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A Comparison of Explicit and Implicit Approaches to EAP Teaching to Postgraduate Students

Original article
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Abstract. The present study aims to explore the role of explicit and implicit approaches in developing pragmatic competence in postgraduate students as part of the Foreign Language course. 32 students were divided into two groups depending on the type of teaching approach for six weeks of instruction. Research proposals written by each group after the interventions were examined with the aim of comparing the employment of pragmatic features such as stance-taking resources and their frequencies. In order to investigate the effects of stance-taking instruction, this study adopted a combination of quantitative and interpretative analysis methods. The results revealed significant differences in the use of stance resources by the postgraduate students exposed to explicit vs implicit instruction. In terms of compliance with the academic writing norms, the explicit instruction was found to be more effective than the implicit one. The analysis found that while the explicit group tended to mitigate their claims and hide authorial presence, the students exposed to the implicit instruction expressed stronger commitments to propositional content and showed writer visibility in the text, which considers to be inappropriate in English-language academic writing. The findings point to important considerations for EAP teaching and future research into academic discourse and contribute to previous studies of the benefits of instruction in the development of pragmatic competence. The results may be employed by curriculum designers to create materials for L2 writers and EAP instructors in their teaching practice.

Keywords: academic writing, explicit teaching, implicit teaching, stance-taking, postgraduate student

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Эксплицитный vs имплицитный подход в преподавании английского языка для академических целей аспирантам

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Аннотация. *Целью настоящей статьи является сопоставительный анализ эксплицитного и имплицитного подходов в развитии прагматической компетенции у аспирантов инженерных специальностей в рамках академической дисциплины «Иностранный язык». Для достижения поставленной цели 32 обучающихся были разделены на две группы, в которых использовались разные подходы (эксплицитный vs имплицитный) к формированию фокусной прагматической компетенции. Проекты исследований, составленные аспирантами после шестинедельного обучения, были изучены с использованием методов количественного и интерпретативного анализа с целью выявления языковых средств выражения авторской позиции и определения частотности их употребления. В результате проведённого анализа были обнаружены существенные различия количественного и качественного характера в использовании данных языковых ресурсов. С точки зрения соблюдения норм письма, принятых в англоязычном академическом сообществе, эксплицитный подход оказался более эффективным, чем имплицитный. Было обнаружено, что аспиранты группы, в которой использовался эксплицитный метод обучения, чаще стремились смягчать категоричность высказываний и скрывать следы авторского присутствия, в то время как тексты участников первой группы отличались большей категоричностью и субъективностью. Полученные данные дополняют предыдущие исследования, посвящённые подходам, используемым при формировании прагматической компетенции в процессе обучения иностранному языку в высшей школе. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы как преподавателями английского языка для академических целей, так и исследователями научного дискурса.*

Ключевые слова: *академическое письмо, эксплицитный подход, имплицитный подход, авторская позиция, аспирант*

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Introduction

In the context of globalization and competitiveness the main task of Russian universities is to improve competitiveness of the country at the global stage by promoting the development of the national economy based on new knowledge. The number of publications and grants won has become a key efficiency indicator for Russian researchers, and publication activity is considered to be an important criterion for Russian universities. This fact motivates both novice and mature researchers to learn academic English and improve the level of English proficiency. For the same reason the Russian universities

have implemented the EAP course into their curricula.

The key role of academic writing in researcher's career has attracted attention of a number of scholars and made them to investigate approaches to help students create coherent academic texts, construct various stances and build effective relations with the target audience. Recent research has demonstrated that the teaching of pragmatics as part of the EAP course is both expedient and desirable [1-8] and enables students to signal communicative intentions effectively and highlight authorial stances. Korotkina, for example, who is considered to be a pioneer in the implementation of EAP into the Russian higher education context, claims that this course aims to develop competencies needed to create academic texts in compliance with the international rhetorical conventions [2]. This process involves a number of tasks: from producing persuasive claims to employing discursive strategies efficiently, from formulating and confirming hypotheses to interacting with readers, from evaluating other's arguments to justifying own ones [9].

