APPROACH TO TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING TO UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS: CASE STUDY OF A RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. *Since 2014, academics at Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU) have had a pressing requirement to publish their research in English language journals to enhance their global competitiveness. However, the majority of university's researchers lack the necessary skills of academic writing. This problem is aggravated by effective contracts which oblige employees to publish yearly. To help our colleagues meet this requirement at work, we have developed a comprehensive advanced training course "Writing for Publication". In this paper, we report how our approach to teaching has developed since the first implementation of the course to its second delivery. The underlying principle for modifying the learning and teaching has been the analysis of participants' responses to the feedback questionnaire. This is considered an effective means of maximising the effectiveness of the course and satisfying learners' needs and expectations as much as possible in the given reality.*

Key words: *research article, publishing in English, writing skills, feedback questionnaire*

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2012, the Government of the Russian Federation passed the order "About the approval of the Programme of step-by-step improvement of the wage system in the public (municipal) institutions for 2012 – 2018" (The order… 2016). According to this order, academics' payment should directly depend on the quality of their performance at work, i.e. the amount, complexity and quality of fulfilled tasks and activities. A major means of realising such an approach is considered the introduction of a new form of employment relations called the system of effective contracts. The main principle here is that each employee chooses a set of criteria to complete during one academic year. The criteria differ in complexity and time input. For each job position, there is an obligatory number of criteria; however, an employee can choose extra points to accomplish for financial reward. The more extra points an employee fulfills in addition to the obligatory set, the higher their financial reward will be.

At the same time, there is always something larger lying behind changes. Russian leading universities are striving to increase their global academic reputation and reach higher positions in world university rankings. Effective contracts may help significantly

to achieve this by stimulating academics to share the results of their research and best practices in teaching with the wider academic community. A key means of achieving this is through publishing in English as, increasingly, English is the language of international communication. Consequently, a considerable number of criteria in effective contracts involve the publication of research articles (RAs) in international journals indexed by leading databases such as Scopus and Web of Science.

The problem that arose with the above requirements is that academic writing in English is a new branch of study for Russian researchers, and most academics have a pressing need to develop their skills in this area. Having a high level expertise in writing about their research in Russian, most researchers appear to be novice writers in English. Academic writing in a non-native language is a challenging task for non-native speakers, demanding not only mastery of the language in general but also the ability to express complex ideas in a written form and an understanding of the disciplinary genres in which they are writing. Indeed, 'the ability to clearly communicate one's research findings determines the extent to which those findings can be used as the basis for research by others' (Cameron et al. 2009).

To address the current challenges of their academics, leading Russian universities have started to develop Academic or Writing Centres delivering workshops, lectures, seminars and short courses. Although writing centers are commonplace in many countries, in Russia this is still a new trend in tertiary institutions. Among examples of such best practices are (Academic Writing Center 2016; Academic Writing for Publication 2016; Academic Writing University Center 2016).

2. PUBLISHING IN ENGLISH: TPU SOLUTION

TPU was among the first Russian leading institutions to introduce the system of effective contracts. The innovation came in 2014 and caused a lot of challenges at the university since publishing in English became an immediate requirement. This meant that within the period of 10 months, which is one academic year, each member of the research and teaching staff needed to produce and submit an RA, gain acceptance and publish the text in a journal. In that situation, our task was to create special conditions for our colleagues from various research areas helping them to achieve two goals simultaneously – obtain the necessary skills and strategies of academic writing in English and produce a polished final draft of an RA for publication in an international journal. Thus, we were the first in Russia to design and implement a comprehensive, long-term advanced training course providing participants with two key outcomes.

