

## SCTMG 2020

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

## SYNTACTIC ORGANIZATION OF AN ENGLISH LECTURE: DISCOURSE SPECIFICITY IN ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION

Nikolaev Sergey Georgievich (a)\*, Sukhomlinova Marina Anatolyevna (b)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, info@sfedu.ru

(b) Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia

### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the problem of the participation of syntactic tools (constructions) in the disclosure of meanings in the texts of academic lectures in the framework of modern English-language academic discourse. The importance of the topic of the article seems quite obvious due to the fact that it is the linguistic design of the discourse that makes it possible to recognize factual, conceptual, and also subtext information contained in the text. The authors aim to trace in detail the influence of linguistic and extralinguistic factors on the syntactic organization of the text of a modern English-language lecture. The research material is 6 academic lectures in English of a general humanitarian orientation. Such research methods as continuous sampling, semantic-syntactic analysis, descriptive method, etc. were used. The authors come to the conclusion that although the text of the lecture is made out according to the rules of the scientific styles. Because in the academic lecture—as in other basic genres of academic discourse—there is a need to prove and argue the stated positions, to discover the causes and consequences of the phenomena being analyzed, the subordinate connection is more important than the composing one. A special role in the article is given to the study of means of expressive syntax, due to which the audience experiences an increased pragmatic effect, associated primarily with the need to convince students of the correctness of the position expressed.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

**Keywords:** Academic discourse, academic lecture, syntactic features, expressive syntax, cohesive elements.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

The English language, possessing in the modern world the status of international (Crystal, 1985), or global one (Kachru, 1985), is also considered the universal language of science and academic communication (only in relation to the countries of the Scandinavian region: Borodina, 2018). The study of academic communication has accumulated a significant research tradition in the American and European scientific paradigms, however, to date there is no single definition of the term "academic discourse". An important feature of academic discourse is that it not only informs the public about scientific achievements, but also transforms them into academic knowledge (Sukhomlinova 2018).

In its formal parameters, academic discourse belongs to the institutional discursive type. According to Karasik (2000), institutional discourse is communication in a given framework of status-role relations, in which the speaker acts as a representative of a particular social institution.

Indeed, the modern academic discourse is an established system of relations "teacher-student", "student-student", "teacher-teacher", the status and roles of which change depending on the type of relationship: "student-student" are equal, "teacher-teacher" are equal, "teacher-student" are unequal (hierarchical). All participants in the academic discourse are in the communicative space of the university environment, in which the educational process in all its variability is carried out. This variability is manifested both in the variety of forms of training, and in extracurricular activities. Students are focused on receiving quality education – the main value of academic discourse; teachers focus on the process of transmitting knowledge and personal education. Thus, we consider academic discourse not only as a product of activity, but also as a dynamic process of its achievement (creation), which is determined by a number of external and internal factors. External factors are determined by the social, educational and scientific environments in which academic discourse is created and functions. Internal factors are associated with personal qualities and attitudes of subjects of discourse. Being institutional, academic discourse has a certain social mission, a special "own" language, role-role communication models, and a system of basic values; it clearly distinguishes strategies, genres, etc. (Sukhomlinova, 2018).

## 2. Problem Statement

In communication, not only the content, but also the form, the construction of the utterance plays an extremely important role, which contributes to a more accurate, capacious, generally adequate disclosure of the meanings of the utterance. A unit of syntactic analysis of modern English-language academic discourse is considered a fragment of this discourse, or discursive fragment. Just note that the specificity of the syntax of the discourse is manifested both in terms of expression and in terms of content.

It is safe to say that the form in the syntax acts as a generator of semantics. This is true both in relation to the sentence syntax and in relation to over-phrased syntax, where meaning generation is no longer based on the sentence structure, but on the composition of the discourse. As rightly noted Galperin (1981), it is precisely in the discourse that words and sentences show the ability to generate meanings; at the same time, it is the form of units that enter into syntactic interaction that allows establishing the nature of this interaction and the meanings to which it strives and ultimately carries within itself. Being in the

syntactic composition of the discourse, the words experience semantic divergence, which is then reflected in their own morpho-lexical plan, being fixed in the usage and, ultimately, in the language system (Galperin, 1981).

