

Workplace Communication IV

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Technologies for Writing at the Private Sector Workplace

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Workplace literacy practices constitute the basis of today's increasingly textualised work life. Due to the legislation on trade secrets, less research has been conducted on literacy practices in the private sector. This interview study of reported literacy practices focused on the software, dictionaries and other technologies used in writing tasks in 11 different businesses in Finland. The informants (n=18) were Swedish-speaking Finns working in the Helsinki area and in Vaasa. The study showed that office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) is used for writing, as is email clients, chats and messaging systems. When encountering difficulties in writing, asking a colleague for help is a frequent strategy, together with searching the internet using Google. More established dictionaries, glossaries, and synonym web sites are also used, but to a lesser extent. The findings suggest implications for teaching at different levels: students could be trained in complex and multilingual text production, to efficiently use the widely used office software and to assess content in free dictionaries and on similar websites from a linguistic point of view.

Keywords: workplace writing, literacy practices, software, business communication, Swedish-speaking Finns

1 Background and Aim

In the 21st century, work life and its literacy practices (Barton 2007) are highly technologised and at the same time textualised (Johansson, Nuolijärvi & Pyykkö 2011b). People use computer software, smartphones, and apps. People are constantly online, and write, read and interact through technologies of different kinds: web browsers, shared documents in cloud services, email, chat, instant messaging services, and so on (Bremner 2018; Goodman & Hirsch 2014). This development of the ecology of workplace writing has been rather rapid, and people born in the 1970s or earlier have undergone a change in work-related communication from 'work on paper' to 'work on screen'. Irrespective of mediating technologies, verbal texts have always been important in knowledge work or white-collar work. Today, it is claimed that verbal texts play an even more important role than before, and there seems to be evidence that many of today's work tasks require advanced reading and writing skills (Johansson, Nuolijärvi & Pyykkö 2011a).

The technologies used for writing at the workplace should not be taken for granted or seen as a minor detail. On the contrary, they are parts of both literacy events, meaning any activity in which literacy plays a role such as an interview about writing, planning a text, writing a text, reading a text, and literacy practices, meaning the patterns or usual ways of performing literacy events in a certain context, place and time, including software and skills for writing that people at a company assume everybody has access to (Barton 2007; Hamilton 2000). The assumption in many theoretical frameworks within linguistics is that language use and context are intertwined and have a reciprocal influence on each other, and that writing is a situated social practice (e.g., Barton & Papen 2010; Gnach & Powell 2014; Tusting 2020). A part of the context of writing is the technology used to visualise and mediate text and other modes, as well as the other tools, writing aids and strategies used to find the appropriate wording (e.g., Hicks & Perrin 2014). Each of these tools and all software comes with its constraints and affordances (Blommaert 2013). As Koskela (2013) has shown, mediating software such as Power-Point can even modify the genre. Therefore, researchers interested in writing and literacy also need to pay attention to the technologies used.

The aim of this article is to investigate which tools and technologies Swedish-speaking Finns¹, working in white-collar jobs in the private sector in Finland, report using for their ordinary work-related communication and work tasks. The main focus is on the technologies used for writing, here understood as software, platforms, messaging services, and writing aids, including some other strategies for finding help. As the study was descriptive, the findings cannot be generalised, but it provided research-based information on the reported use of tools and technologies that a group of white-collar workers (n=18) used in their work-related writing tasks in the year 2018 and 2019. It was not an observational study of the literacy events, and there was no access to texts, as the researchers conducting the interviews obtained consent and access to conduct interviews in meeting rooms only (as is typical according to Mahili & Angouri 2017). Nonetheless, the study offers new knowledge in this field in which little research has previously been conducted

¹ A Swedish-speaking Finn is a Finnish citizen and resident with Swedish as their L1 or both Swedish and Finnish as their L1. About 5 % of Finnish citizens are Swedish-speaking Finns.

in Finland. The findings provide a base for further research in this area, and they can be implemented by teachers of writing in different languages and at different levels, especially in higher education.

The outline of the article is as follows: I start by presenting the theoretical framework and previous research, then continue with a description of the data and methods, going on to the findings and ending with a discussion and conclusions.

2 Theoretical Framework

The introduction above presents the central framework of the ecology of written language (Barton 2007; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič eds. 2000). This framework, sometimes also called New Literacy Studies, sees writing as a social activity. Writing is of interest in sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2013; Lillis 2013) and anthropology (Barton & Papen 2010) and is not restricted to 'everyday writing' in different contexts (also work life), but also covers questions of who has access to which repertoires and varieties of writing, including the tools and knowledge needed for writing in different situations. In Blommaert's (2013) terms, writing needs its material infrastructure.

