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NON-NATIVE STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR EXPECTATIONS DURING THE PROCESS OF COMPLETING A GRADUATION THESIS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract. The article reports on a case study that investigates challenges related to writing a graduation thesis as reported by non-native students of English in one Bachelor of Arts (BA) and one Master's (MA) programme in Estonia, comparing the needs outlined by the students to the perception of those described by their non-native supervisors. The study highlights a number of important academic writing process challenges that need to be considered in an inter-disciplinary context. It also echoes the significance of the interpersonal relationship between the student and the supervisor, voiced in respective research literature worldwide. On the institutional level, a need for discussion emerged among graduation paper supervisors for a more unified understanding of the requirements set for graduation papers. The information obtained allows a more informed approach to the process of supervision on the one hand and academic writing instruction on the other hand.*

Keywords: text linguistics, thesis supervision, supervisor role, feedback, feedforward, academic writing in the humanities

1. Introduction

The present study was triggered by the challenge of guiding students of different levels through the process of doing independent research and reporting on it in English in the form of a graduation thesis as part of their undergraduate or post-graduate degree requirement. Discussions on the topic with colleagues seemed to suggest that students writing their theses in English came with a whole host of needs that manifested themselves at different times in the writing process to varying degrees. The current study, thus, set out to investigate what sort of assistance undergraduate and post-graduate students sought from their supervisor, and if the

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supervisors thought the process of supervision differed depending on the students' level. The aim of the study was to increase the supervisors' awareness of students' research-related concerns as well as to discover the problem areas that could be addressed in academic writing courses geared to prepare students to successfully complete their theses.

2. Background to the study

The students involved in the current study complete their degree courses partly in English and partly in Estonian (Curriculum), engaging in different types of academic writing and submitting a graduation thesis to complete their undergraduate or post-graduate (Master's) programme. The thesis is written in English, and in the process the students rely on the guidance of supervisors who, in the current context, are mostly non-native speakers/writers of English. The students typically enter the programme with very good general skills of English but with fairly little knowledge of the process of writing in general and academic writing in particular. Given the importance of the ability to write different types of texts (i.e. manage different academic writing genres) in the degree programmes, academic writing courses are introduced starting from the first year of their Bachelor level study. Although Leijen et al. (2015: 7774) suggest that in the university context 'many European and former Soviet Union countries [---] guise academic writing skills as grammar and punctuation teaching', this has not been the case in the current context for more than a decade. While certainly not as firmly established as in the universities of the UK and the US, academic writing courses are mandatory for the students from the first year of university study and are informed by such methodologies as the process approach (White 1995), Writing-in-the-Discipline tradition (Kennedy, Kennedy 2012) and English for Academic Purposes (Oshima, Hogue 1999). The courses concentrate on the Anglo-American academic writing tradition, discussing both the writing process and acceptable writing formats there. Teacher and peer feedback specifically tackle higher-order writing skills – critical analysis of the target text features, formulation of thesis statements, organisation of writing, text and paragraph structure, logicality and argument development, audience awareness, quality of sources, etc. Although lower-order writing skills are noted in the feedback, these are typically addressed during other focus courses, e.g. morphology and syntax.

While guiding thesis writing, however, supervisors report on numerous problems that the students seem to encounter during the process and display in the writing produced in spite of the completed writing courses (e.g. finding a research focus, choosing proper sources, etc.). The reasons are probably diverse: lack of respective experience in their mother tongue, the volume of new information to be processed, lack of longitudinal feedforward (Jonsson 2012), inability to transfer the skills acquired in the academic writing class to thesis writing, and seeing the writing class content as a thing in itself rather than something that could inform thesis writing. Also, the area of research chosen by the student sets its own standards for the writing. Wallwork (2016: 3) emphasises that there is not 'just one type of academic English. It differs massively depending on whether the author is

studying humanities [---] or one of the pure sciences [---] it is dangerous to talk of 'academic English' as if it were a homogeneous style". This is echoed in the work of Davies (2012) who identifies nine academic writing domains.[1] Moreover, there is great variety within the domains, e.g. humanities, and while general principles of academic texts are addressed in the writing classes, the latter afford little time to focus on the disciplinary conventions of different fields beyond alerting the students to their existence. Meeting the respective requirements of those fields is left to the supervisor. Supervisors mostly have a clear notion of the requirements set for the product (i.e. a thesis in their discipline) and ample personal experience of writing but frequently have little theoretical knowledge about the writing process. This might result in the supervisors alerting the students to the problems with their thesis but not necessarily to ways of improving them, which students expect (Skinner 2014: 368).