To explore the conditions in which instruction is efficient, a number of studies have focused on the comparison of explicit vs implicit teaching approaches. Consistent with this line of research, the present article deals with the effects of explicit and implicit instructions on the use of stancetaking as a rhetorical category in research proposals of novice writers from Russia which seems to be an insufficiently studied area. The importance of stancetaking is becoming recognized in EAP teaching, but until recently was neglected as teachers focused instead on how writers conveyed ideas rather than position themselves and interact with readers. Even currently many EAP teachers ignore the role of stancetaking resources investing teaching energy in explaining grammar rules. However, to meet the requirements of international academia, non-native English writers need to know and use interpersonal strategies for performing various academic tasks, including publishing their research findings and applying for grants effectively. From this perspective the understanding of learners' stancetaking developmental patterns after explicit and implicit interventions seems to be one of the central issues in EAP research.

A number of L2 instruction studies have compared the effects of explicit or implicit types of intervention on grammar, vocabulary or pragmatics choices [1; 10-14], and the larger majority of them have revealed that explicit instruction is more effective than the implicit one and learners profit from being provided with explicit metapragmatic information. Alcon Soler, for example, examined the efficacy of instruction at the pragmatic level aiming to explore to what extent explicit vs implicit instruction affected learners' ability to use request strategies [1]. The study revealed that learners' awareness of requests benefited from both types of instruction. However, the explicit group showed an advantage over the implicit one.

A brief review of the instruction studies has revealed, however, a few gaps in research. First, no studies have explored academic writing skill development in engineering students predominantly involving humanities students in the experiments. Second, relatively few studies have examined stancetaking developmental trends mainly focusing on grammar or vocabulary development [15-17] or on the production of speech acts such as refusals [16] and requests [11]. Third, although implicit and explicit types of instruction on a limited set of stance features such as hedges or self-mentions have been frequently contrasted in the EAP literature [18; 19], this has rarely been done in the context of all stancetaking features as presented by K. Hyland [20]. Fourth, fewer studies on the role of explicit and implicit interventions have presented open-ended results. For instance, while A. Martinez-Flor showed how learners can benefit from this type of instruction [13], Y.J. Fukuya and M.K. Clark's study revealed insignificant effects of implicit instruction on pragmatic competence development [21]. Finally, previous studies have mainly focused on stance markers use in academic writing by non-Russian speak-

ing EAP learners. No studies have involved Russian participants.

The present stancetaking instruction study conducted in the context of a Russian engineering university could complement the existing body of L2 academic writing research, and contribute to the current practice in EAP teaching using explicit or implicit approaches.

Proceeding from previous studies of L2 academic writing [1; 6; 11; 14; 22-24], it was suggested that research proposals (RPs) written by engineering students exposed to explicit instruction will follow the academic writing conventions to a greater extent than those written by students who received implicit instruction. To confirm this assumption, stancetaking seems to be a valuable tool that offers a broad perspective on shaping propositions to create convincing academic texts.

This study aims to find out which stancetaking instruction approach can improve the pragmatic competence of students more significantly. In order to achieve this purpose the study seeks answers to the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What is the frequency of occurrence of stance features in RPs written by the engineering students exposed to different types of instruction?

RQ2: What categories of stancetaking are more frequent in each group?

RQ3: Which type of instruction is more effective in developing students' stancetaking competence in compliance with the academic writing norms?

By answering these questions, this study can give some insights into academic writing for postgraduate students and add to the body of knowledge about stancetaking preferences of novice scholars from the non-Anglophone countries.

Literature review

Explicit vs implicit instruction

Among different foreign language teaching approaches, explicit and implicit interventions have come into prominence but choosing which approach is more effective is a questionable topic for researchers.

Explicit instruction is one of the oldest language teaching approaches. However, it has been maintaining its relevance for years. J.C. Richards and R. Schmidt define it as an approach in which information about a language is given directly by the teacher, which means that learners are taught rules and provided with specific information about a language involving conscious operations as hypothesis formation and testing [25]. S.D. Krashen defines the key goal of this approach by claiming that instructors should explain the topic clearly and learners should find practice chance until the rule is fully understood [26]. It should be noted that the researcher emphasizes the higher efficacy of implicit interventions arguing that assimilation is much more effective than learning. The effectiveness of explicit teaching of grammar is short-term. Grammatical forms and structures mastered in the process of explicit learning might never transform into implicit knowledge that is used automatically or spontaneously at the subconscious level [ibid.].