Writing is an important activity in many contexts such as the domains of the authorities or academia (e.g., Hynninen 2018; Lassus 2010; Tiililä & Karvinen eds. 2017). Writing is also evident in professions like journalism and public relations. However, the present article does not contain informants from such professions. I have studied private sector employees and what Spinuzzi & Jakobs (2013: 120) call 'integrated writers', those who "do not see themselves as writing professionals, but nevertheless integrate writing with their other tasks across the organization". They are typically knowledge workers with a job description or title that does not imply that 'writing' is an important task, although it is the mode used to gather knowledge from many sources and to structure, revise and present this in the form of text (Gnach & Powell 2014).

As writing, whether 'focused' or 'incidental' (Hicks & Perrin 2014), is a part of many areas of work, the texts and discourses of work life have been of interest to many scholars within different fields. In the Handbook of writing and text production (Jakobs & Perrin eds. 2014), many aspects of writing in professional settings are presented. Some results are also presented in Bremner (2018). Although there are chapters on channels of communication and writing mediated by technologies in both volumes, it seems we still need more research on how employees reason about their use of technologies and how office software are actually used in business settings for activities such as word processing or presentation (Hicks & Perrin 2014; Mahlow & Dale 2014).

A previous survey study (Lassus & Tanner 2019) showed that email is the most frequent channel of writing for communication in working life. The challenges of email and the overload it can cause have been highlighted by many researchers, among them Vidgen, Sims & Powell (2011). They recognise the time consumption and interpretation challenges of emails and suggest a framework for email management to reduce overload. Email has the affordance of sending a message to multiple receivers and copies 'for your

information' (Skovholt & Svennevig 2006), a factor which increase overload. A way of dealing with email overload is to introduce instant messaging software (Darics 2014), use chats, or other similar tools.

Blåsjö, Johansson & Jonsson (2019) analysed today's increased use of digital calendars, especially the functions such as shared calendars and calendar invitations (Outlook), from the point of agency and within the framework of mediated discourse analysis. For their informants, the calendar was an important tool with many possibilities. The informants perceived the practice of shared calendars as also constraining and reducing their agency. Their study also acknowledged non-digital tools such as handwritten notes that imply individual strategies for higher agency.

Work life, especially in bigger companies in the private sector in Europe and Finland, is often international and multilingual, although some companies might have a one-language language policy on the company level. Mahili & Angouri (2017) gave an overview of research on language awareness in workplace settings, stating the importance of studies that acknowledge multilingualism and language choice. The ideologies surrounding different languages also need to be accounted for. A study with this focus is Malkamäki & Herberts' (2014) interview study of language use in both oral and written interaction at Wärtsilä, an international company based in Finland. It found differences between employee groups, but for most white-collar workers, the company language of English was often preferred in email communication and other writing tasks. One reason was that the material or email could be sent onwards to someone not fluent in Finnish or Swedish. Nevertheless, Finnish and Swedish was also used in writing tasks at the local level in Finland.

Jonsson & Blåsjö (2020) discuss writing in a multilingual workplace and analyse writing from a multimodal and resource perspective. Their data covered not only computer-mediated writing, but also handwritten notes and 'post it' tags. Jonsson & Blåsjö also gained access to texts and observed multilingual practices in, for instance, emails and presentations. The language was chosen based on the primary or original recipients, copies to other recipients, or anticipated future recipients. Google translate was used as a resource to gain access to texts in Swedish.

Leijten, Van Waes, Schriver & Hayes (2014) empirically studied a writing and visualisation process at a design consulting agency, using keystroke logging, a method widely used in empirical writing studies, but also ethnographic methods such as observations and interviews. Keystroke logging enabled them to see how the writer used multiple sources in text production, and how software other than Word, such as Excel and shared documents in Google docs, was used during the writing process. The study provided empirical information on the complexity of a writing process and the use of technology and tools and compared this with writing schemas and cognitive processing models during writing.

Mahlow & Dale (2014) provided an overview of the affordances and constraints of word processing software. Three of the affordances concerning language were spell checking,

grammar checking and style checking. Another example of software shown to be important in business communication is PowerPoint (Koskela 2013). In some studies, PowerPoint seems to be considered a genre of its own (Yates & Orlikowski 2007; Schoeneborn 2013). The question of genre is outside the scope of this article, but I consider PowerPoint a mediating technology.

Yates & Orlikowski (2007) analysed presentations made using PowerPoint. They determined that PowerPoint-slides were not only used as projections during presentations, but that they also had a function in printed or electronic form that may or may not have been supported by an oral presentation. Other findings were that information might be too redundant or overflowing, and the design and visuals of the slides also had some problems. According to the study, PowerPoint presentations are typically written in collaboration; junior staff members or secretaries start working on them and senior staff members finalise them. In his study of presentations in a database at a business consulting firm, Schoeneborn (2013) also identified the use of PowerPoint for purposes other than the intended oral presentation. PowerPoint was used for wordy documentation with less graphical elements, something that might conflict with the intended presentation use of visuals and few words. In the study, only the PowerPoint-files that were presentations for the clients contained features of oral presentations. The other files, whether wordy summaries of past projects or more concentrated 'lessons learned' files, did not include features typical of an oral presentation, such as animations or a specific type of heading calling for action.

