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**НОВЫЙ ПОДХОД К ОБУЧЕНИЮ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОМУ ПИСЬМУ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ В АРМЕНИИ**

В статье рассматривается новая концепция преподавания письменной речи в лингвистических вузах, с учетом пересмотра значения и специфики образования в XXI веке. Обосновывается выбор процессуального подхода к обучению письменным жанрам. Показана эффективность подхода не только с точки зрения развития навыков и компетенций в письменной речи, но и с точки зрения преподавания языка, усвоения и закрепления знаний.

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## LITERARY CRITICISM ON THE PAGES OF THE JOURNAL “КАЗАН УТЛАРЫ” (KAZAN LIGHTS)

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In the article the contribution of the journal “Казан утлары” (Kazan Lights) into the development of the Tatar national literary criticism is studied. This journal is the only edition with 90-year history, which has been published since the 20s of the XX century till nowadays. The genre classification and analysis of the critical articles that have been published in the considered journal during last 30 years (since 1980 up to date) will give an opportunity to follow the condition of the national literary-critical process of the last quarter of the XX – the beginning of the XXI century that is the novelty of this paper.

*Key words and phrases:* literary criticism; history of literature and criticism; genres of literary criticism; annotation; comment; review.

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*In the article the new conception of teaching a written language in linguistic higher schools taking into account the re-consideration of meaning and specificity of education in the XXI century is considered. The choice of process approach towards teaching written genres is substantiated. The efficiency of the approach from the point of view of the development of skills and competencies and from the point of view of teaching, mastering and learning language is shown.*

*Key words and phrases:* teaching writing; higher linguistic education; genre-based process approach, process writing, pre-writing.

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**A NOVEL APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE  
 ACADEMIC WRITING IN ARMENIA<sup>©</sup>**

**Background and General Context**

Bearing the legacy of the Soviet centralized and teacher-centered higher education, the modern Armenian academia has traditionally been a place for transmitting information and knowledge from one generation to another. However, the traditional pattern has been recently revised due to a number of reasons, the recent informational and technological boom and global integration processes among others. This revision has led to a shift in the perception of the role of education in general, entailing the incorporation of new elements and parameters in higher education, particularly in terms of teaching academic writing as an important venue and vehicle of knowledge transference and generation.

Integration processes brought about not only formal changes in the organization of higher education, aimed at a higher level of compatibility, but also emphasized the need for upgrading education quality to ensure mobility and competition. These changes could not be purely formal due to another serious circumstance – the imperatively new understanding of education and its role in Knowledge Society.

The concept of Knowledge Society is often regarded as emerging from the simultaneous growth of the Internet, mobile telephony and digital technologies with the Third Industrial Revolution – which, at first in the developed countries, has seen much of the working population migrate to the service sector – has revolutionized the role of knowledge in our societies” [14, p. 18].

The concept of Knowledge Society has given rise to a number of associated concepts, such as Learning Society and Knowledge Economy. In the context of these two associated notions, lifelong learning becomes vitally important for professionals’ needs to learn new knowledge, acquire new skills and develop new competences to ensure their mobility throughout and across the economy. Hence, the crucial new skill in a learning society is the ability to learn how to learn [15].

It was against this background that the role and significance of education was rationally revised, opening up the gates and diversifying activities, normally taken at a university [5]. The new social relations in Armenia – those of knowledge-age capitalism – made the country’s academic space participate in the processes underway all over the world also in terms of the redistribution of assets and revaluation of education. Consequently, it was no longer sufficient for higher education to teach people, they needed more than “knowing what,” for now quality workforce needs to know what to do with the already acquired knowledge, besides, it needs the “know how” of acquiring new information, as well as retaining, processing, storing, transmitting, but most importantly – generating new knowledge.

It is in the light of these integral processes that higher education scholars should undertake the study of the role of education, in general, and linguistic education, in particular. This revision has put forth a number of decisive aspects that determine the actual language instruction and the adherent and accompanying skills and competences to be built among learners as actual learning outcomes.

