

INTERCULTURALITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN BACHELOR THESIS WRITING: MENTORS' AND MENTEES' PERCEPTIONS

Mira Bekar
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
m.bekar@flf.ukim.edu.mk

This paper explores some aspects of the Anglo-centred (US-based and UK-based educational practices) academic literacy promoted in a non-native English academic context. It seeks to understand better how mentors who were trained and partly educated in an Anglo-centred settings, or never received education abroad, affect the bachelor thesis writing process of their mentees. Through several methods such as analysis of theses' structures written in L2 (English), surveys and semi-structured interviews with students and with their mentors in three fields, I will present the findings on how the student positioning is affected when they write a BA thesis in English, while simultaneously trying to cope with the transcultural instruction and the local institutional requirements. The thematic analysis also highlights a range of educational practices and understandings of the thesis writing process including, on one hand, how students build argumentation, distinguish between facts and opinions, become objective, avoid plagiarism following the Anglo-centred writing instruction and, on the other, a fluidity in how university professors use their diverse linguistic and educational resources for the same purpose, without challenging the dominating values of the L2 academic literacy.

Keywords: BA thesis writing, mentoring, L2 academic literacy, Anglo-centred writing, intercultural practices

ИНТЕРКУЛТУРАЛНОСТА И ИНТЕРДИСЦИПЛИНАРНОСТА ПРИ ПИШУВАЊЕТО ДИПЛОМСКИ ТЕЗИ: ВИДУВАЊА НА МЕНТОРИТЕ И НА МЕНТОРИРАНИТЕ СТУДЕНТИ

Мира Бекар

Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ во Скопје

m.bekar@flf.ukim.edu.mk

Во фокусот на ова истражување се неколку аспекти на англоцентричниот пристап на академска писменост промовиран во неанглиски академски контекст. Целта е да се разбере подобро како менторите, кои се обучувани и делумно стекнале образование во странски образовни институции, како и оние што никогаш не биле дел од образовен процес во англофони средини, влијаат врз процесот на пишување дипломски трудови/тези од кандидатите што ги менторираат. Со помош на неколку научни методи, како што се анализа на структурата на трудовите напишани на странски јазик (англиски), анкети и интервјуа со отворени прашања со ментори и нивни студенти што ги менторираат, ќе ги презентирам сознанијата за тоа што влијае на позиционирањето на студентите преку академскиот дискурс додека пишуваат дипломски трудови на англиски јазик, а притоа, истовремено се трудат да се приспособат на транскултурните насоки за пишување како и на барањата за академско пишување на локалната образовна институција. Тематската анализа на собраните податоци укажува на широк опсег образовни практики и поимања за процесот на пишување дипломски трудови. Тука се вклучени, од една страна, аспектите за тоа како студентите градат аргументација, разликуваат факти од лични мислења, стануваат пообјективни, избегнуваат плагијати, следејќи ги принципите на англофоната академска писменост. Но, од друга страна, се покажуваат практиките кај универзитетските професори што ги употребуваат своите разновидни лингвистички и образовни ресурси за иста цел, без секогаш критички да ги доведат во прашање поставените доминантни англоцентрични вредности.

Клучни зборови: дипломски трудови, менторирање, академска писменост, англоцентрични принципи на пишување, пишување на втор/странски јазик, меѓукултурни практики

1 Introduction

The process of developing academic writing competence of students in their particular areas of practice, for particular contexts, involves what has been termed researching multilingually, i.e. researching the use of more than one language in research projects by students (e.g. the reading of the literature done mostly in English, providing data in the local language and in English. The examples provided by Holmes, Fay, Andrews & Attia (2013, 2016) describe students “collecting data in a language or languages different from that of the funding body, or in the case of doctoral students, that of the institution to which they belong, translating the data for the report, or thesis, not always aware of challenges of translation or the need for transparency.” The aim of this qualitative study is to understand: (1) what happens during the whole process of producing BA theses in L2, (2) how “rigorous” that process is in regard to the learning outcomes and confidence as local writers whose L1 (Macedonian) is different from the L2 (English), and who try to sound “international”, and (3) what the roles and perceptions of mentors who transfer the foreign academic literacy across borders are. The relevance emerges from the fact that while there has been extensive research on doctoral supervision, master and bachelor thesis supervision is comparatively much less researched (Anderson et al. 2006; Scholefield and Cox 2016), and findings from studies on doctoral supervision cannot be applied fully to the context of master/bachelor thesis writing, which is markedly different in several fundamental ways. Moreover, to my knowledge, relatively few studies have dealt with bachelor student experiences and perceptions of the context, where they are required to write in English (FL/L2), using the Anglo-centred approach (US-based and UK-based educational practices) in a local context (see Filippou et al. 2017).

