Doctoral students' perspectives on academic publishing

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The general aim of the study is to present the challenges of writing for academic publication as perceived by doctoral students of a particular Hungarian university. The respondents of an on-line questionnaire survey (N=70) were asked to consider their practices for meeting publication requirements and express their opinions on differences between writing for publication in their first and second languages, the (lack) of support in publication-related processes, and the most common language-related problems they face when publishing their research. The findings show considerable differences between the answers and perceptions of doctoral students of humanities and social sciences ('soft sciences') and those in engineering ('hard science'). Furthermore, the results provide directions for further investigation in order to explore practices and differences in more detail. Finally, some pedagogical implications for language teachers and supervisors are introduced and possible approaches are discussed for offering more comprehensive support in writing for research publication.

Keywords: academic publishing, doctoral students, support, soft and hard sciences

1. Introduction

In Hungary, doctoral students must publish their research as part of the requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree – and not only in their native language, but also in a second language (typically English). These writers face a number of challenges. While their access to academic tools (data, equipment, publications) is not as poor as in developing nations, where scholars may lack even the most basic infrastructure (e.g. Salager-Meyer, 2008; 2014), funding for education and research is still rather limited in Central Europe compared to the situation in many other European Union member states, and international collaboration is still limited. This puts Hungarian scholars in a quasi-peripheral academic context, as well as being located outside of the non-Anglophone center (Lillis & Curry, 2010). In addition, explicit instruction in academic writing is not common, as is often the case in the Central and Eastern European nations discussed by Harbord (2010).

The novice scholars studying in doctoral schools face the task of learning how to approach, perform, and write about research within the (often unwritten) conventions of their disciplines. At the same time, they are confronted with the need to report on their research in a second language, as well. In addition, relatively few students take specialized courses where a foreign language is used for instruction, and therefore may be relatively unfamiliar both with academic language and the technical terms of their discipline in a second language (Duff, 2010). Giving research presentations and writing papers in another language poses a real challenge, especially if the student's foreign language proficiency is not very high.

In general, worldwide there appear to be two main approaches to degree requirements: the candidate's research is either published in dissertation¹ (monograph) form or is assembled from published works accompanied by a commentary; the latter option is gaining ground, for instance, in the United Kingdom (QAA, 2011) and in Northern Europe (e.g. Lee, 2010). There are examples of this in Hungary, as well, especially in medical schools. However, in Hungary the majority of doctoral students are required to *both* complete a dissertation and publish papers in order to earn their degree. Therefore, students must publish journal papers and conference proceeding papers while also carrying out their research and working on their dissertations.

Doctoral students in Hungary are thus expected to go through the process of publication several times, both in their native tongue (L1) and a second language (L2). It can be argued that this prepares doctoral students and candidates for an academic or research career, and since they begin publication within a support system, this should ease the publication process for them. From a different perspective, however, one might expect this double set of expectations to be a burden on doctoral students, a source of stress, and potentially a stumbling block in the way of getting the degree.

2. Publication practices and L2 authors

There is an ever growing literature on academic publication, looking at topics as varied as, for instance, the role of disciplinary cultures in publication, the construction of knowledge, instruction in academic research writing (especially in writing centers), the supervisor's role in the publication process, and language policy and globalization. One issue that is often addressed is the role of English in international scholarly publishing. There is general agreement that English currently dominates academic publishing, and that its influence continues to grow. The interpretation of this situation, however, varies greatly. Some see it as neutral (better flow of information, worldwide communication), others as negative (suppressing other languages and non-Anglo-Saxon styles of writing, unequal access to knowledge) (e.g. Tardy, 2004; Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada, & Plo, 2011). We also find studies stressing that an L2 author (also called a multilingual author) has choices and access to information that an English L1 author may well be missing (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Research carried out in several European countries has found that foreign language publications are typically given higher points than publications written in the national language. Curry and Lillis (2004) and Lillis and Curry (2010) trace the publication practices of social scientists in Hungary, Slovakia, Spain, and Portugal, finding that publications in a second language carry higher value in such situations as earning degrees (including post-doctoral degrees), scholarship and grant applications, promotion, and membership of Academies of Sciences. The higher value assigned

¹ This article uses 'dissertation' to refer to the major doctoral work, following American usage.

presumably reflects the larger potential audience of a foreign language publication. It may also take into account the greater effort and time that goes into gaining publication in a second language (see Hanauer & Englander, 2011).