Research elsewhere displays similar results. University supervision is closely related to the issue of feedback which is seen not just as commentary on earlier performance but as the process of generating information to improve. As student responses to supervisor feedback may range from feeling 'confused, frustrated, uncertain and concerned' (Wang, Li 2011: 105), which generally hinders progress, to 'reflective, inspired, confident and determined' (ibid.) which is more conducive, time should be spent on reflection on the kind of feedback needed and how best to communicate it. Jonsson (2012: 66–67) shows that for feedback to be productive, it needs to be useful, i.e. something that can be incorporated in students' upcoming work in the foreseeable future, as well as 'specific, detailed and individualised, although the length of the comments does not necessarily influence whether students address it'.

Difficulties in completing a thesis in English may be associated with students' academic writing ability, but they may also stem from the nature of student-supervisor cooperation. Research into supervision (Hartney 2007, Eley, Murray 2009, Butler et al. 2014, Ashwin et al. 2015, Wichmann-Hansen, Wirenfeldt Jensen 2015) lists a number of challenges that can be viewed from the perspective of a mismatch of expectations of the two parties involved, related to the area it concerns (i.e. providing content and managing the writing process). Ashwin et al. (2015) maintain that close cooperation and relationships between students and supervisors is essential. Wichmann-Hansen and Wirenfeldt Jensen (2015: 330) have found that the cooperation might be challenged by differences in the perception of each other's role in the process, how the work should progress, how much independence should be displayed by the student and what the academic level of the graduation thesis should be, to which (Derounian 2011: 92) adds different personalities and the adopted style for interaction. Wang and Li (2011: 105) divide students writing theses into two broad categories: those displaying a 'reactive attitude who demand explicit and directive feedback' and those with a 'proactive attitude who seek guidance and inspiration'. The category that the student falls into is determined by how advanced he or she is in terms of research experience (Wang, Li 2011: 109).

The supervisor typically has a number of tasks to accomplish during supervision: provide knowledge, give feedback and feedforward, manage setbacks, etc. Derounian (2011: 96–97), emphasising both the intellectual and counselling aspects of

[1] Cf. www.WordAndPhrase.Info (28.3.2018).

supervising during all stages of thesis writing, has identified the five most necessary characteristics for supervisors: 'subject knowledge and grasp of relevant literature; realism, in terms of helping the student to determine what is feasible; responsiveness and willingness to negotiate with the supervisee; an ability to nurture and encourage the student and showing of enthusiasm for the student's dissertation topic'.

Given the complexity of problems related to thesis supervision and the lack of relevant data and analyses of the problems in the Estonian context (cf. Kärtner 2010, Leijen et al. 2015) where graduation theses written in English are frequently supervised by non-native university teachers, a study was designed to investigate to what extent the problems reported in research elsewhere manifest themselves in Estonia. The following research questions were posed:

1) How do the Estonian students in the given BA/MA programme rate their own ability to engage in academic writing with a view of completing a graduation thesis in English? To what extent does the students' perception coincide with the supervisors' estimation of the respective ability?
2) What type of assistance do the students in the programme expect from their graduation thesis supervisors? What forms does thesis supervision take?

3. Method

Data was gathered with the help of two aligned questionnaires: one addressed to the students in the programmes, and the other to the teachers who supervise the research of the said students. For the questionnaires, the work of Leki and Carson (1994), Petric (2002) and Hu (2007) was consulted. Initially, 20 can-do statements were formulated, the format of which was inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), with the statements themselves reflecting the awareness of concepts covered within the writing courses (e.g. writing effective introductions and conclusions, formulating thesis statements, referring to previous research, etc.), the degree of engaging in particular activities while writing (e.g. consulting sample papers, editing, use of dictionaries, etc.) as well as the evaluation of the product/ process (e.g. quality of the thesis completed, level of difficulty of thesis writing as an assignment, etc.). The responses were collected on a 4-point Likert scale. Because the target group of the study was fairly small, it was not possible to pre-test the questionnaire among the students/supervisors in the programme without losing prospective participants in the study proper. For an additional perspective, the questionnaire was discussed with other teachers of academic writing who work in a similar context. As a result, part two was added to the questionnaire, consisting of 2 open-ended questions for students and 3 for teachers.

