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Academic Writing in Russia: Evolution or Revolution?

The first time I realized the immense difference between the U.S. and Russia in writing philosophy was in the late 1990s at one of the NATE¹ conferences in Moscow when a young American teacher referred to his writing teaching experience in Russia. His first impression of his students' assignments was as if they had been written by complete idiots. Refusing to believe it, he started to communicate with the students and soon found out – much to his relief – that they were quite intelligent and well-read. It took him some time, however, to realize that the way they wrote was the consequence not of inability, but of total unawareness of what is thought to be the basics of academic writing in his own country. I was not surprised, however, for I had already been well aware of all the causes and consequences of this situation despite my little experience in teaching writing by that time.

It was among the first pioneers of EAP in Russia that I started my teaching career, but my interest in academic writing had always prevailed. Like most Russians, I learned to write all by myself, with no one tutoring me, neither at school, nor at university. I was extremely lucky, however, to develop – although intuitively as well - academic reading and critical thinking skills as a student at the Moscow State University, for most of the academic literature devoted to the epistemology of structural linguistics that I studied in the mid-1970s was in English. It was a great challenge to grasp the ideas of great linguists in their native tongue, but the experience was invaluable as it gave me the first tacit knowledge of a well-structured academic text. This knowledge helped me face the 'clash of cultures' when I became a translator in science and technology, and later an assistant editor of a Russian academic journal. Both jobs proved to be an incessant fight with Russian authors and authorities, but I left the battlefield unvanquished because the job of an EAP teacher that I suddenly turned to eventually made my knowledge explicit. However, another dozen years had to pass before the idea of academic writing started to be discussed in this country, and I could speak out.

¹The Russian National Association of Teachers of English, <http://www.eltrussia.ru/>

This is a working paper, in which I am giving a personal, first-hand account of the recent changes in the attitude towards academic writing in Russia and describing our first steps on the way of introducing it and the impediments (both cultural and methodological) that we encounter. The idea of the paper emerged from two schools conducted by US experts in 2013; therefore, my aim here is to give an immediate insider's view, rather than conduct objective analysis of the situation nation-wide. I also focus on the American experience without any systematic reference to European approaches to writing. Such research will take time and is still at its initial stage. However, I believe that presenting this account to colleagues via SSRN can, on the one hand, enhance colleagues in Eastern Europe and Asia to compare their experiences and probably unite their efforts, and on the other hand, inform those colleagues in Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries who are considering spreading their knowledge in Russia about the potential drawbacks – but also advantages – of such professional communication. One thing which is certain in today's Russia is that academic writing is rapidly gaining a momentum, and we need consolidation with international colleagues to conduct systematic research.

I also have to admit that in the process of writing this paper, I encountered some terminological problems. Therefore, I start the paper with a reference to the problematic terms.

TRAPS AND GAPS IN TERMINOLOGY

Before getting to the crux of the matter, I have to refer to at least four notions which might cause significant misunderstandings or misinterpretations in communication between Russian and Western educators and teachers.

Composition. The term 'composition' is traditionally translated into Russian as 'сочинение' and understood consequentially as the particular type of written assignment given by teachers of literature in secondary school. The assignment is a paper on a given topic, usually concerning a book from the list of obligatory literary texts studied in class (e.g. Tolstoy's *War and Peace*). Students are supposed to demonstrate the knowledge of the text and the way it is interpreted in the manual and by the teacher. If a 'composition' is written in class, students are forbidden to use the text and have to adduce quotations by heart, as well as the critics' quotations from the manual. The paper is assessed on grammar, punctuation and describing the topic as required. The paper is considered excellent if the student uses elaborate language, quotes the prescribed critics beyond the manual, and expresses the

prescribed ideas passionately, as if they were their own. No idea of focus, organization or word limit is involved, and no particular criteria except the number of mistakes and the teacher's general opinion are applied to assessment. Composition topics in the Soviet era focused on ideology or psychology, the latter pertaining today with hardly any alterations. If a Russian adult is asked how good he or she is at composition, they start thinking back to their school years and teachers of Russian and literature.

