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Структура авторской идентичности в русских студенческих рецензиях на английском языке: голос и позиция автора

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Проблема и цель. В статье исследуется проблема идентичности автора в теоретическом и практическом аспектах. Теоретический аспект включает анализ работ современных англо-американских исследователей, посвященных проблеме авторской идентичности в письменном академическом дискурсе. Цель статьи – на основе теоретических данных определить структуру идентичности, в частности голос и позицию автора. Практическая цель статьи – рассмотреть идентичность начинающих авторов англоязычных рецензий, реализуемую в серии языковых стратегий, а также закономерности их выбора. Для этого выделяются три типа авторского позиционирования: идейный, межличностный и текстовой.

Методология. При теоретическом анализе используются подходы системной функциональной лингвистики и риторической школы жанра, а также новейшие исследования в области изучения английского языка как иностранного. Исследование эмпирического корпуса производится с помощью методов дискурсивного, контрастивного и контекстуального анализа, а также качественной и количественной обработки данных. В ходе анализа выделяются голос автора и точка зрения автора, воплощенные в лексико-грамматических средствах англоязычного академического дискурса. Проведенный эксперимент вводит в контекст преподавания английского языка как иностранного и моделирует ситуацию внедрения жанрового подхода на занятиях по академическому письму в ведущем техническом вузе России. Материалами для анализа служат тексты академических рецензий, написанные русскими студентами на английском языке.

Результаты. В результате эксперимента был выявлен социальный характер авторской идентичности, связанный с гибридной природой жанра рецензии. Было показано, что идентификация и позиция автора находится в прямой зависимости от исходного текста – при выборе учебного или научного текста идентичность автора становится групповой или профессиональной. В соответствии с функционально-стилевой категорией текста для рецензии изменяются и риторические установки – при выборе учебного текста автор пишет для преподавателя и обращается к студенческой аудитории; в случае с научным текстом студент выступает в качестве эксперта и обращается к научному сообществу. Научно-популярный текст способствует выдвижению индивидуального голоса, когда стиль автора меняется в сторону индивидуально-креативного, а диалог между автором и читателем приобретает интимно-личный характер. Маркеры субъективизации (прилагательные с отрицательной оценочностью, использование усилителей) являются типичными для русской языковой и академической культуры.

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Заключение. В заключение делается вывод о том, что выстраивание социально-детерминированной авторской идентичности является необходимым навыком для студента, будущего члена научного сообщества. Авторская идентичность обладает текучестью и изменяется в зависимости от социального контекста – академического дискурса и жанровых характеристик. Жанр рецензии, который предполагает наличие объективного описания структуры исходного текста и субъективной оценки, позволяет выстраивать авторскую идентичность в соответствии с выбором текста для рецензии. Авторская идентичность является также культурно-детерминированной и связана с установками, присутствующими в русской лингвокультуре, академическими нормами и методической традицией преподавания английского языка в России.

Ключевые слова: авторская идентичность; академическая рецензия на книгу; голос автора; позиция автора; позиционирование автора; отрицательная оценка; усилитель.

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The structure of academic writer identity in L2 book reviews by Russian undergraduates: Voice and stance

Abstract

Introduction. *The article focuses on theoretical and practical aspects of academic writer identity. The theoretical aspect comprises the analysis of the Anglo-American bulk of research devoted to the problem of writer identity in the academic written discourse. The purpose of the article is to define the structure of writer identity, its voice and stance. The practical objective of the study is to investigate the identity of novice academic writers represented in their language choices as well as to describe the mechanism of such choices. In order to accomplish the purpose of the research, three types of writer positioning are distinguished: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.*

Materials and Methods. *The theoretical analysis is based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach and Rhetorical Genre Studies as well as recent developments of ESP. The analysis of empirical data has been conducted using the methods of discourse analysis as well as qualitative and quantitative methods of data processing. The study reveals the voice and stance represented by lexicogrammatical means of the English academic written discourse. The conducted experiment introduces the context of ESP and models the situation of the implementation of the genre approach in the Academic Writing course in the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, which is one of the leading technical universities in Russia. The research materials include texts of academic book reviews written in English by Russian undergraduates.*

Results. *The study has revealed the social nature of writer identity determined by the genre hybridity of a book review. It is shown that identification and positioning are in direct connection with the source text; thus, while choosing a textbook or a general science book, the writer identity is getting to be collective or professional. Depending on the functional style of the source text, the rhetorical markers are changing as well. Thus, while choosing a textbook, students are writing for the teacher and addresses the student audience; at the same time in case of the general science text, the student rises to the level of an expert and addresses the scientific community. The popular science text helps work out the individual voice while the author's style is changing toward the creative one and the dialogue between the writer and the reader is taking an intimate coloring. Subjectivity markers (adjectives with the negative value, boosters) are getting to be typical for the Russian linguistic and academic culture.*