Along the lines of the recent evolution in higher education, linguistic education in Armenia has been in a prolonged stage of transformation, aiming at the compatibility of traditional grammar-based and theoretical instruction with the latest trends of communicative competence building. Hence, in the yearning for competitiveness and better adaptability for students in their mobility, the Armenian linguistic curriculum has incorporated the central elements of communication-oriented education with language skills and cultural and linguistic competences as the ultimate learning outcome.

The reforms caused by the new perception of higher linguistic education are also driven by a better understanding of the actual ties between the Armenian academia and the global labour market; therefore, professional linguistic education is now more inclined to equip its beneficiaries with hands-on experience in various job-related situations.

The aforementioned reforms, some already implemented and some still underway, have had a considerable impact on the organization of education, in terms of its international compatibility, yearning for safeguarding its democratic and transparent development due to the introduction of wider accountability, based on a student-centred approach to education. These changes and improvements, some though essentially formal in their manifestation and impact, have inevitably brought about qualitative changes, mostly having to do with the method and approach – a more or less student-centred approach – and the actual understanding of the role of higher linguistic education in general.

Linguistic education is truly unique not only because of its inherently dual nature conditioned by the simultaneous acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge and competence. It is absolutely unique due to the set of competences it presently aims to build in the learner, extending from general linguistic competences to communicative competences, the latter comprising elements of socio-cultural and socio-historical awareness. Thus, language learning within linguistic education is specific due to its dyadic nature, based on the theory and practice, the former ensuring a framework and a foundation for the latter to rest upon.

Within the above-described changes in the understanding of the role and importance of higher education, linguistic education cannot help the general impact. And yet, given its purely specific nature, linguistic education stands out because the object of studies is also a means and a tool for learning.

#### **Analytical Evaluation of Approaches to Teaching Writing**

Teaching academic writing in higher education comes into this domain of complex and intricate relations and bears the influence of all the above-described factors, forces, and implications. Hence, it is obvious that in an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) setting, English is taught to be learnt and is at the same time used as a tool for learning.

The second language teaching classroom has recently witnessed a shift in perceptions, bringing in the ideology of resistance [2] which means that learners for whom English is the second language are also encouraged to critically address the conventions of academic writing in their own professional background.

However, S. Starfield rightly mentions that when teaching academic writing we deal with processes sometimes far beyond acquiring discipline specific textual knowledge [11]. Paltridge et al elaborate on this point by bringing in the need for “broader socio-cultural issues surrounding the teaching of academic writing to be examined” [13, p. 107].

The Armenian linguistic education has traditionally exercised an approach to teaching academic writing, mostly inclined to accommodate to the English-language writing norms and standards. This has been perceived as natural and seems to be natural as long as by accommodation we mean not the full elimination of the native or indigenous element. So, aiming at accommodation within the ideology of resistance (since we cannot totally subtract the cultural element from the equation) the Armenian higher linguistic education strives for maximal approximation with the established norms and standards in English language academic writing. This is largely justified since academic writing courses are designed to develop generalizable [ibid] skills that may be transferred onto other writing activities, mostly in real job-placement situations. Hence, the close-to-native academic writing environment is the actual aim with an expected product that is the main platform of not only learning how to write, but also mastering the language.

With the majority of the Armenian learner contingent entering higher educational institutions on leaving school at CEFR [4] B1 level of English [16], linguistic education as a wholesome module should ensure not only an upgrade in the students' proficiency in the language to CEFR C1 – C2 levels but also the acquisition of specific skills and competences.

Putting all these into a wider context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education, that is the major shift from the Industrial Age to Knowledge Age with all its implications and consequences, the teaching of writing has become more topical in the sense that it is the only subject that can equip students with the skills necessary to acquire, process, critically address and evaluate, research and create new knowledge and information, that is to say to be able to do something with the knowledge they possess, add to what they already possess and share it, all being required both in the academia and the present-day labour market.