Previous research has been conducted on how software affects writing and what tools and technologies are used, but studies that observe the use of software and other tools in text production are rare. The current study contributes to the field by analysing the reported use of software and technology for writing in the private sector.

3 Data, Methods and Ethics

The data consisted of 18 interviews of white-collar professionals working in private companies in the Helsinki area (spring 2018) and Vaasa (spring 2019) in Finland. All the informants were Swedish-speaking Finns and had been educated in Swedish. All had at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent. A criterion for recruitment was that the informants wrote in Finnish and Swedish in their work, and that they worked primarily on tasks that did not involve professional writing, that is, they did not work on communication, journalism, translation, or similar tasks. During the interviews, my colleague and I asked questions on writing, such as what the informants write, to whom and in what language. In the answers, software and technologies were mentioned, and follow up questions were made to gain more information on, for example, the use of dictionaries. The interview data thus consisted of reported use of primarily digital technologies and other strategies for writing in a business context.

The semi-structured interviews were performed bilingually in Swedish and Finnish by me and my colleague, and they were recorded and transcribed. The informants are pseudonymised by Greek letters, as are the companies they work for, in accordance with

the informed consent to participate in the study. At the beginning of each interview, the participants signed a contract to participate, and we reminded them not to reveal any information that could be considered a trade secret (Trade secrets act 595/2018) during the interview.

We visited 11 different companies in the Helsinki area (in Uusimaa, southern Finland) and in Vaasa (in Ostrobothnia, western Finland). In some of these, we conducted several interviews. All the interviews had been agreed upon in advance by email or telephone. Some informants were recruited through a survey (Lassus & Tanner 2019) whereas others were recruited through alumni and personal networks. Table 1 summarises the data.

Table 1. Summary of the interview data

	HELSINKI AREA (2018)	VAASA (2019)
NUMBER OF COMPANIES (N=11)	8 different companies	5 different companies
LINE OF TRADE	consulting (business, management, law, marketing), banking, pharmaceuticals, retailing	consulting (economics, law), banking, insurance
INFORMANTS (N=18)	n=12, 7 male and 5 female	n=6, 3 male and 3 female
LENGTH OF THE INTERVIEWS	on average 48 min.	on average 40 min.
LENGTH OF THE TRANSCRIPTIONS	on average 46 890 characters	on average 35 636 characters

In the present study, the transcribed interviews were imported to Atlas.ti. This software enabled manual analysis and coding the interviews during close reading. The codes emerged during my reading and interpretation of the interviews. The interviews concentrated on themes from the interview guide. In the analysis, one focus was on utterances that mentioned technologies: platforms, software, messaging services, communication modes, writing aids, etc. Some of the relevant codes for this article were (translated from Swedish) 'writing aids', 'office programmes', 'writing short messages', 'writing presentations'. The coded utterances, called quotations in Atlas.ti, were grouped and analysed further in Excel to find patterns of frequent and non-frequent tools and aids. The results are presented qualitatively with examples, and some quantitative data are given when needed. The findings are grouped thematically in the following groups: General characteristics, communication technology, Microsoft office software, model texts and text production tools.

The examples were revised from transcripts into a more standardised written form, to ensure anonymity and make reading easier, then translated into English (see Appendix 1 for examples in original language, Swedish). Exclusions are marked by [...], and "I:" marks a question from the interviewer (comparable with Johansson 2011). These data have been previously investigated in a joint case-study (Lassus & Tanner 2020). The present study was financed by the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland. The Trade Secrets Act, other Finnish legislation, and the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity's (TENK) guidelines for research were followed throughout the study.

4 Findings

4.1 General Characteristics of Writing at the Workplace

The data provided an insight into the everyday writing practices of the informants. Some informants claimed to spend most of the day at their computer (and this was before the COVID-19 pandemic). Others reported not writing any long texts, only the occasional row, or that the time they actually spent writing was only a few hours each day. In Example 1, Gamma 2 explains his work.

- (1) I would not say that my work is about writing. [...] It is about structuring thoughts and analyses and producing material. Yes, there is text on each PowerPoint slide and so on, but it can be just a few words, phrases or sentences or so. I don't feel that I, like, write. (Gamma 2, consulting in marketing)

He seemed to think that 'writing' was something other than what he did. Still, the process he described is similar to the process of focused writing: structuring, analysing and presenting the findings in a PowerPoint-presentation. The amount of text that he wrote on one slide did not seem enough for him to call it writing. Nevertheless, he produced verbal text with the intention that people, both colleagues and the customers who ordered the project, read the "words, phrases or sentences".