Conclusions. *The article concludes that constructing the socially-predetermined writer identity is an essential skill for students and academics. The writer identity is fluid and changeable depending on the social context – academic discourse and genre characteristics. The genre of a book review that combines objectivity and subjectivity gives an opportunity to construct writer identity according to the choice of the source text. The writer identity is culturally-predetermined and connected with the*



standards of Russian linguistic culture, academic rules and traditions of teaching English as a foreign language in Russia.

Keywords

Writer identity; Book review; Voice; Stance; Positioning; Negative value; Booster.

Introduction

Teaching of Academic Writing has recently entered a “post-process era” (Atkinson, 2003 [1]) when “teaching and learning are no longer conceptualized as simply a cognitive process, but also as situated social practice during which novice members of communities develop new identities” (Flowerdew and Wang, 2015, p. 82–83 [2]). The social turn taking place in the sciences with the social construction of knowledge has made identity a key dimension both in the sciences and writing studies. “Within the social turn in writing studies we have also seen a narrative or personal turn, a move to foreground the theorizing of identity and writing through critical reflection and the rhetorical construct of the self” (Young, 2015, p. 90)¹. This “theorizing of identity” together with the rhetorical construction of the self makes the problem of the article in combining the theoretical and practical findings in the joint effort to see the writer identity in a comprehensive way.

The theoretical research of identity is deeply rooted in the fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, Second Language Acquisition, composition research. It is not surprising that the notion of writer identity and its constituent parts “voice” and “stance” have been the focus of scholarly interest and dispute for the last forty years (Elbow, 1981 [3]; Mauranen and Bondi, 2003 [4]; Englebretson, 2007 [5]; Hyland and Sancho Guinda, 2012 [6]; Ritzenberg and Mendelsohn, 2020 [7]; Fang, 2021 [8]). The sense of the writer identity is captured by the notion of voice, an elusive and romantic phenomenon that

has long intrigued both researchers and writing teachers. The early researchers regarded voice in individualistic terms as a trait that “captures the sound of an individual on the page” (Elbow, 1981, p. 287 [9]).

Voicelessness is not possible as “the absence of feelings, intensification and alternative voices is itself a voice” (Martin and Rose, 2007, p. 60 [10]). Writers have different voices and identities across cultures and genres. For example, in contrast to the Anglo-American culture laden with the ideology of individualism that is problematic for L2 writers there are cultures with a collectively oriented background: Bulgarian, German, Italian, or Chinese (Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999 [11]; Vassileva, 2001 [12]; Siepmann, 2006 [13]; Molino, 2010 [14]). A collective voice “registers the social or institutional position from which a person writes” (Prior, 2001, p. 6 [15]) and is quite common for Russian cultural background as well. However, developing a collective voice is not the same as constructing a dialogic perspective on academic communication. One of the very few articles on the Russian academic written discourse describes a small number of interpersonal devices in academic communication, one of the reasons for that being “the lack of incentives to involve the reader in the discourse” (Khutyz, 2013, p. 17 [16]).

Besides engagement signals with interpersonal devices there are also “evaluation” constructs (Hunston and Thompson, 2001 [17]), including “appraisal” or stance frameworks (Biber and Finegan, 1989 [18]). Stance is defined as “the lexical and grammatical expression of

¹ Young M. Identity. In: Heilker P., Vandenberg P. (eds.) *Keywords in Writing Studies*. University Press of

Colorado, 2015. pp. 88–93.
URL: <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/38677>

attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message” (Biber and Finegan, 1989, p. 92 [18]). Evaluation and its more narrow term “stance” is present in all genres of research writing. According to K. Hyland, “over the last twenty years analyses of academic texts have shown us that they aren't as completely 'author-evacuated' as we had once supposed. Instead, they are actually comprised of careful evaluations and interactions” (Hyland, 2010, p. 116 [19]). More than that, in secondary research genres known under an umbrella term “review genres” evaluation plays the leading role.

The writer identity in review genres is the focus of research in many works (Hunston and Thompson, 2001 [20]; Hyland and Diani, 2009 [21]; Hisiao, 2019 [22]). Another issue that has drawn much attention is the pedagogical implication seen as constructing the writer identity in L2 review genres (Zhao and Llosa, 2008 [23]; Jeffery, 2011²); Lancaster, 2016 [24]; Rowland, Knapp, Fargo, 2019 [25]).