However, this practice also has potentially negative consequences for the advancement of research in general, and for the careers of scholars (and doctoral students). If a researcher's topics are closely tied to a particular local culture, language, body of literature, history, or legal system, they may be of less interest to an international audience and more difficult to publish in international journals (Duzsak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Gnutzmann & Rabe, 2014; Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). In topics that are less local, the focus on publishing for an international audience of peers, typically in English, may lead to neglecting dissemination in the local national language – the growth in degree programs for which English is the medium of instruction has led to difficulty in reporting research in the local language, often because the technical terms do not exist (Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). In general, rewarding publication in English or other widespread languages can imply that the local language is of less value. This is reflected in the declining number of journals published in national languages, discussed e.g. in Spain (Martin, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, & Moreno, 2014) and Romania (Muresan & Pérez-Llantada, 2014).

On the other hand, local language publications and local journals continue to exist in great numbers (Hyland, 2015). Reported motivations include being recognized as an expert in the local research community (Lillis & Curry, 2010), dissemination of knowledge of immediate and practical use to practitioners who may not read scholarly literature in another language (Hyland, 2015), or communication with a more general readership (Duzsak & Lewkowicz, 2008). In addition, there may be less competition and publication may occur more rapidly, two factors that would matter to doctoral students on a schedule to accumulate the needed number of publications.

However, the fact remains that local journals, while fulfilling certain purposes, tend to be lower in prestige and influence, and are often less valued than international publications. This reality is reflected also in the publication requirements for doctoral students.

3. Publication requirements: points, genre, language

In this study we gather data from the University of Miskolc in Hungary, a regional university, once engineering centered (with faculties of materials science, earth science, and mechanical engineering & IT) but now also with degree programs in economics, law and humanities, among others. The university houses seven doctoral schools. Publication requirements are set on two levels: university and doctoral school. The university-wide requirements must be met, but policies set by doctoral schools may be higher. Note that the requirements discussed here are for students beginning their

doctoral studies before September 2016 (from which point a new system came into effect).

Students are required to earn a certain number of points for the *absolutorium* (predegree certificate closing the coursework section of the doctoral program) and for the defense stage. The university regulations state that the minimum requirements for obtaining the doctoral degree related to publication are as follows:

- 27 points obtained from publications (15% of total points);
- at least one journal article published in Hungarian;
- at least one article published in an approved journal in a foreign language.

The overall doctoral program regulations for the university include a list of various genres eligible for publication points: journal articles, conference proceedings, conference presentations without publication, book reviews, specialized translations, and patents. Additional genres or activities may be recognized by doctoral schools for publication points. Examples include presenting conference posters, creating teaching materials, or providing software documentation.

For journal articles and conference proceeding papers, publication points vary based on whether a publication is peer reviewed, in what language it is written, and whether it is published in Hungary or abroad. The most highly valued publication (in terms of points awarded) is an article written in a foreign language and published in a refereed journal outside of Hungary (9 points), while an article published in the Hungarian language in a non-reviewed journal would receive 2 points; a conference paper can earn a maximum of 7 points or a minimum of 1. Additionally, some doctoral schools reward publication in a journal with impact factor with extra points.

Regarding the language(s) of publication, the overall university regulation states that at least one journal article must be published in Hungarian and at least one article in a reputable journal in a foreign language. In the 2015 regulations, the mechanical engineering school required four publications, of which one was to be published in a foreign language in a refereed journal. The literary sciences school requires eight publications by the time of submitting the dissertation, but there is no specified requirement for foreign-language publications. The entrepreneurial science school requires 36–54 points for the *absolutorium* with at least one foreign-language publication; for the PhD degree there must be two additional foreign-language publications and one in Hungarian published in one of the approved journals.

Clearly, then, research publication makes up an important part of the doctoral requirements; without it, a degree cannot be awarded. The main aims of this study are to examine how students perceive this task and to investigate factors that may assist them in academic publishing, with an emphasis on second language (L2) publication. A questionnaire was administered to gather information on student perceptions of the differences between publishing in different languages, and what resources and help they

call on in regard to publishing. The overall objective is to identify ways to increase the support available to doctoral students, particularly for the task of publishing in English.

4. Methodology

The study applies both qualitative (interview) and quantitative (questionnaire) data collection methods. First a focus-group interview was conducted with students of different doctoral schools about their experience concerning academic publication (n=6). From this key issues were identified in order to design the questionnaire. After piloting the draft we completed the final on-line version, which contains four- and five-point Likert scale questions, attitude scales, and open questions. This paper reports on a set of questionnaire results and some of the issues selected for later investigation through follow-up interviews.

