Russian Accent in English Written Discourse

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Abstract

This research is a multi-aspect exploratory investigation of Russian English institutional written discourse and highlights its features demonstrated by Russian native learners, tertiary students of English for the tourism and hospitality industry. The author approaches the theme from the perspectives of World Englishes and the pedagogical agenda. This sample study is based on the analysis of the researcher's corpus of English written works by Russian students. It reveals Russian English discoursal variations as manifestations of ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural identity. The paper highlights users' repeated salient discoursal features, the main of which appeared to be in communication strategies, structure, and register. Specific choices of linguistic, stylistic, structural and strategic variables result in the uncovered Russian English discoursal features, such as straightforwardness, excessive evaluation, abuse of negation and others. The research also focuses on their possible unwelcome pragmatic effects in business communication. This paper is a contribution to scarce comprehensive World Englishes discourse studies, particularly to the under-explored theme of Russian English. Revelation of local voices in English discourse and their interpretation in terms of indigenous languages and cultures may be a demanded addition to the World Englishes theory and practice. The pedagogical inferences of this research suggest that culturally relevant English-as-a-foreign-language teaching should take into account the English discoursal profile of learners resulting from their interfering native profile to improve pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Russian accent, Russian English discoursal variations, World Englishes, discourse analysis, pragmatic dissonance.

As English is learned in Russia as a foreign language (EFL) to be used as a means of communication with native speakers and non-native speakers globally, it is evident that mastering English discourse is becoming a most important target, especially for today's students of English for Special Purposes (ESP) preparing to join the professional world community tomorrow. According to Graddol (1997, 2006), English used by non-natives poses at least two issues:

> "English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintaining of standards" (Graddol, 1997, p. 3); and
> "as English becomes more widely used as a global language, it will become expected that speakers will signal their nationality, and other aspects of their identity through English" (Graddol, 2006, p. 117).

Unlike prevalent linguistic EFL error-sensitive areas in grammar, syntax and mechanics (Pescante-Malimas and Samson, 2017, p. 194), particular vulnerable areas in EFL discourse have not become the focus of much scholarly attention yet. Meanwhile, as the overwhelming majority of English learners come from various non-native ethnic backgrounds there arises a pedagogical priority of exploring their discoursal specifics. As Kachru (1997) pinpoints, it is equally legitimate to acquaint foreign writers with rhetorical patterns common to Inner Circle Englishes and at the same time to disclose to English educators differing rhetorical conventions of the world majority learners of English (p.161). Many of such learners are Russians and according to the author's previous quantitative studies, English discourse imperfections rank second after grammar in the most numerous errors of Russian learners (Figure 1).
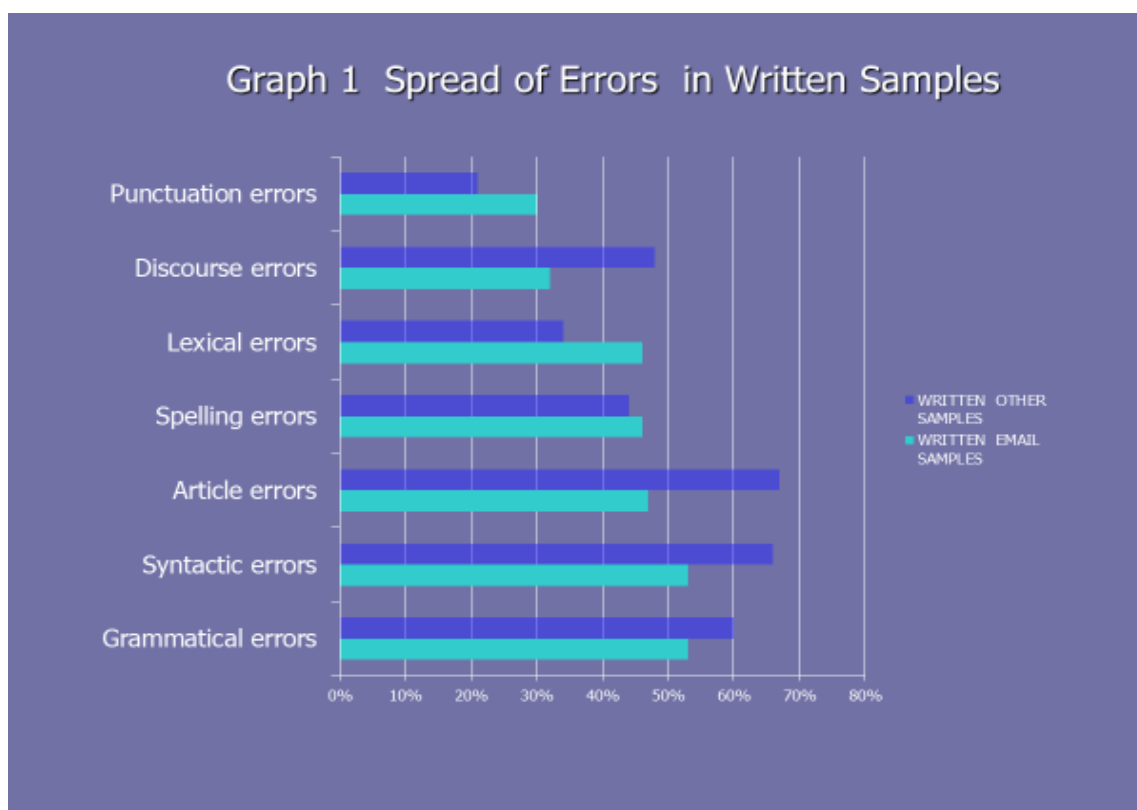