The Likert scale results were processed analysing relative frequencies of responses because of the small number of respondents that could be involved. Open-ended question responses were processed with the help of content analysis which resulted in taxonomies of 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' supervision activities, types of supervisor feedback, as well as predominant student problems during the process of writing a thesis.

4. Participants

The respondents were English philology and English teacher education students and the university teachers who supervised their theses. Data were provided by 16 third-year BA students, 7 first-year and 6 second-year MA students (referred to as M1 and M2 respectively below) and 7 university teachers. All students were non-native writers of English with the average age of the BA students being 23 and that of MA students being 25. All MA students had completed their Bachelor's theses in English and were either in the stage of researching (M1 students) or writing (M2 students) their Master's thesis. Because academic writing-related input varied noticeably for first and second year Master's students (e.g. the number of thesis writing-focused seminars and the amount and frequency of individual feedback from supervisors), it was decided to study Master's students in two focus groups to see if this difference was reflected in the questionnaire responses. All BA respondents were at various stages of completing their BA theses. All student participants had supervisors specialising in their research interests.

The 7 teachers were all non-native speakers of English who supervise BA and MA graduation theses written in English – 1 professor, 4 associate professors, and 2 lecturers. They specialise in a variety of fields – British/American culture, morphology, teaching methodology, language testing, literature, often combining the above. The supervision experience among them varies, but all had taught at the university for more than 10 years. Two of the 7 teacher respondents had supervised only BA theses, the other five had supervised both, with an average number of 7 BA theses and 2 MA theses annually. All supervisors publish their own research in peer-reviewed journals, predominantly in English (95% of all articles), but also in Estonian or Russian with an average number of 2 articles per year.

5. Results and discussion

The responses to the questionnaire appear below in the order they featured in the questionnaire with the Likert-scale section preceding the open-ended part. Questions 1 to 20 in the first part will be referred to by Q1, Q2, Q3, etc.

The first question (Q1) investigated the respondents' perception of the students' overall ability to engage in thesis writing. The responses are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Ability to write good quality academic assignments

Respondents	Yes	Mostly yes	Mostly no	No
Supervisor (n = 7)	0	5	2	0
BA (n = 16)	1	14	1	0
M1 (n = 7)	3	3	0	0
M2 (n = 6)	2	4	0	0

There is a fairly high confidence level among all students with the exception of one BA student. The confidence level seems to slightly increase as students' progress from BA to MA level (the proportion of those who say 'yes' rather than 'mostly yes'

among M2 students compared to M1 and BA students is higher), which might be explained by the fact that the MA students in this study had already completed a BA thesis in English. The supervisors' response differs from those of the students in that none of them say yes with certainty and 2 supervisors think that students' writing quality is mostly not good. This fairly predictable finding is in line with earlier research (cf. Jonsson 2012) but says little about what the supervisors find lacking: the quality of research or writing or both.

5.1. Ability to manage structural elements of academic writing

Questions two to ten asked the respondents to consider the students' ability to manage particular structural elements of an academic text. Table 2 below displays the results of the supervisors' (S) and students' (BA, M1, M2) estimation of the students' respective abilities. As stated above, the students in the study had been introduced to the theory related to those concepts as well as given numerous opportunities to practice them. However, while it might be reasonable to expect students to evaluate their own ability fairly highly, as they remember the respective class discussions and feedback, the supervisor perspective will show to what extent the students can demonstrate what they know.

Table 2. Students' ability to control text structural elements

No.	Statement	Yes				Mostly yes				Mostly no				No			
		S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)
Q2	Write a paragraph	1	3	2	0	5	13	3	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Q3	Effective introduction	0	3	3	3	6	10	2	3	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0
Q4	Write thesis statement	0	2	0	3	2	9	4	2	5	5	2	1	0	0	1	0
Q5	Paragraph structure	0	9	5	4	6	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
Q6	Write topic sentence	0	3	3	2	4	10	3	4	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Q7	Support a claim	0	3	4	3	5	12	3	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q8	Achieve cohesion	0	3	4	4	5	12	3	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Q9	Achieve coherence	0	4	4	4	4	11	3	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Q10	Effective conclusion	0	3	4	1	2	12	2	4	5	1	0	1	0	0	1	0

