

THESIS ABSTRACT WRITING IN THE SLOVAK UNIVERSITY SETTING

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Abstract

Thesis abstract writing seems to be an inevitable element in one's academic life. Although there are numerous studies analysing the abstract as a product of academic writing, the process of its writing has not been investigated in detail so far, in particular in the Slovak academic setting. For this reason, the present paper aims at revealing the attitudes of Slovak students towards thesis abstract writing, their previous theoretical and practical experience with such a genre and the ways of writing the Slovak and English versions. Although there are several areas included in the present analysis, the fundamental goal is connected with the author's PhD thesis in which she focuses on the use of language in English versions of thesis abstracts which are assumed to be non-professional translations of their Slovak counterparts. In order to carry out this analysis, the methodological choice of questionnaire happens to be suitable for demonstrating the current situation of thesis abstract writing in the setting of Slovak academia. The questionnaire in the Slovak language was sent to Slovak students and alumni electronically with the only condition of having written their final theses in Slovak. As to the main result, approximately 90 % of sixty-eight respondents claim that their abstracts were self- or non-professionally translated. This outcome enables the author to continue with the research of non-professional translations from the lexico-grammatical and translational points of view. What is more, the findings also show that the genre of abstract is not only the formal requirement of the Slovak universities, but it seems that the students themselves are becoming more and more aware of its importance in their academic lives.

Keywords: thesis abstract, academic writing, Slovak university setting, abstract writing in Slovak and English, non-professional translation, questionnaire

Abstrakt

Akademický žáner abstraktu, ktorý je spravidla písaný v dvoch verziách – v rodnom a cudzom jazyku, sa považuje za neoddeliteľnú súčasť záverečných kvalifikačných prác študentov slovenských univerzít a vysokých škôl. Práve písanie cudzojazyčného abstraktu sa stalo rozhodujúcim motívom zrealizovania prezentovaného výskumu, keďže jeho nosnou hypotézou, s ktorou autorka článku pracuje vo svojej dizertačnej práci, bol predpoklad, že cudzojazyčný abstrakt záverečnej práce je „nie profesionálnym“ prekladom slovenskej originálnej verzie. Okrem výskumu procesu tvorby cudzojazyčného, zväčša anglického, abstraktu sa však výskum zameriava aj na postoje, názory a predchádzajúce skúsenosti študentov a absolventov s týmto žánrom a tak sa snaží o všeobecné zmapovanie pozície abstraktu záverečnej práce v slovenskom univerzitnom prostredí. Najvhodnejšou metódou pre realizovanie štúdie s danými cieľmi sa javí byť dotazníková forma výskumu, ktorá bola elektronicky rozposlaná študentom a absolventom slovenských univerzít a vysokých škôl v slovenskom jazyku a ktorej jedinou podmienkou na vyplnenie bola napísaná záverečná práca v slovenčine. Zo šesťdesiatich ôsmich opýtaných 90 % potvrdilo predpoklad, že anglické verzie abstraktov záverečných prác boli autorské alebo iné „nie profesionálne“ preklady, čo je považované za najdôležitejší záver daného prieskumu. Na základe neho môže autorka pokračovať v skúmaní fenoménu „nie profesionálneho“ prekladu na vyšších lexikálno-gramatických a translatických rovinách. Výsledky výskumu parciálnych cieľov zároveň naznačujú, že sa žánru abstraktu pripisuje

význam nielen vo formálnych požiadavkách na záverečné práce v slovenskom univerzitnom prostredí, ale aj v samotnom vedomí ich pisateľov – v tomto prípade vysokoškolských študentov.

Kľúčové slová: abstrakt záverečnej práce, akademické písanie, slovenská univerzita, písanie abstraktu v slovenskom a anglickom jazyku, „nie profesionálny“ preklad, dotazník

Introduction

According to English language dictionaries, the term **abstract (n)** is most frequently defined as “[a] summary of the contents of a book, article, or speech”³ or “a short form of a speech, article, book, etc., giving only the most important facts or ideas”⁴. Both these definitions mirror the general idea of what the abstract is believed to be like and what it should include. The general understanding of **the abstract** being a short and summarising text including the most important parts of its original spoken or written form seems to be widely shared, however this term becomes a very specific concept and fruitful subject for discussions in the area of linguistics, in particular in genre analysis and academic writing domains.

One of its specificities happens to be relative newness of the concept since the scientific interest in abstracts roused predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s in the Anglophone academic settings as a part of the intensive theoretical and empirical development in genre analysis (cf. Graetz, 1985; Salager-Mayer, 1990; Swales, 1990; Van Dijk, 1980). It was in the above mentioned period when the first definitions, typologies and descriptions of the linguistic as well as rhetorical peculiarities were introduced in order to support the rationale behind the study of the abstract as an independent genre. Not only in the area of research, but also in the field itself, the abstract has been progressively gaining the importance and nowadays it pervades all levels of academic expertise including the novice writings such as university students' final theses in both Anglophone and non-Anglophone research communities.