Describing these two approaches, D. Nunan states that in case of explicit teaching students learn the rules deliberately and teachers provide them with specific information [15]. In the same vein, K. Hyland claims that explicit instruction is generally referred to as rhetorical consciousness raising that "involves tasks which sensitize students to the rhetorical effects and features that tend to recur in particular genres and communities" [27, p. 181]. Along the same line is J.C. Richards and R. Schmidt who argue that implicit instruction is a non-conscious process of learning through which students are not aware of what is being taught and learned at the same time [25]. Teachers should just focus attention on significant parts of a target form because students should be expert in terms of the target form [17].

Comparing the explicit and explicit approaches, K. Glaser argues that while explicit interventions feature metapragmatic rule provision, the implicit ones are characterized by

the ignorance of metapragmatic information [28]. Learners should deduce the rules from examples without consciousness. J.M. Norris and L. Ortega also claim that the difference between these two approaches consists in whether the learners are provided with rule explanations to help them perceive and understand the target features more easily [29]. Implicit instruction does not require overt discussion about the norms associated with pragmatically appropriate behavior, and encourages problem-solving, interaction between students and teachers, and a more communicative classroom [30]. In contrast, explicit instruction, as K. Bardovi-Harlig and B.S. Hartford put it, involves direct explanation of the rules of discourse behavior, helps learners make informed pragmatic choices [5]. After this imparting of rules students do exercises and activities to practice them.

Contrasting implicit and explicit teaching methods in terms of cognitive psychology, I.S. Kostrikina argues that while the first approach is based on general abilities to learn in practice and can be defined as a specific cognitive resource that allows individuals with mean abilities to be successful in different activities, the second one involves the memorization of knowledge obtained and its further verbalization [7]. In the same vein, Ivonina states that in case of applying the explicit approach, knowledge and experience are stored in a verbal form. This type of learning is based on fast and effective methods of perception, but operates with a limited number of objects. Implicit learning covers a wider range of objects and their relations that cannot be verbalized, but experience gained can be used in practical actions [8].

It should be mentioned here that the literature review revealed a larger number of studies reporting benefits of explicit interventions in the development of academic writing skills [9; 28; 30-34]. K. Fordyce, for example, revealed that explicit instruction is more effective in the short-term, and also has a greater long-term effect, although some of the immediate gains from the explicit intervention had been lost five months later [31]. H.V. Dastjerdi, who explored the extent to which explicit and implicit interventions affect learners' ability to use requests in English, found that participants who were exposed to explicit instruction outperformed those in the implicit group [33]. Glaser claimed that explicit approaches are more effective than their implicit counterparts which ignore metalinguistic information [28]. T.T.M. Nguyen et al., who evaluated the efficacy of two types of instruction on the acquisition of the speech act of constructive criticism by 69 Vietnamese English learners, also revealed that the explicit group scored significantly higher than the implicit one [34].

From these two approaches, it can be concluded therefore that explicit instruction is a set of instructional activities used to provide needed supports for successful development of discursive and metadiscursive competencies through clarity of language and reduced cognitive load. Implicit instruction involves teaching activities which ignore rules or forms, encouraging students to recognize linguistic patterns on their own and apply them in practice. It is evident that both of these approaches has its pros. While explicit instruction removes any doubts in language usage, implicit instruction, that puts learners at risk to apply a rule erroneously, may stir up an interest in learning independently and discovering language rules and forms. The present article will show which type of instruction appeared to be more effective in developing students' stancetaking competence.

Stancetaking as a pragmatic category

Previous research has confirmed that stance is a crucial feature of academic writing, and authors make choices on using stance devices to interact with an audience in different academic genres.

The term 'stance' was introduced by D. Biber and E. Finegan, who defined it as the linguistic expression of commitment to the proposition [35]. In his later study, D. Biber referred personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, and assessments to this category [36]. Since then, stance has been interpreted from diverse per-

