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Efficient Communication for Research: Newest Trends in Designing English Language and Communication Courses for Graduate Students

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Эффективные коммуникации для исследовательских целей: новые тенденции в разработке языковых и коммуникативных курсов для аспирантов

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Defining aims and objectives of modern research and communication in foreign language instruction for post-doctoral students is the task that is to be implemented through the close collaboration of all academic groups involved in the academic decision-making process. Needs analysis helps to narrow down requirements of an individual graduate student, Doctoral Program and University. A newly designed course entitled "Research English: Communication for Research Purposes" offers both traditional academic part of the syllabus as well as the genres and tasks that hitherto were themes of a more traditional business communication courses.

Ключевые слова: *коммуникация для исследовательских целей, коммуникация на английском языке, разработка коммуникативных программ, коммуникативные потребности аспирантов.*

Определение целей и задач для языковых и коммуникативных курсов — задача, которая должна решаться в тесном сотрудничестве различных академических групп, участвующих в процессе принятия академических решений. Анализ потребностей определяет общие и специальные требования целевой аудитории: самих аспирантов, программы аспирантуры и конкретно университета. Новый курс «Английский язык для аспирантов: эффективные коммуникации для исследовательских целей» предлагает как традиционные академические темы, так и темы и жанры, которые ранее осваивались в рамках деловых коммуникативных курсов.

Introduction. Designing and implementing Research English courses for Doctoral students at modern Business Schools. Identifying course aims and objectives.

The course “Research English: Communication for Research Purposes” is the result of more than 7 years’ experience of teaching academic English. “Research English: Communication for research purposes” is both an EAP course and personal development course for Doctoral students of Graduate School of Management, SPbU.

To explain the choice of the course aims and objectives as well as course content selection it is important to introduce four academic groups profiles.

a. Saint Petersburg University, Languages for Academic and Business Communication Department.

b. Saint Petersburg University, Graduate School of Management.

c. Graduate School of Management Faculty.

d. Graduate School of Management Doctoral Students: the students who enroll for the Doctoral Program and take the Research English for Doctoral students’ course.

a. *Saint Petersburg University Languages for Academic and Business Communication Department.*

- 31 language and communication teachers and instructors.
- 8 Associate Professors.
- 11 Doctoral Degrees.
- 1 CELTA Certificate.
- Language courses in four languages: English, French, German, Spanish.
- Courses: general language courses, academic language courses, communication courses.
- We are a teaching and research body from the Institute of Modern Languages, SPbU, working for GSOM, SPbU.

b. *Saint Petersburg University Graduate School of Management.*

Graduate School of Management (GSOM SPbU) is a teaching and research unit of Saint Petersburg State University.

It is a university business school that provides degree programs in management: Bachelor, Master, Doctoral degree programs in management, as well as Executive MBA. These programs are designed and delivered (many of them in English) in collaboration with leading international business schools.

The school obtains international institutional accreditation. High quality of educational programs is approved by reputable program accreditations: EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System), AMBA (Executive MBA) and EPAS — European Programs Accreditation Systems — (Bachelor).

“Master in International Business” program offered at the Graduate School of Management, St.Petersburg State University is in the international ranking Financial Times 2014.

According to EdUniversal ranking since 2008 GSOM SPbU has been the best among business schools of Eastern Europe.

c. *Saint Petersburg University Graduate School of Management faculty.*

65% of the school’s faculty are subject teachers lecturing in English. Language and communication teachers from the Languages for Academic and Business Communication Department work aligned with the faculty graduated from the World’s leading universities and business schools: London Business School (UK), Columbia University (USA), Harvard (USA), Bocconi (Italy), ESADE (Spain), etc. Language and communication teachers

need if not compete than be equal in the quality of teaching with the GSOM faculty.

d. *Saint Petersburg University, Graduate School of Management Doctoral students.*

- The entry level of students' language proficiency is B2 and higher (CEFR).
- About 30% of the students graduate from GSOM SPbU Master Programs and the working language of these programs is English.
- Internationalization is one of the main characteristics of the Doctoral Programs. All the students spend one semester at the academic partners of GSOM SPbU (54 partner business schools from Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas are among top-3 business schools), participate in international conferences where they present the results of their research in English.
- Doctoral Program is top 1 nationally in management. In 2015-2016 one of the purposes for the Program is to make the English language the language of instruction.