Generally, students seem to have a higher level of confidence in their ability to write a good paragraph (Q2) than their supervisors. All supervisors have some reservations about students' ability to present an argument in a paragraph (no 'yes' responses). On all levels, there are students who are very confident, whereas the number of students who chose 'mostly no' is very small (3 out of all the 29 respondents). An increase in confidence among students about knowing what makes an effective introduction (Q3) can be detected as they progress, judged by the proportion of those who chose 'yes' in each group. Interestingly, while just 3 BA students have doubts regarding their knowledge of what makes an effective introduction, the results become more varied as we move from the BA to the M1 level, where a quarter of the students (2) seem to expect at least some struggle here. Supervisors regard students' introduction writing ability as mostly adequate, with just 1 taking a more negative view. Writing an effective thesis statement (Q4) seems harder than the paragraph features discussed above with about a third of the undergraduate students (5) and 4 MA students reporting uncertainty. This is echoed in the supervisors' opinion, with 5 out of 7 expecting problems there.

The structural elements of a paragraph were another focal point of the query (Q5). The results, quite predictably, show the widest spread among BA students, who are only starting to learn about academic writing. Supervisors perceive students to have mostly good knowledge here, still indicating room for improvement. Of the paragraph elements, topic sentences display the most concern (Q6). As with thesis statements, a fairly small group of students (3 BA, and 1 M1) report having problems, while the supervisors take a noticeably more critical view. They seem to be almost equally divided, with 4 respondents saying that formulating the central claim is mostly adequate and 3 finding it to be mostly below par. This is in line with research elsewhere (cf. Petric 2002), saying that students often resort to broad, general statements. Supporting a claim (Q7), on the other hand, causes little concern for MA students, with slightly more than a half being very certain about how to manage it and the rest reporting mostly being able to do it. BA students are less confident, with 1 student claiming mostly to have problems and only 3 being sure about how to provide support for topic sentences. Supervisors mostly (5 out of 7) take a positive view of the students' respective ability. Being able to support a claim is linked with ensuring text cohesion (Q8) and coherence (Q9) (cf. Oshima, Hogue 1999). The responses follow the pattern that starts to emerge in the responses given earlier, with the students' overwhelmingly reporting certainty or near certainty about their skill (just 1 BA student and 1 M2 student express doubt), and the supervisors' estimation of the same skill being noticeably lower. No supervisor is completely satisfied with the students' ability, 5 are somewhat satisfied and 2 out of 7 say that students mostly cannot achieve a good level of cohesion. Clarity is another point of dispute: while a good proportion of MA students (8 out of 13) are very sure of their ability to write clearly and just 1 MA student and 1 BA student mostly cannot do it, supervisors do not agree. Indeed, 3 out of 7 say that students mostly struggle with coherence and the rest note some problems. Similarly, most supervisors (5) think that writing a conclusion (Q10) is frequently problematic, whereas students themselves do not report it as often. Here, too, BA students' responses display a generally high confidence, with just a few (3) expressing strong certainty, and 1 having doubts. It is interesting, though, that MA students, with more consistent

experience – having written a complete thesis already – do not display a unanimously higher level of confidence. M1 students seem sure more often, though (4 out of 7 very confident, with 1 outlier), but the confidence wavers among the M2 group.

5.2. Ability to manage thesis content

Questions 11 to 20 moved away from the structural concerns of academic writing and investigated perceptions of student abilities to manage thesis content. A summary of those beliefs can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Students' ability to manage content

No.	Statement	Yes				Mostly yes				Mostly no				No			
		S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)	S (7)	BA (16)	M1 (7)	M2 (6)
Q11	Meet genre requirements	0	0	1	1	4	9	4	4	3	7	2	1	0	0	0	0
Q12	Worry about plagiarism	3	4	3	3	1	6	0	0	2	5	4	3	1	1	0	0
Q13	Reference to sources	0	5	2	3	4	9	3	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Q14	Precise expression	0	0	0	1	2	12	6	3	4	3	1	2	1	1	0	0
Q15	Computer editing	1	9	5	3	4	3	2	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
Q16	Argumentation types	0	2	1	2	5	8	3	3	2	6	3	1	0	0	0	0
Q17	Use of samples	2	5	2	2	5	9	3	3	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Q18	Dictionaries for register	0	3	3	1	2	8	4	3	5	5	0	2	0	0	0	0
Q19	Punctuation conventions	0	4	3	2	5	9	4	4	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0