Figure 1. Share of discourse in the total of written errors of Russian learners

The data in Figure 1 show the average percentage of student informants out of the total number of 160 who made particular types of errors in English writing. The kinds of writing analysed were students' email messages to the researcher and written business genres important for students of tourism and hospitality. As the graph shows, the most widely spread errors were made by Russian natives in articles usage, grammar, syntax and discourse. Approximately every second informant violated discoursal practices applied by natives in corresponding genres. This makes EFL discourse a zone of special pedagogical attention.

Forming discourse competence in a foreign language is a great challenge. First, there are no settled rules or prescriptions to assume because of the complex hierarchy of the subject and World Englishes diversity. Second, inevitable cross-cultural and cognitive barriers worsen discourse comprehension and production. As Rifkin and Roberts (1995) illuminate, a message can be both understandable and irritating, highly comprehensible and "foreign" (p. 522). In other words, there is something to EFL text that accounts for this "aftertaste", and this something may be discoursal inadequacy.

Literature Review

Discourse study is a multi-focus endeavour. It can become an identification tool: What people are saying or writing makes recognisable who they are, and the ways they are writing construct what they are actually doing (Gee, 2004, p. 48).

White accentuated the influence of factors making spoken and written texts to seem well formed. (Canale, & Swane, 1980, cited in White, 1997, part 3 "Intercomprehensibility & Communicative Competence"). The knowledge of discourse rules is socially shared, and to make mutual understanding possible, "social actors share norms, values and rules of communication" (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 17). It means that, in order to be accurately understood, EFL users have to share them too.

It is important for EFL users to be aware of various discourse dimensions and realise the appropriateness of discourse elements usage at several levels. One of the most crucial and insufficiently investigated World Englishes dimensions is discourse strategies. Cots interprets them as "the systematic adoption of a series of verbal actions which respond to a more or less conscious plan or communicative routine to achieve a specific goal" (Cots, 1996, p. 94). It is here that non-native English users run the greatest risk of making "faux pas" producing unintended effects. Meanwhile, there is evidence that recipients are often less tolerant of pragmatic failures of their foreign interlocutors in intercultural communication contexts than they are of grammatical errors. Thus, Thomas (1983) emphasised the importance of pragmatic competence, as in international contexts it is pragmatic failure that affects communication rather than grammatical and lexical deficiency. Pragmatic dissonance may be cognition-bound or culture-rooted and is a special focus in EFL pedagogical contexts. Moreover, researchers claim that pragmatic failure can deny learners access to valuable academic or professional opportunities (Tanaka, 1997). Consequently, a particular WE discourse accent may pose an issue from communicative, social and pedagogical perspectives.

