

SVETIMŲJŲ KALBŲ STUDIJS/ STUDIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The Estonian Academic Writers' Perceptions of the Most Important Aspects of Effective English Texts: a Questionnaire Survey Conducted at Tallinn University of Technology

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Abstract. Writing in English has become an important tool for communication in today's international academic discourse community. This has motivated Estonian academic writers to produce increasingly more academic prose in English. There is a considerable concern, however, that the writers do not have the discourse and socio-cultural competences in Anglo-American academic writing essential for success in the target community. In an attempt to investigate how knowledgeable Estonian writers are about the various aspects of English academic writing, an experimental study was conducted at Tallinn University of Technology (2004-2008). This paper reports on a questionnaire survey into the perceptions of undergraduate students (N=23) and EAP instructors (N=16) on the most important aspects of writing effective English texts. The outcomes of the survey suggest that Estonian academic writers consider mastery of grammar and lexis as the key contributor to the production of effective English texts, and they are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the significance of text-level discourse in reader-based writing. Implications of the research include the necessity of raising writers' awareness of the textual and socio-cultural aspects of English academic writing through a renewed, discourse-driven perspective for EAP writing instruction in Estonia.

Key words: *L2 writing; EAP writing; the Anglo-American writing conventions; the micro-level and macro-level aspects of English written texts; L2 writing instruction.*

Introduction

In the globalising world, communication across cultures and languages in all walks of life has become more significant than ever before. To facilitate communication, English is now being widely recognized as a global *lingua franca* in many spheres of discourse (e.g., Crystal, 2003; Seidlehofer, 2005). Even though there is some controversy over the global status and long-term future of English (Brown, 1999; Jenkins, 2004), it is considered a "key to the educated elite" (Tonkin, 2001) and due to its socio-cultural power "the primary means of imparting and storing knowledge and information" (Graddol, 1997). To date, the vast majority of academic, scientific and technical texts are being published in the English medium (Crystal, 2003; Tonkin, 2001); however, most writers of these texts are not native speakers of English.

For academics, writing in the internationally accepted medium of discourse is central to their success and professional development in the target community. The ability to produce effective texts in English enables academic writers to communicate their knowledge to the intended readership on a wider scale and thereby gain recognition as members of the international academia. However, although writers may be highly motivated to disseminate their research findings in English-medium publications, to be eligible for publication, the writers have to conform to the conventions and standards of the Anglo-American academic writing style and of the field-specific discourse community. Beyond doubt, the

ability to produce effective texts for international academic publication is of utmost importance for non-native writers, especially of smaller nations and language communities.

The Estonian context for English academic writing

For Estonian academic writers, representatives of a small nation of fewer than one million native speakers of Estonian in the country of origin, competence in English written discourse is a prerequisite for their success in the international academic community. Since Estonia regained its independence in the 1990's, new possibilities have opened up for the writers to promote their research accomplishments on an international scale. There is a concern, however, that the Estonian writers' knowledge of the Anglo-American academic writing conventions and principles of text production is not always adequate to adhere to the expectations of the target audience. Recent studies (Rummel, 2005, 2009) on Estonian academic writers' discourse in English have revealed that although the writers may appear linguistically quite proficient in English and able to recognise reader-friendly English texts, they are not always successful in communicating their academic knowledge to the intended readership. Even though the writers may be familiar with the basic conventions of the Anglo-American writing tradition, they seem to lack the global competences of the target language and are therefore not sufficiently aware of what aspects of writing to focus on in the production of English academic prose. More specifically, the writers are not quite familiar with the discourse

and socio-cultural differences in the writing styles of Estonian and English in regard to the communicative aspects of discourse such as the purpose and the writer-reader relationship, text overall organisation and textual patterning, coherence and cohesion, argumentation and style, metadiscourse, and genre conventions, among other issues. In short, it may be assumed that when composing in English, Estonian academic writers tend to overlook the macro-level features of written discourse and focus on the micro-level aspects of writing such as grammar, lexis and syntax instead. Research (Mauranen, 1996; Ventola, 1996) has reported similar findings in the English written discourse of Finnish academic writers, representatives of another Finno-Ugric language akin to Estonian.

