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DISCOURSE-ANALYSIS OF LEGAL CONCEPTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

ДИСКУРС-АНАЛІЗ ПРАВОВИХ КОНЦЕПТІВ У ВИКЛАДАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДЛЯ СПЕЦІАЛЬНИХ ЦІЛЕЙ

The article examines the feasibility of introducing discourse analysis of legal concepts in teaching English for Special Purposes (ESP). The problem of effective teaching of a foreign language for professional purposes is at the centre of scientific research of scientists, since the standards of higher education and modern professional requirements provide for the formation of not only linguistic, but also analytical, intercultural competencies and critical thinking of future specialists. This issue is of particular relevance in the preparation of students of law specialties (the author focuses on specialty D9 International Law), for whom proficiency in a foreign language is associated with professional requirements for drafting documents in the state and foreign languages, interpreting legal norms, and judicial decisions.

The scientific and source base relevant to the researched issues has been studied. Thus, a number of concepts relevant to the study are outlined: "concept", "discourse", "discourse analysis", the methodological potential of discourse analysis as a tool for forming students' ability to identify, interpret and critically comprehend texts is substantiated. The author focuses on the program results presented in the educational and professional program for students of the specialty "International Law" which provide for the ability of future specialists to perform a comparative analysis of legal systems, prepare professional translations and draft legal documents in the state and foreign languages. The previous experience of implementing the outlined methodology in teaching foreign language for professional purposes is considered. The advantages of the study include the methodological tools presented by two consecutive practical exercises aimed at expanding and normalizing the relevant vocabulary, developing critical thinking and the ability to analyze and interpret one concept in different types of discourse. To familiarize students with the concepts, they study a mind map of basic legal concepts to master structured language patterns. Then one concept is explored in different discursive contexts, showing students how legal concepts vary depending on genre, communicative purpose, and target audience.

Key words: discourse analysis, English for Special Purposes, legal concepts, contextual learning.

У статті досліджено доцільність запровадження дискурс-аналізу правових концептів у викладанні англійської мови для спеціальних цілей (ESP). Проблема ефективного навчання іноземної мови за професійним спрямуванням в центрі наукових розвідок учених, оскільки стандарти вищої освіти та сучасні професійні вимоги передбачають формування у майбутніх фахівців не лише мовної, а й аналітичної, міжкультурної компетентностей та критичного мислення. Особливої актуальності це питання набуває у підготовці студентів правничих спеціальностей (в фокусі уваги автора спеціальність D9 Міжнародне право), для яких володіння іноземною мовою пов'язане з професійними вимогами до складання документів державною та іноземною мовами, інтерпретацією правових норм, актів судових рішень.

Вивчено науково-джерельну базу, релевантну до досліджуваної проблематики. Відтак, окреслено низку дотичних до дослідження понять: «концепт», «дискурс», «дискурс-аналіз», обґрунтовано методичний потенціал дискурс-аналізу як інструмента формування здатності студентів ідентифікувати, інтерпретувати та критично осмислювати тексти. Автор зосереджується на програмних результатах, представлених в освітньо-професійній програмі для здобувачів спеціальності «Міжнародне право» які передбачають здатність майбутніх фахівців до порівняльного аналізу правових систем, підготовки професійних перекладів та створення юридичних документів державною та іноземною мовами. Розглянуто попередній досвід запровадження окресленої методики у викладанні іноземної мови за професійним спрямуванням. До переваг дослідження відноситься методичний інструментарій, представлений двома послідовними практичними вправами, що мають на меті розширення та унормування релевантного словникового запасу, розвиток критичного мислення та вміння аналізувати та інтерпретувати один концепт в різних видах дискурсу. Для ознайомлення студенти аналізують ментальну карту з основними правовими поняттями, щоб опанувати структуровані мовні патерни. У подальшому один концепт пропонується розглянути в різних дискурсивних контекстах, що демонструє студентам, як правові поняття варіюються залежно від жанру, комунікативної мети та цільової аудиторії.

Ключові слова: дискурс-аналіз, англійська для спеціальних цілей, правові концепти, контекстне навчання.

Problem Statement. Proficiency in both specialized knowledge and foreign language of choice is regarded as one of the defining features of a modern, competent specialist. The epoch of globalization and the increasing dominance of English as the lingua franca of international law have significantly transformed the demands placed on legal education. In this regard, Legal English courses in higher education institutions are expected not only to develop students' linguistic accuracy but also to equip them with the ability to interpret professional discourse effectively, given the cultural and language nuances.

However, teaching practices in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly in Legal English instruction, often remain predominantly terminology-oriented. Practice is often focused on translation-based classes with occasional grammar task with little to no relevance to the major. Consequently, core concepts and notions such as justice, proceedings, sovereignty, human rights rarely function as complex cognitive-discursive constructs. Following this line of thought, Makukhina S. (2025) accurately points out that among the features of teaching ESP to future lawyers, the following should be highlighted: a large number of terms, specific grammatical structures, differences between their own national legal system and the legal system of the country whose language they are studying [12, p. 142].