An e-mail message containing a link to the on-line questionnaire was sent to 232 full-time and part-time UM doctoral students enrolled in fall 2015. Seventy valid responses were received in all (a 30% response rate); all seven doctoral schools were represented in the sample and both full-time (70%) and part-time students responded. The gender distribution was 51% female and 49% male, and the average age was 32. All respondents were native speakers of Hungarian.

When analyzing the results, we compared the responses of students of the hard sciences, i.e. the doctoral schools for material science, earth science, mechanical engineering, and computer science (29 responses) with those of students in the soft sciences, i.e. the doctoral schools for entrepreneurial science, law, and literary science (41 responses). This approach was chosen to acknowledge the fundamental role of discipline in academic discourse (e.g. Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2000), at least to some extent. Since disciplines tend actually to be more ranged along a scale, with some being more on the soft side but merging into hard (economics, for instance) (see Hyland, 2000), the two-group system is a simplification, but still provides a useful approach for analyzing the data and identifying whether disciplines play a role; we find it also in publications such as Medgyes and Kaplan (1992) and Becher and Trowler (2001).

5. Results and discussion

The research findings are presented following the logical order of the questionnaire survey, that is, first the respondents' perceptions about the publication requirements are described, followed by language-related research findings. Finally the support PhD students use throughout the process of publication is introduced, which will lead us to the discussion of pedagogical implications.

Student perceptions of the publication requirements

The publication requirements do not appear to be seen in a very negative light; students seem to take them for granted and not to find them overly burdensome. Students in both groups felt fairly certain that they could meet the publication requirements (average 3.9 on a 1–5 scale, with 5 being 'certain') and agreed that careful planning was required to do so; their overall judgment of feeling stressed about it was around 3. Comparing groups, the soft science students more strongly considered meeting the requirements as a part of the research process and believed it to be worth the time and energy; the students in the hard sciences leaned somewhat more towards meeting the requirements being a goal in itself, and ranked it a little less worthwhile. This may be due to a general focus among engineering students on experiments and data over the communication of findings. However, it must be remarked that there were nine (12.8%) respondents who seemed to find the whole process either extremely or quite stressful and two who considered it nearly impossible to meet the requirements.

Number and languages of publications

In order to learn whether students had experience with publishing and what genres and languages they were publishing in, respondents were asked to record the number of their publications in various categories. Figures in Table 1 are not precise, because the item 'more than ten' was chosen by a surprisingly large number of respondents, and their publications were counted as 11. Still, a basic picture of publication numbers emerges.

Table 1. Number of reported publications (hard science respondents n=29; soft science respondents n=41)

	Hungarian (L1)		English (L2)		Other L2		
	hard	soft	hard	soft	hard	soft	total
Journal articles	71	86	47	11	0	3	218
Conference papers	111	108	62	65	2	6	354
Total	182	194	109	76	2	9	572

The average number of papers per person is about 10 for the hard science group, with 60% written in Hungarian; for the soft science students the averages were 6.8 per person, 70% in Hungarian. Considering L2 publications, English dominated, and with the exception of a conference paper in Romanian, all other publications were in German. Conference publications are more common than journal articles for both groups and in all languages. Interestingly, of the soft science conference papers, 80% were published by students in the entrepreneurial science doctoral school, which requires more publications at an earlier stage than many of the other schools. Other genres reported by students were book chapters, conference presentations or posters, and also items that may not actually be eligible for publication points (abstracts, Student

Research Society projects, and specialized translations in schools that do not officially recognize them); these were more typical of new doctoral students.

The main differences found between the groups were in the number of journal articles in English, which is over four times higher for hard science students than for soft, and in the use of foreign languages other than English, which was higher among soft science students (especially law students). The reasons behind these differences are not known, as the motivation behind the choice of publication genre or language was not addressed in the questionnaire. Publishing in a second language could be for reasons of higher prestige, perceived wider dissemination of their work, and/or related to the publication points given for foreign language publication. One respondent in information technology with strong views in favor of English publication even wrote, "Publishing in Hungarian is a 'necessary evil'." However, Flowerdew and Li (2009) found that many established social scientists in Hong Kong preferred to publish their research in Chinese for a variety of reasons, including its relevance to Chinese-speakers. The topics of research may be of greater local interest among the students in the soft sciences.

