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## CURRENT APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING L2 ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS OF POST-GRADUATE DENTAL STUDENTS

*The development of academic writing as a mechanism and practice for knowledge production and exchange is one of urgent issues in teaching English for Special Purposes and English for Academic Purposes. This article is aimed to elucidate current approaches intended for developing academic writing expertise and the ways to adapt them to meet the demands of Ukrainian post-graduate dental students. We have highlighted peculiarities of the approaches,*

*specified the characteristics of dental discourse, which demonstrating biomedical cognitive dominants, incorporates features of some other institutional discourses, analyzed post-graduates' linguistic needs, which have a vital role in the process of designing and carrying out any language training activities.*

**Key words:** *academic writing, dental post-graduates, dental discourse, genres, writing skills, linguistic threshold levels.*

### СУЧАСНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО РОЗВИТКУ НАВИЧОК ІНШОМОВНОГО АКАДЕМІЧНОГО ПИСЬМА У АСПІРАНТІВ СТОМАТОЛОГІЧНИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ

*Розвиток академічного письма як засобу та способу поширення знань та їхнього обміну є одним з загальних питань викладання англійської мови для професійних цілей та англійської мови для академічних цілей. Метою статті було висвітлити сучасні напрямки, спрямовані на розвиток навичок академічного письма, а також способи їх адаптування до потреб українських аспірантів стоматологічних спеціальностей. Ми окреслили особливості цих підходів, описали характерні риси дискурсу стоматології, котрий, побудований на біомедичних когнітивних домінантах, включає також різнорівневі елементи інших інституційних дискурсів; проаналізували мовні потреби аспірантів, що є визначальними при розробці та впровадженні різних методик навчання іноземній мові.*

**Ключові слова:** *академічне письмо, аспіранти стоматологічних спеціальностей, дискурс стоматології, жанри, навички письма, мовленнєві порогові рівні.*

### СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ В РАЗВИТИИ НАВЫКОВ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОГО ПИСЬМА НА ИНОСТРАННОМ ЯЗЫКЕ У АСПИРАНТОВ СТОМАТОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТЕЙ

*Развитие академического письма как средства и способа распространения знаний и их обмена является одним из актуальных вопросов преподавания английского языка для профессиональных целей и английского языка для академических целей. В статье освещены современные подходы, направленные на развитие навыков академического письма а также способы их адаптации к потребностям украинских аспирантов стоматологических специальностей. Мы определили особенности этих подходов, описали характерные черты дискурса стоматологии, который, опираясь на биомедицинские когнитивные доминанты, включает также разноуровневые элементы других институциональных дискурсов; проанализировали языковые потребности аспирантов, которые являются определяющими при разработке и внедрении различных методик обучения иностранному языку.*

**Ключевые слова:** *академическое письмо, аспиранты стоматологических специальностей, дискурс стоматологии, жанры, навыки письма, речевые пороговые уровни.*

*Change your language and you change your thoughts.*

*Karl Albrecht*

High quality international collaboration requires a high standard of English language proficiency. Nowadays fast dissemination of new knowledge and scientific achievements circulating by means of research papers written mainly in English is constantly growing. Many scientists have registered a tendency in increased number of MD theses, PhD theses in English irrespective of whether they are submitted in English-speaking countries or not (J. Swales, C. B. Feak, 2010; T. Lillis and M. Curry, 2010). There has been also a notable increase in research articles in English submitted not only to international, but in-home specialized journals as well [6, p.52].

The need to publish in English or to present the results of the researches at conferences in English probably puts many authors whose native language is not

English at a disadvantage compared to their English-speaking counterparts, though this disadvantage may be difficult to quantify in figures [9, p. 256]. Many Ukrainian-language periodicals have responded to the trend toward anglicization by making an attempt to switch their language of publication to English. Nowadays about 25 of the medical journals on the list of recognized special publishing have been already published in two of three languages. The reason for this trend is to be found in the increasing importance of impact factors for the evaluation of academic performance, and thus for the scientists' careers. Only English-language journals achieve high impact factors, because journals in other languages are unlikely to be read and cited internationally.