The course is entitled "Writing for Publication". We piloted it in 2014, and since then have been keen to maximise the effectiveness of learners' outcomes and teaching methods applied. The guiding principle for introducing changes has been the analysis of participants' responses to the feedback questionnaire. This is regarded as an effective means of achieving best results in the Russian reality in tertiary institutions when, being novice writers, researchers have to readily demonstrate high results in publishing internationally. Learners' feedback helps us to understand what should be done to satisfy their needs as fully as possible and facilitate their professional development as effective writers for international audience. In this paper, we report how we have evolved in our approach to academic writing at TPU in the given reality.

3. WRITING FOR PUBLICATION COURSE

3.1. Overview of the initial course

A detailed description of the course specifics was presented in (Goryanova, Sinclair, and Slesarenko 2015). Briefly, the course was delivered for a group of 14 TPU researchers with language proficiency of upper B1 or B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference. The course consisted of three modules (Table 1) covering key aspects of academic writing:

Table 1 Course specifics

Module No	Module Name	Face-to-face sessions
Module 1	Structural characteristics of RAs	30 h.
Module 2	Lexical choice and grammatical accuracy	28 h.
Self-directed study, completing RAs in preparation for Module 3		
Module 3	Proofreading techniques	30 h.

Module 1 and Module 2 were delivered in parallel since structural and language aspects of academic writing are closely integrated. In terms of text structure, the sessions included a thorough discussion of an academic writing format Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion (IMRD) as the most prominent norm for the structure of an RA. Other essential parts of an RA were studied in detail as well. Among them were composing a title, specifying key words, writing an abstract and conclusion. To design the learning materials, we used a number of RAs already published in English language journals and provided by the participants before the start of the course. Those were texts the learners had chosen as the most relevant to their research disciplines.

In terms of language, the sessions focused on:
- language features of abstracts, introductions, methods, results, discussion and conclusion;
- language functions in academic writing, such as definitions, generalisations, data commentary, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, referring to graphs and tables and moderating and qualifying claims;
- grammatical and lexical forms typical of academic writing, including inter alia, common verbs and adjectives, prepositions, collocations, colloquial vs formal styles, multiword vs single-word verbs, adverb position, linking words and phrases;
- tense and aspect, definite and indefinite articles, active and passive forms of common verbs, adverbs, punctuation, etc.

Thus, each section of an RA was examined in detail for language and structural features typical of all genres as well as discipline-specific. The participants were also familiarised with the features of composing topic sentences and building a general-to-specific paragraph structure.

After that, the participants had a period of self-directed study during which they worked on their RAs, building on the knowledge and skills acquired during the first two modules and incorporating this into their writing. The texts were further used in Module 3 of the course when they were examined for text integrity and coherence, peer corrected, proofread and completed into the final drafts of RAs ready for submission to English language journals.

On completion of the course, the participants had developed a clearer understanding of the structure and organisation of RAs in their disciplines, become familiar with the language of those RAs (grammar, lexis, functions) and developed final drafts which were subsequently submitted to international peer-reviewed scientific journals and published. In addition, the participants developed an awareness of various strategies for continuing to develop their academic writing proficiency.

3.2. Focus groups: course participants

Fourteen TPU academics participated in the course in 2014, representing the first focus group for this study. In 2015, the number of participants equalled 18, which is the second focus group. All the learners, ranging from research assistants to full professors, had been selected on the ground of certain requirements, described in (Goryanova, Sinclair, and Slesarenko 2015).

Overall, the participants' areas of current research belonged to a range of disciplines, including physics, materials science, mathematics, geology, chemistry and geochemistry, oil and gas, biomedicine and bioengineering, electrical engineering, management, cultural studies, philosophy and psychology. This variety of disciplines was integrated into learning to illustrate the typical features of academic writing in English, from text structure to language functions, regardless of research specifics. At the same time, the course focused learners' attention on how disparate academic writing can be within various disciplines. This was achieved by following individual lined along the study.

3.3. Feedback questionnaire

The data required for this study were collected through a feedback questionnaire provided to the focus groups upon completion of the course in both years, 2014 and 2015. The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of four items (Table 2).