It was expected that MA students would express noticeable confidence in their awareness of genre-specific requirements (Q11) because of a wider experience of writing for different courses. Also, M1 and M2 students were expected to display a difference as the latter had by this time been exposed to a number of focus seminars and tutorials about thesis writing which M1 students had not. The results supported that expectation to some extent. BA students' responses fall into two groups with 9 out of 16 reporting being able to mostly meet genre requirements and the rest saying 'mostly no'. MA students are more confident, but most (4 students in both groups) are only partly sure about it, and there are 3 (2 M1 and 1 M2 student) who are mostly not confident. It was expected that supervisors would overwhelmingly report observing genre characteristics as a problem because of the spread in the disciplines they represent and the students' lack of adequate practice of the diversity of genres during the writing courses. Yet 4 out of 7 supervisors were mostly satisfied with the level students achieved here while the rest were not. This confirms the

need for genre-related awareness-building among both students and supervisors, as emphasised in research elsewhere (cf. Davies 2012, Wallwork 2016).

Students sometimes find it hard to appropriately incorporate information from different sources in their own writing. Responses to the query about the extent that they worry about plagiarism (Q12) divided MA students into two almost equal groups: those who pay conscious attention to authenticity (3 and 3) and those who do not (4 and 3). The MA students' claim that they do not to worry about plagiarism does not necessarily mean that they engage in it, though. They might have interpreted the question as having the tools to avoid plagiarism and said that, indeed, they knew how to do it, hence the lack of worry. For a clearer response, the question should be followed up by an interview to avoid vagueness. BA responses are more varied here, which may indicate their more ambiguous understanding of the concept, unawareness of the norms connected to it and thus a more relaxed attitude to the issue. Supervisors' responses clearly show a need to inform students' more of plagiarism-related concerns as just 3 of 7 seem to be completely content with managing citation in theses.

Finding appropriate sources and incorporating previous research properly into theses was considered one of the major concerns for students prior to the study (cf. Eley, Murray 2009). The responses to the respective question (Q13) did not entirely support the worry. The majority of MA students are either completely or mostly convinced that they can appropriately refer to the sources used: just 2 of 13 said they could not. The same is true of BA students whose respective number is 2 of 16. Given that at the time their questionnaire responses were given, they had not commenced their BA thesis research yet, the result seems to refer to their awareness of the need to refer to previous research rather than the actual skill to do it. Supervisors appear divided almost equally between those who maintain that students mostly refer appropriately (4) and those who say they do not (3).

Clarity of expression (Q14) is hard to achieve for a variety of reasons, so all groups were expected to report having at least some problems here. As expected, the difference between supervisor and student perception is quite noticeable: while the overwhelming majority of the students (12 BA, 6 M1 and 4 M2 students) consider their way of expression clear most of the time, only 2 supervisors share this opinion and 1 thinks students completely lack the ability to make a clear point. Using computer editing programmes (Q15) was expected to be overwhelmingly popular as means of achieving clarity, but the results show that their use varies widely: MA students were more avid, perhaps because of being more knowledgeable about the programmes' assets, although 2 M2 students report not using them at all. Twelve BA students report either always or mostly making use of them. As the questionnaire did not specify any types of editing programme, nor were the respondents invited to list the programmes utilised, interpretation of the responses can only be speculative. Subsequent discussion of the response with supervisors suggested that the latter interpreted it as students using spell and grammar check prior to submitting drafts of their work, with 6 respondents finding that students could make better use of them.

In their academic writing courses, students of English are familiarised with different rhetorical patterns to communicate meaning. Respondents in this study displayed varied knowledge of them (Q16). Although the confidence level is still

relatively high, there are more students (6 BA, 3 M1 and 1 M2 student) who report being mostly unfamiliar with such patterns. It is not surprising that the familiarity level is highest among M2 students, as at the time of responding to the questionnaire, they were in the process of completing their MA thesis and, through seminars and tutorials, were more sensitized to finding effective ways of communicating their research findings and implications to the reader. At the same time, it is the M1 group that seems to feel most insecure about organising their writing (3 out of 7 reports mostly not being familiar with rhetorical alternatives). Supervisors all imply a degree of dissatisfaction, and 2 out of 7 deny that students are capable of adequately demonstrating alternative ways of argument presentation most of the time.

