

РОМАНСЬКІ ТА ГЕРМАНСЬКІ МОВИ

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THE EVOLVING ROLE OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND PECULIARITIES

The article discusses the role of academic English in the modern system of higher education. It emphasizes the importance of students acquiring not only everyday language skills but also academic style communication and critical thinking abilities. The modern system of higher education, characterized by its complex and evolving nature, now demands students not only possess everyday communication skills but also excel in academic discourse, a global medium for knowledge exchange.

The article highlights the challenging peculiarities of the academic texts and the advantages of mastering academic English, such as the ability to analyze scientific research, write academic papers and participate in academic debates. The need for teaching academic English in Azerbaijan arises from the increasing demand for publication activity and integration into the international educational community.

Despite the status of English as a primary foreign language in Azerbaijani universities, academic English presents significant challenges. Structurally, academic texts require mastery of formal writing conventions, such as the use of thesis statements, coherent arguments, and standardized formats for research papers and essays. Lexically, academic English involves a specialized vocabulary that goes beyond general English, with complex terminology that is both difficult to learn and essential for effective academic communication. Stylistically, academic English demands formal, impersonal language, often using the passive voice and avoiding casual expressions or rhetorical questions, which can be difficult for non-native speakers to adopt.

Academic English represents an existing system of implicit and explicit rules and regulations that implements the processes of reproducing and exchanging academic knowledge. The article notes the necessity to bridge the gaps between general English and academic English introducing academic writing and reading in the early stages of university education in Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, the article discusses the target audience of general academic English classes and the need of preparing students for academic and labor mobility in the international market.

Key words: *academic English, academic reading, academic writing, global academic discourse, communicative competence, peculiarities of academic language, early stages of university education.*

Introduction. The modern system of higher education has a complicated multi-level structure with multiple components that can alter depending on the society demands. One of the main targets of foreign language teaching in that system is not only acquisition by students of skills of communicative competence in everyday language, but also in academic style. In this context, academic English presents research interest as a linguistic, communicative and discourse phenomenon and as a reflection of links between individual local and global educational cultures [1, p. 255].

By the end of university education students must have a number of competences among which the

ability to communicate effectively, to analyze the outcomes of scientific research and apply them to solve various research objectives, the ability to do their own scientific research and ability to think critically. If previously the main goal of the institutions of foreign languages in Azerbaijan and in other soviet and, later, post-soviet countries was to cultivate students' skills to communicate, to read and translate various texts on daily topics in foreign languages, today the range of goals has expanded.

English has always been the most popular language taught at schools and universities as the foreign language in non-English-speaking states.

English is called “modern Latin” because it has become a language of science. It opens access to up-to-date information for independent research. English is a crucial medium for communication, and it is essential to strive for good communication skills to excel in one’s career. Clear and forceful expression is necessary for effective communication. The role of English in tertiary level study has changed dramatically. It has turned from the object of study to the medium for obtaining knowledge. The focus is no longer on the language itself as an object of study, but on the language as a means of access to information and a medium of communication.

The objectives and tasks. The objective of the article is academic English (AE) and its peculiarities that are sometimes challenging for the university students. The task is to assess the role of AE in the modern world and consider it as a mighty tool that enables people to consolidate global scientific community and integrate into contemporary academic discourse. The article highlights the importance of introduction of AE to the curricula from the early stages of university education in Azerbaijan and defines the main characteristics of AE. The article also addresses the challenges faced by students and teachers engaged in academic language in countries where English is not the primary language, in particular in Azerbaijan, which determines the relevance of the chosen topic.

Analysis of resent research and publications. The problem of introduction of AE into the university curricula especially in non-English speaking countries is acute and arouses interest of many researchers. In his paper “Academic English: A Conceptual Framework” Robin Scarcella (University of California, Irvine) states that mastering AE is one of the “most reliable ways of attaining socio-economic success”. He also discusses linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural/psychological approaches of teaching AE [2].