This paper discusses the data obtained from a questionnaire survey that examined a small sample of novice (N=23) and expert (N=16) L2 academic writers at Tallinn University of Technology (TTU). The intention of the survey was to identify what the Estonian academic writers perceived as the most important aspects of effective English written texts. The research was guided by the assumption that the Estonian writers, independent of their L2 proficiency, regard the linguistic competence of grammar and lexis as the most essential factor in the production of readable academic prose in English, whereas they tend to disregard the communicative aspects of text-level discourse. It can be argued that knowledge of the text-level features of English discourse, and of the skills and competences that contribute to effective written discourse in English is not adequately distributed among Estonian writers. A likely reason for that may be that L2 writing instruction in Estonia has been focused primarily on developing learners' linguistic competence of the micro-level aspects of English writing.

Theoretical background

Writing effective academic prose in English is not an easy task to accomplish for L2 writers since the English written text should conform to certain norms and exhibit specific communicative qualities that the target readership would expect to find in the text. In line with this, many scholars (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Bhatia, 2002; Connor, 1996; Coulthard, 1994; Flowerdew, 2002; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Halliday and Hasan, 1989; Hyland, 2003; Kroll, 1990; Leki and Carson, 1994; Mauranen, 1996; Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1993; Swales, 1990; Tribble, 1996; White, 1997, among others) have emphasised the need for L2 writers to become more thoroughly informed in the intricacies of Anglo-American writing in terms of the various discourse strategies, knowledge bases, skills and competences necessary for the production of high-quality English texts.

The multifaceted nature of English written texts would certainly require awareness from L2 writers of both *micro-level* and *macro-level* attributes of discourse. Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p.62) have outlined these attributes at different levels of discourse as follows: syntax and semantics on a sentential level, cohesion and coherence on a textual level and lexicon as the "diffuse element" underlying the other four. The textual level of English written discourse exhibits the linguistic properties, which reflect its organisation, logical flow, rhetorical force and thematic focus. In this respect, effective academic writing can be defined not only by the linguistic quality of

isolated sentences but rather by the textual patterning and logical presentation of meaning in context. The textual information structures and patterned functions of English, such as, for example, the problem-solution (Hoey, 1994), the claim-counterclaim (McCarthy, 1993), the hypothetical-real (Winter, 1994), the general-specific (Coulthard, 1994), and various other structures enable writers to achieve the communicative purpose of written discourse. In the words of Widdowson (1979, p.118), effective communication only takes place when sentences perform "a variety of different acts of essentially social nature".

In reality, as a likely consequence of grammar- and lexis-driven methods of traditional L2 writing instruction at school, non-native writers tend to attribute a primary role in the production of English texts to *micro-level features* of writing such as grammatical conventions, word choice and syntax. While the writers may have become linguistically fairly competent in English after years of language study at school, they do not always appear to have acquired the communication skills essential in the construction of effective discourse. This discrepancy is likely to remain an issue of constant debate among L2 writing scholars; whereas some writing scholars seem to believe that L2 writers must master the language forms before aiming at fluency, coherence and style, the growing number of researches (e.g., Hyland, 2003; Raimes, 1991; Truscott, 1996) insist that in L2 context, the ability to construct meaning in discourse and the fluent expression of ideas are the most crucial aspects of English writing. Besides, evidence has revealed (Spack, 1988; Truscott, 1996; Widdowson, 1979) that increased syntactic maturity does not necessarily contribute to increased writing quality. Spack (1988, p.30), for example, suggests that L2 writers' difficulty with academic writing "may not lie in a lack of [linguistic] ability but rather in the social and cultural factors that influence composing".

