Shaping of a writing researcher’s identity

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Abstract. The article highlights the problem of writing for publication research purposes and its impact on a beginning scientist’s identity. The author points out two aspects of research writing and publication in international indexed journals. The first aspect is the developed skills of academic writing in English. The second aspect is the knowledge of research methodology and scientific publication design. The paper views the use of the two mentioned skillsets through the lens of English for Scientific Research module. During the module, the doctorate students of Northern (Arctic) Federal University were offered a survey consisting of three blocks of questions. The students’ answers were further developed through Socratic questioning technique in order to investigate the students’ identity formation. The findings reveal a severe lack of confidence among beginning scientists in relation to the research publication process, particularly to the methodology of research. The author concludes that the challenges of the research publication process impact the identity of a junior scientist in a negative key. The study demonstrates that beginning writing scientists need a thought-through professional assistance in the area of publication research, especially research methodology so that they could build a strong identity, necessary for their development in the international scientific community.

1. Introduction
Publication rates determine the status of the university, a separate scientist and even a student. In this paper, we are discussing the question of mastering the craft of research writing and its impact on the identity of a beginning scientist, a doctorate student. Research writing may be defined as the process of sharing the answer to the research question, providing evidence, reasoning and interpretation and presenting sources, that served as a ground for the answer to the stated research question. It is vital to master the process of research writing for anyone who develops their career in academia. Publications in the international indexed journals reflect the high results the researcher achieved. They also present the professional stance of the author. In fact, the articles that researchers write to tell the world about their work define the scholar’s relationship with the world. They serve to demonstrate the scholar’s self-concept in the way the author presents their interests, experiences and self-efficacy. In a word, writing for research publications makes a researcher’s identity. That is why there is no surprise that any researcher, be it a well-known and respected scholar, or a junior scientist, who has just started their academic career, pays due diligence and effort to grasp the art of research writing in English and publishing in the international scientific indexed journals.

Language is a constitutive force, as it has been expertly demonstrated by M. Foucault [1]. The authors of texts are doing their professional job, which means they are producing value through their writing. Being engaged in writing, one has to assess, “what to produce, what to name the productions, and what the relationship between the producers and named things will be” [2]. For research writing this means...
being able 1) to use the rules of academic writing in English in a correct way; 2) to use the knowledge of research methodology and scientific publication design. So, these two aspects need to be incorporated into the present-day university programme for post-graduate students. The existing bulk of publications and analysis of Russian universities’ sites proves that academic curricula makers are aware of this logic and both of the aspects are introduced into the post-graduate programmes of the universities. It is possible to observe that they are represented by such modules as “Academic English”, “English for Research Publications”, on the one hand, and “Research Design”, “Scientific Research”, on the other hand.

Even if many academics have a clear vision concerning the content of modern doctorate programmes, the problems with research writing do not disappear. The authors of the texts on the topic under consideration describe various stumbling blocks of a research writer, beginning from low language competence and going on with the challenge of publications’ rhetoric and academic conventions [3]. Students’ problems of manuscript writing and publishing, from language and presentation and to academic misconduct, have been highlighted in multiple studies [4: 409 - 410]. If we remember about the ties between a researcher’s publication rates and their professional identity, we can understand the struggles that should take place in a junior scientist’s mind. In this case, to fix the issues of research writing equals to returning peace and security to a beginning scholar and, eventually, making it possible for them to use their energy and effort for scientific creativity, inventions and disciplinary breakthroughs. From the mirroring perspective, “having knowledge of the phenomenon of research identity has potential to guide training efforts, foster commitment to research, and promote the profession through rigorous research” [5].

In our study, we are going to analyse the change of junior scientists’ identity in the course of research article writing during the module of “English for Scientific Research” held as a part of the post-graduate programme at Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangelsk, Russia. The study will present the results of a three-stage survey that was offered to the students at different times of the module of “English for Scientific Research”. Processing the results of the story, we discovered structural problems of doctoral education, which appear to be rather common for all Russian universities. Being well aware of the fact that the task is quite ambitious, we still think that to solve these problems means to assist in the enterprise of growing the academic environment that is comfortable for the evolving identity of a successful Russian scientist. In this respect, changing the ways of doctoral studies has the potential of retaining talented scholars in their motherland and aid the development of this state.

