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‘Accept with Revisions’: Regulating the Language of Student Writing

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This article focuses on the regulation of student writing by exploring a specific form of such writing, *the maturity test*. In Finnish universities, the maturity test is a compulsory part of a bachelor’s degree in which students demonstrate their familiarity with the topic of their bachelor’s thesis, as well as their mother tongue skills. Maturity tests are written, revised and assessed in a multiphase process in which students receive both written and oral feedback on their texts before submitting the final version for acceptance. The focus of this paper is on feedback conversations between the student and the reviser. The questions explored are: (1) what aspects of the texts and their acceptability are brought up in the conversations and by whom, and (2) what kinds of normative systems do the participants orient to? The findings suggest that there are several kinds of these systems, and that the participants orient to polycentric systems of norms, which are tied to a various *centring institutions*. The data include regulatory documents, maturity tests, and feedback conversations.

Keywords: academic literacy; higher education; language regulation; polycentricity; text trajectory

Introduction

Language regulation – an everyday phenomenon in most Finnish educational and institutional contexts, such as universities – here refers to practices through which language is monitored, intervened in and managed (see e.g. Hynninen 2016; Hynninen and Solin 2017). This article deals with regulating academic writing in higher education in Finland. On national and institutional levels, language is regulated by or according to national language policies and national laws, which in return, are based on and regulated by national politics and traditions (see e.g. Sonntag and Cardinal 2015). In the context of higher education in Finland, for example, due to Finland's political history, both Swedish and Finnish have the status of a national language, and therefore, good command of both languages is required from everyone working in public administration. In higher education institutions, the required skills are trained, tested and documented by specifically designed tests and courses, such as language proficiency tests and courses on academic writing conducted by language teachers and lecturers as part of their everyday working practices.

In this article, it is argued that, in addition to high-level language policies (national and institutional language policies), everyday settings of language teaching in higher education are significant sites for language regulation. In other words, language and writing are regulated also in everyday linguistic and discursive practices in educational settings where language is taught, produced, evaluated and discussed. The relationship between high-level language policies and everyday practices is thus considered to be dynamic; while high-level language policies represent institutions (here universities) and nations (here Finland), they are actually interpreted and put into practice in everyday teaching and writing practices in universities which then constitute language policies on a lower level. This means that the everyday regulation of language in Finnish higher education is where language policy happens and where higher education language policy is actually implemented. Language regulation is a vital part of the educational and institutional language regime, and it has so far

been mainly invisible and could also be described as hidden literacy (see e.g. Lillis 2013, 95–97). Considering that the maturity test functions as an institutionally and juridically defined demonstration of one's written standard language skills and has significant consequences for one's life and career, it is essential to investigate what aspects of a student's text and its acceptability are brought up in feedback conversations.

The focus in this article is on the regulation of student writing. The purpose is to explore a specific form of such writing, the maturity test. In Finnish universities, the maturity test is a compulsory part of a bachelor's degree in which students demonstrate their familiarity with the topic of their bachelor's thesis, as well as their mother tongue skills. In the data used here, maturity tests take the form of BA thesis abstracts. They are written, revised and assessed in a multiphase process in which university students receive both written and oral feedback on their texts before submitting the final version for acceptance. In the data used here, the feedback is given by language revisers who work as senior lecturers of Finnish language and linguistics, and who revise maturity tests as part of their annual workload. This article analyses feedback conversations between the student and the reviser, with a particular emphasis on the discussion on aspects of norms, conventions and acceptability regarding language and genre-specific issues. The aim is to examine how language and writing are regulated in a particular language practice and on what kinds of norms and systems of norms the regulation is based. The questions explored are:

- (1) what aspects of the texts and their acceptability are brought up in the conversations and by whom,
- (2) what kinds of normative systems do the participants orient to?

Theoretical Perspectives and Background

The context and motivation for this research stems on the one hand from the public and academic discourse in Finland where since the beginning of 1990s there has been a considerable amount of discussion on the weakening of L1 writing skills of Finnish children, especially on upper-secondary and tertiary levels (e.g. Leino 2006). Similar concerns have been expressed in higher education contexts in other countries, too (see e.g. Lea and Street 1998). On the other hand, there are only a few studies on L1 academic writing or academic literacy in higher education in Finland (Julkunen 2002; Vuorijärvi 2013). This is the case despite the wealth of global studies on academic literacy and studies on literacy in primary and secondary school in Finland (e.g. PISA studies), especially for the last two decades, and the quite rapid expansion of the number of students attending higher education in Finland during the 20th century.¹ There are, however, studies on interaction in academic supervision and seminar practices in Finnish university context, focusing on contexts of thesis writing (e.g. Vehviläinen 2009; Svinhufvud 2013; Svinhufvud and Vehviläinen 2013) or language supervision in Swedish-speaking contexts quite similar to the one examined in this article (e.g. Henricson and Nelson 2017).

The research reported in this article is theoretically based on research on language ideologies and norms (e.g. Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Kroskrity 2004; Hynninen 2016; see also Mäntynen 2012 et al.) as well as on academic literacy and sociolinguistics of writing from a discourse studies perspective. Therefore, instead of a top-down or a global perspective, language regulation is viewed from a local or a bottom-up perspective (see Blommaert 2005; Lillis 2013). Furthermore, writing and language regulation are looked at as discursive

¹ This is according to Statistics Finland (2007, 2017a, 2017b); in 1920, there were 3,600 students in all higher education institutions in Finland, whereas in 2016, there were almost 300,000 students in universities and universities of applied sciences.

practices and situational activities, and similarly, language ideologies and norms are considered locally constructed (e.g. Mäntynen et al. 2012; Solin 2012; Hynninen 2013).

