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CONCEPTUAL ABSTRACT MATRIX AS REFLECTION OF VARIOUS LANGUAGE CODES

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Abstract

In today's academic field the access to scientific researches' results are widely open and it is only the matter of your academic skills to become a member of it. The article is an attempt to illustrate the importance of an academic discourse skill for non-native English-speaking scientists both experienced and novice. Thus, academic written discourse should be treated not as an individual art but one of the language competences, which should be included into higher education institution curricular programs and trained accordingly. It is widely known academic written discourse has its specific features and subcategories. Linguistically speaking, building any abstract is a process of compression and, therefore, constructing another, though, a secondary type of an academic discourse text. Contextually, this new text is a representation of all the basic concepts implied in the body of the original article. So, in other words, any abstract is a conceptual matrix of the article content and its message. Additionally, in the article a corpus of one hundred and fifty abstracts was taken as empirical material to investigate the diversity of language codes within writing a scientific article abstract with the purpose to show the strategically crucial language code priority, which dominates and even dictates the usage of grammar, lexical and syntax structures of the recipient language academic discourse.

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1. Introduction

The expansion of higher education in different countries resulted in its wider access and availability of international student and faculty members' mobility. The student body has become more varied as people coming from different economic, social and cultural backgrounds study together within diverse national programs. It also allowed international students to complete their studies in universities outside their countries of origin.

This higher education boost resulted in the rivalry growth between universities for "tuition fee paying students as a source of financial support. Higher educational institutions are also in constant competition between one another in the pursuit of high international academic ranking positions, research funding, and worldwide recognition" (Marta, 2015 p. 895). Besides, additional pressure is placed on university teaching staff, who have to show excellent results in all fields of activity, especially academic and scientific, in order to put up with a positive image of their university. Academics have to demonstrate their mobility through participation in international scientific conferences or publishing their scientific findings in international Web of Science or Scopus journals. Thus, a recent decade has introduced a rise in publication activities of university teaching staff as well as other scientists and researchers.

The global acceptance of English in the scientific and academic environment "has shaped new academic contexts and goals, at the same time creating additional challenges especially for non-native speaking academics" (Marta, 2015, p. 895). The expansion of the English language in academic circles, which has practically turned it into a basic academic skill that scholars must have for decent reporting their academic performance and desired results, has also been recorded in the Russian higher education environment. Practically, the research activities that bear the greatest importance nowadays are those whose results are published in English in high impact international journals.

This importance placed on publishing in English in prestigious international journals has broadened the focus of teaching, which now includes the skill of presenting the findings of scientific research in proper academic English, in other words, the academic discourse is now one of the core components of Russian academic curricular programs.

2. Problem Statement

Academic discourse, its features and components have been studied by a good number of Russian and foreign scholars (Al-Khasawneh, 2017; Alekseeva, 2018; Begona, 2014; Bolivar & Parodi, 2015; Dobrynina, 2016; Hyland, 2009; Khutyz, 2015; Lorés, 2004; Oorzhak & Krapivkina, 2016; Popova, 2015; Suleimanova et al., 2016; Suleimanova, 2018; Suhomlinova, 2019; Sina Nasiri, 2012). It should be noted that academic discourse not only informs the society about scientific achievements, but also transforms them into academic knowledge. In addition, academic discourse can be regarded as a sort of language code based on culture, individual and educational background of the scientist (Hyland, 2009, p. 12).

Academic writing, as a subcategory of the academic discourse, is a broad term that usually refers to an "act of producing written discourse within some academic environment by all those involved in the academic world, from teaching staff members or senior scientists to novice scholars or students. Thus, various types of texts such as books, research articles, reports, reviews, abstracts, editorials but also theses,

dissertations or student essays can be analyzed as academic genres or its sub-genres. They must each conform to a certain structure and respect conventions and rules that set them apart from other types of written discourse” (Marta, 2015, p. 897).