1.1 Literature Review
Beginning from the 90-ies of the XX century philosophy of education has vastly employed socio-cultural perspective on the processes connected with learning and identity formation [6]. The psycho-linguistic paradigm in research on foreign language acquisition was replaced by socio-linguistics and interactionism, which conceptualised language as a social but not a cognitive phenomenon. Discourse analysis and communicative theory were blamed for being too individualistic and mechanical [7]. Socio-cultural theory turned its attention to the study of culture, psychology, history and the nature of a human being at the same time [8]. The new perspective drew on the works of J. Dewey, G.H. Mead, W. Stern, G. Simmel. The roots of the approach date back to the philosophies of G.B. Vico, G.W.F. Hegel, I. Kant, J.G. von Herder, W. Humboldt, K. Marx. Contemporary scholars following similar perspective conduct research in the framework of pragmatism, constructivism and transactionism. Socio-cultural theory of mind was deeply analysed in the works of Russian psychologist and philosopher L. Vygotsky [9]. Vygotsky discussed the dialectical nature of the relationship between a human mind and the social environment. According to his theory, an individual’s cognitive processes derive from social interactions and are mediated by language and other semiotic artefacts. Social environment comes as both a context and source of mind development. In the process of human interactions, individuals build on their peers’ expertise, who direct the learner’s actions to foster his/ her knowledge formation. The socio-cultural approach views a person as an agent operating his/ her psyche mediated by signs. In this process between an agent and a mediator, the relationship of dialectical nature emerges [10].
The concept of a language learner identity is also studied in this perspective. Penuel and Wertsch analysed a wide range of research on identity and drew a conclusion that identity is a feeling which is perceived by individuals as an experience of continuity, directed to the future. This continuity is consciously chosen by individuals themselves as it is foreseen as positive [11]. Whereas the previous scientific paradigm measured an individual’s inner sense of identity, Penuel and Wertsch suggest taking mediated action as a unit of analysis. The complex relationship between actions, cultural artefacts, socio-cultural context and activity aims are now elements that direct the process of individual identity formation.

Speaking about identity, Chen et al. differentiate between three aspects: individual identity, the identity of relationship and collective identity. The first, individual identity represents a person as an independent being, functioning apart from other people. The second, identity of relationship, depicts a person in his/her interactions with other people. The third, collective identity, shows a person’s value as a member of a group. Collective identity confirms membership in a group, that has, or claims to have, definite characteristics [12]. It consists of:

- Cognitive characteristics of a group, such as typical features or ideological position;
- Emotional characteristics, meaningful for the group;
- Behavioural characteristics, for example, the language of communication in the group.

From the stance of the socio-cultural approach, it is vital to understand that education does not function in isolation. Lave and Wenger define education as a form of interaction and co-participation of the educational process participants and their environment [Lave, Wenger 2002]. The notion of a learning community acquires a special significance from such a perspective. Learning communities are set relationship between people, various activities and the world, as well as neighbouring learning communities. Thus, major attention is given to the interdependency between the educational process participants, educational process itself, educational practices, cooperation and social environment. The development comes as a process where participation gradually increases the participant’s input and his/her sense of belonging to the community. L. Kajee states that the learners’ activities in a learning community directly depend upon their identity construction [13].

B. Norton draws on P. Bourdieu’s constructs of capital and habitus [1991] and proposes the concept of investment for the study of identity [14]. This concept is in tune with the socio-cultural theory and manifests language acquisition, freedom from imposed identities and evolving activity communities instead of institutional communities, offered by society. The notion of investment, advanced by Norton, replaces the notion of motivation in foreign language acquisition. As compared to motivation, investment implies the hope for profit and gains. This term pinpoints the active role of an individual and his/her identity in task performance and in a learning goal achievement. In this research, we follow B. Norton’s definition of identity as a person’s understanding of “his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” [14].

The notion of researcher identity is also important for this study. Here we stick to the definition given by M.R. Lamar and H.M. Helm. According to this definition, researcher identity is “an individual’s self-concept as a researcher and includes the process of understanding experiences, increasing awareness, and incorporating both into the sense of self” [15]. The scholars also view researcher identity “as a unique concept that possibly includes research self-efficacy and interest” [15].

2. Methodology
The imperative to publish scientific articles for those who plan to develop in science has changed the curricula of post-graduate programmes in Russian universities. To meet the requirement of boosting post-graduate students’ publication levels, Northern (Arctic) Federal University has introduced new modules, aimed at teaching research skills. The English language syllabus has been extended to several modules. The first module focuses on academic English and prepares students for the PhD exam in English, which is uniform for all Russian universities offering PhD programmes. Students have to demonstrate the skills of professional literature reading (scanning and detailed reading) and speaking on
the topic of scientific research. The second module is named “English for Scientific Research” and is taught in three semesters. The intended outcome of the first semester is a literature review for the prepared article. The second part of the module discusses the structure of the prepared research article and teaches to write an abstract. The final result of the last, third, semester is a submitted research article written according to the international format (IMRAD) of referenced journals, indexed in international databases.