Therefore, the development of students' academic writing as a mechanism and practice for knowledge production and exchange seems to be an urgent issue in teaching English for Special Purposes (ESP) as well as English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This paper is aimed to elucidate current approaches intended for developing academic writing expertise of post-graduate dental students.

Some scholars believe that making generalizations about developing academic writing skills is impossible (D. Russell, 1995, E. Wardle, 2009). Studies by L. Carroll, A. Herrington and M. Curtis, and L. McCarthy reveal considerable variety in the writing undergraduates do and in the disciplinary approaches they encounter. Disciplines differ in modes of inquiry, in forms of proof, and in methods of research. These differences manifest themselves in writing, as documented in corpus-based studies by J. Swales, S. MacDonald, K. Hyland, and others, differences students will appreciate when they learn to write the genres of their chosen majors. Despite this variation, there are some approaches that generalize existing theories and principles for academic writing, no matter the discipline.

Many researchers provide a framework for the strong relationship between academic writing and discourse competence, which is a central element of several existing models of communicative competence proposed by applied linguists [1; 3; 5; 10].

The discourse competence is defined according to The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) as "the ability of a user / learner to arrange sentences in sequence so as to produce coherent stretches of language" [4, p.123]. It includes knowledge of and ability to control the ordering of sentences in terms of topic/focus; given/new; 'natural' sequencing, e.g. temporal; cause/effect (invertible); ability to structure and manage discourse in terms of its thematic organisation; coherence and cohesion; logical ordering; style and register; rhetorical effectiveness.

Discourses play a significant role in articulating, preserving knowledge, and enforcing relations in science. Dental discourse in the broadest sense (discourse in and about dentofacial anatomy, dentofacial anomalies, their diagnosis, treatment, prevention as well as and relevant language ideologies) has profound social and anthropological significance. Demonstrating marked biomedical cognitive dominants, it incorporates certain features of some other institutional discourses (engineering, computer technologies, economics, and esthetics). K. Bennet, J. Nelson, S. Aranha and other researches point out the nature of academic discourse even for native-language students is complex and difficult to achieve.

Academic discourse involves using academic sources to create knowledge by making a contribution to the understanding of a topic, for example by offering a new conception about the topic (B. Spatt, 1999; N. Spivay, 1984; R. Sternberg, 1998; R. Veit, 1998). According to L. Flower (1994), academic discourse occurs when writers "enter into the academic community by contributing to both a serious, energetic conversation and to a shared body of knowledge... They enter the discourse by offering us research, scholarship, and theory. In addition to these finished thoughts, academic discourse also encourages and values writing which presents new ideas, hypotheses and mysteries, issues for negotiation, and thoughtful reflections" [5, p. 24].

The problem is that the requirements of academic discourse are often implicit and students are expected to gain a grasp of academic literacy without

necessarily being given instruction in how to utilise these conventions of academic writing.

The authors of recent publications as H. Nesi and S. Gardner (2012), M. Tian, K. Bennet emphasizes that the starting point in developing students' awareness of writing across disciplines is not the texts themselves but their disciplinary contexts. This enables them to subsequently classify and analyse genre families, and system of the language including vocabulary, syntax and grammar in terms of features which are shared across genres but also those which are discipline specific. In relation to academic writing instruction, operationalizing the different elements of discourse competence and promoting its development are the central aims of genre-based approach.

The research and practical activities in dentistry as well as social context are basic factors which determine the development of genres and their priority in the genre system. With reference to the genre based approaches, definition of genre may be adopted more generally as “a social construct, existing in order to achieve some kind of conventionalized purpose in recurrent or typified situations within a particular cultural context or discourse community” [3, p. 35].