The present article aims to combine the theoretical and practical perspectives on the writer identity in the context of writing studies and L2 writing, focusing on the genre of a book review. The main purpose of the article is to explore writer identity and its structural components in “one of the most interpersonally loaded genres of the academy – academic book review” (Tse, Hyland, 2009, p. 768 [26]) through the use of voice-related and stance language features.

In line with Roz Ivanic (1998)³, we distinguish three major types of the authorial stance called positioning:

- the ideational positioning seen as the writers’ ways of representing the world;
- the interpersonal positioning which considers the dialogue of the writer with his reader;
- the textual positioning defined as writers’ ways of conveying meaning through their preferred use of textual features.

Specifically, we will focus on epistemic stance features that include meanings of certainty, doubt, actuality, as well as indicators of the source or perspective of knowledge, and attitudinal stance features that include evaluative adjectives with positive or negative values and verbs denoting personal feelings and emotions.

The article is attempting to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do students position themselves as students (collective voice), or professionals (professional identity)? What key factors determine this choice?
2. In the textual positioning analysis, what epistemic and attitudinal stance features are typical for student writing?
3. What are the valued patterns of stance in student review genres seen in cross-cultural perspective?

Methods

In the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology review genres are taught in the advanced elective course for postgraduate students named *Genres of Scientific Writing* and are an essential part in the syllabus of the tailor-made course *Academic Writing in the Sciences: Theory and Practice* (Alenkina, 2020⁴).

² Jeffery J. V. Subjectivity, intentionality, and manufactured moves: Teachers’ perceptions of voice in the evaluation of secondary students’ writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 2011, vol. 46 (1), pp. 92–127.

³ Ivanic R. *Writing and Identity. The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. John

Benjamins Publishing Company, 1998. 373 p. URL: <https://www.benjamins.com/catalog/swll.5>

⁴ Alenkina T. *Genres of Academic Writing*. Moscow, R. Valent, 2020. 148 p. URL: <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=42890134>



25 undergraduate students who attended the course of Academic Writing in the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology were given an assignment to write a book review.

The book reviewed had to be a general science book, a popular science book or a manual relevant to their own field of research written in English or in Russian.

The full citation of the book together with the photo of the book cover was mandatory. Students were instructed to have the introduction,

the target audience of the book, the main analysis section (summary of the original book and a critique or evaluation), the conclusion/recommendation as obligatory structural parts of the book review (Walford, 1986⁵). They could also include *Works Cited* list if they cited the words of other researchers. The word limit was 600 words.

As a result of their work, students have made the following choices (please see Table 1).

Table 1

Source texts for book reviews

Source texts for book reviews	Students have made the following choices
Manuals and textbooks in Russian	7
General Science Books in English	15
Popular Science Books in English	3

One of the frequent choices of our students is the manuals and course works on quantum mechanics (Professor Kiselev), mechanics of liquids and gases (Professor Kirichenko), or Green's Function: problems and solutions (Professor Levitov and Professor Shitov). Their choice is understandable: students know these professors in person, attend their lectures and seminars, thus, they have made an impression not only about the course but about the textbook as such.

The second option of the students has been the English-language general science and popular science books. Among the authors of the books are the ones of the bestseller *Quantum Computation and Quantum Information* (Michael Nielsen and Isaac Chuang), *An Introduction to*

Quantum Field Theory (M. Peskin and D. Schroeder), *Fundamentals of Thermoelectricity* by K. Behnia. There are also some technical manuals and guides that were of interest to our students: *Pattern of Enterprise Application Architecture* by Martin Fowler or *The Certified Wireless Network Administrator Study Guide* by David Coleman and David Westcott.

Popular science books have not been as popular among Russian students this year. Among the chosen works are such famous books as David Deutsch's *The Fabric of Reality: The Science of Parallel Universes and Its Implications* (1997), Dave Goldberg's *The Universe in the Rearview Mirror* (2013) and Matt Ridley's *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* (1999).