One of the serious obstacles in discourse study is the fact that unlike other language levels, discourse has no codified norm to which to resort. Therefore, the practical concern for EFL learners pertains to which English discourse norm they should regularly employ. Linguists give various answers. Kachru and Smith (2008) highlight an acrolect, or a preferred dialect, of an educated variety of English used for international communication (p.60). In McArthur's terms

(2001), it may be English as a Native Language (ENL) and International Standard English (ISE), which is globally used preserving the essential unity of English as a means of international communication. Unfortunately, for EFL learners, ENL and ISE differ. The idea of two diverging Englishes was highlighted by Crystal (1988, p. 265). Since ISE is not clearly described and remains no stable variety, it becomes unreliable from pedagogical perspectives. Consequently, the teaching model in the Expanding Circle should remain the native norm (Mollin, 2006, p. 54). Echoing this opinion, Saraceni (2016) acknowledges that World Englishes are mostly described in terms of the extent of their deviation from more established varieties (p. 79). Eligibly, this research considers ENL discourse patterns as a benchmark. Although there is no monolithic ENL, trustworthy authoritative British and American ENL sources of "model" exemplars and judgements about expected discourse features were considered. Digressions from them by Russian English (RE) users might be regarded as their discoursal accent, because as Kachru (1983) argued, unlike mistakes, deviations are "the result of a productive process which makes the typical variety-specific features; and it is systemic within a variety and not idiosyncratic" (p. 159).

The Oxford Dictionary defines accent as "[def.1] a distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010, p.9). Scholars have already admitted foreign accents in written discourse and noticed that unlike face-to-face interactions, online communication makes categories of L2 identity less salient (Klimanova & Dembovskaya, 2013). In other words, a foreign accent can exist in oral and written discourse, although it is less conspicuous in the latter. Revelation of such accents and their interpretation by means of local culture contributes to the World Englishes theory and practice and may be pedagogically meaningful.

There have been a number of contrastive studies of English and Russian discourses recently, many of them by Russian researchers, such as Khoutyz (2013), Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013), Uzlenko (2002) and others. Each concentrated on a particular aspect of cross-linguistic analysis of English and Russian discourse such as difference in reader engagement strategy, in social interaction behavior, and in symbolic meaning of folklore concepts accordingly. However, there has not been attempted a multi-aspect viewing of English written discourse strategies of Russian natives. The focus of this research, therefore, is on insufficiently investigated English discourse strategies as problem areas for foreign learners and characteristic RE discourse features. Written discourse is chosen because it constitutes a considerable share of business interaction in tourism, is functionally important for professionals, and, as evidenced by Godfrey (2016), clear written communication is ranked within the top five employability advantages (p. 114).

Research Questions
Considering the importance of maintaining standards of written discourse by foreign students in view of potential pragmatic misfire; sparse scholarly information about written ENL features, and scarce data about RE discoursal features, this study was undertaken to seek answers to the following Research Questions:

   a) What are the main acknowledged ENL prototypical features of written discourse in general and relevant written genres in particular?
   b) What are the multi-aspect characteristic features of RE written discourse and how do they compare to the ENL prototypical ones, if at all? How may they result in pragmatic dissonance? What may underlie differences?
   c) What kind of pedagogical implications may follow?

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This exploratory research relies on the World Englishes theory of Kachru (1983) and Bolton (2004); discourse theory relevant to language learning developed by Cook (1989), Van Dijk (1997), Gee (2004), Paltridge (2012), Kachru (1997); as well as comparative discourse studies of Swales (1990). Also to be considered is the field of cultural linguistics as noted by Sharifian (2011) as "unfamiliarity with the systems of conceptualisations on which the international speakers of English are relying may lead to various forms and degrees of discomfort and even miscommunication" (p. 95). Since the researcher does not share the ENL linguistic repertoire and has insufficient "insider knowledge" (Saraceni, 2016, p. 97), a look at the studied matter through native familiar behavioural patterns of the researcher was practiced. Saraceni titled this approach "tourist gaze", as the things that leap to the eye are those that stand out being different from familiar "home" features. The author also drew on Bhatia's (2013) model of discourse genre analysis regarding integrated communicative purpose, structural patterns, distinctive textual characteristics, and rhetorical conventions.

Methods

As there are no ready-made data banks of Russian English, the researcher's corpus of students' written samples was set up and investigated. The data were received over the period of 2013-2018. The informants were Russian native male and female adult tertiary students of tourism and hospitality of various ages: undergraduates for the specialist diploma, for bachelor's and master's degrees at the Moscow Institute of Tourism Industry. They used English in natural contexts (writing a trip report about one's journey) or quasi-natural contexts (simulated written activities in suggested professional situations like replying to a customer's letter of complaint, refusing a customer's request). Most written products were homework submitted by email, some were presented in handwriting in contact classroom sessions. Taking into consideration Van Dijk's (1997) requirement for discourse analysis known as "naturally occurring text or talk" (p.29), the samples were not edited and were studied in their appearance. The pedagogical context of the researcher reduced the genre range to professionally relevant ones. Thus, the research concentrated on such ESP genres as business letters and email messages of confirmation and cancellation, of request and refusal, of complaint and apology, cover letters, curriculum vitae, trip reports, as well as essays and home reading reviews. The total number of discourse samples analysed was 220. The number of informants involved amounted to160 persons.

