DISTRIBUTED LANGUAGE THEORY IN ESP DEBATES

Olga A. Karamalak
HSE University (Moscow, Russia)
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5502-8487

Ksenia A. Vertlib
HSE University (Moscow, Russia)
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6522-8537

A b s t r a c t . In the current digital environment, the need for writing arguments and counterarguments has increased considerably. People interact on professional and academic forums and write emails and messages on social networks and in professional applications within their companies. This explains the importance of teaching students to conduct debate in writing at lessons of English for specific purposes (ESP). The purpose of this research is to develop argumentative and critical thinking skills of students in the sphere of ESP. The aim of the paper is to create a series of tasks that would assist students assist in becoming more competent in the field of ESP and would also make the overall process of debate conduct easier by reducing stress level. The tasks are intended to be interactive, team-based, research-intensive, and are expected to enhance students' linguistic competence. Based on the identified clusters of content errors in written debates, the exercises are divided into four groups: 1) theses; 2) arguments; 3) examples and proofs; 4) counterarguments. Some exercises are complex and are aimed at developing different aspects of written debates simultaneously. This research is based on the sample of 98 students' written debates as part of an assessment task in the discipline English for International Relations and Business at the Faculty of World Economy and International Relations (HSE University). Drawing on the theoretical approaches of social constructivism and distributed language, all these exercises encourage students' autonomy and their active participation in the classroom to generate knowledge and skills of writing arguments. They involve dynamic interaction and cooperation, and provide knowledge through dialogue, since language is viewed upon as an activity. Internet and online teaching platforms are used in teaching, since cognition is distributed and extends beyond the limits of one's mind, thus presupposing a technological expansion.

ТЕОРИЯ РАСПРЕДЕЛЕННОСТИ ЯЗЫКА
В ДЕБАТАХ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ДЛЯ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЦЕЛЕЙ

Карамалак О. А.
Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва, Россия)
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5502-8487
SPIN-код: 2779-5741

Вертлиб К. А.
Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва, Россия)
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6522-8537

А н н о т а ц и я . В современных цифровых условиях необходимость в написании аргументов и контраргументов значительно возросла. Люди взаимодействуют на профессиональных и академических форумах, пишут электронные письма, сообщения в социальных сетях и профессиональных приложениях внутри своих компаний. Это объясняет важность обучения дебатам в письменной форме на занятиях английского языка для специальных целей. Исследование направлено на развитие у студентов аргументационных и критических навыков мышления в области английского для специальных целей. Цель данной работы заключается в создании серии заданий, которые помогут студентам стать более компетентными в аргументации в области английского для специальных целей и сделают процесс проведения дебатов более легким, снизив уровень стресса. Задания составлены и предложены таким образом, чтобы они были интерактивными, командными, исследовательскими и способствовать повышению языковой компетенции студентов. На основе выявленных кластеров ошибок в содержании проведенных письменных дебатов упражнения разделены на четыре группы: 1) тезисы; 2) аргументы; 3) примеры и доказательства; 4) контраргументы. Некоторые упражнения являются комплексными и направлены на одновременное развитие различных аспектов письменных дебатов. Это исследование основано на результатах работ письменных дебатов 98 студентов, выполненных в качестве оценочного задания по дисциплине «Английский язык для международных отношений и бизнеса» на факультете «Мировая экономика и международные отношения» (НИУ «Высшая школа экономики»). Согласно теории социального конструктивизма и распределенного языка все упражнения способствуют автономии студентов и их активному участию в классе для формирования знаний и навыков написания аргументов. Они предполагают динамическое взаимодействие, сотрудничество и тем самым возникновение знаний через диалогизм, поскольку язык рассматривается как действие. В заданиях применяются Интернет и специальные онлайн-платформы для обучения, поскольку сознание распределено и выходит за пределы нашего разума, предполагая тем самым технологическую расширенность.

Introduction

In the modern world there are a lot of situations which require people to advance their opinions and persuade their opponent either orally (in a conversation, at a conference, in professional environments, etc.) or in a written form (in work correspondence, on online forums, etc.). In this respect, a person should be able to provide arguments for and against their opinion in a logical way and organize them in an argumentative way. These skills are referred to as argumentative literacy [Gudkova 2021] and they can be performed in an interactive speech mode or a written format.

