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Raising Teaching Efficiency: Teaching Translation of Business Correspondence to Economics Students

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Abstract

The development of written translation competency in economics students is a topical problem in foreign language teaching. The object of the study is the method of teaching written translation to economics students. The subject of the research is testing the efficiency of the method for teaching written translation of business correspondence to economics students in the framework of English as a foreign language. The goal of the study is to develop a model for teaching written translation of business correspondence and to substantiate its use in the training of economics students. The authors propose and experimentally test a method of teaching the translation of English-language business correspondence. The research methodology involved a pedagogical experiment conducted in several stages with four experimental groups (120 students). The experiment included the selection of suitable educational materials, the development of a set of exercises, and criteria for evaluating WTBC skill formation. The efficiency of two teaching variants, Variant A and Variant B, was compared. The results obtained evidence that the use of appropriately selected educational material and a set of exercises developed on its basis ensure the high quality of the written translation of business correspondence by students. Furthermore, the variant of performing special exercises to improve translation skills in all types of business correspondence at the end of each learning cycle improves learning outcomes.

Keywords: English, economics students, written translation, business correspondence, original text, translation text.

1. Introduction

Business correspondence (BC) plays a fundamental role in intercultural communication between business partners (Demina, 2012) as it is used to establish commercial relations, negotiate

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contract terms, and discuss ways of fulfilling them (Skripak et al., 2022). This creates a social demand for the training of professionals who are able to translate BC in written form and assume responsibility for the quality of their work and the success of intercultural business communication. The goals of improving educational programs and materials and raising the quality of teaching are directly influenced by the social demand for written translation of business communication (WTBC) skills. This highlights the importance of WTBC in the professional lives of students – future economists and the significant role that the ability to translate various forms of BC plays in intercultural communication (Eskerkhanova et al., 2023; Sergeeva et al., 2022).

The current developments in the economy have a direct impact on the necessity for scientific research on the issue of teaching written translation of business communication (WTBC).

Our investigation of the problem of teaching written translation reveals that this phenomenon has been studied predominantly by linguists (Kaba, Gjinali, 2023; Iliushkina, 2015; Adipat et al., 2023; Enesi et al., 2021) and there are no pedagogical studies of WTBC teaching methods.

A significant issue in teaching WTBC to economics students is the selection of educational materials (Vinogradova, 2021). The choice of learning materials has always been and continues to be one of the most complex problems in teaching methodology (Nguyen, 2022). There are various approaches that can be utilized to address the task of teaching written translation of BC, including functional, situational-functional, communicative, and statistical-pragmatic approaches (Enesi et al., 2021).

The problem of selecting materials for teaching written translation in higher education has been explored in several works (Kovalenko et al., 2023, Wu et al., 2023; Popova, 2014; Volkova, 2019). Researchers suggest that in choosing materials for teaching written translation, it is necessary to consider the methodological principles of communicative necessity and sufficiency (Papadakis et al., 2022), thematic selection (Popova, 2014), and the accessibility of the selected material for its assimilation (Litwinowa et al., 2022). Although authors of the article agree with these principles being significant, authors are also believing it crucial to rely on the principle of "use in practice" (frequency and prevalence) (Volkova, 2019).

Authors propose several principles to consider when selecting learning materials for teaching WTBC, including thematic relevance, necessity and sufficiency of the materials, feasibility and accessibility, as well as usage, such as frequency and prevalence (Borodina et al., 2023; Feizuldayeva et al., 2018).

Based on the analysis of psycholinguistic features of the process of written translation (Fedorova, Karpova, 2019; Zhao et al., 2020), consideration of the structure and content of written translation competence (Chernova et al., 2022; Tolmachev et al., 2022), and the analysis of the challenges of WTBC (Andreeva et al., 2017; Kuznetsova, 2020), authors proposed an experimental hypothesis that the mastery of WTBC skills at a high level is achievable through the selection of appropriate training content, the implementation of a system of exercises, and the use of an optimal teaching methodology.

The purpose of this study was to create a teaching model for WTBC and evaluate its effectiveness in training economics students. To accomplish this goal, the study set out the following research objectives:

- 1) to choose suitable educational materials, establish stages and sub-stages for WTBC teaching, develop a set of exercises, and determine criteria for evaluating the level of WTBC skill formation;
- 2) to conduct an experimental test to assess the efficiency of the proposed teaching method on economics students;
- 3) to draw conclusions based on the study's findings.

2. Methods

Based on the purpose of the study, a pedagogical experiment was selected as the main research method, which was conducted in multiple stages.

At the preparatory stage, authors have defined the goal and objectives of the experiment. Thus, the goal of the experiment was to test the efficiency of the developed method of teaching WTBC, particularly the expediency and adequacy of using the developed subsystem of exercises, as well as to compare the efficiency of two variants of the method.