Informants Gamma 2 and My expressed that they wrote very short texts, and this was why they did not consider their work to be about writing. In some lines of trade the texts were longer, especially in banking. Most of our informants employed in banks worked with investments and private banking, or as managers. They were critical about the amount of text needed to comply with bank regulation. The regulation and supervision of banks were mentioned as the reason for the long texts. Epsilon explains his view on his work-related writing in Example 2.

- (2) I: Do you think that writing has increased during the last years?
Epsilon: Yes [...] The regulation entails a lot more documentation and bureaucracy. [...] Let's say that if during a working day I meet customers for about two to three hours a day, then the remaining seven hours go to writing reports and so on and answering customers' messages. (Epsilon, private banking)

In Example 2, Epsilon indirectly said that he worked overtime, as the hours he used for meetings with customers and the seven hours spent on writing added up to between nine and ten working hours per day, which is more than the normal eight hours per day in Finland. He needed to write reports on the meetings, and his investment plans to the customers also had to be written in a specific way. Epsilon, and other informants from the banking sector, did not criticise the regulation itself, but the number of texts and volume of writing was considered excessive.

4.2 Communication Technology

As expected, all the informants said that they wrote emails. 'Email' is a communication channel rather than a type of text, but few of the informants could give any details on the contents or purpose of their email. When talking more about emails, some mentioned the use of the email client Outlook or talked about 'the mail system'. Others used 'email' in the same way as 'telephone' or did not mention the software or provider at all or whether they read and wrote emails on their computer or on their phone. Some commented on the length of their email messages and there seemed to be a shared opinion that a good email is a short email. Although unpreferred, sometimes they needed to write a longer message and send it via email. In this case, many informants mentioned editing in Word as a good technique, or structuring the message, as informant Gamma 2 describes in Example 3.

- (3) If I have a lot to say I try to structure myself by, for example, using bullet points or in some other way, like, making paragraphs in it, so that it doesn't end up as a big lump text. (Gamma 2, consulting in marketing)

As the number of email messages had increased, other ways of communicating had emerged. Quite a few of the informants said that they had started to use messaging services and chats in internal communication, because it was faster than email. Many tried to avoid email in different ways, as there was an overflow of it. But the chats were also a short-cut to get a person's attention, as Beta explains in Example 4.

- (4) You can chat, it appears as a field so that if someone does not answer, if I for example do not answer the email directly, then that person can send me a chat saying 'hello have you seen my email?' (LAUGHS) (Beta, pharmaceuticals company)

Chats were used mainly by the younger informants, but also by somewhat older ones as Beta. The software mentioned were Skype, Lync, Slack, Yammer, and Microsoft Teams. The opinion raised in the interviews was that for short and simple questions, chat was preferable. Some of the software showed whether a person was busy or free to talk, and the chat also worked over national boundaries and time zones in international teams. But as Example 4 shows, the person who received a message through chat could be working on something. Thus, the chat window that popped up, perhaps together with a sound, was an interruption. Surprisingly, this was not seen as a serious issue, no informants talked about this as an interruption. Most informants were happy to have a channel through which to send questions or comments to a colleague, and many labelled the chat conversations 'informal'.

Another channel for short messages that several informants mentioned was WhatsApp. Since 2014, WhatsApp has been owned by Facebook and can be used to mediate text, pictures, voice, videos, links, etc. It was also reported to be used for communication, mainly with colleagues. One of the informants, Epsilon, said that some private banking customers would contact him via WhatsApp, and he had to tell them that it is not a secure or approved tool for conveying a commission or conducting other bank business.

A few mentioned other short messages, such as traditional phone-mediated short messages (SMS). Short messages were used to, for instance check something or remind someone of an appointment.

When talking about emails and short messages, some informants also spontaneously said that they preferred to call people. Instead of sending many emails back and forth, they called. The informant My for instance said that if the email was more than ten lines, he would call instead. He was one of the older informants, but one of the youngest, Kappa 1, also said that he gladly made calls. In this study, preferring to call had nothing to do with age, but most informants who claimed to like calling people were male and lived in or had lived in Ostrobothnia. This observation could be just a coincidence, but gender-related and regional aspects on telephone use in business contexts could be investigated further in another study.

4.3 Microsoft Office Software

So far, this article has not focused much on the dominance of Microsoft software. However, it was obvious that most informants used Microsoft Office. Some mentioned 'Office 365', others 'the Office-programmes' while some listed almost all the Microsoft software available in Office 365. Of all the informants, 15 mentioned the use of Word, 11 mentioned PowerPoint and eight mentioned Excel. Although fewer informants talked about PowerPoint, it was still mentioned many times. PowerPoint was an important tool for those who used it. Fewer mentioned Excel, and this might have been due to the interview context. The questions were about writing, and Excel may not be the primary tool for this; it is more for handling numbers. In this section, I take a closer look at what the informants said about the three frequently mentioned Microsoft Office programmes.