3. Research Questions

Traditionally, academic discourse considers primary and secondary scientific texts. Among the latter are reports, reviews and abstracts for research articles. Reviewing, in general, is a way of compressing text information which requires cognitive, creative and synthetically analytical transformation of an article original text into another text, which is supposed to have its conventional format (Smolova, 2015). Reviewing may also result in the format of an abstract realized as "a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of [an] article" (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020, p. 25), on the one hand, but also as a conceptional matrix of the latter.

Commonly, abstracts are seen as readers’ doorway to view an article, journals’ selection for contributions, and for conferences to accept or reject articles (Lores, 2004). Thus, any abstract is to reproduce the core concept structure of its informative content. The key words are also a sort of core concept points to refrain the author’s message of its scientific research.

Moreover, Taylor and Chen (1991) emphasize the importance of cultural variations in written discourse structure. They also added that “the cultural background of the author might lead to variation of the rhetorical structures of texts, and that such variation should be considered in ESL teaching programs” (p. 319). Therefore, authors of scientific research articles need to be aware of cultural differences in respect with a text structure to succeed in international community.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this article is to illustrate the different language code using written academic discourse as one of the examples. Building an abstract, which is a specific structure, any scientist uses the conceptual matrix of his article as the main basis for compressing its full text, on the one hand, but the article’s successful interpretation is no doubt possible if the semantic, grammar and syntax codes of the two languages are observed and accurately followed. Only that method of transformation from Russian – English written academic discourse allows to keep the message of registered and analyzed results given in the article body.

5. Research Methods

A total of one hundred and fifty abstracts were selected from a number of journals where linguistic and language teaching methodology issues are discussed (e.g. The Cognitive Studies of Language, The Issues of Cognitive Linguistics). The corpus analyzed, written by non-native English speaking scientists and researchers, consists of abstracts randomly picked out from the journals. The selected abstracts were published between the years of 2016 up to 2020. The abstracts were produced mainly for various topics within both the cognitive linguistics paradigm and academic discourse. The language and style of the abstracts were analyzed by descriptive-comparative method means.

6. Findings

Firstly, a research article abstract is characterized by a strict structure. The European Association of Science Editors recommends authors to adhere to the following abstract structure: (1) Background; (2) Objectives; (3) Methods; (4) Results; (5) Conclusions; (6) Final Conclusions. It was found out that the majority of analyzed abstracts don't follow this structure: most of the abstracts miss the Background and start with Objectives as well as they don't contain Final Conclusions. Thus, the compulsory parts in the abstracts written for the Russian journals (some of which are cited in Scopus) are Objectives, Methods, Results and Conclusion.

Secondly, the size of the abstracts varies a lot, even in the same journals. For example, in The Issues of Cognitive Linguistics Journal authors are requested to write two abstracts – one in Russian (short, no more than 500 printed characters or around 65 words) and the other in English with the requirements to follow: 150-200 words, covering the topic, objective, methods, findings, conclusion and final conclusions. The results of the abstracts size analysis (Volume 2, 2016) are presented in Table 1.

Table 01. The analysis of abstracts in Vol. 2, 2016, The Issues of Cognitive Linguistics Journal

Overall number of abstracts	18
Abstract 1 (p. 5, pp. 9-10)	80 words (Russian), 215 (English)
Abstract 2 (p. 11, p. 22)	78 words (Russian), 157 (English)
Abstract 3 (p. 23, p. 28)	56 words (Russian), 175 (English)
Abstract 4 (p. 29, pp. 37-38)	47 words (Russian), 161 (English)
Abstract 5 (p. 39, p. 47)	174 words (Russian), 276 (English)
Abstract 6 (p. 49, p. 55-56)	176 words (Russian), 202 (English)
Abstract 7 (p. 57, p. 61)	74 words (Russian), 269 (English)
Abstract 8 (p. 62, pp. 72-73)	53 words (Russian), 161 (English)
Abstract 9 (p. 74, p. 82)	71 words (Russian), 187 (English)
Abstract 10 (p. 83, p. 92)	98 words (Russian), 139 (English)
Abstract 11 (p. 93, p. 101)	224 words (Russian), 300 (English)
Abstract 12 (p. 102, p. 111)	76 words (Russian), 203 (English)
Abstract 13 (p. 112, pp. 121-122)	145 words (Russian), 187 (English)
Abstract 14 (p. 123, pp. 127-128)	79 words (Russian), 324 (English)
Abstract 15 (p. 129, p. 133)	72 words (Russian), 126 (English)
Abstract 16 (p. 134, p. 145)	76 words (Russian), 206 (English)
Abstract 17 (p. 146, p. 149)	57 words (Russian), 203 (English)
Abstract 18 (p. 150, p. 157)	54 words (Russian), 276 (English)

