

ABSTRACT – INTRODUCTION TO THE ACADEMIC GENRE

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ABSTRACT. The article presents a method of work on abstracts with students in the engineering courses of study. It is applied to students at the University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski” in the module in English for Special Purposes (ESP) on the curriculum in Foreign Language Teaching. The objective of the activities offered is for students to conceive the notion of “abstract” within the academic genres, to understand and learn the principles of constructing such a summarising text, and using a guidance algorithm, to be able to produce an abstract on a training scientific text. The focus is on tasks on reading for comprehension, term recognition and production. Work is also targeted at stylistics and visualisation. The implementation of the tasks includes preparatory work in the Internet environment, independent work with a text and an English dictionary/ a dictionary of terms, revising grammar materials. Errors and difficulties are analysed. Examples to follow are given to facilitate student work on the issue. The applicability of the activity is discussed.

Key words: ESP, abstract, method, language competences, terms.

АБСТРАКТ – ВЪВЕДЕНИЕ В ЖАНРА

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РЕЗЮМЕ. Статията представя методика на работа със студенти от инженерни специалности по писане на абстракт. Тя се прилага за студенти от МГУ „Св. Иван Рилски“ в модула по „Специализиран английски език“, включен в учебната програма по чуждоезиково обучение. Целта на предложените дейности е студентите да осмислят понятието „абстракт“ в рамките на академичните жанрове, да разберат и научат принципите на конструиране на такъв резюмиращ текст и, използвайки насочващ алгоритъм, да могат да съставят абстракт върху учебен научен текст. Акцентът е върху задачи за четене с разбиране, разпознаване и производство на термини. Работи се и по стилистика и визуализация. Изпълнението на задачите включва подготвителна работа в среда Интернет, самостоятелна работа с текст и речник по английски език/ терминологичен речник, преговорни граматически материали. Анализират се грешки и затруднения. Дават се помощни примери за работа на студентите по темата. Обсъжда се приложимостта на дейностите.

Ключови думи: специализиран английски език, абстракт, методика, езикови компетенции, терминология.

Introduction

Our combined work touches on two fields of foreign language training: the methods of ESP training and the acquisition of language competences.

Currently, a larger part of means of scientific facts and engineering knowledge is conveyed through printed matter, like monographs, specialised books and manuals, scientific compendiums, journals, company materials, industrial and institutional documentation, etc. or online sources, such as magazines, research sites, conference proceedings and likewise. Publications on how to teach students perceive a scientific text on the lexical level, i.e. on the level of terms, and how terminological competences can be enhanced abound in literature, including the most recent articles of ours (Yusein, 2018; Purvanova, 2023). Here, we focus on the challenging task of offering students insights into perceiving an overall text and extracting the main points in it. Thus, as contemporary foreign language teachers, we are responsible for forming the necessary language competences in engineering students on the semantic and overall conceptual levels, so that the students could comprehend an author’s ideas, feel confident with the new information, gain crucial skills in working with technical texts and information sources, and ultimately, be guaranteed quality participation and professional communication in specialist environments, like producing research articles and participating in scientific forums, conferences, symposia, etc.

Objective

The objective of the activities offered for class work is for students to produce a properly laid-out abstract on a text. The focus is on tasks on reading for comprehension, extracting notions, term production, text production.

Methods

Target group

The activities are directed to students trained in English in the module in English for special purposes (ESP) in the second, third and fourth year within the courses of studies in *Computer Technology in Engineering* and in *Geology and Geoinformatics* in the Bachelor’s degree at the University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski”. Alternatively, group level permitting, first-year students in higher-level groups may also be trained in abstract production.

Algorithm of work

To fulfil the training activities, the following steps are followed that comprise:

- preparatory work within the Internet medium;
- individual work with a general English dictionary and a dictionary of terms;
- text reading;
- comprehension and oral expression of the essence/main ideas in paragraphs/sections of the training text;
- revision of the Passive voice;

- guided writing of an academic text: an abstract.

During and after the performance of tasks, we have also considered including an analysis of possible difficulties and errors.

Activities

I. Preparation. We prepare the classes offered by putting an accent on the **activity “Work in the Internet environment”** and practicing one of the four skills in foreign language teaching: reading. Students are offered a single one or a selection of articles in English available on the Internet, preferably by authors they are familiar with, e.g. their lecturers. These materials may be accessed at home through a link shared, or displayed via multimedia, or simply printed and handed out. Students are trained to outline the elements of an academic article.

II. Logically, the **stage of initial explanations** ensues. Students are offered explanations about the objectives of the task. Students are engaged in the **activities “Term introduction”** and **“Dictionary work”**. The notion of “abstract” is introduced.