Clearly, academic writers should aim to contribute to coherent transaction of ideas and write as effectively as possible, making their ideas, intentions and arguments "unmistakably clear" (Lorentz, 1999, p.55) and reading "as easy as possible" (Turk and Kirkmann, 1989 p.10). Therefore, in order to succeed in English-dominant academic discourse, L2 writers should attempt to combine the inherently complex characteristics of writing ranging from "mechanical control to creativity, with good grammar, knowledge of subject matter, awareness of stylistic conventions and various mysterious factors in between" (Wall, 1981 p.53). In other words, apart from focusing on the micro-level linguistic features of discourse such as grammar, lexis and syntax, L2 writers should recognise the macro-level fundamentals of unity, text organisation, and coherence. Moreover, writers should consider a number of important socio-cultural conditions for writing, in particular, the intended message, the writer's purpose, the topic and the expectations of the audience.

Methodology: participants and procedures

The following section outlines details of a questionnaire survey conducted at Tallinn University of Technology (TTU) in the frame of an extended experimental study (2004-

2008)¹. The survey was carried out with a sample of *novice* and *expert* L2 academic writers – the undergraduate students (N=23) and the English language teachers (N=16) of TTU. The data for the survey were obtained from the students' course-initial needs analysis questionnaire and the English language teachers' questionnaire.

The sample of *novice academic writers* was composed of second-year students (aged 18-20) of engineering and information technology, including 19 (83%) male subjects and 4 (17%) female subjects. The students' objectives for EAP writing instruction were two-fold: in the short term, this instruction was expected to enable the writers to adhere to the immediate educational requirements of their academia (e.g., writing essays and term papers) and, in the long term, empower them to fulfil their academic career enhancement purposes (e.g., producing longer academic texts such as research papers and theses).

The student subjects participated in an integrated-skills EAP course at TTU²; they were taught and investigated in two different L2 proficiency level groups (Level B2 and Level C1; Common European Framework of Reference, CEFR, 2001). The students were streamed into language groups based on Nelson Placement Test³ and DIALANG Test⁴. According to Nelson Placement Test scores, 12 (52%) subjects were at the intermediate + level of English proficiency and 11 (48%) subjects were at the advanced level of English proficiency. The subjects designated as intermediate + had an entry level Nelson Placement Test score of 85-90, and the subjects designated as advanced had an entry level Nelson Placement Test score of 98-113. Based on DIALANG Test results, the subjects' English language proficiency can be related to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001) Level B2 (Vantage Level) and Level C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency Level) respectively. Grouping students on the basis of their L2 proficiency was expected to reveal whether the writers' linguistic competence of English would yield any differences in their understanding of the underlying principles of effective academic writing in English.

The sample of *expert academic writers* involved 16 qualified EAP instructors of the Language Centre of TTU. All the teachers had a 5-year Diploma degree equivalent to a Master's degree, one teacher had an additional Master's degree and one teacher was pursuing for an additional Master's degree. As regards the respondents' tertiary-level teaching experience, 8 (50%) teachers had more than 16 years of experience, while 5 (31%) teachers had 11-15 years of experience and 3 (19%) teachers had 6-10 years of experience. Nearly half (44%) of the teachers had participated in several ESP/ EAP training courses and projects initiated by the British Council or some other international organisation. The sample represented different age groups: 8 (50%) teachers were in the age group between 40-45 years, 4 (25%) teachers were in the age group between 46-55 years, and 4 (25%) teachers were over 55 years old. All the respondents were female.

Procedures. In a questionnaire survey, both students and teachers were asked to reflect on what aspects of English academic writing they would consider most important in the production of effective texts. More precisely, in the first class of the EAP course, the student subjects were instructed to complete a course-initial needs analysis questionnaire (see Appendix 1), aimed at eliciting students' perceptions of their practices and performance in English, and their expectations for EAP instruction at the university. The instrument contained twelve questions, eight of which (Q3, Q5, Q7, Q 8-12) were directly concerned with the skill of writing. The focus of this paper is Question 10 that instructed students to rank, in the descending order of importance, six aspects of writing: *grammatical accuracy*, *spelling and punctuation*, *subject content*, *overall organisation*, *vocabulary* and *good ideas* in respect to their impact on the discourse quality of English academic texts.