Table 2 Feedback questionnaire

No	Question
1.	Has the course helped you develop your academic writing skills?
2.	Which aspects of the course do you think have helped you the most, and why?
3.	Is there anything you would like to change in the course or have spent more time working on? If so, why?
4.	Any further comments you would like to make.

With the exception of the first item, all were open questions, inviting the participants to comment as extensively and freely as they wished. We assume that such an approach can provide credible qualitative information on the subject. Open questions do not narrow learners' thinking to quick *yes* or *no* answers; instead, each learner is able to reflect on own perception of the subject more deeply and thus focus on most individually essential sides and the impact they had or may have had if present. In this case, the degree of respondent's self-expression when completing the questionnaire rises, which may often lead to unanticipated findings, i.e. remarks that can lend a fresh perspective to the subject.

Before distributing the questionnaire sheets among the participants, we clarified each of the questions. This allowed the respondents to prevent losing direction when answering

the questions. Both focus groups had two academic hours to complete the questionnaire in class. Those who were unable to attend the session were allowed to do the task at home and then email us the answers. A positive moment about the entire process is that all the respondents are our colleagues, i.e. content teachers who give training to students within own disciplines and develop courses adapting to the changing reality in Russian tertiary education. This means that the respondents were fully aware of the significance of their feedback and were open to such a dialogue, which enabled us to elicit as much information as possible from individuals.

In 2014, all 14 participants completed and returned their questionnaires. We analysed the given responses for the course strengths and weaknesses and thus were able to identify the areas for improvement. Based on this, we introduced the corresponding changes to the course in 2015.

The 2015 participants were asked to provide their feedback on the undertaken study as well. The feedback questionnaire offered to the focus group was the same as in 2014 (Table 2). The participants were unaware of the specifics of the previous course and how the course had changed. All 18 learners gave responses to the questionnaire. The analysis of the obtained feedback allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of the new approach.

All the responses were translated from Russian into English specifically for this paper.

4. Focus Group of 2014

The results of the feedback questionnaire revealed the apparent variety in the course aspects that the participants highlighted as the most helpful. This is perhaps not surprising, given participants' varying ages, levels of proficiency, experience of academic writing (both in English and in Russian) and their different discipline areas. Nevertheless, all the participants felt positive about the course and found the knowledge of academic writing in English and skills acquired both useful and applicable in practice.

4.1. Responses to the questionnaire

Question 1. In response to the first question, six participants answered with a simple affirmative, such as "Yes.", "Absolutely!" or "It was very helpful!" The remaining responses were also positive but offered varying degrees of elaboration, such as

> *It was my first experience in writing.*
> *Now I can analyse academic text structure.*
> *It helped me to prepare six articles for journals with impact factor more than one.*
> *I now write more quickly and confidently in English...*
> *The course gave information that was entirely new for me.*

The last comment was accompanied by the caveat that "...it is impossible to learn how to write a manuscript in such a short period of time".

Question 2. The responses to the second question showed that different participants found the course helpful in different ways. Seven learners commented that the focus on grammar was the most useful part of the course. For example,

> *Lessons on English tenses, articles and prepositions were the most helpful as we do not have the same rules in our language.*
> *Grammar lessons were especially useful, particularly when we discussed punctuation.*

One participant mentioned that the analysis of academic style was the most helpful aspect of the course "…since the stylistics of Russian and English scientific texts is different". Another revealing comment was: "The most helpful things for me were standard forms and language constructions used in academic texts. Operating these structures, the text can be easily constructed just like Lego."

This seems to be a recognition of the fact that much academic written language (as with most genres) consists of multi-word units – variously referred to in the literature as lexical phrases, prefabs, formulaic sequences and lexical bundles (Charles, Pecorari, and Hunston 2009).