As seen from the table 66% of the abstracts fails to follow the size requirements, both in Russian and English. It is relevant to add that in most cases abstracts in Russian are often descriptive in nature, they consist of a few sentences: A new paradigm always requires some changes in terminology. (1) *This is true about Cognitive linguistics, which has brought many new terms into the field of linguistic studies* (The Cognitive Studies of Languages, 2018, p. 30). Such short abstracts do not reflect the idea of the article content since it is not possible to both conform to the limited size and content requirements.

Thirdly, focusing on the abstract content, it should be noted that the research article abstract is a fragment of a scientific discourse that verbalizes scientific knowledge in a certain field. An abstract, like a

scientific text as a whole, is one way of expressing new knowledge, but in a special format. However, all concepts highlighted in the scientific text of the article should be present in the text of the abstract. In other words, the abstract is a conceptual matrix of a research article, and keywords are the centers of these concepts. When translating abstracts from one language to another, only structural and syntactic changes are possible, but the conceptual component, which the author of the article originally determined, must be preserved.

The analysis of the English-language abstracts written by Russian-speaking authors helps identify the main mistakes. In the overwhelming majority the abstracts are a literal translation from Russian.

Table 02. Abstracts samples

<p>(2) <i>V stat'e raskryvayutsya usloviya, pri kotoryh formirovaniye trebuyemykh kompetentsiy obuchajushchihsiya po osnovnym professional'nyim programmam pedagogicheskogo napravleniya osushchestvlyayetsya v sootvetstvii s zakonmernostyami pedagogiki dialoga i printsipom polikul'turnosti v kontekste estestvennoj prirody dialogichnosti kul'tury.</i></p>	<p><i>The article reveals the conditions under which the formation of the required competencies of students in the basic professional programs of the pedagogical direction is carried out in accordance with the laws of pedagogy of dialogue and the principle of multiculturalism in the context of the natural nature of dialogic culture.</i></p>
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Excessive literal translation in this case leads to a violation of the lexical and grammatical norms of the English language, which is characterized by greater compression compared to the Russian language. In addition, the polysemy of Russian and English words and differences in their compatibility in two languages lead to the wrong choice of lexical units (examples 3-5).

Table 03. Abstracts samples

<p>(3) <i>Predstavlena metodika raboty s tekstami raznykh zhanrov, obuchenie uchashchihsiya strategiyam chteniya.</i></p>	<p><i>The *technique of working with texts of different genres, teaching students reading strategies is presented.</i></p>
<p>(4) <i>Nastoyashchaya stat'ya posvyashchena obzoru metodicheskogo opyta prepodavaniya foneticheskogo aspekta inostrannogo yazyka v kontekste professional'noj podgotovki.</i></p>	<p><i>This article is a review of the *methodological experience of teaching the phonetic aspect of a foreign language in the context of vocational training.</i></p>
<p>(5) <i>Rabotaya s tekstami, sodержashchimi lingvostranovedcheskuju informatsiju, obuchajushchiesya ovladevajut lingvostranovedcheskimi umeniyami.</i></p>	<p><i>Working with texts containing *linguistic and geographical information, students learn *linguistic and oriental skills.</i></p>

In the examples, the words in bold are used incorrectly from the point of view of their semantics: for example, in (3), the author should use the term *technology*; in (4) *methodology experience*; in (5), the term *country studies*. In other words, the terms used in the Russian-language version of the abstracts should correspond to the terminology adopted in the English scientific discourse.

Another frequent mistake is made when Russian authors begin abstracts with the phrase **The article is devoted ...*, **The article is dedicated to*. E.g.