The lack of active learning, in particular – discourse analysis in ESP teaching hinders students' motivation (as they do not directly see the connection between language learning and major), ability to critically interpret texts and strategies embedded in international legal documents, statements, and media. Mentioned approach leads to students demonstrating strong terminological competence while lacking discursive awareness and interpretative skills.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. The peculiarities of teaching ESP has been a subject of heightened interest among domestic and foreign researchers. Not only are the pedagogical implications examined, but also pitfalls in successful implementation of specialized lexis and classroom organization receive substantial attention. Thus, this article relies on a fundamental investigation conducted by Hoffman C. (2011) "Using Discourse Analysis Methodology to Teach "Legal English"". With the means of DA, the author proves how it empowers students to criticize legal texts and concomitantly enables them to purposefully craft language to achieve a desired discourse message. These skills are wholly portable – both in law school and in law practice [11].

Although published in 1979 (revised in 1988), the paper "Reading English for Specialized Purposes: Discourse Analysis and the Use of Student Informants" by Andrew Cohen, Hilary Glasman, Phyllis R. Rosenbaum-Cohen, Jonathan Ferrara and Jonathan Fin is still widely cited and presents itself as a foundational piece in the understanding of the topic [9].

Sytnyk I. (2020) has broadly explored the notion of discourse in modern linguistics, offering her own vision, which is referenced in this paper [5]. Meanwhile, a research conducted by Babyatinska Yu. and Guseinova K. (2020) on structural-semantic characteristics of legal terminology in English provides an overview analysis of legal concepts [1]. Thus, it was established that structural differences between the Ukrainian and American legal systems necessitate linguistic and syntactic adaptations to prevent translation errors and ensure the accurate conceptual transfer of terminology, which is applicable for the needs of ESP classes as well.

More recent aforementioned research by Makukhina S. (2025) analyzes the specific features of teaching ESP in the context of globalization and European integration [12]. A contemporary study by Catenaccio P. (2025) taps into AI and discourse analysis and implications for ESP genre pedagogy in EFL settings [8].

Although both discourse analysis and ESP pedagogy have received substantial attention in research paradigm, their methodological integration into ESP remains under-theorized.

Objective of the Article. The objective of this article is to theoretically substantiate the expediency of discourse analysis in ESP teaching, particularly for law students. Additionally, the aim is to suggest methodological model of the integration of discourse analysis of legal concepts into the teaching process in higher education. The study aims to demonstrate how conceptual and discursive analysis realise the requirements of the educational program, enhance students' communicative competence, discursive awareness and critical thinking skills, equipping them for a more comprehensive professional output.

Discussion of the Main Material. To proceed with the discussion of the outlined issue, the understanding of the term "concept" should be ensured. Within contemporary cognitive linguistics, a concept may be interpreted as a psychomental formation that designates either an objectively existing state of affairs or an entity of reality itself, which can be verbalized provided that a sufficient lexical resource is available to represent it at the linguistic level [2, p. 54].

A concept presents a minimal unit of knowledge about the world. By investigating a concept in linguistic studies, researchers are able to determine how it characterizes a particular linguoculture and through which linguistic means it is manifested in various types of discourse. Applying this understanding to concepts in legal sphere, it becomes evident that they function not merely as specialized terms but as a culturally fixed cognitive structure in a certain type of discourse.

Within the framework of this research, I. Sytnyk's (2020) definition of "discourse" as a "set of many oral or written coherent texts created for a specific purpose in a specific communicative situation, which are united by a common theme, which are characterized by special grammar and vocabulary, special rules of word usage and syntax, special semantics, which interact with each other in combination with extralinguistic and pragmatic, sociocultural and other factors" is used [5, p. 125].

When it comes to discourse analysis (hereinafter – DA), its main theme is the study of the unique relationship between language and the context in which it is used [7]. Meanwhile, according to Sokolova I. (2011) DA is a method of researching communication, which aims to reveal the social context behind oral or written speech, to study the relationship between the linguistic code in communication and social, mental, psychological, and cultural processes [6]. Thus, it goes beyond grammar-vocabulary acquisition level by examining how spoken and written material functions within the specific cultural context, how the text is organized for a target reader and how the meanings and messages are constructed to achieve meaningfulness.

This clarification serves as a supporting bridge for the further investigation which covers the role of discourse analysis introduction in ESP in legal education. In particular, Educational Program "International Law" (Bachelor's degree) of Uzhhorod State

University stresses the importance of future graduates' abilities to:

1. Conduct comparative analysis of legal systems, evaluate and substantiate their disadvantages and advantages, find and interpret relevant foreign legislation, consult people on its content and practice.
2. To possess skills in professional oral and written translation from/into foreign language(s), specifically within the specialized subject matter of international law.
3. To draft international treaties and related documentation (ratification laws, explanatory notes, etc.) in Ukrainian and foreign languages; to prepare procedural documents, draft legislation, explanatory notes, comparative tables, and other supporting documentation for draft laws; and to conduct diplomatic and business correspondence [3].

