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Refugee-background students negotiating academic literacy practices in L2: a dialogical and nexus analytical approach

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Abstract: This study explored the academic literacies of multilingual refugeebackground students who had completed some higher education studies before migrating to Finland. Previous studies have paid little attention to students like them. The research context is a pilot training programme integrating language and content studies. Applying dialogical and nexus analytical perspectives, the study investigated the sense-making processes of two key participants in a Finnish-medium accountancy course that formed part of the programme. The primary data, comprising interviews and video-recorded meetings between the students and their teachers and tutors, were analysed by applying dialogical interaction analysis and narrative analysis in a nexus analytical framework. The results show that the students actively tried to make sense of the target literacy practices. This was observed in negotiations related to the use of technology, norms on authorship and plagiarism, and autonomy in studying. The course was challenging for the students, possibly because their previous experiences and resources had not prepared them for what was expected of them either explicitly in instructions or more implicitly in institutional discourses. This article concludes that structures and practices can be exclusionary if no attention is paid to them and discusses ways of improving inclusiveness in higher education.

Keywords: second language learning, higher education, literacy, Finnish, refugees

Zusammenfassung: Diese Studie untersuchte die akademischen Lese- & Schreibkompetenzen von mehrsprachigen Studierenden mit Flüchtlingshintergrund, die vor ihrer Migration nach Finnland ein Hochschulstudium absolviert hatten. Bisherige Studien haben dieser Gruppe wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Der Forschungskontext ist ein Pilotausbildungsprogramm, welches Sprach- und Inhaltsstudium miteinander vernetzt. Unter Anwendung dialogischer und nexus-

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analytischer Perspektiven untersuchte die Studie die Prozesse der Sinnfindung von zwei Schlüsselteilnehmern in einem finnischsprachigen Buchhaltungskurs. der Teil des Programms war. Die Primärdaten, bestehend aus Interviews und Videoaufzeichnungen von Treffen zwischen den Studierenden und ihren Lehrer*innen und Tutor*innen, wurden unter Anwendung der dialogischen Interaktionsanalyse und der narrativen Analyse in einem nexus-analytischen Rahmen untersucht. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Studierenden aktiv versuchten, die angestrebten Lese- & Schreibpraktiken zu verstehen. Dies wurde bei Gesprächen über den Einsatz von Technologien, über Normen zu Autorenschaft und Plagiaten sowie über die Autonomie im Studium beobachtet. Der Kurs stellte für die Studierenden eine Herausforderung dar, möglicherweise weil ihre früheren Erfahrungen und Ressourcen sie nicht auf das vorbereitet hatten, was von ihnen erwartet wurde, sei es explizit in den Anweisungen oder eher implizit in den institutionellen Diskursen. Der Artikel kommt zu dem Schluss, dass Strukturen und Praktiken ausgrenzend wirken können, wenn ihnen keine Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt wird, und er erörtert Möglichkeiten zur Verbesserung der Inklusivität in der Hochschulbildung.

Tiivistelmä: Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan pakolaistaustaisten opiskelijoiden osallistumista akateemisiin tekstikäytänteisiin toisella kielellä. Näillä opiskelijoilla oli myös aiempaa korkeakoulutusta. Ryhmä on jäänyt aiemmissa tutkimuksissa vähälle huomiolle. Tutkimuksen konteksti on uudenlainen korkeakoulutaustaisille maahanmuuttajille tarkoitettu koulutus, jossa yhdistyvät kieli- ja sisältöopinnot. Tutkin, miten kaksi avainosallistujaa ymmärtää ja ottaa haltuun suomenkielisen laskentatoimen kurssin tekstikäytänteitä osana koulutusta. Teoreettisesti ja metodologisesti tutkimus nojaa dialogiseen lähestymistapaan ja neksusanalyysin viitekehykseen. Ensisijainen aineisto koostui haastatteluista ja videoiduista tapaamisista opiskelijoiden ja heidän opettajiensa ja tutoriensa välillä, ja analyysissä hyödynnettiin narratiivista analyysiä ja dialogista vuorovaikutusanalyysiä. Tulokset osoittavat, että opiskelijat yrittivät aktiivisesti ymmärtää ja ottaa haltuun kurssin tekstikäytänteitä. Tämä tuli esiin tekniikan käytöstä, tekijyyteen ja plagiointiin liittyvistä normeista sekä opiskelun itsenäisestä otteesta neuvotteluna. Kurssi oli opiskelijoille haastava, mahdollisesti koska heidän aiemmat kokemuksensa ja resurssinsa eivät kohdanneet sen kanssa, mitä heiltä odotettiin eksplisiittisesti tehtävissä ja implisiittisemmin institutionaalisissa diskursseissa. Artikkeli osoittaa, että korkeakoulun rakenteet ja käytännöt voivat olla eksklusiivisia, jos niihin ei kiinnitetä erityistä huomiota, ja se esittää tapoja inklusiivisuuden kehittämiseksi.

1 Introduction

For many migrant students, completing higher education studies in a new academic environment is challenging, since literacy practices and study cultures vary across educational systems, and studying successfully in a second language might not be easy. Increasing interest is being shown in multilingual students' literacies in academic contexts. Most previous studies have concerned relatively privileged students, such as international students studying in English. In contrast, this study focuses on the literacies of refugee-background students currently taking university-level courses in their developing L2 Finnish in Finland. They took part in a full-time training programme piloted by a Finnish university that integrated language and disciplinary studies that they could complete without being enrolled in any existing degree programme. These students either already had a university degree or had completed some higher education studies before migrating. This group of refugee-background students has received little research attention (however, see, e.g., Sontag 2018).

This study focuses on two key participants who took an accountancy course as part of the training programme. This course was an independent study unit, which meant that there was no teacher-led instruction offered except for some lectures with voluntary participation. However, the students received some support in coping with their assignments from their teachers and tutors. The study reveals some of the participants' negotiations, processes and struggles, often invisible to educators, that occurred between their receiving and submitting course assignments. Although the students' perspective is the main focus of this study, tools for improving the inclusiveness of refugee-background and other culturally diverse students in higher education are also discussed. Globally, the need for improvement is urgent, as only three percent of refugees worldwide have access to higher education in their host state (UNHCR 2019).