A similar ranking order item was included in the English teachers' questionnaire (see Appendix 2; Q1); in response to this question the teachers were asked to assess the importance of the six aspects of writing dependent on the learners' L2 proficiency (Level B2 and Level C1). The teachers completed the questionnaire at a regular departmental meeting on a voluntary basis; hereby, it should be noted that half of the teachers responded to the questionnaire anonymously.

Results and discussion

This section reports on the findings of the survey from three different perspectives: firstly, it provides an overview of the undergraduate students' attitudes as to the most important aspects of effective academic writing in English (Appendix 1; Q10); secondly, it outlines the teachers' perceptions of the same aspects of writing in regard to EAP writing instruction at Level B2 and Level C1 (Appendix 2; Q1); and finally, it presents a comparative analysis of the data obtained from the total sample of respondents, including the B2-level subjects, the C1-level subjects and the EAP instructors. Figures 1-3 and Table 1 provide the distribution of answers in the combined totals of Ranks 1-2 (1 – most important) in percentages.

Overall, while data analysis revealed a fairly significant division of opinion in the Estonian academic writers' perceptions of the most essential contributors to effective English written texts, it clearly highlighted a certain aspect

¹ The experimental study was aimed at investigating Estonian academic writers' general views on English writing and determining their common problems in English academic writing in regard to the communicative aspects of discourse. The focus of the research was to identify Estonian writers' practices and needs in English academic writing in order to upgrade EAP instruction and enhance the learners' L2 composing skills. The outcomes of the study have been reported in recent publications by Rummel (e.g., 2005, 2009)

² The EAP course has been designed to enhance students' L2 academic literacy skills for their instant and future academic activities. The course runs over a 16-week semester for a total of 40 academic hours and ends in a final EAP examination (which is also a graduation requirement) with an equally weighted assessment of the four language skills. The Examination Writing Test requires students to compose a 200-word argumentative essay in 45 minutes on one of the two assigned prompts. Students' examination scripts are scored on an institutionally devised five-point analytic rating scale with a focus on grammar, vocabulary, organisation, spelling and content.

³ Nelson Placement Test is a paper-based diagnostic proficiency test of English yielding the highest score of 125 points.

⁴ DIALANG is a computer-based Internet-delivered diagnostic test, developed with the support of the European Commission.

of writing commonly appreciated by most subjects of the survey. In particular, a substantial proportion (57-67%) of the Estonian subjects appeared to prioritise *grammatical accuracy* as the most fundamental feature of English written discourse. This finding is in line with previous research on L2 writing (e.g., Riley, 1996; Ventola, 1996) that has demonstrated similar results with higher priority given by L2 writers to English *grammar* as opposed to other aspects of language. The reason for that may be that L2 writers tend to identify grammar with the written form of the language and regard effective writing in English merely as a matter of designing grammatically correct sentences.

Undergraduate students. The students were asked to rank six aspects of writing in terms of their significance to academic written discourse in English. As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority of students prioritised *grammar* as one of the key contributors to English academic texts.

An interesting observation was that while the values attributed to *grammar* were nearly equally distributed among the B2-level subjects (63%) and the C1-level subjects (67%), their preferences as to the other aspects of writing differed markedly. This variation can be further illustrated by the values ascribed to *vocabulary*: namely, a significant proportion (63%) of the B2-level students regarded vocabulary as of high importance in academic writing, whereas only a small number (17%) of the C1-level subjects prioritised that feature. A similar difference applies to *spelling and punctuation*: while as many as 45% of the B2-level students ranked these features first and second in importance, only 17% of the C1-level subjects placed the aspects high in their rating. Somewhat surprisingly, both *content knowledge* and *good ideas* received fairly low scores from the students; thus, only 9% of the B2-level subjects and 17% of the C1-level subjects ranked these features first and second in importance.

