

Academic writing skills in Russian of foreign students

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Abstract. The article analyzes the types of exercises for foreign students in order to develop academic skills. In particular, we are talking about foreign medical students. Speaking about the current trends towards updating the content of foreign language teaching and the new requirements of individual universities for the implementation of professional training in foreign languages, we have to state that due to the novelty and multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, this problem in the conditions of domestic higher combined education has been developed only to a small extent. In the context of distance learning, it is quite difficult for foreign students of medical faculties to read the text in their specialty and extract the information necessary to solve a specific speech problem. The article deals with the peculiarities of teaching academic writing in Russian as one of the types of speech activity. Special attention is paid to the distinctive features of the written speech by students of medical specialties; several stages of work based on structural and semantic analysis of the text material are highlighted and described. The development and implementation of adapted special texts and exercises in the educational process allow foreign students to understand the content of articles, accurately determine the main and secondary information in the material, reproduce its main content using the skills of summarizing, annotating, note-taking.

Keywords: academic writing; structural and semantic analysis of the text; stages of teaching writing

1 Introduction

Competence in academic writing among university undergraduates has been a key area of research for over the last 30 years [1]. In modern conditions of expanding international relations between universities and integration of world educational systems, the success and mobility of a modern specialist are largely determined by his level of knowing foreign languages, where a particularly important evaluation criterion is the ability to express his thoughts correctly in writing in a foreign language [2]. For a long time writing as a term of

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methodology was considered the “cinderella methodology” and was almost completely eliminated from the learning process, and that was a strategic mistake according to E.I. Passov.

In recent years we can say that the role of writing in teaching a foreign language is gradually increasing, so writing is beginning to be considered as a reserve in improving the effectiveness of teaching a foreign language. In Russian, on the contrary, literal statements do not have such a clear structure, and the reader has to build part of the idea independently. To teach students to write academic texts in Russian as a foreign language, a student must understand and accept the canons of Russian-language academic discourse [3].

2 Methods

Methods of monitoring the educational and academic and extracurricular activities of foreign students, expert assessments of the content of courses taught and their results were used at Belgorod National Research University to determine the components, pedagogical tools and competencies relevant to the high quality of the offered education. The article uses methods of analyzing theoretical material, describing linguistic facts. In addition, the article contains developed practical tasks for foreign students of the medical specialty. The main approach in the study is integrative, which involves ensuring the integrity and systematic nature of the pedagogical process.

3 Results

Today, the concept of “academic writing” is widespread. Academic writing is considered as an element of research competence. The active emergence of new teaching tools in this discipline is also evidence of the increasing public attention to academic writing [4].

Writing and written speech in teaching methods of a foreign language is considered not only as a learning tool, but as the goal of teaching a foreign language. Writing is a technical component of written speech. Written speech, along with oral speech, is a so-called productive (expressive) type of speech activity, which is expressed with graphic signs in a certain context.

The purpose of this article is to summarize the author’s experience of teaching academic writing to foreign students of medical specialties at the Belgorod State National Research University in 2018-2021.

The analysis of errors of foreign students showed that the production of monologue statements of this type, such as abstract-summary, abstract-review, involving reliance on a written source of information, causes great difficulties, so it is necessary to provide good training for the creation of texts in the specialty of this type.

Some students meet with the problems of arguments in writing, taking into account the international requirements for the presentation and distribution of information in a particular section of scientific work (for example, annotation / Abstract, introduction / Introduction, description of research methods/methods and (expected) scientific results/expected Outcomes), the choice of language and compositional means that will correspond to the communicative task implemented in a particular segment of a foreign scientific text; insufficient level of research competence and analytical skills required in the planning, organization and design of the results of research activities in medicine discipline [5].

In our opinion, the method of teaching writing can be successfully implemented if we rely on the structural and semantic analysis of texts.

In this regard, we have developed a textbook “Russian language in medicine texts”, intended for 3rd year foreign students in medical institutions.

The purpose of this textbook is to teach the students the skills of taking notes and reviewing authentic Russian literature in their specialty. It is assumed that the users of the manual have the basics of the Russian language (at the level of TRKI).

The development of the textbook is based on a number of conceptual provisions that meet the requirements of modern methods of teaching foreign languages [6, 7].

In popular science literature, the examples of the use of grammatical constructions for scientific articles are offered. They are built on the vocabulary characteristic of the style of scientific literature and contain the most commonly used general medical vocabulary, which is necessary in any narrow specialty. Popular science texts contain information on various specialties and in various fields of medicine.

The first and second parts of the textbook include popular science articles that summarize the essence of the problem. At the same time, the student is offered tasks for their abstraction, which involve the further reduction of the source material.

For educational purposes, at the initial stage of the work, it is advisable to use short texts for abstracting, the content of which is presented in a compact form that does not require significant changes. The manual consists of two parts, each of which has its own educational and methodological purpose.

The first part includes the practice of reading, performing lexical and grammatical tasks to the context, as well as mastering the technique of redistributing the information of the text in the abstract format, compressing sentences and lexical design of semantic connections between fragments of information in the abstract text.