Publishing in languages other than English appears to be seen as superfluous among some respondents; one student comments that, "A good solid level of English of at least intermediate level is indispensable, other languages are not important because you can get all information in English". While soft science students have better foreign language knowledge (20 of them assessed themselves as being at intermediate or advanced level in English, 37 in another language), they seem to publish outside of Hungary much less frequently than the hard science students. Publication in Hungarian may be in order to reach a particular audience for a certain topic primarily of local interest, or may reflect avoidance of L2 publication due to insufficient proficiency in a foreign language, lack of confidence, or lack of guidance for writing and going through the publication and review process in English or another L2. Because of the numerous factors and possibilities involved, motivation for language choice was deemed a suitable topic for further investigation in in-depth interviews.

Differences between publishing in L1 and other languages

From interviews we identified six main issues: accessing information sources, expressing thoughts, using terminology, structuring research writing, learning about the expectations for various research forums, and obtaining feedback. Students were asked to compare the ease of each of these activities for L1, L2 English, and other L2; average ratings are shown in Figure 1.

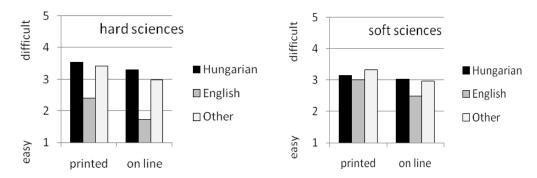


Figure 1. Level of difficulty in accessing information, by source, language, and discipline group

When accessing sources of information for their research on-line, hard science students reported more difficulty in finding information in Hungarian than the soft sciences group. Both groups reported less trouble finding both online and printed information in English than in Hungarian. This highlights difficulties faced by researchers from a non-Anglophone background in accessing relevant and up-to-date information; it also points to a possible lack of resources in the Hungarian language for particular disciplines.

Students were also asked about the difficulty of certain aspects of writing in L1, L2 English, or another L2 (language unspecified). Not surprisingly, students reported less difficulty with expressing their thoughts in an academic style when using Hungarian than when using an additional language; the gap between L1 and L2 English was wider for soft science students than for those in the hard sciences. Interestingly, the soft science students reported somewhat more difficulty with terminology and structuring in Hungarian than the hard science students did. This may be because social sciences and humanities papers sometimes follow a less fixed format compared to the typical experimental article, and are required to explain concepts more often, since they have less clear-cut technical terminology than in the sciences and engineering (Becher & Trowler, 2001). In addition, engineering sometimes imports newer terminology directly from English. For all items, the hard science average for L2 English was under the score of 3 (neither easy nor difficult), while the soft science average rose above 3 for all L2 English items.

In order to better interpret the disciplinary differences that emerge in the survey results, a clearer understanding of the role of academic writing in the disciplines is needed. Interviews could explore these issues, identifying discipline-specific features for publishing in L1 and L2.

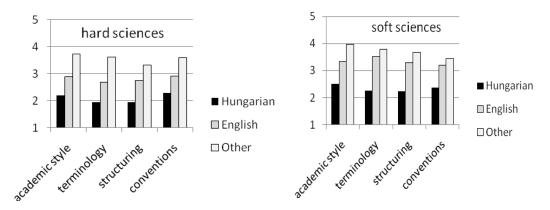


Figure 2. Perceptions of difficulty in writing-related issues: writing in academic style, using technical terms correctly, structuring a paper, and becoming familiar with conventions of the publication forum, by language of publication

Support in publishing activities

Knowing of possibilities for publishing or getting information about upcoming conferences is an important aspect of the publishing process. The main source of information was reported to be the supervisors, colleagues, other doctoral students, and also the doctoral school itself. Mailing lists and outside sources were uncommon; this may be related to the relatively low membership of respondents in professional societies – 38% of those in the soft sciences and 50% of those in the hard sciences did not belong to any academic associations.

The main source of support when students intend to publish is, of course, their supervisor(s). Among the roles of the supervisor that that respondents rated as extremely important were helping doctoral students to become independent researchers, assisting them during the publication process, making corrections to the content of their papers, and helping them with building up and organizing their papers. Hard science students also highly value the help of their supervisors in correcting the style and language of their foreign language articles (they rated it as the second most important aspect), while the students in the soft sciences expect their supervisors to help with improving the style and language of their Hungarian articles. Studies have shown that the supervisor is a major factor in research performance, which is measured mainly in publications (Gu, Lin, Vogel, & Tian, 2011; Lei & Hu, 2015) and these data show that Hungarian doctoral students expect their supervisors to assist them with successful publication. In general, students also said that their supervisors actually performed these activities, although some students felt that their supervisors could improve in certain areas.