In this study, academic literacies such as completing an assignment are approached from a social perspective, in line with the new literacy studies (Barton and Hamilton 2000) and academic literacies framework (Lillis and Scott 2007). Here, the key concept is literacy practice, which connects individual's activities around texts to social structures (Barton and Hamilton 2000). The relation between the two is "mutually shaping" (Kaufhold 2017: 74), since situated activities are embedded in culturally and historically formed patterns, which also develop through these activities (Barton and Hamilton 2000). Thus, literacy practices are seen as situated as well as part of social structures, power hierarchies and institutional practices (Lillis and Scott 2007). To understand the process of students' participation in new literacy practices, the study applies nexus analysis, which is a theoretical and methodological framework focusing on social action (Scollon and Scollon 2004). This social action takes place at the intersection of the cycles of participants' life histories and the interaction order of the current situation and surrounding discourses (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 19–20).

The social action in this study concerned negotiating on and completing assignments. The research question was: How do refugee-background students negotiate their Finnish-medium university assignments? Given the study context, it was particularly interesting to examine how well these students' life histories and resources meet the discourses of Finnish academia and how this intersection becomes visible in the students' narratives and interactions with their teachers and tutors. Negotiation on assignments with other people and the students' sensemaking processes are understood from a dialogical perspective, which does not draw a clear line between social and cognitive processes (Dufva 2013; Linell 2009, 2017).

2 Refugee-background students engaging with L2 academic literacy practices

The literature on students with a refugee background shows that they often face considerable challenges in accessing higher education and succeeding academically in their host countries (see e.g., Kong et al. 2016; Sontag 2018; for a review, see Ramsay and Baker 2019). While language- and literacy-related issues are often identified as major struggles (e.g., Kong et al. 2016), they have rarely been studied in detail (see, however, e.g., Hirano 2014, 2015). Moreover, research on refugee-background students has typically focused on students with low or interrupted education and/or who have completed some high school studies in the host country (e.g., Hirano 2014, 2015; Kong et al. 2016). My research thus offers a novel perspective by focusing on the literacies of two refugee-background students who had completed some higher education studies before migrating.

Here, literacies are understood in a broad sense. In today's learning contexts (and to a large extent in all contexts), participating in literacy practices demands much more than traditional reading and writing skills. This study thus draws on the multiliteracies framework (Cope and Kalantzis 2009) which takes into account the multilingual and multimodal aspects of meaning making. Multilingual students can draw on their wide-ranging linguistic repertoire when engaging with texts, a strategy that can help them achieve deeper understandings of texts, create more diverse texts and foster their confidence as "literate beings" (García and Kleifgen 2019: 568). The multimodal aspect of literacies, on the other hand, might be challenging for those with little experience of it. For example, refugee-back-

ground students might be less used to using information technology or navigating online platforms in higher education contexts (Kong et al. 2016).

A rich body of literature has accumulated on second language learning and use in academic contexts in the field of English for academic purposes (EAP). This field has its roots in the research domain of languages for special purposes (LSP), which is well established in applied linguistics (see Hyland and Shaw 2018). Research on EAP as well as LSP education and training has usually focused on more privileged learner groups, most commonly university degree students learning English for their studies and/or future profession. In general, reading and writing in academic contexts in L2 is considered challenging. For example, Wette and Furneaux (2018) found that international graduate students in New Zealand and the UK found issues such as source-based writing, metadiscourse strategies and the ability to write coherent texts difficult. L2 use is also often seen as a factor contributing to plagiarism (Pecorari and Petrić 2014). In their review, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) noted that this is often explained by cultural differences as well as the general difficulty of academic writing. Students' experiences with new literacy practices, such as source-based writing, are influenced by their literacy histories, and hence participating in new literacy practices means negotiating with both one's previous experiences and one's future (Barton et al. 2007). For example, Gu and Brooks (2008) argue that change in students' perceptions of plagiarism should be seen as a multi-layered, sociocultural process, which also includes the appropriation of conceptual understanding instead of only learning the rules on a surface level.

From a social perspective, higher education students' struggles are often related to mismatches between their language and literacy skills and what is expected and required from them (Wingate 2015: 104). Students are often expected to socialise into the language and literacies of disciplines, although these are rarely made explicit to them (Wingate 2015: Ch. 1). Students from various backgrounds may also be confused about what is required, since writing conventions "are treated as if they were 'common sense' and communicated through wordings as if these were transparently meaningful" (Lillis and Turner 2001: 58). Hirano (2014, 2015) gives a positive example of how support structures can help students with still developing language and literacy skills. She found that refugee students with below admission-level literacy skills were able to succeed in college studies in the U.S. The students developed a variety of strategies to cope with reading (Hirano 2015) and overcame their language-related writing challenges with resources and support from their tutors, professors, other faculty members, peers, and the writing centre (Hirano 2014).

3 Nexus analysis and dialogical theory as theoretical and methodological frameworks

In this study, students approached their university assignments both in dialogue with their teachers, tutors and peers and in constant dialogue and negotiation with their past experiences and previously encountered discourses as well as with their studying materials. These perspectives are merged in the analysis by applying nexus analysis and dialogical theory. Both approaches underline the wholly social nature of human action. Nexus analysis conceptualises how different ideas and aspects of social action are linked (Scollon and Scollon 2004: viii), whereas dialogical theory describes the principles of external dialogue and the processes of human sense-making (Linell 2017).

In nexus analysis, social action is seen as an intersection combining participants' life histories (historical bodies), the interaction order that they establish together, and discourses in place (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 19–20). The historical body refers to a person's life history, motives, and beliefs about the future, which she carries in her physical body (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 46–49). The interaction order is the interactional structure of social action, involving, for example, participants' cultural practices and institutional roles, such as teacher or student (Goffman 1983). Discourses in place refers to characteristic, socially accepted ways of language use that carry values and ideologies (Gee 1999) as these are understood in, for example, critical discourse analysis.

The dialogical perspective, introduced by Bakhtin (e.g., 1981) and further developed by, for example, Linell (2009, 2017) and Dufva (2013), helps to both conceptualise the interaction in situ and understand the socio-cognitive aspects of social action and learning. The fundamental principle of dialogue is the reciprocity of contributions: initiatives and responses are aspects of the same act and are mutually dependent (Linell 2009). Interaction is therefore always co-constructed, and its function is to negotiate understandings (Linell 2017). Understanding involves relating new information to something already better known or understood, and it can be part of interactions, that is, external dialogues. Understanding can also result from solitary activities such as reading and thinking, which can thus be regarded as inner dialogues (Linell 2017: 305). In this study, students' negotiations take place in both external dialogues and inner dialogues. They are understood as sense-making, which "concerns the bringing of order to one's world, as well as the development of understandings of self, others and the surrounding world" (Linell 2017: 302). In the dialogical approach, language learning is also seen as a "social-cum-cognitive process", in which linguistic resources are appropriated as a result of sharing and recycling those of others (Dufva 2013).