Five other participants identified the analysis of text structure as the most helpful part of the course. Of this group, typical comments were:

> *Understanding the structure of an article helped me most.*
> *The most important part, in my opinion, was the analysis of text structure.*
> *The discussion of text structure was very useful. Now, I can identify the structure and content of a text from an unfamiliar discipline.*

One participant noted the differences in structure between RAs in English and those in Russian journals. Another participant commented on the benefit of analysing the structure of RAs and then trying 'to write in the same manner', followed by giving 'feedback to each other'.

For two participants, the third module, which involved a detailed analysis and proofreading of individual RAs, was the most beneficial part of the course. One comment was that 'the obtained knowledge is consolidated better in practice' and the other stated: "Proofreading was the best practice. Now, I have the sense of *bad grammar* and *unnatural English*."

Question 3. The responses to the third question show a considerable similarity between participants' recommendations. The focus was largely on the third module of the course. Two participants indicated the large amount of time devoted to the discussion of every final draft. For example,

> *Even though I realised some of the most frequent mistakes that occur in academic texts written by non-native speakers, to my mind, it took too much time.*
> *It is difficult to work for a lesson with a text from a totally different research area; while such work is beneficial for the author, others seem to be less involved.*

Five other comments included the suggestion to individualise lessons within this module and 'transfer them into tutorials' or 'the work in small groups according to a professional area'.

Although one participant noted that grammar 'can be learned by an ordinary English language course', seven other participants highlighted that they would like to have spent more time on grammar due to considerable differences between the two languages, Russian and English, in terms of academic style. One learner even suggested using grammar and vocabulary tests or gap filling exercises.

Another aspect of the course concerned text structure. While one participant mentioned that the order of RA writing 'is known from previous work', five other learners responded that they would like to have studied more details related to each section of an RA. For example,

> *It would have been better to use more real examples of articles.*
> *I would like to have learned more about writing Methods and Results.*
> *It would have been useful to compare the same part from several RAs and discuss its structure and language.*

Question 4. There was a high degree of consistency in the responses the participants gave to question four. Although only nine learners provided their comments, practically all of them emphasised the necessity to discuss the peculiarities of Russian-to-English translation when writing an RA. For example,

> *Nothing was mentioned about the problems of translating a text from Russian into English. This is extremely important.*
> *I need some practice in how to translate complex ideas into the English language.*
> *My English sentences sound Russian. Translation practice should be added.*

Five participants recommended introducing more contact hours with Russian instructors due to the differences between the two languages. The comments were such as

> *I suppose the third module should be delivered by Russian teachers because it is difficult for a native English-speaking teacher to correct the Russian structure of English sentences.*
> *It would have helped to add lessons on translation with Russian teachers.*

One participant made a reference to the mode of instruction: 'Such courses can be done totally by Russian specialists who are competent enough and know what our language problems are.'

4.2. Analysis of the responses

The major benefit from the questionnaire is that we were able to see the drawbacks of the course through learners' perception. We identified the areas that the participants recommended either covering or rearranging. This further gave us ideas on how to modify the course and make the learning process more effective for Russian learners.

One area suggested covering the problems of translating complex scientific ideas from Russian into English, working in this case with Russian instructors. This recommendation seems reasonable. The initial concept of the course was to create a natural English language environment during the lessons to encourage the learners to think and write in English from the start. For this purpose, most of the contact hours were covered by a native English-speaking instructor invited for the course. However, it is certainly impossible to learn to write about science immediately in English within a short period of study. Non-native English-speaking researchers typically need a lot of practice and time in order to acquire this skill at a highly professional level and sound natural when writing about complex ideas and data in English. The course can only equip its learners with various strategies and techniques and give them training on how to apply these strategies and techniques in writing.

We came to the conclusion that when preparing the final draft, many participants worked with the Russian variant of their RAs, translating it into English. Given that the two languages are completely different, learners should indeed be familiar with various Russian-to-English translation techniques. This would enable them to write about their research smoothly and accurately. Moreover, this particular skill would facilitate learners' thinking in English more effectively.