The wide range of written academic genres within the space of dental discourse is subdivided into primary ones as research papers (reports), review articles also known as secondary research papers, case report papers, and peripheral genres as abstracts, field observations, response papers, informative and lab reports, conference previews and reviews, position papers (e.g. editor's pages), proposals (viewpoints, letters to the editor, forum), news items, including survey of dental industry news, trade news and new products, and Web-based projects. The pivotal genres of academic writings within dental discourse do not exist in isolation but as part of a complex reticulation of genres that interact to form a genre system, as well as a way of the segmentation of dental discourse space. Perhaps it should be also pointed out the peripheral genres coexist and interact with the genres of printed media assuming new

stylistic features. This contributes to the development of fruitful vivid dialogue within the discourse community.

To develop dental post-graduates' abilities in academic writing, EAP instructors should conduct analyses of written genres within specific disciplines and across the disciplines, providing a framework in which expert and practical knowledge is internally organized and related with regard to cognitive genre theory as well as the dual processing theory [1]. This also suggests focusing on particular rhetorical purposes, discussing the building blocks in designing discipline-specific texts, teaching to choose proper language means in order to achieve relevant communicative goals with specific emphasis on discourse development and discourse competence. As S. Aranha. points out, "No matter the language the text is written in, students have to negotiate the genre conventions, the knowledge and the values of academic writing in their struggle for a personal voice" [1].

From the standpoint of content-based academic writing approach, writing is connected to study of specific academic subject matter and is viewed as a means of promoting understanding of this content. Five principles for structuring content-based writing approach are defined and exemplified: topic-centred "modules" or "mini-courses," content-based academic writing courses (reading and writing intensive), content-centred English-for-special-purposes courses, composition or multiskill courses/tutorials as adjuncts to designated university courses, and individualized help with course-related writing at times of need (through faculty in writing-across-the-curriculum programs, tutors, and writing centre staff) [10].

What challenges do Ukrainian post-graduate dental students face developing their academic writing skills? Most of dental post-graduates of Ukrainian Medical Dental Academy are interested in learning academic writing due to the pressure of publishing or perishing. But they are often unaware of the linguistic constraints of academic writing in a foreign language. Post-graduate courses in Ukraine do not include special disciplines whose aims are to develop

academic writing skills; little attention is usually paid to academic writing while preparing post-graduates for their comprehensive English examination for the Candidate's degree.

Our post-graduates seem to be at very different linguistic threshold levels, so more grammar and vocabulary are essential for writing production. For many of them, poor skills in English language in generally complicate mastery of discipline-specific discourse. Our own findings obtained for a decade and a large body of researches has established the fact that effective usage of English as a second language in academic writing demands comparatively advanced language proficiency (E. Hinkel, 2011; I. Lee, 2009; P. Ur, 2009; I. Leki, J. Cummings, 2008; G. Thompson, 2001; S. Weigle, 2002).

Language proficiency in academic English includes competencies in the grammar of standard written English, complex sentence structure, developed academic vocabulary, punctuation conventions. The essential elements of grammar instruction should be designed to be flexible to develop learners' practical and useful skills, directly relevant to producing academic text, and the amount of effort and time devoted to each can be adjusted depending on learners' needs as well. Grammar instruction that has the goal of preparing students for academic studies needs to be designed Teaching grammar for writing cannot take place in isolation from the lexical and discourse features of text.

Grammar teaching even at the intermediate levels of student proficiency, which is quite common among Ukrainian dental post-graduates, can begin with an examination and analysis of structures in formal academic writing. Early on, the objective of instruction is to develop learners' awareness and noticing of common grammatical features, and then building on this foundation, the regularities in grammar structures can be explicitly addressed and practiced in the production of academic writing (M. Celce-Murcia, 2002; P. Ur, 2011). At higher proficiency levels, instruction can also highlight the effects of grammatical features on context, discourse and text, i. e. grammar activities



should be embedded in real writing opportunities and draw on the discourse of the oral health disciplines that these students are studying.