Both frameworks share the idea that the broader contexts of situated social actions and their historical aspects are meaningful. Nexus analysis sees an action "as a moment in time and space" in which discourses, historical bodies and the interaction order intersect, and "they can be thought of as having a history that leads into that moment and a future that leads away from it in arcs of semiotic cycles" (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 160, see also Hult 2019). The dialogical approach, in turn, acknowledges the interplay between local and nonlocal aspects of situations, which Linell (2009, 2017) calls "double dialogicality". Nonlocal aspects are expectations that we relate to the situation type, such as expecting the teacher to start the class. Moreover, on the local level, each utterance has retrospective and proactive aspects that make them relevant in relation to prior situations and utterances as well as expected future situations and utterances (Linell 2009: 177).

4 Conducting a nexus analytical study

4.1 Context and participants

This study is part of a larger study focusing on a fully funded training programme aimed at facilitating migrants' access to working life or higher education. All the participants had completed some higher education studies in their country of origin, and some had a degree. Some of their study paths had been interrupted by, for example, a security crisis. The nine-month programme, integrating language and content studies, was piloted in a university in the latter half of the 2010s. It allowed the students complete both tailored Finnish and English courses and selfselected university-level courses from various fields without being enrolled in any specific degree programme. The latter were intended for independent study and available to anyone interested (normally for a study fee) as part of the Finnish adult education system. To support participants with their content studies, themes and materials were sometimes brought to Finnish language classes. Participants also received more individual support than regular students from their advisor, teachers and tutors. They had regular tutor group meetings, in which Finnish degree students helped them with assignments and materials and spoke Finnish with them.

This study focuses on two key participants, Adam and Waseem (pseudonyms), who took an accountancy course which required study of a book and either an exam or learning assignments. All the materials and assignments were in Finnish. The assignments comprised three short essays and four comprehensive accounting tasks. Students also had access to supplementary materials and could attend lectures, but this was not obligatory. Adam had previously studied economics. Waseem, in turn, had no prior experience of accountancy, although he had completed some studies on tourism. Both were from a Middle Eastern country and had a refugee background. At the time of the training programme, they were in their twenties and planning on applying for degree programmes but did not yet know what these might be. They had B-level Finnish and English in the CEFR and hoped to study in Finnish in the future. However, Waseem later enrolled in a degree programme in English and completed an accountancy course as part of it. Adam also enrolled in a degree programme in English. The students in both programmes were from diverse backgrounds and English was their lingua franca.

4.2 Data and methods

Methodologically, the study was conducted in a nexus analytical framework. Nexus analysis draws on critical discourse analysis, anthropological linguistics, and interactional sociolinguistics and allows combining several methods in parallel. In designing and conducting the research, I loosely followed a practical fieldwork guide (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 152–178). In the final stage of the analysis, I also used dialogical interaction analysis (Linell 2009) and narrative analysis (Barkhuizen 2013). In nexus analysis, the first stage is engaging with the field and identifying the central social issue (Scollon and Scollon 2004). I had a dual role in the field, as I was one of five Finnish L2 teachers in the training programme while also gathering longitudinal data for the research project. In nexus analysis, the researcher is always considered part of the research process and a participant in the nexus of practice. Despite the ethnographic orientation, I did not systematically observe students in the classroom, as I wanted to separate my researcher role from classroom interactions, although the participants were probably unaware of this. However, as a teacher, I had a good overall view of the training programme and was familiar with its goals and structure. The participants signed informed consents. This was not a requirement for participation in the training programme. As my interest was in literacy activities, I focused the data gathering on these. I interviewed the students, gathered their written and oral course work, and video-recorded meetings where they were present.

In the second stage of nexus analysis, navigating, the researcher zooms in on an interesting nexus point (Scollon and Scollon 2004). Based on the literature and my observations and experiences as a teacher, making sense of subject studies and completing them seemed an interesting nexus point at which students' life histories, Finnish university practices, and study-related discourses intersected. I selected the two participants owing to their motivation to complete their course and be involved in the study. Scrutinizing all the accountancy course data, I identified three key cycles: discourses, people, and interaction orders (see Scollon and Scollon 2004: 160-165). I then tracked these cycles across the whole dataset. For example, noticing that authorship in the assignments was a recurring theme, I zoomed out again to examine this in light of the whole dataset. In practice, this meant, for example considering authorship-related data in the students' life histories, such as prior writing experiences.

Finally, I zoomed in closer and selected for detailed analysis a few interaction events in which the cycles intersected. Based on the literature and dialogical theory of sense-making (Linell 2017), these events yielded interesting insights on the research problem. The interactional data came from students' meetings with teachers and tutors (see table 1). Four students doing the accountancy course formed one tutor group, with two native Finnish-speaking tutors (Laura and Juha). Four of the six tutor group meetings were video recorded. These four students also had a meeting with business studies teachers, where they could ask questions about the course. I was present at this meeting and video-recorded it but did not participate in the discussion. The main interaction language in all meetings was Finnish.

To analyse the interaction order (Scollon and Scollon 2004), interaction data were analysed from the dialogical perspective, applying Linell's (2009) dialogical interaction analysis. The concept of a communicative project is used as an analytical unit to understand the joint construction of meaning and mutual understanding in dialogues (Linell 2009: 178-198). The concept describes how single utterances often centre around a bigger task (Linell 2009: 178-198). Communicative projects are nested and embedded with each other and are dynamic and emergent in nature, even if they often have a goal. They are also jointly constructed, even when participants' roles are asymmetrical, as "listeners too contribute actively to interpretations" (Linell 2017: 304). In addition, I analysed the interaction data in a broader nexus analytic framework and in light of the whole dataset and research literature. This meant, for example identifying the discourses present in the teachers' and tutors' talk.