Although the abstract may be found in different linguistic forms, the predominance of its English versions is understandable due to the function of English as a lingua franca in the world and thus even non-English written pieces of work tend to be accompanied by English abstracts. This fact brings along another relatively new phenomenon – **non-professional translation** and **self-translation** which have been by and large studied in the area of academia by way of investigating research articles written by non-native English speakers (cf. Alharbi & Swales, 2011; Markkanen & Schröder, 1989; Perales-Escudero & Swales, 2011; Pisanski Peterlin, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2013) and which reify the underlying hypothesis for the present article.

It is evident from the foregoing that the concepts of abstract writing and non-professional translation respectively are not completely new in the area of linguistics; however their interconnection, i.e. the analyses of non-professional translation within abstract writing, happens to be a fresh insight into the issue. Since the interconnection may cover a wide range of possibilities for analyses, the present author focuses in this research as well as her PhD thesis solely on non-professional translation of Slovak thesis abstracts into English in the setting of

³ Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/abstract>

⁴ Available at: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/abstract>

Slovak universities. Naturally, there was the primal need to investigate the present author's assumption that English versions of thesis abstracts were non-professionally translated, which became the underlying aim of this study. Even though the analysis of non-professional nature of abstract translations was cardinal here, the author widened the scope of research and examined also the attitudes of participants towards abstract writing, their theoretical knowledge as well as previous experience with the genre in order to get an overall picture of thesis abstract writing in the Slovak university setting. Accordingly, the article seeks to explore the above mentioned underlying and partial aims by means of a (questionnaire) survey of Slovak university students whose characteristics are outlined in the following.

2 Methodological Approach and Questionnaire Outline

For the overall goal and individual aims of this study, the most suitable method appears to be the questionnaire. Questionnaires and surveys pertain to the most common descriptive method in humanities (Cohen & Manion, 1989, p. 94) and enable to investigate knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, behaviour as well as attributes of participants (Taylor-Powell, 1998, pp. 2–3). In spite of a couple of disadvantages such as a low response rate or missing interaction between the researcher and participants; survey processing costs, easy distribution and answer collection, good reliability, economy and anonymity (Gavora et al., 2010; Švec, 1998) make this method still far more advantageous in the analysed context here. What is more, the possibility to send online versions of questionnaires to potential respondents helps administrate, precisely evaluate the data and achieve the goals of a piece of research more quickly.

After setting the research aims summarised in the previous section and choosing the most suitable research method, the online questionnaire was formed on the basis of twenty-seven questions in the Slovak language⁵ which were divided into four main parts. Although the most important part of the questionnaire was related to investigation of the assumption that English versions of thesis abstracts were non-professional translations, the order of questions had to follow the logical structuring, hence the questionnaire form started with general information about the participants, continued with attitudes towards abstract writing, theoretical knowledge and previous experience with abstracts up to the way of writing the English versions of abstracts. The first block of questions thus included one close-ended and four open-ended questions concerning characteristics and information on respondents' education (cf. Table 1).

Table 1: Block of Questions 1

No.	Questions and options	Notes
1.	Mark your age group, please. a) < 25 b) 25–35 c) 35–50 d) 50 +	required/mark only one option
2.	What is your highest qualification degree?	required/e.g. Bachelor, Master, PhD etc.

⁵ For the purposes of the present article, the individual parts of the questionnaire are translated into the English language.

3.	What study programme did you study?	required
4.	In which university did you study the study programme stated in 3?	required
5.	When did you finish your studies stated in 3?	required/year

The second block of questions surveyed the attitudes towards abstract writing in general, Slovak versions of thesis abstracts, foreign language versions of thesis abstracts, their purposes as well as participants' previous theoretical knowledge and experience with this genre. This part was framed up into five partially close-ended, three open-ended questions and one close-ended Likert rating scale task (cf. Table 2).

Table 2: Block of Questions 2

No.	Questions and options	Notes																																																						
6.	Writing Slovak abstracts in general is: a) mandatory b) useful and reasonable c) meaningless d) other	required/tick all that apply																																																						
7.	Writing foreign language abstracts in general is: a) mandatory b) useful and reasonable c) meaningless d) other	required/tick all that apply																																																						
8.	What is the purpose of thesis abstracts in general?	required																																																						
9.	What is the purpose of thesis abstracts in relation to their authors?	required																																																						
10.	What is the purpose of thesis abstracts in relation to their readers?	required																																																						
11.	Mark the importance of the following parts in thesis abstracts, please. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1</th> <th>2</th> <th>3</th> <th>4</th> <th>5</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Introduction</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Motivation</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aims</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Methodology</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Description of chapters</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Specific results</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contribution of research</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Conclusion</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		1	2	3	4	5	Introduction						Motivation						Aims						Methodology						Description of chapters						Specific results						Contribution of research						Conclusion						required/mark only one option per row 1 = not important 2 = less important 3 = moderately important 4 = quite important 5 = very important
	1	2	3	4	5																																																			
Introduction																																																								
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Conclusion																																																								
12.	Was academic writing a part of your university studies? a) yes b) no c) other	required/mark only one option																																																						
13.	Were you familiar with the required structure and norms for thesis abstracts? a) yes, the information was provided during your university studies b) yes, the information was provided by your supervisor c) yes, the information was provided by other students and/or alumni d) yes, you found the information individually, e.g. university regulations on the Internet etc. e) no, no information was provided f) no, you were not interested in that kind of information e) other	required/tick all that apply																																																						
14.	Would you like to be informed on such norms? a) yes, as a part of university studies b) yes, by way of a writing guide c) yes, through your supervisor	required/tick all that apply																																																						