Word is widely available software for writing texts and most of the informants in this study reported using it. In some cases, Word was used to produce texts such as reports of different kinds that could then be forwarded as a Word or pdf file. In other cases, Word was used for writing text that was later copied into an email client, internal platforms, databases, etc. Some informants mentioned that Word's spellcheck was useful. Ita 1 describes how she uses this software in Example 5.

- (5) It's the usual Office-software [...] Usually these different authorities offer some kind of channel for reporting, these kinds of platforms or something similar, that you enter data into. But it's first worked on in Word and Excel and so on. (Ita 1, retailing)

Example 5 is typical of some of our informants. Many of them worked with reports in Excel and Word – in Ita 1's case it was a report on social responsibility, and this report was then uploaded or its information was submitted to an external platform for an authority or an external party, but not for a public audience.

A few informants talked about the company's templates and graphical guidelines, but they seemed to be either taken for granted or not used, as so few informants mentioned

them. The use of other templates or models for drafting documents is discussed further below under the heading 'Model texts'.

PowerPoint is a programme primarily for presenting content (verbal text, visual text, audio, videoclips, etc.). It emerged as important in the interviews, although the questions focused on writing and what the informants had been writing recently. Somewhat surprisingly, writing even longer texts and reports in PowerPoint seems to be common. The informants who reported using PowerPoint showed awareness of the fact that they were writing texts, although the visual aspects of PowerPoint were also important. Some of the texts were used for presentations, but it remained slightly unclear from this data whether longer project reports written in PowerPoint were actually presented orally, or whether the slides were primarily intended to be read and used as documentation. This requires further investigations through observation and access to texts. In Example 6, the informant Gamma 1 explains that the presentations he works with are for the customers and will be presented to them, but that they are collectively drafted.

- (6) Yes, it's for to the customer, of course, but we usually also go through them also internally [...] We go over and think about how we should present this, what the best way is to communicate it. (Gamma 1, consulting in marketing)

The informants who worked as managers said that they wrote PowerPoint presentations to give in-house presentations. The language used varied, sometimes the slides were in one language and the presentation in another. One of the informants, Gamma 2, said he also used PowerPoint as a tool for thinking and planning. He explained that he is 'visual' and wants to sketch things.

Excel is a programme for calculating and handling numbers. However, it is also possible to use Excel for other purposes that benefit from a layout of columns and rows. Excel was mentioned in the interviews as software used for writing, often accompanied by an explanation that the informant only wrote a few words or sentences, not a long text. As many of the informants worked in financing with tasks such as credit, investments, or audits, it can be assumed that they used Excel for handling both numbers and verbal texts explaining these numbers. One informant said that the Excel files she used were online. In Example 7 Jota, who works with audits, explains her work with Excel, Word and company-internal software.

- (7) Jota: Sure, we use a lot of Excel, but then we also have programmes of our own, internal ones.
I: Do you write the texts in Excel?
Jota: Yes we certainly do. The part of the text that you write on your working paper [...] I certainly like Excel. Of course, we don't write long essays but it's more like small comments [...] If you have to write longer reports, then of course you use Word. (Jota, consulting in economics)

For audits, Jota and her colleagues used Excel and internal software. Jota liked Excel and used it for writing shorter texts in the working paper during the audit. She was aware that the texts were short and pointed out that for longer reports she used Word.

The informants who did not mention Excel worked in different companies: in legal and marketing consulting, banking and retailing. Some might have forgotten to mention Excel or only used it for handling numbers. Others might not see it as writing when they work with short texts in Excel, like Jota in Example 7. The use of Excel, Word and PowerPoint and how these support each other in text production would be an important area to investigate further through observation.

4.4 Model Texts

As using model texts and recycling texts are strategies used for text production in many work life contexts (e.g., Honkanen 2013; Koskela 2013; Lassus 2010; Tiililä & Karvinen eds. 2017), questions on this were asked. Although the most frequent writing task was writing emails, there seemed to be no templates for writing 'normal emails'. Alfa said that there were no templates in Word, even for offers, and My claimed that only secretaries used templates. However, model texts, norms and regulations existed.

In banking, regulation is strict and the texts dealing with investments and credits have a preferred structure and vocabulary. One of the informants at one of the banks, Zeta 1, had the task of checking and adjusting larger credit applications so that the text complied with the regulation. Another of the informants, Zeta 3, wrote credit applications and documented investment discussions, and found the regulation very constraining. Here, the views on the models differed (described in Lassus & Tanner 2020).

Jota, who worked with audits, explained that there was a detailed description of the official audit report which only stated necessary and regulated information. She had her own model texts that had been checked by colleagues and used them to save time. Many of the informants similarly reported that they used unofficial model texts, texts that they themselves had saved, and used these as the basis for new texts. Other informants reported that their companies had a relatively official practice of using model texts as a basis for new texts. This was encouraged in some companies, and the main aim was to save time. Legal consultant Delta 1 added that it was also a matter of quality assurance: as one text had been checked and proven to be of good quality, using it as the basis in a new case was sensible.

