

EXPLORING TEXTUAL DIVERSITY: SCIENTIFIC AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TEXTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES^{1*}

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Abstract. The ability to comprehend and engage with academic and professional documents is crucial for university learners pursuing a degree in informatics within the realm of their English language education. This article explores how teachers can introduce students to a variety of scientific and business communication texts by designing specific tasks to enhance their skills in interacting with such materials. Our goal is to give some insights to the ongoing conversation about foreign language education by sharing different strategies and assignments used in this context. We aim to highlight effective teaching practices that empower students to navigate the complexities of scientific discourse with confidence. The article provides a practical example, illustrating the teaching of the job application topic with background information and examples of practice activities.

Keywords: *language education; teaching strategies; scientific texts; business communication materials*

1. Introduction

To prepare university learners of English for their future careers, they must grasp the distinct features of the different types of academic and professional texts. Scientific texts and business communication materials exhibit specific styles, vocabulary, and grammatical structures that distinguish them from other written and spoken language forms. Proficiency in these nuances is vital for clear communication in professional settings and enhances professionalism. The authors aim to prepare university students for the language demands of their future careers by introducing them to various types of academic and professional texts and their unique characteristics and providing engaging practice ideas.

At the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics of the University of Plovdiv, learners of English need to be proficient in working with scientific texts that present information related to scientific research, theories, or studies. In their foreign language classes, students have to become aware of the specific format of scientific texts, the process of peer reviewing, and be able to understand and describe empirical data. Equally important are professional or business communication materials, the category of which includes documents created for business purposes such as emails, memos, reports, business letters, proposals, and other forms of communication used in the corporate or professional world. University students majoring in informatics can benefit from business communication materials in English in their classes in various ways. For example, for their future careers, they will need to enhance their professional communication skills to be able to convey complex technical concepts clearly and concisely. Additionally, many information technology projects involve creation of reports so professional communication resources can provide examples and templates for writing reports, covering aspects such as structure, style, and content. Furthermore, clear and professional email communication is crucial in the business world, and business communication materials can provide learners of English with guidelines on email etiquette to help them understand how to compose effective and respectful emails. What is more, university students need to work on their presentation skills because they are frequently required to present their ideas and findings to various audiences. Business presentation resources can be very beneficial for incorporating effective presentation techniques, including slide design, delivery, and handling questions and objections. Such

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materials can also be used for collaboration and team communication by providing examples and tips on how to communicate effectively within a team, addressing issues such as collaboration tools, virtual communication, and conflict resolution. Utilizing business communication materials in university English classes offers additional benefits, such as assisting students in preparing for job interviews, communicating effectively with clients, understanding their requirements, managing expectations, and creating and maintaining project documentation. Last but not least, these materials contribute to the development of cross-cultural communication skills, crucial for interacting with colleagues and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.

2. Literature Review

Comparable research has been conducted by several authors. For example, (Rao 2014) discusses English for Science and Technology (EST) as a subset of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the context of engineering education. The author utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, to assess the language needs of engineering students and the teaching competencies required. Findings suggest a focus on specific language skills, teacher training, and the incorporation of Communicative Language Teaching for effective language education in engineering colleges. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding students' needs for successful language teaching and learning. In addition, (Rasulova, Ataulayeva 2023) explore approaches to teaching academic writing in English, focusing on the challenges faced by students in an English for Academic Purposes course. The authors analyze various methodological approaches, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and propose strategies to overcome difficulties in academic writing. They discuss the controlled-to-free approach, free-writing approach, paragraph-pattern approach, grammar-syntax-organization approach, and process approach. The study includes practical examples, such as creating cause-effect essays and annotations, with an emphasis on combining different approaches for effective teaching. The results suggest that a balanced combination of approaches enhances writing skills, considering both the process and the final product. Also, the article of (DiCerbo et al. 2014) reviews the construct of Academic English (AE) and its incorporation into instructional and teacher professional development research. It emphasizes the contextual nature of AE, highlighting its varied usage in different content areas, grade levels, and educational settings. The literature underscores the importance of considering language patterns related to specific situations and purposes. The article recommends further research priorities, including a systematic investigation of AE demands in teacher-student interactions, teacher talk, textbooks, and assessments. It also suggests exploring the impact of different approaches to AE instruction and rigorously documenting and evaluating professional development programs for AE teaching and learning. The authors stress the need to consider students' diverse characteristics, including prior educational experiences, English language proficiency, culture, and home language.