The present study was conducted at Northern (Arctic) Federal University in 2017 – 2020. The research base includes three groups of post-graduate students; the total number of the students is 22. The students engaged in research came from various disciplines, mostly from the sciences. The participants have the experience of English for PhD students course completion during their first year of post-graduate studies. We undertook the research while the students were studying in the first, second and third modules of “English for Scientific Research” programme. The curriculum included 2-4 academic hours of lectures and 16 academic hours of tutoring sessions in each module.

A survey, including three blocks of questions, was offered to the students at different times of the programme. The first block was given to the students at the beginning of “English for Scientific Research” module. It had the aim of clarifying the level of students’ engagement in scientific research of the chosen discipline. It also checked whether the students had received any publishable research results, according to their own perception. The second block of the survey questions was suggested to the students 1) at the beginning of the first module, 2) before writing a literature review, the final product of the semester and 3) at the end of the first semester, when they had completed writing a literature review to the prepared article. These questions based on the assumption that the students were ready to engage in writing a scientific article and revealed the extent to which they were confident of the future article design in terms of research methodology. The third part of the survey questions was answered on completion of “English for Scientific Research” module. It focused on the post-writing stage and provided analysis and feedback on the work conducted during the whole module. The surveys were anonymous and included close and open-end questions. Students were encouraged to elaborate on the close-end questions, if possible. Here we present the survey questions:

Block 1: Engagement in disciplinary research
Are you engaged in research activities at the moment?
Are you inspired by the research you are conducting?
Have you already received the results of your research?
Do you think the results are significant?
Would you like to publish these results?

Block 2: Writing for publication. Research article design
Have you discussed writing of the article with your scientific supervisor?
Do you know the problem question of your article?
What is the aim of your paper?
Have you thought of the target audience for your future article?
Have you defined the results you will present in your article?

Block 3: After-publication feedback
What are your feelings about the writing process of this publication text?
What was the most challenging part of the article drafting?
Are you satisfied with your publication text?
What is your biggest revelation about article preparation?
Has the text been accepted by a publisher?

To interpret the results of the survey and extract additional information, interviews with the students were held. The interviews followed the method of Socratic questioning as a tool to explore ideas in depth. The technique is known for its potential to foster independent thinking in students and give them
the ownership of their conclusions. The teacher adopts the position of ignorance and facilitates students’ construction of the required knowledge. In such a search of answers, goal-oriented questions orientated the whole process, whereas minor operative questions were asked for additional data.

3. Results

3.1 Engagement in Disciplinary Research

The first block of questions checked students’ involvement in research activities and at the beginning provided almost uniform answers. All of the students were engaged in research (100%) with their scientific supervisor. The students admitted being inspired by their research or, at least, acknowledged the high value of their tasks (98%). Conversely, as for the results of their research, the students seemed to be doubtful. Only 53% of the students answered they obtained the first results of their research. These results were assessed as significant by 51% of the students. However, 94% of the students told they wanted to describe the work they were doing in a research article because they 1) thought other researchers could build on their findings (58%); 2) felt they needed to make their findings public to show authorship (36%); 3) it was a requirement of the university (6%).

![Figure 1. Engagement in disciplinary research](image)

3.2 Writing for Publication, Research Article Design

The second block of questions was given to the students in class before the lecture and provided the students’ perspective at the development of their research in terms of research methodology. All of the open-ended questions, that were included in this block, received answers from the students depending on their specific research areas. Notably, all of the students showed a lack of confidence and declared a serious difficulty related to the necessity of presenting answers to the questions connected with the research methodology (100%). As they confirmed, they had spoken about the stated questions with their scientific supervisor. The questions received their answers. However, these answers were hard to group, interpret, correlate or provide with details to such an extent that they could be organised in a text.
3.3. Post-publication Feedback

The third block of questions was aimed at the analysis of the students’ writing process and was given to the students after the article drafts had been submitted either to the teacher (100%) or to the teacher and the publisher simultaneously (54%). The answers revealed insecurity and low confidence level characteristic of the independent writing process (48%). Students also admitted the importance of teacher’s assistance, that changed their perception of writing for publication process (96%). The modules’ activities influenced the students’ methodology research (67%). The students explained that they had not focused on the methodology issues before. The module design and tutoring sessions which aimed at article drafting helped the students form their research methodology skills (79%). That was acknowledged as a revelation of the course (72%). All of the submitted texts were eventually accepted by the publishers, though in two cases the texts were addressed to other journals. Overall students’ satisfaction with the publication texts reached 83%.