Those who used model texts in their communication with customers pointed out that the text had to be tailored for the customer – each text had to be individual. Theta, who worked in business consulting said she used, and was encouraged to use, model texts. She explains this in Example 8.

- (8) Theta: We definitely have quite a lot of models to use and also a lot of previous material that we are welcome to use.
I: Are you also encouraged to do that?
Theta: Yes, we certainly are encouraged to, you don't have to reinvent the wheel every time. But, of course, it's the content that you still have to work on a lot, after all, it must be tailor-made. [...] But, sometimes this is maybe not the best way to use them, it depends a bit, but I'd say that I myself at least work a little faster, if I have a

model that I can revise , or some kind of example and I can work on it, compared to having a blank sheet so to speak. (Theta, business consulting)

Theta explained the benefits of using model texts. She said that there was no need “to reinvent the wheel” and that it was easier to start with something other than “a blank sheet”. She expressed how in some cases the models helped her. But she also expressed some reservations, as she did not always see the model texts as useful, and tailoring, revising or polishing up the text also took time.

Some informants, when asked, reported using no models or did not recycle texts. Two informants identified with the idea of a model text but said that they did not use such texts themselves. Nevertheless, they are most likely familiar with the writing task and genre at hand and can in that way have a model or understanding of what phrases and vocabulary can be used and how the text should be structured. Still, as many businesses involve large volumes of longer texts, recycling pieces of previous texts might be a way to decrease the workload, as it does in the public sector.

4.5 Text Production Tools

Producing text is a complex process, and for the informants in this study it was also a multilingual process, which added to the complexity (cf. Jonsson & Blåsjö 2020; Mahili & Angouri 2017). The informants had knowledge of at least three working languages: Swedish, Finnish and English. These languages were used in different proportions in different companies, but all the informants used Finnish and Swedish at work; some also used English. English was used to a lesser extent, and mainly in contacts with customers or colleagues in other countries. A similar pattern emerged in our survey study (Lassus & Tanner 2019). Swedish, or both Swedish and Finnish, was the language of the informants’ childhood homes and all had mainly been educated in Swedish. Most of them had studied in Swedish, some also or only in Finnish or English. All of them expressed at least a certain degree of difficulty using many languages at work. Questions were asked on what they did if they needed help, or if they had writing aids, dictionaries, or similar tools at their disposal.

Some dictionaries were mentioned. Ita 1 and Jota used a multilingual web-based dictionary called MOT and Gamma 1 mentioned a similar one called Sanakirja (with both a free version and a paid version). Some informants talked about ‘online dictionaries’ without naming them. Quite a few mentioned searching using Google and using Google translate. When asked, one of the informants, Gamma 2, specified that Google was not his source, but that he used some online dictionaries or websites, such as bab.la, which he accessed via Google. Beta, who worked in a pharmaceutical company, said that earlier she had a dictionary on her computer, but it was expensive, so the company stopped paying for it. Instead, she had access to a site for health personnel, Duodecim Terveystietti, and used this as a terminological resource. The informant with a strong legal profile, Delta 1, used legal dictionaries.

Zeta 1 and Zeta 2, who worked at a bank, named the Swedish SAOL (Svenska Akademiens ordlista, The Swedish Academy Glossary). This is a well-known normative glossary

available online, in print or as an app. Both informants who mentioned this were slightly older and had a strong Swedish-speaking background. Two younger informants, Kappa 1 and Kappa 2, who worked at another bank, named an open website with Swedish synonyms called *synonymer.se*. In Example 9, Kappa 1 answers my question on dictionaries or writing aids.

- (9) In that case the Internet [...] Google [...] or a page with synonyms or something similar [...] or exactly this that you ask a colleague 'hi I need a new word, this is what I want to say but I want to say it in another way'. (Kappa 1, banking)

Kappa 1 used the most common strategies to solve vocabulary problems, which was to use Google to search, use a synonym website or consult a colleague. He pointed out that the company was very careful to write a good, professional text – the company did not want to look like an 'amateur' but to make it '110 per cent for the customers'.

The most frequent way among the informants of finding a word in another language, or an equivalent or corresponding word, was actually to ask a colleague. If the text was to be written in Finnish, they asked a Finnish-speaking colleague. The colleague could be physically close or reached by phone or even a video call. Reading and checking each other's texts was prevalent, and different kinds of collaboration in the informants' text production is a field worth investigating more thoroughly. Although revealing one's lack of knowledge could potentially be associated with shame or in some other way complicated, none of the informants expressed these kinds of feelings. On the contrary, they reported that they easily asked colleagues for help, indicating strong relationships or maybe even friendships (cf. Paukstat 2019). Only a few informants did not ask for help but 'dug in their own vocabulary' and resolved the problem in this way. Why they chose this strategy was unclear. One possibility was that they did not want to bother anyone with their question and in this way showed respect for their colleagues. Another possibility is that they had no close enough colleague to ask, or that they felt ashamed to ask. This strategy of not asking for help was used by informants of different gender and age. Last, many said that they handled language-related issues by writing in a different way; by rewording their text.