Although (Baker et al. 2014) aim at teachers of English learners in the elementary and middle grades, their guide can be viewed as a valuable resource for all educators teaching scientific work to English learners as it responds to current trends in education. This text introduces an updated practice guide on teaching academic content and literacy to young English learners. The original guide from 2007 focused on early reading interventions, while this updated version expands its scope to include middle school years and addresses academic vocabulary, writing, and content-area learning. The guide provides recommendations for teaching English learners in grades K–8, emphasizing the importance of learning academic English. The four key recommendations are intensive teaching of academic vocabulary, integration of oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching, regular opportunities for developing written language skills, and small-group instructional intervention for struggling students. The guide targets educators working with English learners and is based on rigorous studies of instructional interventions, prioritizing practices with causal evidence.

3. Methodology

In the contemporary educational landscape, cultivating an appreciation for scientific texts among students presents a formidable challenge. The pervasive disinterest in extensive reading, particularly

within the realm of scientific literature, has propelled educators to explore innovative methodologies. These methodologies aim not only to captivate students' attention but also to enrich their comprehension and analytical skills.

This article seeks to elucidate a pedagogical approach meticulously crafted to sustain student interest in the often intimidating domain of scientific texts. Acknowledging the prevalent aversion to prolonged readings, especially in the context of English learning, our methodology adopts a multifaceted strategy to address this challenge.

The initial step involves providing concise descriptions of the text's format, accompanied by illustrative examples to furnish students with a preliminary understanding of the material. This introductory phase is instrumental in demystifying complex scientific jargon, thereby rendering subsequent engagement with the texts more accessible.

At the core of our methodology lies the diversification of activities designed to complement the textual content. Ranging from group discussions to interactive exercises, these activities aim to align the learning experience with the diverse preferences and learning styles of our students. This strategic integration not only sustains interest but also cultivates a profound comprehension of scientific concepts.

In contrast to the conventional approach of assigning lengthy readings and subsequent extensive written analyses, our method is tailored to accommodate the evolving landscape of student engagement. The focus shifts from the traditional expectation of lengthy written responses to fostering critical thinking through alternative avenues.

It is imperative to note that our intention is not to assert the exclusivity or unparalleled efficiency of this methodology in teaching scientific texts to English learners. Instead, we invite educators to engage in a discourse, sharing their experiences, insights, and alternative approaches. Through fostering a collaborative exchange of ideas, we aspire to enrich the pedagogical landscape and empower educators to adapt methodologies that resonate with the dynamic learning preferences of today's students.

In conclusion, this article serves as a humble contribution to the ongoing dialogue on effective teaching methodologies. We encourage fellow educators to delve into this discourse, share their experiences, and collectively elevate the art of teaching scientific texts to new heights. Depending on the learning objectives and the proficiency level of our students at Plovdiv University, we may adopt different approaches to teaching scientific and business communication texts in English. In our work, we focus on the development of skills and the analysis of texts with their similarities and differences. Developing skills is essential for learners to apply their language abilities such as reading comprehension, writing, critical analysis, and communication in real-world situations, whether in academic, professional, or personal settings.

When university learners of English are presented with a scientific or a business communication text in the classroom, first they are provided with background information about the topic and asked to share their preliminary knowledge on the topic. Then key vocabulary and concepts are introduced and emphasized by using visuals, multimedia, or discussions to activate prior knowledge. Relevant examples are added to help learners recognize and adapt to the specific genre. We try to make sure that the scientific texts we select align with the learners' proficiency levels, starting with simpler texts, and gradually increasing their complexity. It is important to consider the relevance of the topics to maintain students' interest and engagement in the work. If they experience any difficulties while reading samples of the texts, learners are encouraged to highlight unfamiliar terms or whole paragraphs, or take notes. While reading, if need be, pauses are made for comprehension checks and discussions. Similarly, after the learners have finished reading the text, peer discussions are organized to reinforce understanding, and written summaries or responses to questions are assigned.

To practice working with scientific or business communication texts, a variety of assignments can be offered, such as vocabulary exercises, for example matching scientific terms with definitions, answering comprehension questions to assess understanding of the text, writing tasks like summaries, analyses, or responses to prompts, and presentations to summarize and explain the content orally. Students' progress is tracked through their participation in the class work and various assignments such as quizzes, peer reviews, or self-assessment tools.

Since the onset of the pandemic, we have utilized Google Classroom for both in-class activities and the submission of homework assignments. Each week, students are allocated distinct tasks, and the platform proves valuable by facilitating constructive feedback on the submitted work. We consider timely feedback especially important for encouraging learners to reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement.