spectives. B. Gray and D. Biber, for example, described it as the tool used for encoding opinions and assessments [37]. K. Hyland referred stance to the type of evaluation, conceptualizing it as an attitudinal dimension that includes features used by writers to present themselves and convey their judgements and opinions [20]. K. Hyland distinguished between three components of stance: evidentiality, affect, and presence. Evidentiality refers to the writer's expressed commitment to the reliability of the proposition and its potential impact on the reader; affect involves a wide range of attitudes towards what is said; and presence concerns the extent to which the writer projects him/herself into the text. These three components are realized in the four stance features: (1) hedges used to withhold complete commitment to a proposition (e.g., *may, can, to assume, probably*), (2) boosters that help express certainty in what is being said and mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with an audience (e.g., *clearly, to show, must*), (3) attitude markers used to indicate the writer's affective attitude to propositions (e.g., *reliable, interesting, useful*), and (4) self-mentions that manifest the explicitness of an authorial presence (e.g., *I, we, us, me*). Hyland's taxonomy of stance resources was adopted for the current study as the most comprehensive one including a wide range of writer-oriented features. In addition, this taxonomy can help identify pragmatic functions of linguistic markers used to construct stance in RPs written by differently instructed students.

Materials and methods

In order to answer the research questions, a mixed methods research design was adopted. The following section will provide details concerning participants, instruments, procedure, and methods used in the present study.

Participants

The participants of the present study were 76 engineering students who were taking postgraduate course at a Russian university. Only students with a high level of English language proficiency were selected for the purpose of the study. The proficiency level was assessed using the Oxford Quick Placement Test which includes 60 multiple-choice questions and assesses reading skills, vocabulary knowledge and structural competence. The total number of participants who got more than 50 scores was 32. The participants were divided into two groups.

Instruments

Two instruments were employed in the study. The Oxford Quick Placement Test was given to 76 postgraduate engineering students to determine their level of homogeneity in terms of English language proficiency. The second instrument, a research proposal writing task, was given to the students to compare their competence in the employment of stance features after explicit or implicit interventions.

Procedure

The study spanned a period of six weeks. In the first week, the postgraduate students took the placement test. In the next four weeks, the first group received the implicit stancetaking instruction and the second group was exposed to the explicit instruction. The instruction was incorporated into the EAP course. As part of the syllabus requirements, the students are involved in writing activities where they have to write research proposals. The task of writing RPs as an English language exam eligibility criterion has been performed by the postgraduate students of the university under study since 2021. RPs submitted by students at the end of the first year are a concise comprehensive description of their future research including seven rhetorical moves (Background Statement, Gap, Purpose, Means, Report on previous research, Achievements, Significance Claim) which serve a number of communicative purposes such as establishing a territory, establishing and occupying a niche, stating the research purpose, providing background information on the topic, presenting the methodology, describing achievements and excepted results. Structurally and meaningfully, these RPs are similar to RPs written by international students when applying to degree programs or for research funding. In our case, however, the RP is an English language exami-

nation task intended to assess both student's academic English language proficiency and ability to construct a research project in a discipline. Research proposal writing is therefore an important task which can help in assessing the degree of development of both the linguistic and research competences in postgraduate students.

The first group was provided with explanations on how to make their academic writing more interactional by examining sample academic texts (research articles and research proposals). Afterwards, the teacher gave the students a sample research proposal containing stance features from Hyland's model which were underlined. However, the students were not introduced explicitly to Hyland's model and were not taught the terms/definitions of the stance features. Then, they were given another sample research proposal and asked to underline stance resources in the text. In addition, they were asked to fill in gaps with appropriate stance markers which were omitted in the sentences from the sample research proposal.

Also based on Hyland's model of stance features, the second group was provided with a handout including a list of definitions and examples of stance resources. The teacher explained the students how to make their academic writing more interactional by using stance features. Then, the teacher introduced the stance markers from Hyland's model. The students learned the terms and definitions of the stance markers (hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions) explicitly along with examples. This was followed by reading through a sample research proposal and underlining stance features in the text and then discussing the features they identified with the instructor. After having been exposed to the explicit stancetaking instruction the students were given an individual task to fill gaps in the sentences with appropriate stance markers.

In the sixth week the participants from both groups were asked to write a 2000-word English-language research proposal to compare their performance on the use of stance features. 32 RPs written by the postgraduate students were divided into two parts. The number of tokens in each subcorpus was 33,126 and 35,439, which makes 68,565 tokens altogether.

In order to investigate stance markers in RPs written by the students exposed to different types of stancetaking instruction thus achieving the goal of the study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted. Specifically, frequencies were used to determine the dominance of each stancetaking category in each subcorpus. Afterward, contextual analysis was adopted as the qualitative research method to elaborate on the results from the quantitative analysis. This study also employed a comparative qualitative approach as it sought the realization of stance markers in RPs written by the postgraduate students exposed to different types of instruction.