Data collection involved convenience sampling, that is, gathering written documents of students the researcher was teaching in particular years. The size of the sample corresponded to the normal size of many business genres and was one-page text of about 1800 signs.

The following study design applied:

a) ENL scholars', writers' and rhetoricians' judgments about intrinsic English discourse features were summarised. The researcher, a native Russian, applied the "tourist gaze" approach to English written discourse of the selected genres in order to spot uncommon to Russian similar written genres features (trustworthy ENL resources of British Council, FluentU blog were used). Discoursal characteristic features of English as described by natives and spotted as noticeable by the researcher made up a kind of a matrix to judge RE discourse in terms of comparison with ENL.

b) The RE discourse corpus of student-authored written samples was processed. The raw data were browsed through and coded with a predefined set of ENL dimensions codes, categorised and juxtaposed with the above qualities to identify the most visible features. The main principle for identifying RE discourse salient features was demonstration of the same feature by several informants rather than the number of a feature's occurrences, as the latter could result from some idiosyncratic preferences. Results below encompass only common and repeated specifics found in more than five people's works.

Although discourse analysis deals with complex and unstructured data, scholars have a choice of computer-aided tools for this purpose today (Stegmeier, 2012), like JASP (Love et al., 2019). Despite the fact that these platforms can extract topics from texts and create annotations, they are mainly useful for quantitative linguistic elements counts, frequency of word combinations, and parts-of-speech information. Such subtle matter as discourse strategies and their pragmatic effects are beyond their scope. That is why this research employed an e-tool only for assessing evaluative attitude, or sentiment analysis. The Stanford CoreNLP Natural Language Processing toolkit (Manning et al., 2014) was chosen for its accessibility and clear visualisation of prevailing in-text positive or negative attitudes in tree graphs.

During the research the themes and tasks offered to students did not involve any sensitive information, trespassing upon privacy, or personal identification. All quoted examples of RE discourse are participant students' quotations.

Findings and Discussion

The research revealed a set of certain characteristic ENL discourse qualities that may distinguish it from other ethno-cultural discourses, presenting it at three levels (Table 1).

(1) General discourse qualities.
Researchers highlight the English tendencies to laconism (Visson, 2015, p. 82); factual presentation of information (Condon & Yousef, 1975); non-categorical indirectness and unobtrusiveness (Loveday, 1982; Leech, 1983) eased by softeners like *couldn't/wouldn't, I'm afraid that, rather* in contrast to Russian "self-confidence and dogmatism" (Visson, 2015, p. 78-81); positivity, unwelcome negation because of its psychologically intimidating impact on ENL users (Visson, 2015, p. 32–33) and so on. These are due to deeply rooted cognitive patterns or culture-based practices.

(2) Particular discourse qualities determined by the channel of communication (oral, multimodal or, as in this research, a written channel).
It has been noted that English written text requires clear structuring and cohesion of four types (Kirkpatrick, 1999, p. 49-50). Besides, it is characterised by explicitness or low context (Paltridge, 2012, p. 138; Khoutyz, 2013, p. 3). As Paltridge (2012) testifies, "spoken texts may be more implicit and leave a lot of what is to be understood unsaid whereas written texts (in English at least) may often be more explicit" (p. 138). Apart from that, English written discourse is marked by a high level of nominalisation that is presenting actions and events with nouns, rather than verbs (Paltridge, 2012, p. 137; Visson, 2015, p. 159; Uzlenko, 2002), which may align with the above-mentioned characteristic of laconism.

Interactivity as addressee awareness and self-engagement also characterises written English discourse. Hyland (2005) paid attention to the interactional quality of English texts marked by

boosters (definitely, absolutely) and hedges (possibly, hopefully, might) providing indirect evidence of the author presence and materialising such quality as self-identification (p. 49).

(3) Special qualities determined by a particular discourse genre.
As Paltridge (2012) pointed out, genres are culture specific with particular purposes and linguistic features (p.65). According to Swales (1990), a discourse genre has its own form, structure, contents and positioning determined by audience expectations (p.49). A written text may not seem plausible if its structural, linguistic, stylistic and content elements and their arrangement do not correspond to the "prototypical" features of the corresponding ENL discourse genre. Some dimensions of ENL genre discourse important for EFL learners are indicated in the table below.

