

Professionally-Oriented Approach to English Language Teaching of Students of Journalism

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Abstract Today's tertiary education is in urgent need of curricula aimed at teaching professional skills and competencies to university students. As a compulsory subject in many universities across Russia, English has been adjusted to meet this need, giving rise to ESP and EPP programs designed for narrow specialists. Nevertheless, journalism students have been paid little attention due to a common belief that to cover a wide variety of topics, they need EGP ("General English") supplemented with essential journalistic terms. The current paper refutes this stereotype by introducing a workable model of how English can be taught to journalism students through fostering professional competencies such as genre writing, editing, pitching, and publishing. The authors use the example of BJW (Basic Journalistic Writing) and the student magazine *MessAge* issued within its framework to illustrate a successful implementation of a professionally-oriented course. The latter is based on a complex methodological approach, which combines CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), genre writing, process and product writing, and Project-Based Learning (PBL). The surveys taken among BJW students in 2018-2022 provide evidence that they highly value the course for its practical approach and an opportunity to master professional competencies from the first year of the Baccalaureate program.

Keywords Journalistic Writing, Genre Writing, Professional Competencies, English for Journalism Students, ESP, Project-Based Learning, Professionally-Oriented Course

1. Introduction

The rapidly changing labor market requirements pose a new task before universities: to prepare specialists who would have not so much theoretical knowledge as 21st-century workplace skills, which can help them find a quality job in this highly competitive society. As a reflection of this tendency, Russian universities are increasingly abandoning traditional educational curricula focusing on the assimilation of a massive amount of theoretical material in favor of professionally-oriented programs, which enable students to acquire practical skills and tools. According to N. Temmerman [1], there is a need for employees "who have both theoretical knowledge and understanding as well as hands-on, real-world know-how and who can hit the ground running."

The formation of professional qualities, often referred to as "a competence approach", has been recognized as critical by many contemporary educationalists such as T.M. Shamsutdinova [2], M.N.Salapura, E.A. Bogdanova [3], E.V.Lisichko [4]. According to R.P Milrud [5], students' EFL communicative competence should be linked with their professional competence and changed under the demands of the professional context. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in ESP (English for Special Purposes) programs targeted at professionals in various fields such as law, business, medicine, and engineering. Traditionally, these programs focus on three main areas: 1) professional language (specialized vocabulary and structures), 2) professional content (the ability to read and comprehend professional texts), 3) professional communication (the ability to carry out conversations in

professional settings). In Russia, beginning in 2009, the concept of ESP was put at the core of ELT (English Language Teaching) programs designed for non-linguistic universities and faculties, thanks to the efforts of Russian educational scholars E.N.Solovova and S.G.Ter-Minasova [6]. In the subsequent ten years, ESP has been successfully integrated into the national curricula of higher education, bringing afore the specific needs of different groups of learners.

What are the specific needs of university students today? This is the question to be asked in the first place when speaking of the 21st-century ESP programs in higher education. Are the learners' needs in ESP still confined to the three areas mentioned above, namely studying specialized vocabulary, comprehending professional texts, and conversing on professional topics? Hardly so. Today learners' needs are shifting from pure language acquisition to the ability to perform professional-related activities or tasks. Language is not the goal but rather the means of the educational process. Therefore, it is essential that educators carry out a thorough analysis of students' professional needs before developing ESP programs. As Dudley-Evans notes, the defining feature of ESP is that its teaching should be based on the needs analysis, which will provide answers to the three main questions: "What do students need to do with English? Which of the skills do they need to master and how well? Which genres do they need to master, either for comprehension or production purposes?" [7].

The Dean of the Faculty of Journalism of MSU, Prof. Elena Vartanova [8] defines the needs of the students of the Faculty of Journalism as follows:

- the ability to gather, verify and analyze information (investigative competency);
- the ability to create texts in various genres for the mass media (authorial competency);
- the ability to review and edit media texts, bringing them into conformity with the existing norms and standards (editorial competency);
- the ability to work out and implement mass media projects.