In the paper, first, I outline some frameworks present in tertiary education in regard to mentoring and translanguaging practices; then, I analyse student theses' topics and structures written in L2 (English) and finally, I present the data analysis and findings of semi-structured interviews and surveys with four students and with their three mentors addressing various aspects of the thesis writing process in three fields: translation, literature and TESOL. The research encourages a more serious involvement into critical higher education, especially Anglo-centred writing literacy.

1.1 The Context

The institution where the participants in this study work as professors and mentors of student BA writing theses or are enrolled as undergraduate students operates mainly monolingually. This means that the language of instruction at this university is Macedonian except for the foreign language departments, where teaching is conducted mainly by Macedonian professors, some of whom have educational background at foreign universities. With the exception of some foreign language-oriented studies, mentoring and examination is also undertaken in Macedonian. This context inspired me to create a case for the position of translanguaging aspects in order to explore the institutional practices and the Anglo-centric influence (Edwards 2004).

The participants', both mentees' and mentors' primary and secondary education, as well as their BA degrees were all undertaken in Macedonia, where the L1 is Macedonian. The mentors involved in this study started learning English in private language schools at the age of 10, whereas students (mentees) started learning English in the second grade, which was a compulsory foreign language. Their first degree in English language and literature was taught in English. Thus, English was not just a foreign language (EFL) or their L2 (they consider it as such), but it was a language of academic study (EAP).

The first mentor (M1) has never had any official education abroad. One of the mentors (M3), did her MA in TESOL, in the UK, for a full academic year. The other one (M2) attended secondary school in the USA, for one semester and took undergraduate courses in the USA, twice for two months. Those that were educated abroad had the opportunity to explore the written discourse and the "required norms" international students should use when writing in English. This placed them in a context to research multilingually (Holmes et al. 2013; 2016). Specifically, they attended English-medium courses, read everything in English, and conducted research in English, but they also wrote literary pieces and research papers in Macedonian for Macedonian University Proceedings and Macedonian publishing houses. In the classes devoted to Academic writing, during their undergraduate studies, they were required to write compare and contrast essays, descriptions and narratives and produce some creative writing. They were not taught to build argumentation, incorporate sources nor develop rhetorical strategies. And back then, they were not required to write a BA thesis to show their writing skills in order to graduate, which is different from their mentees' graduation for which a 20-40-page long BA thesis is required.

The English Department where all the participants work or study provided *A Manual of Thesis Writing*, which gives clear guidelines about the format, layout font, font size, the length and number of copies, but it provides freedom in terms of content, structure and referencing style. It also requires a summary in Macedonian if the thesis is written in English (each Department of a foreign language allows students to write the thesis in the language they are majoring in). There are directions and suggestions for topic choice, avoiding plagiarism, and the structure. The suggested structure is Abstract, Main body and Bibliography. The Main body is described as a section which contains formulation of the problem, definition of the topic, description of the Methods, Data analysis with comments and Conclusion. But they are not stated as compulsory elements. The Manual does not provide distinctions that are discipline-specific.

