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Teaching academic writing skills to students of the faculty of foreign languages

The authors of this article reveal the importance of didactic principles in teaching academic writing in English to students. Updating of the investigated topic is associated with the issue of teaching students to write in a foreign language, with determination of new requirements for the quality of training young professionals. The article analyzes the possibilities of mastering the discipline «Language for academic purposes» in terms of teaching. In the context of formation of academic competencies it reveals the importance of certain pedagogical conditions. The article shows how the continuity of specific educational stages may be used while training academic writing skills in a foreign language.

Key words: academic writing, foreign languages, speech activity, stages of teaching, pedagogical conditions, didactic principles, academic competences, essay parts, written communication, research skills.

The experience of teaching the course «Language for academic purposes» at the faculty of foreign languages shows that one of necessary, but insufficiently developed skills which students have is the skill of academic writing in a foreign language. Today the curriculum of the specialty 5B011900 «Foreign language: two foreign languages» includes the discipline «Language for academic purposes» which is taught in the final year, however modern conditions reveal the necessity for an integrated approach to the development of skills of academic writing. Students do not fully manage to acquire the skills of academic writing whereas it represents the necessary condition for receiving higher education.

The analysis of essays reveals students' weaknesses as absence of stringency in thinking and accuracy of thought, low level of analysis and generalization performance, weak display of independence and initiative in choice of their own view of life [1]. In this regard updating of this problem is determined by modern requirements to quality of young specialists' vocational training which implies that the skill of academic writing in a foreign language is very important. It is caused by the requirement of society for the experts proficient in oral and written foreign language in the midst of all those socio-political and socio-economic transformations in Kazakhstan and growth of economic and cultural relations with foreign countries.

Theoretical reasoning of importance of skills in academic writing makes it possible to emphasize the following tendencies:

- academic writing promotes the realization of knowledge of a foreign language through linguistic-cultural course contents;
- academic writing (for example, in English) together with reading, speaking and listening creates correspondent integrative qualities such as: system city, integrity and complexity of speech activity in professional formation of future expert;
- academic writing in a foreign language during vocational training of expert in any profile has to become not only an independent type of speech activity, but also to fulfill educational, developing and disciplinary functions of development of student's identity.

This purpose requires the increase in efficiency of teaching a foreign language in general and to improve practical focus of contents on vocational training in «Language for academic purposes» that causes, in turn, formation of the following work directions:

- organizing the training process of students on the basis of learner-centered and activity approaches;
- applying productive methods for practical use of academic writing when training students;
- developing methodological aspects of improving the process of teaching academic writing, both while learning a foreign language, and within the discipline «Language for academic purposes».

Implementation of productive teaching academic writing in English to students requires application of such didactic principles as:

- continuity of levels of training (from basic to advanced);
- integrity of teaching the speech activity as such;
- competent integration of all types of speech activity (reading, writing, listening, speaking) [2].

The need for these principles is attributed to the fact that academic writing in the system of professional training in the conditions of the faculty of foreign languages will always interact with the following components: as a separate type of speech activity along with reading, speaking and listening; as a means of improving the quality of students' vocational training in integration with reading, listening and speaking. Therefore for productive teaching of academic writing in a foreign language to students it is also important to focus on the principles of complexity and adaptability as well in order to provide both efficiency of teaching academic writing in a foreign language to students from intermediate to advanced level, and development of professional qualities of students' speech activity as future experts [3, 4].

The analysis of work of the faculty of foreign languages shows that today, as a rule, preference is assigned to the approach which considers writing in a foreign language only as an aid for teaching other types of speech activity, i.e. skills of writing lag behind the level of proficiency in other types of speech activity. Solution of this problem requires realization of certain pedagogical conditions of teaching the skills of academic writing in a foreign language which, in particular, would provide the continuity of the following stages:

- 1) at the initial stage students study spelling, grammar, vocabulary and adequacy of using it;
- 2) the second stage implies teaching academic writing where students get the skills of style in official academic writing.