Table 1. Target English discourse dimensions

General qualities	**Written English qualities**	**Genre-bound qualities**
Factual presentation	Explicitness	Content
Laconism	Nominalisation	Structure and frame (e.g. required opening and closing part corresponding to each other and the purpose of the genre)
Positivity	Self-engagement	Register (tone)
Non-categorical indirectness	Addressee-awareness by the writer	Acceptable discourse strategies of particular functions (requesting, refusing, face-saving, apologising etc.)
Non-evaluative presentation	Punctuation and spelling specificity (I not i as a pronoun, capital letter following the colon sign, capitalised nouns in titles, avoidance of exclamation mark etc.)	Communicative style (e.g. full sentences vs noun collocations; metaphorical vs non-metaphorical narration, with/without humour etc.)
	Elaborate structuring and cohesion (special markers, long noun groups, complex sentences types)	Language specificity (clichés, terminology, idioms, abbreviations etc.)
		Layout patterns

RE samples analysis pursued answers to the following questions: Do RE discourse samples demonstrate these characteristics? What are the most typical RE users discourse features? The results showed the following typical variations on the prototypical qualities.

General Qualities of RE Discourse: Positivity, Non-Evaluation, Non-Categorical Stance
The analysis of RE 1-page essay samples showed that 64% of the informants made 3 to 7 negations per sample, so were not fully positive (negative verbal forms or negative adjective or noun prefix counted). The individual peak of negations recorded was 12 per essay. Here is an extract from this essay by Darya:

> People think that zoos help endangered species to survive. But this is **not** true because most rare animals are extremely difficult to breed in captivity. In addition, it is nearly **im**possible to meet the animals' natural needs in zoos. On this basis I can conclude that zoos do **not** seem to help endangered species and keeping animals behind bars only for the sake of our entertainment is **not** quite fair.

These findings echo the opinion of Visson (2015), whose contrastive analysis of English and Russian discourses revealed dissonance between Russian linguistic "negativism" and "pessimism" and American "optimism and positive thinking" (p.31, 33).

Considering the non-evaluative quality of discourse, 71% of the Russian informants mostly imparted evaluative attitudes to their writing. The counts were based on three or more words with an evaluative sememe per sample. Students used the following highly evaluative lexis: *Terrible, disgusting, aggressive, boring, huge, helpful, enjoyable, great, outstanding; victims, suspicion, violence, happiness; efficiently; and destroy*. These findings confirm the comparative cognitive study of Uzlenko about the difference between the Russian and English linguistic mindset. It revealed mostly non-evaluative, tending to be impartial English discourse as opposed to predominantly evaluative Russian one (Узленко, 2002). The fact that the evaluative quality is confirmed on the material of two researches testifies to the fact that there may be cognitive causes underpinning ENL and RE discoursal differences. Native cognitive schema present a great risk for transferring them to international contexts.

The non-categorical stance appeared hard to trace in RE written discourse. Russian students of English do not typically use such markers as *rather, fairly, hardly, likely, possibly, might, some, would, I am afraid, I am sorry but, or regrettably*. Here are some examples:

(1) "I want to ask you to return the money" (a bid for a refund).
(2) "Our holiday was spoilt through the fault of the hotel" (a letter of complaint).
(3) "Go to the Baikal. You will like it!" (A trip report).

Being non-categorical is a fundamental quality and a form of politeness in English communication, that is why ignoring it may lead to pragmatic failure or some unwelcome outcome, such as reluctance to refund the money or to visit Lake Baikal. The RE specifics shown above tend to demonstrate interfering native discourse features.

Qualities of Written RE
RE written samples were checked for such qualities as explicitness, self-engagement, addressee awareness, and style of writing.

Explicitness. Explicitness was marked by broken cause and effect relations, omitted textual conclusion or content required by the context (missing names, dates), unclear allusions, evasive promises without specific dates, exact amounts and other details. An extract from a RE trip report below from the student Svetlana serves as an illustrative example:

> I won`t describe all delights of travel in second-class carriage of the train, I can only say that we were 'very pleased' with the number of the wagon 13. Superstitions and everything. However, we got to Ulan-Ude lucky. We transferred from the railway station to the bus station with a small adventure. Two hours later, we were admiring the expanse of the great lake.