1.2 Current BA thesis structures

The following three examples show how the structure, format and content of BA theses differ in the three subdisciplines mentioned, which is a result of the flexibility given by the Manual and the mentors:

a. Topic and the structure of Thesis 1 in Translation by S3:

This graduation paper provides a comparative analysis of the three Macedonian translations of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*.¹ The structure includes: Abstract, Introduc-

¹ The purpose of choosing this topic is to conduct a definitive research of these three translations and to determine their quality as well as answer the question of whether any progress has been achieved

tion, Translating poetry (theory), Methodology (Defining concepts and translation techniques such as calques, transposition, etc.), Loss and gain, (Un)translatability, Map of Deviations, The Beat Generation, Howl, Introducing the three different translations of Howl, Data analysis of excerpts, Conclusion, Summary in Macedonian, Bibliography.

b. The structure of the thesis 2 in Literature by S2:

The thesis analysed the psychological and moral development of the two protagonists Ged and Tenar, from Ursula Le Guin's novels *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *Tehanu*, respectively, and depicts their journey towards individuation. The structure includes: Abstract, Introduction, A Wizard of Earthsea (plot summary and Coming of age), Tehanu (plot summary and Stages of development according to the Myth of the Hero, according to the heroine's journey), Conclusion, Summary in Macedonian, and References.

c. The topic and the structure of thesis 3 in TESOL by S4

The aim of this thesis was to take a look at SEN students' school lives, i.e. (1) how many SEN students are enrolled in schools across the country, (2) how they learn English as a second language and the difficulties they face in the process, and (3) if (individualized educational plans) IEPs are available for and implemented by Macedonian teachers. The structure consists of: Abstract, Summary in Macedonian, Introduction, Literature review, Macedonian SEN students statistics, Research Methodology, Understanding and working with SEN students (SEN Students' experiences, SENs from a dialectologist's point of view), Key findings and discussion from the research questions, Conclusions and recommendations, References, and Appendix.

d. The topic and the structure of thesis 4 in Literature by S1

The thesis focused on *The Zoo Story*, a play by Edward Albee with the aim to contribute to its range of interpretations by analysing its existential aspects such as alienation, miscommunication, solitude, the meaninglessness of life etc.² A linguistic analysis of the play was encompassed to provide a substantial line of reasoning when it comes to disintegration of communication. The structure consisted of: Abstract, Introduction, Theory-Existentialism, Analysis, Conclusion, Summary in Macedonian, and Bibliography.

The common features of all BA theses' structures are: Abstract, Summary in Macedonian, Introduction, Theory (understood in the broadest sense from definition, to theoretical frameworks to literature reviews), Data analysis, Conclusion and References. The Methods and Research methodology differ significantly. In the TESOL thesis the research methodology follows the format of most frequently suggested structures for this section by Manuals and Reference books, whereas in

in the translation process in the almost forty years spanning between the first and last Macedonian translation of the poem.

² A mosaic by pinpointing the correlatives between the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism (narrowing down to Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre as its pioneers), and place *The Zoo Story* within this framework was created.

the Translation and Literature theses the students were asked to define the concepts analysed and the plot summary along with the main features of the novels that are subject of research. In the translation thesis, the Methods section is about methods of translation, not about research methods. Moreover, in the Literature thesis there is no Methods section and the data analysis is about one concentration - the development of the main character, which makes the thesis more of a thematic analysis and a narrative. The theses in literature have no separate Results section, and the focus is on the analysis of excerpts about major concepts.