We approach written debate tasks and other preparation assignments through a social constructivist approach in pedagogy [Vygotsky 1978; Taylor 2018] which will be expanded further to a distributed language approach [Cowley 2011, 2022, 2024] or ecological viewpoint (which consider e-gadgets as part of our extended cognition [Cowley 2011; Zheng et al. 2024].

Written debates were chosen as one of the four module assessments for third year students majoring in International Affairs at HSE University. The module on International relations includes the following themes: (1) Hard and Soft Power, (2) Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and (3) Armed Conflicts. The assessment task is then presented to the students, who have 60 minutes to respond to the topic questions. They must first provide a thesis statement with three prongs that support the student's position. Next, they must unfold one argument, explain it, and support it with a suitable example. Finally, they must exchange their paper with a partner, read the question and the argument, put forth by their opponent, and then provide a counterargument (a polite critique, a counterargument, an expansion and explanation, and a relevant example) in response. To prevent plagiarism, three distinct subjects were assigned to each group. A form with the prescribed blocks was given to them: Topic, Student 1, Thesis statement, Argument, Evidence, Student 2, Counterargument, Evidence. It was forbidden for students to use smartphones or the Internet.

Within the study, the following questions are recommended:

1. Are soft power strategies effective in the contemporary international system?

2. Is hard power an effective means to influence the behavior of other political bodies?

3. Is soft power a more difficult instrument for governments to wield than hard power?

4. What is better for humanity: the devotion of the West to R2P or the BRICS countries' rejection of international action?

5. Does R2P prioritize the interests of powerful states over the protection of vulnerable populations?

6. Is humanitarian intervention, in terms of food, water, and medical aid, motivated only by the desire to help suffering people from another country?

7. Can a war be justified by a just cause?

8. Is a just war better than an unjust peace?

9. Do advanced technologies make warfare more cruel?

The assessment rubric was used to grade the student papers (98 students took part in the research). The grading scheme used by the institution comprises 10 points maximum where 3 or less is considered as failure. Overall, the data indicate that students successfully completed the task: just 1% failed the assignment, and 92% of students earned an excellent (10, 9, or 8) or good assessment (7 or 6). However, we analyzed students' papers in order to determine the challenges they faced while completing the task.

The most common errors found in the content were as follows: (1) a thesis statement lacking the three points that support the position stated; (2) an argument lacking focus, logic, or organization, or starting with evidence rather than a well-formed argument; (3) lack of relevant examples to support an argument or a counterargument; and (4) a counterargument that either fails to refute the initial claim or offers examples that are not pertinent.

The aim of this work is practical and pedagogical, to develop a sequence of assignments which can help students improve their argumentative literacy in ESP debates and facilitate the completion of the written debates assignment. We are aimed to design exercises which are interactive, collaborative, research challenging, and expand linguistic boundaries. They will be classified into four categories depending on the above defined clusters of content mistakes.

Although many exercises have been worked out in the pedagogical literature aimed at thesis statement development, argument or a counterargument articulation, a Fact that Needs Proof (FNP), and a Specific Supporting Detail (SSD), there is no overall sequence of exercises designed to improve argumentative literacy for ESP debates from the point of a distributed language approach.

This set of exercises can be implemented in teaching ESP and research can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the exercises within a study group.

Literature Review

Social constructivist and distributed language approach in pedagogy and debates

A collaborative learning strategy, called social constructivism, places emphasis on student participation, dialogue, and information sharing. According to this approach, a language instructor should implement learner-centered and collaborative teaching strategies in FLT. The fundamental element is that students work together to solve issues, exchange ideas, and produce new content to supplement what they already know. Multiple groups and interactive strate-

gies are possible within this teaching method, small-group and whole-class discussions, as well as student participation on certain subjects (e.g., in pairs) are also relevant. Students collaborate and brainstorm to identify patterns, solve issues, or just come up with something fresh to add to their knowledge. Knowledge exchange, teamwork, and information utilization are essential elements of learning and methods for reaching learning objectives. To sum it up, this learning paradigm emphasizes active interaction between students, the teacher, and other elements of the teaching-learning process [Saleem et al. 2021].

Vygotsky proposed social constructivism as a theory of learning in 1968. According to this perspective, language and culture serve as frames for how people see, interact with, and understand reality. Vygotsky believed that learning concepts are perceived and internalized by experience and cultural context as a function of language transmission. Because knowledge necessitates a community of individuals who share a language and culture, it is socially created and co-constructed. Knowledge is seen by social constructivists as something that students acquire in collaboration with peers and instructors. This particular approach of cognitive constructivism encourages students to work together with a facilitator or with other students [Mohammed & Kinyo 2020].