The analysis process went through several steps. Quantitative analysis was applied to all cases of stance markers in the two subcorpora so as to analyze the socio-pragmatic context in which linguistic means are used to identify whether they act as stance markers.

First, stance markers were identified manually in 32 RPs. Second, the markers found in the corpus were manually analyzed in context. Since the sizes of the two sub-corpora were not equal, the raw frequencies of occurrence of stance markers and normalized frequencies of the number of occurrences per 1000 words were determined. The occurrences were processed automatically with AntConc 3.4, an advanced text analysis application which provides details about the text and can ensure the accuracy of research results. Then, an interpretative analysis was carried out to describe the quantitative analysis results.

Results

The stance markers found in the corpus are presented in *table 1*. The table summarizes the raw and normalized frequencies of stancetaking in the two sub-corpora.

Table 1 shows that the raw and normalized frequencies of stance features differ across two groups. A total of 378 stance devices were found

Table 1

Raw and normalized frequencies of stance markers in the corpus

Stance markers	SC1		SC2	
	Raw frequency	Normalized frequency	Raw frequency	Normalized frequency
Hedges	51	1.5	201	5.7
Boosters	145	4.4	128	3.6
Attitude markers	141	4.3	187	5.4
Self-mentions	41	1.2	3	0.02
Total	378	11.4	519	14.72

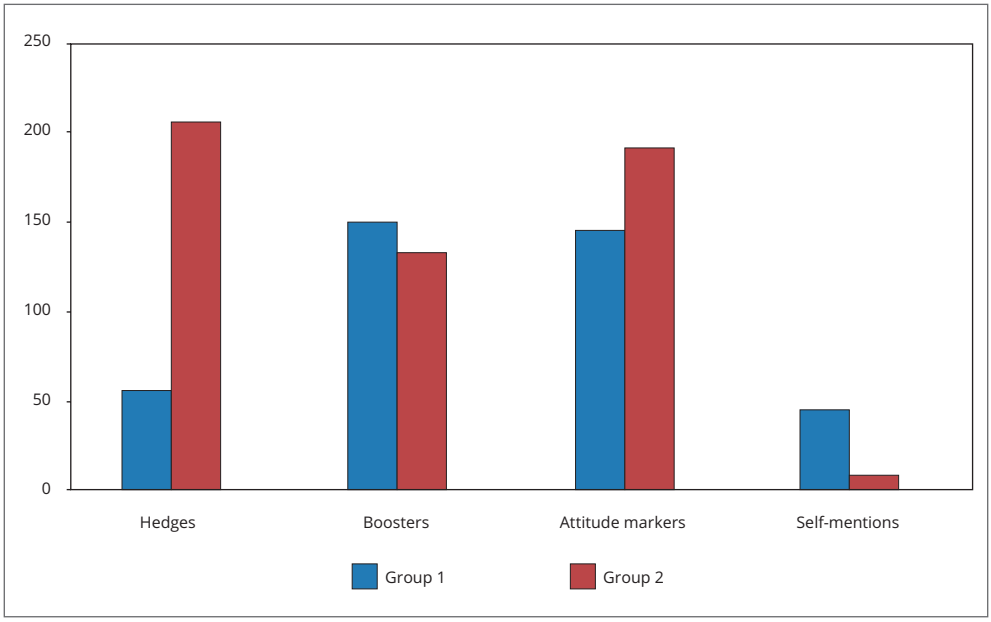

Fig. 1. Stance resources in RPs written by postgraduate students from two groups

in SC1, and 519 in SC2. The raw and normalized frequencies show that in SC2 the number of stance markers was about one and half times more than in SC1. We can assume that the explicit instruction helped EAP learners to be more careful in making claims, anticipating, acknowledging, and challenging, thus following the academic writing norms.

In the explicit group the most frequent stance resources were attitude markers accounting for 5.4 per 1000 words and hedges accounting for 5.7 per 1000 words. In SC1 boosters were used most frequently. The study also revealed that students from the first group employed less hedges and more self-mentions than those in the second one who tended to hedge their claims and hide authorial presence.

The diagram below illustrates quantitative differences in the use of stance resources by postgraduate students from two groups.