It was only in 2013 that my colleagues and I first heard the term 'composition' in its U.S. meaning due to the two events described further in this paper. The only term of which we had been aware before was 'academic writing'.

Academic writing. The Russian term 'академический' ('academic') has always been used in reference to the highest scientific or philosophic level of study, or the Academy of Sciences. It was never applied to universities or secondary schools until the 1990s, when it started to be rather carelessly adopted into educational discourse due to the spread of international contacts. The term 'academic writing' was used by EFL teachers either in English or informally in Russian. To be able to discuss the issues openly with Russian educators, I had to write a dissertation (Короткина) in which the term was introduced and defined. Even so, I was forbidden to mention academic writing in the title – even in inverted commas. It did appear in inverted commas two years later in the title of the introduction to the first discussion on academic writing in press (“‘Academic Writing’”), initiated by the scientific journal *Higher Education in Russia (Vyssheye Obrazovaniye v Rossii)*. It was indeed a revolutionary step, for it caused a passionate discussion that is still in progress today. However, not to puzzle the readers by the new term (for few were aware of my dissertation and the corresponding articles), the introducers used it interchangeably with a variety of other terms, some of which were equally informal, but more familiar to the readers, such as 'academic work', 'scientific work', 'academic culture', 'teaching science', 'scientific text', etc.

I suppose it was this carelessness in terminology that encouraged teachers from all over Russia to contribute to the discussion, which after a while was made a rubric titled 'Academic writing and research competences'². Despite the lack of essential terminology, the problem was approached in many different ways by many different teachers in different universities. A typical example was a biologist with PhD in history of science teaching a course of academic writing to sociology students (Kouprianov). Other courses include

² www.vovr.ru/clubitr.html

‘methodology of a scientific text’, ‘discourse analysis of a text’, ‘methodology of science’, etc., but each time the proportion of writing (which is usually insignificant in comparison with reading) depends on a particular course designer. Such courses are primarily designed to help students cope with scientific (academic) texts, for they had no academic reading or critical thinking at school. The titles are invented to match the existing curricula standards. Consequentially, as the term ‘academic writing’ does not exist in principle, heads of programs sometimes manage to include it informally by taking the hours of other disciplines. My 32-hour course for the third year students in management, for example, was named ‘Marketing (Academic Writing)’. It had nothing to do with marketing, of course. Thus, allowing authors to use whichever terminology they found appropriate seems to be the only way for the journal to enhance everyone concerned to freely express diverse experiences, practices, and ideas about writing.

Very soon, however, voices were heard calling for order. For example, Professor Alevtina Robotova, expert in Russian, argued against the simplification of the term ‘academic’, which should be understood as ‘corresponding to the best models’ (50). Accordingly, the term ‘academic writing’ could be applied only to monographs or other scientific publications (48). She did not object to using the term, but recommended that the authors should define it properly. Joining the discussion, I contributed to it with some what-is-what’s (Korotkina “Academic Writing”), but agreed that any new term should be explicit and understood similarly. Due to the published debates, the idea behind the term ‘academic writing’ is starting to shape. It is not yet as clear as ‘academic writing’ or ‘composition’ in their American understanding because of the lack of knowledge of methodology, but at least it can be used in communication both nationally and internationally.

Writing instructor/tutor/teacher. Apart from those ‘happy few’ who luckily fell into the hands of outlaws like me, any Russian if asked, ‘Who taught you writing?’ or ‘Who was your writing instructor?’, will most probably think as far back as primary school. People of my age would remember drawing hooks, sticks, and other calligraphic elements, whereas younger adults will remember striving to fit at least three clumsy words into one line. Some might think of secondary school teachers of Russian with endless filling-in the appropriate endings, suffixes, vowels, commas, etc. into given sentences or items. There was nothing more to it. Still others might remember writing ‘compositions’ on literature (as described above). If a teacher of Russian and literature is asked how she teaches writing, she will most probably refer to either the rules of morphology and punctuation (which hardly any Russian

can manage in life), or developing students' 'culture': 'general culture', 'culture of speech', 'reading culture', 'cultural person', 'cultural members of society', etc.