Figure 2. Writing for publication. Research article design

Figure 3. Post-publication feedback
4. Discussion

4.1. Engagement in Disciplinary Research
Module participants demonstrated a high level of engagement in research. They described their research process, which included literature study, experiments, calculations. Students chose their research areas according to their personal academic interests. There were cases when students changed the topic of the research on the advice from the supervisor. However, most of the students were highly motivated for research and found their activities worthwhile. In half of the cases, the question on the results of the research was answered in a negative way. Students were either not sure of the findings they could report or considered their scientific search incomplete to tell about any results. This situation seems to have a curious potential for discussion.

As it has been said, the students answered the first block of questions at the beginning of the module “English for Scientific Research”. However, the students had been working at the research for a year under the supervision of an experienced professor in their corresponding disciplinary area. Common sense tells that such a solid time period could not have been wasted to such an extent that students did not receive any findings. The situation made it necessary to start an investigation using the Socratic method. In 100 % cases, the students came to the understanding that their research contained valuable findings, even if these findings were not the final result that they were seeking. At the same time, the interim results were considered important enough to be published. Such a realisation made the students empowered and motivated. They expressed their satisfaction and noted an added sense of confidence and clear perspective in terms of their future actions in their academic lives.

4.2 Writing for Publication. Research Article Design
This block of questions turned out to be the most time- and energy-consuming for both the students and the teacher. When the questions were asked before writing a literature review, the students could not make out the point of such interrogation. They did not connect writing a literature review and designing their future article form the methodological perspective. The general relationship was apparent but the necessity to define the problem question, aim, target audience and the results of the future article was not obvious. More than that, these issues were not in the focus of the students’ attention as they had not been discussed before. According to the data, received from the students, their disciplinary research was organised around the content of the studies and left the matter of methodology behind.

Mentoring sessions with the English teacher, who had professional experience of publishing and was aware of the requirements of the research article genre, allowed students to receive knowledge of research methodology and form answers to the positioned questions. Students reported a reassuring change of their awareness in relations to the IMRAD format, accepted as a standard format of international refereed publications. Moreover, they also articulated the understanding of research methodology importance for their future academic careers. There were answers that claimed to have a completely new sense of assuredness in their professional activities. The students revealed enjoyment derived from their increased competence and personal growth.

4.3 Post-publication Feedback
On completion of the module “English for Scientific Research” the students submitted their written articles to the teacher. The imperative of publishing was not accepted by the total amount of the authors. Almost half of the module participants failed to send the article texts to the scientific journals. They explained their decision with high requirements of the journals and the inability to cope with the challenge. Those, who managed to send their articles to the editor, in most cases faced the necessity to introduce minor corrections or seriously revise the texts. However, all of the submitted articles were accepted in WoS and Scopus editions. The students noted the essential role of their English teacher in the process of article drafting and the language module in general. The biggest attainment in the module was named the increased knowledge of research methodology. Academic English skills came next. The
students were satisfied with their first experience of publication in the international journals and expressed their hope of becoming prolific authors.

4.4 Building the Identity of a Publishing Scientist

In the process of research writing facilitation, teachers are guided by the method of inquiry. As it is suggested by D. Vaughn [16], the use of scientific inquiry method implies:

- observation, identification, and statement of the problem as a question;
- statement of a hypothesis or hypotheses (an initial explanation to the question);
- identification of basic assumptions that have established credibility;
- gathering data, syntheses and determination of useful (applicable to the problem) information (variables to test);
- experiment and observation of the interactive nature of selected variables;
- recording observations, the results of experiments, and the creation of modeling scenarios;
- acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis or multiple hypotheses;
- development of conclusions;
- testing the conclusions and either accepting or rejecting them.

The use of Socratic questioning and inquiry method makes it possible to influence the formation of the writer’s identity, leaving the ownership of the decisions to the student. It allows for the empowerment that stays with the learner, adding to his academic and professional knowledge. In our study, the students exposed the feelings of surprise, which was evoked by the realisation of connections between the outcomes of research writing and scientific methodology, which had been of vague interest to them before. Such a revelation guarantees that the new skills will be adopted as professional baggage and make the students’ life in science competent and fruitful. If such an awareness were produced from the position of the teacher’s authority, it would never have the long-lasting effect of inner beliefs and personal standpoint.

G. Park, in her analysis of a writer identity, calls writing a way of knowing [17: 336-345]. E. Adams St. Pierre goes beyond this neutral claim, announcing that “writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery” [18: 967]. The process of writing a scientific article put NARFU’s post-graduate students in the situation when they had to form their research ideas in a written text. This was the first experience of concrete, substantial thinking for many of the module participants. They had definitely produced much creative thinking before. However, the previous professional and academic disciplinary experience did not require to be so accurate and objective in relations to its verbal expression. It did not take so much effort as it had been understandable and familiar. Writing a scientific article made students reflect, assess and summarise, bringing to new, sometimes unexpected conclusions.