Besides the second stage should preferably begin not in the 4th year of study as it occurs now, but at least in the third year, and it also should be based on the level approach.

These stages are realized provided that the following pedagogical conditions are satisfied:

- maintenance of such contents, forms and methods of teaching students which would make learning a foreign language a complete process of speech activity (reading, writing, listening and speaking) focused on consolidation of skills in academic writing;
- establishment of substantial and functional connections between all types of speech activity for the purpose of ensuring system city and consistency in developing the skills of academic writing;
- interrelation of development of academic writing skills with students' creative self-realization during their speech activity;
- continuity of levels of essential, intermediate and advanced assimilation while teaching a foreign language;
- differentiated approach to teaching a foreign language with account of students' acquisition of language competences;
- continuous updating of integral educational process with innovative methods of teaching academic writing of proficiency level in a foreign language.

Against this background, when studying the course «Language for Academic Purposes», the following academic competences are to be developed in students:

- acquisition of skills in structuring a text at the level of competent organization of its contents within sentences and paragraphs;
- well-developed language skills in terms of style and vocabulary for competent writing of articles, texts, and various business and information documents;
- ability to analyze and assess written works of various levels, including both their own and someone else's texts;
- ability to work with authentic sources, and also to prove their own point of view about their assessment, etc. [5].

We know that all students have different level of proficiency in a foreign language, thus, according to the level of proficiency in a language the exercises used in the course of training must be different. In order to teach them to state their ideas in a piece of writing competently, we have to teach them:

- to correctly write and use in a professional context lexical units, such as nouns denoting phenomena and objects of professional sphere, verbs denoting process, adjectives denoting characteristics of professional objects;
- to build sentences correctly, from simple to compound and complex sentences;
- to structure paragraph and text correctly.

Our Russian-speaking students first of all organize their thoughts and arrange them in sentences in Russian, and only then to the Russian sentence they choose an equivalent in English, beginning with grammar structure and up to lexical and phonetic filling of Syntegra. The distinctive feature of English sentence is fixed word order. In order to develop the skills of correct organization of an English sentence, we use the following exercises:

1) Translating from Russian into English. A wide-spread mistake of students in this task is a transfer of the structure of Russian sentence in English. Most often they put words in random order, like in Russian, forgetting about the fixed word order. More often it happens in impersonal sentences peculiar to the academic style. At this stage, it is important to pay attention not only to spelling of words, but also to organization of sentences according to grammar rules of English.

2) Putting words in the sentence in correct order. These can be exclamatory, declarative and interrogative sentences.

3) Identifying the sentence parts: For example: Identify subjects and predicates in the following sentences.

4) Correcting the mistakes. Mistakes can be very different: in arrangement of punctuation marks and capitalization, in agreement of subject and predicate.

After students have mastered the arrangement of sentences according to the rules of English, it is possible to proceed to writing paragraphs. In our case paragraph is a group of sentences united under one theme or idea. Paragraph consists of three main parts: topic sentence, body and concluding sentence [6].

For work with structuring a paragraph and writing it, we use the following exercises:

1) Studying the paragraph: Read the paragraph and answer questions;

2) Working with the topic sentence. For example: 1. Read each paragraph and three topic sentences below it. Then choose the best topic sentence and write it on the line. Read the paragraph again. Make sure that the topic sentence gives the main idea for the whole paragraph;

3) Working with the body. Here it is very important that each sentence belong to the topic sentence. They are to support idea, add details or give examples to the ideas in the topic sentence. For example: 1. Read each paragraph carefully. Underline the topic sentence. In each paragraph, one supporting sentence does not belong because it isn't directly connected to the topic sentence. It doesn't fit the ideas in the paragraph. Put parentheses () around the one sentence that doesn't belong;

4) Working with the concluding sentence. The concluding sentence usually in brief conveys the information of the paragraph. In many cases, information in the topic sentence is similar to the idea in the concluding sentence. However, it can be an offer, an opinion, or a prediction. For example: 1. Read each paragraph. Then read the concluding sentences below it. Circle the letter of the best concluding sentence;

5) Writing an individual paragraph on the given theme. After students have acquired the technology of organizing sentences and paragraphs in English, we proceed to creation of individual thematic texts, namely essay.