Culture. Being broadly used in both languages, the word 'culture' seems to be especially admired in Russia. However, if historians, sociologists, or anthropologists have their own international definitions, educators and philologists use it so widely that the meaning gets completely ambiguous, substituting the notions of 'civilization', 'literacy', 'knowledge', 'skills', and even 'science' and 'technology'. For example, an examiner at a PhD exam wondered why in discussing academic writing I was using the term 'academic literacy', whereas she thought 'culture' a much better term. I referred to the definitions of both, eliciting the difference, but my opponent would not agree, arguing that there could be no definition of culture because it meant 'everything'. 'Even nuclear physics?' I retorted in the hope of ringing the bells around the bomb, but her reply was, 'Sure, as well as chemistry, astronomy and whatsoever'.

It is important to note here that the only course which could be considered the closest (though very roughly) to academic writing in the official Russian curricula is named 'The Culture of Speech'. It is taught in humanities and is supported by a variety of manuals. However, all of these focus mainly on literary texts and language details (lexis, prepositions, collocations, style, register, etc.). The only students who seem to manage it full-scale are future editors, literary critics, and journalists. There are also courses named 'culture of scientific speech', taught by few, among whom Professor Natalia Kolesnikova from the Novosibirsk State Technical University appears to be the loudest advocate of real academic writing. Her manual *From Notes to Dissertation* (Колесникова) is a real bestseller and the only one that I had managed to find on writing in Russia.

To avoid misinterpretations in this article, I will use the term 'composition' referring to the U.S., and 'academic writing' or 'writing' referring to Russia. As the word 'culture' cannot be avoided, I will sometimes use it in inverted commas not to confuse the more general notion with the one used by U.S. authors in discussing, for example, writing tutors as 'cultural informants' (Myers 55).

THE URGE FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

In English-speaking countries, academic writing has been taught for such a long time and from such an early age that some U.S. authors started to regard clear writing and effective argumentation as part of their culture (Staben and Nordhaus; Myers; Leki). In

Russia, on the contrary, academic writing has never been taught. It is true that unless students are taught to express their ideas in a proper way, they will find it difficult to write research papers, or academic or professional texts. It is not true, however, that Russian academics consider ambiguity and deficiency of argument as part of their culture. They strive to present clear texts, and after years of personal unaided practice many of them succeed. This sad tradition is the mere consequence of the Soviet days; academic writing did not interest educators because students were forbidden to express their own views, and most technological advances were regarded as secret information to be kept within a narrow community of specialists and not to be published abroad. Obviously, the Soviet educational policy should not be confused with the Russian academic culture – or today's educational policies.

The fall of the 'iron curtain' triggered the integration process, which resulted in the emergence of joint educational and research projects and the spread of authentic English teaching materials. After decades of isolation, the main demand for EFL materials focused on the lower levels of language learning, and it was only in the mid-1990s that academic writing first appeared in Russia (mostly along with American fellows). However, even today academic writing in English is rarely taught as a specialized course aimed at developing students' writing skills for their academic or professional career. It is generally viewed as part of exam preparation (IELTS or TOEFL) and consequently limited by the test requirements. More extensive courses of writing can be found in joint programs, but they are usually taught by British or American professors, or Russian teachers who work in the same departments (for example, the International College of Economics and Finance at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE)³, or the New Economic School (NES)⁴, Moscow).