#### **Linguistic Education, Language Instruction and Teaching Writing**

Traditionally, language has been taught by the teacher-centred approach within the framework of which “teachers have been teaching discreet points of grammar or phonology in separate lessons, focusing mainly on the formal features of the language at the expense of encouraging students to use the language” [3, p. 35]. Hence, linguistic universities have seen themselves as institutions to primarily teach languages and transmit well-grounded theoretical and practical knowledge, whereas the above-mentioned skills required for generating knowledge are **not** integral to the knowledge of English and have to do with processing and understanding information, namely narrowing down topics, collecting and organizing material, telling the major from the minor, collating the perspectives of different authors, evaluating their theories, expressing one's own substantiated opinions, as well as generalizing and drawing conclusions,

in more generic terms – researching, analyzing, arguing and synthesizing. This means that the traditional perception of writing as part of or deriving from grammar is no longer valid, for language proficiency is not yet a guarantee for successful writing. The new understanding of writing teaching has moved beyond correct spelling, grammar or syntax. Other dimensions have come to the fore, these being the pre-writing activities, largely related to the students' critical thinking ability in terms of their recognition of credible sources of information and proper response to other scholars' perspectives. Another important aspect is the transition from the prewriting activity to the actual writing and drafting strategies. The post-writing revision and proofreading are the stages to conclude the process [9].

As it can be inferred from the above-mentioned, the process approach to teaching writing prevails over the product and genre approaches per se. The other approaches, the traditionally practiced approach of controlled composition [7] or the rhetorical functions alone do not seem to fully meet the requirements and needs of academic writing teaching and learning in a second language context. This can be accounted for a few reasons: the product approach aims at ensuring a finalized product without taking the learners through all the aforementioned stages before, in and after actual writing, targeting at summative assessment. Hence, the educational value of such an approach is not high from either competence-building or language instruction perspectives, due to its incapacity to safeguard continuity and sustainability. The genre approach as a probable alternative might seem valid. However, confining students to any genre hinders the gradual formation of generic and transferable skills that would also be applicable beyond the given genre.

Given the above-stated, it would be appropriate to share J. Flowerdew's perspective that a procedure should be implemented to focus on the study of genres and genre acquisition [6]. In this case the emphasis will not be laid merely on a specific genre with all entailed limitations. Following R. Badger and G. White [1], we can also argue that the product, process, and genre approaches<sup>1</sup> are not mutually exclusive; moreover, they are complimentary. To teach effective academic writing in an ESL environment, it is preferable to practice a comprehensive approach, encompassing the features of the process and genre approaches: "a process approach to genre-based teaching" [13, p. 74]. It is important to ensure genre awareness and genre acquisition among students through a step-by-step approach, peculiar to the process approach.

It is quite interesting to note that it is yet not quite reasonable to give up rhetorical functions [ibid, p. 62] – descriptions, narratives, definitions, exemplification, classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect and generalizations – inside an ESL writing classroom. Regardless of the approach adopted and the conceptual framework and despite their label – "rhetorical" – these are also functions of the mind; that is, these are mental procedures of processing the information acquired in the pre-writing research. To put it differently, these are critical thinking strategies that ensure valid inquiry and appropriate synthesis.

And yet, given the other facet of linguistic education, where the teaching of the language should by no means be disregarded, elements of controlled or guided composition still persist. This is due to the fact that controlled composition enables to emphasize accuracy and correctness of language for it reinforces the knowledge previously acquired in the language classrooms.

Thus, we see that the most beneficial strategy to exercise is the implementation of a mixture of several approaches, some dating back to mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century (controlled composition, rhetorical functions). In this mixture, the combination of the more recent approaches – process and genre ones – function as major driving forces [8] and provide a better focused view and a firmer base for gradual improvement among students and enabling formative assessment.

The process approach to genre-based teaching brings in a few major foci: genre-specific discourse and regulations operating within the given discourse. From the linguistic education perspective, this enables the development of genre-specific vocabulary and also syntactic patterns that are normative for a given genre. It is obvious that when speaking of academic writing we would ordinarily focus on analytical, argumentative and research essays, as well as larger formats (research papers).