Basic Journalistic Writing (BJW), an ESP course for journalism students, was specially designed to meet the objectives described above: its primary goal is to teach students the core professional competencies in journalism, namely writing, editing, pitching, and publishing articles in English. The program is meant for students with the B2+ level of English (CEFR scale) because it is at this level that "a student is able to produce clear, detailed texts on different topics ... by synthesizing and evaluating information and argumentation from several sources" [9]. BJW takes 340 academic hours of teacher-guided auditorium work and 380 hours of students' independent work. To get enrolled in the course, students need to meet specific requirements: 1) have a high score of USE (United State Exam) in English (above 90 points); 2) pass a creative writing contest held by BJW teachers at the

beginning of the academic year. First launched in 2018, BJW quickly gained popularity among journalism students, who proved to be highly motivated to obtain professional and English language skills related to their future job.

2. Methodology

The primary goal of BJW is the formation of professional competencies of future journalists by teaching them the art of creating texts in different journalistic genres such as breaking news, features, and reviews, and guiding them through all the stages from writing to submission and publication. In the core of the course there lies "the genre approach to teaching/learning that considers writing as a purposeful act and focuses on the analysis of the contextual situation in which writing takes place" [10]. According to D. Rose, J. Martin, genre learning exposes students to extensive cognitive practice, which requires attention, deliberation and problem-solving skills, as well as social practice, which requires knowledge of audience, intention and purpose [11].

A defining feature of the course is that students progressively learn different genres of writing, each of which reflects particular structure, language, style and purpose. This is especially important for L2 learners, for whom it can be challenging to produce texts that should be aligned with the conventions and norms of contemporary genre-writing in English-speaking communities. As Hyland puts it, "texts are most successful when they employ conventions that other members of the community find familiar and convincing." [12]. For Celce-Murcia [13], such discourse competence is developed where genre pedagogies encourage students' effective 'selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, and utterances to achieve a unified spoken message' in specific contexts.

Among other teaching methods employed in this course are PBL (Project-Based Learning), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Product Writing and Process Writing.

2.1. Project-Based Learning

PBL is primarily associated with the principle of management, which accentuates the how-to component of work organization. According to E.S. Polat and M.Yu. Bukharkin [14], PBL is directed at achieving a tangible, practical result through the solution of theoretical or practical problems. One of the main characteristics of project learning is the interdependability of all group members and their responsibility for the team's collaborative success. The authors agree with D.A.Dubover [15], who notes that the method of project learning is especially suitable for Generation Z students,

born in the 1990s - 2000s, who are proactive, have an entrepreneurial inclination, and a strong need to realize their creative potential.

In BJW, PBL is used to stimulate team-based activities, primarily related to the production of mass media projects such as print and online English-language newspapers and magazines (MessAge, Faces and Places, Express, Invisible, Inside Out) as well as the release of radio podcasts and TV newscasts.

2.2. Content and Language Integrated Learning

Another method employed in BJW is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), in which "teachers use a language other than their students' mother tongue to promote additional language learning and content acquisition in a non-linguistic area" [16]. As Coyle [17] states, CLIL is made up of four components, the so-called four Cs: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. According to Andryukhina [18], these components are indivisibly connected with 21st-century competencies. In the latest years, the method of CLIL, advocated by such scholars as K.S.Grigoryeva, I.I. Filipovich [19] has widely spread throughout tertiary education in Russia. Basic Journalistic Writing successfully implements all four components of CLIL: students study extensive theoretical material concerning the production of texts in different journalistic genres (Content). They are actively involved in discussing course materials, doing team-based tasks, conducting peer assessment, and producing content (Communication). The course promotes all six categories of the cognitive process: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Cognition), without which it is impossible to produce and publish a journalistic text. While reading and analyzing materials from various English language media, students learn about values, beliefs, and behaviors of people with different cultural backgrounds (Culture).

2.3. Product and Process Writing

The course is aimed at developing students' writing skills by means of product and process writing. The product writing approach is realized through a thorough study of a model text. Students analyze the text's content, structure, thought organization, and stylistic features before writing a similar text in the same genre, the product.