In other universities, even the HSE in general, Russian teachers of English are reluctant to teach writing because it is time-consuming and complicated, because it is completely new to them, and because teacher training courses on writing are still hardly available. Moreover, ESL (ESP) teachers in non-linguistic universities are typically disregarded as researchers, discriminated financially, and looked down on by disciplinary professors. The literally shocking details of the situation across Russia were presented in the

³<http://icef.hse.ru/en/>

⁴<http://www.nes.ru/en/>

report of the baseline study carried out by the British Council and the Russian Ministry of Education (Winetroube and Kuznetsova). A decade later, a second baseline study (Froumina and West) showed that the situation changed insignificantly. Unfortunately (although consequentially), both surveys pay little attention to writing. Nevertheless, despite all the impediments and limitations, the future of English academic writing in Russia is quite predictable: the process is slow, but irreversible due to the growing demand from students and the availability of materials and professional development programs.

The demand for the internationalization of the Russian education, science and technology raised several issues, among which the need to publish research results in international reviewed journals seems to be now of paramount concern. Other issues include teaching English with the focus on writing, improving the quality of research, and, quite logically, improving the quality of publications at home. These issues are interdependent and interrelated, which makes their solutions arguable.

A good example of an apparently successful solution can be the policy recently introduced by the HSE, one of the most rapidly developing Russian universities. To encourage international publications, they enhance qualitative research, and provide substantial financial support for those who have published abroad (Окна), and academic writing support for those who have not. The Academic Writing Center (AWC), established in 2011, provides seminars on academic writing in English, lectures and seminars by Western professors and publishers, and proof-reading sessions by English-speaking colleagues. The AWC has also created a well-organized and informative web site with videos and podcasts⁵. Within two years, the HSE managed to increase the number of their international publications quoted in the Web of Science and Scopus from 88 in 2010 to 295 in 2012 (Bakin 112). As I also give seminars at the AWC, I can note the motivation and interest on behalf of the professors, researchers, and PhD students who attend them.

However effective, and even efficacious, the policy could be for the HSE, I would not be too optimistic about other universities. On the one hand, few professors and scientists in Russia have a good command of English. The policy of attracting them to one particular university does not increase their total number. On the other hand, brief seminars cannot be effective for those whose English is below upper-intermediate level, though they are the majority. According to the national survey conducted in 2008 (“Знание иностранных языков”), only one third of respondents with higher education claimed the general

⁵http://academics.hse.ru/writing_skills

knowledge of a foreign language. The lack in foreign language competence among both students and teachers is also admitted by the Ministry of Education and Science (Higher Education 11). As academic writing is only possible at the advanced level, the number of English-writing Russian specialists might be considered virtually insignificant. Therefore, the HSE experience can hardly be useful for other Russian universities, although the policy of stimulating qualitative research and introducing projects to support young researchers and professors provides a realistic and feasible model.

International academic publications could be enhanced by translation, but that is the point at which the problem of academic writing in Russia becomes especially poignant. It is not because the translation of academic texts is too complicated or expensive that Russian articles rarely appear in international journals, but because the original texts lack academic literacy and ‘cultural’ appropriateness. Whichever institutional or financial reforms the government would foster in higher education, demanding from universities to radically change the quality of education (Higher Education 13), Russian specialists and professors will not overcome the problem until they are taught how to write (and many of them how to teach writing, too).

Thus, the problem of writing in Russia appears holistic, involving educational, administrative, and methodological issues, which could not be solved by separate actors and need consolidation. Moreover, it has to be defined and analyzed.

THE URGE FOR CONSOLIDATION

Academic writing has only recently started to gain interest among Russian academics. Since 2011, there have been at least four roundtables on academic writing held in Moscow. Two were held at the HSE and the Russian State University of Humanities in spring 2011. Boris Stepanov and Arkady Perlov, who initiated them respectively, started the mentioned above discussion in the journal *Higher Education in Russia*, which involved more authors than had been expected. In the fall of the same year I led another roundtable at the HSE devoted to academic literacy and writing. Unlike the first two, this roundtable gathered teachers of EAP and Russian, and not only disciplinary professors. Interestingly, among those present was Olga Aksakalova, U.S. professor and director of Merrill Lynch Writing and Communication Center (WCC), NES, who later invited me to participate in their seminars on composition and writing center pedagogy. I considered the roundtable a failure because I failed to persuade other speakers to speak, and because I failed to keep the audience, who gained the opportunity to speak instead, from deviating from the key issues. I found it very

comforting, therefore, to hear from Olga nearly two years later that she felt the same frustration as I did when she realized that the audience was incapable of concentrating on the ideas I was trying to deliver.