Taylor [2018] introduced the social constructivism learning theory, which defines potential growth (academic performance) as the degree of development a learner may reach with the assistance of peers or teachers. According to him, learning is a social activity that incorporates historical figures, family members, peers, and casual acquaintances. Social constructivism argues that communication, teamwork, and the use of knowledge are essential elements of learning and methods for accomplishing learning objectives. This particular form of cognitive constructivism encourages collaborative learning.

Students acquire ESP through linguistic actions: participating in debates, dialogues and group discussions, doing collaborative exercises, brainstorming arguments and counterarguments, looking for decision making propositions to political issues, and researching particular facts to support arguments and counterarguments.

The social constructivist approach has been developed further into the distributed language approach [Cowley 2011; 2024; Love 2004; Linell 2013; Thibault 2011; Kravchenko 2007 and etc.] or the ecological approach to perception and language learning [Zheng et al. 2024]. According to this stance, "the new ecolinguistics treats language as a part of human action. Languaging, the basis for language development, co-constitutes technologically endowed environments" [Zheng et al. 2024: 109].

The text of an online discourse is generated through the interaction of participants with the text and different gadgets used to generate the text. In this interaction, the reader who is supposed to write a counterargument identifies the affordances of the environment that are significant to them. By affordance we mean explicit and implicit meanings, some logical errors or other discrepancies which can be attacked in the refutation part and technological environment. American psychologist, Gibson, originated the word "affordance" (from the English affordance, derived from afford – to have or offer the opportunity). According to Gibson's ecological theory of perception, affordance is the potential for an organism to respond in a certain way in its surroundings; these circumstances, which are important to the organism, show up in how it interacts with its surroundings [Gibson 1979: 127].

The concept of "language" refers to a diverse collection of occasions, pursuits, and tangible objects. A distributed viewpoint is centered on the actions individuals perform, frequently in concert, to generate and interpret what are understood to be language signals. In other words, it involves rejecting the idea that language is like a made-up code. We connect cognitive dynamics across time-scales when we engage in language, rather than relying on systematic information. It is possible to link language to existence in the larger human ecosystem. According to a distributed perspective, language develops when individuals behave independently or in groups while orienting to denotata and (physical) wordings [Cowley 2009].

Participants in written debates mutually serve as a source of disturbances for each other. Student A introduces arguments which correspond to their knowledge in International Affairs and personal opinion in this domain. Student B seeks to oppose the advanced argument, by expanding their own boundaries. As a result, it brings students to direct dynamic interaction in a written environment which leads to the expansion of consciousness [Karamalak 2010, 2013].

The acquisition of knowledge through interaction confirms that consciousness is distributed: it is not something that happens within us when a person is "stewing in their own juices," but rather what we do, accomplish, and achieve together. Interaction with the environment, and with other people as part of that environment, can elevate us to a new level of knowledge. Consciousness is not something that exists within us; it is actively created by us through dynamic interactions with the world. We always write and read with others, as we are open systems of interactions [Bohm 1985; Harris 1981; Maturana 1980; Maturana & Varela 1992, and etc.].

Depending on the goals of the lesson and the formal specifications of university curricula, debate formats might vary [Bonwell & Eison 1991]. It implies that student discussions are possible, with the aim of presenting reasons in support of one's position and refuting that of the opponent. It is also feasible to include students who will serve as judges or press representatives in debates to add interest. These students may then select a winner or pose challenging questions.

Debates can be conducted virtually using computer-mediated communication (CMC), which enables interaction between students from other colleges and classmates in the same group. Since CMC encourages students to apply their L2 vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills in online interactions, it is thought to increase students' autonomy [Wach 2012].

According to Zheng et al. [2024]:

In this new ecolinguistic view, second language learning draws on both language and its technological extensions in shaping various modes of skillful activity. By focusing on activity in which wordings play a part, one plays down language use, operationalized learning and individuals. Rather, the focus falls on how, in enlanguaged worlds, co-acting (at times, with oneself) contributes to skills and expertise. Performance in distributed systems can ground coordinative agency as one both masters practices and individuals as a person. One draws, to a large extent, on skilled linguistic action and how usage brings "relevant" properties to wordings.

