

**IDENTIFYING KEY AREAS IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR
ACADEMIC WRITING**

In present-day academic writing there are systematic patterns of grammar structures reserved for specialized functions. Lexicogrammatical approach focusing on frequently occurring combinations of words and grammar has been evidenced as exceptionally effective in teaching academic writing. Different academic genres even within a particular field demand different linguistics knowledge. Selecting appropriate structures, academic texts of appropriate difficulty level, preparing by highlighting, analyzing the language use, and setting writing tasks that require students to encounter and use the academic words facilitates medical students to master academic writing.

Key words: *academic writing, lexicogrammatical approach, writing skills, tenses, aspects, non-finite constructions.*

Сучасному академічному письму притаманні характерні граматичні структури та моделі слововживання, які застосовуються для вираження певних комунікативних функцій. Доведено, що лексикограматичний підхід, який передбачає опанування поширених граматичних моделей у поєднанні з відповідними лексичними одиницями, виявився надзвичайно ефективним у навчанні академічному письму. Різні жанри академічної прози навіть у межах певної галузі знання вимагають різних лінгвістичних засобів. Тому вибір найпоширеніших структур, текстів різних жанрів та відповідного рівня складності, їх опрацювання при розробці навчальних завдань, які передбачають гнучке осмислене використання мовних засобів, у значній мірі сприяє формуванню іншомовних та професійних компетенцій у здобувачів вищої медичної освіти.

Ключові слова: *академічне письмо, лексикограматичний підхід, навички письма, граматичні часи, аспекти, не особові дієслівні конструкції.*

Introduction. Though there are different, even contradictory views on the importance of grammar in language teaching and learning, grammar still plays an important role in developing the language system of learners. M. Celce-Murcia [4] emphasizes that for educated, academically-oriented, and advanced L2 learners, grammar instruction is essential if they are to achieve their educational and professional goals.

There is a wide variety of direct and indirect approaches to present different definitions of grammar. Grammar can be generally defined as “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” [11, p. 76]. Instead of giving a straightforward description of what grammar is, other scientists consider grammar as “a nourishing resource”, which helps students reinforce their language learning [3, p. 10]. The teaching of grammar concentrates on the methods in which language users learn and apply grammar rules to build sentences in for meaningful purposes in specific contexts.

J. Norris and L. Ortega conclude that a focus on grammar leads to the overall effectiveness of language teaching [8]; P. Scheffler and M. Cinciała demonstrated that the teaching of grammar can foster L2 acquisition: as grammar structures facilitate the attainment of a learner’s grammar output, grammar rules make a contribution to a sense of confidence as well as to the general learning process of the learners [9, p. 21].

Considerable effort has been devoted to identifying the essential grammatical features of text that can be useful in L2 materials and teaching to reduce the learning burden and/or simplify communication in a second language. One of the challenges the ESL pedagogy is facing is the selection of grammar structures depending on learners’ needs. Writing skills following the reading skills are those that Ukrainian healthcare professionals and medical researchers have to use the most actively in their professional and academic career [6, p. 261]. The purpose of this

review is to find out what grammar constructions and their attendant lexical elements are critical in teaching L2 academic writing to Ukrainian medical students.

Materials and methods. This study is an empirical applied research of a qualitative type mainly based on data collection approaches. We used both subjective and objective information obtained through the observation, data from questionnaires, interviews, and writings to evaluate the needs of the participants (medical and dental year students learning the course “English for Special Purposes” and PhD students learning the course “English as a language of Science”) in acquiring academic writing skills and to arrange the needs according to their priorities. We also explored the grammar material offered by the courses “ACE101xAcademic English” by The University of Queensland, Australia, and “Academic Writing Made Easy” by The Technical University of Munich.

