

Challenges In Developing The Academic Writing Abilities Of Adults Learning English

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to an overview of the problematic aspects of teaching academic writing in a foreign (English) language. The identified problems are illustrated by the results of an analysis of English-language scientific works of master and doctoral students. The work highlights the causes of difficulties and possible ways to resolve them. One of the most important elements of cognitive cycle is perception. Sensory perception polymodal: there are five modes of perception, but they are used to varying degrees. A person learns about the richness of the surrounding world thanks to five external sense organs: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Through the organs feelings, we receive, select and accumulate information that enters brain. This article proves information about cognitive and linguopragmatic problems of perception verbs in English and Uzbek languages.

Keywords: academic writing in a foreign (English) language, Language for Specific Purposes, scientific works, project proposals, problems and contradictions in teaching academic writing, publication requirements, academic environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the integration of Kyrgyzstan into various international educational projects, for example, the Bologna process, the Erasmus Mundus academic mobility program, etc., university teachers and students are faced with the need not only to pass international exams (IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC), but also to directly participate in the educational and scientific process in a foreign language. In this regard, the expansion of international relations between universities, further integration and standardization of world educational systems, the success and mobility of a modern specialist is largely determined by his level of proficiency in foreign languages, primarily English as the language of international professional communication. Moreover, modern processes in the world confirm any reforms can be successful if in their center there is a person with his real problems; at the same time it is an object and the operating subject at the solution of all complex of difficulties in education process, being urgent tasks and also the purpose and means of transformations in all spheres of society [28].

With the introduction of requirements for the publication activity of teachers in universities, the postgraduate stage of training (advanced training courses) was also affected, and the requirement to publish research results in the English language in foreign journals indexed in WoS and Scopus attracted academic writing courses into the methodology of teaching English as a technology for teaching culture written English scientific speech.

One of the tasks of modernizing the content of language education is to strengthen the emphasis on the development of professional communicative skills in a foreign language as part of teaching a foreign language for specific purposes (Language for Specific Purposes - LSP). When teaching LSP, an important role is given to the formation of academic writing (AW) skills as a set of skills that satisfy the need of a future specialist in solving

various problems of foreign language written communication, including informing the scientific community about the results of his research activities. Although teaching AW skills in a foreign language begins at the stage of schooling, the main task of preparing a specialist to master the rhetorical, stylistic and compositional norms of AW is transferred to the stage of studying at a university and is implemented within the framework of the project “Academic writing”. The result of mastering this course is the creation by the student of an academic text as a product of foreign language written activity (for example, various types of essays, official letters, abstracts for scientific research, articles for international journals or applications for participation in a conference) that meets the real needs of official business or scientific communication [21].

Despite this, teaching English-language academic writing at non-linguistic faculties does not have the necessary developmental potential for objective reasons related, first of all, to a shortage of hours [21] and as a result, as practice shows, when assessing written work, difficulties arise at different levels of writing text - at the level of content, structuring and its linguistic design [23]. The problem of creating a formal scientific document lies, as a rule, in the academic linguistic incompetence of the authors, which is explained by the lack of teaching academic writing at universities and schools [11].

In foreign scientific literature, the problem of academic illiteracy is considered by many scientists, such as Pierson D.J., Silber C.A., Nathan Wells and others [20; 25; 16]. Proficiency in academic writing is a challenging task even for native speakers [17]. I. Leki notes that native English speakers expect a text to have a consistent organization, logical coherence of ideas, original but understandable content of a work in which the reader rarely has to think about anything. In English, the author is responsible for being understandable to the reader [15]. While there is a tolerance for errors that are considered common to all native speakers of English, errors by authors whose first language is not English are well recognized by journal editors and reviewers and are viewed more critically by the latter. This explains the relevance of developing a special course-module of academic writing, the main goal of which will be to develop academic competencies in order to teach the style of formal writing, and to warn authors against traditional linguistic errors [17].