When asked about access to feedback on content and on style/language, students from both groups reported no particular difficulty with getting comments on Hungarian papers, but somewhat more with English. We also asked students who provided them with feedback (Figure 3). The main source was the supervisor, although there were

science and humanities students whose supervisors did not give feedback on either content or style/language, particularly in English (possibly because of their lack of language knowledge). In this case, they mainly turned to friends who know English, language teachers, other doctoral students, or family members (and a few asked nobody for feedback before submission).

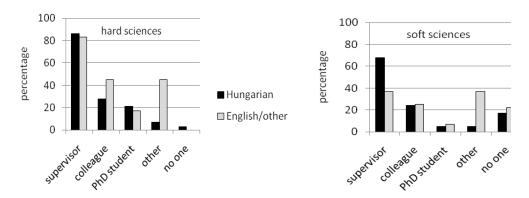


Figure 3. Sources of feedback on a manuscript before submission, by language of publication

The role of help outside the research team emerges in the questionnaire results, particularly in regard to L2 writing, although the use of literacy brokers (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003) outside the research group appears to be fairly limited. A few students had their papers looked at by teachers of Hungarian or foreign languages, and a few used proofreaders. Students who reported having their articles translated into a foreign language (four respondents in all, or 10%) sought translators themselves and paid the costs themselves, or asked an acquaintance to help for no charge.

The survey results give a general picture of the situation in terms of sources of support that students are using, but do not show where the system is falling short or what could be improved. In particular, the access to resources by part-time students should be explored. Support-related issues should be examined in more detail during interviews.

6. Pedagogical implications

The responses to the survey show that publication is taking place mainly in Hungarian and in English, and the supervisor typically provides the main support with publication-related activities. Clearly, many doctoral students are succeeding at the task. However, requirements are becoming stricter, and the primary aim of publication in journals with impact factor or other reputable journals is difficult to achieve, especially when writing in a foreign language.

Survey responses show little evidence of a structured support system for academic writing, either in Hungarian or in a foreign language (principally English), and therefore students' access to support is uneven, and not all have the same opportunities. On the

doctoral school level, more explicit guidelines for publication planning may aid students in meeting the publication requirements and obtaining the degree within the targeted period of time.

What can language teachers do? It would probably be helpful to incorporate academic writing instruction into the curriculum of the doctoral schools, for credit. As shown in the survey, many students have not had the opportunity of participating in any training in academic writing (in any language) but have strong interest in such courses. Another possibility for language teaching with a focus on publication might be to offer short courses or regular workshops. It should be pointed out that not only doctoral students but also early and mid-career scholars could benefit from opportunities for publication-focused instruction and coaching.

Furthermore, access to proofreading or "author's editor" services would help improve the presentation of research and findings. Matarese (2013) introduces ways that language professionals contribute to scholarly publication – as teachers, but also as copy editors, "authors' editors", translators, mediators and mentors, providing support services to help researchers create "clear, accurate and credible reports in English for international communication" (p. 258).

Various types of mentoring approaches are shared in Thein and Beach (2010), namely collaborative research, co-authored research, reciprocal review and evaluation, and networking. Unfortunately, not all supervisors are willing or able to help students with each draft of a paper (especially an L2 paper). Experienced faculty members (or teams of language teachers and subject teachers) could coach students – not only those that they themselves supervise – through the challenges of journal article writing and the publication process. It is also necessary to stress the major role that academic reading has in learning to write in an academic manner (Escribano, 1999). Thus, incorporating regular supervised reading of L2 articles into research activities could well have a positive effect on writing.

While the idea of writing groups and writing retreats (see e.g. McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006) is unfamiliar at this university, several people – not just students, but early and mid-career academics – have expressed interest in participating. This type of organized peer support could prove to be helpful not only in acquiring techniques for academic writing, but also in motivating busy researchers to make regular progress in writing up their research.

It seems clear that a combination of the above-mentioned approaches would offer opportunities to meet different needs at different levels. Classes or other group activities cannot meet all needs; writing support also needs to be individualized and in order for it to be effective, it needs to be multifaceted (Matarese, 2013); Matarese goes on to suggest that multicultural and multilingual aspects are also important when providing academic writing support.

7. Conclusions

Publishing their research findings is a must not only for full-fledged academics but also for novice scholars, who are still on their way to the doctoral degree. We conducted our investigation in the context of doctoral education in order to discover those issues that might need pedagogical intervention to help students with writing for publication. The survey results showed that disciplinary group differences influence publishing practices in terms of the genre and the language of publication. The respondents also reported L2 language-related difficulties in their academic writing practices and a varying amount of support. While many of the results need further investigation in order to find the underlying reasons for the phenomena revealed, survey responses show a need for a larger range of writing and publication support options for doctoral students.

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