Thus, the course should introduce special hours with Russian specialists to discuss the peculiarities of the Russian-to-English translation and provide learners with the corresponding training. In this case, the course should continue to emphasise the need for participants to try to think and write in English from the start; simultaneously, the course should show them how various ideas, which we mean in Russian, should or should not be expressed in English when writing about research.

Another participants' recommendation was to arrange the third module of the course in the form of individual tutorials or lessons in small discipline-specific groups, rather than discuss texts within the whole group. Indeed, the course showed that the participants were highly involved in the discussion of other colleagues' texts at the beginning of the lessons. They could identify problems typical of their own writing as well and thus practice the proofreading technique. However, afterwards they often became discouraged by such an activity due to the unfamiliar research topic and not being linguists. Thus, the organisation of the feedback on learners' final drafts should be more individualised and include a combination of group lessons and tutorials. The focus during the latter should be on the problems of individual writing only.

One more participants' remark on using more examples of published RAs should be taken into consideration as well, even though various examples of that kind were incorporated into teaching during the course. Writing skills in a second language are better acquired when they are based on reading. The idea of examining more texts, particularly those in their own discipline areas, would be for the benefit of learners and the development of their writing proficiency.

4.3. Changes introduced

To further support TPU researchers on their trajectory from novice to proficient academic writers in English, we took into account all aspects of the feedback from the 2014 focus group. In 2015, we introduced another approach to the course. First, most teaching hours were done by Russian instructors. The native English-speaking specialist joined the course in the middle and on the final stage when the participants' texts were completed and sent to the instructor for proofreading. After that, this instructor provided the group with several hours of feedback. During these workshops, the teacher commented on the most important language points from learners' writing to be corrected. These points were logically grouped and presented on a big screen for discussion. The participants could further see the amendments individually in their own texts.

Second, a considerable number of contact hours were devoted to the peculiarities of translation into English when writing an RA. We aimed to show the learners how to work with the two parallel languages to achieve natural sound in the non-native language. The covered topics were logically integrated with grammar aspects of academic writing. Thus, the sessions focused on communicative structure and balance of a sentence, absolute constructions, active and passive style, adverb position, redundancy, linguistic search on the Internet and other topics. We provided the participants with good and inappropriate examples of sentences translated from Russian into English. The lessons had little theory and a lot of practice. For this purpose, we asked the participants to share examples of sentences from their RAs in Russian and used these sentences as a learning material for group, pair and individual work. Such an approach gave the learners sufficient training in translating and facilitated their thinking in the non-native language.

Third, in the 2014 course the participants first studied the necessary aspects of writing an RA and then worked on their texts during a month of self-guided study. In 2015, we organised this work differently. The participants wrote their texts gradually in accordance with the order of sections constituting an RA. For example, after studying the structural and language peculiarities of Introduction, the learners had time to complete this part of their future RA in English. After that, they began to study a new section. Such an approach

presupposed intensive work within the course. However, one of the requirements for the course participation was that each learner should have ready material (or even drafts) to describe in the RA. Thus, all the participants were familiar with the mode of work on their RAs in advance and did their best to meet the deadlines with high-level pieces of writing.

The main advantage of this approach was that the participants were able to apply the new knowledge and skills in writing the corresponding section immediately after their acquisition. This facilitated precise and careful work on each section of their articles – from learning to individual writing. Moreover, following the results of the 2014 questionnaire, we used more examples of RA sections (from published texts) to examine them for text structure and language in the group. Afterwards, the learners did individual online search for discipline-specific RAs to analyse the necessary sections for the discussed peculiarities and presumably find new features. The variety of the learning material provided the participants with a deeper understanding of the specifics of academic writing in English.