Hedges

The sub-corpora exhibited significant differences in the employment of hedges: 5.7 in SC2 and 1.5 in SC1. Even though the implicit group tended to deploy the modal verbs for hedging effectively, they seemed to underuse other lexical items in comparison with their peers exposed to the explicit instruction. The postgraduate students from the second group provided with the stancetaking rules seemed to be more efficient

in producing interpretative utterances and making their claims tentatively, as in the following example:

*This is **usually** achieved by increasing intensity of hardening of the outer side.*

The hedge *usually* is used to protect the writer against inaccuracy of research results by mitigating the intensity of the claim.

In the following example the plausibility hedge is used by the student exposed to the explicit instruction to create a distance from the authorial statement and signal that the claim is based on a plausible assumption rather than a fact:

*In most cases, they **can** be turn out of shape due to the imbalanced distribution of thermal residual stresses.*

*According to the calculation results, the annual volume of coal production in this region **may** reach 121 million tons.*

The modal verbs *can* and *may* emphasize the uncertainty of the authorial position by allowing information to be presented as open to negotiation.

Boosters

The corpus-based analysis revealed that boosting devices were used more frequently by the implicit group who expressed stronger commitments to propositional content and tended to suppress alternative views. In addition, the more frequent use of boosters than hedges by the first group indicates that they tended to occupy a stronger stance and were more keen to highlight the significance of their studies. Here is an example which illustrates the employment of a certainty booster by the implicitly instructed student:

*Results of the study **clearly demonstrated** that the advantage of the technology is its integrated nature involving the use of technological digital twins.*

The compound boosting device consisting of the adverb *clearly* and the cognitive verb *demonstrate* assists the writer in leading readers to the same inferences. The author anticipates possible responses but chooses to prevent them.

In addition to evidential verbs and nouns, students from the implicit group frequently used modal verbs such as *must* and *should* that make claims categorical.

*The issues of technological support **must** be considered in a complex.*

Attitude markers

The distribution of attitude markers was also found to differ among the two groups. However, in both groups they ranked first and were used to express opinions and evaluate findings and research objects. The following instance shows one occurrence of the assessment marker the function of which is to reveal the author's evaluation of the research results as ideational information:

*The technology provides higher precision due to a more **efficient** machining scheme.*

Here attitude is signaled by the adjective *efficient* that conveys a positive evaluation of the new technology. In the following examples the assessment markers create a rhetorical effect which constructs problematic issues worthy of studies:

*The prefrontal cingulate cortex responds to visual stimuli, yet **little** is **known** about if and how visual experience modifies ACC circuits.*

*This technology is **poorly studied** in mechanical engineering studies.*

*The analysis of the probabilistic properties has identified previously **unknown** functional capabilities of this method.*

Self-mentions

Self-mention manifests the explicitness of an authorial presence through the employment of first-person pronouns *I, we, me* and *our* and possessive adjectives *my* and *our*. The distribution of these stance features was also uneven across two groups. The fewer number of instances of self-mention was in SC2. This finding reveals that the explicit group tended to downplay their personal role in the research to highlight the phenomena under study and chose an impersonal style to show that their research findings are unaffected by individuals, thereby strengthening the objectivity of results, which is in line with the academic writing conventions accepted in the engineering community.

The implicit group showed a higher writer visibility. In SC1 41 first-person pronouns were

found. They were used to make a personal standing, signal authorial persona, demarcate authors' research results from those obtained by other researchers, and present authors as original contributors of research. Here are two examples that illustrate the use of the self-mention markers by the students from the first group to intrude into their proposals and indicate their active role in research:

***Our** results demonstrate that simple sensory stimuli can be used to reveal how experience modifies higher-order prefrontal circuits.*

*This allows **us** to explore power systems which simultaneously produce and accumulate energy.*

Discussion

The study aimed to compare the employment of stance markers in English RPs written by postgraduate students exposed to implicit vs explicit instruction has shed some light on how the teaching approach influences the academic writing skill improvement. To achieve the research purpose, 32 students were divided into two groups depending on the stancetaking instruction approach: consciousness-raising activities and explicit metapragmatic explanations vs unconscious activities and pragmalinguistic input enhancement.