2 Research on international, translingual writing and thesis mentoring

To understand “internationalisation” we need to see different internationalisation-related educational practices of students and their mentors. As Donahue (2009) raised awareness that US scholars must reorient their discourses accepting the idea that their field is not the only source of writing theory in higher education, in a similar manner the mentors included in my study believed that the Macedonian writing practices do not always offer what mentees and scholars need for concise research and argumentation-based writing and oriented themselves towards the Anglo-centred one. Therefore, for the purpose of this research I use the concept of “internationalisation”, as a process in which one orients their discourse towards a foreign academic literacy that is “privileged”, but with the aim not to impose, and simultaneously support students to maintain some local writing practices such as less rigorous critical approach, a more balanced approach to argumentation and some emotion-driven analysis meaning that students’ relate to the thesis personally and objectivity of the analysis is affected by their emotions. There are views of some scholars and learners that the imposition of English is seen as a colonizing act at times, or as Donahue (2009) stated, “interestingly, more often by the English speakers doing the imposing,” especially with teaching of written English that in some non-US-based educational contexts is greatly influenced by US models because of certain political, ideological and pedagogical reasons. In this context, together with my colleague Fay we suggested that “dominant flows of expectations from privileged languages and academic contexts could be challenged” (Bekar & Fay 2020: 42). Operating within Kachru’s (1985:12) Concentric Circles Model framework, countries such as Macedonia are referred to as “Expanding Circle” countries that had zero to minimal colonial impact and history, whose varieties of English used are different from those found in countries where English is largely the “native”/ L1 language (“Inner Circle” countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, etc.) and from the “Outer Circle” countries with “institutionalized second-language variety of English” that has “a long history of acculturation.” Additionally, Canagarajah’s (2013) used the notion of “translingual practice” in connection with the challenges of designing language pedagogy in contemporary contexts, while Holmes et al. (2013) defined the concept of “researching multilingually” as “the ways in which researchers conceptualise, understand, and make choices about generating, analysing, interpreting and reporting data when more than one language is involved” (p. 297). The concrete translingual and transnational research aspects addressed in my study are: engagement with literature written in different languages, adopting and

adapting structures of thesis as a genre, which in the end are a combination of recommended IMRD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) and preferred local structures, and finally, coping with the diverse linguistic reality in the process.

There has been extensive research on PhD thesis mentoring, master and bachelor thesis mentoring (Anderson et al. 2006; Scholefield and Cox 2016). However, bachelor thesis writing process is different in some significant aspects from master thesis or PhD thesis writing. Scholars have explored the importance of mentorship in guiding students' learning and promoting researcher development throughout the journey (Kobayashi, Grout, & Rump 2013), or they address the impact of relationship between mentors and mentees on the satisfaction with their studies (Ives & Rowley 2005; Mainhard et al. 2009). Supervision may be perceived as "a secret garden where student and mentor engage with little external scrutiny or accountability" (Halse 2011, p. 557) or an agonistic master-slave relation (Grant 2008). Others have tried to define 'good' supervision and the role of the mentor in regard to the successfulness of specific supervision methods (Grant 2008; Roberts & Seaman 2018). Only few comparative, cross-country and cross-disciplinary studies were conducted (e.g., Sidhu et al. 2014, Hu et al. 2016).

The relationship between the mentor and the mentee in bachelor and master contexts reflects a situation in which mentees rely on their mentors too much, but at the same time they feel the need to show that they can do their own research, while being allowed to decide on their own (e.g. Filippou et al. 2017). Other scholars such as Bekar and Yakhontova (2021) showed that *the self* of the thesis writer consists of four major dimensions: uncertainty of competence as academic writers, emotionally loaded situations affecting writing, supervisory relationships, and personal efforts to overcome difficulties. Mentors should teach students to question "the givens" involved in an educational situation. If a critical action seeks to be transformative (see Freire 1970, 1973; Pennycook 2010), the individual should problematize the genesis and the givens of the action possibilities they perceive in the particular educational context. Considering everything mentioned above the complexity of the relation between the mentors, the mentees and the specific aspects of the thesis writing process will be addressed further.

3 Methods

3.1 Instruments and participants

The instruments used in this study included a survey, semi-structured interviews and thesis structure analysis. A survey consisting of 18 questions was distributed to three mentors in the fields of Literature, Translation and Applied linguistics (TESOL). Another survey consisting of 22 questions was distributed to their four mentees who defended their theses in the period between 2017 and 2020. Both surveys covered the following areas: demographics, educational background with the emphasis on the exposure to Anglo-centred education, formatting, structuring of the thesis and the process of making decisions about it, the awareness of the differences of the English and local academic literacies, the specific language used, and

reflecting on issues such as objectivity, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and avoiding plagiarism by acquiring other skills. Additionally, I used semi-structured interviews with some of the participants for further explanation and details, in cases when the answers were not addressing the issues required. The analysis of the student theses meant analysis of the choice and spectrum of the topic, the structure and the linguistic elements used.