Fourth, the course included group and individual tutorials scheduled in accordance with the stages of preparing an RA for publication. For example, after the participants were ready with their Introduction section, we considered these texts and then commented within a group session on the most significant weaknesses from these texts, asking the participants to correct or improve particular sentences. This enabled the participants to learn from each other and practice the proofreading technique. After that, each participant was invited to a tutorial to receive individual feedback relevant to his / her piece of writing. As long as the texts varied considerably in length depending on learners' research specifics, we commented only on part of each text. Various aspects of learners' writing were discussed, including articles, prepositions, noun and verb phrases and other grammar points. However, a considerable number of comments focused on sentence balance and meaning. Sentences often needed to be partly or completely reconstructed due to the difference between what a learner wanted to express in Russian and the meaning the sentences had in English. Thus, the main function of tutorials was to help the learners understand their weaknesses in writing and show how these weaknesses can be improved. In other words, the participants were able to learn from own writing.

To summarise, the 2015 course focused on the difficulties Russian scientists experience when writing about their research in English; step-by-step writing of an RA; individual feedback and tutorials during the whole process of writing. Such an approach allowed us to individualise the learning as much as possible. At the same time, each participant managed to work thoroughly on each section of his/her RA within the following steps: detailed study of writing a particular section of an RA –> individual writing –> tutorial. This chain was preceded by the study of language aspects of academic writing in English and the peculiarities of translating into this language.

The participants' intermediate results, apart from the new knowledge and skills, were prepared sections of their future RAs. The final result of the course was a complete text for publication, which was proofread by the native English-speaking course instructor and then submitted to the chosen international journal. As the instructor marked, the RAs contained no serious problems with learners' use of English; the comments made were mostly on minor issues, very few of which lead to any difficulty understanding the texts.

5. FOCUS GROUP OF 2015

5.1. Responses to the questionnaire

Question 1. The responses to this question were similar to those received in 2014 in terms of positive feedback. There were five short answers such as "Yes!" and "Of course!" and two responses repeating the content of the question, i.e. "Yes, the course has helped me to improve my writing skills".

The remaining responses were more extended, highlighting the new knowledge and skills that the participants were able to obtain within the study. For example,

> *Certainly, I have learned a lot of things that I was previously unfamiliar with.*
> *Definitely, yes! There was some information which I already knew, but at the same time, I learned a lot of new and important things. Thank you!*

and other comments of a similar kind.

Question 2. Four participants mentioned that the training on text structure was the most useful part for them**. For example,

> *Russian articles are more flexible. Now, I know the structure of English Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion, and Conclusions. Writing is easier when you know the features of each section.*
> *The lessons on RA decomposition were especially helpful. We worked with different extracts from published articles and could see how different people use similar patterns to write about their research.*

However, 14 other participants gave comments on each of the three modules of the course, highlighting what was especially useful for them, rather than marking only one module as the most beneficial. The most general statement was that "everything covered within the course was equally valuable and helpful". All other comments were more extended and elaborate. In terms of language peculiarities of academic writing, one participant wrote that previously, he/she often wrote in English 'following intuition', whereas now he/she chooses 'appropriate language constructions more consciously'. Another participant mentioned that 'academic style appears to have a lot of features' which he/she 'either never heard of or knew about theoretically'. Other participants mentioned the importance of the translation technique or focused on grammar. For example,

> *I have learned a lot about how to translate accurately and make Russian sentences sound less Russian in English.*
> *Google search was great! I will definitely use it.*
> *Punctuation was very helpful.*
> *The exercises on redundancy were challenging and helpful.*

and other comments of that kind.

The comments on the text structure training often included reference to academic writing in Russian. Five participants wrote that the learning 'was helpful not only for writing in English, but also for writing in the native language'. The same participants added that they began 'to apply the strategies and the logic of structuring the information within a text to writing RAs in Russian'. One participant provided a general remark that '…the knowledge on text structure enables a writer to develop a precise plan on what and where to write about, while a clear structure of a text helps readers to perceive the information easier and more effectively.'