These specific features of the four groups are enumerated to present valuable reasons for the following statement: the faculty of the Languages for Academic and Business Communication Department work in a very challenging academic environment.

It will help explain the new tendencies in designing English language and communication courses for Doctoral students of modern business schools.

Tendencies in Designing English Language and Communication Courses for Doctoral Students of a Modern Business School.

Tendency 1. A good program can never be designed and implemented without productive collaboration and non-stop networking of all academic groups that are the participants of the decision-making process. In the above described case, they are:

— School Academic Directors. They contribute a lot identifying the competences to be developed during the course. The competences that are the reflection of the overall strategy of the educational institution.

— Doctoral Program Directors. They contribute a lot identifying the competences to be developed during the course that are specific for a particular Doctoral program.

— Previous years' Doctoral students help to identify communication skills gaps.

— Program designers as well as course instructors convert it all into a working course syllabus that can be easily adjusted to changing needs.

This is the scheme we all keep in mind when we start designing new language or communication courses or introduce changes into the existing courses for GSOM SPbU.

What do we have as a result? It is a 100 contact hour course, very intensive and challenging for both the instructor and the students; the course that is the reflection of the feedback received from the four interested academic groups.

Tendency 2. Needs and expectation analysis always comes first and my main task as the course and syllabus designer and instructor is to specify the focus of

the syllabus - the focus that is the response to the needs of the particular group of Doctoral students, particular Doctoral Program and particular Business School.

The main expectations of all the above mentioned groups are:

— To develop written communication skills for productive publication activity,

— To develop oral communication skills for participation in national and international conferences

— To become skillful enough to fulfill the primary obligations for Doctoral students of Graduate School of Management: to become effective science communicators.

Tendency 3. It is a tasks-oriented more than skills-oriented course. During this course Doctoral students master Academic/Research communication formats and genres that will be developed as a step-by-step response to their 1st year of Doctoral program study obligations.

Main course objectives:

1. To master Academic/Research writing skills to complete written communication tasks and write two main course texts:

Research Proposal and Critical Review and

2. To master speaking skills for Academic/Research purposes to complete oral communication tasks.

To do that we deal with traditional Research English program issues (academic writing) that include

— Academic definitions,

— Summarizing techniques,

— Plagiarism and paraphrasing,

— Referencing,

— Writing an abstract, etc.

To respond to new expectations of Doctoral students we formulated specific course objectives:

1. To develop team-building skills for research purposes: collaboration within bigger and smaller groups,

2. To introduce “collaboration principle” for mastering successive feedback techniques and improve

a. personal style of formulating oral and written responses;

b. personal style of receiving and processing information delivered by other participants.

3. To develop the mode of active participation based on independent critical/diagnostic thinking, ability to avoid academic groupthink and ability to communicate their research positions in a persuasive way.

To do that we introduce less conventional issues:

— Networking strategies for Doctoral students,

— Pitching for academic/research purposes,

— Knowledge management for research purpose,

— Developing personal style for presentation and lecture delivery,

— Positive and negative feedback in academic context: from peer-to-peer evaluation to critical reviews.

Table 1 illustrates the main communication tasks the students complete during the course.

Table 1

Communication tasks introduced in the course.