5 Discussion and Implications

This study shed light on the material infrastructure of writing (Blommaert 2013). I have offered a glimpse into some of the reported writing practices of 18 Swedish-speaking Finns working in 11 different businesses in the Helsinki area and in Vaasa and especially how they use technology when writing. The informants were not employed for writing external texts such as public relations texts and they did not see themselves as writers, as the texts they produced were short. Despite this, the informants did report that they write and especially informants who worked in banks needed to document their work. All the informants were familiar with, and seemed to have the skills needed to access, software and other technologies for writing in a multilingual work environment. The tools that mediated their writing and the most common writing tasks did not differ so much between the informants or companies. Email clients, Microsoft office and Google

were widely used tools for producing written communication and documents. Shorter texts were usually internal chats written using specific software, WhatsApp-messages and other short messages, and were mainly reported by the younger informants. Writing short messages to colleagues was perceived as easy and informal. Email messages were frequent, and they also had to be short. Longer texts were usually written in Word, but the text could also be written in PowerPoint or using other software. Texts could be forwarded through a platform or 'system' placed at the informant's disposal either by the company, an authority, or other party, but not for public use.

The email overflow problem (Vidgen, Sims & Powell 2011) was clear. Some informants took measures to avoid unstructured or overly long emails. Some preferred to call rather than send emails back and forth. Instant messaging services (Darics 2014) or chats were used instead, as they were regarded as more informal for internal communication. Previous research has identified an issue of language choice with emails in multilingual companies (e.g., Jonsson & Blåsjö 2020). Also in this study, the informants anticipated future readers and forwarding of messages, and chose the language or switched languages accordingly.

Although English was the corporate language in the companies that employed some informants, they did not solely use English. In fact, most of the informants did not report extensive use of English in writing, which is a rather surprising result considering the quite opposite findings of Malkamäki & Herberts (2014). English was used most by two informants in companies with ownership outside EU. Overall, Finnish was used most, but also Swedish. Language choices of these informants will be analysed more thoroughly in another study, but the idea of not excluding anyone through one's choice of language (as Jonsson & Blåsjö 2020 and Mahili & Angouri 2017 have also pointed out) seemed to prevail.

Previous research has identified some other digital and analogue tools used in work life (Jonsson & Blåsjö 2020; Blåsjö, Johansson & Jonsson 2019). The informants in this study did not identify their calendar as something they wrote in, but My and Gamma 1 did mention handwritten notes. Others reported writing notes for themselves using digital tools, mostly Microsoft software. In this sense, the informants in this study also showed signs of needing to write for personal use only in the work life context.

Not all the informants reported 'real' writing of long texts in a word processing software such as Word or importing a table from Excel or data from other resources (Leijten et al. 2014). But Word was mentioned by almost all the participants, so some kind of writing in the traditional sense was taking place, sometimes with the help of model texts in order to save time. Writing in PowerPoint proved to be frequent, and those who were active users of PowerPoint mentioned the software often. Clearly, the informants used PowerPoint to mediate verbal text. PowerPoint has attracted researchers' attention because of its different functions (Koskela 2013; Schoeneborn 2013; Yates & Orlikowski 2007). It is unclear from this data, however, whether longer texts that were reported as written in PowerPoint were also presented in oral presentations, whether the sole function of these long textualized PowerPoint-slides was to document something, or

whether both presentation and documentation was accomplished through the same set of slides. This needs to be investigated thoroughly in different work life contexts.

Irrespective of the software used for writing, at some point most of the informants needed help to find the right wording. Some informants mentioned one of the advantages of Word: spell checking (Mahlow & Dale 2014). They did not mention it in combination with PowerPoint, although the same spell check can be carried out in all Microsoft office software. People working professionally with language know that there are not many free dictionaries of high quality on the internet. There are some, especially for Swedish and Finnish, but very few informants mentioned them. Instead, searching via Google or even using machine translation was mentioned. The informants seemed to lack knowledge of good free online resources, and the employers did not seem to give them access to paid dictionaries. In a multilingual work environment, these kinds of writing aids are essential for high quality texts. It is good that the informants were self-confident and not afraid of asking a colleague for help but using a colleague as a dictionary might not be a feasible long-term solution. Relying solely on one's own language skills and rewording or deleting a passage when the skills are not sufficient, is not very conducive to development.

These findings provide a positive overall picture of the writing tasks of Swedish-speaking Finns in the private sector in Finland. They have the skills required to perform well at work, in the required languages, and most said that if they lacked knowledge after graduation, they had learnt what they needed through their work.