The outlined program learning outcomes (PLO) confirm the urgency of addressing legal discourse analysis within English language instruction for students of this specialty, as the ability to compare systems, interpret foreign legislation, translate texts, and draft documents directly depends on their ability to analyse and interpret all relevant concepts in the framework of a particular legal tradition and communicative practice.

Hence, a comprehensive understanding of legal systems and their key components is at the front as well as the expediency of DA. Such an approach will directly support the learning outcomes. However, a significant challenge in ESP classes arises when legal concepts undergo semantic blurring due to their internalization in one's mother tongue.

Introduction of thematic mind maps, syntagmatic collocations and relevant word forms from the very first session (Fig. 1) is seen as advantageous. Such visual aids serve as a cognitive scaffold, allowing students integrate the appropriate formulation in their argumentation and further studies since the very first lesson.



Fig. 1. Mind-map of core concepts

To support this, a foundational research by Romantsova Ya. (2022) “Concept law in the construction and legal professional language consciousness” reports the naïve-linguistic and legal understanding of the concept “LAW” in Ukrainian and English linguistic cultures [4]. In the ESP classroom, these findings and appropriate frame will allow students to move from a subjective, emotional perception toward professional verbalization.

In a similar vein, Hartig A. J. (2016) provides two categories of legal discourse-relevant concepts: broad legal principles and local, context-specific concepts. While the teaching of foundational legal doctrines (e.g., *mens rea*, consideration) may fall within the domain of law faculty, ESP instructors play a crucial role in developing students’ ability to identify and interpret context-specific legal concepts as they function within authentic genres such as judicial decisions and case law [10, p. 84].

Strengthening the reading skills is an indispensable part of any ESP class and language instructors can make a significant contribution. Thus, Sokolova I. (2011) claims that the most appropriate method of the implementation of discourse analysis is in the process teaching writing and reading. Firstly, this approach explicitly addresses the differences between culturally determined genre differentiations. Secondly, it provides opportunities for intensive mastery of vocabulary and grammar in the context of communication. Finally, students become more critically aware of the social structure and ideology of the culture and society that created a certain discourse [6]. However, assigning a lengthy reading piece without proper introductory tasks does not seem to be an effective pedagogical strategy, as it may lead to superficial comprehension of the material or even lack of it. Consequently, as a continuation of the previous mind-map analysis, a separate analysis of vital legal concepts is offered.

The task presented in this research is specifically developed for first-year law students (CEFR B1+-B2) and aims at developing their critical thinking and professional language competence. The concept under analysis is “freedom of speech” (within the thematic framework of Human Rights and/or Introduction to International Law in ESP classes). Students are to be provided with short adapted excerpts from:

1. Constitution of Ukraine (Article 34).
2. European Convention on Human Rights (Article 10).
3. A short media commentary addressing the limitations of freedom of speech, including social media platforms such as X.

4. Politicians’ speeches on the issue.

5. Annual Amnesty International Report.

Students are tasked to identify and create their own mind-map surrounding the concept taking into consideration *verbs*: express, interfere, violate, be entitled to...; *modal verbs*: shall, may be, ought to; *institutional parties involved*: state, court, individuals, organizations. Subsequent tasks should then focus on analytical questions concerning the way the concept is constructed in a certain document, whether this right is absolute or conditional etc. For a more advanced class, students could be asked to analyse how the understanding of the concept functions within different law systems: in the USA and European systems, and respective media.

What outcomes are expected: students will be able to analyze legal concepts beyond dictionary definitions, identify discursive markers and linguistic strategies in legislation, speeches, social media posts, NGO’s reports and understand how sociocultural factors affect the understanding of human rights.

Similarly, qualitative research by Hoffman C. (2011) illustrates the expediency of DA while introducing students to American law system. Instead of assigning students a generalized reading, the author introduces legal discourse through an examination of the landmark case *Erie v. Tompkins*. Students are guided to analyse the decision by focusing on parties involved, the language they used to differentiate between the majority and the dissenting arguments, recipients of the text (judges, scholars, policy makers), the sources of law applied etc. [11, p. 10].

This research has an immense practical value, since in this way complex legal issues are approached through active discourse analysis, enabling learners to understand how legal concepts and arguments are constructed. Engagement with authentic reading materials promotes active participation and retention of appropriate language patterns. Subsequently, these are then transferred to students’ own writing enabling them to meet the discursive expectations of professional communication.

Summary and Possibility of Future Research. The article addresses the methodological need of introduction of DA in language instruction, particularly for students of law specialties. The research draws on the necessity to align current foreign language teaching practice with the requirements of modern world. Thus, future professional should be able to appropriately communicate, analyse and evaluate relevant information in state and foreign languages.

The findings demonstrate that integrating DA into Legal English teaching enhances students' language, critical thinking, analytical skills. Through active contextualized learning, future professionals are expected to appropriately manage and navigate to real-world legal settings. By offering a structured methodological model for integrating DA into classroom, the study demonstrates how conceptual

analysis can foster professional communicative competence.

Further studies will focus on interdisciplinary applications combining discourse analysis with legal writing training (specifically for professional exams as TOLES) as well as on philological perspectives, particularly the issues of verbalization of legal concepts in Anglophone discourse.

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