Greater attention should be paid to the opportunities that are provided for post-graduates explicitly to grapple with the language of the discipline. This includes active approaches to reading, listening, and discussion of concepts — “an apprenticeship to both the concepts and the language in which they are constituted.” According to D. Moore, students engaging with the “new language” of a discipline need opportunities to present concepts in oral and written dialogues with their lecturers. Dental terminology may be presented as a conceptual map, or a hierarchy tree formed by cognitive entities representing an abstraction of professional experience and knowledge. These entities may differ by their information capacity and significance of information.

Systematic and institutionalised development of effective academic writing should be a high priority for undergraduate and postgraduate coursework programs to create better transition experiences. Particular attention should be paid to the explicit transitions that occur in the development of scientific writing skills from undergraduate to post-graduate programs.

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## Keywords

- Academic writing;
- Writing instruction;
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- Systemic-functional linguistics;
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#### Keywords

After investigating the literature, the authors found that the primary cause of these difficulties is students' **lack of knowledge about what exactly is expected** of them, namely, the lack of task representation.

Graff and Hoberek (1999) attributed the applicants' lack of knowledge not to the deficiencies in the applicants but to “a lack of interest in socializing hopeful members of the academic family into its particular customs, beliefs, and behaviors” (p. 242).

**Transformation of Knowledge: Text Processing of Single Sources**

**Integration of Knowledge from Multiple Sources**

**Findings Presentation and Discussion**

As an advocate of discipline-specific approaches to the teaching of academic writing, Hyland (2004: 11) points out that:

However, this type of approach may not take into account EAP learners' previous writing experiences, their identities and preferred discursive practices. If, for the sake of getting good marks in their assignments, they have to sacrifice their own identities and voice and blindly adhere to very strict academic conventions imposed by the academic institution, it would be wrong to allow this to happen. The academic literacies perspective, according to Street (1995: 114), rejects:

... the way language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients.

Representatives of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough 1989) and Critical Language Awareness (e.g. Clark and Ivanič 1991; Fairclough 1992; Ivanič 1997) argue that it is important to show learners how language positions them and suggest what they can do to find ways of challenging positions with which they do not wish to identify. Through exposure to different types of written genres in the classroom displaying varying degrees of objectivity and subjectivity, EAP practitioners could present alternative ways of writing available to students.

Another important issue to bear in mind is that whilst Genre Analysis offers a number of ways to identify the functions and linguistic conventions of discipline-specific genres, we should take care not to present models of genre as static or neutral, as it seems to be the case with many EAP programmes. Genres are fluid and can evolve and change over time. We should also be conscious of the fact that the way writers write will depend, to a large extent, on their own views of knowledge construction in their discipline, the epistemology of their discipline and the identities they wish to adopt.

There are a number of strategies that first-year students might be taught regarding debriefing questions. These include analyzing what action the verb that introduces the question indicates—for example, understanding the difference required when asked to “list” something or when required to “compare” something. Similarly students can be taught a three point strategy for interpreting questions. These tools might be taught in an academic literacy module. One student wrote in detail how this might be achieved:

Within the limited scope of this, I can merely mention the often debated question about some varieties of English that often depart in significant ways from “normal” academic English as practiced in the English speaking countries.

Bruce provides a framework for the strong relationship between academic writing and discourse competence and follows with an account of the development of the concept of discourse competence. and the significance of genre-based approaches to

the development of the concept.

2. the concept of discourse competence. and the significance of **genre-based approaches to**

the development of the concept.

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begin

by considering the notion of discourse competence as a concept that accounts for the

knowledge elements and skills employed by expert academic writers, and then consider genre as a way of operationalizing the different elements of discourse competence knowledge for the purpose of writing instruction. I review briefly the

diversity of approaches to theorizing genre knowledge, and then present the dual social genre/cognitive genre approach that I have used as a basis for research and course design in an EAP context. I exemplify this model by summarizing the key elements of two studies of research genres in which I have used this model. I conclude with a brief theoretical discussion of the issue of construct validity in relation to using the concept of genre in research that relates to writing instruction.

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not even in

and is not a part of the regular graduate program of English for special purposes.

their mother tongue (the course described by Figueiredo and Bonini is an exception,

and is not part of the regular graduate program in which it was taught).