Educators at all levels, especially in higher education, could take some measures based on these findings. Teachers could train and demand deeper word processing skills from their students, using templates and importing tables from Excel. Students could be trained to write texts other than strictly academic ones, and to write using data from different resources. This could prepare them for the complex writing tasks needed in work life.

It is also important to discuss the advantages, affordances and constraints of different technologies and expectations of different genres, and to train students to use different office software. Based on this study, Microsoft Office software skills are essential in the private sector, although research has shown that using presentation software to write long texts is not without problems. Teachers need to show students how to download spellchecking packages for different software, and to train students to change the language settings of documents (whether Word or PowerPoint or some other software). Knowledge of good and reliable online dictionaries is important to pass on to students. It is also important to discuss multilingualism and how to take those who do not speak the same language into consideration (Mahili & Angouri 2017). This does not mean using a monolingual code, or English only. Different translanguaging practices are possible (Jonsson & Blåsjö 2020), as is the use of parallel language.

Further research is needed to obtain a better understanding of the literacy practices of multilingual businesses and the demands they place on employees. To realise this kind of research, collaboration is needed between academia and workplaces in all sectors of

our societies. As digitalisation and multilingualism increases, research-based empirical knowledge is needed not only to better prepare students for work life demands, but also for companies, organisations and other workplaces to understand what measures they could take to build a good ecology for workplace writing in which their employees can thrive.

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Appendix 1.

The examples 1–9 in the original language, Swedish. The examples are revised into a written mode to protect the informant's identity.

- (1) Jag skulle inte säga att mitt jobb handlar om att skriva. [...] Det handlar om att strukturera tankar och analyser och framställa material. Det ingår ju text på varje Power-Point-slide och så där men det kan handla om bara enstaka ord eller uttryck eller meningar eller så där. Jag upplever inte själv att jag liksom skriver. (Gamma 2, consulting in marketing)
- (2) I: Tycker du att det har blivit mera skrivande under de senaste åren?
Epsilon: Jo [...] Regleringen medför mycket mera dokumentation och byråkrati. [...] Ska vi säga att om jag under en arbetsdag träffar kunder ungefär en två till tre timmar i dagen så går sedan övriga sju timmar till att skriva rapporter och så vidare och att besvara kundmeddelanden.
(Epsilon, private banking)
- (3) Om jag har mycket att säga försöker jag strukturera mig till exempel genom att använda bullet points eller på något sätt liksom styckeindela det, att det inte bli en lång klumtext. (Gamma 2, consulting in marketing)
- (4) Du kan chatta, den kommer upp som ett fält så att om nån inte svarar, om jag inte till exempel svarar på emailen genast, så då kan den där människan sätta åt mej en chatt "hallå har du sett min email" (SKRATTAR)- (Beta, pharmaceuticals company)
- (5) Det är vanliga Office-program [...] Oftast erbjuder ju de här olika instanserna någon sorts rapporteringskanaler, sådana här platforms eller sådant, som man sedan matar in på. Men det bearbetas först i Word och Excel och så. (Ita 1, retailing)
- (6) Jo, det är nog till kunden, men vi går igenom dom oftast internt också [...] Vi går igenom och funderar på hur vi ska presentera det här, vad är det bästa sättet att kommunicera det här. (Gamma 1, consulting in marketing)
- (7) Jota: Nog använder vi ju mycket Excel, men sen har vi också egna program, interna.
I: Skriver ni texterna i Excel?
Jota: Det gör vi nog. Den del av texten som man skriver på sina arbetspapper [...] jag tycker ju om Excel. Vi skriver ju inga långa essäer utan det är ju mera små kommentarer [...] Om man ska skriva längre rapporter så använder man ju nog förstås Word. (Jota, consulting in economics)
- (8) Theta: Vi har nog ganska mycket botten att använda och också mycket material från tidigare som man kan använda till godo.
I: Uppmuntras ni också att göra det?
Theta: Jo det uppmuntras vi nog till, att man behöver inte uppfinna hjulet på nytt varje gång. Men självklart är det sedan innehållet det som man egentligen då ändå måste fila på ganska mycket, att det ska vara ganska skraddarsytt. [...] Ibland kanske

det inte ändå är det bästa sättet att använda dem, det beror lite på, men jag skulle säga att jag i alla fall själv kommer lite snabbare på om jag har en botten och sedan kan jag ändra på det eller någon form av exempel och sedan arbetar jag vidare på det, än att ha ett helt tomt ark så att säga. (Theta, business consulting)

- (9) Obj: Internet i så fall [...] Google [...] eller en synonymhemsida eller liknande [...] eller just det att man frågar en kollega att "hej jag behöver ett nytt ord, det här vill jag säga men jag vill säga det på ett annat sätt". (Kappa 1, banking)