It took me a year to recover before I felt confident enough to make another attempt. One of the encouraging factors was the ongoing discussion in the *Higher Education in Russia*, and the other my close contacts with the AWC, HSE. The situation with writing was starting to change, and it was high time we consolidated actions around it. In February, 2013, the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSSES) and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) in cooperation with the HSE were holding the annual conference *Trends in Educational Development*, in which I organized a roundtable ‘Literacy matters: preparing cadre for the 21st century’ and invited speakers from different universities. Surprisingly, this time there were so many of them willing to speak that despite having twice the time I had initially planned, we hardly managed to listen to every speaker, and those who were late to register as speakers stayed among the audience, which caused vivid discussions. It was clear now that we were on the way to real consolidation. I was especially happy to meet Boris Stepanov, HSE, and Professor Tatyana Venedictova, Moscow State University (MSU). The articles written by the key speakers contributed to the discussion in the journal *Higher Education in Russia*.

Everyone seems to agree now that the matter has become too urgent; even the attitude to writing on behalf of university authorities is definitely changing. Yet the gap between intentions and their realization appears horizonless. To cover it, we have to start with creating the appropriate foundations both in theory and practice; otherwise, it will hardly be possible to consolidate actions, develop programs, train specialists, and, consequently, establish writing centers and introduce academic writing into university and desirably secondary school curricula. Even the most innovatively thinking and open-minded educational authorities will be reluctant to finance an enterprise the basis of which is not clearly and convincingly stated. Teaching writing is practical, but it can only be successful when supported by effective theory, pedagogy, and methodology.

IN SEARCH OF THEORY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE U.S.

Theoretical foundations of academic writing (or composition) have been thoroughly developed in Western studies. They have been adapted to multiple educational contexts and fostered the development of academic writing methodology and writing center pedagogy. This profound knowledge and experience would be of great value in developing similar

practices in Russia, and should be promoted and disseminated – provided they are understood properly.

The year of 2013 brought this idea to life, starting with a series of events, provided by international colleagues. The most effective among these events were two clusters of seminars delivered by U.S. professors that produced an effect of discovery on the Russian participants. The first was a series of eleven seminars on composition and writing center pedagogy given at the WCC, NES by Olga Aksakalova, director, and Kara Bollinger, a young compositionist; the other was the 16th Fulbright Summer School “Academic Writing: Perspectives from Russia and the U.S.”, held at the MSU just after the seminars at NES. As I had an opportunity to attend both, I can give a brief first-hand account of their effect on participants.

First of all, it was not an easy task for Olga and Kara to find a dozen Moscow EAP teachers motivated to join seminars on writing pedagogy. Even so, few of us were teachers of academic writing, whereas others joined the seminars just to learn about it and decide on teaching – or not teaching it – in the future. Being EFL teachers, we expected practical guidelines, probably supported by some methodological advice and hopefully assessment techniques. Starting with theory and history of composition and rhetoric came as a surprise. Some considered it unnecessary and left; others thought it generally interesting, or just waited patiently for practice. I dare say, I was the only one who was totally engaged and asked for more.

The input was immense. What amazed me first was how the development of approaches to writing is regarded in the U.S. Even as I looked through the materials of the starting session at NES, such as *Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* (“The Bedford Bibliography”) and Steven Lynn’s *Rhetoric and Composition* (Lynn), I wondered why it had not occurred to me to regard writing in connection with rhetoric while working on my dissertation on academic writing in 2008-2009. This connection was so obvious and inherent to writing that now my research seemed insufficient and lacking evidence, which made me sorry about having been unaware of the term ‘composition’ five years earlier.