As was only predicted, *text organisation* was the area that exhibited the most pronounced differences in the students' responses. Even though a reasonably large proportion (45%) of the B2-level subjects ranked text organisation third in importance, none of them regarded organisation as one of the most significant contributors to writing effective texts in English. In contrast, as many as 50% of the C1-level subjects attributed high significance to text organisation, and 33% of the students placed it third in rank.

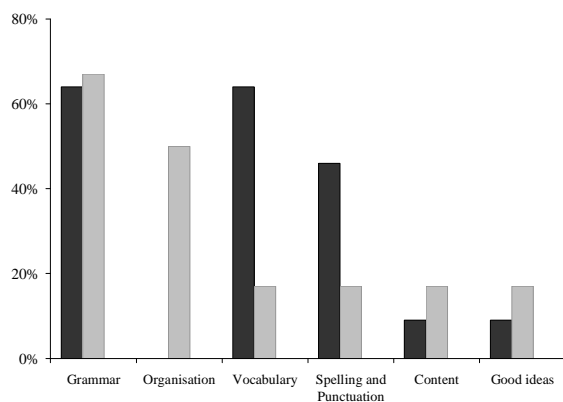


Figure 1. A comparative overview of the B2-level (black) and C1-level (grey) students' responses; the combined totals of Ranks 1-2

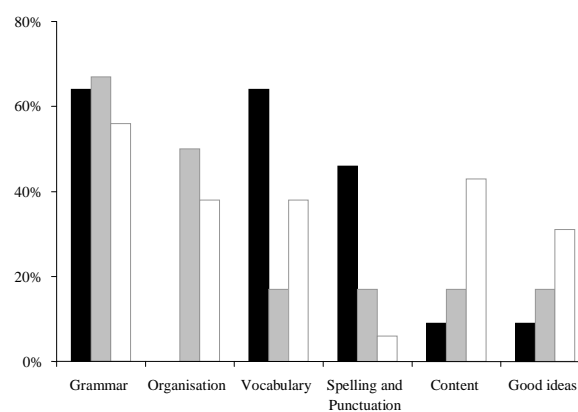


Figure 2. How important do you think the following aspects are in English academic writing? A comparative overview of the responses obtained from the B2-level students (black), the C1-level students (grey), and the English teachers for L2 writing instruction at B2-level (white); the combined totals of Ranks 1-2

EAP instructors. Similarly to the undergraduate students, the English teachers were asked to reflect on the six fundamental aspects of English academic writing; responding to the question, the teachers were expected to specify the significance of these aspects in teaching writers at different levels of L2 proficiency (Level B2 and Level C1). Figures 2-3 below present the responses suggested by the EAP teachers in parallel with the answers provided by the B2-level and C1-level students.

As outlined in Figure 2, the teachers' responses in regard to teaching L2 writing at B2-level showed their instructional preferences for *grammar* (57%). With respect to the other aspects of English writing, nearly half (44%) of the EAP instructors considered *content* most important and an equal proportion of them deemed *vocabulary* (37%) and *text organisation* (37%) highly relevant for B2-level writers. At the same time, only one teacher believed that text organisation was the key aspect (Rank 1) of English academic writing to be focused on already at B2-level instruction. An expected outcome was that the teachers regarded *spelling and punctuation* as the least important consideration in B-2 level English writing.

The teachers' attitudes towards L2 writing instruction at C1-level are presented in Figure 3; at that level of L2 instruction, the teachers attributed greater importance to *content* (82%), *vocabulary* (75%), *grammar* (69%) and overall *text organisation* (63%). It is worth noting that while the majority of teachers did not identify *text organisation* as most relevant to C-level writing, none of the teachers appeared to totally neglect this crucial aspect of writing and none of them placed it fifth or sixth in rank.

The total sample. When comparing the data obtained from the total sample of Estonian academic writers – the B2-level students, the C1-level students and the EAP teachers – a significantly high degree of between-group variation can be observed in the respondents' priorities in all other areas but *grammatical accuracy*. It can be seen in Table 1 below that grammatical accuracy was universally recognised (altogether 64% of the respondents) as by far the most important aspect of English academic writing. Thus, 57%

of the teachers rated competence in grammar highly relevant in B2-level writing and 69% of the teachers considered it equally important in C1-level writing.