The experiment was conducted within 5 months in the 1st and 2nd semesters of the 2021–2022 academic year based on 3 universities: K.G. Razumovsky Moscow State University of

Technologies and Management (the First Cossack University), Peoples' Friendship University of Russia and Moscow Polytechnic University. The study was conducted with the participation of second-year students studying economics and management. The cluster method was employed for sampling since the unit of measurement was a student group. In total, 120 students were involved. In the process of the experiment students were divided into 4 experimental groups (EG) of 30 people each.

To effectively organize and implement training in written translation of business correspondence (WTBC), the authors selected English and Russian-language BC training texts. The texts were chosen based on several criteria, such as authenticity, relevance to the subject matter, linguistic complexity, translation value, and volume. The authors obtained the training texts from authentic educational literature and websites that presented English and Russian-language BC of Russian companies. These selected texts were then utilized in a set of exercises for teaching WTBC.

The authors proposed a division of business correspondence (BC) into three groups based on the stages of contractual activity in intercultural business communication. The first group consists of pre-contractual BC, such as appeals, requests, and offers. The second group is contractual BC, which includes messages, confirmations, reminders, and refusals that are attached to the conclusion of a contract. The third group is post-contractual BC, which pertains to the fulfillment of the terms of the contract, such as complaints and apologies. These specified groups and types of BC were used in the set of exercises for teaching WTBC.

Based on the aim of the study and an analysis of existing approaches to creating systems of exercises for translation students, authors of the article identified two stages: mastering the basics of WTBC and improving WTBC skills. The first stage of mastering the basics of WTBC was divided into four sub-stages to correspond with the stages of the translation process: 1) analyzing the original text (OT), 2) translating the OT, 3) evaluating the translation text (TT), and 4) editing the TT.

1 Stage. The exercises were categorized into four groups based on the number of sub-stages: 1) to form skills to analyze OT; 2) to form skills to carry out translation; 3) to form skills to critically evaluate TT; 4) to form skills to edit TT.

2 Stage. A group of exercises was implemented to specifically improve WTBC skills. Thus, it can be concluded that the developed system for WTBC training comprises five different groups of exercises, as outlined previously.

Based on the goal, authors have chosen a basic, natural vertical-horizontal experiment, with the vertical dimension testing the effectiveness of the proposed exercise sub-system for training WTBC translators. The horizontal dimension involved comparing two variants of the method.

To ensure accurate interpretation of the experimental results, scientifically justified criteria were selected to assess the level of WTBC skills. These criteria included the accuracy of conveying the content of the OT and the communicative intentions of the sender to the receiver of the TT, the stylistic accuracy of the TT, the relative correctness of the linguistic rendering of the TT, and the accuracy of the extra-linguistic rendering of the TT.

Each participant's TT in the experiment was evaluated and graded in points, with a maximum score of 100 points available for all the criteria. The points were distributed between the criteria based on their significance for achieving the training goals in WTBC, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Distribution of points by criteria for assessing the level of WTBC skills

Criterion	Maximum score
1. Accuracy of OT content conveyance	40
2. Stylistic accuracy of TT execution	20
3. Relative correctness of the linguistic rendering of the TT	20
4. Accuracy of the extra-linguistic rendering of the TT	20

The specified criteria for assessing the WTBC skills of each participant allowed for an objective evaluation. The points received for each criterion were totaled, and the learning rate was computed using the equitation:

$$K = Q / N$$

where Q represents the number of correct answers and N represents the total number of tasks (Bespalko, 1968).

A learning rate of at least 0.7, the coefficient of scientificity, was considered satisfactory. Scores were graded on a scale from 0 to 1 (100 %), and the learning rate was compared to this range. The relation of scores, the learning rate, and grades are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. The relation of scores, the learning rate, and grades

Score	Learning rate	Grade
90-100	0.9-1	Excellent
80-89	0.8-0.89	Good
70-79	0.7-0.79	Satisfactory
> 69	> 0.69	Unsatisfactory

Prior to the experiment, the participants underwent a pre-experimental cross-section, which was designed to assess their proficiency in WTBC. The selection of the appropriate form of assessment was based on the study's objectives, which aimed to evaluate the participants' ability to perform WTBC. The pre-experimental cross-section aimed to evaluate the initial level of written translation competency in the field of English-language BC. Two authentic commercial letters of approximately 1,200 characters each were given for written translation from English to Russian and vice versa. The first letter was a post-contract complaint from a buyer about defective goods and a demand for compensation, while the second was a pre-contract offer letter from the head of the sales department of a Russian company addressed to potential clients, which needed to be translated from Russian to English.

The process of the pedagogical experiment involved teaching WTBC to students in the experimental groups.