Kristina Anstrom, Patricia DiCerbo, Frances Butler, Anne Katz, Julie Millet, and Charlene Rivera in their paper “A Review of the Literature on Academic English: Implications for K-12 English Language Learners” also consider interaction between academic language and academic content and presented the overwhelming research on this topic [3]. In his research named “English for Academic purposes: an Advanced Recourse Book” the American philologist Nel Hyland also gives the detailed analysis of the problems of AE and designed his research as a guide for teachers working in the field of English for Academic Purposes [4]. David Corson, DiCerbo, Patricia A., Mauranen A., Oshima A. also studied problems of AE, and this is far from the complete list of researchers interested in the

given topic. Having studied a large body of literature on this topic, in the article we examine an approach to the study of academic writing as applied to the realities of Azerbaijani universities.

The presentation of the main material. Academic English and its Advantages for Students. Mastering academic English (AE) requires students to study specifics of foreign scientific texts, genres of scientific discourse, their grammatical and stylistic peculiarities. Academic language is designed to be correct, clear and precise and to convey complex ideas and concepts. However, even a good degree of linguistic confidence in everyday conversation does not ensure the ability to cope with cognitively and linguistically demanding academic materials. The acquisition of general academic language skills includes mastering of academic terminology, ability to read and analyze scientific and professional texts, ability to take part in academic debates and communicate effectively, ability to write academic papers in standardized form, ability to translate scientific texts from native language into English.

Today, due to the improvement of the educational standards and new set of priorities, the elements of scientific communication which include scientific articles, abstracts, academic texts, synopsis, formal papers, are gradually being introduced into the university curriculum. It brings to the necessity to strengthen theoretical and pragmatic bases of the teaching academic language in order to develop students’ academic mobility.

During the soviet period the standards of academic writing and the requirements to the scientific work in our country were developed in relative isolation from the international scientific community. It brought some divergence in the structure of scientific works. Such a divergence was grounds for refusal to publish our scientists’ research in the prestigious international scientific journals. In 2005 Azerbaijan officially joined the Bologna process. Our country signed the Bologna declaration and committed to bring the curriculum in line with European standards.

A number of reforms were carried out in our educational system that enabled our students and scientists to join the international educational society. Amid the process of integration of Azerbaijan universities into the world educational environment, active participation of our young scientists in the international forums and conferences, the main focus should be on academic mobility that can serve quality assurance of higher education. However, there are considerable inequalities in the area of academic mobility, depending on the students’ socio-economic

status as well as country of origin, main focus should be on academic mobility that can serve quality assurance of higher education [5, p. 13].

Academic and labor mobility contributes to qualitative improvement of scientific and professional cooperation, formation of qualified local human resources that are capable of occupying a worthy place in the international labor market. In this context, providing an educational basis for academic and labor mobility becomes the primary focus of attention of the international community, employers, university staff and, of course, students.

Shifting the focus from GE to general AE from the first year of university education will enable students to integrate into the scientific environment easily, comply with academic norms and cultivate their academic and professional accomplishments. Many professions require the ability to read, write, and communicate effectively in English, and, of course, those who are proficient in AE have a clear advantage. English empowers young minds, and it is increasingly necessary for job market needs in different capacities, including interacting with customers and clients, explaining policies and procedures, delivering presentations, and more. Organizations all over the world are now training their employees in English, improving their skills and providing opportunities for further development.

Challenges of Academic English for students who use English as a foreign language. The need for introduction of AE into university curriculum has dramatically increased in connection with the necessity to boost the publication activity of the young researchers in the international indexed journals of leading databases like Scopus, Web of Science and others. “Some of the world’s most renowned authors and Nobel Laureates have published their work in English. Being familiar with the language can allow you to explore vast English literature that has spanned across centuries” [6].