The second discovery was writing center pedagogy. In fact, what we had been aware of concerning writing in the U.S. was course books for EFL students, such as the world-famous manual by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (Oshima and Hogue), and irregular pieces of information obtained from American fellows during international EFL conferences in Russia. The clear and systematic outlook on the 30 years of history of writing centers, their goals, position and role in universities, given by our tutors and supported by readings, such as

The Writing Center Director's Resource Book (Murphy & Stay), gave me the idea of the role they play in the U.S. higher education. Materials on methodology, as Steven North's article advocating working 'to produce better writers, not better writings' (North 50) along with live examples and our own role play in class made me feel the advantages of the hands-off approach described by U.S. authors (Brooks; Corbett). Finally, the heated discussions around ESL students' problems (Myers; Linville; Staben and Nordhaus; Leki) gave us a good idea of the problems faced by U.S. writing tutors today.

The seminars were indubitably a challenge for the leaders. Overcoming misunderstandings was hard, but it led to mutual benefit. I believe, the main outcome for both sides was discovering the state of art with writing in the others' country, and realizing the shocking gap between them. We had neither common terms to name notions, nor common notions to apply the terms to. However surprising it might sound in today's world, we rediscovered America. Fortunately for three of us, we had an opportunity to immediately proceed with the exploration by participating in the Fulbright Summer School.

EXPLORING COMPOSITION IN-DEPTH

The School sessions were led by three experienced professors from the U.S. ("XVI Fulbright"). Both our NES tutors were among the participants, observing how they understand or misunderstand, interpret or misinterpret the new information. I also observed the communication with deep interest, though most my attention was on the subject matter.

The School enabled us to apply the newly obtained knowledge to a wider learning context. Discussing one of the sessions with Olga Aksakalova, I was surprised by her being sure that we were learning the same things a second time. In fact, I kept wondering if those who had not been prepared by similar previous experience, were capable of understanding properly what was going on, for there is a huge gap between learning and doing, or hearing about methodology and applying it. I had a wonderful chance to check it.

In the beginning of the School we were asked to hand in any papers we had written with a view to being consulted by Professor Ronald Schleifer, one of the leaders. I considered it a good opportunity to challenge the borders of what I thought was relevant for an international publication, and in two nights wrote the first four-page draft of the paper you are reading. I was especially curious about how different the reactions of Russian colleagues would be from those of the U.S. professors. In fact, they proved diverse. A MSU professor, though appreciating the content, called me 'militant'; a colleague from Central Russia accused me of traducing the image of Russian education; even my friend, an expert in

academic writing from the HSE and one of the three of us who had attended the NES seminars, said she would have never accepted such a paper from a student. Much to my satisfaction, American colleagues appreciated the paper and did not find anything intolerant or offensive in it. On the contrary, they found the draft worth developing for publication (what I eventually did).

This diversity in comprehension made the ‘cultural’ differences between us acutely visible. However open-minded Russians might seem today, they are still cautious about referring to their own experiences, or proving their own position in writing. The very pronoun ‘I’ is considered unacceptable. Paradoxically, this shadow of fear before established authorities is in fact ephemeral; their comprehension of *what* is written is merely impeded by *how* because writing is still traditionally valued for words rather than meaning – at least, in humanities (and most participants were philologists). Hiding one’s own ideas (if any) behind authoritative quotations instead of proving them with the appropriately selected evidence is commonly accepted. Because of that, ‘academic’ publications by young researchers are hardly ever read, for they are understood to be written with the only purpose to add to the researcher’s portfolio. At the same time, wordy, unstructured papers by authoritative writers are often considered academic because they are written in an elaborated or complicated language, whereas brief and clear ones are supposed to lack thought.

This ‘cultural’ feature of Russian writing is difficult to overcome. I believe that it can only come to an end when we manage to bring up a whole new generation of academic writers with international understanding of composition. For this, we need to promote writing across Russia, involving disciplinary professors, editors, teachers of English and Russian, educators and administrators, and create writing centers and associations of teachers of writing (or even composition if we manage to think of an appropriate Russian term).