Likewise, 63% of the B2-level students and 67% of the C1-level students assigned grammatical accuracy the highest priority in English academic writing.

A somewhat unexpected outcome was that whereas the teachers' and students' opinions on *grammatical accuracy* differed only slightly, the subjects' perceptions of other aspects of English academic writing were fairly diverse. Table 1 indicates that while the B2-level students placed equally high value on *grammar* (63%) and *vocabulary* (63%), the C1-level subjects prioritised *grammar* (67%) and *text organisation* (50%). Even though the EAP teachers appeared to identify all the six aspects of writing as quite important to teach to L2 students, quite surprisingly, the majority of teachers appeared to express more concern about the linguistic rather than the textual aspects of EAP writing. The fact that only 37% of the teachers rated awareness of text organising principles as highly important for B2-level writers may be indicative of their understanding that lower level L2 students would need to master the grammatical forms of English first to be able to compose a standard written text. Although the English instructors' preferences for teaching C1-level writers were fairly different and a substantial number of the teachers considered knowledge of *text organisation* (63%) highly valuable for these writers, the teachers attributed still greater importance in EAP instruction to *content* (82%), *vocabulary* (75%) and *grammar* (69%) than to the logical organisation of ideas. An interesting finding was that the aspects of English writing that gained a fairly high ranking from the teachers (e.g., *content* and *good ideas*) received a significantly lower ranking from the students.

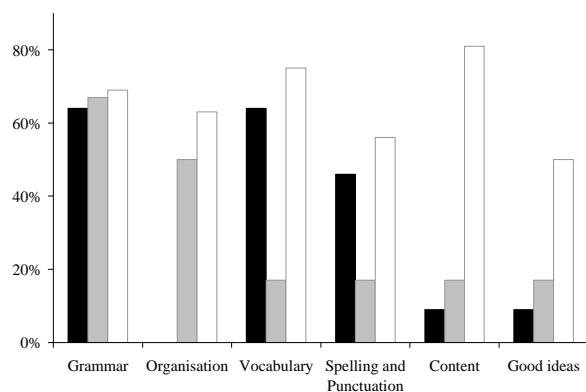


Figure 3. How important do you think the following aspects are in English academic writing? A comparative overview of the responses obtained from the B2-level students (*black*), the C1-level students (*grey*), and the English teachers for L2 writing instruction at C1-level (*white*); the combined totals of Ranks 1-2.

Furthermore, the survey findings displayed a certain pattern of diversity in the B2-level and C1-level subjects' answers. The B2-level students tended to rate sentence-level features of writing such as *vocabulary* and *spelling* considerably more highly than their C1-level peers; the C1-level students, in contrast, seemed to recognise not only the linguistic competence of *grammar* and *lexis*, but also the global competences of English written discourse.

A comparative analysis of the B2-level and C1-level students' answers exhibited certain differences in their understanding of the role of *text organisation* in writing effective English texts. Indeed, none of the B2-level subjects attributed the highest significance to text organisation, although 45% of them placed it third in importance. In contrast, the C1-level subjects regarded knowledge of text organisation as highly relevant to L2 writing. This was evidenced by the fact that as many as half of the C1-level students ranked text organisation first and second in value, and a fairly large proportion (33%) of them placed it third in importance. By comparison, 63% of the teachers believed that text organisation was crucial for teaching C1-level writers, whereas only 37% of the teachers maintained that this aspect was highly significant for teaching B2-level writers.