But despite the variety of types of essay, all of them have common structure. Each essay, irrespective of type it belongs to, includes: introduction, body, and conclusion. Usually introduction and conclusion consist of one paragraph while the body — from three paragraphs. Meanwhile there is a great variety of ways to teach writing each part of essay, regardless its type.

Introduction for many types of essay represents only one paragraph. This is an introduction paragraph which usually consists of three parts:

1) The hook;

2) The connecting information;

3) The thesis statement.

A good hook isn't so simple to write. It demands training and non-ordinary approach. The following exercises are good to use:

1) Ask a question. If the reader wants to know the answer to a question which «has hooked» him, he will read the essay;

2) Use interesting observations which will make readers learn the main reasons for events;

3) It is possible to use a unique scenario to capture attention of the reader;

4) Start with a well-known quote which will begin the essay in the direction unexpected for the reader;

5) Use a surprising or shocking statistics.

The following stage of work with essay is to teach writing the connecting information from the hook to the main / thesis statement. Connecting information includes from three to five sentences which help to direct the reader on the essay topic. These sentences can be background information or examples about the topic. It is worth to note that the topic shouldn't be discussed at once. First, it is necessary to imagine that the reader already knows about the topic. Then to fill gaps between what the reader already knows and what he needs to know about the topic. It is very important to know your readership when you write the essay.

Further, we proceed to the main / thesis statement. The main / thesis statement formulates the main idea of the essay and reports how information will be organized. The thesis statement determines the main idea which you want to convey, and tells what moments will be explained and confirmed in the body of the essay. The thesis statement is a draft of the essay. Many thesis statements include the idea about the essay topic, and after that general reasoning in support of the idea or position.

The following stage is the work with the supporting statements or the body of the essay. The supporting statements in the essay are the body of the essay. The supporting sentences always refer to the topic sentence of the paragraph. In the body of the essay the author explains and confirms his ideas or opinions which he expressed in the thesis statement. The body of a good essay is to develop the thesis statement, so that the reader can understand the author's point of view completely. The supporting statements mainly represent examples, reasons or grounds, facts or more specific or peculiar information about the essay topic. Without these sentences the essay will turn into general description or review.

One of ways to make the supporting information in the body of the essay clear is to use suitable transitional words, or linking words. They will help the reader to follow ideas of the essay. These can be both separate words, such as but, this and although; and phrases: in addition, as a result, for these reasons. The body of the essay consists of three or four paragraphs between introduction and conclusion. The body of the essay usually follows the organization plan determined by the author before he begins to write. This organization differs depending on the type of the essay.

The following stage is the work with the conclusion. It is important that the essay have a good conclusion. Introduction and conclusion often contain the same ideas and words. Someone thinks that to write the conclusion is the most difficult part of the essay; for others on the contrary it is the simplest. When writing the conclusion it is important to follow these principles:

1) The reader should be shown that this is a conclusion. The conclusion can be marked with some transition or link words which tell the reader that it is the last part of the essay. For example: in conclusion; from the information given; to summarize. Sometimes the first sentence of the conclusion states the thesis or the main idea of the essay again: As previously noted there are numerous problems that new parents face today;

2) The conclusion shouldn't introduce new information. The conclusion is to help the reader to conceive again the main ideas which you presented in the essay. Therefore, any new information in the conclusion will sound as continuation of the essay body;

3) For many authors the conclusion is difficult to write. It demands much work, creative approach and concentration as well as writing of a good hook and the thesis statement does. The type of essay can determine the way of ending the essay; however the ideas given below can help in writing the conclusion of the essay:

- The last sentences often represent the suggestion of some idea, opinion or prediction about the essay topic;
- Sometimes the last sentence just says that the question discussed in the essay is supported with such a large number of convincing facts that the answer to the question is absolutely clear now. It is better to change contents and style of the conclusion, but the conclusion usually finishes with the sentence which expresses an offer, an opinion, or a prediction. The author assumes what is to be done now, or the author suggests final opinion about the topic, or foretells what may happen further. The essay without conclusion looks incomplete [7].