PONDERING ON A WRITING CENTER

The U.S. idea of a university writing center is hardly achievable in Russia today, although it is only a matter of time. Such centers will certainly be needed when Russian students cease to be producing the effect of ‘complete idiots’, which will happen when writing is introduced into every classroom in the form of appropriately created tasks, just as John Bean presents it in his book (Bean). Another essential trend should be developing writing in secondary education, where the situation is the gravest. We should therefore start with units that will function like hybrids of writing centers, WAC departments and professional development programs.

To meet these diverse needs, we need to think in terms of an umbrella center of writing and writing methodology, which should be open to all, and function as an independent, interdisciplinary, and even inter-institutional unit. I have to admit that the idea of an independent writing center should be credited to Zhenya Bakin, head of the AWC, HSE, although he expressed it informally in a private conversation. Complete independence of a writing center is certainly a utopia, but close collaboration between university centers is quite plausible. Who can and should be independent is a professional unit, an association similar to the U.S. CCCC which would provide conferences for teachers of writing and promote their interests. This idea was verbalized during the final session of the Fulbright Summer School by Professor Tatyana Venediktova, MSU, and supported by all the participants, so I hope it will not remain unrealized for too long.

Even before meeting the U.S. colleagues, I had worked on developing a concept of a writing center which would be different from both AWC, HSE, and WCC, NES. I initially proposed it as a methodological center of academic writing for the RANEPa and then published it as a concept feasible for other Russian universities. According to the concept (Korotkina "From Linguistic Center"), an academic writing center should

- provide theory and methodology for designing academic writing courses in Russian;
- offer flexible academic writing programs for faculty members and researchers in both English and Russian;
- promote collaboration and communication among disciplinary professors and teachers of writing to influence change in curricula development;
- interact with other university writing centers in organizing and conducting seminars, roundtables and conferences aimed at disseminating methodology of writing and related competences;
- foster the development of teacher training and professional development programs for teachers of academic writing in both English and Russian. (124).

Today, pondering on all the knowledge obtained in the two events, I would not change any of these principles. They were appreciated by my colleagues from different universities, and even as I was writing this article, I received a message from Professor Natalia Kolesnikova from Novosibirsk, who wrote to express her approval, share concern about promoting writing in Russia and discuss further collaboration.

The idea of WAC-type collaboration is definitely gaining a momentum. Although 'writing across the curriculum', 'language across the curriculum' and other similar terms do

not yet exist in the Russian educational discourse, the idea is already in the air. During the autumn of 2013, I was asked for advice and assistance by several different officials. Evgeny Mironov, dean of the RANEPa Liberal Arts program and speaker at the 2013 roundtable on academic literacy, proposed to have seminars on writing for the teaching staff. His special concern was about students' papers being assessed differently by different teachers, precisely as described by Bean (255; ch. 15). Dmitry Dozhdev, dean of the MSSES faculty of law, proposed collaboration in designing an external course of legal writing in English for Russian legal scientists. Professor Irina Grishina from the StPetersburg Academy of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education (where I defended my dissertation) asked for seminars on writing for secondary school principals, methodologists, and teachers. Tatyana Intigrinova, head of the Center of Applied Research, NES, invited me to give regional seminars aimed at helping professors and researchers with international publications. Last but not least, Mikhail Sapunov, editor-in-chief of the journal *Higher Education in Russia*, proposed collaboration in promoting writing and research skills in doctoral programs across Russia with a view to changing the requirements to dissertations.