Written tasks/genres	Oral tasks/ genres	Integrated genres	Integrated formats
Research Proposal (text): Title, aims and keywords Research Background Literature review Research questions Research methods Research outcomes	Academic presentations based on Research Proposal parts	Round Table discussion on research-related issues (input information: controversial, discussion-provoking research articles)	Networking strategies for Doctoral students
Critical review (journal article text)	Article rendering (extended summary) with elements of critique	Conferencing (with peer-reviewing articles to be presented at international conferences the students are going to take part in)	Feedback sessions. Positive and negative feedback in academic context: from peer-to-peer evaluation to critical reviews
	Pitching. Pitching for Research Purposes	Meeting with the supervisor: Introducing an issue that reflects conflict of interests	Developing personal style for effective academic communication
	Lecturing		Knowledge management for research purpose

Tendency 4. Courses for Doctoral students become more interactive.

“Why interaction activity is important for Doctoral students”? — The answer to this question is to be obvious for the students and the course instructor from the very beginning.

Rationale for Doctoral students and instructor:

A group of Doctoral students act as a research project group where each person benefits from in-group academic interaction. The aim of the project is to help each other be prepared to communicate research ideas in English to various interested groups.

Two more questions are closely related to the one stated above:

a. How can we introduce interaction and collaboration principles into “Research English: Communication for Research Purposes” Course?

b. How can we initiate collaboration as a response to controversial research-related and debate-provoking issues?

Tables 2, 3, 4 illustrate the succession of Steps 1-6 algorithm of using articles to master various communication genres (rendering, round table discussion, and a motivation pitch).

Step 1. The instructor introduces an article as a source of information and controversial content;

Step 2. The students identify the main message of the author;

Step 3. The instructor introduces the tasks to be completed by the students;

Step 4. The instructor introduces a new genre;

Step 5. The instructor and the students identify and discuss the skills they need to demonstrate;

Step 6. The instructor and the students identify and discuss the challenges they can face when implementing the communication tasks.

Table 2

Algorithm 1

Step 1. Source/ Input information	Step 2. Message	Step 3. Task	Step 4. Genre	Step 5. Skills to demonstrate	Step 6. Challenges
N. Piercy. The role of academics should be to challenge status quo [3]	The true value of a business school research is to challenge the status quo of modern business: to analyze, criticize and challenge management practice. Now they do the opposite — take an apologetic stance and placate the aggressor — corporate business	To introduce the controversial issues from the article to the audience of Doctoral students. Render the article (the set of the ideas provided by the author) and present critique of your own	Article rendering (extended summary) with elements of critique	Oral communication skill: Is able to speak to academic audience (particular context) without mixing the ideas of the author and the ideas of the speaker. Thus be able to let the audience choose whom to support	1. The language of the article is far from being academic: very emotional and opinionated — it is hard to keep to academic style of presenting both the text and the position of your own. 2. Great temptation to introduce the position of your own before introducing all the message of the author. 3. Skills of presenting positive or negative critique (this task goes throughout the course) are still under formation/ 4. Emotional intelligence issues
Introduced by the instructor	Identified by the students	Introduced by the instructor	Introduced by the instructor	Identified together with the students	Defined by the instructor and discussed with the students

Table 3

Algorithm 2

Step 1. Source/ Input information	Step 2. Message	Step 3. Task	Step 4. Genre	Step 5. Skills to demonstrate	Step 6. Challenges
R.Dulek. Academic Research. Two Things that Get My Goat — and Three that Offer Meaning [2]	“Academic research tends to turn into gamesmanship. The games: “Listening”, “Cross-listing”, “Stealing” are getting more and more popular. Still it is a endless resource of ideas, meaning and academic growth” Identified by the students	To debate the controversial issues from the article. Identify and give academic support to the position of your own	Round table discussion	Skill to process and generate ideas. To communicate to compromise. To persuade others. To be able to be an audience	— It is hard to develop ‘selective deafness’ to negative information. To be stress-resistant — Doctoral students are not always ready to work as a team, etc.
Introduced by the instructor	Identified by the students	Introduced by the instructor	Introduced by the instructor	Identified together with the students	Defined by the instructor and discussed with the students