In the discourse, the initial utterance is prospectively connected with the subsequent ones, and any subsequent utterance is retrospectively based on the previous ones. Moreover, the role of syntax is not limited only to the coordination of statements among themselves, i.e. to the creation of semantic connectedness due to various kinds of repetitions (pronouns, synonyms, etc.). The main feature of discursive syntax is the ability to generate non-trivial semantics, unique meanings that either receive a one-time fixation in a discursive form, or remain at the disposal of speakers for a longer period if this form is imported into the system and fixed in it as a carrier of significance (Borbotko, 2011).

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the article is the syntactic organization of the text of an academic lecture in modern English.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the work is to trace in detail the influence of linguistic and extralinguistic factors on the syntactic organization of the text of a modern English-language lecture.

### **5. Research Methods**

During the research, the following methods are used: continuous sampling, semantic-syntactic analysis, descriptive method.

### **6. Findings**

The syntactic organization of academic speech reflects the main characteristics of the scientific/academic style of presentation such as logic, generalization, abstractness, accuracy, clarity of expression of thought. Since the content of basic academic genres is focused on the transfer of a complex system of scientific knowledge, the establishment of a causal relationship between them, the syntax of academic speech gravitates to complex constructions. Phrases and superphrase unities (SPUs) in academic communication are characterized by structural completeness, the presence of homogeneous members, union connection, a variety of subordinate connections, etc.

Based on the structural correlation of the components of SPUs, five main types of grammatical connection in SPUs are distinguished: 1) chain, 2) parallel, 3) radiative, 4) connecting, 5) situational. The presence of different types of SPUs is determined by two main factors: the type of components of the unity of proposals and, on the other hand, the nature of the relationship between them. These two factors, in turn, depend on the functional style, the type of the text itself, and the individual manner of the author (Galperin, 2007).

One of the most obvious syntactic parameters of academic discourse is the category of cohesion, which is more characteristic of a coherent text, and not of a single sentence. It is implemented by contact and distant methods. As stated by Galperin (1981), namely, “distant cohesion, carried out mainly by lexical repetition (identical, synonymous and/or periphrastic), provides a continuum of narration”.

The means of cohesion in an English-language academic text traditionally include grammatical, logical, compositional, structural and stylistic. For instance, grammar means, as a rule, belong to unions and allied utterances like “*in connection with*”, “*that is why*”, “*however*”, “*as*”, “*as well as*”; all deictic means: pronouns, adjectives, etc., for example, “*given*”, “*called*”, “*mentioned*”, “*this*”, “*such as*”, “*similar*”; participles. These cohesive tools link paragraphs and SPUs. The adverbs “*already*”, “*soon*”, “*several days (weeks, months, years) ago*” and others, being temporary parameters of the message, “interlock” individual events, giving them credibility. The same function is performed by the prepositions of the place, for example, “*nearby*”, “*opposite*”, “*behind*”, “*under*”, “*above*”, “*in front of*”. The means of cohesion include the forms of enumeration: “*firstly*”, “*secondly*”; graphic markers: *a*), *b*); allocation of parts of the statement in numbers: *1*), *2*), etc.

The most important means of expressing logical connections are special syntactic tools that indicate the sequence of thought development (“*first of all*”, “*at first*”, “*secondly*”); reflective opposing relationships (“*however*”, “*by the way*”, “*at the same time*”, “*nevertheless*”); cause-effect relationships (“*therefore*”, “*in accordance with*”, “*because of*”, “*in this connection*”); transition from one thought to another (“*before we start discussing ...*”, “*let’s consider ...*”, “*it’s necessary to stop at ...*”).

Compositional-structural means of cohesion include those that interrupt the sequence and logical organization of a message by digressions, inserts, temporal and spatial descriptions of phenomena, events that are not directly related to the main theme of the story. Such “violations”, as a rule, constitute a secondary plan of communication (for example, memories). Here is an example of the use of memories in the text of the lecture:

***I remember*** working thirty-plus years ago on a film biography of the turbulent southern demagogue Huey Long, a film supported generously by the Endowment ....