The description of the state of affairs with academic writing in Russia will not be complete without mentioning secondary education. The positive trends towards internationalization and equality in education have resulted in introducing unified exams, in which both Russian and English tests now include essay sections. However, as school teachers lack experience in teaching academic writing, preparation for both these sections is limited to applying clichés instead of expressing students' own ideas. For example, Olga Rozenblum (Rozenblum) claims that students are incapable of solving the tasks in the unified Russian exam because there are no courses preparing them to think critically and write academically. Preparation for the English exam is even more procrustean. My first year students at the RANEPa Liberal Arts program showed me the clichés they were given in schools. Amazingly, they had to write dozens of similar papers starting with the same phrase: "Nowadays, more and more people..." and following step by step in the likewise prescribed manner. A student from Georgia, who studies in the same group, admitted having been given precisely the same instructions in her country. It was then that I realized why the thirteen happy young faces had turned gloomy when I announced that I was going to teach them academic writing. Definitely, the designers of the unified exams meant to recommend rather than prescribe, but with no appropriate practice and methodology, teachers were doomed to slip into the familiar trap of 'filling-in-the-gaps'.

It is hard to reform higher education, but to reform secondary education in Russia with its territorial, social, and ethnic problems is much harder. Establishing new exam standards is not a panacea, and there are definitely similar problems in the whole educational system, and they need similar approaches and solutions. The example with Georgia shows that similar problems are faced by teachers in all post-Soviet states and probably Eastern Europe. I believe that focusing on writing – and therefore critical thinking – we can make the reform work.

CONCLUSION

The account I have given is certainly personal. It might therefore lack objectivity, or awareness of some other events or experiences. If so, the reader can refer to other authors. Pluralistic ideas expressed by Russian teachers and educators, as well as by our colleagues from abroad, will help us get a clearer picture of where we are and in which direction we ought to move. There are still too many in-home and international misunderstandings and closed-shop ideologies that have to be overcome before we reach the level of quality education that Russia has long deserved. We are on our way, and our colleagues from the U.S., Britain, Australia, and other countries with long experience in academic writing – or composition – could provide assistance and share experience.

The Fulbright Summer School in Moscow showed convincingly that our interests meet. The three U.S. leaders were definitely positive about the outcomes. I especially appreciated the opinion expressed by Professor Ronald Schleifer, University of Oklahoma:

In engaging contemporary Russian scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, I have discovered that there is much that Russian teachers and scholars can learn from our American experience while at the same time there is much we can learn from the sense of widening scholarship and pedagogy that is taking place in Russia today. Writing cross-culturally enriches the work and the horizons of what is possible for both Russians and Americans.
 (“XVI Fulbright”).

The changes we expect to introduce into the Russian education are indeed revolutionary. Revolutions, however, may be painful and destructive. They might be effective in politics and economics, taking just a few years to reform production and employment, but in education, dozens of years may not be enough. Russia is not the only country that is striving for change. The shift in educational paradigms is global, and if moving from the ‘school of thought’ towards the ‘school of possibilities’ is difficult in the West, how can we

expect moving from the 'school of ideology' in the same direction being easier? I would argue, however, that as rapid changes in politics are possible when other countries' long experiences are properly analyzed, rapid changes in writing traditions and teaching writing seem equally possible. Therefore, we need to start with profound analysis of theory, practice and methodology developed by others, consider priorities, contexts, resources and constraints, agree upon the course of action, and then meticulously implement it. Then the revolution will turn into rapid evolution, which is more promising and less shocking.

I consider establishing university writing centers a feasible first step to such evolution. They should certainly be flexible in form and content to meet the needs of particular universities. On the other hand, they should develop in close communication with each other and share good practices. The national association would help establish closer and more regular contacts with writing centers and WAC departments in Western universities. It is essential that these contacts should involve writing center directors, whose advice would be invaluable in building relationships with university authorities.

The cultural differences in writing between Russia and the West are not as significant as some philologists might think. Academic writing strategies are easily – and willingly – accepted by Russian students and adult specialists. Once they have grasped the idea, no 'culture' or 'writing traditions' matter anymore. Writing becomes easy because now it makes sense, enhancing international communication for authors of any cultural background. I would conclude that writing tutors are not 'cultural', but rather 'civilizational informants'. We may well preserve our cultures back home, studying ancient lore, celebrating old festivals, or reading fairy tales to children. But we need our children to be brought up as 21st century citizens of the world capable of writing and speaking explicitly to the whole world. If it ought to be named 'global culture', I would not object, for what's in a name?

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