(6) *The article is **devoted to** the study of English everyday lexis* (The Cognitive Studies of Languages, 2018: p. 105).

(7) *The paper is devoted to idioethnic specifics of cultural senses verbalization by German scriptonyms in the process of semantic, word-building and phraseological derivation* (The Cognitive Studies of Languages, 2018, p. 109).

(8) *The research is dedicated to the concept HEALTH which is an anthropologically important concept of culture* (The Issues of Cognitive Linguistics. Vol. 3, 2016: p. 49).

These phrases represent literal translation from the Russian cliché *Статья посвящена* that cannot be translated via the verbs *to devote / to dedicate* due to the differences in the meaning: **to devote** – *to give an amount of time, attention, etc. to something*, **to dedicate** – *to give a lot of your time and effort to a particular activity or purpose because you think it is important* (Oxford Learner's Dictionary). The meaning of the verbs place certain limitations on their use and in the context when the author has to describe the aim of the abstract it is advisable to rely on authentic English cliché like *The paper deals with / addresses / presents / illustrates / studies* etc.

Furthermore, one of the features of the Russian language is the widespread use of nominal phrases with a dependent noun in the genitive case. When translating them into English, the authors resort to *of-phrases* excessive use, trying to convey the Genitive case relations in Russian (examples 9-12).

Table 04. Abstracts samples

<p>(9) <i>V kachestve kljuhevogo voprosa predstavlyaetsya neobhodimost', vozmozhnost' i trudnost' vybora avtorom uchebnika eticheskoy pozitsii v protsesse otobrazheniya spetsifiki mentaliteta i kul'turnogo svoeobraziya na primere nemetskoyazychnyh etnosov.</i></p>	<p><i>The key issue is the necessity, possibility and difficulty of choosing an ethical position by the author of the textbook in the process of displaying the specifics of mentality and cultural identity exemplified by those of German-speaking ethnic groups.</i></p>
<p>(10) <i>V ramkah ovladeniya zvukovym kodom inostrannogo yazyka takoj podhod predpolagaet variativnost' vybora kursa v ramkah distsipliny 'Prakticheskaya fonetika'</i></p>	<p><i>For the purposes of the acquisition of the sound code of a foreign language, this approach assumes the variability of the choice of course within the discipline "Practical Phonetics"</i></p>
<p>(11) <i><...> vydelit' faktory, ot kotoryh zavisit vybor govoryashchim togo ili inogo reprezentanta <...></i></p>	<p><i><...> and determine the factors on which the speaker's choice of means of representation of a particular concept depends <...></i></p>
<p>(12) <i>Stat'ya posvyashchena issledovaniju protsessa obrazovaniya kontaminirovannyh toponimicheskikh edinits.</i></p>	<p><i>The article is devoted to the investigation of the process of creating of contaminated toponymic units.</i></p>

All of the abovementioned examples require a conceptual rethinking of Russian nominal syntactic models. As a rule, the so-called *of-phrase* is implemented in the form of an attribute construction N-Adj, the first element of which is the conversed noun". Thus, *the speaker's choice of means of representation of a particular concept depends* (Example 11) should be transformed into a more adequate syntactic structure, *the speaker's choice of particular concept representation means*, while keeping the conceptual content of the syntactic language unit.

Moreover, one of the features of the abstracts translation into English (examples 9-12) is the excessive use of a definite article to describe the linguistic problem as a whole, as in example 10: *For the purposes of the acquisition* or when implementing a nominative function in the same example *of the sound code*.

7. Conclusion

This paper is a useful contribution to highlight language code diversity within academic discourse. In today's academic circle it is highly important to possess a professional academic discourse skill, part of which is abstract writing. We have endeavoured to prove the fact that a language code can dominate the process of building, compressing and transformation of an article text into an abstract, which is definitely another type of secondary scientific text. Any abstract as a result of mentioned above transformations is, nevertheless, a copy of the conceptual structure of the whole article with its key ideas and conclusions. Moreover, the article illustrates the fact that breaking language semantical, grammar and syntax codes can easily ruin the whole message implied by an article's author.

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