Informal interviews formed the second data source (see table 1). I had spent enough time with the participants to share mutual ground, and the interview questions were mostly based on the training contents, already familiar to all. The interviews can thus be regarded as ethnographic interviews (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 42–58). The last two interviews were done after the preliminary analysis to add a cycle that would aid understanding the participants' experiences and involve them in interpreting the data. These interviews were reflective in nature. Waseem and I also watched some data excerpts together. The interview language

was chosen by the participant. The group interview (and all the prior interviews in the whole dataset) and Adam's final interview were in Finnish, probably because we were used to speaking Finnish together. However, as Finnish is my L1, this language choice adds to power asymmetry. Waseem's final interview was mainly in English, possibly because Waseem was using it more in his everyday life at time of interview. The interview excerpts were analysed within the narrative analysis framework from a small stories perspective, which sees not just traditional "big stories" but all narrative activities as worth analysing (Georgakopoulou 2015). I analysed the narratives for both content and form (see Barkhuizen 2013: 8–9), paying attention to ways of telling on the linguistic level and to the tellers as part of the interview interaction and as characters in their stories (Georgakopoulou 2015: 258). In the analysis, because the students were using their second (or third) language, I carefully monitored my interpretations of their linguistic choices.

Table 1: Primary data in chronological order. Participants' names are pseudonyms, selected by the participant or me.

Data	Participants	Timeline	Length (hours)
Meeting with teachers	Waseem, Adam, 2 other students, 3 teachers, Kirsi (researcher), a study advisor (half of the meeting)	Some of the students had already started studying for the assignments	1:30
Tutor group	Waseem, Adam, 1 other student, Laura (tutor), Juha (tutor)	5 weeks after the meeting	1:04
Interview	Waseem, Adam, Kirsi	10 weeks after the meeting and about a month before the deadline for submitting assignments	
Interview	Waseem, Kirsi	About 2 years after the meeting	1:35
Interview	Adam, Kirsi	About 2,5 years after the meeting	0:33

The two types of datasets and their analyses were brought together in a nexus analytical framework to both complement each other and create a holistic, triangulated understanding of the whole dataset. I translated the Finnish data excerpts into English, and these were checked by another linguist. Clearly, some aspects of interaction get lost in translation, and some speech features of an L2 speaker are hard to translate. The original transcribed data excerpts are presented in the Appendix. The last stage of nexus analysis is changing the nexus of practice. This is addressed in the discussion section.

5 Findings

5.1 Assignment as a literacy practice: negotiation on materials and authorship

The students' efforts to make sense of the assignment as a literacy practice was visible in their question-answer session with the business studies teachers. For example, the students wondered if they would get feedback from the teacher before final submission, if they could use sources outside the mandatory material, and how strict the word limit is in an essay-type assignment. The example below concerns the materials. Adam is talking about hard copies, whereas the teacher is referring to online materials. The role of technology recurs across the dataset.

Example 1 (translated from Finnish)

A: - - could you give us handouts, so that we can read, and then we can

T: you can find them

A: we can prepare before

T: I can email you the link where you can find it

A: because we were on [the online platform 1] and we couldn't find them

T: in [the online platform 2] you can find the materials - -

A: and we can print them or

T: you can print them or read them on computer screen

Adam starts this communicative project by asking if the teacher can give them handouts to read. Adam's word choice (antaa oppimateriaalimonisteita) refers to hard copies on paper, although it is possible that he has few other expressions in his Finnish repertoire to describe accessing materials. The teacher replies that she can email him the link. Adam continues by explaining that they could not find the materials on the online platform (which he has already used during the training programme), and it turns out that the materials are on another platform. Adam continues being active by asking if they can print the materials, a question indicating that Adam is not very familiar with using online materials. The interview data confirm that Adam has not used IT in his previous studies. Thus, his prior experiences as part of his historical body are explicitly present in the dialogue. Similarly, in Australia, Kong et al. (2016) identified IT use as one of the major challenges for refugee-background students.

In this communicative project, the participants' student and teacher roles are traditional: Adam seeks information about the materials from the teacher, who has that knowledge. However, in talking about the materials, the teacher seems to take it for granted that they are online, as she offers little explanation on their use. The discourse of technology-mediated studying is powerful here: Adam is expected to know how to handle online materials. About two and half years after this discussion, Adam reflects on his decision to quit the course in a similar way: "I told them I don't want to continue - - no-one told us how to figure out everything on [online platforms] or how to find materials and instructions (trans.)."

The themes of plagiarism and authorship, assignment-related aspects that the students were also struggling with, recur across the data. Below, Waseem is wondering if it is okay if their answers are somewhat similar as a result of studying together, and Adam wants to double-check if they are allowed to copy source text in the assignment.

Example 2 (translated from Finnish, except for words in italics)

W: okay, I have one question - - of course you can't copy anything when you're answering, but I have one thing because we study together, for example me and Adam are doing a project together and we are trying to study the different parts and our answers will be little similar, what I and he answer, maybe one question or two questions (.) not really the same but a little bit the same, is it very very not, is it not very good (.) or what is your opinion

T: yeah, everyone should write their own answers, yeah but in my opinion, it supports learning when you talk about those things (.) so, you can discuss them together and work together, but everyone produces their own answers so they can't be exactly the same

W: yeah of course but if I if we have the wrong idea (.) then everyone has the same wrong idea in their answers (.) and I don't want the teacher to feel like okay

T: plagiarism

W: copying from each other

T: yeah yeah

W: that's what I mean, okay another question

A: so we have to write in our own words or we can copy what the book says, for example

T: own words yeah

A: aha xxx

T: if you copy directly from the book, for example if you want to add a definition how something is defined, then you should put it in inverted commas, but otherwise you have to write your own words

The excerpt involves two main local communicative projects, one initiated by Waseem and the other one initiated by Adam. Waseem introduces a new topic by asking if it is okay if his answer and Adam's answer are "not really the same but a little bit the same" (*ei todella sama mutta vähän sama*) as a result of their studying together. For the Finnish class in the training programme, they were doing a project together on one of the themes of the accountancy course. The teacher replies that everyone should answer in their own words, but it is a good idea to

study together. While this comment alludes to the principles of collaborative learning, it seems to conflict with the standard assessment practices.