The research of language ideologies is based on the idea that language users' conceptions and views of language, i.e. language ideologies, are essential in shaping and constructing language (Silverstein 1979; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Blommaert 1999; Kroskrity 2004; Mäntynen 2012 et al.). In this field of study, language ideologies are viewed as mutually shared and dynamic, but it is also worth noticing the effect and power of experts and expert knowledge in constructing languages, standards and genres, as for example Gal and Woolard (2000, 1) point out. Furthermore, the representation of these ideological views on language are constantly reproduced and activated in linguistic and discursive practices (Gal and Woolard 2000, 1–2).

The approach applied in this article is further supported by theoretical and methodological ideas proposed by Bhatia (2004) and by Blommaert (2005) in discourse studies and by Lillis (2013) and Lillis and McKinney (2013) in the frame of sociolinguistics of writing. Epistemologically, both discourse studies and sociolinguistics of writing, as well as the study of language ideologies discussed above, share a similar view on language as social action and the idea that meaning is made and construed in social practices, i.e. that meanings are social, dynamic and contextual, and also that social practices are shaped and constructed by and through language (see e.g. Gee 1999, 16–20; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009). In both research fields, strong theoretical and methodological emphasis is laid also on the significance of context and social practices. Theoretically, discourse (language as social action) and the concept of context are considered dynamic, multi-layered and multi-dimensional. This again is discernible in the use of multi-dimensional analytical framework, and, for example, in applying an ethnographic perspective. (E.g. Bhatia 2004, Chapter 6; also Blommaert 2005, Chapter 3, esp. 62–67). In this article, discourse studies perspective is

applied especially in the multi-dimensional view of context and, methodologically, in the use of ethnographic knowledge and data and in the use of systematic qualitative analysis. Similar methodological approaches are proposed and used in sociolinguistics of writing in which the objects of study are not only texts but also their institutional and social contexts and text trajectories. This field of study offers a highly relevant research framework for the study of writing as social practice and also for this article. Following Lillis's (2013) ideas, writing and literacy are viewed as social practices that are linked to institutions and issues of regulation, and furthermore, instead of focusing only on the written text, the focus is on the texts' trajectory and on how and under what conditions texts come into being and are accepted (Lillis 2013, 114–115, 118–119).

The Context and Data for the Research: Maturity Test as a Site for Language Regulation

This article deals with a particular institutional test in the Finnish academia, the maturity test. Maturity test is a compulsory part of bachelor's degrees in which students demonstrate their familiarity with the topic of their bachelor's thesis, as well as their language skills. The institutional requirement to demonstrate language skills is based on the Act on the Knowledge of Languages (424/2003) and the Decree on the Demonstration of Proficiency in the Finnish and Swedish Languages in the Civil Service (481/2003) in Finnish law. The high-level language policy dealt with in this article is constituted by these two statutes. According to Act on the Knowledge of Languages (424/2003 § 6), from Civil Service personnel who are required a university degree, *excellent* command of written and spoken language is required in the majority language of the given administrative district (i.e. in bilingual areas in Finland either Finnish or Swedish depending on which one is the language of the majority).

Furthermore, according to Decree 481/2003 §15 (*Excellent command of written and spoken language*), no proficiency tests are needed if a person has both (1) got their secondary or high school education with the language in question as their mother tongue, and (2) written an accepted maturity test in higher education in the language in question. Thus, by writing a maturity test in their mother tongue, students demonstrate the language skills required to work in public administration in Finland. For the same purpose, the required proficiency level in the official language proficiency test equals to C2 according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

There are no nation-wide practices, guidelines or rules for Finnish universities in how to organise the maturity test. In Finnish universities and high schools, the maturity test is organised and conducted in various ways and genres; practices vary between universities but they may be different even between faculties of the same university. Still, in most universities in Finland, the maturity test is either an essay, an abstract, or a written exam on the topic of one's bachelor's thesis written by the student after finishing their thesis (see e.g. University of Tampere 2018). The text is then assessed and evaluated both from the point of view of content and language by the thesis supervisor and by a language reviser (usually a Finnish/Swedish language teacher). In general, the test is evaluated on a two-level scale (accepted–rejected/pass–fail), and neither written feedback nor oral feedback-conversations will take place, at least unless the author fails the test. Traditionally, in most Finnish universities maturity tests are evaluated without any personal contact between the student and the language reviser. Thus, the assessment process is often quite distant for both the student and the language reviser, and therefore, also the juridical and institutional status of the test often remains opaque and is perhaps not recognized by the student and the thesis supervisor.