Studying samples of previous research is a common pre-writing strategy taught to students. It was therefore expected that a high proportion of students would report doing it (Q17). Indeed, about a third of the students on all levels (5, 2 and 2 respectively) always look for samples in order to complete an assignment, and a further half of the students (9, 3 and 3) mostly do, making it a popular approach to get started. Supervisors' responses (2 respondents saying 'yes' and 5, 'mostly yes') probably reflect one of their own supervision strategies, i.e. encouraging students to study past theses as samples.

In writing programmes, special attention is paid to achieving a proper level of text formality – register. Student responses to the question whether they resort to dictionaries to achieve this (Q18) show that about a third of the BA respondents (5) mostly do not use dictionaries while writing, while the rest of them (3 + 8) do. On the Master's level, it is widespread, with just 2 M2 students saying they mostly do not. Most supervisors (5) are dissatisfied with the register thesis drafts display. This is clearly one of the areas where student performance and supervisor expectations are at odds. The same goes for the familiarity with the conventions of punctuation in academic writing (Q19), with a higher confidence level on the part of the students than the teachers.

The final query of the questionnaire asked the supervisors and students to rate the overall difficulty of academic writing for the students. Research findings (cf. Leijen 2015, Leki, Carson 1994, Petric 2002, Skinner 2014, etc.) unanimously emphasise the complex nature of academic writing and, therefore, it was expected that students on all levels would support the claim. The data in Table 4 below display the responses as they appeared in the study.

Table 4. Complexity of academic writing

Respondents	Yes	Mostly yes	Mostly no	No
Supervisor (n = 7)	3	3	1	0
BA (n = 16)	6	7	3	0
MA1 (n = 7)	4	0	3	0
MA2 (n = 6)	0	2	4	0

The majority of BA students think that English academic writing is always (6) or mostly (7) a difficult endeavour, and 4 of the 7 M1 students are quite convinced of the same. On the other hand, the majority of MA students (3 M1 and 4 M2 students) believe that English academic writing is mostly not hard. In the supervisors' opinion, students almost always find academic writing hard, which must be a reflection of

what the supervisors see as they interact with students and give feedback on thesis drafts or review the theses submitted for defence.

5.3. Student supervisor expectations

In the second part of the questionnaire, both students and supervisors responded to open-ended questions. The students first specified the sort of help they expected from supervisors while planning/writing a thesis and then listed the type of feedback that they found unhelpful. The responses were subjected to content analysis, which yielded a number of expected supervisor activities. Table 5 below displays the list of student expectations voiced in the three groups and the number of students who mentioned it in each group.

Table 5. Student expectations with regard to supervisor help

Type of support		BA students (n = 16)	M1 students (n = 7)	M2 students (n = 6)
1.	Recommend sources	10	6	0
2.	Suggest/correct topic	8		3
3.	Correct grammar and punctuation	7	1	0
4.	Comment on coherence and logicality	7	2	2
5.	Direct research	6	5	4
6.	Show samples	4	2	1
7.	Check thesis at various points	4	0	0
8.	Point out shortcomings	3	3	2
9.	Help with cohesion	3	0	0
10.	Correct register/formality	1	2	0
11.	Give timely feedback	1	0	0
12.	Help with references	1	0	0
13.	Evaluate research methods	1	2	1
14.	Answer student's question	1	1	0
15.	Point out errors	3	0	0
16.	Offer general comments	1	0	0
17.	Correct style	1	0	1
18.	Give clear directions for change	0	3	1
19.	Be positive	0	1	1
20.	Maintain good cooperation	0	1	0

Overall, 20 helpful supervisor activities were identified which ranged from being very general, hard to interpret without follow-up interviews (e.g. check thesis at various points, offer general comments, point out shortcomings) to quite specific (e.g. show samples, suggest a topic, help with content). The most frequently mentioned types of help were finding relevant sources (16) and helping with content (15), but also suggestions for a topic (8), feedback on thesis structure (11) and shortcomings (8), grammar and punctuation (8), as well as samples to follow (7). Few students mentioned help with register (3) and style (2), which may be related

to over-confidence in their writing ability observed above (cf. Table 1). Although students seldom mention the student-supervisor relationship, comments about being positive and maintaining good relationships are found in MA responses. Other student expectations pertain to clarity, timeliness of feedback and getting answers to queries. What can be noticed is that the diversity of expectations diminishes as the students become more experienced. While BA students have identified 17 different types of requests, albeit some of them represented by a single mention only, the number goes down on the MA level, with 12 and 9 types of help listed by M1 and M2 students respectively.