Three professors and four students were involved. The professors were colleagues of the researcher, whereas the students used to study at the same Department where the researcher works. However, the researcher was not involved in the supervision process. The three professors, at the time of the survey, were at the rank of Assistant and Associate professors at a local public university. They all work for the English department and prepare students to become English teachers, translators and interpreters. The fields they obtained their PhDs in are British and American literature, TESOL and Translation/Interpreting from English into Macedonian and vice versa. They reported on the length of mentoring bachelor thesis writers, six to eight years, and on the years of teaching writing - 10-15 years. English was a compulsory subject in the elementary public schools they attended. After all that exposure to English, along with the fact they do multilingual research and publish in English, it (English) is even more than just a foreign language. Thus, we can say that the professional context of the mentors is transcultural.

The four mentees, aged 21-23 at the time of the graduation, all studied at the Department of English Language and Literature, defended their theses between 2017 and 2020, in the areas of British and American literature, TESOL and Translation/Interpreting. Their primary, secondary education, as well as their BA degree were all undertaken in Macedonia, where the language of instruction was Macedonian, while at the university, both English and Macedonian were used. None of them spent any time abroad for academic purposes, but their exposure to English was immense considering that they belong to the Internet age and English is a compulsory subject throughout their whole elementary education. Additionally, they took private English classes to develop their speaking, reading and writing competences. The answers to the surveys are deeply grounded in this heavy exposure to English.

4 Data Analysis and Results

The surveys were not exactly the same but they addressed same major issues. The method thematic analysis was used. It is a highly inductive method, meaning that the themes came to light from the data, and patterns of meaning were identified and explained. I have categorised the responses into thematic units such as greatest challenges for translingual writers, Anglo-centred academic literacy practices, and thesis formatting and structuring related issues.

4.1 Greatest challenges

Mentors were asked to reflect on the greatest challenges in the process of mentoring thesis writing in another language. They pointed out the struggle they experience

when they explain the balance or what should be transferred from L2 (English) into the local academic writing culture. More specifically, they described the difficulties they face teaching BA thesis writers to avoid transfer from their L1 writing, and the hard time they experienced in deciding what kind of feedback would benefit the students, and not only teach them the format but “the rationale behind the format of their graduation papers”, as one of the mentors (M3) stated. Mentor 1 (M1), unlike the other two, has never spent any time educating himself in an Anglo-centred environment, and they mentioned the following:

“The biggest challenge that I face when mentoring BA thesis is how to ensure that the students follow the standard academic practices in structuring the thesis, providing solid and substantiated arguments, following the citation and referencing rules, as well as maintaining the language level required for academic writing.” (M1)

The quote shows the challenges, which local mentors observe, perhaps as a result of their full immersion in the local writing practices throughout their education, and never having formal academic experiences in an English-speaking country. Their instruction for teaching academic writing practices was acquired through Manuals, written materials and online sources. Their publications were only for local or regional publishing venues.

I further asked the mentors to reflect on how exactly and in which areas they helped their mentees gain or develop writing-related skills and how much that instruction was based on the Anglo-centred norms of thesis writing. All mentors mentioned the issue of defining concepts and avoiding plagiarism with proper paraphrasing, summarizing and citing. Two of them pointed out the challenges of teaching students to provide arguments and counter arguments as well as to distinguish between facts and opinions. Only one mentor mentioned the issue of teaching mentees to be objective. The “further explanation with arguments and counter arguments” and the awareness of the importance of “providing context in argumentation” is what exactly was challenging in regard to “proper” argumentation. In regard to the aspect of defining concepts, mentors reflected on their feedback activities, stating that they try to challenge the given definitions presented in the literature in such a way as to negotiate more between themselves about what is relevant and what is not for the thesis’ purposes. Students did not have this practice during their previous education. Mentors’ comments pushed the mentees to clarify the notions they write about, first to themselves, then to the readers. The mentors who were educated abroad have learned the skill of developing a working definition of the major concept they are exploring, a skill that is not that much encouraged in the Macedonian context, since the respect for the important scholars is the frequently accepted instruction.