RQ 1 guiding this study asked about the frequency of occurrence of stance features in RPs written by each group of students. To answer this question, a quantitative analysis was conducted. It revealed that the raw and normalized frequencies of stance features differed across two groups. In the RPs of the explicit learner group the number of stance markers was one and half times more than in the RPs of the implicit group. The higher frequencies in the explicit group's writing seem to represent more determined attempts to engage with readers and present themselves as competent researchers immersed in the practices of their discipline.

RQ 2 asked which categories of stancetaking are more frequent in each group. The textual analysis showed that while in the explicit group the most frequent stance resources were hedges, in the implicit group boosters were used more frequently. The study also revealed that students from the implicit group employed more self-mentions than those in the explicit one who tended not to announce authorial presence.

RQ 3 asked whether explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction in developing students' pragmatic competence. The analysis revealed that the explicit group demonstrated greater compliance with the academic writing conventions accepted in the international academia. The implicitly instructed students took far less involved positions than their peers exposed to the explicit instruction. The use of explicit instruction made the students more conscious of the need for mitigation and contributed to the development of the ability to express more nuanced stances. The explicit interventions were also effective in decreasing the explicit group students' reliance on self-mention.

There are several possible reasons why explicit interventions appeared to be more effective. First, the higher efficacy of explicit teaching concerning students' gain in appropriate use of stance features might be explained on the basis of Bialystok's model of language processing [38]. The researcher states that explanations of learner performance may be related to two dimensions of language proficiency: the way in which knowledge is represented in the learner's mind, and the processing system learners use to control this knowledge during language production. Based on this theory, I suggest that after the interventions, both groups seem to have mastered the use of stancetaking in academic writing and were aware of the appropriate lexical choices. However, explicit interventions turned out to be more useful at the control stage, taking into account the difficulties experienced by the implicit group with respect to the appropriate choice of stance features. Second, as V.K. Bhatia put it, the explicit approach acts on learners' meaningful rather than unconscious pragmatic skills [39]. The students who had discussed stancetaking conventions processed the input at a deeper level than those who were exposed to the implicit instruction and received only enhanced input without discussing it. As

a result, the explicit group developed a higher level of awareness of the stancetaking rules established in the international academia, since not all input that is noticed by the learner may be comprehended, internalized and integrated into the learner's interlanguage system [40]. What is more, teachers have regularly encouraged students from the explicit group not to be too categorical in their statements, to mitigate their claims which has also had an effect on writing results. Finally, the success of the explicit group can be explained by the fact that all the students involved in the study are Russian adults who are accustomed to the explicit language teaching approach.

Conclusion

The increasing role of English in academic settings has brought some challenges to L2 writers who are forced to publish their research papers or to write grant proposals in English, which requires knowledge of core pragmatic features of academic writing, including stance features. The English for Postgraduate Students program establishes a requirement for postgraduate students to know both the linguistic and metadiscourse features of academic genres as well as follow academic writing and speaking standards.

This study aimed to explore the use of stance markers as metadiscourse features in English RPs written by engineering postgraduate students instructed explicitly or implicitly in order to reveal which teaching approach is more effective in the academic writing skill improvement. The results revealed significant differences in the use of stance resources by the postgraduate students from two groups. In terms of compliance with the academic writing norms, the explicit instruction was found to be more effective. The analysis found that while the explicit group tended to mitigate their claims and hide authorial presence, the students exposed to the implicit instruction expressed stronger commitments to propositional content and showed writer visibility in the text which considers to be inappropriate in English-language academic writing.

To conclude, it is necessary to point out limitations of the study. First, it should be admitted that the research results presented here are limited due to a small number of participants and RPs collected to build the corpus. Due to this limitation, the research results can be interpreted only as trends which may be confirmed or rejected by comparative research based on a larger corpus and involving a larger number of participants. Second, this analysis was limited to written academic discourse. It will be of interest to see if the type of instruction has an effect on the use of stance features in oral presentations of research results. Third, six weeks of instruction were not so adequate to compare the differences between the two approaches in terms of success. The intervention duration should be extended. The implicit approach may turn out to be more effective for students exposed to long-term instructions. Finally, data used for the study was obtained immediately after instruction. It would be useful to collect data several months later after the interventions to compare the long-term and short-term effects.

The findings point to important considerations for teaching both EAP and other academic disciplines and contribute to previous studies of the benefits of instruction in the development of pragmatic and other competences required for future specialists. The findings can be employed by curriculum designers to create materials for learners and instructors in their teaching practice.

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