based on the thesis that English is the language of international communication and no longer belongs to its traditional speakers. One of the arguments for this hypothesis is that the number of people who speak English as a second or foreign language significantly exceeds the number of people who speak English as a first language. The number of non-bearers, according to various sources, can reach up to a billion people, while the number of bearers, even taking into account the countries of the expanding circle, does not exceed 700 million people [26, p. 107]. Most communication in English takes place between non-native speakers, and the appropriateness of using a native speaker as a teaching model has therefore been questioned.

A related topic in this offshoot of the discussion is the discussion of standards and norms of the English language. Only in the internal norm-defining circle, according to B. Kachru’s scheme, there are five variants of the English language [22]. If we turn to Tom MacArthur’s scheme, then, in his opinion, there are eight world standards of the English language (ibid.). In this regard, the issue is more often raised about what norms and standards should be followed in teaching English and whether it is generally worth setting the goal of learning a second or foreign language as close as possible to the standards set by native speakers [20, p. 386].

Another branch of the discussion is based on the fact that the authors consider the existing native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy to be useless and no longer reflect current realities, and offer to replace the terms “native speaker” and “non-native speaker” with more neutral “expert user/novice user”, “more/less accomplished user”, “monolingual/bilingual speaker”, etc. [27, p. 342; 28, p. 437]. The reason for these transformations is the increase in the number of bilinguals and polyglots who are able to communicate freely in two, three, or more languages. There are also more and more cultures where the English language is replacing the local language, and we are no longer talking about the former colonies of Great Britain, but about countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, where the English language is actively penetrating into different spheres, gradually replacing the original language of these countries. People start learning English from an early age and are surrounded by an English-speaking environment, while at the same time, they speak the local language and are surrounded by their native culture. The issue arises about the cultural and linguistic identification of such people.

Another major issue of debate is the effectiveness of native speakers as lecturers of English. Native speakers are gradually losing their privileged
status in matters of mastering the English language. Having mastered the language independently in childhood, they, as a rule, do not understand the difficulties faced by students learning a language at a more conscious age, are not a successful model of language acquisition for non-native speakers, and do not know how to teach effective strategies for learning a foreign language [27]. Also, non-native speakers better understand the cultural characteristics of their students. American, Canadian, Australian, and other native lecturers tend to be very sociable, open, and active, however, this type of communication with students is not always easily accepted, for example, in some Asian cultures.

Each of these strands of debate is generating more and more theoretical debates in linguodidactics that are unlikely to be resolved any time soon, although most linguists recognize that for effective English language teaching it is necessary to reach a consensus on the model and objectives of teaching [14].

Conclusions. Returning to the comparative definitional analysis of the Ukrainian term “language bearer” and the English term “native speaker”, the authors conclude that these terms, on the one hand, have a common semantic core, and, on the other hand, a number of significant differences. The common semantic core includes a) language proficiency since childhood; b) a high level of language competence; c) a high level of development of speech skills. The significant differences are as follows. A language bearer belongs to a specific people, sociocultural, and linguistic community. As for a native speaker, there is the inconsistency of criteria determining who is considered a native speaker, the role and place of a native speaker in teaching English as a second or foreign language, and an issue about the status of bilinguals and polyglots.

As can be understood from the above-mentioned, in Ukrainian-language linguodidactic discourse the term “language bearer” is not problematic. In addition to the core common with the English term “native speaker”, only one unique feature is added – belonging to a particular people, sociocultural and linguistic community. This can probably be explained by the fact that in the Ukrainian linguistic tradition, language is closely connected with the culture of the people, and one can even often find the term “bearer of language and culture.” The absence of other specific features is most likely explained by the fact that the authors of Ukrainian-language dictionaries and encyclopedias consider the term obvious to users without presenting additional explanations.

By transferring this understanding of the Ukrainian term “language bearer” to the English term “native speaker,” Ukrainian teachers, lecturers, and specialists miss the array of data that exists in the Anglo-American professional linguodidactic discourse, often understanding a “native speaker” as an educated British or American and not realizing what such understanding
for modern British-American linguodidactics is at least controversial. Also, Ukrainian-speaking users of the term “native speaker” usually do not realize the degree of ethnocentrism that exists in British-American professional discourse. When the term “native speaker” is mentioned in the context of language teaching in English-language periodicals, it is spoken exclusively about the English language, and the entire problematic of this term is also related to the status of the English language in the world and the history of its spread.

From all of the above, it can be concluded that between the Ukrainian term “language bearer” and the English term “native speaker” there are significant differences in their understanding by representatives of different professional sociocultures. Thus, it can be assumed that by conducting a more in-depth analysis of the functioning of terms in linguodidactic discourse, this difference in perception and use will only intensify.

However, the issues raised in the 1980s in the Anglo-American professional linguodidactic discourse are gradually moving into Ukrainian professional linguodidactic discourse. Ukrainian articles on this topic appear, these issues are discussed at conferences and have gradually begun to penetrate into monographs, textbooks, and dictionaries. This is also confirmed by the Google Books Ngram Viewer graph showing increased interest in the term “native speaker” over the past decade.

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