This piece of RE contains reference to one of Russian superstitions, the belief that number 13 spells ill luck. This unwelcome circumstance is marked by "very pleased" in inverted commas and by mention of superstition without any explanation. Writing this report for TripAdvisor, the author overlooked the fact that superstitions are culturally-rooted and may differ globally, which makes her text inexplicit in international contexts. Besides, there is mention of some adventure, which is left behind the scene without any comments. This leaves the reader wondering why it was mentioned at all. In a word, RE reticence may run counter to the English requirement of explicitness. This phenomenon can be explicated by the high context of Russian culture in contrast to lower-context ENL cultures (Hall, 1976). RE writers keep from dotting their i's and crossing t's in order not to seem trivial or to offend readers doubting their intellectual capacity. This feature was noticed by other researchers (Khutyz, 2013, p. 3). Alternately, lower-context Anglo cultures "embed much more meaning in the words that make up their verbal messages" (Hackman & Johnson, 2000, p. 301). Failure to follow this expectation is likely to produce the effect of a pragmatic dissonance and discoursal accent.

Self-engagement. Self-engagement or self-involvement was demonstrated by 68% of the informants in their essays. Only samples with three or more markers like *I, my, as far as I can judge*, *I think,* or *in my opinion* per sample were taken into account. The personal maximum of self-identification instances came up to 22 per essay. In other words, the majority of students were not afraid of being personal and self-involved. This result runs counter to the data of Khoutyz (2013, p. 7) who compared English and Russian English academic articles and discovered that English-writing scholars more often than their Russian counterparts use the first-person singular pronouns. Such strategy is culture-rooted, as ENL users belong to individualistic cultures, and Russians are from a moderately collectivist culture background (Lewis, 2006), where it is in bad taste to point to oneself. The contradictory results may be due to the difference in the genres studied (personal essay vs academic paper). However, it may be a forerunner of a new trend in RE discourse under the influence of communicating globally in English.

Addressee-awareness. Reader awareness was demonstrated by 57% of the informants, which is less than in the case of self-engagement. This quality materialised with such markers as *you, your, we, "It's a well-known fact that", "We shouldn't forget", "It's up to you to",* imperatives *"Be yourself", "Don't be afraid"*, rhetorical questions like *"Why are people fond of books?",* and *"Who wouldn't like to visit Lake Baikal?"* Since the researcher did not set the pre-task of applying these techniques by students, the fact that the majority of them demonstrated these two vernacular English written discourse strategies proves that they are not foreign to Russians and do not need much pedagogical effort.

Style of writing. A widely spread feature of Russian English business messages is the profuse usage of contracted forms, which produces an effect of careless familiarity sooner than expected. What is more, contractions may peacefully coexist in the same message with the formal markers like *"Dear Sir"* and *"Yours faithfully"*. Evidently, stylistic consistency and full-form writing in English seem to pose a problem for Russian users despite the fact that

contracted forms do not exist in written Russian to interfere. It may be the result of intra-communicative interference of social netting.

RE users' written style is characterised by some noticeable punctuation features, which were highlighted in the author's earlier papers (Bondarenko, 2015, p. 99), the most salient characteristic being the abuse of the exclamation mark even in institutional writing. According to the data received, every third informant used it at least once per text.

RE Lexical Markers

The reason for foreign looking text may be lexis as well. The research revealed substitution of descriptive word combinations and paraphrases for special terms and clichés, which is especially ruinous for business communication: "*The place of the event*" (the venue); "*the administrator on duty*" (the duty manager); and "*possibilities to eat*" (wining and dining facilities).

Another cause of the lexical "foreign effect" was connotation blindness of Russian writers. They are often unaware of the negative lexical connotations, for instance:

(1) You must comment on the gala dinner menu attached here.
(2) The problems of inbound tourism will be considered at the conference.
(3) The toilets en route were dirty and not free.

"*Must*" is too imperative and authoritative a verb to use writing to a client. The word *"problem"* has a disapproving connotation in ENL communication. Ignorance of euphemisms ("*facilities", "the gents", "the ladies*") makes RE discourse seem too brusque and lacking courtesy.

Genre-bound RE Discourse Qualities

Structural RE variations. Analysis of RE samples disclosed the following features. First, RE learners tend to avoid in business letters the introductory sentence stating the purpose of the message or gratitude for the previous message of the addressee. They prefer to take the bull by the horns from the very start without performative statements of apologising, or requesting like "I am writing to enquire about":

(1) Dear Sir/Madam,
Yesterday late in the evening I arrived in Spain and checked into the Don Angel Hotel (letter of complaint).