The context of this article, and the source of its data, is the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Helsinki, which applied a unique practice for assessing maturity tests during

2008–2017. This article springs from a larger research project on language policy and L1 writing practices in the Finnish academia, aiming to provide knowledge on academic literacy skills and practices as well as language regulation and teacher–student interaction in language supervision. For this project, a corpus of naturally-occurring written and spoken data was collected in the University of Helsinki in 2014–2015. The data consist of both (1) written and (2) spoken data including (i) Finnish maturity tests in the Humanities written by students (N=74), including revisions by teachers who are native Finnish speakers and work as senior lecturers in Finnish language and linguistics subject (N=4)², and (ii) video-recorded face-to-face conversations (N=70), in which the students get feedback on their texts and the revisions are explained by the language revisers. The length of the conversations varies from 4.20 minutes to 25.17 minutes; the average length is 10 minutes including opening and closing routines (e.g. identifying the student, finding their tests, small talk about the weather, signing the research permission, giving practical advice on the assessment process). The conversations were recorded by the language revisers, and only the student and the language reviser were present at the encounter. The data also include institutional and administrative documents (e.g. official records of meetings, decisions), student guidelines, teaching material and ethnographic data including emails, observations, notes on meetings and experiential knowledge that was gathered while the author was working with maturity tests and student writing in the Faculty in Finnish language and linguistics. The data is in Finnish, and for this article, the examples have been translated into English by the author. In order to convey the meaning and tone of the expressions and interaction as accurately as possible, and to make the examples easy to read, the translation follows the original conversation quite literally but for

² Since June 2017, due to Rector's decision, the assessment process of maturity tests at the University of Helsinki no longer includes language revision conducted by language teachers. This will, undoubtedly, affect and change the practices of regulating language and writing, as well.

readability some repetitions and self-corrections have been omitted, as well as some phonological and morphological variation of spoken Finnish.

The data provides access to a specific setting of writing and assessing maturity tests in a Finnish university. In this case, maturity tests are written, revised and evaluated in a multiphase process in which students get both written and oral feedback on their texts before submitting the final versions for acceptance to their supervisor who then forwards them to the Faculty. The whole text trajectory along which the texts travel is illustrated in Figure 1.

[Figure 1. The text trajectory of a maturity test.]

As can be seen in Figure 1, the written maturity tests in focus are in the form of BA thesis abstracts. To write the abstract, the student is supposed to use a one-page document. This document includes slots for institutionally required information about the thesis as well as a text box where the abstract is to be written in the candidate's mother tongue -- in this case Finnish -- regardless of the language of the thesis (Figure 2). After filling in the form, the student submits the document for language revision (Figure 1).

[Figure 2. An abstract written as a maturity test.]

After sending their abstract to the language reviser, the student is invited to discuss the text with the reviser. As part of the assessment process the feedback conversation provides a chance to improve one's text before it becomes accepted as a maturity test. In other words, the process imitates that of an academic review process.

During the process, students' texts are evaluated according to a three-level scale: i) accepted, ii) accepted with revisions, and iii) rewrite and resubmit. The evaluation and quality

of each text is discussed in a face-to-face conversation between the student and the teacher who has reviewed the text. At this stage, the abstract is accompanied with another document, a two-page assessment form which is filled in by the language reviser and which will travel along with the abstract until the end of the process acting as the official form of acceptance (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3. First page of an assessment form.]

In relation to language regulation and norms, the assessment form is highly significant, since it includes a list of various kinds of generic, linguistic and orthographic features which might be pointed out as problematic in a given student's text. The main function of the assessment form is to communicate these issues to the person at the next stage of the process, the supervisor, who will be assessing the revised version of the text. However, it is important to note that the form also acts as a document of regulation including the 'rules' or 'guidelines' for an accepted abstract, to students, language revisers and supervisors alike.

In addition to the assessment form, there can be various kinds of markings on the abstract itself, depending on the individual techniques each language reviser uses (see Figure 2 for markings). There are, for example, some abbreviations that are used and also mentioned in the assessment form (e.g. AM=tense, T=style; 2T refers to section 2 in the form and T to style).

The evaluation and quality of each text is discussed in a face-to-face conversation between a student and the teacher who has reviewed the text. The two documents, the abstract and the assessment form, are used as resources in the interaction (see Magnusson 2016; Savijärvi, Mäntynen, Henricson, and Nelson, 2018), and they can even be considered having some kind of agency in organizing social interaction in the situation.

The main purpose of the feedback conversation is first of all to explain to the student the outcome of the assessment, and to explain what needs to be revised or changed in order to improve the text, but also to enable learning by discussing academic writing together with a language teacher, and to give and get feedback on the student's academic writing skills in general. Empirical research on the same data has shown that feedback is usually given quite delicately (Fabritius 2016), and that students' responses in these situations are typically positive (Savijärvi, Mäntynen, Henricson, and Nelson, 2018), which implies an orientation or willingness to mutual co-operation. The conversation is typically a discussion about and around norms, normativity and language regulation and how they are or should be implemented in that particular student's text. The text itself and the assessment form function as resources for the discussion, as well as its topic. While maturity test as a proficiency test is based on institutional regulations, the feedback conversations are a form of situated regulation, evaluation and negotiation in which both students and teachers draw on various normative systems.

The Findings: Aspects of Regulating Writing

The findings show that both language revisers and students take up various aspects of regulating writing and they also orient to various kinds of normative systems. Institutional descriptions of the features of good standard Finnish in maturity tests vary across Finnish universities and faculties, and in some contexts no guidelines for language standards are provided, or guidelines are only provided in some seminar or lecture courses, particularly when teaching academic writing. At the time of data collection, the guidelines on the Faculty website included a generic description and guidelines of an abstract but no explicit description of language criteria.