⁵ Walford A. J. (ed.) *Reviews and Reviewing: A Guide*. Oryx Press, 1986. URL:

https://books.google.ru/books/about/Reviews_and_reviewing.html?id=PpIYAAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y

Results

Review Analysis: Results and Discussion

Students tended to position themselves not as autonomous individuals but as people who are willing to be a part of the collective “we” – students and scientists. The collective voice represents the institutional group and depends on the book students were reviewing (1)–(2). Thus, writing about the textbooks and course materials, Russian writers position themselves as students whereas reviewing a general science book as a scientist:

(1) *On the whole, I wouldn't recommend this manual to undergraduate students. But being a student myself, I know that this resource is lacking.*

(2) *Understanding what is happening in our universe is very important, but only for general knowledge. Being a scientist in this field, I was interested in learning about it from a scientific point of view, so I read Hawking. Stars, black holes, galaxies... It sounds so mysterious, but reading fiction books our erroneous opinion that everything is incomprehensible only intensifies. If **you**, like **me**, want to know the whole depth in this area, then only scientific literature can help.*

The voice is getting to be individualistic when writers chose a popular science book. In this case they tended to construct intimate relationship with their readers (3)–(4):

(3) *Matt Ridley's book is a fascinating tour. Like in Hermitage, do not try to understand all things at once. Have fun from stops near the brightest “exhibits”. I do not promise it is easy, but it is by all means interesting.*

(4) *In conclusion, the book is a real classic of popular science, but the main idea of the book is not to make the reader start learning physics. It just shows the beauty of physics as a science that investigates the Universe. It is written without difficult equations or definitions and is aimed at the usual reader. **You** could recommend this book*

*to a friend who has always been afraid of physics, especially if this friend is **you**.*

In contrast, writing is getting to be more detached when students opted for general science books. In this case students made insightful suggestions upon what was to be improved in the book. They were concerned primarily with the subject matter, suggesting information that should be added (5)–(6):

(5) *The decision of which material to include in the book is in general well grounded. At the same time, some topics are not covered enough. **I would like to see more** materials on abstract algebra and add a chapter about connection between it and number theory, because there are many interesting Olympiad problems connected with both these mathematical branches.*

(6) *Another significant part missing from the book is the story about **Monstrous Moonshine conjecture**. Mathematicians who studied representations of the biggest finite group called the “Monster group” noticed its connection to absolutely different part of mathematics, i. e. to elliptic curves. It was so unexpected that John Conway named such a phenomenon “Moonshine”. Richard Borcherds introduced the definition of vertex algebras and used it to prove the mysterious relation. Many people who are inspired by such a beautiful relation and use it as a starting point in studying of vertex algebras will be disappointed because it is absent in the book.*

Envisioning themselves as professionals in the field, the authors positioned themselves as peers, pointing out the errors and deficiencies of the original text (7):

(7) *However, starting from the second chapter many significant mistakes were made by the author in very essential formulas. One of the repetitive errors is to treat vectors as scalars, which leads to critical misunderstandings and inaccuracy in the final equations. The other*

*common mistake is to treat the three-dimensional space integrals as one-dimensional integrals and vice versa. This makes the understanding of the material very complicated. These issues **resulted in errors in almost every equation in the first five chapters of the book.** However, thanks to the spherical symmetry in the most problems, they did affect only the numerical constants. Nevertheless, these problems must have been eradicated before the book was published.*

In contrast, while students reviewed course books, they showed more commitment. The authors of such texts perceived their target audience also to be students. Thus, the **interpersonal positioning** was in maintaining a constant dialogue with the readers (8)–(9):

(8) *The chief merit of this book is that it consistently explains quantum field theory from the start point of simple concepts such as quantum oscillator and classical fields. **Thus, the only thing a student should do** in order to understand any chapter of this book is only to master previous chapters. Moreover, tasks provided after each chapter helps students to consolidate the material.*

(9) *The most notable feature of these books is their briefness and clarity. To understand the material **you** don't need to make notes and calculations on paper: everything is described in detail and without further ado. This may be due to the soft-mathematical style of narration: new concepts are introduced in the distinguished definitions, and sometimes there are encountered statements with proofs. Besides, when the definitions are needed again in the new chapter, they are mentioned again, so **you** don't need to leaf through the whole book looking for them. Also **you** can find in these books many helpful illustrations and examples.*

The **textual positioning** of Russian writers is determined by the pedagogical tradition of the EFL education in Russia as well as the cross-cultural interference and individual preferences.