(2) Dear Ms. Lari,
On behalf of the Don Angel Hotel, kindly accept our sincere apologies for not being able to provide you the high standard of hospitality (letter of apology).

Second, RE writers like to preface factual narration with an evaluative emotional statement:
(1) It was a terrific time spent together. We visited four cities: Dresden, Nuremberg, Munich and Stuttgart. We enjoyed the October beer festival.

(2) Two days ago I returned from your Tour ST 104/5. I am so annoyed that I was there! The standards and the organization were awful. I have a number of comments about it.

The above structural features of RE discourse give evidence of some straightforwardness, impulsiveness and a strong emotional dominant, which is, by and large, in accord with the immoderate Russian national character as described in scholarly literature (Евтушенко, 2008, p. 105–106). Structural conventions are significant for successful communication, for "being a social outsider is very much a case of non-conformity to the norms and regularities of discourse structure" (Cook, 1989, p. 23).

RE discourse strategies. RE strategies of **requesting** turned out to be rather direct and less polite than ENL requirements. Below are some eloquent quotations:

> (1) Could you give us details about discounts?
> (2) We are very sorry but we have to ask your company to refund the money paid for the tour.
> (3) We should inform you that we demand a credit note toward the next deal.
> (4) We demand you have a proper attitude to our tourists.
> (5) Send us a check.
> (6) Please deal with this matter urgently, otherwise we will be forced to take the matter further.

The chosen examples are arranged in the order of growing brusqueness from the first politely neutral, through attempted softeners (we are sorry, we should inform you that) to an open warning demonstrating request strategies rather different from normally applied standards. Lewis (2006) testifies to vagueness and understatement of English people as manifestation of non-confrontation (p. 63). On the contrary, Russian strategies of verbal politeness are less elaborate in terms of discoursal means and are reduced to a proper intonation and a special word – "пожалуйста" (please). As evidenced by other researchers, negative transfer may occur when "learning in one context negatively influences one's performance in another context" (Hajian, 2019, p. 103).

RE strategies of **refusal** were also characterised with some straightforwardness without any verbal markers heralding bad news (although, however, whereas, unfortunately): "I was delighted to receive your offer but I will not be able to accept it". In sensitive situations like refusal, RE users do not seem to care about face-saving, and at best exclude the addressee from the motivation of the refusal: "Another candidate's qualifications better meet our requirements" (not yours); "I have accepted an offer from another company" (not yours).

RE samples of **apologising** have demonstrated examples of adopting such a strategy as fault-shifting:

> (1) It was not our fault.
> (2) I was very sorry to hear that the honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Kotov was spoiled through the fault of the Garden Hotel. The hotel did not cope with their duties and the staff in charge will be punished for their mistake. I will personally sort it out.

As can be seen, there is an attempt to keep face without resort to corporate ethics saving the reputation of the company. This is a kind of split-off from traditional Russian collectivism and may be suggestive of starting ethno-psychological changes in the Russian mindset. Besides, RE apologies are marked with verbal preference of the plural *We* to the singular *I*, especially in the opposition of collective responsibility versus personal actions: "*We are sorry for the*

incident"; "Please accept our apologies for…."; "Our agency regrets"; "I can assure you that…"; "I will refund you the full amount".

Such language preferences can be interpreted from the ethno-psychological perspective as readiness of Russian natives to take decisive actions personally and, at the same time, certain reluctance to assume individual responsibility for doing wrong, preferring instead to share it with others concerned.

It is also worth mentioning such a noticeable RE "repair" technique in face-threatening messages as a "thank you" note at the end: "*Thank you for your cooperation*" (after asking for a refund); "*Thank you for your understanding*" (at the end of an apology letter); "*Thank you in advance*" (at the end of a letter of complaint). "*I believe I am entitled to a partial refund. I would be grateful if you could deal with this matter as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing from you. Thanking you in advance. Your faithfully*" (a letter of complaint).

This friendly gesture in an awkward situation makes a negative reply at the other end harder to make. However, this self-defensive strategy may produce pragmatic dissonance felt as weakness by the addressee because ENL cultures, especially North American, value assertiveness, pressure and persistence (Elashmawi, 2001, pp. 36, 38, 48). Such pragmatic dissonance can be explicated by the fact that Englishes are affected by users' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and reflect their specific conventions mirrored in the schemas they use (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p.9).