In the following, the kind of aspects of texts and their acceptability that are taken up by teachers and students in the feedback conversations are highlighted. The focus is mostly on what the participants take up and consider as elementary features of an acceptable abstract written in good academic Finnish. In other words, the main focus is on the content of the interaction and not on the interaction itself, which will be dealt with more thoroughly in other outcomes of the wider project. It is important to bear in mind that oral interaction is only one stage of the text trajectory in which the criteria for the maturity test is constructed and represented. Therefore, it is argued that what needs to be explained or discussed in the feedback conversation are especially the aspects that are somehow crucial for accepting the text as a maturity test. First, main aspects of acceptability brought up both by the student and the supervisor are presented concisely in Table 1. Secondly, the categories presented in Table 1 also imply what kinds of normative systems the participants orient to, and these orientations to various systems of norms related to aspects of acceptability will be shortly illustrated with the help of five examples.

[Table 1 here.]

In Table 1, the aspects of texts that are brought up in the conversations are organized into eight thematic classes based on a thorough qualitative analysis of the conversational data as well as ethnographic understanding. However, the numbers in Table 1 should be read rather as thematic tendencies than absolute facts since the analysis and research is qualitative by nature and the analysis is also based on ethnographic understanding of the broader context and practices involved (see Bhatia 2004, 20–23). The analysis of the aspects was conducted systematically by identifying all the topics that were introduced by either the language reviser or the student during their discussion on the student's maturity test. Here ethnographic

understanding means, for example, that when a language reviser simultaneously points to the end of a given abstract (with a pen) and suggests that the student should be more explicit in expressing that they are writing about their findings, it means that both the identification of the topic (metadiscourse) and its thematic categorization (Category IV in Table 1: genre [abstract]) are further substantiated by the ethnographic and experiential knowledge on language revising and access to teaching materials, faculty guidelines, and assessment forms used in this particular context.

The counting of topics is complicated at least for two reasons: first, because of the nature of language use and interaction in which one topic might be dealt with for ten minutes, and the others might merit just quick remarks, and secondly, because of the way topics can be analysed as being, for example, either new or given topics, sub-topics and topics that are associated with previous topics. These obstacles have been taken into account by grouping and categorising the topics into larger thematic classes and also by having thorough notes on the qualitative analysis to support arguments of quality concerning the data.

In the assessment process of a maturity test, like in any educational test, the definition of acceptability is a core issue. In the case of the maturity test in Finland, the ultimate acceptability is in principle regulated by the statutes, but what makes a given text acceptable as an instance of academic writing is (re)constructed and defined in actual everyday linguistic and discursive practices in which writing is evaluated, discussed, taught and regulated.

With regard to defining a given text's acceptability, language revisers in the present data focus on various aspects concerning linguistic, textual and generic features of the texts including syntax and semantics, many of which can be introduced as features of genre, academic style or good style in standard language (see Example 1; see Genre, Standard Language, and Scientific Style in Table 1). In the conversations, the texts are assessed, first of all, according to readability and comprehensibility in general, and secondly, according to

generic norms appropriate for the abstract, including move structure and composition (see Example 4, and Genre in Table 1). Thirdly, more specific linguistic and grammatical features, such as tense, person and referentiality, are also brought up (Examples 2, 5, see Genre in Table 1). Finally, issues of terminology and accuracy of word choice (Scientific style, Standard Language/Style, and Document/Keywords in Table 1) as well as the level of standard language, orthography and punctuation are mentioned but usually without further discussion unless the student asks for further instructions, as these are considered to be of least importance for the text's acceptability (Example 4; Standard Language/Orthography in Table 1). Interestingly enough, language revisers take all of these aspects up in quite a systematic order starting from readability and ending with punctuation. This seems to reflect the linear organisation of the assessment form, except for readability, which is not mentioned in the form at all. There seems also to be a general tendency that, like one teacher comments, 'the better the text is, the more detailed aspects are brought up'.

While language revisers tend to follow a clear agenda, Table 1 shows that students rarely initiate new topics but, in their responses, they sometimes take up, for example, one or more of the following aspects of academic writing: readability, disciplinary instructions and lack or contradiction of guidelines (Examples 1, 3, 4; see e.g. Genre/Rationale, Instructions, and Document/Document Template in Table 1). While language revisers and students take up different aspects of language and academic writing, they also orient to various norms. These different orientations are illustrated by the following examples which also emphasize various aspects of acceptability mentioned above.

In Table 1, there are stylistic aspects of texts in three categories: Standard Language, Genre (Rationale), and Scientific Style. The reason for this is that they are partly constructed as separate or overlapping categories in the conversations. In example 1, the aspects of scientific style and good standard language style are brought up by the language reviser

without explicating what kind of norms are at stake, and the student's reply brings up another possible normative system.

Example 1

- LR: This [points to the text] I wondered that "The Three sisters, in my opinion, is conscious" (.) if you think like, can a play truly be conscious, so, would it be possible to rephrase this somehow? [*Tätä [osoittaa kynällä tekstiä] mä jäin miettimään et "Kolme sisarta on mielestäni tietoinen" (.) jos ajattelee et, voiko tosiaan tota, et, voiko näytelmä olla tietoinen, niin et voisko tän muotoilla jotenkin toisella tavalla?*]
- S: Well, that's probably quite like taken straight like from the content of my thesis [*Toi on varmaan, tota, aika tota suoraan muokattu siis itse mun työn sisällöstä*]
- LR: Okay [*Joo*]
-
- LR: It might of course be that there are different ways to express these in different disciplines - - well, you might reconsider this from that perspective [*Se- tietysti voi olla eri aloilla vähän erilaisia tapoja ilmaista näitä -- et ainakin voi miettiä siltä kannalta*]

In Example 1, the language reviser points out an expression and questions the semantics of the expression 'can a play truly be conscious?' by posing a question to the student. The student's response ('taken straight like from the content') contains an element of disagreement, orienting, and implicitly referring, to disciplinary norms that differ from those implied by the language reviser. The language reviser admits the possibility of different

interpretations and yet reformulates the point by asking the student to reconsider the expression. Semantics or the ‘illogicality’ of an expression is typically a locally constructed norm which one would not easily find in a Finnish grammar or the writing guides. Thus, Example 1 illustrates also the idea of local construction of norms and the way in which the participants can orient to different norms while tackling with a particular issue.