The second part is intended for the practice of using the skills formed in the first part of the manual, but in tasks involving a higher degree of independence of students where the training material brings them closer to the real conditions of working with information materials necessary for the preparation of review essays for articles.

This textbook creates perfect conditions for consistent and purposeful work on mastering the techniques of reading, taking notes, and abstracting.

The manual uses fragments of articles from newspapers and magazines, which made some compositional changes necessary for solving educational problems.

The development of the task system should be based on the principle of step-by-step formation of skills; each task involves working out a certain set of operations with the language and informative material of texts.

As a result of mastering the discipline, students should:

- know the main features of the genres of academic writing (essay, abstract, review);
- be able to analyze essays and scientific articles of professional orientation from the point of view of stylistics and composition;
- possess the skills of bibliographic description of printed publications and electronic resources;
- create abstracts, annotation, and introduction of scientific articles in the specialty.

It is advisable to conduct training in various citation methods:

- direct citations and links (integrated and non-integrated);
- citation of the secondary source, phrases and expressions used to include references and quotations in the text of the work. It is necessary to explain how to use definitions correctly when explaining terms, concepts, and teach different ways of using definitions.

Nowadays it is quite difficult for foreign students of medical faculties to read the text in their specialty and extract the information necessary to solve a specific speech problem. In this regard, the teacher should:

- pay more attention to writing an essay, scientific work, report;
- provide literature;
- teach how to make bibliographies, reviews;
- explain the structure of the review;
- teach how to work with text.

Creating secondary texts involves two main processes: “folding and unfolding information”. While “folding”, the primary text is reduced, which preserves the information necessary and sufficient to communicate the main idea or the most important provisions of the source. The reverse process makes up for the cuts made.

The main procedures for folding the primary text are taking notes, annotating, and summarizing. The level of proficiency in these methods of folding information depends on the ability to refer, because writing an abstract involves the use of various procedures for folding information.

Two main areas of academic writing application are writing for science and teaching others to write in Russian [8].

We illustrated our positions with the tasks are suggested to our foreign students. Targeted extraction of information from the text is implemented by taking notes of texts according to their specialty. An important and very productive form of work is the inclusion in the learning process of tasks aimed at the target interpretation of the text.

Most of the tasks are focused on teaching students to transfer the main content of the text in the form of summaries and theses. It is advisable to offer students tasks aimed at transforming the text: compressing the text and expanding it. When students modify a text, they learn to isolate a thought from a sufficiently large number of sentences in Russian and apply compression techniques when transmitting a Russian text. While working with text material, tasks are offered to replace parts of the text with synonymous equivalents and eliminate redundant information. An important and very productive form of work is the inclusion in the learning process of tasks aimed at the target interpretation of the text.

4 Discussion

The discussion about the role and place of academic writing in university education allowed us to draw a number of conclusions that this discipline can contribute to the development of interdisciplinary and international complex professional competencies [9, 10].

In this case, we suppose it is necessary to form the academic literacy of students with a professional orientation in a language format. In foreign scientific literature, the term “academic literacy” is considered in the works of I. Lecky, J. Brain, B. Green, K. Hyland and L. Hamp-Lyons [11].

An important stage in the preparation of foreign students of medical specialties is the research of Ukrainian researchers. We are talking about the need to develop the skills of academic writing among foreign students at the preparatory faculty [12].

While training an important role is given to the formation academic writing skills as a set of which will help a future specialist in solving various tasks of foreign language written communication, including informing the scientific community about the results of his research activities. The text is supplemented with clarifications, explanations, and semantic “threads” which are connected it with the entire system of communicative and socio-cultural relations [13].

In order to achieve positive results in English Academic Writing and to develop it on a larger scale, the more Academic Writing Centers should be established at other Russian universities [14]. In general, foreign students of Belgorod National Research University are highly motivated by the Academic writing course and in spite of insufficient resources; they learn and develop writing skills. Some of them might experience challenges but the positive thing is that the methodological approaches based on new directions are actively introduced and developed right now in Russia.

5 Conclusion

Academic writing strategies are easily – and willingly – accepted by Russian students [10]. Our task is to expand the resources of international communication for students from any country of the world. One of the ways of implementing this task in the process of teaching foreign students is to use adapted exercises in the course of academic writing in Russian.

Language and intercultural communication skills are considered to be basic skills in our globalizing world [15]. Writing a text is a complex process that requires several skills at the same time [3].

The professionally-oriented communicative competencies allow foreign students to understand the content of articles in their specialty, accurately identify the main and secondary information in the material, and reproduce its main content using written supports.

Academic writing skills cannot be attributed only to language skills. When selecting practical tasks for foreign students, it is necessary to keep in mind both educational and cognitive functions. For this purpose, the teacher needs to find effective methods and take into account the specialization of the student group. A balanced combination of methods will allow to adapt medical students in the process of studying the course “Academic Writing”.

Academic writing in a foreign language in vocational training of the expert of any profile has to become not only an independent type of speech activity, but also perform the educational, developing and educational functions of personal development of the student [16].

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