CMC is essential in linguistic skills development and knowledge extension in general. CMC can be performed in both synchronous and asynchronous online debates formats. While a teacher can monitor the learning process and offer rapid feedback, synchronous learning environments increase student involvement and motivation [Hrastinski 2008]. On the other hand, since they are not constrained by time, asynchronous learning environments offer greater freedom to teachers and students [Mayadas 1997; Chen et al 2024]. Asynchronous conversations aid in the growth of reflexivity, which is defined as the capacity to generate ideas and then evaluate them [Archer 2003].

Online debating fosters interactions that are more comfortable and encouraging [Vinagre & Corral 2018; Khalsi 2013]. In the opinion of William and Mostert (2005), they enhance higher order thinking and are a helpful tool for refining critical thinking. This is consistent with Tu's (2004) study, which asserts that students have plenty of opportunity to consider their arguments more carefully and offer more reasoned evidence to support them in online written discussions. Students may more easily assess their thoughts and make revisions when they type their responses.

Students who struggle with fluency and competency in English may find it easier to develop their arguments in a written format [Tannen 1998]. Additionally, text-based debates are a better format for timid or introverted students who might be reluctant to interact with others in person but are willing to contribute to the discussion by typing their opinions [Rinekso & Muslim 2020]. According to Aubry (2022), the text-chat mode, which requires students to permanently record written ideas during interaction, may encourage more focused production during writing.

Gudkova [2021] notes that when debates are conducted in writing, students are motivated to point out weaknesses in one another's arguments, which enhances discussion and develops their critical thinking abilities. There are, however, several drawbacks to this approach for students. First, the convoluted process and the teacher's lack of guidance might confound some debaters [William & Mosert 2005]. Second, there is a chance that certain arguments may be misunderstood for a variety of reasons (inaccuracies in syntax, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, for example), which could cause misunderstandings between debaters [Murphy & Coleman 2004]. As such, it might affect their performance and reasoning.

Methodology

This research, practical and pedagogical in its nature, is aimed at designing a set of exercises from the point of social constructivism [Vygotsky 1978] and distributed language [Cowley 2011, 2022; Thibault 2011; Linell 2013; Zheng et al. 2024 and etc.] where learners take an active stance and build their language skills in ESP in social interaction, dynamics, and cooperation; where language skills are considered as extended due to bodily dynamics and environmental extension, physical or virtual/digital. Assignments are proposed based on the results of the previous case study, the analysis of the works written by the third year students majoring in International Relations of HSE University. Consequently, according to the outcomes of that study, students faced problems with (1) writing a thesis statement which reflects the ideas further developed in the main body, (2) providing a persuasive argument or an organisationally correct argument (FNP), (3) providing an appropriate and logical SSD; (4) writing a relevant counterargument refuting the opponent's idea.

Exercises for Developing Argumentative Literacy

One of the most effective tasks to develop thesis statement writing is a collaborative discussion of each other's ideas. Students can be divided into groups of three or four and given a controversial topic pertinent to the lesson. Each student is supposed to suggest their thesis statement, then students discuss all together the advantages and disadvantages of each other's works and suggest improvements. Not only does this task help students master argumentative skills, but it also encourages students to cooperate and hone critical thinking skills. According to Sumekto and Setyawati [2018], self-correction tasks also have a positive influence on metacognitive skills.

Task. Do some research into modern technologies used in war and write a thesis statement on the following topic "War will become less destructive if robots replace soldiers on the battlefield."

Instructions. Give students 7-10 minutes to research the topic, then divide them into groups of three or four, ask them to exchange their results and let them discuss their ideas for 12–15 minutes. After this, students should write a well-developed thesis statement with three prongs. Finally, they should exchange their thesis statements and suggest some improvements if necessary.

Alternatively, students can be asked to write a thesis statement on a topic within the themes studied they choose themselves. Students' interest may be ignited with some independence and an array of topics to choose from. While exploring the topic, students can come up with questions which can be discussed together with their peers. This task is aimed at mastering research skills, collaboration and creativity. While they learn how to write a well-developed thesis statement, they are not assessed by the teacher, but can benefit from their partner's help and suggestions.