Example 2

LR: Now, the instructions are that one should be consistent in using either first person singular or passive [*Se ohje on nyt se että pitäisi olla niinku johdonmukaisesti yksikön ensimmäinen persoona tai passiivi*]

In Example 2, norms of acceptability are both taken up and constructed by the language reviser by explicitly using the noun *instructions* and the modal expressions *one should be consistent in using*. Instructions and consistency as well as the use of person in relation to genre are typical aspects of acceptability taken up in the conversations (see Table 1: Instructions, Genre/Person, and Consistency) and by using them the language reviser orients to a combination of normative systems including genre-related norms, stylistic norms, and maybe also norms given in teaching and in the Faculty's guidelines in which the consistent use of person was mentioned at the time. The norms in question deal with a common issue in the field of academic writing, the use of active vs. passive voice, but on top of that, the idea of consistency as an ideal is expressed.

Example 3

S: Since I didn't get any instructions for this [keywords] I was just wondering --
[*Ku mä en saanu mitää ohjeistusta tähän [avainsanoihin]ni mä sitä itekin
mietin...*]

Example 3 illustrates the ways in which students in the data orient to instructions (see Table 1: Instructions). They sometimes take up the lack of guidelines or instructions in their responses to language reviser's feedback but on some occasions instructions come up when students pose questions to the language revisers. The student's response in Example 3 refers to a particular genre-related norm regarding the abstract and the institutional form: the use of keywords (for which there is a particular slot in the form: Asiasanat; see Table 1: Form/Keywords). Obviously, the student is not only orienting to genre-related norms but also to the normative system of studying and the role of a student; one of the normative (regulating) systems in educational contexts is that of guidelines for academic writing available to students. This is also evident in Table 1 which shows that topics taken up by students often concern either instructions or the form (36 out of 54 cases).

Example 4

LR: [it's] Quite readable and like, in my opinion, the structure functions very well and it's good scientific style, it's just these tiny details -- [*Oikein sujuva ja niinku mun mielestä toimiva rakenteeltaan ja hyvää tieteellistä tyyliä et ihan näitä pieniä yksityiskohtia --*]

S: But you mean there's nothing else -- you mean that like this really is readable -- I'm surprised [*Mut täs ei siis ollu tän enempiä -- siis että tää oli tää on ihan ymmärrettävä -- olen yllättynyt --*]

S: ... positively. [... *positiivinen asia*.]

Example 4 highlights the way the language revisers can follow the agenda based on the organisation of the assessment form. In this example, the language reviser moves quickly from mentioning good readability to (move) structure and scientific style and finally to 'tiny details' in just one turn to which the student responds positively. In other words, the language reviser gives positive feedback in a highly concise way by mentioning the core issues or aspects of acceptability, and seems to orient to some kind of a convenient system of norms which is applied to abstracts (and maturity tests) in this context. In the data used here, language revisers in general tend to orient to core aspects of acceptability and to the task of assessing maturity tests, which is demonstrated in the very concise and effective ways they take up the essential aspects. At the same time, the procedure and order of things in Example 4 reveals an orientation to the assessment form, but this is not always the case; in some conversations, the reviser follows the structure of the abstract by giving feedback in a manner of 'reading' the text from the beginning to the end.

As it is demonstrated in Table 1 and also briefly in the previous examples, a set of various features and aspects of language and texts are taken up in the feedback conversations between a language reviser and a student. However, during the conversations, some aspects become constructed as more crucial than others in respect to acceptability, for example the consistent use of person (Example 2).

A similar phenomenon can be found in Example 5 in which a particular feature, in this case tense, is represented as crucial or central in the process of writing an acceptable text. As it was shown in Table 1, tense is taken up by the language revisers especially in relation to genre.

Example 5

- LR: -- and here, I've marked accepted with revisions [points to the assessment form], so you don't have to send me anything at all - - we'll just look through a few places in the text, as you can see this is, there are just these markings referring to two things about tense [points to the text] [-- *ja tänne mä oon merkannu näin että hyväksytty pyydettyjen korjausten jälkeen, eli mulle ei enää tarvii palauttaa yhtään mitään – me käydään täst muutamia kohdat läpi, niin ku näät että tää on, tääl on vaan (.) kahteen tuommoseen aikamuotoasiaan [osoittaa tekstiä]*]
- S: Yeah, true, I started to think about that [points to the text] -- [*Totta, mä rupesin miettimään tätä [osoittaa tekstiä]- -*]

In Example 5, after expressing the outcome of the assessment ('accepted with revisions'), the language reviser takes up only two things. The 'two things about tense' are represented as relevant and central not only verbally but also by calling attention to them by pointing to the text with a pen. In addition to that the aspects of genre and genre-related norms are most often brought up in the conversations (277 cases out of 588), they are usually given much more time and significance as well. The conversation in example 5, for instance, continues by a quite thorough explanation of how tense is used in different moves of an abstract.