After reviewing a quantity of studies, it became clear that the difficulty of getting the skills of academic writing is not limited to the Osh State University staff and undergraduate students, nevertheless other learners in any parts of the world are likewise have the corresponding problem as well. For example, (10; 1; 3) investigated the disposition of academic weaknesses amidst undergraduate students. Moreover, the challenges have been identified by some other experts as Raza (2015), Aldabbus (2017), Al-Mubarak (2017) [22; 2; 4] in a connected study. Al-Samadani (2010) claimed that the complexity of academic writing is not constricted to linguistic and grammatical problems, however there are some other questions much as writing an acceptable thesis statement, developing, organizing, revising, and eventually editing it to guarantee an effective, error-free collection of writing [5].

2. METHOD

In a number of non-linguistic universities, an example of which is the Osh State University, at the final stage of foreign language training, the level of formation of foreign language communicative professional competence of a master's graduate is determined by the level of his readiness to compose in English so called project proposal - a written description (justification) of the planned scientific research (final master's or doctoral dissertation thesis) - and its subsequent “defense”. Since a project proposal is a concise, comprehensive description of a future scientific research, its methodology, preliminary results and conclusions, in terms of its genre characteristics this type of work is close to a “research proposal” [17;19] – a written document (application), the purpose of which may be to obtain funds for the applicant to conduct research, finance a trip to a foreign conference, or approve the submitted project at an intermediate stage of master's or doctoral studies. It is assumed that successful preparation of a scientific work in English in the genre project proposal is designed to demonstrate the master's or doctoral student's level of mastery of the university's educational program, experience of independent research activities and the ability to write its results in accordance with the requirements accepted in the international academic community. Speaking about current trends towards updating the content of foreign language teaching and the new requirements of individual universities for the implementation of the tasks of professional training in foreign languages, we have to state that, due to the novelty and multidimensionality of the phenomenon, this problem in the conditions of domestic higher education has so far been developed only to a small extent. Contrary to optimistic forecasts, practice shows that by the 4th year, students at a non-linguistic

university are not ready to take on writing scientific texts in a foreign language, and teachers of language departments do not have the necessary arsenal of tools to help them with this. Obvious contradictions are revealed between high expectations for the results of students' development of AW skills and the objective difficulties of fulfilling this mission through the efforts of foreign language teachers, especially in the conditions of a non-linguistic university.

An example of writing a secondary text - an annotation that has a fairly fixed structure and volume. Both university students and doctoral students experience difficulties when writing thesis, in most cases trying to format them as a direct translation of an analogue in Russian or Kyrgyz. Since writing an annotation is an important skill for a person functioning in an academic environment, the lesson in the course "English for Academics" [11] (fig. 1).

Motivational stage	1. Discussion 2. Create a mental map
Working with structure	1. Identification of meaningful elements of the structure 2. Recognition of elements in text 3. Identification of functional phrases characteristic of each of the elements
Working with language	1. Revealing the meaning of lexical units from the context 2. Certain logical connections reflected by certain connectives 3. use of academic vocabulary and linking words in the context of annotations 4. Using the studied material to describe your research
Abstracts from various sciences	1. Recognition of specific features inherent in annotations from different fields 2. Working with grammar and vocabulary (passive voice, academic vocabulary)
Writing an abstract for your own article	1. Writing an abstract 2. Mutual assessment in accordance with the criteria 3. Editing the abstract

Figure 1. Work on the thesis

At the motivational stage, students discuss what an abstract is, for what purposes and for what audience it can be created. The main work begins with analyzing the thesis and deducing its structure. We emphasize that students work independently, while the teacher plays the role of a facilitator. Next, work is carried out on the speech structures inherent in each element of the thesis; the focus is also on academic vocabulary and collocations. It is important to pay attention to linking words that allow you to logically connect the elements of the thesis, as well as to the structural and linguistic features of thesis from different sciences (for example, the use of passive voice, characteristic of natural science thesis). The exercises are designed in such a way that students themselves notice these features, and then use this information in tasks, the complexity and openness of which gradually increase. The final product is a thesis in English for your own article-research paper; it is also subject to peer assessment according to clearly defined criteria and revised in accordance with the comments of colleagues.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this work, we would like to highlight and illustrate some of them, based on the experience of evaluating scientific works, namely project proposals written by undergraduates and doctoral students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Analysis of students' works (N = 20) allowed us to identify a number of problems indicating the undeveloped methodological platform on the basis of which it is supposed to train specialists in composing texts of scientific genres in accordance with the standards for these texts in the international academic community.