Results and discussion. Teaching grammar is still considered as an *inert knowledge problem* (the term was coined by Alfred North Whitehead in 1929) that refers to the fact that students learn things in the classroom that they cannot later put to their own purposes outside of the classroom. When students are taught grammar as a set of rules, then they can apply the rules to exercises successfully during the lesson, but they cannot activate their knowledge of the rules when they are communicating during another part of the lesson or in another context. Grammar teaching that has the goal of preparing students for academic writing also needs to be designed to develop learners' practical and useful skills, directly relevant to producing academic text.

Academic texts use the grammar of the general language but the frequency and functions of some features are different, depending on the genre and on the discipline [2; 10]. This difference results from communicative purposes: academic prose aims to inform, therefore it includes more explanation and argumentation in support of its informational claims and descriptions. The analysis of relevant literature shows that academic texts in many languages are characterized by a nominal style with relatively few finite verbs; they use a narrow range of tenses, mood forms and aspects and have relatively simple clause structure but highly complex noun phrase structuring.

Grammar teaching even at the intermediate levels of students' proficiency should start with an examination and analysis of sentence structures in formal writing. In English, the structure of a basic sentence is relatively easy to teach because English has a rigid word order, e.g., the subject is followed by a verb, which is followed by an object. Although some variations of this skeletal structure are possible, for example, emphatic constructions including inversion, fronting, and cleft sentences, first and foremost, attention should be focused on the conventional sentence construction and boundaries.

Insufficient knowledge of verbs, which are typically used in academic written discourse, inability to modulate the message via tense, aspect, mood and voice, is a serious obstacle for learners as it prevents them from expressing their thoughts in all their nuances and couching them in the expected style. Recent studies have tended to focus largely on these areas of difficulty, in particular on the issue of tense and aspect and the question of the transferability of General English rules to English for Academic Purposes [10, p. 151]. Voluminous reports and our own findings [5, p. 136] demonstrate there are three tenses used both in passive and active voice that make up 98% of the tensed verbs used in academic writing. The most common tense is present simple, followed by past simple and present perfect. Passive voice verbs considered as strongly associated with academic writing, however, are not ubiquitous in academic writing, and according to D. Biber et al., passives account for only 25% of all finite verbs in academic prose [2, p. 115].

Academic written discourse in opposite to the spoken one expresses special information in more condensed syntactical fashion, thus complex structural sentence configuration and length is one of its most significant linguistic features. The gerund and infinitive clauses are the most commonly exploited to condense special information compared to hypotactically or

paratactically linked finite clauses. Gerund and Infinitive constructions organize the reduced part of semi-complex sentences, omitting such categories as number and person that can be incomprehensible for non-native English speakers. They serve to make a verbal form function as a noun phrase that fit in with the nominal paradigm of professional formal writing. But quite often these grammar structures can be overlooked by English teachers.

However, this is not the only problems that medical students whose average English level proficiency ranges between A2 – B1 levels are faced with. They also have to deal with the fact that each verb within the context of using English for academic purposes has its own preferred lexico-grammatical company, for example, *to support* the view / hypothesis that ..., *to provide* evidence / information); and *to differ* significantly; *to vary* considerably / widely; *to apply* equally; closely *related*; widely *used*; generally *accepted*) and tend to appear in routinized structures (as discussed in; there is (no, some, little) evidence that, it should be noted that) [3, p. 12]. This is in line with the recent reports suggesting the grammar tasks should be embedded in the relevant meaningful context, rather than isolated tasks [1]. This contrasts with traditional grammar instruction, which included isolating and labelling parts of speech, or grammar drilling. Grammar and punctuation teaching have been proven as more effective when taught in the context of particular genres (critique, opinion article, case report, conference papers, IMRaD article) [1; 3; 4].

In sum, in present-day academic writing there are systematic patterns of grammar structures reserved for specialized functions. Lexicogrammatical approach focusing on frequently occurring combinations of words and grammar has been evidenced as very effective in teaching academic writing. Different academic genres even within a particular field demand different linguistics knowledge. Selecting appropriate structures, academic texts of appropriate difficulty level, preparing by highlighting, analyzing the language use, and setting writing tasks that require students to encounter and use the academic words facilitates medical students to master academic writing.

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