Previous empirical analyses on tense and person in the written data of this project (the abstracts assessed in the conversations) show that language revisers orient to linguistic and genre-related norms that are not mentioned in handbooks of academic writing in Finnish (e.g. Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2010; Kniivilä, Lindblom-Ylänne & Mäntynen 2012), but are, however, mostly consistent with descriptive Finnish grammar (see Mäntynen, forthcoming 2018; Mäntynen & Virtanen 2015).

In sum, the findings presented in Table 1 suggest that an acceptable text comprises various features and orients to i) norms and style of Finnish standard language, ii) generic features of an abstract, iii) readability, accuracy and consistency, iv) scientific style, v) various instructions given e.g. in teaching, and vi) to formal issues required in the institutional document. It is, however, important to keep in mind that many features of the texts are not taken up in feedback conversations; language revisers mention details only if there is a need for revision. In order to get a full picture of acceptability, analysing both the texts, assessment forms and the conversations is needed but this would need a separate study as it falls out of the scope of this article. Besides the thematic categories of acceptability in Table 1, the small selection of examples (Examples 1–5) was used to further highlight the ways in which talking about these aspects bring up and construct orientations to various normative systems. These systems of norms will be discussed in the following section.

Conclusions

This final section is devoted to a discussion of overall systems of norms, especially by looking more thoroughly at what kinds of normative systems the participants construct and thus orient to in regulating writing in this particular educational context.

The previous section presented what aspects of acceptability language revisers and students tend to discuss and also briefly to what kinds of norms or normative systems they refer to while discussing a student's text. In order to understand the ways in which writing and language are regulated, it is important to look at what kinds of normative systems the participants orient to. It is worth noticing that following a discourse studies perspective introduced in the theoretical background, orientations and normative systems are (re)constructed through and by language by the participants. The findings presented in the

preceding section suggest quite surprisingly that, in general, there are several kinds of these systems, and they also seem to have an essential role in how and according to what criteria writing and acceptability of a given text is evaluated by both language revisers and students. The systems of norms that students and the language revisers oriented to in the data can be categorised as follows:

- (1) genre-specific or genre-related norms concerning both the structure, organization and rationale (e.g. use of tense and person) of an abstract, and the language its is written in (e.g. terminology, disciplinary style) (see Swales 1990: 58, 179–182),
- (2) norms of scientific style and disciplinary norms,
- (3) standard language norms including orthography, normative Finnish grammar and norms of good style,
- (4) institutional norms (e.g. formal aspects of the document, assessment as a task), and finally,
- (5) instructions (e.g. various ‘guidelines’ and ‘rules’ or the lack of them).

The norms of academic writing seem to be in many ways relative and influenced not only by disciplinary or genre-related normative systems but also by individual and situational aspects of regulating writing, such as existence or lack of guidelines or locally constructed norms of language and style. In other words, the system of norms can be described as polycentric.

According to Blommaert, “polycentricity is a key feature of interactional regimes in human environments” and that there are many sets of norms to which one can orient to in seemingly stable or monocentric situations (Blommaert 2010, 40). Following Blommaert’s (2010, 39–41) idea of polycentricity of normative systems, our data suggest that language regulation of a maturity test has several different centres of norms that effect its regulation (see Figure 4).

[Figure 4. Language regulation in maturity tests: polycentric norms.]

First of all, as shown in Figure 4, there is the juridical centre of norms represented by Finnish law. This system of norms is reflected especially in the ways the whole assessment process of maturity tests is organized and as such, embedded in the text trajectory itself. The law requires the student to have excellent command of standard (mother tongue) Finnish which then constitutes another normative system, i.e. norms of standard Finnish as defined institutionally by Finnish language board. Whereas the law and the Finnish language board can be interpreted as higher-level sources for the orientation to norms of standard Finnish, another essential regulating source is the Finnish academia, as represented by e.g. disciplines and subjects, as well as the teaching of academic writing itself in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Helsinki. The influence of the latter instances is manifested in the assessment process as genre-related and disciplinary norms, and as various guidelines and rules of academic writing or the lack of them, all of which are (at least partially) rooted both in the history and conventions of particular disciplines and in practices of teaching languages and academic writing in the humanities. The different sources and systems of norms mentioned above can be interpreted as *centring institutions*, i.e. specific, authoritative actors (Silverstein 1998, 4 as quoted in Blommaert 2005, 75) which are tied to specific orders of indexicality and which reproduce those orders including the norms involved (Blommaert 2005, 74–75). In relation to this, Lillis (2013, 113) mentions that the text trajectories of many texts are strongly tied to particular centring institutions, such as the academia. Furthermore, as Lillis points out, “the way in which texts come into being is influenced by explicit and implicit regulatory regimes and how individuals orient to these” (Lillis 2013, 115). This is exactly what the findings of this research show.

Finally, the findings have implications to a better understanding and teaching of academic literacy skills in Finland, and to our understanding of the nature of language regulation as an everyday academic practice and activity in the universities. Whereas in higher-level language policy and statutes in Finland the criteria for excellent command of mother tongue skills is based on the skills of standard language, the analysis of the data here shows that in everyday linguistic practices in higher education, language regulation is more polycentric and based on a variety of systems of norms and values. Surprisingly, among these systems, not all the attention is paid to norms of standard language but instead the other sources of norms are given more time and more prominence. The analysis also highlights that in order to demonstrate their skills in Finnish, students need to have good knowledge not only of standard language but also of academic genres and research conventions in general.

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Figure 1. The text trajectory of a maturity test.