The first reason is the students' insufficient development of language and speech skills necessary for preparing foreign language scientific texts.

As the analysis showed, many students experience certain difficulties in composing an authentic-sounding scientific text of the genre in question. Thus, in some works the following problem “areas” or deviations from the linguistic norm of the scientific style in English are identified:

- in the field of morphology: incorrect use of word-forming elements (prefixes and suffixes, endings), as a result of which near-scientific words are formed that do not exist in English (for example, “documentate” meaning “to document, record”);

- in the field of vocabulary use: 1) a limited set of lexical means of coherence for organizing utterances; 2) a meager supply of authentic scientific expressions used in English-language scientific works, and their replacement with a tracing-paper translation of special terms, scientific expressions and common stable combinations (“on the example of something”) from the native language; 3) violations in the use of prepositional combinations and stable phrases (collocations and clichéd combinations); 4) inaccurate choice of the meaning of polysemantic lexical units in a specific context; 5) the use in the same meaning of words that are similar in sound and spelling, but may differ significantly in meaning or features of use (adapt → adopt; base → basis, raise → rise), 6) mixing in some cases of units of academic and non-academic style of speech; 7) lack of phrases that soften the level of categorical statements and conclusions (known in the English-language methodological literature as “hedging”);

- in the field of grammar: 1) discrepancy in the person and number of forms of the subject and predicate; 2) incorrect use of complex grammatical constructions (for example, the subjunctive mood, impersonal constructions) and articles (especially in stable scientific expressions); 3) inaccurate choice of types of tense forms adequate to the purpose of a scientific statement at different stages of development of thought; 4) various violations in the order of words in an English sentence; 5) the dominance of passive constructions where it would be appropriate to use active voice forms, etc.;

- in the field of stylistic design of work: a) non-compliance with the norms of academic style (for example, the use of conjugate verb forms and lexical units of informal style); b) violation of the rules for formatting in-text and post-text references in accordance with the recommended international citation standard of the American Psychological Association (APA); 3) ignorance by some students of basic norms of English punctuation.

In frequent cases, texts of project proposals are perceived with great difficulty, since, in fact, they represent a translation of the Russian-language version of the work, reflecting the peculiarities of preparing a text of a scientific genre characteristic of the Kyrgyz or Russian languages, in particular: complex syntactic constructions, an impersonal tone of the statement (in English it is more “personalized” and may include personal pronouns in the gender I/we), the predominance of passive forms, etc. Some works are notable for the use of a literal translation of scientific terminology accepted in the domestic tradition (for example, subject/object of research, relevance, novelty of research, thesis, etc.), but completely unacceptable in an English-language scientific text if it claims to be positively assessed by members of the international academic community. Moreover, a serious problem for some students is a reasoned and consistent development of thought, taking into account international requirements for the presentation and distribution of information in a particular section of a scientific work (for example, abstract, introduction, description of research methods and (expected) scientific results/Expected Outcomes), as well as the precise choice of linguistic and compositional means adequate to the communicative task implemented in a particular segment of an English-language scientific text (for example, justification of the relevance of the topic, identification of the research problem taking into account the results of a review of selected sources on the problem, justification of the selected research methods). Often the text of various sections of the work is not perceived as a complex syntactic whole, since a separate idea or argument is introduced in it, but is not developed or illustrated properly in subsequent sentences, and the division into paragraphs in some places is either absent or too fractional.

The second reason is the insufficient level of research competence and analytical skills required when planning, organizing and documenting the results of research activities.