The learning process consisted of three cycles: 1) training in the written translation of pre-contractual BC; 2) training in the written translation of contractual BC; 3) training in the written translation of post-contractual BC. Each of the three cycles was comprised of microcycles (MCs) corresponding to the groups of exercises in the developed system. Furthermore, authors produced two variants of the WTBC teaching method.

In variant A, cycles 1-3 each contain five MCs. The first four of these match the groups of exercises in the developed system. The additional MC-5 is a summarizing cycle created using the simulation of real situations of business communication and designed to improve the skills of written translation of the types of BC covered in a particular cycle.

Variant B of the proposed methodology for teaching WTBC includes three cycles, each consisting of multiple choice exercises (MCs). Cycles 1 and 2 contain four MCs each, but without the summarizing MC-5. In contrast, cycle 3 includes five MCs, including the summarizing MC-5, which is aimed at improving the written translation of all types of BC.

During the experimental phase, the training was conducted according to a predetermined schedule in a classroom setting using the training materials prepared for the study. The training was conducted once a week for a duration of 52 minutes (equivalent to 1.3 academic hours), taking into account the two versions of the developed WTBC teaching method.

The experimental training in each group comprised a total of 35.2 academic hours, out of which 20.8 hours were allotted for classroom work, 10.4 hours for independent work (homework), and 2.6 hours for control tests. Thus, the total time invested in the experiment across all four groups was 83.2 classroom hours, 41.6 hours of independent work, and 10.4 hours of control tests.

At the end of the first cycle, an interim cross-section (a control test) was conducted in all four groups to assess the level of WTBC skills after the initial training using the proposed method. The objective of the interim testing was similar to the pre-experimental one and used the same scale to determine the extent of improvement in WTBC skills.

After the completion of the pedagogical experiment, a post-experimental cross-section was conducted in all the groups to assess the level of students' mastery of WTBC skills and determine a more effective version of the teaching method. The validity of the results was tested using the F-test, specifically the Fisher angular transformation criterion. To determine which variant of the WTBC training method, A or B, was more effective, the following equation was used:

$$\varphi^* = (\varphi_1 - \varphi_2) \sqrt{\frac{n_1 \cdot n_2}{n_1 + n_2}}$$

where φ_1 – the angle that corresponds to the larger percentage; φ_2 – the angle that corresponds to a smaller percentage; n_1 – the number of observations in sample 1; n_2 – the number of observations in sample 2.

3. Results

Tables 3 and 4 show the average results of the pre-experimental cross-section for all of the defined criteria.

Table 3. Pre-experimental results (translation from Russian into English)

Group	Mean values for individual criteria, in points				Total score	Mean learning rate
	Accuracy of OT content conveyance	Stylistics of TT rendering	Linguistic rendering of the TT	Extra-linguistic rendering of the TT		
EG-1	20.5	11	11.5	10.5	53.5	0.54
EG-2	21	10.5	13	10	54.5	0.55
EG-3	24	12	15.5	13.5	65	0.65
EG-4	23.5	12.5	15	12	63	0.63
max	40	20	20	20	100	1

*EG – experimental group

Table 4. Pre-experimental results (translation from English into Russian)

Group	Mean values for individual criteria, in points				Total score	Mean learning rate
	Accuracy of OT content conveyance	Stylistics of TT rendering	Linguistic rendering of the TT	Extra-linguistic rendering of the TT		
EG-1	23	11	13.5	10.5	58	0.58
EG-2	23.5	11.5	13.5	10.5	59	0.59
EG-3	26.5	15.5	13.5	11	66.5	0.67
EG-4	27	15.5	13.5	11.5	67.5	0.68

*EG – experimental group

Based on the presented tables (Tables 3-4), it can be observed that the learning rates obtained in the pre-experimental cross-section are below the sufficient level of 0.7, indicating that students in all groups lacked sufficient skills to perform WTBC.

The decision was made to teach WTBC to EG-1 and EG-2 using variant B of the method since their learning rate was slightly lower than that of EG-3 and EG-4, which were taught using variant A. Variant B was considered more efficient as it concentrated the exercises aimed at improving WTBC skills across all types of BC, which modeled real-life business communication situations and allowed for better results. Table 5 displays the mean results of translations from English to Russian and vice versa in the pre-experimental and interim cross-sections.

Table 5. Comparison of the results of pre-experimental and interim cross-sections

Group	Learning rate in pre-experimental testing	Learning rate in interim testing	Increase
EG-1	0.56	0.72	0.16
EG-2	0.57	0.72	0.15
EG-3	0.66	0.84	0.18
EG-4	0.66	0.85	0.19

*EG – experimental group

Table 5 presents the results of the interim testing, indicating that all groups achieved a learning rate of at least 0.7, indicating the efficiency of both the A and B variants of the proposed teaching method.