According to the outcomes of the conducted research, some students encountered problems with coming up with a relevant argument which can support their viewpoint. In this case argument mapping

can work as an effective task aimed at developing both critical-thinking and debating skills. Students can use different colors to show connections between claims and to differentiate between arguments for and against. According to Chen et al. [2024], this task can help L2 learners visualize their arguments and evaluate their validity. When performed collaboratively, the task also contributes to developing brainstorming skills and knowledge acquisition in ESP. Argument mapping can be done with the help of special applications such Argumentation.io, Argumap, or FigJam (Figure 1). They are based on the same idea that students should generate arguments and organize them in a map showing connections between arguments and SSDs.
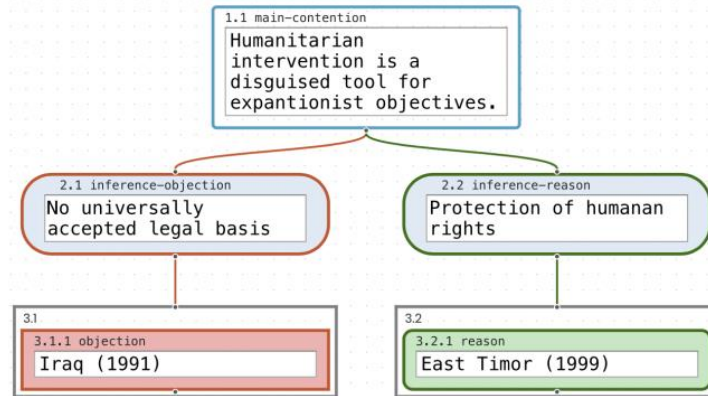

Figure 1. Argumentation.io mapping

Oral activities such as turn-taking [Teasley & Roschelle 2013] also align with the pedagogical objectives of argumentative literacy development. Collaborative completion implies one student suggesting an argument, and their partner should extend the idea by providing strong evidence or an example.

Task. Think about the following topic: "Soft power is more effective than hard power in modern international relations." Provide arguments in favor of your opinion and ask your partner to give a relevant example.

Instructions. Give students an article on the significance of soft power and its benefits as homework or assign students to do research on this topic. In class, divide students into pairs and ask them to work in turns. First, one student should generate an argument based on the studied material or their knowledge of the subject. Their partner should listen carefully and be able to provide an illustrative example. Then, students take turns.

Another oral activity that can be beneficial for developing both argumentative and counterargumentative skills is commenting on a quote. This task implies a deep analysis of thought-provoking statements and the ability to interpret them as well as illustrating one's perspective. One student is asked to provide their stance on the given quotation, substantiated with a strong argument and a valid example. Their partner is supposed to listen actively and refute this argument regardless of their opinion on the topic. This task, though oral, is a great preparation for debates in writing in which students cannot choose their viewpoint when it comes to providing a counterargument.

Task. Work in pairs. Comment on the following quote: "Swords determine outcomes, but it is minds that determine the hands that wield the swords." Give an argument to justify your opinion and a relevant example. Your partner should identify a weakness in your argumentation and provide a counterargument.

Instruction. Divide students into pairs or let them choose a partner themselves. Give them 5–7 minutes to think about both sides of the issue and let them choose a position. Then, one student presents their understanding of the quote, gives one argument illustrated by a relevant example. Their partner listens attentively, tries to identify a flaw and respond to the provided argument with a rebuttal.

This task should help students develop both critical thinking and communicative skills as they are supposed to view a problem from different perspectives and express their opinions orally. Besides, students learn to see the relevance between the argument and the example.

Exercises on relevance between the example and the argument can be in different forms. First, an argument with an irrelevant example can be provided so students can discuss why the latter does not support the argument. Second, an argument can be proposed then students should do research to provide relevant examples. Their answers can be discussed and the examples evaluated in terms of relevance. Third, an opposite task can be given - when an example is presented and students are asked to articulate an argument.

Task: Work in groups of 3–5 people. Read an argument and a provided example. Decide if the example is relevant and illustrative enough, give your explanation or provide a better example. Discuss your ideas in small groups, then give your explanation to the whole class.

"Despite the fact that the development of advanced technologies has led to the creation of weapons of mass destruction and new methods of waging war, technologies can also work as a deterrent to war. For example, economic sanctions or digital sanctions in using several apps, disconnection from TV channels or banking systems such as SWIFT can help make the confrontation less cruel."

Instructions: Provide students with arguments and examples so that they can discuss them and determine their relevance. Give them ten minutes to work in small groups, then listen to their answers and arrange a whole class discussion.

The practice of presenting counterarguments needs special consideration. Arguments that refute one another are essential to a successful debate and are crucial to dialectic and dialogic ways to reasoning. For example, pragmatic dialectics highlights how sophisticated defenses of positions develop dialogically as proponents react to or foresee the objections of their opponents [cf. van Eemeren 2018: 37].