In the USA or Great Britain schools and universities academic writing is given a lot of attention and time. Teachers pay serious attention to the students’ papers, give detailed instructions for tasks and have fixed evaluation criteria. Students write academic papers on most subjects, and from early ages pupils obtain skills of critical thinking, reading and writing. The primary role of such an attitude is to teach students to think, to formulate and substantiate their own ideas, to discuss them with others, to understand and critically evaluate the opinions of others, to draw conclusions from such discussions, and finally write a well-argued and complete text. While in our country the development

of these skills is carried out mainly in the frames of a separate course.

Nowadays, studying English begins at a very early age in Azerbaijan. In elementary school children start to learn the basics of English. In upper secondary education the process of learning is built on reading texts, retrieving information, analyzing, discussing and creating original texts sometimes with the author’s position. At this stage the focus is still on learning general English (GE). At the final stage of secondary education, in their learning materials students encounter just some elements of academic language for the first time.

Despite the rapid development in teaching GE in Azerbaijan, as well as in the other countries where English is not a native language, after entering the university, the bulk of first-year students are often not ready for a sudden transition to AE. Traditionally AE is introduced into the curriculum at the final stage of education when students have already mastered the GE. However, our innovative approach lies in beginning to build the basis for the further development of AE skills in the initial stages of university education. With the right methodology, a bridging stage between GE and general AE during the first year of university, enables students to adapt to the challenges of modern education. The gradual immersion in the terminology of the academic language, mastering its style and getting acquainted with its peculiarities give freshmen the opportunity to avoid tangible difficulties in the learning process.

Undoubtedly, the problem of obtaining skills of AE may be particularly visible or acute for second-language speakers [7, p. 114]. The standard of language of bilingual students or students who use English as a foreign language differs from that of native speakers. We should take into consideration that the number of English users in the world many times exceeds the number of native speakers. The different culture people use English as “lingua franca” and it leads to distortion of its grammar, phonetic and even lexical structure of the language [8, pp. 10–39]. Moreover, even native speakers often simplify the language of scientific papers, that leads to lower standards of AE. Thus, compared with GE teaching, teaching academic style requires even higher professional skills and experience. In this regard, Cai Jigang, a Chinese scholar, claims that “teachers (of academic language) should not only have a solid and systematic language foundation, but also be familiar with the construction and dissemination of professional knowledge” [9].

Students from other traditions of teaching and learning may realize the intrinsic value of new learning

experience and even discard the old ways of learning. In his article, Neil Heffernan from Hiroshima Shudo University, Japan, states that many Japanese students are taught writing in junior and senior high schools by Japanese teachers of English, primarily using grammar-focused and translation-based approaches. However, these methods often create difficulties for students when they transition to Japanese or Western universities. As a result, they are typically unprepared for the demands of conducting research and producing well-structured academic writing that meets the expectations of Western academic standards [10].

This is entirely applicable to our country. The typical writing models and structure that are taught in Azerbaijan schools significantly differ from those of academic writing.

Teachers should assist students to acquire the skills to build properly structured essays (that contain appropriate thesis statements, topic sentences supported by examples, logical conclusions), to write reviews (that include their evaluative ideas), to use correct referencing conventions, etc. The requirement to observe unity and coherence in their papers that can also be a new challenge for the learners.

We should also take into consideration the cultural aspect of writing that may vary from country to country, and that is still the subject of debates in the area of ESL writing. According to the research of Grabe and Kaplan on contrastive rhetoric [11, p. 506] learners and even experienced researchers write differently influenced by patterns within their culture. In this regard, teachers of AE should adjust students' writing style to meet international standards.

In addition, taking into account ESL aspect, it is supposed that obtaining the skills of communication in academic style in English, students can also apply them in their native language. The research conducted by Margarita Calderon [12, p. 113] also warrants such a conclusion. The object of her research were bilingual (English-Spanish) students from schools in El Paso, Texas. The research showed that students achieved better results not only on AE tests in English, but also on similar tests in Spanish.