Four comments referred to Abstract writing. The participants emphasised that they 'had been unaware of the fact that Abstract has own inner structure'. Three other participants wrote about the mode of delivery, highlighting that 'the content and delivery of sessions were comprehensive and consistent'. Other comments indicated the benefit from focusing on vocabulary in context, i.e. phrases and language patterns for a particular meaning or typical of a particular RA section; verb groups, link words and others.

All the learners were equally positive about the writing practice and tutorials, marking the latter an 'efficient', 'effective' and 'most appropriate' way to deliver the module. Most of the participants considered 'significant' and 'beneficial' the opportunity to 'improve own writing', 'correct own mistakes' and 'reconstruct own sentences'. Two participants wrote that

> *...if a learner has certain weaknesses or mistakes in writing, they will repeat each other through the entire text; thus, working with own texts facilitates learning from own writing and own weaknesses, which is always better and more thorough.*

Another comment focused on 'individual approach' and 'a comprehensive analysis of individual texts both from structural and linguistic point of view'. One participant called this part of the course 'the most challenging, but significant'. Other comments appreciated the arrangement of tutorials in advance and the opportunity to discuss own writing with groupmates in joint feedback sessions.

Question 3. The responses to this question provided several recommendations. In terms of language training, a recommendation was to study more examples of vocabulary in context and do more exercises (for instance, choosing an appropriate verb or preposition. Another comment was to learn more about proofreading, i.e. 'what exactly to pay attention to when proofreading an own or a colleague's text'.

Two participants commented on the writing practice, indicating that they often found it 'very difficult to write about their research immediately in English within a short time frame'. Consequently, the recommendation referred to future course participants and highlighted the necessity to have 'a complete draft in Russian'. In terms of individual feedback, two recommendations were 'to focus more on tutorials due to their significance and benefit for individual writing'. One participant wrote that he / she would prefer to have discussed his / her entire text with the course instructors during tutorials, rather than certain parts only.

One comment referred to text structure – the participant mentioned that he / she 'would rather have devoted more time to the peculiarities of writing the Results section of an RA'. Among other recommendations was the suggestion to deliver the course for researchers of hard sciences and researchers of humanitarian areas separately and to invite specialists from technical fields to participate in the course delivery.

Question 4. Four participants out of 18 provided additional comments that were uncovered in the responses to questions 1-3. One participant gave a suggestion to create templates in terms of RA structure, so that learners could insert their texts in this file: "In addition to putting notes during lessons, it would be good to use a template with structural components for each section of an article."

The same participant wrote about interaction opportunities between a learner and a teacher: 'I would like to have had more opportunities to communicate with teachers in case of difficulties in my writing, for example via Skype, Viber or other applications. It could have helped me solve language problems immediately.'

One participant referred his / her comment to the schedule of the sessions

I think the lessons should be given during the day rather than in the evening because it is easier to understand and learn the language in the first half of the day. Moreover, in this case there is more time for revision.

5.2. Analysis of the responses

The 2015 focus group provided us with several recommendations for the future development of the course. Some of the comments may have practical application, while others seem less appropriate to introduce. First, the recommendation to develop a template for each section of an RA may hardly seem reasonable. Even Abstract structure, which, ideally, has a clear set of components, may vary depending on individual research specifics, being often rather condensed in hard sciences. The same refers to Introduction and Conclusion; having certain structural peculiarities typical of all disciplines, these sections can be more or less extended and vary in terms of the order of the structural components. The structure of the rest sections, such as Methods, Results and Discussion, largely depends on individual research. Thus, the best approach here seems to study the typical structural features of each section of an RA, to investigate discipline-specific peculiarities and then to follow an individually appropriate pattern – which is exactly the way the learning was done within the 2015 course.

Second, the comment on the schedule for sessions seems highly individual since timing is typically an issue which can hardly ever satisfy everybody to a full extent. In case of on-the job advanced training, arranging lessons in evening time is quite suitable for most of university participants involved.