Table 4

Algorithm 3

Step 1. Source/ Input information	Step 2. Message	Step 3. Task	Step 4. Genre	Step 5. Skills to demonstrate	Step 6. Challenges
Doctoral degree. The disposable academic. Why doing a PhD is often a waste of time [1]	“Obtaining a PhD degree can be very discouraging now. It may be a bad choice if done without proper thinking”	Prepare a motivation pitch and pitch to the audience of Doctoral students. Reason: in the hour of need to remind the academic audience about the great dream they are chasing	A motivation pitch	To be able to identify a motivating message and stretch it into a pitch, To be exact, concise and persuasive: *main idea first, *very straightforward way of presenting supporting information and *call for action at the end, etc.	To pitch is not traditionally one of the genres that Doctoral students regard as a target genre. To speak with the objective to motivate and make everyone change the things for the better is not what a PhD student is used to. Students tend to be “too academic”, but a pitch is not a speech to educate or disseminate knowledge they are used to, etc.
Introduced by the instructor	Identified by the students	Introduced by the instructor	Introduced by the instructor	Identified together with the students	Defined by the instructor and discussed with the students

Tendency 5: New communication genres are introduced to Doctoral students. They need to master genres that used to be relevant only for business communication.

- Networking strategies,
- Pitching,
- Personal communication style and etiquette,
- Positive and negative feedback in academic context: from peer-to-peer evaluation to critical reviews.

Why is it essential to teach the Doctoral students how to pitch?

It is important as the situations when they need to give a concise and energetic speech and introduce a research-related problem and possible solution are not rare in academic world.

When doing their Doctoral courses and writing their Doctoral thesis they need to know how:

- to pitch an opinion.
- to pitch a position.
- to pitch to motivate.
- to pitch to the Academic Board/panel to get a grant (to sell research ideas).
- to pitch to Corporate Partners' Board for research-related as well as career perspectives, etc.

— Being a part of unpredictable academic environment Doctoral student needs to know.

— how to pitch their position, their research proposal, pitch in conflict situations and in uncertain/open ended situations.

— how to communicate with their scientific adviser online, how to write a cover letter when submitting a paper to a journal.

It is hard sometimes to introduce new genres to Doctoral students. If the majority of formats we work with are within the scope of traditional tasks, such a communication genre as a pitch is definitely from the “grey zone” of the unrecognized needs.

A big challenge for the students is to recognize that they need to become experienced in mastering these genres.

Tendency 6. Research courses become personal development courses with all the interpersonal relations risks.

Including formats that permit students to demonstrate their opinions and intentions takes the instructor close not only to doctoral students' research but also to the doctoral students' feelings and emotions.

This year for the first time I ran across a very subtle and risky matter. It is research-based frustration.

From this year student's critique of the course:

“I should also confess that gains from English course went much further than my initial expectations, as I received true communication training due to interactive assignments, which were both involving and challenging. My motivation was raised because of the link of the content of the course to my current research. It helped me a lot with shaping research strategy. And besides, maybe not intentionally, but our English classes helped our group with team bonding. I understand that this has the opposite side too, due to the fact that only these

classes offer a stage where we are aloud and even encouraged to speak up. So along with research status students might share frustration and other negative feelings, so it might be considered that this course is provoking them, although it is not true. It just gives a floor to reveal them.”

Not all students know how to communicate their dissatisfaction. This is a new challenge that I need to introduce into the new course objectives.

Conclusion.

Nowadays the academic diversity is rich. We should design and redesign our courses as a response to the changing needs, expectations and requirements of the course — related audience: mostly our students. We need not doubt to introduce new communication genres that are still non-traditional for Doctoral language and communication courses.

Academic communication skills for Doctoral students and academia in general are no less important than business communication skills for business professionals. The aim of Research Language course is to help Doctoral students to become true science communicators.

The mission of the communication course for Doctoral students is to help students to exercise their right to be free to formulate and deliver their research ideas to the global interested audiences.

The mission of the instructor is to facilitate their way up to national and global recognition.

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