After the language course, we conduct summative assessments to evaluate not only students' language proficiency but also their understanding of content and application of the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the semester. Normally, we use a mix of written exams, presentations, and projects. We have described a project assigned during the English for Technology course involving the development of a website, a presentation, and a Kahoot quiz in (Ivanova et al. 2023: 343-349).

In our work, we try to regularly assess the effectiveness of the methodology and adjust our approach based on the learners' feedback and performance. We consider the Annual International Conference of the Institute for Bulgarian Language Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin the perfect forum for staying informed about new teaching strategies, sharing them with other teachers, and incorporating them into our work.

A practical example from our experience of introducing scientific or business communication texts to our students at the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics is on the topic of *Job application*.

As mentioned earlier, we utilize the Google Classroom platform for our language course. Each week, we upload relevant materials under the designated topic for students to review. Additionally, we establish a shared file, featuring a table containing the names of all students in the respective group. This file grants them editor rights, enabling collaborative work in real time. This approach ensures that students can simultaneously contribute to the document and stay informed about each other's contributions.

In our discussion on job applications, we commenced with a brief introduction highlighting the significance of effective job applications. Learners were then prompted to articulate the three key components: a resume, a cover letter, and an interview. Subsequently, we delved into the subtopic of crafting a resume (CV), where we focused on its purpose and the essential sections, including contact information, objective or summary, work experience, education, and skills. The basics of formatting and organizing information within this document were also explained. As a practical illustration, students watched a quick tutorial on creating CVs and utilized an online platform to compose a new Europass CV. They followed tips for adding sections and specific information by selecting relevant options from a list, encompassing different types of skills such as language, digital, communication and interpersonal, management, and leadership skills.

To ensure privacy, students were advised against sharing sensitive personal information such as postal addresses and phone numbers when creating their CVs. Upon completion, students made copies and uploaded them to the Google Classroom platform. They engaged in peer review, providing feedback on each other's work. Finally, the teacher offered individualized feedback through comments. Below are some examples of students' work:

ABOUT ME

I'm a Plovdiv university student.
I study Programming, Math and English.
I have a drivers license.
I'm versed in photo editing.

I would like to be in:
Position: Entry-Level IT Support.
Description: Provide basic technical support, troubleshoot issues, and assist with IT tasks.

Thank you for reading my CV. Best regards.

02/01/2024

Fig. 1. Excerpt from a student's CV

WORK EXPERIENCE

Social Media Assisant

Lidl

Plovdiv, Bulgaria

- maintenance of social media accounts
- creating graphics for the media posts
- keeping up to date with promotions

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Graphic Design Training

Social Media Manager

10/03/2021 – 14/05/2021

Plovdiv, Bulgaria | lild.bg

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Mother tongue(s)

Bulgarian

Other language(s)

English

Listening



C2

Dear Professor Golev

I am writing to express my interest in becoming a part of the IT Support team at the University of Plovdiv. It has always been a dream of mine to work with computers and having the opportunity to hone my skills in an establishment of this calibre is an honour.

I believe that my skill set will be just what I need to get this position due to my past experience in a very similar position, albeit private, I have built, upgraded and fixed over 30 computers for family, friends and clients.

I look forward to hearing from you to discuss this possibility.

Sincerely Krasimir.

Fig. 3. Excerpt from a student's cover letter

Fig. 2. Sample from another student's CV

After completing the task of creating a CV, we transitioned to the second subtopic: crafting a motivation or cover letter. Learners were prompted to distinguish between a cover letter and a resume, as well as between a cover letter and a motivation letter. Emphasis was placed on the importance of customizing each cover letter for the specific job, and the key elements of a cover letter were discussed, including an introduction, body paragraphs highlighting applicants' qualifications, and a strong closing. Once again, students were provided with structured information on this topic, enriched with examples to enhance understanding. Subsequently, students participated in a practical exercise, writing a cover letter to apply for a job. To add authenticity to the task, learners were given a list of entry-level job positions for applicants with no previous experience, allowing them to choose positions according to their personal preferences. The cover letters were written in a shared file, and afterwards, learners provided comments on each other's work. Below are some extracts from students' cover letters.

The subsequent subtopic focused on preparing for an interview. Initially, we engaged in a discussion highlighting the significance of interviews in the hiring process and underscored the importance of researching the company to which students were applying. Drawing on the diverse experiences of students who had participated in interviews in both their mother tongue and English, we leveraged their insights to explore common interview questions and strategies for effective responses. Additionally, we emphasized the relevance of body language and professional attire for success. The practical component of this session involved students conducting mock interviews in pairs or small groups.