Third, the recommendation to add more training on language in context, on the contrary, would be a good thing to follow in the future course. This should be based on the 2015 tutorials and the proofreading of participants' RAs by the native English-speaking instructor. Both procedures allow for identification of language gaps that participants may need more training in before doing individual writing. Such training would certainly facilitate developing learners' writing skills.

Fourth, the suggestion to spend more time on the features of the Results section may be satisfied by asking individuals to examine more RAs within their scientific field. This will enable them to determine more features, both structural and language, relevant specifically to their study. Such an approach was applied in the 2015 course since, as previously mentioned, the Results section largely depends on individual and discipline specific writing. However, even based on a single comment in this regard, the respective sessions should presumably focus more on participants' individual reading followed by feedback to the rest in the group.

Fifth, the idea to deliver the course to academics from hard sciences and those from humanitarian areas separately seems reasonable since there is a growing recognition that academic texts reflect discipline-specific knowledge-making practices (Hyland 2004). However, the "Writing for Publication" course is principally a learning process that aims to enhance participants' skills in academic writing regardless of their research identity. The course creates the environment in which learners are encouraged to learn from their own writing and that of native speakers, highlighting the essential writing strategies and techniques applicable to any discipline.

A similar argument refers to the suggestion to invite technical specialists to the course delivery. One the one hand, this could give learners the opportunity to obtain writing experience from professionals within their specific fields. However, to satisfy everybody's

interests, there should be several technical specialists invited to the course due to the diversity of research fields participants belong to. Moreover, such specialists would require an academic background to be able to teach academic writing, and identifying such specialists is likely to prove difficult. In this case, the entire concept of the course would considerably change and finally lead to several discipline-specific courses designed for small groups of scientists.

The best solution here would presumably be to implement the active reading technique into learning as much as possible. The "Writing for Publication" course familiarises participants with the features of this technique and incorporates it during sessions focused on a particular section of an RA. However, to become good writers, non-native English-speaking scientists should practice active reading within their disciplines regularly, which largely depends on individual motivation. To provide learners with ongoing support, another solution could be to form small virtual study groups of three or four colleagues who are working in the same or related discipline areas so that they could work collaboratively, sharing ideas and discussing various issues related to their research. This could satisfy other 2015 recommendations as well, in particular to introduce more tutorials to the course and, consequently, to have more hours on proofreading own and colleagues' texts. Such an environment could be created on the university educational platform and be part of the face-to-face course. In this case, an English language instructor could act in the role of mentor, providing advice when necessary.

Finally, the idea to make the course more interactive in terms of instant teacher accessibility via the Internet could be highly beneficial for learners. However, being a learning process, such academic support should be scheduled and designed on the university educational platform, rather than provided via Skype, Viber or another application at any time. The virtual learning environment could help to solve this problem as well, supporting participants in their individual study when they are to complete the respective section of a future RA.

6. CONCLUSION

Given the 2015 course participants' feedback, there is a clear understanding that the changes introduced to the course produce certain benefits for learners in terms of the effective development of their academic writing skills. The participants found the entire learning process well-balanced and thorough, which indicates that the course is being developed in the right direction with regard to learners' needs and expectations in the Russian reality. At the same time, there are good reasons for organising additional support to participants within their study. Since some participants may need more guiding on their writing and since there are linguistic as well as content differences between texts in different discipline areas, a further development would be the creation of an online "Writing for Publication" course. This would provide several opportunities for learners, such as to have more language training, to interact virtually with instructors in case of any difficulties related to individual writing, and to collaborate with colleagues on discipline-specific lines. Moreover, learners would be able to follow the course remotely.

We believe that our experience can be helpful for colleagues abroad and in Russia who have faced the same reality with the necessity to help university researchers achieve two goals within short time, i.e. develop their academic writing skills in English and produce an RA for publication in an international English language journal.

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