Following Foucauldian perspective, language is a tool that builds a new perspective of reality. The establishment of a fresh view of reality means the construction of a new identity. Employing B. Norton’s concept of investment, we may state that students’ investment in academic writing practices with a tutor enabled them to receive access to the community of research writers. In the sense developed by P. Bourdieu in his theory of capital, the skills of research methodology fostered in academic writing sessions will present students’ cultural, social, economic and, eventually, symbolic capital of acknowledged research writers. As research methodology is a vital part of research writing and publishing, research methodology skills will allow students to be recognised by others and by themselves as legitimate members of the academic and research community.

While the supervisor generally transmits capital to the student in academic socialisation, the process of collaborative writing (with a tutor, in our case) involves coauthors recognising the capital each one brings [19: 188]. In the present context, this should mean a new institutional approach which would recognize the influential capital of English tutors with an appropriate background of research writers. Such a capital adds to the student’s capital of disciplinary knowledge and results in high-quality research papers and an empowered student with a new research writer identity. A student discusses with the teacher how they approach their disciplinary research. The teacher asks meaningful questions directing
the student’s academic inquiry. In this respect, “meaningful questions” are the questions that should facilitate the student’s development of their own research methodology. Among such questions are the questions that point out the problem of the research, its background, target audience, accurately articulated hypothesis, aim and objectives, research results and methods used to achieve those results. The exchange between the teacher and student may engage them in a debate, thus consolidating their perspectives in a written text.

5. Conclusions
The research has focused on the identity of a research writer whose professional activities concentrate on publishing the results of their scientific investigations. The quality of published texts impacts the scholar’s status in academia. The process of research writing defines overall life experiences as a writing scholar spends a significant load of his time crafting articles and presentation texts. Arguably, research writing is the process that construes the identity of an academic. The significance of research writing skills makes those skills a desired goal. In order to reach such a goal, a writer takes a genuine effort to master English for research writing purposes. Teachers pay not less effort to make academic English writing, or scientific English, classes as useful as possible. Notwithstanding the general intentions, the results of them are not satisfactory enough. Even if more and more Russian authors publish their texts in the international indexed journals, much leaves to be desired in this area.

In this paper we have presented the results of a survey that was conducted in several stages and aimed at the study of junior scientists’ perception in terms of their scientific research and the prospects of research results’ publication. The survey also included the post-work feedback of the authors. The findings show that the students experienced a substantial lack of confidence in their research writing activities. Thinking of the perspective of publication made them hesitant as to the research methodology and the general questions a writer poses when they plan their future publication. The students were at pains when they thought of the background, target audience, research question, aim, hypothesis, and even results of their research. They did not really know what to speak about, so the question of “how to speak” came only next.

The use of Socratic inquiry in the interviews with the students exposed, that they were perfectly professional in their research. Moreover, they had discussed their research process with the scientific supervisor, and their practical achievements were considerable. Ultimately, the interviews allowed to bring out the answers to the posed questions of research methodology in most of the students’ cases. The results and all the other structural methodology elements of a research article were elicited. The article texts were drafted, edited, re-edited and completed. When the students became aware of what they had revealed, they proved to be capable writers. The fact that all the submitted texts were accepted by the journals proves this.

The visible misery of the beginning authors, the answers to the survey questions, the results of the interviews communicated meaningful information of the students’ identity. The self-perception of the students at the beginning of our research betrayed their weak status in the academic community, lack of confidence in their professional future and unsteady ties with their professional community. The increased belief in their own strength, which came after the long process of work during the module of “English for Scientific Research”, changed the situation. The freshly acquired skills of research methodology, publication design and research writing created a different identity of the junior scientists. The new identity incorporated a new vision of their academic future, increased awareness of the publication process and the desire to continue their academic and professional endeavour.

The experiment demonstrated a high value of the two competences of a successful publishing researcher with a healthy identity, i.e. the ability to use the rules of academic writing in English in a correct way and the knowledge of research methodology and scientific publication design. Both of the skills of an acknowledged professional in the academia need to be fostered through the university doctorate curricula. Which courses need to be responsible for this is an open question. Another mystery is the personality of the teacher that takes the responsibility of educating young scientists. Our modest
suggestion is that such a teacher should be a proliferate and authoritative writer by themselves. However, this seems to be a separate, though closely connected, topic of discussion.

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