When asked if there was any unhelpful supervisor feedback, BA students mostly either did not respond (4), or said 'no' (10). Only 2 students noted supervisors' criticism that pointed out flaws but did not suggest improvements. M2 students echoed the BA students' opinion (2) with one student adding that 'overly emotional feedback can be off-putting'. M1 students mentioned suggesting irrelevant or no sources (2), supervisor being 'mean' (2), receiving only negative feedback (2), pointing out errors without suggestions for change (2), and lack of clarity (2). The expectations identified in the current study mirror the findings of prior research in that students value feedback that is manifold (cf. Derounian 2011: 97), useful, specific, clear and individualised, i.e. observe the level of the student (Jonsson 2012: 66–71).

Supervisor questionnaires requested respondents to identify the most frequent student requests, list common stumbling blocks, and indicate the manner of editing student work if at all undertaken. 14 types of student requests were noted: planning the overall thesis structure, deciding the research focus, which theory/authors to use and how to refer to their work in the thesis, general evaluation of the work done, explaining/suggesting research methodology, help with formatting, relevance of information provided, access to sample papers, help with writing an introduction, connecting theory and practice, compiling a research instrument and wording of the title. The requests again range from very general approval (Is my work OK?) to fairly specific help (wording of the title, establishing a research problem, etc.). The most frequently mentioned types were planning the overall structure of the thesis (5 respondents) and deciding research focus (5), as well as advice for relevant theory (4) and assistance with references (3).

The 13 types of problems noted involve different aspects of the process, testifying to the diversity among what supervisors notice or consider important about a good thesis: logicality of discussion, finding a research focus, time management, voicing the student's own stance, cohesion within and between paragraphs, finding sources, avoiding repetition, presenting data in sufficient detail, deciding what is relevant, relying overly on the supervisor, formulating research questions, incorporating previous research and structuring the paper. The problem most frequently mentioned is the general logicality of discussion in the thesis (6). All others appear less often, but involve the content (finding the narrow focus for research – 3, originality of research – 2, avoiding repetition – 1, writing up research in sufficient detail – 1, deciding what is relevant – 1); organisation (cohesion inside and between paragraphs – 2, structuring the paper – 1), incorporating previous research (finding sources – 2, citation – 1); but also time management (2) and overdependence on the supervisor (1).

All seven Estonian supervisors reported editing thesis drafts. The type of corrections most frequently noted was language and punctuation (5), followed by a group of features contributing to clarity of discussion: logicality (4), deleting irrelevant information (3), style (3), cohesion (3), coherence (2). Editing seemed to involve particular thesis sections more frequently than others: wording of the title and research questions, writing introductions and conclusions and presenting references. It has to be noted that the above are supervisors' self-reported editing practices. For a more reliable account, a follow-up study could look at the actual edited drafts by the same supervisors to see to what extent the self-reported practices correlate with the actual ones.

6. Conclusion and implications

The current study concentrated on student and teacher perceptions of academic writing ability of students in one BA/MA programme in Estonia completing a graduation thesis in English, and proceeded to investigate two sets of research questions:

- how the said students rate their own ability to engage in academic writing and to what extent their perception coincides with their supervisors' estimation;
- the type of assistance/ feedback that students expect from their supervisor and the forms that supervision takes.

The results of the analysis show that the Estonian students in the study generally rate their English academic writing abilities higher than their Estonian supervisors do. The two groups probably comment on different aspects, though. Students may be reporting on their awareness of different aspects of what makes English academic writing effective, whereas supervisors rate what they see in student writing, basing their decisions on the degree to which standards of appropriate academic discourse have been met in student writing in their opinion. Thus, as they monitor the thesis writing process, they assess their students' academic writing skill rather than student knowledge. Many of the flaws identified by the supervisors in the Estonian students' academic writing in English, both on the structural level (e.g. writing effective paragraphs, formulating thesis statements and topic sentences, etc.) and while managing content (e.g. finding a topic and managing sources, securing clarity of expression) mirror problems discussed in respective studies abroad (cf. Butler et al. 2014).

