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**PERSUASIVENESS IN ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS WRITING**

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In this paper, academic writing and business writing are compared from the viewpoint of persuasiveness as one of their most important characteristics. Several genres of academic and business writing are considered, and a conclusion is made that students should be taught not only how to write correctly and in accordance with the discussed genres but also how to write persuasively if they are planning to become successful professionals, particularly with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in mind. The roots of persuasiveness are traced back to ancient rhetoric. Apart from traditional arenas of persuasion – courtrooms, political campaigns and commerce, today’s university textbooks on Persuasion consider traditional theories in such contexts as health promotion, advertising, behavioral prediction, social media, individualized tailoring of political messages, and many other issues. Contemporary topics taught today within the realm of the Theory of Persuasion indicate that it is a dynamic discipline with both substantial theoretical background and numerous practical applications. One of such applications is the English language teaching, and two aspects of it – business and academic writing – are looked at in more detail in this paper. Professional functions dependent on persuasiveness are considered, and the causes of the Russian students’ lagging behind in many genres of business and academic writing are revealed.

*Key words:* theory of persuasion; persuasiveness; rhetoric; academic writing; business writing; 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Some of the principles we rely on in teaching Academic and Business English in higher education in Russia, are as follows:

- the alignment of ELT programmes with Common European Framework of Reference;
- the step-by-step development of writing competence from A1 to C2;
- teaching the genres of writing necessary beyond the classroom, i.e. in real-life professional communication;

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- dealing with the problems learners have at various levels of proficiency, especially at B1, B2 and C1 as most frequently taught in Academic and Business English;
- overcoming these problems with the help of contemporary course books.

Students learning General English may have various aims: furthering their education, taking exams, travelling, reading books and watching films, etc. Unlike them, professional people's aims in learning English may be to: get a better job, advance their career, meet their organisation's targets, manage other people, help their colleagues do their jobs more effectively, advertise or sell their products.

Among the three main purposes of human communication – informing, persuading and entertaining the recipient or the audience – business communication is more dependent on persuasion than on providing information or entertainment. Suffice it to say the following activities are common in business communication: proposing a solution at an in-company meeting, negotiating a deal with a customer and advertising a product. Each of these events is relying on some shared information about the issues discussed: the details of the proposed solution, the advantages of the deal to be agreed on or the description of the advertised product. However, the major aim is to persuade the reader or listener that the proposed solution is worth taking, the deal is worth signing or the advertised product is worth buying. It is clear that in Academic English the major aim of the writer or speaker is to inform the reader or listener about the research results, though this aim can be accompanied by the intention to 'sell' an idea or approach while such intention can be expressed openly or in the form of 'a hidden agenda'.

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the verb 'persuade' means to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to them and making them believe it. The idea of persuasion lies in the basis of ancient rhetoric and dates back to Aristotle, Plato, Isocrates, Cicero, Quintilian and other scholars, thus covering a millennium between 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. However, the classical authors were mainly interested in three domains of using persuasion: forensic (courtroom appeals), epideictic (ceremonial occasions) and deliberative speeches (political debate) [Larson, 2012]. Rhetoric was mainly a strategy and an art of persuasion. The fundamental assumptions of Aristotle about rhetoric were: a) it is used for doing something; b) it can be taught; c) it is based on the doctrine of the mean; and d) it helps the truth to win [Aristotle, 2018].

Some contemporary authors distinguish between the terms 'persuasion' and 'persuasive communication', the former being rather an effect while the latter means a process [Stiff, Mongeau, 2016]. Persuasive com-

munication occurs when people intend to affect other people's personal choices related to their ideas or behaviours, hence, the most common arenas of persuasion today are politics and business. Persuasive communication may take place even when the effect has not been achieved. For example, one's proposal may be rejected, the deal may not be agreed on and customers may not buy the advertised product despite the persuaders' efforts.

Apart from traditional arenas of persuasion – courtrooms, political campaigns and commerce, today's theory of persuasion studies broad contexts as health promotion, advertising, public relations and online communication [Perloff, 2016]. They often boldly interfere with such topics as college drinking, attitudes to same-sex marriages, abortions, and other burning issues. New editions of well-known textbooks on persuasion expand discussions to behavioral prediction, the use of guilt appeals, social media, individualized tailoring of political messages, and many other contemporary topics [Stiff, Mongeau, 2016].

Persuasion usually involves influence. However, not all types of influence are based on persuasion. Other forms of influence not covered by the term *persuasion* – and probably the worst of them – are blackmailing, threatening, manipulation and other unethical, forceful or coercive actions. However, many people have been victims of commercial or political dishonesty, which makes them look with suspicion at any form of persuasion in business or politics.

Manipulation is seen today as suggestion, i.e. hidden penetration of ideas, aims and views into the addressee's mind that makes him or her engage in a certain action [Kovshova, 2009]. Unlike manipulation, persuasion relies on argumentation, competition of ideas, comparison of options and free choice.