Moreover, the teacher might not understand a second-language user's viewpoint. From a dialogical perspective, sharing and recycling linguistic resources is an integral part of language learning (Dufva 2013), and hence, as here, working together would probably also mean helping each other linguistically. Typically, it has not been a subject teachers' responsibility to take language-related issues into account (see Tkachenko et al. 2016: 9, Wingate 2015: Ch. 3). Wingate (2015: 45) points out that subject teachers might be unwilling to take on this responsibility, as they might believe that language and literacy issues are separate from content, or they might feel uncomfortable doing something they have not received explicit instruction on dealing with.

Waseem further expresses concern about what the teacher will think if their answers are wrong in the same way. The teacher then co-constructs the meaning by naming Waseem's concern as plagiarism before he can finish speaking, and they seem to share understanding of what plagiarism means. Waseem's concern is quite specific, indicating that while aware of the general principles of plagiarism, he is unsure how to apply them in this situation. In the interview, he told me that he had learned these principles on another course in Finland and I knew this theme had been discussed in the training programme. Previous studies have also shown that it is not always clear to students what counts as plagiarism, and that institutional as well as discipline-specific conceptions of it vary (for a review, see Pecorari and Petrić 2014: 279–281), making it even harder for students to know what to do.

In the same excerpt, Adam starts a new communicative project related to the same topic, when he asks about copying from sources. His word choices "so we have to write in our own words" (eli on pakko kirjoittaa meidän sanoja) indicate that this is his presupposition, and he is only double-checking. In the language classes of the training programme, the students had practised paraphrasing, for example, by summary writing. Adam seems unsure if it is not allowed to copy from source texts on all occasions – whether it is a course- or text-specific or more general norm. Overall, this excerpt shows how students try to make sense of different writing and studying practices. It also shows how the teacher treats writing conventions "as if they were 'common sense" (Lillis and Turner 2001: 58) without explicitly explaining them. Her words assume that she expects students to know what adding a definition means and what inverted commas are.

An interview two months later revealed that Waseem had taken the teacher's instruction seriously. He commented on working together as follows: "I say if we do this together, for example if we get something wrong the teacher won't be happy because we have the same things wrong, and we will get kicked out of the uni- from [name of city] (trans.)" and laughed. While clearly a joke, it indicates how worried Waseem was about plagiarism. The last interview added a further cycle of discourse related to plagiarism. Waseem told me that when working on the accounting assignments Adam had not understood the seriousness of plagiarism. Waseem wanted to raise this in the interview so that as their Finnish teacher I could confirm he was right. Waseem's impression was that Adam "wanted to have it easier" because he was tired. Waseem also mentioned that they are not so strict about plagiarism in his current degree programme. Adam, in turn, in the final interview, explained how he was using in-text citations in his current degree studies, and described how he paraphrased source texts for his assignments. Thus, the students' negotiation on writing conventions continued after the training programme. Gu and Brook (2008: 350) point out that change in students' understanding of plagiarism should be seen as a dynamic and complex process "that involves the students in on-going self-adjustment, consciously or subconsciously, to the values and beliefs of teaching and learning that are anchored in the local context".

5.2 Negotiating study practices: discourses on using online videos

The students also received support with their assignments in tutor group meetings. Although their tutors Laura and Juha were from another field, Laura had learned basic accountancy when serving as the treasurer of an association. Below, Laura advises the students to search for videos on course themes, and they end up doing this together.

Example 3 (translated from Finnish)

L: it's a lot and it might be little difficult but you could watch some educational videos about double-entry bookkeeping

W: well yeah yes xxx but I've been thinking that we have about less than three, three weeks and in my opinion one questions needs

L: yeah that's true

W: only one question

A: could you send this video

W: she doesn't have it

A: xxx

W: we can search

L: ((turns to her screen)) let's see

W: ((to Adam)) she says search

((everyone is watching Laura's screen))

L: double-entry bookkeeping

J: and youtube

((Laura is typing))

L: I feel like this is a thing that you can't understand before ((turns to face Waseem and Adam)), or you understand it while you're working on the assignment

((everyone is watching Laura's screen again, she scrolls down))

L: let's see what we get here

In this example, the local communicative projects are nested, and the action emerges from co-constructed dialogue. Before the excerpt, Laura has explained some basic ideas about double-entry bookkeeping. She concludes that the whole thing might be a little difficult to understand and starts a new local communicative project by encouraging the students to watch videos on the topic. Waseem questions Laura's advice and responds to it by saying that they do not have enough time for that, since just one question takes so much time. He seems to think that searching for videos adds to the original work, whereas Laura seems to think that the videos would help them understand the basic concepts and that searching for additional sources is a self-evident practice in studying.

Later in the same excerpt, Laura comments that "you understand it when you're working on the assignment (trans.)". Both this comment and her previous advice reflect the ideal that understanding is the goal of studying. Laura's words might therefore be part of an institutional discourse with a hegemonic ideology favouring learning. The different perspectives, seeing videos as extra work and emphasising understanding can be seen as internalised discourses (see Scollon and Scollon 2005) that are part of the participants' historical bodies. Interestingly, in the interview about two years after this discussion, Waseem told me that he sometimes watches videos to understand themes in his studies but did not start doing this right after this dialogue.

Adam, then starts a new communicative project and asks if Laura could send him the video. Waseem explains to Adam that Laura does not have the video but suggests they search for it together. This co-constructed action, searching for the video, serves as scaffolding on how to search for online material: Laura says her search term out loud, and Juha adds "and youtube (trans.)". Laura's comment "let's see what we get here (trans.)" emphasises that they are all in the same position of not knowing what videos they will find. In sum, in this example, Waseem and Adam are in the roles of active learners while Laura and Juha act as experts on studying. There is a hierarchy of discourses: Laura and Juha represent the more powerful discourse in this context, as they end up searching for the video. In other words, Waseem and Adam are socialising into the local studying practices and ideologies through peer support.

In general, Waseem was the most active student on assignment-related talk in the tutor group meetings. In the final interview, we watched a video clip from the data in which Laura explains what accruals (siirtosaamiset) mean. Waseem reflects on this below.