The process writing approach focuses on brainstorming, generating ideas, and organizing them into cohesive paragraphs using a mind map, a Venn diagram, spidergram, or double-response sheets. On the whole, in BJW, students pass all the stages of procedural writing, described by S.V. Bogolepova [20]: generating ideas, gathering information, planning, writing a draft version of the text, revising the content, and structure of the text.

3. Developing Professional Competencies

3.1. Developing an Investigative Competency

The genre study begins with the analysis of a model text, also known as a mentor text, which contains features typical of the genre. Students explore the text's content, its structural and stylistic features, grammar and vocabulary. They also analyze factual, conceptual, and subtextual information in the text to reveal the author's message and intent. At this stage, the text is viewed as a holistic structure with a specific stylistic and intonational composition. At the second stage, students deconstruct the text, subjecting it to a detailed functional analysis. They divide the text into paragraphs or logical sections and study each part from the point of view of its function and place in the text, paying special attention to explicit and implicit linking between the paragraphs. A paragraph, in its turn, is deconstructed into sentences with the purpose of finding out their specific role and meaning in the paragraph's structure. Students reveal the topic sentence, which is commonly a summary of the paragraph's content, and define the function of every other sentence in the paragraph, such as explanation, demonstration, specification, or exemplification. At the final stage, the sentence segments are analyzed in terms of functional sentence perspective: theme and rheme. The authors recommend interchanging the deconstruction of the text with its reconstruction from different constituents, which helps students develop a clear understanding of the text's compositional carcass. It should be mentioned that this sequence resonates with the major stages of the Teaching and Learning Cycle, which is defined by Rueda and MacGillivray as "building the field, deconstructing the text type and the context, jointly constructing (modeling) the text and supporting independent construction" [21].

In each of the stages mentioned above, students work with Research Sheets where they note down the results of their exploration of the genre texts, including observations concerning the content, structure, and stylistic peculiarities of the texts as well as vocabulary and grammar structures. Students are encouraged to add their comments regarding the text's headline and subheading and its opening, body, and closing paragraphs. To further promote the investigative competency, students are encouraged to share and discuss findings with their partners, using journalistic and linguistic terms presented in the course glossary designed by BJW authors. This approach also facilitates better memorization and assimilation of the course material.

3.2. Developing an Authorial Competency

In the course of an extensive investigation of the model texts, students acquire a "text recipe" with a clear

understanding of its "ingredients", mode of preparation, design, style, and potential "clientele". Thus, they can proceed with the creation of their own text in a given genre, following the steps consistent with Rogoff's learning model [22]: apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation (when 'one is confident and able to incorporate previous practice into his or her personal repertoire').

It should be mentioned that students are free to choose the theme of their articles based on their interests, intention, outlook, competence, and experience, bearing in mind the needs and preferences of their target audience. It is crucial that students recognize the essential difference between writing for the teacher and journalistic writing intended for a larger audience, which implies a profoundly different form of presentation of the material as well as various tools of impact and persuasion. Another difference is that students are encouraged to discuss their future articles with their groupmates, helping one another to find journalistic hooks and appealing angles. Such interaction helps them hone soft skills such as collaborating, debating, accepting, and rejecting criticism. The real-world experience essentially promotes the students' authorial competency: the course envisages tasks and assignments similar to those carried out by professional journalists in real-life settings. Before writing an article, students have to gather necessary material, often by taking interviews, conducting surveys, visiting exhibitions, theatrical performances, film premiers, or other public events. In addition, they have to carry out extensive research on the topic to provide background, support their arguments or bring examples.

3.3. Developing an Editorial Competency

Editorial competency is fostered by guiding students through all the editing stages: from the first to the final draft, including self-editing, proofreading, peer-reviewing, and teacher feedback. After producing the first draft, students self-edit and proofread their work, i.e., revise their text to make sure it is accurate in vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. They also have to ensure the text's conformity with the requirements and norms listed in the Author's Guide and the Style Guidebook designed by BJW teachers. At the next stage, students exchange their work for peer-reviewing. They check each other's writing and give recommendations on how to improve the quality of the text and make it more persuasive and attractive for the target reader.