Not underestimating the significance of multiple drafts as well as the introduction of constructive written peer and teacher feedback at this stage of development, it seems more legitimate to dwell upon the shift of focus from composition to the stages before and after it. Though it is assumed that in any approach pre-writing and post-writing do take place, this is unfortunately not always the case. The notion of process approach should be extended to include all the three stages pertinent to writing, namely the stages around the actual penning or typing – pre-writing and post-writing.

The new perspective of teaching writing in the Armenian higher linguistic education is distinguished by a lot of attention being paid to the pre-writing stage. This is absolutely justified, for whatever the genre; the pre-writing process is what matters in terms of knowledge acquisition and generation.

To ensure maximum benefit from the pre-writing process, it is advisable to focus on a few factors:

- students' familiarity with the theory of genre-specific writing, for example, the theory of "context-audience-purpose" triad;
- students' ability to narrow down their discussion topics to manageable scales, realistically evaluating their limitations;
- student's ability to conduct research, evaluating their sources;
- students' ability to make authors converse with one another and to converse with different authors [8].

It is only the actual writing and the post-writing stages that require close work with the language in terms of vocabulary choice and grammatical patterns, ensuring correctness and appropriate style. Hence, at least one of the stages

<sup>1</sup> The product approach is a traditional approach, in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text which is usually presented and analyzed at an early stage. The process approach to writing prioritizes thought enhancement and language development through multiple drafts [12]. The genre-based approach lays an emphasis on teaching "writing together with reading and supplementary foci on the linguistic features of writing," with full commitment to the conventions in the given genre [10].

has nothing particular to do with the activities normally taken in linguistic classrooms. It can be easily argued that parts of the actual writing process such as outlining, organization, structuring, and others have mostly to do with the actual thinking process within the frames of conventions in a given discipline and genre.

Therefore, the new approach to teaching writing should seriously emphasize the pre-writing thinking, for the overall success of any writing is primarily the thinking behind the written text. Grammar, style, ethos and pathos are moved to the background in academic writing where writing is where one not only explores, but also learns.

In the light of the above-mentioned considerations, a writing program that adheres to the new perspective should ensure a proportional distribution of time and classroom activities to direct students in their pre-writing efforts and proper organization in the matter to be written. This means a serious shift from lexis and grammar-based exercises (traditional approach to teaching languages) that focus mostly on parallel structures and transitions to ensure a smooth flow of written language. Not at least undermining the importance of accurate and correct writing, however, it currently seems but obvious that the writing class should be more about learning and generating new knowledge than a collective effort for grammatically correct reiteration or mere reproduction.

Traditional language teaching and also teaching writing as a component of it triggered figurative creativity based on proper and accurate grammar and lexicon. However, the shift in the paradigm has brought about a new understanding of the role and methods of teaching languages and writing in particular, not only as an end-product or an extended process aimed at refining writing only. Writing may be considered a venue for language acquisition, too, however, with its primary objective lying in the adequate strategies and procedures to process the existent and to generate new information.

Even though fiction and personal non-fiction writing may be aspects to be incorporated into the general higher education linguistic curriculum, the primary aim of linguistic professional training should be to feed the labour market with workforce that is competitive and has the skills of processing information and generating new knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge age.

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#### НОВЫЙ ПОДХОД К ОБУЧЕНИЮ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОМУ ПИСЬМУ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ В АРМЕНИИ

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В статье рассматривается новая концепция преподавания письменной речи в лингвистических вузах, с учетом пересмотра значения и специфики образования в XXI веке. Обосновывается выбор процессуального подхода к обучению письменным жанрам. Показана эффективность подхода не только с точки зрения развития навыков и компетенций в письменной речи, но и с точки зрения преподавания языка, усвоения и закрепления знаний.

*Ключевые слова и фразы:* обучение письму; высшее лингвистическое образование, процессуальный подход к обучению письменным жанрам; письмо как процесс; предваряющий письмо этап.