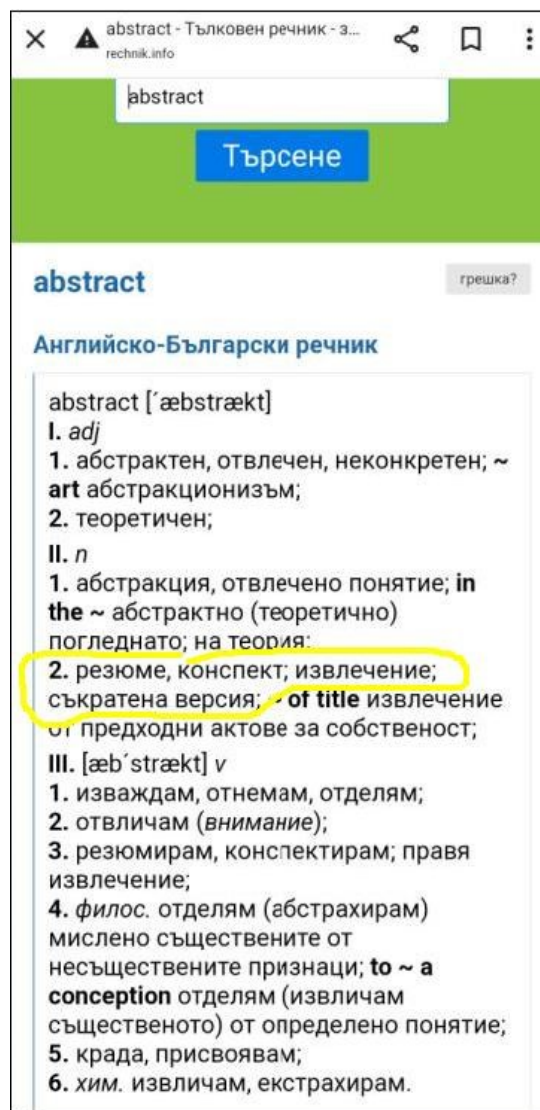
A lecturer is free to organise term presentation in their own manner. We hereby offer just one of many practical ways:

A fairly simple instruction for writing a research paper is read by the students, available at: Website of the UMG at → Science → International Scientific Conference → Paper Formatting Instructions → Paper Guidelines. It says:

“An abstract in English, not longer than 300 words. The abstract should be focused on the most important issues, discussed in the paper. The authors should clearly explain the contents of the work...” (<https://www.mgu.bg>).

For the novice in academic writing, this definition is not really very informative. Therefore, students may be asked to browse for an explanation of the term “abstract” and work individually or in groups and compare their understanding. We enclose the two definitions in the very first sources which the cache offers: “An abstract is a brief summary of a research article, thesis, review, conference proceeding, or any in-depth analysis of a particular subject and is often used to help the reader quickly ascertain the paper’s purpose” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_\(summary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_(summary))). Here is another one, by St. Kerpedzhiev (2013: 64): “The ABSTRACT contains in a concise form the specific features of the study - the subject, the methods used, the main results and conclusions. Since the summary is one of those items that are also distributed independently of the main text through secondary information publications, it should not contain quotations. Besides, it is not recommended to use equations, tables or other similar means in it. The use of sentences from the body text of the article is allowed. The length of an abstract is usually around 200-300 words.”

If such explanations are insufficient, a more dictionary approach is resorted to: students check up the possible dictionary definitions to the term “abstract”. Here is what the online English-Bulgarian “Dictionary of the Words in the Bulgarian Language” suggests for the noun (<http://rechnik.info/abstract/>):



III. The assignment. A material is handed out to the students with exercises and steps to follow. This may either be printed out (strongly advised) or presented via multimedia. A short text about computers is also distributed.

Work on the computer text begins with the standard grammar revision and term recognition exercises. The activities and procedures observed are as follows:

Exercise 1 (grammar recognition) - Circle the passives in the text

Exercise 2 (term recognition) - Circle the computer terms in the text. They may be nouns, or adjectives, or verbs. Memorise their meaning.

Then, a step-by-step explanation is given for the summarising activity. It is in the form of an algorithm to read with a number of examples. The steps to follow include:

- outlining the main idea in each of the paragraphs in the computer text in one word possibly;
- constructing summarising sentences by:
 - listing the order of ideas in the paragraphs;
 - adding verbs to the list of ideas/paragraphs;
 - finishing the sentences with the summarising words;
- varying the patterns followed;

- adding an introductory sentence in the beginning of the abstract.

Exercise 3 (summarising) – Follow these steps:

Step 1 - Try to outline the main idea in each of the paragraphs in the computer text in one word possibly - we usually use nouns for them, such as a definition, a list, a classification, a discussion, methods, etc. (и т.н.) There may be paragraphs with 2 or more ideas in them.