Table 1. How important do you think the following aspects are in English academic writing? (in percentages)

	Teachers B2	Students B2	Teachers C1	Students C1
Grammatical accuracy	57	63	69	67
Spelling and punctuation	6	45	56	17
Subject content	44	9	82	17
Text organisation	37	0	63	50
Vocabulary	37	63	75	17
Good ideas	32	9	50	17

In sum, the above data seems to indicate that both the teachers and the students considered the *linguistic competence* of English (i.e., the mastery of grammar and lexis) as the basis for effective academic writing in English. Findings of this survey confirmed the data well known from previous research (e.g., Connor, 1996; Leki and Carson, 1994; Kroll, 1990; Raimes, 1991; Tribble, 1996; Truscott, 1996; Widdowson, 1979) that L2 students tend to identify competence in English writing with the linguistic competence of *grammar* and *lexis*; however, their difficulties with writing in English may largely be due to difficulties with composing and textual skills rather than linguistic skills. Consistent with this tendency, most student subjects of this survey identified the quality of English academic texts exclusively with the mastery of grammar and vocabulary and only a few of the C-level writers referred to the importance of *discourse competence* in producing readable English prose. The relatively low rating assigned by the students to the text-level attributes of English writing indicates that they are not well aware of the significance of these features in effective academic communication. The EAP instructors' preference for teaching the surface-level aspects of writing rather than the textual attributes of discourse is somewhat surprising; however, this evidence clearly indicates that text-level aspects of writing are not adequately addressed in EAP instruction in Estonia.

The above findings may reflect a controversial situation in EAP instruction in Estonia; namely, due to time and administrative constraints in EAP classes, students and teachers may not be able to focus on the communicative aspects of English, in particular, the discourse and socio-

cultural competences crucial to writing. Even if considerable effort may be expended on discourse-related issues, the main focus often remains on grammatical accuracy and lexical adequacy. This common pedagogical practice in teaching EAP may substantially have contributed to the difficulty Estonian academic writers have encountered in attempting to produce readable texts for English audiences. It cannot be denied that the linguistic competence of grammar and lexis is of high importance in English academic written discourse; however, this competence is by far not the only factor accountable for the production of effective texts. Above all, L2 academic writers should be able to discover the relationships among the ideas of the text and “the organizational scaffolding upon which the text content is constructed” (John and Paz, 2004, p.1).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed Estonian novice and expert academic writers’ perceptions of the most important aspects of effective writing in academic English. The overall findings of the survey suggest that academic writers are not sufficiently aware of the underlying principles of the Anglo-American writing tradition and the text level contributors to readable English academic prose. Furthermore, since Estonian academic writers lack knowledge of the English language in real discourse and do not have the necessary competences, skills and strategies for writing, they have considerable deficits in creating coherent English texts for the English-medium readership.

Non-native writers have traditionally attributed a primary role in L2 writing to sentence-level features of a written text such as grammatical conventions, word choice and syntax; as a result, writers fail to appreciate the discourse aspects of developing content, text organisation, audience awareness, argumentation, style and flow of thought. The discourse fundamentals of writing must be important considerations in developing reader-friendly texts in any language; nevertheless, the findings of this research indicate that the vast majority of the Estonian writers, regardless of their L2 proficiency, were primarily concerned with the surface-level aspects of English texts. In the light of this, even though composing in English has gained a new perspective for Estonian academic writers as a prime communication skill central to their professional development, composing quality texts in English is likely to remain a critical task for the majority of Estonian writers.

Learning to write in English for academic purposes is a complex process for L2 writers, which requires prolonged contacts with real-world written texts and a great deal of instruction and practice. To a certain degree, the writers’ deficiency to produce effective texts in the English medium has been fostered by the traditional L2 instruction at Estonian schools; therefore, this research suggests a renewed perspective on L2 writing instruction in Estonia, especially in the ESP/EAP settings. As the circumstances for international academic written discourse clearly indicate the privileged position of the Anglo-American writing tradition, one of the priorities for EAP writing instruction should be to enhance Estonian writers’ knowledge about how to write for academic audiences that are governed by Anglo-American writing norms. The increasing need for writers to produce quality English texts

for the international readership should shift the focus of EAP writing instruction from the surface-level features to the global aspects of written discourse. In other words, EAP writing instruction in Estonia should be aimed not merely at developing writers’ linguistic competence of English grammar and lexis but more importantly at raising their awareness of the different aspects of language in discourse. A discourse-driven approach to teaching EAP writing would enable Estonian writers to become better familiarised with the fundamentals of English written discourse and through this gain mastery of the techniques and competences of Anglo-American writing.