The cover letter by the student Sergey below illustrates a multi-aspect RE discourse accent:

> Dear Mr. Ferdinand
> Having functioned as front office duty manager at IterContinental Moscow tverskaya for the last several years, I would like to serve as the Front office manager at Holiday Inn Taganskiy.
>
> After almost 2 years working experience on the reception desk I've grown like a staff member and like a person as well. I've learned a lot of leadership skills and now there are about 3 people, who I responsible for.
>
> Notice in my enclosed resume that I have:
> •   Strong Leadership skills
> •   Working involvement in progress and growth
> •   Stress-resistant
> I have a proven great work and amazing results under pressure — and I can't wait until I can help you and your great team! Thank you for your consideration of my attached resume and cover letter. I'll check in with you next week to see when I can fit into your interview calendar.
> Sincerely yours

As it is seen, alongside with some spelling, grammar and lexical mistakes the letter has an unusual structure (no opening sentence with reference to the information source about the vacancy, no paragraphing), non-prototypical rather direct and categorical laudatory comments without factual proof, self-centred, not company-centred. The tone is more presumptuous than respectful (the imperative recommendation to notice, the promise to participate in an interview

before being shortlisted). The emotional exclamatory mark, "thank-you" technique, and contracted forms are also there.

Summary

As a result of this research, ENL discoursal features of relevant written genres were discovered and explored. Written RE repeated characteristic features were uncovered and inferences made about their correspondence to the expected qualities: RE is less positive and explicit but more direct and categorical, lacks addressee awareness and lexical accuracy as compared to ENL discourse. Genre-bound RE discourse is characterised by specific discourse strategies, such as evaluative attitude, emotional preamble before factual narration, and "thank you" courtesy closing phrases in the function of "advance payment" for expected response. The revealed RE discoursal variations can be explicated by the World English variety functioning in a Russian socio-cultural context, local cognition, negative transfer of Russian discoursal practices. These variations combined form a part of Russian learners' specific discourse profile to be considered for reorientation of EFL instruction toward culturally relevant discourse teaching based on comparative discourse strategies analysis. Thus, this research significance is in highlighting the issue of selective approach toward discourse qualities that need special pedagogical effort from EFL instructors and learners and in outlining such qualities for Russian learners of English.

Recommendations

Sensitising Russian students to problem-prone EFL discourse dimensions and making them visible for other learners are a worthy challenge because it makes them zones of focused attention and scaffolding for educators. To this effect, it can be recommended to redistribute time budget in favour of problem areas in order to efficiently approximate prototypical discoursal qualities through focused tasks and exercises, parallelly developing intercultural pragmatic awareness. The exploratory nature and limited scope of this research necessitate more data about RE discourse features from the perspectives of describing RE discoursal variety. It would seem illuminating to carry out comparative discourse genre analyses between ENL and particular Expanding Circle varieties, including RE. Besides, further research is required from educators to develop pragmatic awareness of students and elaborate efficient cross-cultural discoursal customisation.

Conclusion

This research attempted a multi-aspect investigation of RE written institutional discourse and highlighted its features. It confirmed the importance of cross-cultural aspects of foreign language discourse learning and teaching and revealed Russian learners' problem areas in mastering discourse competence. Besides, distinctive ENL discourse features were clarified.

The main RE variables lie in the field of communicative strategies, structure, register, and lexical choices. Inconsistency with the target discourse qualities and written genre patterns may lead to unwelcome pragmatic effects in international contexts because of failure to meet addressee's expectations. It concerns such RE qualities as unavailable or low interactivity, abuse of negation, overdosed evaluation, insufficient nominalisation, familiarity, communicative straightforwardness, etc. Put together and regularly repeated these features account for Russian accent in English written discourse. RE discourse profile can serve as a manifestation of Russian identity in the Expanding Circle and could be taken into account by others as part of intercultural communication courses within EFL paradigm. Thus, the present

research is a small contribution to scarce comprehensive World Englishes discourse studies, particularly, to the under-explored theme of Russian English and may stimulate its further studies as well as investigation of discourse variations in other Englishes.

EFL learners often shape their discourse competence in monocultural contexts preparing for international contacts. That is why, although Expanding Circle learners and teachers of English need discourse models on which to rely, they will also need skills of cross-cultural discoursal reconceptualisation. This fact makes mastering ENL discourse standards only a core basis of EFL discourse competence with necessary further multiple cross-cultural adjustments to follow.

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