

GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL FEATURES OF ACADEMIC WRITING IN ENGLISH FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Taking into account the rapid development of integration processes and prioritizing of academic mobility in Ukraine, it is essential to place more emphasis on teaching grammar and lexis which will enable the Ukrainian medical students to produce the English-language academic writing of competitive quality. In fact, researchers [1; 4] assert that conversational fluency does not guarantee the effective production of academic text: despite having studied English in their native countries, most students experience difficulties at the college- and university-levels in English-speaking environment [3]. Therefore, one of the most relevant tasks of teaching English as a second language is identifying grammatical structures and vocabulary with a view to help students in improving the quality of their academic style.

Based on the corpus analysis of written academic prose, S. Conrad [1] and J. Frodesen [2] organize grammar structures into two major groups: “grammar constructions essential in academic writing, and grammar features found in practically all textbooks, but hardly ever used in academic writing” [3, p. 7]. Hence, the constructions which require “intensive and persistent instruction” [3, p. 5] in the context of developing academic writing skills are: the simple present tense, the simple past tense, and subject-verb agreement; passive voice constructions in simple present and simple past tenses (e.g., “the tolerability of this surgical technique was examined”). J. Swales and C. Feak [5] remark that the passive voice provides the effect of objectivity, thus constituting a prevalent feature of academic texts.

Moreover, specific verb tenses should be considered in terms of their contextual use and function in academic discourse [1]. For instance, the present tense is appropriate for citations of sources, as well as in abstracts of research reports and background information (e.g., “Most physicians argue that it is reasonable to apply age criteria for heart transplantation”); the present perfect tense is traditionally used

in introduction sections of academic essays and papers (e.g., “This method of treatment has been considered inappropriate for these disorders”); while the actual research is written in past tense (e.g., “Gastric emptying in patients was measured by scintigraphy”) [3]. Yet another important aspect of academically-oriented grammar is adverbial clause. Hence, the concession clauses (e.g., clauses with “although”, “though”) and the conditional clauses (e.g., “if”, “in case”, “unless”, “provided that”) are in the focus of attention. Students should be aware of the purpose of adverbial clauses in academic writing, which is the reallocation of data in order of importance: “the most important information goes into the main clause, and secondary information goes into the adverbial clause” [3, p. 11].

Teaching grammar for academic purposes cannot take place without taking into account the lexical features of text. In this context, special attention is paid to the reporting verbs which are widely used for paraphrasing, writing reviews, and citing information from other sources (e.g., “the author states, remarks, indicates, observes, believes, points out, emphasizes, advocates, reports, concludes, underscores, mentions, acknowledges, discusses”, etc.) [4]. Apart from the reporting verbs, students should master nominalizations (nouns ending in “-ion”, “-ity”, “-ness”, “-ment”), gerunds, and abstract nouns; exemplification markers (“for example”, “for instance”, “such as”) [4]. Not least important are impersonal “it”-constructions (e.g., “it seems/appears/is clear that...”), since they “depersonalize text and create an impression of the writer’s distance and objectivity” [3, p. 10]. Moreover, it is important for students to differentiate between informal conversational discourse and academic English. The following constructions must be avoided in academic writing: indefinite and universal pronouns (e.g., “something”, “anyone”, “nobody”, “everything”), contractions (e.g., “don’t”, “isn’t”), emphatics (e.g., “always”, “totally”, “for sure”), exaggeratives and intensifiers (e.g., “awful”, “huge”), and casual hedges (e.g., “anyway”, “sort of”, “kind of”) [4].

Hence, highlighting the abovementioned grammatical and lexical features is essential for academic mobility and successful recruitment of future medical scientists. On the other hand, a certain range of grammatical phenomena are regarded

by scholars as having low instructional importance [3] in terms of developing academic writing skills, such as future perfect and future perfect progressive; past perfect and past perfect progressive; passives in future perfect, future progressive, present progressive, past progressive, past perfect, past perfect progressive; as well as the subjunctive constructions [1; 5]. As a matter of fact, the progressive aspect and the combination of the perfect and the progressive aspects are employed in academic writing particularly rarely (less than 8% of all verb phrases). As to the subjunctive constructions, E. Hinkel [3] contends that they do not provide the necessary effect of academic detachment. Since these grammar phenomena are found in textbooks and curricula, taking a certain amount of class time, students should be instructed as to their rarity and low priority in academic writing.

Thus, the instruction of academically-oriented students requires the lecturer to place more emphasis on essential vocabulary and grammar, as well as to clearly define the inappropriate structures. It is our belief that such a shift in focus of attention will eliminate difficulties which the Ukrainian medical students may experience during their academic mobility and help them in meeting the demands of college and university programs in English-speaking countries.

References

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