Example 4

K: do you think you understood, like some of what she said or like how much did you understand W: at that time or now

K: at that time at that time

W: I understood some, but I guess (.) I guess I was asking more for any informations to start how to to know how to I can start of doing the assignment (.) but now now I'm listening to it and I understand more actually even without seeing what are we actually talking about, and I understand more what she is trying to say (.) I guess it's more about the knowledge of the thing, more than the language, a lot more than the language here (.) cause my level in Finnish language at that time was better than now, and I still understood more what she is trying to say

Waseem thinks that now, having completed an accountancy course in another institution, he understands more of what Laura is saying in the video than he understood in the original tutor group meeting. He emphasises that familiarity with the content is a better aid to understanding than knowledge of the language. He feels that he was more proficient in Finnish at the time of the tutor group meeting, perhaps due to his more frequent use of Finnish in his daily life back then in comparison to the time of the final interview, when he was studying in English and mainly spoke English with his peer students. Waseem's observations are in line with previous studies. For example, Jeon (2007) found that background knowledge plays a significant role in understanding the content of academic lectures in a second language.

However, Waseem also thinks back to his questions to his tutors and reflects that he was more concerned about how to start studying than about the actual content. This is also evident in the video recordings. For example, in one tutor group meeting they went through the tasks and Laura advised him where to find answers to the questions in the textbook. Thus, Waseem was struggling with the study practices and autonomy expected of him. I elaborate on this in the next section.

5.3 "I was so lost" - Intersection of language, content knowledge, numerical skills and the course structure

Although recommended by the teachers, the accountancy course was not easy for Waseem and Adam. They even questioned the recommendation. The reason (given by one of the teachers in the meeting) was that the course "includes a lot of mathematics" (siinä on paljon matemaattista). The teacher compared the accountancy course to a course on leadership, in which the students were to write a 30-

page essay in Finnish: "Finns find that very difficult, so in comparison this (the accountancy course) is easy" (suomalaiset kokee sen todella vaikeana, elikkä siihen verrattuna se on helppo). In this setting (and interaction order), the teachers had the power to choose the students' studies and had made these choices based on their beliefs about studying in a second language. Wingate (2015: 78) notes that the challenge of writing is often emphasised over reading in multilingual contexts, as also seems to be the case here. Although the students did not need to produce long essays, they were expected to learn how to do the accounting tasks from materials in Finnish.

The accountancy course could be completed in two ways: taking an exam or doing assignments. Doing assignments was recommended by one of the teachers: "the teacher will mainly advertise the exam in the lecture, but there is an assignment option, which is probably easier and better for you (trans.)". Waseem attended a lecture (not mandatory for passing the course) and talked with the teacher (a different one from those at the meeting). In the following excerpt, he describes their discussion on the exam.

Example 5 (translated from Finnish)

W: after the lecture I went to talk to the teacher, I told [the teacher] who I am - - [the teacher] didn't know us that we don't speak Finnish or we are not Finns (.) because everything, it's little difficult I mean (.) [the teacher] told me that - - [the teacher] advised yeah this (laughs) (.) that the assignments are too difficult for everyone (.) [the teacher] says no-one does them. (.) all the students go to the exam they take the exam (.) the exam is much easier than this assignment (.) but the problem is that we can't use anything there, that I can't for example if there is a question in the exam and I don't understand one word, I need half an hour to understand what it means (.) I don't dare to take the exam

Waseem explains how the teacher actually recommended taking the exam, because "the exam is much easier than this assignment" (tentti on tosi helpompi kuin tämä kotitehtävä). Waseem's impression is quite strong, as he says the same thing in four different ways. The problem with the exam is that he can't use any external resources, and hence doesn't dare choose this option. Not understanding just one word may mean failure. According to Waseem, the teacher who gave the lecture was also unaware that L2 users were taking the course. From the L2 user standpoint, this intersection of official norms (students may not use external resources), unofficial norms (taking the exam is preferable) and limited linguistic resources is challenging.

Waseem tried doing the assignments anyway. In the last interview, he stated, "I was so lost and I can say I finished the course and I was still lost". In the penultimate interview, he explained how understanding Finnish also played a role in completing the accounting tasks. While explaining this, he showed me the assignment on his laptop.

Example 6 (translated from Finnish)

W: I have to add these numbers in the right place (.) but it's difficult (.) it is a language thing and a professional vocabulary thing at the same time (.) now for example (.) I want to put this (.) in the right place which is in the right row in excel for example I read that we make a deal for sports equipment for 30 000 euros. I thought - - they produce the product because we make - - what I do next is wrong, because if I do something wrong, then all the numbers are wrong, okay this we make means that they sell - - there is a big difference

Waseem distinguishes between "language" (kieli) and "professional vocabulary" (ammattisanat). Different disciplines have their specific terminologies (for economics, see Simonnæs and Kristiansen 2018), and from a layman's perspective professional language might appear mainly as professional vocabulary. Waseem also gives an example of this difficulty: in the instructions for an accounting task, it is said that "we make a deal for sports equipment" (tehdään urheilua väline kaupat) and Waseem confuses this with producing sports equipment (tehdään urheiluvälineet). These two phrases look similar in Finnish. The misunderstanding meant that "all the numbers are wrong" (numerot kaikki väärin). Here, understanding language and the concepts behind it is also intertwined with numeracy and technical skills, as Waseem explains that he has to use spreadsheet software. Hence, completing the assignment requires various skills that can also be considered as multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis 2009).

A second reason why the teachers recommended this course was knowing that some of the students had a background in economics and could use their existing knowledge. Waseem had not studied accountancy before, and thus could not rely on existing knowledge. Adam, in turn, had a background in economics, and he asked friends from his country of origin to send him some old materials in his first language for revision purposes before studying the contents in Finnish. Thus, his plan was to draw on his multilingual resources (see García and Kleifgen 2019) in order to get the background information that would help him when reading the materials in Finnish. However, Adam did not ultimately complete the assignments. Waseem completed but did not pass the course.

However, about a year later in another higher education institution Waseem completed an accountancy course that included online lectures as part of his degree programme. Thus, unlike the first course, it was not independent study, and it was in English, which was a lingua franca for the teacher and most of the students. Waseem's experience of this course was significantly different: "Huge difference, absolutely huge difference between what I have been trying to do at university and I failed I failed really bad I did even that I put so much effort, and what I'm doing at [the other institution], I learned so much". In the following example, Waseem reflects further on both experiences.