In short, a pedagogical focus on the whole text can shift L2 learners’ attention away from sentence-level grammar to discourse features crucial to creating meaning in English texts. A discourse-driven approach to EAP writing instruction could not only provide useful information for undergraduate students as novice academic writers but also be of value to expert academic writers in the acquisition of internationally acceptable English writing skills. Admittedly, questions arise about whether discourse-driven EAP writing instruction would be beneficial only for writers at higher levels of L2 competence or whether learners should be exposed to text-level rhetoric already at lower levels of English proficiency. These issues are definitely subject to further discussion.

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Kärt Rummel

Svarbiausi akademinių anglų kalbos tekstų bruožai: Talino technologijos universitete atliktos apklausos analizė

Santrauka

Svarbia šiuolaikinės tarptautinės akademinės bendruomenės bendravimo priemone tapo tekstai anglų kalba. Tai skatina Estijos akademinės bendruomenės narius vis daugiau darbų skelbti angliškai. Tačiau manoma, kad tekstų kūrėjams trūksta anglakalbės akademinio rašymo sociokultūrinės kompetencijos bei diskurso suvokimo, būtino sėkmingam tekstų funkcionavimui. Siekiant išsiaiškinti Estijos tekstų kūrėjų kompetencijų akademinių anglų kalbos tekstų rašymo srityje, Talino technologijos universitete 2004–2006 metais buvo atlikta apklausa. Straipsnyje pateikiami studentų (N=23) ir akademinės anglų kalbos dėstytojų (N=16) apklausos rezultatai apie svarbiausius angliškų akademinių tekstų bruožus. Apklaustųjų nuomone, svarbiausi veiksniai kuriant tekstus anglų kalba yra gramatikos ir leksikos gebėjimai, o teksto turiniui teikiama nepakankamai reikšmės. Tyrimo išvadose taip pat akcentuojama būtinybė gerinti tekstų kūrėjų sociokultūrinius akademinių anglų kalbos tekstų rašymo aspektus pasitelkiant atnaujintą, diskursu grindžiamą akademinės anglų kalbos rašymo dėstymą Estijoje.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY: ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES
Course Participant Questionnaire

Name:

1. **Why are you taking the course?**
2. **Where have you acquired your English language skills?**
How many years have you studied English?
3. **How would you assess your English skills? (Give points from 1 to 5)**

reading	listening
writing	speaking
4. **What subject knowledge do you have?**
5. **Please indicate the frequency of each activity in your job/ studies, etc.:**
A – often, B – sometimes, C – rarely, D – never

Do you have to read anything in English?	A B C D
Do you have to write anything in English?	A B C D
Do you have to speak English?	A B C D
6. **What do you need to read in English?**
7. **What do you need to write in English?**
8. **What English skills should you improve to be successful in your future career?**
(Give the order of importance)

reading	listening
writing	speaking
9. **What is 'academic writing'?**
10. **How important do you think the following six aspects are in academic writing?**
Provide the order of importance (1 – most important; 6 – least important) and give your comments on each factor.

Grammatical accuracy
Spelling and punctuation
Subject content
Overall organisation
Vocabulary
Good ideas
11. **How would you improve the readability of your writing? What aspect would you consider the most?**
12. **Should you always think of writing as a way of communication? Why?**

APPENDIX 2: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: (optional)

Date.....

1. How important do you think the following six factors are in English academic writing?

Could you provide the overall order of importance (1 – most important, 6 – least important) and give short comments on each aspect?

Grammatical accuracy

B2 level

C1 level

Spelling and punctuation

B2 level

C1 level

Subject content

B2 level

C1 level

Overall organisation

B2 level

C1 level

Vocabulary

B2 level

C1 level

Good ideas

B2 level

C1 level

2. What is 'text organisation'?

.....

3. How could ideas be linked in a text?

.....

4. How could students improve their writing?

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