It is hard to translate the term *persuasion* into Russian as there are several equivalents used by different Russian authors: *убеждение*, *убеждающая коммуникация*, *увещательная коммуникация*, *речевое воздействие*, *коммуникативное воздействие* и другие. Besides, the Russian word *убеждение* also means a system of views and is closer to the word *conviction*, which has little to do with teaching how to write persuasively in professional contexts. To avoid misunderstanding, the authors of this paper prefer to use the term *речевое воздействие* in their publications and lectures in Russian. The same term is used by the previously cited author.

Contemporary programmes for students majoring in Communication in many foreign universities include such compulsory courses as Rhetoric, Theory of Argumentation, Theory of Persuasion, Interpersonal Communication, Organisational Communication, Intercultural Communication, Conflict Management, Leadership, as well as many electives such

as Communication in Medicine, Communication in Education, Public Relations, Advertising, etc. It is not surprising that university course books on Business English may borrow some elements of the above courses and use them in listening and reading materials, communicative activities including role-play, case studies and numerous writing tasks from formal letters to reports and proposals. It is clear, however, that such courses aim at teaching English in the first place, and only then, as a side effect, they develop broader professional competencies referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Differences between teaching writing in Business English and Academic English are not confined to the role of persuasion in them, but are also determined by the content, functions and genre of communication. Thus, topic areas in Business English Certificate (BEC) tasks do not coincide with those common of Academic Module of IELTS or a content list of any published course in Academic English or ESP. Content areas in Business English often include:

- Personal identification;
- The office, business environment and routines;
- Entertainment of visitors, free time, relationships with colleagues and customers;
- Travel and conference meetings;
- Using the telephone or the Internet;
- Health and safety;
- Buying and selling;
- Company structures, systems, processes.

The management functions discussed at higher levels of Business English materials often include:

- 1) contributing to decision-making processes, explaining, evaluating or modifying decisions;
- 2) communicating needs, changes, news;
- 3) developing relationships with suppliers and customers;
- 4) advertising or publicising the company, its products and services;
- 5) taking care of customer relationships.

The language necessary to carry out these functions in the international contexts is assessed at Business English Certificate Higher<sup>1</sup>. As can be seen from the numbered points above, all the managerial functions have a strong reliance on persuasive skills of the manager as a speaker or writer. The reason why we refer to writing skills more frequently than to speaking skills in this paper is not that persuasion is less important in business speaking, but because Russian students are still lagging behind

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<sup>1</sup> *Brook-Hart G. Business Benchmark Advanced. Cambridge University Press, 2013.*

in writing, which is revealed by international exams: BEC, IELTS or Cambridge Certificates. Their scores are commonly lower for writing than for any other exam paper. The most common reasons for that are:

- lack of knowledge of any business area, which is common with undergraduate students;
- no training in business writing in L1;
- reliance on internal translation from L1 when writing in L2;
- so-called ‘writing block’ – a psychological problem that has to be addressed when noticed – the earlier, the better.

Considering the genres of business writing (i.e. what types of texts people write when they communicate in or about business), these are basically notes, minutes of meetings, formal and semiformal letters (including e-mails), slides for power-point presentations, reports, proposals, advertisements, brochures, leaflets and catalogues. It is worth comparing them with the genres relevant for academic writing. Notes, memos, minutes, letters, presentations, reports and proposals are also important for students of Academic English. However, similarly important or even more important for students of sciences are the skills of writing papers, articles, summaries, abstracts and several other types of texts that seem to be less important in teaching Business English. At the same time, writing advertisements is a more common activity in Business English. As for leaflets, catalogues and brochures, they are too long to be used in a course book, though their elements are sometimes included in writing tasks of Business English course books<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, such texts are unlikely to be found in academic writing materials, as they are often aimed at promoting goods or services. Anyway, ELT courses in higher education should model the content and conditions of the future students’ profession, so it is very important to apply role play, business games and simulations [Kasatkina, Lichak, 2018].

Thinking about persuasion in business writing, it is worth considering a broader question: what makes business people persuasive?

The analysis of Business English published materials shows that this might be a complex of various characteristics:

- Having a good product or service to sell;
- Having an attractive marketing mix (a range of products);
- Having good ‘people skills’ (personality);
- Being expert;
- Being liked;
- Being enthusiastic;
- Having good communicative skills;

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<sup>2</sup> Lisboa M., Handford M. et al. Business Advantage. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

- Using language well.

Only the last two features have to do with the skills practiced in a language classroom. Others are either inborn talents ('being liked', which means being charismatic, able to charm people), or the skills acquired in other courses – particularly those students are majoring in ('being expert'). The latter also depends on the professional experience university graduates gain in their jobs. The first two bulleted points refer to objective characteristics of the job former students can get after graduation or when changing jobs and moving forward in their careers.