Counterarguments, according to Rocci [2020], have the following characteristics: (a) they start a sub-discussion; (b) they rely on whether a certain step in the original argument's existing structure is acceptable, relevant, or sufficient; (c) they have their own argumentation structure; and (d) they encourage further developments of the original discussion's argumentation structure. The three basic categories of counterarguments – rebutting a conclusion, refuting a premise, and undermining an argument – which Peldszus and Stede [2013] identified in Pragma-Dialectics should be explained to students. Undermining an argument "questions the supporting force of the premise for the conclusion" by pointing at a possible exception that could invalidate the inferential step from premise to conclusion [Peldusz & Stede 2013: 9].

<u>Exercise on conclusion rebuttal.</u>

Task. Below is an argument. Work in pairs, discuss the argument, Refute the concluding idea, using the following linkers: however, but, nevertheless, nonetheless, despite this, in spite..., although, though, even though.

Instructions: Explain the difference among three types of rebuttals (rebut a conclusion, rebut a premise, and undermining an argument). Then give this task allowing time for discussion and writing a counterargument (7 min).

"The concept behind soft power is that preferences may be shaped by appeal rather than coercion. Without using military force or imposing economic sanctions, this non-coercive strategy enables governments to build partnerships and shape the policies of other nations."

Sample answer: However, partnerships are not always possible to form through attraction and persuasion in case of conflicts of interest. There are situations that demand quick results, such as military conflicts.

<u>Exercise on premise rebuttal.</u>

Task. Below is an argument, read it carefully, work in pairs and write a refutation of the premise. Pay attention to the advanced assumption, question it. Think what is needed to make this assumption true.

"It can be less expensive to use soft power than force the economy or conduct military actions. It enables nations to accomplish their foreign policy objectives without incurring the financial costs of using strong force measures. This cost-effectiveness is becoming more and more important in a time when military operations might be politically and financially unfeasible."

Sample answer: Expenses should be measured and compared for both strategies taking into account the length of their implementation. Only afterwards can it be claimed that soft power is undeniably less expensive to apply than hard power. Otherwise, it seems irrelevant to argue the cost-effectiveness of soft power, given its long-term implementation.

<u>Exercise on undermining an argument.</u>

Task. Read an argument carefully and question the

connection between the premise and the conclusion. Work in pairs, discuss your ideas and write a refutation.

"In comparison to hard power, soft power is frequently viewed as a more sustainable method of influence. Even though hard power can produce immediate benefits, as global dynamics change over time, its efficacy tends to decline. On the other hand, soft power creates enduring bonds based on respect for one another and common ideals and values that withstand shifting political environments."

Sample answer: Despite the possibility of creating partnerships based on common ideals and values, its practical realization is not always possible since countries can pursue their own goals and may have considerable cultural differences. Sometimes it is needed to protect a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity which requires the use of hard power, particularly in reaction to perceived threats or transgressions by other powers. Moreover, political changes can be unpredictable and lead to the inefficiency of soft power.

Another exercise to practice refutation based on logical fallacies can be proposed. The most common logical fallacies in international relations are false cause (post hoc), bandwagon, emotional appeal, slippery slope, black-or-white, special pleading, ad hominem, appeal to authority, begging the question, etc. Students are encouraged to find information about them with an example. Then they create their examples without naming the logical fallacy and others try to guess and determine them with proper explanation. Exercise on logical fallacies:

Task: Work in groups of four, read arguments below and determine a type of a logical fallacy there. Explain your opinion and try to find a common ground to agree on the fallacy.

(1) "Country X has a lot of soft power because everyone says they do. They have a popular culture and their citizens are well-educated, so they must be influential on the global stage."

(2) "Opponents often argue that if hard power is applied, it will inevitably lead to military actions, suffering people, numerous human rights violations resulting in conflict expansion and further on global war."

Instructions: Divide students in groups of four and present an argument to them. Allocate 5–7 min for their discussion so that they can generate an answer.

These tasks can develop logic, critical thinking, and argumentation skills. They allow a broader look on the problem and development of different perspectives on the same issue. Linguistic tools for convincing can be applied together with logic fallacy analysis. Students do research, surf the Internet or/and use AI to provide sound argumentation and support with relevant examples.