Speaking about the organizational and content side of the preparation of project proposals by some students and doctoral students, we have to state a generally low level of culture in planning and organizing scientific research as a multi-stage process, including a number of standard procedures (identifying “gaps” in the development of a problem, clarifying the goals and objectives of the planned research, justification of the chosen methods of collecting, analyzing and processing scientific data, the expected value of the work). After all, the

compilation of a scientific text most often occurs at the final stage of the “research cycle” [13] and is a cumulative reflection of the author’s conclusions about the significance of the entire work, based on a thorough analysis of the results obtained during the research. In particular, in the works of some students we noted difficulties: in critically reading information sources on the research problem; selection of relevant information for a reasoned statement of objectives and justification of the expected results of the study; in citing sources using strategies of paraphrase, generalization, synthesis of information from several sources; in compliance with the formatting of in-text and post-text citations in accordance with the requirements of the APA Recommended Citation Format.

It seems to us that the above problems are largely due to the following factors. Despite the complexity of the task of preparing master’s and doctoral students for the preparation of English-language project proposals, at the moment the very structure of organizing the educational process in a foreign language at the university in question does not provide ample opportunities for training and practice in the preparation of scientific texts in English within the framework of AW courses at the level of bachelor’s degree. It’s not even a matter of the limited number of classroom hours. We are talking about the content of training in these courses, which in rare cases allows you to develop those AW skills in English that are necessary to create an authentic foreign language scientific text (and not its literal translation into a foreign language), prepared and designed in accordance with the expectations of the international community. In this regard, the question of the objective readiness of individual specialists in foreign languages to the formation and development in students of the skills necessary to compose a foreign language scientific text in the format of international requirements. It is obvious that not all foreign language teachers, not being native speakers and not having extensive experience in publishing activity in a foreign language, can fully fulfill the mission entrusted to them. Unfortunately, this problem is often complicated by the objective difficulties of abandoning this mission in the context of the institutional requirements of the university as an employer.

A necessary condition for resolving this contradiction through the efforts of educational institutions may be the implementation of a set of measures to improve the qualifications of teachers with the participation of foreign and domestic specialists with experience in participating in international research projects and publishing scientific works in foreign peer-reviewed journals, to provide opportunities for professional training to perform the duties of tutors (consultants) with university AW centers, to expand business contacts with colleagues dealing with the problems of teaching AW, as well as to attract teachers to participate in scientific internships at various universities around the world (for example, within the framework of international academic mobility programs). In addition, it is necessary to note the problem of low representation in Kyrgyz/post-Soviet the market of already proven English-language teaching aids, which consistently reveal the fundamentals and strategies for composing scientific texts of different genres, taking into account the difficulties experienced by authors for whom English is not their native language [8;12;25;26;27]. In such manuals, much attention is paid to the linguistic design of a scientific text: its genre, composition, lexico-grammatical and stylistic features, for example, the choice of preferred tense forms to indicate the relevance of the topic, descriptions of research methods, justification of the significance of the planned research results, etc. Particular attention is paid to them is devoted to the analysis of schemes for the logical organization of text based on the so-called “moves” [24] – text segments that perform a specific communicative function and determine the author’s choice of lexical and grammatical means corresponding to this function in a particular section of scientific work. Arrangement sequence *moves* in different sections of a scientific text is not strictly fixed and largely depends on the specifics of the scientific field. For example, the chain *moves* for the Abstract section of a typical empirical article may include: designation of the relevance of the selected research problem → identification of the “lacuna” in the development of the problem → clarification of the goals and objectives of this study → description of procedures and means for collecting and analyzing data → presentation of the obtained or planned results → discussion of their significance.

4. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, our personal experience of teaching AW in a foreign language and analysis of works devoted to this issue allow us to conclude that domestic teaching aids that address the problems of teaching the composition of English-language scientific texts, taking into account the difficulties faced non-English speaking English users, almost none, except for work [6].

Finally, one cannot but agree with the opinion of colleagues [9; 14] that when posing the very problem of teaching AW both in a foreign and in their native languages, it is necessary, first of all, to raise the question of

the development of students' general "academic literacy" [13; 14], critical thinking, and the cultivation of reflective analysis of the progress and results of independent scientific activity at its different stages. This involves creating an appropriate academic environment that nourishes and stimulates the development of academic culture, involving students and teaching staff in participating in research projects and acquiring international experience in educational and research activities.

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