“I have pointed out that it is useful for the readers to know which concepts are going to be discussed in the thesis and applied to the selected literary works. I have therefore suggested to the student to define and explain them from the beginning, i.e. in the Introduction to the thesis rather than later, and then apply them to the specific works.” (M2)

Students reflected deeper on the same issue – the challenges of the whole writing process, what they felt comfortable with, and what they most needed help with. What they mostly enjoyed was: how collaborative the whole process was (referring to the mentor's engagement) and the brainstorming sessions about the title and argumentation (S1); being allowed to work on something you have “immense personal interest in” and being disciplined (S3). The biggest challenges for the mentees were: “keeping a fine balance between creative input and building argumentation based on previous research”; writing the main claims (reported by S1); pushing oneself to start writing, long quotations (S2); gathering more material increases the difficulty of distinguishing what is truly important, length, as reported by S4, who is grateful to her mentor deciding for her which paragraphs could be cut out. Interestingly, students reported that avoiding plagiarism and distinguishing between facts and opinions was something they were familiar with because of the practice in the writing classes, whereas mentors stated that these aspects present great challenges for them to be properly taught to the students, due to the fact that in the Macedonian educational system no serious attention is paid to plagiarism.

One of the three mentors (M3) mentioned objectivity as a challenge when mentoring, and one of the students described this challenge precisely, stating: “One of the translations I was analysing was done by one of my professors, who I greatly admire. So, it's a little more difficult to write and judge, in a way, the work of someone you know and respect professionally, than of some other, “faceless” person” (S2). Their feeling is that it is harder to be objective in Macedonian than in English. Another student, S4, who is a mentee of M3, admitted that she was not being fully objective and was told this by her mentor; the reason being the level of loaded emotions related to the topic of students with special needs (SEN).

To sum up, challenges are of different nature but those that dominate for mentors and mentees are “defining of the main claim” and “being objective”, which are skills not addressed in Macedonian academic writing but are rather learned through the process of internationalisation, i.e., accepting the Anglo-centred strategies for developing these skills.

4.2 Anglo-centred literacy practices

The second example is about mentors' and mentees perceptions of the Anglo-centred academic literacy, which is the preferred one at the English Department, at Ss. Cyril and Methodius university in the Republic of N. Macedonia. M1 (Translation mentor) understands the notion of “import” of foreign academic practices as borrowing “strategies of objectivity, argumentation and reliable facts and opinions.” Similarly to him, M2 (Literature mentor) believes that what she “imported” is “to teach students that writing a bachelor theses means to write directly, conveying the main points straight away from the beginning; to distinguish between more and less relevant information and select only what is directly related to their thesis; and to check information from multiple sources.” Along that line of thinking, M3 (the TESOL mentor) emphasised the fact that what she lacked with the Macedonian writing, which she consulted before going abroad “didn't fill [her] with confidence in regard to research rigour, organization of ideas, strength of argumentation, clar-

ity of expression.” Therefore, she adopted international academic practices. When asked to comment on this further, especially if students sometimes combine the two (L1 and L2) writing practices, M1 admitted that combining is crucial due to the fact that “our students have come through our educational system and have arrived to their studies with already formed academic and writing habits.” The other mentors were strongly against this, stating that they “mainly convey to students the Anglo-centred/English-based approach” because they themselves have been exposed to it, they practice it for their teaching and publishing purposes, and want to prepare their mentees for the international reader.

Here, the dual perception of the mentees is worth mentioning. They believe strongly in all aspects of Anglo-centred writing, except for some points related to division of sections, and at the same time do not see this academic style as “privileged”, as critical pedagogues perceive it. For instance, M1 believes that the “privilege” is in the opportunity of students to learn about other writing practices apart from the local ones. For M3, the perception of “privileged” is that “Anglo-centred practices appear to be fit for purpose.” Similarly to M3, the literature mentor (M2) sees the use of English and American writing models just as a logical and expected tool or as she put it “since my students are students at the Department of English Language and Literature and study this field, they are mainly exposed to the Anglo-centred set of understandings of genre, argumentation and logic, so I wouldn’t say that this is the privileged or dominant form in general at university level.”