Stylistic forms of cohesion are revealed in such an organization of the text in which stylistic features are consistently repeated in the structures of the SPUs and paragraphs. The identity of structures always implies a certain, and sometimes a significant degree of semantic affinity. If in one paragraph of the text we find a structure that can be defined as expanding from cause to effect, then the same unfolding of the structure in the second or third paragraph (passage) will be a form of cohesion. The same can be said of cases of incomplete parallelism of structures: the beginnings of two or more excerpts from a text (Galperin, 2007).

In the material of this study, numerous binding elements were found that are found at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of sentences. These include: “*(it is) in fact*”; “*but (somehow)*”; “*but perhaps*”; “*let me make it perfectly clear*”; “*it seems to me (that)*”; “*for some reason*”; “*nevertheless*”; “*even though*”; “*I believe*”; “*I’m sorry to say*”; “*in a larger sense*”; “*in this regard*”; “*thus*”; “*let me conclude*”; “*eventually*”; “*this means*”; “*for example*”; “*first of all*”; “*the first one that comes to mind is*”; “*let me conclude*” and other.

A certain part of the links are universal. However, some connecting elements occupy a special place in the text. So, the link “*so the other point I would raise ... is*” emphasizes the logical sequence and introduces the next element of the enumeration. Examples of this include: “*another thing I want to talk about is*”, “*and then*”. There are links expressing explanations and repetitions, for example: “*and again*”, “*that means*”; indicating comparisons, for example: “*(so) like this*”, “*and like that*”. Along with this, connecting elements are used that signal the presence of a cause-effect relationship, for example: “*and therefore*”, “*because*”. Opposing relationships are expressed using expressions such as “*but the important point to remember is*”, “*but what I want to show is*”. The final part of the paragraph, section, entire lecture can be made out using the following links: “*let me conclude*”, “*to sum this up*”. Own opinion can be expressed by means of such connectives as “*I would argue*”, “*I believe*”.

In academic lectures, a number of techniques are used to ensure the integrity of the text:

- Referential phrases (“*as scientists say*”, “*some scientists believe*”, “*according to the scientists*”, “*N. mentioned*”, “*as N. has already described*” and other).
  - ✓ Impersonal constructions.
  - ✓ Indefinite- personal sentences.
  - ✓ Passive constructions.
  - ✓ Participial constructions.
  - ✓ Inclusions that can be divided into expletives and explanatory structures. For instance:

*These, **mind you**, [inclusions, aimed at attracting the attention of the audience] these five classical disciplines of social science are the traditional ones that you see often invoked but there are other fields of social science that are not listed here but are as important and as attractive and active. The first one that comes to mind would be, **for instance**, geography, **okay**?*

*So computational models **to sum this up** [cohesive link], **especially the variety of models known as agent-based models** [limiting element] are being developed with increasing realism.*

- Functional-syntactic tools indicating:
  - a) transition from one thought to another (“*let's discuss*», «*further we are going to consider*”, “*here what I would like to do is*”);
  - b) repetition of a thought (“*as I have already mentioned*”, “*as I said*”);**
  - c) conclusion (“*in conclusion*”, “*to sum this up*”).

Quite widely, as methods providing the compositional integrity of the text, parallelisms are used that are selected graphically in order to emphasize the speech significance of each item (Petruk, 2007). Along with syntactic parallelism, enumerations and repetitions are used, which, on the one hand, perform a cohesive function, and on the other, are stylistic techniques for the rhythmic organization of the text. For instance:

*Another **point of view** would be, a contrasting **point of view** [repetitions] could be seen also if you think about public policy.*

An important strategy of syntactic-stylistic design of lecture texts is the use of interrogative sentences. In the main part of the lecture, as a rule, rhetorical questions are posed. Real questions that require a momentary answer are asked in the question-answer part of the lecture. At the same time, the research material contains questions formed as follows: narrative sentence + token “right” / “okay” +

question mark at the end of the sentence. This strategy is a reflection of the individual manner of the lecturer. For instance:

*Under certainty, this hardly ever happens in this building, **right?***

In the text of an academic lecture, complex sentences prevail over simple ones. Within complex sentences, the number of complex sentences is much higher than the number of simple sentences. This fact is explained by the need to prove, substantiate the thoughts expressed, to discover the causes and consequences of the analyzed phenomena. Here is an example of a complex sentence:

***Most people probably don't think about it, but the United States has a big burden of tropical diseases, particular in the southern part, and it's like I'm at a Florida university, so we're probably more cognizant of that than researchers in the Midwest for example.***

An important syntactic-stylistic feature of academic speech is the inverse word order. Inversion refers to expressive syntax. In the first place in the sentence may be additions, circumstances, participles. At the beginning of the statement, these members of the sentence are logically distinguished. For instance:

***Armed with that and another important feature, we know that those fossils lived in an environment very similar to coastal Bahamian environments today.***

***Out of these associations we find the material, the glue, to make our fragile experiment stick, permanent; "a machine," someone once said of our glorious Constitution, "that would go of itself."***

The syntactic form of the lecture text depends on the way it is presented. The text of the lecture, as a rule, is prepared in advance; however, not all lecturers read the text to the audience from beginning to end. It is when the lecturer begins to retell the prepared text that he uses syntactic constructions depending on the level of education and individual characteristics. The lecturer can resort to simplifying the syntax when he realizes that the material is not quite clear to the audience. In this case, a sentence with a complicated syntactic structure is split into simple or complex sentences with fewer subordinate clauses. The level of proficiency in an unprepared speech, in particular, is manifested in the question-answer part of the lecture. In the text of the lecture there may be sentences with violation of the syntactic structure. This is due to the fact that in the dynamic process of generating a spontaneous scientific monologue, the speaker does not initially think out the syntactic model of the sentence that he intends to pronounce (Palatovskaya, 2016). For instance:

***It's a very brief answer to a very important question that would deserve a lengthier answer but...***  
[unfinished sentence].

A special place in the syntactic structure of the text of an academic lecture is occupied by the expressive word order. Expressive means contribute to the expression of content, communication in the scientific field, and due to this they make convincing and clear evidence, emphasize important points of the statement, or rather express the author's assessment of the phenomena described (Kozhina, 1977). Under the expressiveness of scientific discourse Skripak (2013) understands the expressiveness of accentuation, concretization of thoughts, logical emphasis, amplification of the author's reasoned thoughts, and activation of the reader's attention.

Expressive elements of speech emphasize the author's logically reasoned thought and contribute to the intelligibility of its presentation. According to Kuralova and Abdulmanova, (2015), expressiveness in

syntax should be understood as the ability of a structure to stand out in the speech chain. The authors describe three types of expressive syntactic means: those associated with the complexity of the syntactic structure, those associated with a departure from the grammatical norm, and discursive expressive means. The means of expressive syntax include syntactic structures that stand out in a discursive fragment and thereby enhance the pragmatic effect on the recipient (Kuralova & Abdulmanova 2015). Expressive structures that affect syntax complications include:

- *Sentences with a complicated structure* or structure resulting from the modification of a simpler sentence. In particular, this includes splitting emphatic constructions, which structurally represent a complex sentence, and in the semantic plan they are a variant of a simple sentence. The expressiveness of such constructions consists in highlighting the individual elements of the utterance and shifting the semantic focus.
- *Sentences with a connecting link*. From a formal point of view, relative subordinate clauses with a connection are a complex sentence. However, the connection between the main and subordinate sentences is more of a composing character rather than a subordinate one. Thus, the dual nature of the syntactic connection and the unclear grammatical status of the structure as a whole allows speaking of its complicated nature and, as a consequence, expressive properties.
- *Parentetic statements*, i.e. statements containing introductory elements. As noted by Aleksandrova (2009), introductory elements “violate” and “destroy” linear syntactic links in a sentence. In addition, parenteral statements switch the attention of the addressee to another fragment of the discourse, in other words, deautomatize the perception of the addressee. For instance:

*And then finally, bacteria are small but they are so numerous that they can actually influence the chemical composition of sea water (Knoll: Internet).*

The next group deals with expressive structures associated with a departure from the grammatical norm. In this case, the norm refers to a neutral, direct word order. According to Kuralova and Abdulmanova (2015), the expressiveness of these structures is associated with a violation of the expected order of deployment of the discourse, so that they are highlighted in the speech chain. A feature of their use in the dialogue is their high pragmatic potential, because they convey a whole range of implicit meanings: threat, sarcasm, etc. These means include:

- *statements with inverse word-order*;
- *statements with emphatic “DO”*;
- *default statements*.

The discursive means of expressive syntax, in which expressiveness is manifested within the expanded discursive fragments, and not within the framework of individual statements, include:

- *initial conjunction*;
- *dialogical repetition*;
- *parceling* (Kuralova & Abdulmanova, 2015).

## 7. Conclusion

1. Due to the fact that the main purpose of the lecture is to convey to the student audience scientific information from various fields of knowledge, the text of the lecture is compiled according to the rules of the scientific style of speech, in which, however, there may be inclusions in the form of instructions, addressing the audience, "lyrical retreats "etc.

2. At the syntactic level in the texts under study, the category of cohesion is most clearly realized, the means of which in the academic text are traditionally divided into grammatical, logical, compositional, structural and stylistic.

3. In the syntactic organization of lecture texts, priority is given to polypredicative complex constructions characterized by multi-stage subordination of predications and two-component complex sentences. Consequently, the subordination is considered the most significant in academic lectures than the co-ordinating constructions and parataxis.

4. In spontaneous speech, the syntactic organization of the lecture text depends on a number of linguistic and extralinguistic factors characterizing the producer of speech as a unique linguistic personality.

5. The means of expressive syntax reinforce the pragmatic impact on the addressee and allow more clearly and convincingly argue the author's thoughts.

## References

- Aleksandrova, O. V. (2009). *Problems of expressive syntax: on the material of the English language*. Moscow: Book house "Librokom".
- Borbotko, V. G. (2011). *Principles of discourse formation: From psycholinguistics to linguosynergetics*, 4rd. ed. Moscow: Book house "Librokom".
- Borodina, D. S. (2018). *Transnational English in Anglo-Scandinavian bilingualism*. Simferopol: ARIAL.
- Crystal, D. (1985). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Galperin, I. R. (1981). *Text as an object of linguistic research*. Moscow: Science.
- Galperin, I. R. (2007). *Text as an object of linguistic research* (5th ed.). Moscow: KomKniga.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards and Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk, & H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Karasik, V. I. (2000). On the types of discourse. *Language personality: institutional and personal discourse* (pp. 5–20). Volgograd: Peremena.
- Kozhina, M. N. (1977). A comparative study of the scientific style and some trends in its development during the period of the scientific and technological revolution. *Language and style of scientific literature* (pp. 3–25). Moscow: Science.
- Kuralova, T. V., & Abdulmanova, A. K. (2015). Means of expressive syntax in modern English. *Human., socio-econ. and soc. Sci.*, 9, 314–316.
- Palatovskaya, E. V. (2016). The syntax of oral discourse: problems of segmentation. *Russ. Philol.: Bull. of the Kharkov National Pedagog. Univer. named after G.S. Skovoroda*, 1(56), 35–40.
- Petruk, K. A. (2007). *Semantic and syntactic characteristics of the disclamation speech genre in English legal discourse* (Cand. Dissertation thesis). Volgograd.
- Skripak, I. A. (2013). Expressive syntax in the texts of scientific discourse. *Philol. Sci. Quest, of theory and pract*, 4(22), part 2, 170–173.
- Sukhomlinova, M. A. (2018). *Contemporary English-language academic discourse: genesis and genre specificity*. Rostov-on-Don; Taganrog: Publ. House of the Southern Fed. University.