The third bulleted point has an interesting relation to what Quintilian, ancient Roman rhetorician and author, wrote about a good persuader. He was the first to notice that to succeed in persuasion one has to be a good man, not just a good speaker [Ross, 1990]. This had to do with ethical credibility – the idea of 'ethos', which was considered inseparable from the ideas of 'logos' (the ability to develop argumentation) and 'pathos' (emotional appeal) – the other two basic assets of a good rhetorician [Larson, 2012]. It is very useful to instill these ideas in today's students of Academic and Business English because critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, social responsibility and emotional development are among the skills considered necessary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and included in the Cambridge Framework of Life Competencies [Gorodetskaya, 2019]. The course books developing these 'beyond-the-language' competencies within a course of English are becoming more and more popular.

'Being enthusiastic' does not seem to belong to any of the discussed categories, inborn or acquired. It is on the one hand, a personality trait and, in many English-speaking professional environments, it may mean 'being polite'. It is a cultural skill developed within intercultural communication courses, as well as students' mobility programmes and professional training sessions provided by international companies for their employees. Indeed, the careers of many university graduates show that those of them who are emotionally involved in the job they are doing, not necessarily because they love the job but because they dislike doing anything indifferently, get promotion much sooner than their less enthusiastic colleagues.

The success in the last two areas listed above – having good communication skills and using language well – depends a lot on what language teachers do in their classes, how they motivate learners, what methods and materials they use and how effectively they turn their students into good communicators. The latter depends on how much the students have practiced delivering the content in a clearly structured piece of writing, avoiding irrelevant statements, developing persuasive arguments, using suitable register, showing business-like approach to the problems considered or discussed, choosing the right words and demonstrating sufficient

accuracy in grammar and spelling. Writing is the activity that allows students to master the above skills and reveal them in self- and peer-evaluation most conspicuously, while correcting speaking cannot be equally effective. However, writing inevitably influences speaking by providing set models suitable for formal communication in any profession.

The problems many students have to overcome when moving to higher levels of proficiency in academic or business writing are lack of professional experience and, as a result, lack of ideas to write about. Here, good teaching materials and the teacher's tips can help. Some students claim they have no talent for writing. It is hard to deny that some people are more gifted in certain areas, some are less, and teachers can be great motivators as well as great de-motivators depending on their empathy and politeness. A good teacher will always help such a student to raise their self-confidence rather than use direct criticism as a major pedagogical tool. An important role is played by the students' experience in formal writing in their native language: in some countries formal writing is not practiced in secondary schools within the course of L1, at least in a systematic way. University students very rarely have compulsory courses on how to use L1 in academic or professional genres of writing. One more obstacle is that the tradition of such writing may be quite different in the students' native cultures from that of the English-speaking world. All this requires additional effort on the part of the country's educational authorities, university administration and ELT professionals.

According to V.V. Safonova, international professional communication requires that today's students of Russian universities should be involved in communicative and culturally oriented activities aimed at research projects and modelled according to their realistic professional aims [Safonova, 2019].

In terms of mastering a foreign language, a practical consideration for university students is that most of their potential employers prefer the candidates who speak and write in both L1 and L2 not only accurately but also eloquently and persuasively.

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## **УБЕДИТЕЛЬНОСТЬ В АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОМ И ДЕЛОВОМ ПИСЬМЕ**

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В данной статье академическая письменная речь и деловая письменная речь сравниваются с точки зрения убедительности как одной из их наиболее важных характеристик. Рассматриваются несколько жанров академического и делового письма и делается вывод о том, что студентов необходимо учить писать не только грамотно и в соответствии с рассмотренными жанрами, но и убедительно, если они планируют стать успешными профессионалами, особенно с учетом навыков XXI в. Речевая убедительность берет начало в античной риторике. Помимо традиционных областей ее применения в суде, политике и торговле, современные университетские курсы по теории убеждения применяют сложившиеся теории к таким областям, как пропаганда здорового образа жизни, реклама, прогнозирование поведения, использование социальных сетей, индивидуализация политических кампаний и многим другим общественно важным вопросам. Современные темы, рассматриваемые сегодня в курсах по теории убеждения, показывают, что это динамично развивающаяся дисциплина, имеющая прочную теоретическую базу и многочисленные практические применения. Одним из ее применений является преподавание английского языка как иностранного, два аспекта которого – деловая и академическая письменная речь – рассматриваются в данной статье

более детально. Анализируются профессиональные функции, зависящие от владения приемами убедительности, и выявляются причины заметного отставания российских студентов в овладении некоторыми жанрами делового и академического письма.

*Ключевые слова:* убедительность; убеждающая коммуникация; риторика; английский язык для академического / делового общения; навыки XXI в.

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