Example 7

W: I would say maybe because I'm studying the programme of [name of the current programme]. I felt like I'm really responsible for understanding this stuff - - it should be my one of the things that should be good at if I want to be like, working in the, any any office or any management office in the tourism field, maybe when I was in [the training programme] I was focusing on the language more, I didn't think that accounting can be something important in my maybe in future, so I just wanted to pass it maybe somehow, maybe I wasn't like thinking about it in responsible way or, like I was thinking about it as credits only, just having credit, maybe (,) and the language was a problem somehow (.) even that most of the words that I learned from that course laskentatoimi (accountancy) I still remember till now, like basics things and pääoma (capital) and like this, laskentatoimi itself I never used it in my Finnish language normal life I never use these words, oma pääoma (equity capital) and this stuff but I still remember all these words as a language

For Waseem, the biggest difference was realising the importance of the topic for his future career. He felt responsible for learning the contents, whereas in the previous programme, he had focused on language and getting credits. Waseem's new degree programme was in tourism – the same field that he had studied in his country of origin, and he felt that this was what he wanted to do. Interestingly, the programme included an accountancy course. The first course would also have been relevant to his field, but he did not recognise it then. In other words, the relevance of the course for Waseem's future had a significant impact on his perception of it. Waseem also notes the language aspect. For him, Finnish was "a problem somehow", but he still remembered some field-specific words – they had been strong affordances for him (see Dufva 2013). What he means by saying that he remembers words like oma pääoma (equity capital) "as a language" remains unclear; maybe he did not fully understand the concepts behind the words.

In addition, Waseem states that the study practices and the structure of the independent study course were challenging. When asked what would have helped him to learn better, he harks back to study practices (see also example 4).

Example 8

W: by making it a lot more simple and focusing on one thing, I was trying to do everything together (,) the theoretical part and the the questions the the numbers questions - - and I guess I would have needed like more personal learning, like I don't know like if I should study it by myself or somebody comes to tell me like hey, this is it in a simple way, and now try to work on it, I didn't know even how to start because, in the course it was just like questions and then now work on the questions, okay there was some materials to read but it wasn't like for a beginner, I was absolutely beginner I didn't know where what, I have a whole book in Finnish language I wouldn't really start to read from first page to the last page of like three hundred or five hundred pages book to understand, to know where I should find this question to answer

Waseem considers that the earlier course was hard for him because he did not know how to proceed with it. He received no clear guidelines, whereas the later course was more structured and started with the basics of accounting. It seems that it was closer to his historical body – closer to the practices he was used to. Waseem also lacked the reading strategies to cope with a Finnish textbook. In Hirano's study (2015: 182), the refugee students used study guides that highlighted key concepts in the reading materials, and similar study guides could have helped Waseem too. In Waseem's course, students were only given questions to answer and were expected to work on these independently. Thus, it seems that the assignment instructions left the students responsible for their own learning. A similar discourse of responsibility was present in the teacher-student meetings. When a student asked for tips or advice on how to pass the course, the teacher did not mention any specific study strategies. Instead, her answer was rather abstract: "Well the contact instruction is important, and familiarising yourself with the materials and the literature, and then it's just hard work (trans.)."

6 Discussion

The aim of this study was to present an example of what the process of making sense of a university assignment and trying to complete it can be like for a refugee-background student. In this case, the focal students were struggling with the norms related to authorship, technology as a taken-for-granted part of assignments, and autonomy in learning that they were expected to possess as well as studying in a second language, Finnish. These issues became struggles because the students' historical bodies (including their resources and previous learning experiences) were not prepared for what was expected of them either explicitly in instructions or, more implicitly, in institutional discourses. The students, Waseem in particular, were active in tackling their problems. However, the results show that, in nexus analytical terms, the process is complex, as it is also related to other aspects of social action. In the data, the interaction orders of the participants were traditional: students were active in trying to understand, and the teachers and tutors, who were more familiar with the relevant literacy practices, acted as experts. This power hierarchy was also related to powerful institutional discourses, making it seem that the students were expected to socialise into the conventions and ideologies of a Finnish university. The same discourses were internalised in the historical bodies of teachers and tutors who, at least partly, took them for granted, making it even harder for the students to make sense of them.

The results show that the practices of this university course lacked flexibility and, as already stated, did not match the students' skills and resources. In this tailored training programme, it was not possible to develop all the content studies, as the students were from many different fields and taking different courses. Since the data gathering of this study, development work has already taken place

to improve the training programme. The last phase of nexus analysis is returning to the field and changing the nexus of practice, and the results of this study will thus be used in further development work. The case study is also an illustrative example of how study practices can be exclusionary for multilingual and culturally diverse students.

My findings support those of previous studies (e.g., Tkachenko et al. 2016) showing that awareness of the nature of literacy practices and the language-related aspects of content studies is important. These practices should also be made explicitly visible to students, for example by issuing clear guidelines for group work in independent study assignments. In Finland, while the importance of subject teachers' language knowledge and language awareness with multilingual students has been recognised in school contexts (see, e.g., Aalto 2019), little attention has been paid to higher education. Moreover, a dialogical orientation and attitude towards multilingual and culturally diverse students would make higher education more inclusive. The present students were able to have dialogue with their teachers and tutors about the course, which seemed to help them navigate academic expectations and build understanding. However, it was only the students who seemed to try to make sense of these practices while the teachers and tutors mainly had an expert role in their interactions. In Finland, most higher education teachers and most students share the same education culture and first language. I argue, therefore, that practices will remain exclusive, if teachers and curriculum planners make no effort to understand the perspectives of multilingual and culturally diverse students. Open dialogue would also help to create awareness of practices and maybe also to view them critically instead of taking them for granted (see also Tkachenko et al. 2016).

In this study, I used the term "refugee-background student" rather than, for example, multilingual student. This was because I wanted to enrich the picture of refugee-background students presented in the research literature and because, in contrast to most previous studies, I wanted to emphasise that second language academic literacies do not solely concern privileged international students. While the focal participants' previous experiences, language skills and other individual factors impacted on how they perceived their assignments, it can be questioned whether this was related to their refugee background. The participants never mentioned their refugee status, even when comparing their past and present experiences. It seems that all multilingual, culturally diverse students have to navigate new literacy practices in new academic environments (e.g., Wette and Furneaux 2018). Hence, it is important to see beyond students' migrant status and focus on their skills, strengths and potential (see Sontag 2018) and find ways to support their individual needs. As Harvey and Mallman (2019) have shown in Australia, this is not yet the case in higher education. However, focusing on the potential of My ethnographic orientation, diverse data sources and role as a teacher and researcher helped me to see the whole picture and map the cycles of individuals and discourses longitudinally. The last interview with Waseem, which included joint reflection on the video data collected two years earlier, opened a whole new perspective on the case. It also reminded me of the need for caution in interpreting the data. Thus, after the interview, I decided to omit some of my own interpretations, bearing in mind that Waseem's view might also have changed somewhat during the two-year interval. In sum, discussing the preliminary findings with the participants was a fruitful approach, and it can also stand as the last stage of nexus analysis, changing the nexus of practice. This research process thus demonstrates how ethnographic knowing is emergent in nature (see also Blommaert and Jie 2010). Theoretically, the study combined dialogic understanding with nexus analysis. This helped to better understand students' sense-making processes and also gave tools for analysing the interaction order of the dialogues in the data.