In this regard the reforms have been introduced in the curriculum of the faculties of Azerbaijan University of Languages. They are aimed at increasing the academic literacy and mobility and development of the students' critical thinking abilities. Since 2003 the authorities of our university have initiated the courses of Academic Writing and Reading for teachers for further integration of these disciplines into the learning process. Firstly, the foreign instructors were engaged in training to increase the professional competence of

our teachers. Afterwards, trained personnel began to share the experience with their colleagues. However, changes in the curriculum have affected not only writing and reading subjects, but also listening and speaking because in addition to ability to express their thoughts in academic style in written way and read and analyze scientific literature, students have to be ready to listen and understand speeches and lectures highlighting the meaning and deliver speeches in consistent and convincing way.

Peculiarities of Academic English. Mastering English for academic purposes is a significant challenge, involving far more than basic language proficiency. Success in academia demands a deep understanding of the nuances and complexities of AE. According to Bailey, being academically proficient means “knowing and being able to use general and content-specific vocabulary, specialized or complex grammatical structures, and multifarious language functions and discourse structures – all for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills, interacting about a topic, or imparting information to others” [13, p. 10].

The variety of academic genres, such as essays, reviews, research papers, and dissertations, each demands a different structure and approach. Students who cannot adapt to these varying formats may find themselves struggling with different academic tasks. Learning to navigate these genres is key to academic success.

However, any type of academic writing involves the development of basic skills, such as writing introductions and conclusions, using transition signals and logical connectors (tools that link both sentences and the text as a whole), structuring the text, parallelism, etc. Each composition has a thesis statement that locates in the introduction and reflects the core of the text. An introduction is followed by the body that is divided into paragraphs and each of them supports the main idea of the composition. A conclusion resumes and summarizes all written above. Each type of academic texts has its recommended length.

There are some criteria by which university-level texts are both written and, accordingly, evaluated. Unity, coherence, support and mechanics constitute metalinguistic textual skills, which are universal for any type of academic writing. A focus of the text in academic writing is worded in the thesis statement and it should be clearly visible.

The focus of the text and its organization act its “backbone”. Adding support in the form of the details and argument and linking them with transitions,

we obtain a strong organizational framework or “skeleton.”

Specialized vocabulary, formality and style, grammar and structure, communication challenges are some of the key obstacles that learners face on this journey.

AE is characterized by a vast and specialized vocabulary. Students must grasp a wide range of technical terms and expressions common in academic literature. This extensive lexicon is difficult to master and often hinders clear and precise communication. Unlike discipline-specific vocabulary, GE words may not receive explicit instruction in content area classes [14]. These words are sometimes longer and harder to pronounce than words that students encounter in early stages of education. They may have specific suffixes and prefixes. Unexperienced readers can find orthographically complex words challenging. The words like *applicability*, *significance*, *subsequence*, *promptitude* can cause difficulty in reading, writing and pronunciation. For example, the word *feline* is more complex for perception than the word *cat*. Moreover, polysemy of some of academic words can also be a reason for confusion. For instance, the word *retain* has four meanings and the word *obtain* – three. Correct understanding and usage of terminology is crucial for effective participation in academic discussions and writing.

One of the most challenging aspects of academic English is adopting a formal tone. This involves writing in the third person, avoiding casual language, and maintaining objectivity. In addition, it is advisable to avoid rhetorical questions and contractions in the written speech. The Passive Voice is commonly used instead of Active Voice. Straying from these conventions can undermine the credibility of a student’s work. For many learners, the shift from everyday language to the formal, precise style required in academic writing is a significant hurdle.

Academic writing demands grammatical accuracy and logical organization. Any shortcomings in these areas can obstruct the clarity and interpretation of ideas, further complicating the learning process. Students must not only master complex grammatical rules but also learn to structure their arguments in a way that is coherent and easy to follow.

In academic language the choice of verb tense also plays its role. The past tense is generally used to

discuss completed research, whereas the present tense is employed to present the findings.