If we have the text nearby printed, we usually write the summarising word next to each paragraph to avoid forgetting ideas, e.g. (напр.)

§1 – **list**

§2 – **definition**

§3 –

§4 –

etc.

Step 2 - Now begin constructing summarising sentences. Use a sentence for each paragraph in the text. Following the order of paragraphs, list them using numerals, like:

The **first** paragraph

The **second** paragraph

The **third** paragraph

The words in italics are called markers of listings and they give the logic of your text.

But it gets boring, especially when there are 10 or more paragraphs or more pages.

So, you continue the list of paragraphs with:

The **next** paragraph

Then, the text/the article

After that, the text

Further,

Until you come to the long-awaited

The **last** part of the text ☺ ☺ ☺

Step 3 – Add verbs to your list of paragraphs, e.g.:

The **first** paragraph **presents**

The **second** paragraph **offers**

etc.

Step 4 – Finish your sentences with the summarising words which you marked beside each of the paragraphs in the text (see Step 1 above), e.g.:

The **first** paragraph **presents** a list of

The **second** paragraph **offers** a definition of

etc.

Step 5 – See if your summary sounds interesting. Often, it may be boring because you used the same structures in each sentence.

Vary the patterns you followed, change verbs, change the markers of listings you used throughout the sentences.

Here is an example of listing using verbs, not numerals:

The text **begins** with a list of

The text **continues with /proceeds with** a definition of

The text **finishes/ends/concludes with** a list of 7 methods of

You may also combine summarising sentences from different patterns; thus, you hold the readers' attention, your summary sounds intriguing, and last but not least, your audience does not fall into deep slumber until they finish reading your summary ☺

IV. The stage of the initial implementation of the assignment. Students are asked to produce a very simple abstract following the above steps. They are involved in the activity “Guided writing”.

Exercise 4 (writing an abstract) – And now it is your turn to try your hand on summarising the ideas in the attached short text.

As many variants of the assignment fulfilled by students are then read aloud as possible. The didactic objective is to help students memorise the patterns used.

V. The stage of the task implementation analysis. Possible errors are discussed and corrected. When analysing the work at this stage, it is obligatory to give instructions regarding the correct sequencing of the summarising sentences: they are arranged according to their order in the author's text. Another issue is the use of the Passive Voice to render emphasis on the impersonal action, not on who performs it. Punctuation (i.e. commas) after logical markers of sequencing should also be considered since it is part of the stylistics of the scientific text generated.

VI. The stage of the final implementation of the task. Students are asked to re-write their abstracts correctly.

To consolidate the new knowledge acquired, they may be given a longer text on the same topic and assigned to produce an abstract to it for homework.

Results achieved

The implementation of the activities on the tasks assigned can be beneficial in many respects.

- Introducing students to the elements of a research article/scientific text;
- Introducing students to the notion of abstract;
- Introducing students to the abstract as an academic genre;
- Acquisition of skills on the part of students to summarise an author's ideas expressed in a paragraph/section of a text;
- Creating conditions for a guided written academic discourse;
- Creating conditions for a correct and efficient independent written academic discourse;
- Improved skills when working with academic information;
- Improving students' communication skills;
- Students broaden their knowledge related to the production of academic texts.

Applicability

- Similar summarising tasks can initially be performed with every text covered in class in order to help memorise the algorithm or vary it.
- Further, abstracts can be generated on a regular basis to ensure the longevity of the knowledge offered.
- Besides, this approach results in transforming knowledge into a linguistic competence.
- Thus, student performance is enhanced and communication skills manifested and upgraded.
- The activities can also be addressed to students trained in English in the third semester within the “streamed” language groups.
- With the necessary language alterations, the algorithm can be employed by language teachers of other languages offered at this educational institution.
- The algorithm is also applicable in the master’s degree and with Ph.D. students;
- And last but not least, it can be a useful tool in distance learning.

Conclusion

In this article, a method of practical work with engineering students in the Bachelor’s degree students at the University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski” is offered. The objective of introducing the notion of “abstract” in the context of academic writing is achieved. The aim of explaining the principles of constructing this particular type of summarising text known as an abstract is fulfilled through an algorithm supported by numerous examples. Guided writing is suggested in class and consolidating writing along the pattern offered is applied for

homework.

The regular application of the algorithm is strongly recommended for improving students’ understanding and summarising of scientific information, enhancing the style of their academic discourse, and upgrading their linguistic competences

The authors’ team expresses their hope that, from the educational point of view and applicability, the method will contribute to students’ future occupational development and the increase in their competitiveness in the long run.

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