Tiedekunta/Osasto □ Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta		Laitos □ Institution – Department Nykykielten laitos	
Tekijä □ Författare – Author			
Työn nimi □ Arbets titel – Title I mutamenti fonetici e semantici dei termini essenziali della lingua marinara italiana dalla fine dell'Ottocento fino a oggi Foneettiset ja semanttiset muutokset italiankielisessä purjehdussanastossa 1800-luvun lopulta nykypäivään			
Oppiaine □ Läroämne – Subject Italialainen filologia			
Työn taji □ Arbets art – Level Kandidaatintyö	Aika □ Datum – Month and year Toukokuu 2014	Sivumäärä 27	Sidoantat – Number of pages
Tiivistelmä □ Referat – Abstract			
<p>Tutkielma käsittelee italiankielisessä purjehdussanastossa tapahtuneita foneettisia ja semanttisia muutoksia 1800-luvun lopulta nykypäivään. Tutkielmassa verrataan purjehtijoiden käyttämiä sanoja 1800-luvun lopun meriessansastoon ja tarkastellaan, onko sanoissa tapahtunut äänteellisiä tai sanojen merkitykseen liittyviä muutoksia ajan saatossa. Analysoitava aineisto on rajattu noin 60 oleelliseen italiankieliseen purjehdussanaan, jotka ilmentävät yleisen purjevenetyypin, bermudatakiloidun sluupin, eri osia. Kaikki analysoidut sanat ovat substantiiveja.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa analysoitu aineisto on koottu leksikografian menetelmin pienen yksikielisen sanaston muotoon. Tähän aineistoon valitut purjehdussanat on kerätty kahden italialaisen instituution, merenkulkukulttuuria edistävän <i>Lega Navale Italiana</i> ja kilpa- ja harrastuspurjehduksen harjoittamista koordinoivan <i>Federazione Italiana Velan</i>, opetusmateriaaleista. Näiden opetusmateriaalien sekä kahden Internetissä toimivan italiankielisen sanakirjan, <i>Treccanin</i> ja <i>Garzantin</i>, avulla selitän omin sanoin purjehdussanojen merkitykset. Näitä sanoja verrataan 1800-luvun lopun vastaaviin sanoihin. Vertailukohtana on vuonna 1889 julkaistu Alberto Guglielmottin kirjoittama merenkäynti- ja armeijasanan sanakirja <i>Vocabolario Marino e Militare</i>.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa päädyttiin huomaamaan, että purjehtijoiden käyttämien sanojen ja Guglielmottin listaamien 1800-luvun lopun sanojen välillä on tapahtunut ennen kaikkea semanttisia muutoksia. Aineiston perusteella sanojen merkitysten muutokset näyttäisivät johtuvan pääosin teknologisesta kehityksestä, jonka seurauksena purjeveneet ja niissä käytetyt materiaalit ovat kehittyneet merkittävästi 1800-luvun lopulta nykypäivään. Lisäksi siirtyminen suurista purjelaivoista huomattavasti pienempiin purjeveneisiin on johtanut joidenkin sanojen käyttöön deminutiivimuodossa. Foneettisia muutoksia ilmenee aineistossa vähän. Nämä äänteelliset muutokset nykyisten ja vanhojen purjehdussanojen välillä eivät johdu italian (kielen) foneettisen rakenteen muutoksista, vaan sanojen rinnakkaismuotojen käytöllä. Tutkielma osoittaa myös, että purjehdussanastoon on ilmestynyt monia uusia sanoja 1800-luvun jälkeen. Purjehdusteknologia kehittyi jatkuvasti, minkä vuoksi myös purjehdussanasto on jatkuvassa muutoksessa. Purjeveneiden osia kuvaava perussanasto koostuu lähestulkoon kokonaan italiankielistä tai italian kielen äännerakenteeseen sopeutuneista vierassanoista. Tulevaisuudessa tilanne voi olla toinen, sillä purjehdussanaston kaltaiselle erikoissanastolle on ominaista vieraskielisten sanojen käyttö.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords purjehdussanasto, fonetiikka, semantiikka, kielen muutokset			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			

Figure 2. An abstract written as a maturity test.

Humanistinen tiedekunta
Kandidaatin kypsyysnäytteen arviointi

Nimi:

Opiskelijanumero:

Oppiaine/laitos:

Äidinkielen hallinnan kannalta kypsyysnäyte on

- ☐ Hyväksytty ilman muutoksia
- ☐ Hyväksytty pyydettyjen korjausten jälkeen (ks. merkinnät tekstissä ja tässä lomakkeessa)
- ☐ Pyydetään laatimaan uudestaan ja tuomaan vielä suomen kielen tarkastukseen

The maturity test

- is accepted without revisions
- is accepted with revisions (see markings on the text and on this form)
- has to be rewritten and resubmitted for language revision

Toimintaohjeet:

- **Hyväksytty ilman muutoksia:** Opiskelija toimittaa hyväksytyn tiivistelmätékstin ja kandidaatin kypsyysnäytteen arviointilomakkeen tenttikuoressa ohjaajalle, joka tarkastaa kypsyysnäytteen sisällön ja toimittaa suorituksen tiedekuntaan rekisteröitäväksi.
- **Hyväksytty pyydettyjen korjausten jälkeen:** Opiskelija laatii äidinkielen tarkastajan korjausehdotusten perusteella uuden tiivistelmätékstin. Tämän jälkeen hän toimittaa alkuperäisen tiivistelmätékstin, muokatun tiivistelmätékstin ja kandidaatin kypsyysnäytteen arviointilomakkeen tenttikuoressa ohjaajalle, joka tarkastaa korjaukset ja kypsyysnäytteen sisällön sekä toimittaa suorituksen tiedekuntaan rekisteröitäväksi.
- **Pyydetään laatimaan uudestaan:** Opiskelija laatii äidinkielen tarkastajan korjausehdotusten perusteella uuden tiivistelmätékstin ja toimittaa sen äidinkielen koordinaattorille uuteen kielentarkastukseen.