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Appendix: Original data excerpts in Finnish

Example 1

A: voitko antaa meille tämä oppimateriaalimonisteita, eli lukemaan ja sitten voimme

T: ne lövtvv

A: voimme voimme valmistaa sitä ennen

T: voin laittaa sen linkin sähköpostiin mistä se lövtyv

A: koska olemme itseni, verkossa [oppimisalusta 1:ssa] ja emme löytäneet

T: [oppimisalusta 2:ssa] on ne materiaalit - -

A: ja ja voimme tulostaa tai

T: voi tulostaa tai katsoa, joo koneelta

Example 2

W: okei, minulla on yksi kysymys - - totta kai et voi kopita kopioi mitään kun sä vastaat jotakin, mutta minulla on yksi juttu koska me opiskelemme yhdessä, ja esimerkiksi minä ja Adam tehdämme tutkimus yhdessä ja sitten me yritämme opiskella jo, osakysymykset ja meidän vastaukset se tulee vähän samalla tavalla minun ja hänen mitä me vastaamme, että ehkä yksi kysymys tai kaksi kysymykset (.) ei sama ei todella sama mutta on vähän sama, onko se tosi tosi ei, että onko se ei hyvä (.) tai mitä sun mieltä

T: joo, jokaisen pitää kirjottaa omat vastaukset, joo mutta minun mielestäni se että te keskustelette niistä niin se lisää sitä oppimista (.) niin, niitä voi sillä tavalla niinku yhdessä pohtia ja yhdessä tehdä, mutta jokainen tekee omat vastaukset että ei voi olla täsmälleen samat

W: joo totta kai mutta sitten jos mä jos mä jos meillä on väärin idea, sitten kaikki tulee sama väärin idea (.) vastaukse- vastauksella ja (.) että mä en halua että se tulee että, opettaja tuntuu että okei

T: plagiointia

W: coping from each other

T: yeah yeah

W: se on vain mitä mä tarkoittaa, okei lisäkysymys

A: eli on pakko kirjoittaa meidän sanoja tai voi, siirtää mitä kirja sanoo, esimerkiksi

T: omin sanoin joo

A: ahaa xxx

T: jos ottaa suoran kopion jostain kir-, kirjasta, jos haluaa vaikka jonkun määritelmän että miten joku asia on määritelty niin sillon se laitetaan niihin lainausmerkkeihin, mut sitten muuten kirjotetaan omin sanoin

Example 3

L: siin on aika paljon asiaa ja se voi olla vähän vaikee mut kannattaa esim kattoo jotain opetusvideoita siit kahdenkertasest kirjanpidosta

W: no joo kyllä xxxxx mutta mä olen ajatellut että meillä on noin vähemmän kuin kolme, kolme viikkoa

L: joo

W: ja ja yksi kysymys tarvitsee, minusta xxx

L: joo nii on

W: vain yksi kysymys

L: mm

A: voisitko lähettää tätä videoo

W∙ hänellä ei ole

A: xxx L: mm

W: voimme etsiä

L: ((kääntyy katsomaan tietokonettaan)) katotaas

W: ((katsoo Adamia)) hän sanoo etsi

((kaikki katsovat Lauran tietokoneen ruutua))

L: kahdenkertainen kirjanpito

I: ja voutube perään

A: xxx

((Laura näppäilee tietokonetta))

L: ja toi must tuntuu et tää on ihan sellai asia et tätä ei voi niinku ymmärtää ennen ku ((kääntyy selittämään Adamille ja Waseemille)) tai sä ymmärrät sen siinä ku sä teet sitä tehtävää

((kaikki katsovat taas Lauran näyttöä, Laura selaa hiirellä sivua alaspäin))

L: mitähän täält tulee

Example 5

W: tunnin jälkeen mä menen puhutaan opettajan opettajan kanssa, kertoi hänelle että miten mites kuka minä olen - - hän ei tiennyt meitä, että olimme, että emme puhua suomea tai me emme olle emme suomalaiset (.) koska kaikki, koska se on vähän vaikee mä tarkoitan (.) hän kertoi mulle, - - hän neuvoo joo tämä (naurahtaa) (.) että että tämän kurssin tehtävät ovat liian vaikea kaikille (.) hän sanoo ei kukaan tekee sitä (.) opiskeli- kaikki opiskeli- kaikki ovat kaikki opiskelijat joka hänellä on, he tulevat tenttiin, he tekevät tentin (.) tentti on tosi helpompi kuin tämä kotitehtävät (.) mutta ongelma on, että emme voi käyttää mitään siellä, että en en voi esimerkki jos minulla on tentillä kysymys ja mä en ymmärtänyt yksi sana, mä tarvitsen puoli tuntia että ymmärtää mitä se tarkoittaa (.) ensiksi mä en uskoa mennä tenttiin

Example 6

W: tämä numerot minun täytyy laittaa sen oik- oikeassa paikassa (.) mutta se on vaikea (.) se on kielen (.) ja ammattin sana juttu samaan aikana (.) nyt esimerkki esimerkki (.) mä haluan laittaa tämä (.) oikeessa paikassa, joka se on oikeessa riv-rivillä, joka on exellä esimerkki mä luin sitä että se on tehdään, kolmekymmentätuhatta urheilua väline kaupat, mä ajattelin että - - he tekevät tuote koska tehdään - - mikä mä teen seuraava se on sitten se on väärin, koska mä teen jotakin väärin, sitten numerot kaikki on väärin, okei tämä kun me että se tehdään, että se tarkoittaa että he myyvät - - se on tosi iso eri ero