Students’ perceptions about the academic language required for BA theses were slightly different. Two of them (S1 and S4) were confident since the Academic writing courses they took at the university prepared them well for the academic tone and discourse. S2 stated that they “became more aware of the linguistic patterns and the overall structure after the first draft was revised by the mentor.” S3 felt that writing academically in English just “comes naturally when you study the language so long.” All four mentees mentioned that they learned how to paraphrase, summarise and cite from the professors who taught them these skills and from their mentors. Only S4 added that the books and excerpts she used during the process affected her writing, too. This implies that students rely heavily on and have full trust in their mentors’ writing practices. Mentees do not perceive anything as being imposed on them nor challenge the preferred practices of mentors.

What follows are some exact linguistic structures I noticed in their theses such as use of pronouns, academic register choices, Anglicism, sentence length etc. Students confirmed they learned them from the “typical English writing” to make them sound “more confident” in English:

(1) “The backbone of the theatre of the absurd is Existentialism; and, since Existentialism has many representatives both in philosophy and in literature, for the purpose of my thesis I shall limit to its founding fathers: Søren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre, respectively.” (S1)

(2) “An equally significant aspect of...”; “it should be noted...”; “interesting is the fact that...”; “this thesis is grounded upon the insights of..” (S2)

(3) “Through the exercises and conversations we had mostly in English and tailored to their proficiency level, I gained immeasurable information about SEN students’ foreign language learning.” (S4)

Another linguistic feature that is not typical of the Macedonian academic writing is the use of first person singular. In our writing tradition the inclusive pronoun “we” is recommended because it includes the audience. However, all four students were allowed and even encouraged to use “I” by their mentors, who themselves acquired this strategy by the exposure to the Anglophone writing. Only one student used a combination of “I” and “We.” “I” was predominantly used by her when “expressing a really strong personal opinion.” Students believe that “1st person singular increases accountability.” S4 combined the use of “I” with passive forms because for some instances the passive “sounded more professional” at certain points.

Further on, students defined the major differences between academic literacy in Macedonian and in English, more specifically in regards to the following:

(1) Macedonian sentences being significantly longer and “more flowery in terms of language”; (2) Macedonian writing lacking structure due to “frequent digression and comparisons with other works” (S2);

(3) English sounding more academic, which is the reason for many accepted Anglicisms that “significantly changed the Macedonian academic writing style” (S2);

(4) The academic writing in English being “more clear, better structured and just more succinct in general, while Macedonians like to over-explain” (S3), and

(4) “bi-lingual writers reflecting on personal thoughts, feelings and sentiments more heavily when they write in Macedonian, and they are more factual when writing in English” (S4).

Students in this study as bi- and multilinguals do approach critically the differences between “typical” Anglo-centred and Macedonian academic literacy and seem to be fully aware of: the dominance of narration in Macedonian versus conciseness in English; over-elaboration of certain concepts by using much longer sentences in Macedonian; and emotion-driven research in Macedonian, which may lead to missing out important details - not a feature of objective focused academic writing in the Anglo-centred writing tradition.

4.3 Formatting and structuring of the thesis

Mentors and mentees work hard on formatting and structuring the BA theses. At the Macedonian university there is no standardised style for formatting the BA theses nor for citing sources; therefore, the English Department proposes APA or MLA citations styles, accepted in linguistics and literature fields. However, the other professors who come from different educational and disciplinary backgrounds use different citation and formatting systems (e.g. French, German, Russian educational backgrounds). The need for local writing cultures is recognised and appreciated, and often the dominance of APA style is challenged. The lack of standardised, required structure, format and the variety of options for the referencing styles provide both mentors and mentees some freedom in choosing what to borrow from international academic writing practices and what to keep from the local ones.

For instance, in my research, the literature mentor explicitly stated that for her it is more important that students “provide a historical overview and compare literary works from different aspect than to have a Results section” (M2). “The focus should be on the analysis”, she added. Similarly to this, M1 (the translation/inter-

pretation mentor) stated that “the focus is more on the analysis and critical discussion than on the structure of the thesis.” The TESOL mentor (M3) does not “insist on students formulating hypotheses because they clash with how [she] understands research,” additionally, she believes that “any inquiry is best approached with an open mind, rather than with an explicitly formulated ‘agenda’ of sorts.” For her, content is more important than structure.