This section gives further instructions for what the student will have to do depending on the outcome of the assessment (above) and to whom to send the accepted text or the revised/new version and other required documents.

Tekstiin pyydetään tekemään seuraavassa osoitettuja osa-alueita koskevat parannukset

Kielentarkastaja voi viitata tekstissä esiintyviin ongelmiin osa-alueiden numeroinnilla (1–4) tai kirjainlyhenteillä (esim. P = pronomini). Lisätietoa palautteen aiheista saa tarvittaessa esim. "Kirjoittajan työkalupakista" (www.kielijelppi.fi) tai kielenkäytön ja tutkielmantekko-oppaista.

Here the student is given instructions how to revise or rewrite the text, with specific reference to four textual components (1–4, specified below in detail), as well as reference to writing guides.

1 Tiivistelmän kokonaisrakenne ja ulkoasu

- ☐ Lomake täytetty väärin tai puutteellisesti: työn taji nimetty väärin / avainsanat puuttuvat
- ☐ Tiivistelmän kokonaisrakenne: tutkielman aihe, tavoite ja teoriatausta (lyhyesti alkuun), aineisto ja menetelmät + tulokset (konkreettisesti) + päätelmät **ks. moniste (LIITE)**
- ☐ Tiivistelmän aikamuodot (AM): tutkielman aiheen, tutkimuskysymysten ja päätelmien esittäminen preesensissä, tutkimusvaiheiden ja -menetelmien esittäminen imperfektissä
- ☐ Tiivistelmä itsenäisenä tekstinä: ymmärrettävissä ilman laajaa taustoitusta, argumentointia tai lähdeviitteitä
- ☐ Tiivistäminen: tiivistelmä tutkielmasta (tekstistä) eikä tutkimusprosessista; ei suunnitelmaa
- ☐ Kappalejako: johdonmukaisesti sisennys/ tyhjä rivi (paitsi tekstin alussa)
- ☐ Fontti (Times New Roman tai Arial, fonttikoko 10–12: liian pieni fontti / liian suuri fontti / ei lihavoitua / ei kursivointia / ei suuraakkosia)

1. The overall organisation and layout of the abstract

- The form is not completed correctly or fully: *the type of the work is incorrect / keywords are missing*
- The overall structure of the abstract: *the topic, purpose and theoretical background (briefly in the beginning), data + methods (concretely) + conclusions see the handout (attachment)*
- Tense in the abstract (AM): *the topic, research questions and conclusions presented in present tense, and methods and research steps in past tense*
- The abstract as an independent text: *understandable without further explanations, argumentation or references*
- Basics of an abstract: *abstract of the thesis (text), not of the process; not a research plan*
- Paragraph use: *consistent use of indentation / empty line (except in the beginning of the text)*
- Font (Times New Roman or Arial, font size 10–12: *font too small / too large / no bolds / no italics / no CAPS*)

Figure 3. First page of an assessment form (with English annotations).

Figure 4. Language regulation in maturity tests: polycentric norms.

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Figure 3. First page of an assessment form (with English annotations).

Figure 4. Language regulation in maturity tests: polycentric norms.

Aspects of Texts as Topics	LR	S	Total
I Standard Language			127
– Orthography	63	3	(66)
– Normative Grammar	21	1	(22)
– Style (Norms of Good Style)	39	-	(39)
II Accuracy, Readability, Consistency	34	-	34
III Scientific (Academic) Style	16	1	17
IV Genre (Abstract)			277
– Genre (Abstract)	27	1	(28)
– (Move) Structure	58	3	(61)
– Paragraphs	15	-	(15)
– Results (as a Move)	21	-	(21)
– Tense	17	-	(17)
– Person	18	-	(18)
– Metadiscourse	22	-	(22)
– Rationale (Style/Register)	73	4	(77)
– Hedging and Modal Expressions	9	-	(9)
– Concepts	6	3	(9)
V Document/Form			71
– Formal Aspects	44	2	(46)
– Keywords	10	3	(13)
– Typography	4	2	(6)
– Document Template	1	5	(6)
VI. Instructions			37
– Course on Academic Writing	2	4	(6)
– Library	-	1	(1)
– Faculty (website)	2	3	(5)
– Unspecified Instructions	3	5	(8)
– Lack of Instructions	-	4	(4)
– Contradictory Instructions	-	5	(5)
– Fellow Students	-	1	(1)
– Example Used in Teaching	6	1	(7)
VII. Disciplinary Practices	12	1	13
VIII. Other (Normative) Resources			12
– Finnish Normative Dictionary	4	-	(4)
– Language Center's Website	2	-	(2)
– Other (each Mentioned Once)	5	1	(6)
Total			588

Table 1. Aspects of texts introduced as new topics in feedback conversations by language revisers (N=4) and students (N=70). LR=Language reviser, S=Student.

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Table 1. Aspects of texts introduced as new topics in feedback conversations by language revisers (N=4) and students (N=70).