Written debates in ESP involve a lot of preparation and research work. Students should be assigned authentic texts, videos and podcasts which will provide them with a deeper understanding of the topic and help them to get to the core of the problem under discussion. After preparatory work, students can be asked to discuss their ideas in text messages or on online platforms designed for this goal. It might engage students more and boost their motivation. Recent studies state that online activities help students become more active learners [Hsieh & Tsai 2017] and encourage students to share their ideas without time

and place restrictions [Sung et al. 2016]. Besides, when students are involved in a debate in writing, they may benefit from the structure of the argumentative genre [Laurinen & Marttunen 2007].

Since we hold the view that our cognition is distributed and e-gadgets and services have become part of it, we advance the use of e-platforms, such as GoogleDoc, Flipgrid, Perusall, Miro or Kialo and others for holding online debates or for practicing argumentative literacy in or out of the classroom. GoogleDoc provides a great opportunity for students to work collaboratively on one topic. It is convenient for students to write several arguments for one topic at the same time. They do not waste any time with paperwork as they can see each other's ideas in real time.

Another platform which can be used for debating online is Flipgrid – a video platform which can be used for recording small videos with arguments or discussing ideas in the comments. Flipgrid can be used for debating by recording a small video devoted to a controversial issue. The task of students is to provide their arguments in the comments and to disagree with each other. Another task can be to give students a topic which has some controversy and ask them to record videos in which they should voice their opinion and provide an argument with SSDs. Then, they should disagree with each other at least once in comments. Flipgrid contributes to developing argumentative skills, writing skills and active listening as well as allowing to improve digital skills.

Perusall can be used for exchanging opinions about an uploaded text or audio/video fragment in the class environment or receive notifications about recent entries if debate is held asynchronously (Figure 2).
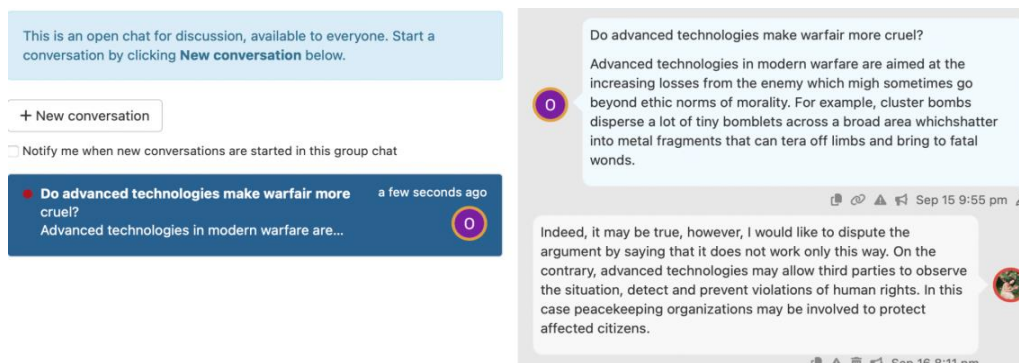

Figure 2. Written debates on Perusall

Miro is an online board designed for collaborative work and exchanging ideas both synchronously and asynchronously. A teacher can put a topic on the board and ask students to write their comments presenting arguments in favor of their opinion, then they can be asked to refute them. Another way to use Miro is to post several thesis statements or arguments and ask students to estimate their relevance and validity by leaving a comment. Miro has special templates for argument mapping and can be used for visualizing connections between arguments and counterarguments.

Kialo is an online platform designed for developing critical thinking skills providing an array of opportuni-

ties for holding online discussions. This platform is suitable for organizing debates for students with a good command of L2 and for those who need some scaffolding in order to participate in a discussion. Proficient students can be given a controversial topic and asked to generate arguments for and against it whereas students with a lower proficiency level can be provided with arguments that will be used in the course of the discussion. Their task will be to generate SSDs to illustrate the argument. Kailo is very convenient for leaving counterarguments since every argument can be refuted in the comments.
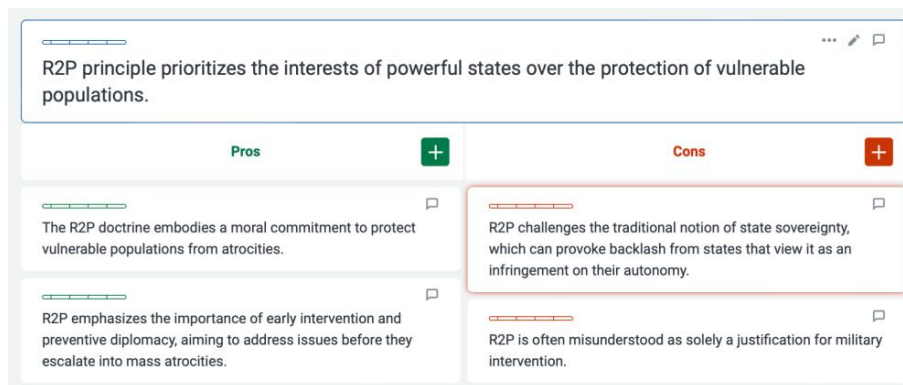