As the specific feature of academic writing is its formal style of exposition, students have to use scientific vocabulary properly, perform preciseness and clarity when composing a text, and also shouldn't use phrase logical units and words of colloquial style excessively [8]. In this regard the teacher is faced with a task to develop students' ability to structure the text so that they can use this skill in the scientific activity later on, as the correct structuring of the text is the most important component of academic writing. When students acquire the discipline «Language for academic purposes», teachers have to make students aware of various samples of texts; then on the basis of these samples to express their thoughts in their piece of writing through such types of texts as narration, reasoning, composition, etc. Thus, students have to know the main signs of genres of academic writing like: scientific article, research paper, summary, and essay; to be able to analyze scientific articles with regard to the author's research strategy; to have skills of writing research papers and summaries of scientific articles, etc. on their own [9].

It is also necessary to note that as the specialty 5B011900 «Foreign language: two foreign languages» is focused on pedagogical sphere, adequate selection of language material is important, and that naturally demands the account of thematic and genre accordance. This means that the question consists in the choice of

the topic of pedagogical sphere where the highest demand is for certain specific training of future experts. For that purpose the problem of assimilation of professional and highly specialized vocabulary becomes a question of paramount importance [10]. Hence the main feature of this course is to be its practical orientation on the development of academic writing skills, and this provides also parallel development of students' both cognitive (ability to make hypotheses, to analyze information, etc.), and language abilities (ability to convey a thought and to present it by means of language means) [11].

Modernization of higher education system of recent years in Kazakhstan is focused on the search for effective ways of improvement of foreign language teaching. Training process nowadays becomes closely connected with a real opportunity for university graduates to be integrated into the international scientific environment where they will be required to show not only the knowledge of language, but also their research skills [12]. In this process in recent years a special attention is paid to written communication in the form of scientific articles, reports, business reports. This makes the task of development of students' foreign-language academic abilities extremely urgent.

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А.А. Карманова, И.Н. Соколова, Т.А. Пастушенко, М. Страма

Шетел тілдер факультеті студенттерінің академиялық жазу дағдыларын дамыту

Мақалада студенттерді ағылшын тілінде академиялық жазуға оқытуда дидактикалық ойындардың маңыздылығы қарастырылды. Аталмыш мәселенің өзектілігі студенттерді шетел тілінде жазуға оқыту мәселесіне, жас мамандарды дайындау сапасына қойылатын жаңа талаптардың анықталуына байланысты. Авторлар студенттердің «Академиялық мақсатқа арналған тіл» пәнін оқытушы тұрғысынан игеру мүмкіндіктеріне талдау жасады. Академиялық құзыреттіліктерді қалыптастыру барысында белгілі бір педагогикалық шарттардың маңызын ашты. Сондай-ақ шетел тілінде академиялық жазу дағдыларын оқытуда нақты оқу кезеңдерінің сабақтастықтығы қалай пайдаланылатындығын көрсетті.

А.А. Карманова, И.Н. Соколова, Т.А. Пастушенко, М. Страма

Развитие навыков академического письма у студентов факультета иностранных языков

Актуализация исследуемой проблемы связана с задачей обучения студентов письму на иностранном языке, с определением новых требований к качеству профессиональной подготовки молодых специалистов. Выделена значимость дидактических принципов при обучении студентов академическому письму на английском языке. Исследованы возможности освоения студентами дисциплины «Язык для академических целей» с точки зрения преподавательской деятельности. В контексте формирования академических компетенций раскрыта значимость определенных педагогических условий. Показано использование преимуществ конкретные образовательных этапов при обучении навыкам академического письма на иностранном языке.

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