While editing, students fill in Peer Evaluation Sheets. They assess each other's work upon various criteria, including content, structure, language, persuasiveness (the selection of criteria can vary depending on the genre). We assume that peer editing is a crucial professional tool for journalism students, helping them not only master the language but also promote editorial competency. According to both teachers and students of BJW, peer

editing is a lot more effective than self-editing. It should necessarily be mentioned that Peer Evaluation Sheets are checked and graded by the teacher, which makes students adopt a more serious attitude to this activity. Based on the peer review report, students produce the second draft of their article, which is then sent to the course teacher for assessment and feedback. It is worth mentioning that the distinctive feature of BJW is the opportunity for students to discuss their drafts during individual feedback sessions with the teacher, which allows the former to get a detailed explanation regarding their mistakes and receive specific recommendations on how to improve the quality of the text.

4. Practical Application of Competencies

The knowledge and skills obtained in BJW have an immediate practical application: the students get their articles published in the print magazine *MessAge*, issued by the Publishing House of the MSU, and its online supplements specializing in topics such as psychology, travel, fashion, food, cinema, lifestyle. These projects are designed and run on different digital platforms, including Tilda, Lucidpress, and Readymag, and also have their accounts on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Telegram. Each of the digital supplements has its own student editorial board and design team, which allows to engage more students in the process of publishing a magazine.

Before publishing, student authors have to pitch their article: send it to the editors of English-language magazines, along with a Pitch Letter where they provide a summary of the article, explain its relevance, indicate the target audience, the author's intent, and the appropriate section in the magazine.

On the whole, pitching articles to editors, both in written form (through letters) and orally (through individual meetings) is another real-life skill attained during the course.

Thus, the course simulates real-life professional conditions, bridging the world between education and work and helping students hone their journalistic competencies.

5. Results and Discussion

In 2018-2022, over 300 first and second-year baccalaureate students of the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University took the Basic Journalistic Writing course, having produced over 1000 articles in English.

According to the survey of BJW students conducted at the end of the academic year 2022, 81% of students rate the course as "excellent" and 19% as "very good". 97% of

respondents claim that writing articles for the BJW course is pivotal in terms of preparing them for their future jobs. 86% of students mention that the knowledge and skills obtained in the BJW appear to be more valuable and relatable than those in other academic courses. As the main advantage of the course, the students pinpoint hands-on experience, namely the publication of articles in print and online editions. The students also rank high the opportunity to thoroughly explore the core journalistic genres (breaking news and feature articles) and to "learn from masters" by reading and analyzing a large number of authentic articles from the English-language media. The respondents also point out that the BJW assignments are substantially different from those in regular ESL classes, implying more responsibility (65%), more creativity (81%) and more freedom (72%).

Meanwhile, the students note that the course has helped them to essentially broaden their minds and researcher's skills through extensive pre-writing tasks, including interviews, investigation and data analysis.

A large portion of those surveyed (82%) emphasize the importance of obtaining technical skills such as creating a site for online magazines, designing the front and back covers of print magazines, photo-editing, and managing social media. 79% signify the advantage of joining the editorial boards, which enables them to assume different professional roles such as content and photo editors, editorial assistants, social media managers, layout designers, etc. The students also single out such elements of the course as project work, teamwork, group discussions, and contests, which help them promote soft skills.

6. Concluding Points

The obtained results suggest that the course of Basic Journalistic Writing has been successful in teaching ESL students the core professional competencies in journalism: writing, editing and publishing articles in English. The course has helped students to significantly improve their writing in terms of text organization, grammar and style.

Among the limitations, the authors would like to mention the increased workload of BJW teachers, who have to check more written assignments and spend a lot more time on organizing students' professionally-oriented work. Another problem is the lack of teaching staff who can cope with the growing number of students willing to take the course. This has posed new tasks before the BJW authors: firstly, to write a coursebook of BJW for ESL students; secondly, to design a special training course for those teaching English to journalism students.

Authors' Contribution

Z.V.Kostanian and S.Yu.Kuznetsova contributed

equally to this paper.

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