As soon as the Russian tradition of teaching EFL is based on oral genres, written speech of Russian students is full of oral conversational of the typical features of Russian students is the use of oral markers that form the individual voice. These markers are “in my opinion”, “I think”, “to my mind” (10)–(11):

(10) ***To my mind**, the authors described structure-related processes in sufficient detail.*

(11) *The textbook is primarily aimed at students who have already finished basic courses in numerical analysis and algebra; but, **in my opinion**, there are also several parts that require deep knowledge in combinatorics and basic knowledge in topology.*

Conversational formulas are found in all the cases of critique; especially expressive are they in using evaluative adjectives with negative values (12):

(12) *The book contains large paragraphs which could be page-long, **plenty of lyrical and historical digressions which are mostly useless for studying**, and many explanations contain several conceptual examples which are not necessary in such a number. Thus, this book has even more fluff than other books in Sivukhin's general physics course.*

The writer used negative stance features when it comes to his own reader experience: (13)–(15):

(13) *Although it keeps the reader actively engaged in the material, too much of this activity may become **annoying**.*

(14) *Nevertheless, even such a book can't contain all possible facts in the field, so a lot of such useful, but not easily provable facts are presented as exercises and aren't followed by proofs, which is sometimes **frustrating**.*

(15) ***Sadly**, the abundance of technical transformations of the formulae in Prof. Kiselev's publication, prevents the reader from feeling the flavour of quantum mechanics and building*

positive associations, so by the end the reader gets confused and disappointed.

The textual positioning of writers is often manifested through the Russian favorite words and expressions. Usually these words create the emotional charge of the text. They are called boosters and as a rule don't add much to the understanding of the text. These words that are a result of interference from the Russian language are "very" and "huge" (16)–(18):

(16) *It is **very well structured** and **gives a very broad overview** of the history and of the work done on that field together with the proper references.*

(17) *It can also be **very beneficial** for people who understand field theory from the physical point of view, but want to look at their subject from a different angle.*

(18) *For me, a **huge role** was played by the scientific literature in the field of space.*

One more textual characteristic in the Russian works is the conversational formula that is prevailing in the book reviews as an appraisal marker: to do a **fantastic** job/to do a **good** job/ to do a **monumental** job (19)–(21):

(19) *The authors collected problems from the most prestigious mathematical Olympiad "The William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition" beginning with 1938 and **did a fantastic job** on generalization of their solution principles.*

(20) *The book is well written in terms of structure and logical organization and **it does a good job** in the first chapters of reviewing the basic physical effects and phenomena such as heat and charge flow, magnetic field induced effects, introduction of transport coefficients and others.*

(21) *Michael Nilsen and Isaac Chuang **have done a monumental job** of explaining hundreds of quantum computing articles in an understandable and friendly manner.*

On the whole, students tried not to use hedges that prevail in English academic discourse (Salager-Meyer, 2011 [27]) and used boosters as markers of subjectivity instead.

Discussion. Conclusions

Although the present paper is viewed as a case study, its results are worth discussing at the theoretical level as well.

The ideational positioning of Russian students is in projecting the identity corresponding to the source text. Thus, while critiquing a Russian-language manual or a coursework, students positioned themselves as a part of the collective "we" – students and constructed their target audience as students as well.

A different situation is in reviewing general science books. Interestingly, students took over the role of an expert, pointing out the overt errors and suggesting changes to the subject matter of the text.

The interpersonal positioning and a dialogue with their readers is much more natural and smooth when students see themselves as members of academic community and displaying their collective voice, as well as showing their creative personalities. The latter happens when students review popular science books. In these cases their voice is individualistic with the usage of writer pronouns "I" – "we".

The textual positioning of Russian students is largely affected by cultural norms of their native language, personal preferences, and the level of the English language command. Students tended to overuse boosters in their reviews (*very, huge, fantastic, monumental*) and preferred evaluative adjectives with negative values (*useless, annoying, frustrating*).

The writer identity is a "complex individual and social phenomenon" (Matsuda, p. 146 [28]) that is constructed through socially shared



resources for meaning making. These resources are manifested in the genre characteristics of a book review with its obligatory summary (objective) and critique (subjective) parts, which makes this genre to be complicated for Russian students.

The complexity is in the alternating interpersonal strategies of objectivity and subjectivity, which A. Molino called "interpersonality" (Molino, 2010 [29]).

On the one hand, the "myth of impersonality" (K. Hyland [30]) of Anglo-American research writing along with the Russian cultural norms emphasizes the detached style of writing that encourages the higher use of inclusive "we".

On the other hand, our experiment suggested that Russian students underused both writer pronouns or "used them unadventurously"

(K. Hyland [30]). Despite that, students wanted to show their individualistic voice by using adjectives with negative value and boosters as they found them to be more appropriate for the style and genre of a book review.

Among the implications of this study is the need to read more mentor texts – book reviews and book review articles across disciplines – and emphasize cultural models of constructing the writer identity in Anglo-American tradition. One more way to increase the awareness of Russian students is to include the voice-related characteristics in the assessment criteria table.

The contribution of the article is in the synthesizing of theoretical and practical aspects of the writer identity and applying them in the pedagogical practice.

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