Figure 3. Kailo for pros and cons

Discussion

In general, written debates in ESP can be regarded as an effective assessment task which tests both stu-

dents' knowledge of the subject and their ability to apply critical thinking skills in practice. Argumentative literacy is a useful skill as it allows students to ex-

press their ideas logically and persuasively as well as negating their rivals' arguments. Many employers require their employees to communicate in chats, forums, and via emails, which means that those whose argumentative skills are well developed will have a competitive advantage. Communicating online in the working environment is usually polite and formal, however, debating on forums, especially if it is anonymous, is informal, even sometimes rude since people tend to vent the rage if their opinions clash. Students should be aware of it.

It should be noted that all the suggested tasks can be integrated and supplemented with other activities aimed at practicing active vocabulary items or grammatical structures. When generating thesis statements, arguments, or examples, students can be assigned to use at least three active vocabulary units. Active vocabulary can be practiced in such applications as Quizlet, Memrise, or Busuu. These platforms encourage students to learn vocabulary in an entertaining way independently from the lesson time. This tests not only professional knowledge of the subject, but also the vocabulary specific to the area of students' professional interests.

Although grammar may not be the focus of the lesson, students should practice emphatic structures such as inversions to stress the importance of the given argument and hedging strategies to soften their arguments when needed. Students should be encouraged to widely use conditional clauses to show the cause and effect relationships and express hypotheses.

Digital platforms can be utilized to boost students' motivation and engagement in the lesson; however, they can also distract students or give them leeway to cheat if they are not supervised carefully. Therefore, it is recommended to strike a balance between in-class traditional activities and their digital alternatives.

We expect that after performing these tasks, students should improve their knowledge of the topic, master their research skills and writing skills. Collaborative work contributes to developing independence from the teacher and improving cognitive capabilities. These tasks also help students to activate the knowledge acquired on the topic of their specialization. Not only does it help them hone critical thinking skills but it also develops active reading and rebuttal strategies.

Conclusion

When students write in a professional academic environment that values their autonomy, dialogicality, and the development of their argumentation and critical thinking skills, written debates can be a helpful tool for them to locate, explore, and organize ideas. When graduates go into the workforce, they will need to be able to defend their positions both orally and in writing, which calls for a strong demand for these skills. Written debates are an important part of ESP curriculum in tertiary education to support students in developing their analytical, critical thinking, and cooperative learning skills. Online forums and debate websites provide a space where individuals can research, defend, and justify their positions and/or refute the opposite viewpoints on contentious issues through textual disputes.

All the exercises have been designed in the framework of social constructivist and distributed language theories, where language is regarded as action which is socially and dialogically constructed through interactions and technologically extended by the Internet and e-gadgets.

This article contributes to pedagogical understanding of written debates as well as its practical implementation in the set of exercises aimed at thesis statements development, coherent argument and counterargument articulation, and relevant evidence support. A book of exercises on argumentative literacy development for ESP in International Relations can be proposed. Further research on the efficiency of the exercises can be conducted among students based on the results of their written debates. Students' feedback can play an important part in designing exercises and teaching written debates. The manuscript can be of interest for both practitioners, including second language instructors in ESP, who practice debates and argument propositions, and academic researchers in pedagogy, ESP, and logic.

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Данные об авторах

Карамалак Ольга Алексеевна – кандидат филологических наук, доцент Школы иностранных языков, Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва, Россия).
Адрес: 101000, Россия, г. Москва, ул. Мясницкая, 20.
E-mail: okaramalak@hse.ru.

Вертлиб Ксения Андреевна – преподаватель Школы иностранных языков, Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва, Россия).
Адрес: 101000, Россия, г. Москва, ул. Мясницкая, 20.
E-mail: kvertlib@hse.ru.

Authors' information

Karamalak Olga Alekseevna – Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor of the School of Foreign Languages, HSE University (Moscow, Russia).

Vertlib Ksenia Andreevna – Lecturer of the School of Foreign Languages, HSE University (Moscow, Russia).