Such comments sound liberating, because research showed that L2 writers of English feel anxieties to meet requirements of thesis production at foreign universities. They perceive that those professors who strictly follow Anglo-centred norms such as accurate usage of formatting, citation and punctuation style affect negatively the positioning of the students as an aspiring young scholars (e.g. “I was quite anxious at the start of the process” or “Formal instructions were lacking, what I had was a piece of advice and instructions shared by my mentor over a cup of coffee”). In this sense, the flexibility of the mentors’ comments such as the ones above are not discouraging for the mentees when producing their first complex academic task, and are not promoting an ethnocentric approach, which may make them feel like they are not adequate for the task, in this case, not graduating just on the basis of not knowing the Anglo-centred academic writing conventions. All mentees agreed that they used the format and structure by combining the basic instructions provided by the institutions, but fully adopted the suggested structure by the mentors. The templates from previous students worked for three mentees, but not for one. Basically, students benefitted most from the templates given to them to follow.

Questioning the Anglo-centred approach to academic writing did not occur, but questioning of the local (Macedonian) approach did happen, both by professors and students. More specifically, they promoted the Anglo-centred practices (as presented in many Manuals, Guidebooks and writing courses), and criticised the local ways of: writing of the main claim, providing arguments and counter arguments, defining concepts, distinguishing between facts and personal opinions, developing a critical stance, and avoiding plagiarism with proper paraphrasing, summarizing and citing that is expected in one educational context. However, although they promoted them as they reported, they did not force these practices.

5 Discussion of findings and conclusion

This study explored the experiences of mentors and mentees in the process of writing BA thesis in the English language, used by the participants as L2 and for academic practices (EAP). The exposure to the English-medium instruction in regard to academic writing was seen as a positive experience by all participants. The understanding of the BA thesis as a genre, building argumentation, using sources, writing precise and shorter sentences, being objective, all of which were promoted through the Anglo-centred values, were not considered privileged, but just seen as tools that are fit for the purpose of thesis writing. There were fewer Macedonian-centred understandings of the above mentioned concepts.

My intention was to show which choices were more dominant in the English-based academic rhetorical and linguistic “norms”, how those benefit or disadvantage students and whether the participants challenge any of those understand-

ings and choices. After analysing students' theses in terms of structure, content, formatting and language used, and after performing a thematic analysis of the surveys and semi-structured interviews findings showed that Macedonian mentors and mentees who work and study in the field of English language and literature do not challenge the Anglo-centred writing practices, but rather see them as something that comes naturally as a result of a long exposure. But they challenged the Macedonian writing practices even though the exposure to them has been much longer. This can be described as a process of acquiring "survival skills for the academic world", as defined by Bekar and Fay (2020). Both L2 mentors and mentees learn how to adapt skilfully to the expectations of readers of BA theses according to the requirements of the Macedonian institution. Additionally, mentees learn to embrace, without questioning, the requirements of the Macedonian mentors who practice the Anglo-centred academic strategies while accepting "internationalisation" and interculturality.

What looks concerning, and you may (dis)agree with me is that these experiences, situated in a peripheral setting, in terms of academic and language status, highlight the fact that dominating languages, dominating contexts are adopted with less criticality. Mentors do not approach critically the normative values except in a sense of replacing the local with the foreign because it serves the purpose better. Mentees do not even challenge the directions given by their mentors and seem to align easily, because they treat their mentors as experts. This might be due to the fact that in "expanding circle countries academic English has not been "institutionalized" and there has not been "a long history of acculturation", to use Kachru's concepts. Being critical involves "contesting mythological and ideological values, concepts, principles, and the ways knowledge is produced and reproduced" (Simpson, 2020). but why only towards the local writing practices? In his sense, translingual and international young scholarship is the one which will benefit from contesting of the ideological values and bringing the international voice in, particularly the aspiring scholars who are less familiar with the methods of performing criticality in education research.

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