One more important issue is using correct punctuation. Punctuation marks help to navigate readers through a text, avoid misinterpretation of a text, separate the parts of sentences.

Users of academic language should ensure accuracy in citations. Effective academic writing involves not just clarity and precision but also the ability to reference sources and format bibliographies correctly. Failing to meet these requirements can affect a student’s grades and reputation. Mastery of academic writing skills is crucial for producing well-structured and credible work.

For students with little experience in academic environments, establishing effective communication can be a significant barrier. The formal protocols and expectations of academic discourse can be intimidating, making it difficult to connect with professors and peers. Overcoming these communication challenges is vital for academic success.

Conclusion. The importance of AE in higher education cannot be overstated, especially in today’s increasingly globalized educational landscape. As highlighted in this article, mastering AE equips students not only with language skills but also with the critical thinking and analytical abilities required for academic success and global mobility. It empowers them to engage in scientific discourse, write effectively for academic purposes, and participate in international educational and professional exchanges.

In Azerbaijan, the integration of AE into the curriculum has become a pressing need, driven by the nation’s efforts to align its educational standards with international expectations. By bridging the gap between GE and AE from the early stages of university education, students are better prepared to meet the challenges of modern academia. This proactive approach ensures that students can adapt to the complex linguistic and cognitive demands of academic environments, ultimately promoting greater academic and labor mobility on the global stage.

Overcoming the peculiarities of AE opens doors to international academic and professional opportunities, making it a crucial skill for students to master in today’s globalized educational environment.

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Алієва В. С. ЗРОСТАЮЧА РОЛЬ АКАДЕМІЧНОЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ВИЩІЙ ОСВІТІ: ВИКЛИКИ ТА ОСОБЛИВОСТІ

У статті обговорюється роль академічної англійської мови у сучасній системі вищої освіти. Підкреслюється важливість набуття студентами не лише навичок розмовної мови, але й навичок спілкування в академічному стилі та критичного мислення. Сучасна система вищої освіти, що характеризується складним характером та розвитком, вимагає від студентів не лише повсякденних комунікативних навичок, але й досконалості в академічному дискурсі – глобальному середовищі для обміну знаннями. У статті висвітлюються особливості академічних текстів, які можуть викликати труднощі, а також переваги опанування академічної англійської, такі як можливість аналізувати наукові дослідження, писати наукові роботи та брати участь в академічних дебатах. Потреба у викладанні академічної англійської в Азербайджані зумовлена висхідним попитом на публікаційну діяльність та інтеграцію в міжнародну освітню спільноту. Попри статус англійської мови як основної іноземної мови в азербайджанських університетах, викладання академічної англійської викликає значні труднощі. Структурно академічні тексти вимагають дотримання формальних правил написання, таких як постановка проблеми, послідовність аргументів і стандартизованих форматів для наукових робіт та есе. Лексично академічна англійська включає спеціалізований вокабуляр, що виходить за межі загальної англійської, зі складною термінологією, яку важко вивчити, але яка необхідна для ефективної академічної комунікації. Стилiстично академічна англійська вимагає дотримання формального стилю, використання безособових форм та пасивного стану та уникнення розмовних виразів або риторичних запитань, що можуть бути важкими для сприйняття тих, хто не є носіями мови. Академічна англійська являє собою чинну систему імпліцитних та експліцитних правил і норм, що реалізують процеси відтворення та обміну академічними знаннями. Автор наголошує на необхідності подолання прогалів між загальною та академічною англійською мовою шляхом впровадження академічного письма та читання на ранніх етапах університетської освіти в Азербайджані. Крім того, у статті обговорюється цільова аудиторія, що вивчає загальну академічну англійську та необхідність підготовки студентів до академічної та трудової мобільності на міжнародному ринку.

Ключові слова: академічна англійська, академічне читання, академічне письмо, глобальний академічний дискурс, комунікативна компетенція, особливості академічної мови, початкові етапи університетської освіти.