To facilitate this task, learners examined an example of a mock interview for a position supervising children in an English learning summer camp, accompanied by guidance. An extract from the example is provided below:

The provided guidance outlined distinct sections of the mock interview, including the introduction, experience with children, English language skills, a problem-solving scenario, questions for the interviewer, and a closing. It specified the approximate time allocated to each section and included sample

questions for consideration. Subsequently, students either chose or were assigned the roles of interviewer or interviewee and commenced preparations for their mock interviews.

I am writing to express my interest in the Retail Sales Associate position at asdf store. I am currently pursuing my Bachelor's Degree at the University of Plovdiv and I think I would bring a young new perspective to your work environment.

My previous job experience as a cashier has provided me with strong communication and teamwork skills as well as an understanding of the programs used on cash registers.

I am drawn to this job opportunity precisely because of the great work environment at your firm as well as because of the proximity of the store's location to my home and the overall public opinion of your establishment.

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to discussing how I can contribute to the work environment and the general customer satisfaction.

Sincerely,

Fig. 4. Sample from a student's cover letter

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

Welcome the candidate and introduce yourself.

Explain that the interview will focus on their suitability for a role supervising children in an English learning summer camp.

Encourage the candidate to share relevant experiences and skills.

2. Experience with Children (10 minutes):

Ask questions to assess the candidate's experience working with children.

Evaluate their ability to create a positive and safe environment for kids.

Example Questions:

Can you share an experience where you worked with children, and what role did you play?

How would you handle a situation where a child is feeling homesick?

3. English Language Skills (10 minutes):

Assess the candidate's proficiency in English.

Ask how they would engage children in language-learning activities.

Example Questions:

How would you create a fun and interactive English learning environment for children?

Fig. 5. An extract from an example of a mock interview

Once ready, students enacted their interviews, followed by a group discussion and feedback session. For the assigned homework, students were tasked with recording a video or audio of a mock interview, wherein they played both the roles of an interviewer and an interviewee. It is noteworthy that all students, without exception, opted to record audio instead of video.

Lastly, we addressed additional crucial aspects of the job application process. This included highlighting the importance of networking and cultivating an online presence, utilizing platforms like LinkedIn and professional websites. We also underscored the significance of proactive follow-up actions after submitting applications or attending interviews. Additionally, we delved into the role of professional references in the job application journey.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper underscores the critical importance of nurturing the ability of university students in informatics to comprehend and engage with diverse academic and professional documents. Through the dissemination of practical teaching strategies, particularly in the context of job applications, the article catalyzes enhancing students' language proficiency and practical skills.

By offering valuable insights and proven practices, we seek to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding foreign language education. The provided practical example illustrates the tangible application of these strategies in authentic teaching situations, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

As educators, let us not merely acknowledge these strategies but actively incorporate them into our pedagogical frameworks. The ultimate aim is to cultivate a dynamic learning environment that equips learners with the linguistic and practical tools needed for success in their academic and professional journeys.

We invite educators to reflect on their teaching methodologies, encouraging an exploration of innovative approaches that resonate with the evolving needs of language learners. The journey towards effective language education is a collaborative one, and through open dialogue and shared experiences, we can collectively advance the field.

In essence, our work advocates for an inclusive approach to language education, one that goes beyond traditional boundaries and prepares learners comprehensively for the multifaceted demands of their academic and professional trajectories. As we move forward, let us continue to refine and adapt our teaching practices, ensuring that our students not only excel in linguistic proficiency but also thrive in the real-world application of their acquired skills. The pursuit of excellence in language education is a shared endeavor, and this study stands as a testament to our commitment to this noble cause.

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ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА РАЗНООБРАЗИЕТО ОТ НАУЧНИ ТЕКСТОВЕ В ОБУЧЕНИЕТО ПО АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК

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Резюме. Способността за работа с научни текстове е от особено значение за студентите по информатика в обучението им по английски език. Настоящата статия разглежда начините, по които преподавателите могат да представят на обучаемите различните академични и професионални текстове, както и предлага конкретни дейности за подобряване на уменията им за взаимодействие с такива материали. Целта на авторите е да споделят някои стратегии и задания, използвани в този контекст. Стремехът ни е да опишем ефективни практики за преподаване, които позволяват на студентите уверено да се ориентират в сложността на научната литература. Статията предоставя и практически пример, илюстриращ преподаването на темата за кандидатстване за работа с основна информация и примери за практически дейности.

Ключови думи: *чуждоезиково обучение; стратегии за преподаване; научни текстове; материали за бизнес комуникация*

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