Table 6. Comparison table of the results of pre- and post-experimental cross-sections

Group	Learning rate in pre-experimental testing	Learning rate in post-experimental testing	Increase
EG-1	0.56	0.92	0.37
EG-2	0.57	0.92	0.36
EG-3	0.66	0.89	0.23
EG-4	0.66	0.88	0.22

*EG – experimental group

Table 6 shows the average performance results for pre- and post-experimental cross-sections in English to Russian and Russian to English translations.

The pre-experimental testing conducted and the results obtained (Tables 3-4) helped to identify the challenges that students faced in translating BC and confirmed the need for a specifically designed set of exercises to improve their written translation skills. The low scores obtained in all criteria at this stage suggest that students lacked sufficient knowledge in intercultural business communication, particularly in BC form, and were deficient in terms of vocabulary and translation skills.

The authors observed that groups EG-3 and EG-4, which were trained according to variant A, achieved the best results in the interim cross-section (Table 5). The authors attribute this to the inclusion of the fifth MC in the first cycle, which aimed to improve students' ability to translate pre-contractual correspondence.

While the interim results showed improvement, it is crucial to note that the criteria indicators did not reach the desired level. The average number of semantic mistakes made by students in both translations was three in EG-1 and EG-2, and two in each text for EG-3 and EG-4. Although these numbers may seem acceptable, even one semantic mistake can result in a misunderstanding of the TT, leading to unexpected outcomes in intercultural business communication. Therefore, this number of mistakes is considered as unacceptable.

The efficiency of the two variants of the method was compared on a horizontal level, based on the results of the experimental training. Table 6 indicates that the mean learning rate did not differ significantly across the groups. The highest learning rates were observed in EG-1 (0.92) and EG-2 (0.92) that were taught using variant B, where the improvement of WTBC skills was conducted at the end of the final training cycle over three lessons and based on all types of BC. On the other hand, students in EG-3 and EG-4, who were taught using variant A, with the improvement of WTBC skills at the end of each cycle and by specific types of BC according to the cycle, demonstrated slightly lower learning rates (0.89 and 0.88, respectively).

Based on the experiment, it can be concluded that the participants were able to improve their skills in accurately conveying the meaning of the OT and the communicative intentions of the sender in the TT, with an increase of 1.7 times in EG-1 and EG-2 and 1.4 times in EG-3 and EG-4. They were also able to correctly render the TT in terms of stylistics, with an increase of 1.5 times in EG-1 and EG-2 and 1.2 times in EG-3 and EG-4, and at the linguistic level, with an increase of 1.3 times in EG-1 and EG-2 and 1.2 times in EG-3 and EG-4. Finally, the participants also improved their skills at the extra-linguistic level, with an increase of 1.8 times in EG-1 and EG-2 and 1.6 times in EG-3 and EG-4.

Based on the experimental results, it can be concluded that variant B is more effective in teaching WTBC. The performance of exercises aimed at improving the skills of translation of all types of BC at the end of training cycles contributes to higher learning outcomes.

Authors used the F-test to statistically confirm this conclusion.

As a rule, methodological research considers the presence of effect as the attainment of the 0.7 learning rate and the absence of effect – as the failure to reach it. Yet since all participants in our experiment reached the sufficient learning rate and the obtained mean rates were much higher than the sufficient (0.7), it is reasonable to consider the learning rate of 0.9 as the effect and the

failure to achieve this coefficient – as the lack of effect. Thus, authors have determined the difference in the shares of students who failed to reach the 0.9 learning rate.

Table 7. Average results of pre- and post-experimental cross-sections

Group	Presence of effect		Absence of effect		Total number of students
	Number of students	Percentage share	Number of students	Percentage share	
EG-1, EG-2	45	75 %	15	25 %	60
EG-3, EG-4	21	35 %	39	65 %	60
Number of students	66		54		120

*EG – experimental group

The statistical analysis showed that the value of ϕ_{emp} is 3.318, which is higher than the critical values of ϕ_{crit} (1.64 with $p < 0.05$ and 2.31 with $p < 0.01$). This indicates that a higher proportion of students in EG-1 and EG-2 achieved the learning rate of 0.9 compared to EG-3 and EG-4. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the variant B of the developed model for teaching WTBC is more efficient than variant A.

4. Conclusion

The results of the study support the hypothesis that the use of carefully selected educational materials and a corresponding set of exercises can improve the quality of student performance in WTBC. Additionally, as it was obtained in the results the use of specialized exercises to enhance translation skills in all types of BC at the end of each learning cycle led to improved learning outcomes.

The potential applicability of the proposed methodology for teaching translation of other types of official business texts is a promising area for future research. However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of the methodology may vary depending on the specific characteristics of the text and the learning context. Further studies could explore the generalizability of the findings to different types of texts and learning environments.

The main limitation of this study is that there were no control groups. Furthermore, due to the limited duration of the pedagogical experiment, which spanned only two semesters, it was not possible to observe the long-term development of WTBC skills beyond this timeframe.

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