Although students believe they can handle thesis writing well, more awareness should be instilled in them with regard to what they believe they can do and what their texts actually reveal about their English academic writing ability. In order to improve their ability, several approaches could be considered. One way would be to provide access to and teach students how to use proof-reading tools and corpus-based resources. This would provide a wealth of samples as well as opportunities to make informed decisions about improving their work. Another approach would be opening a writing centre. While more practice could be incorporated in the academic writing course in the classroom, in the form of discussion of samples of good and less successful samples of graduation theses, and ways of improving the latter, there is usually a time constraint involved that sets limits to curriculum expansion.

A writing centre, on the other hand, would allow more varied activities – group discussion, peer and instructor evaluation, etc. – that would allow an individual approach with more focused discussions of students' individual challenges.

The students in this study predominantly sought research direction from their supervisor, i.e. suggestions for topics and sources, ideas for research instruments and methodology, etc. (cf. Derounian 2012), which may indicate that they are generally 'reactive' types of researchers (Wang, Li 2011: 105). Still, there was variation here, some being very general in their requests and others quite specific. It also transpired that the level of independence increases as the students advance in their studies. M2 students indicated the fewest types of help yet they were mostly quite specific in what they needed. Supervisors' observations of students' problems differ slightly from those pointed out by students themselves. While they agree that finding a research focus and relevant research literature are a predominant worry, supervisors additionally notice frequent requests to comment on the structure and logicality of writing.

Time should be spent communicating the expectations of both parties to the partner in the graduation thesis writing process, i.e. what the supervisor expectations are with regard to the quality of work produced, the time-frame, delivering the product, working with feedback, etc., and what the student expects in terms of content support, manner and timing of feedback, etc., with agreements made either orally or in the form of contracts as suggested by previous research (cf. Derounian 2012).

Supervisors provide a wide variety of assistance during supervision, including editing student drafts. The variety in the type of assistance on the one hand probably reflects idiosyncratic student needs, but it may also be a sign of diversity in supervisors' understanding of what constitutes a sufficiently high standard of academic writing. While the context discussed in the article warrants some diversity, as the topic areas represented by the supervisors vary considerably and thus almost represent different genres, a degree of consensus here is necessary, as the supervisors also act as reviewers of theses supervised by their colleagues. Thus it seems vital to conduct on-going supervisor discussions and foster supervisor cooperation to set and maintain unified standards, i.e. understanding the diversity of what constitutes good academic writing, to promulgate it among students, and to maintain a unified assessment framework for it.

The number of supervisors and students involved in the study is small, and it represents just one Estonian teaching/learning context, which sets limits to the generalisability of the findings. It is not possible to discuss supervisor or student researcher types for example, but it is possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about Estonian students' expectations for the supervision of their graduation thesis and observe some typical non-native supervisor activities while guiding thesis writing in English. This allows for reflection on the content of the academic writing courses offered to students at various stages and points to the need for further awareness-building among both students and supervisors about the nature and challenges that emerge in the process of writing and supervising a graduation thesis.

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JUHENDAJA JA ÜLIÕPILASE OOTUSED INGLISKEELSE LÕPUTÖÖ KIRJUTAMISE PROTSESSIS: JUHTUMIUURING

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Artikkel kajastab uurimust, mis võrdles inglise keeles lõputööd kirjutavate üliõpilaste ja neid võõrkeeles juhendavate õppejõudude poolt väljatoodud probleeme ühes bakalaureuse ja ühes magistriprogrammis Eesti kontekstis, keskendudes üliõpilaste väljendatud vajadustele ja võrreldes neid juhendajapoolse nägemusega üliõpilaste akadeemilist kirjutamist puudutavatest vajadustest. Uuringust osa võtnud üliõpilaste ootused juhendamisele sõltusid mõningal määral sellest, millisele tasemele oma akadeemilises karjääris üliõpilane jõunud oli. Ilmnenud vajadused jagunesid mitmesse gruppi: otseselt teksti loomisega seotud probleemid, mida akadeemilise kirjutamise õpetamise raames on oluline vaadelda interdistsiplinaarsest aspektist; isikuomaduste ja isiksuste vahelise suhtlemisega seotud probleemid; ning institutsionaalne tasand, st asutusesisene hoiak lõputöödele esitatavate nõuete suhtes.

Võtmesõnad: tekstilingvistika, akadeemiline kirjutamine humanitaarias, lõputöö, lõputöö juhendamine, juhendaja roll, tagasisidestamine