	d) yes, by means of a one-off seminar e) no f) other	
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The third and most vital section of the questionnaire was made up of nine partially close-ended questions focused on the actual process of writing Slovak as well as English thesis abstracts. Specifically, it surveyed the cooperation between the participants and their supervisors, the way of writing Slovak and foreign language versions of thesis abstracts and their authorship (cf. Table 3).

Table 3: Block of Questions 3

No.	Questions and options	Notes
15.	Did you cooperate with your supervisor while writing your thesis abstracts? a) yes, while writing the Slovak thesis abstract b) yes, while writing the foreign language thesis abstract c) yes, while writing both versions of thesis abstracts d) no e) other	required/mark only one option
16.	If you answered “yes” in 15, what was the priority for your supervisor? a) number of words b) rhetorical structure c) motivation part d) aim statement e) hypothesis statement f) contribution part g) practical implication h) description of chapters i) specific results j) grammatical and stylistic corrections k) other	required/tick all that apply/if you answered “no” in 15, write “NO” in the option “other”
17.	Were you the author of your Slovak thesis abstract? a) yes b) no c) other	required/mark only one option/if you have more final theses, answer in relation to your latest thesis, please
18.	What was the language of your foreign language thesis abstract? a) English b) German c) Russian d) French e) other	required/mark only one option/if you have more final theses, answer in relation to your latest thesis, please
19.	How was your foreign language version of thesis abstract written? a) as an independent piece of writing – not following the Slovak version of thesis abstract b) as a translation of the Slovak version of thesis abstract c) other	required/mark only one option/if you have more final theses, answer in relation to your latest thesis, please
20.	If your foreign language version of thesis abstract was written as an independent piece of writing, were you its author? a) yes b) no c) It was not an independent piece of writing. d) other	required/mark only one option

21.	<p>If your foreign language version of thesis abstract was a translation, specify, please.</p> <p>a) author's translation with the final correction from a professional translator b) author's translation with the final correction from a non-professional translator c) author's translation without further correction d) professional translation without the author's interference e) professional translation with the author's interference/cooperation f) non-professional translation without the author's interference g) non-professional translation with the author's interference/cooperation h) Google Translate (or a similar tool) without further correction i) Google Translate (or a similar tool) as a basis for translation with the final correction from the author j) Google Translate (or a similar tool) as a basis for translation with the final correction from a professional translator k) Google Translate (or a similar tool) as a basis for translation with the final correction from a non-professional translator l) It was not a translation. m) other</p>	<p>required/mark only one option</p> <p>professional translators = those who practice translation as a professional service</p> <p>non-professional translators = students of translation studies; students of philology; native English speakers, etc.</p>
22.	<p>If it was a professional translation, what do you think about its price?</p> <p>a) appropriate to the genre and type of translation b) inappropriate to the genre and type of translation – overrated work c) inappropriate to the genre and type of translation – underrated work d) without financial compensation e) It was not a professional translation. f) It was not a translation. e) other</p>	<p>required/mark only one option</p>
23.	<p>If it was a non-professional translation, specify its translator, please.</p> <p>a) a student of translation studies b) a student of philology c) an alumnus/alumna of philology d) an English speaker living abroad e) a native English speaker f) a teacher of the English language g) It was not a non-professional translation. h) It was not a translation. i) other</p>	<p>required/mark only one option</p>

Finally, the last set merged the issue of the respondents' experience with abstracts from the reader's point of view and included a couple of concluding questions too, all but one in partially close-ended form (cf. Table 4).

Table 4: Block of Questions 4

No.	Questions and options	Notes
24.	<p>Have you ever read a thesis abstract?</p> <p>a) yes b) no c) other</p>	<p>required/mark only one option</p>
25.	<p>If “yes” in 24, why have you read it?</p> <p>a) to search some study materials – Slovak thesis abstracts b) to search some study materials – foreign language abstracts</p>	<p>required/tick all that apply</p>

	c) to check the grammatical and stylistic structure of Slovak thesis abstracts (for other students, friends, etc.) d) to check the grammatical and stylistic structure of foreign language thesis abstracts (for other students, friends, etc.) e) to check the content of Slovak thesis abstracts (for other students, friends, etc.) f) to check the content of foreign language thesis abstracts (for other students, friends, etc.) g) to look for inspiration for your own Slovak thesis abstract h) to look for inspiration for your own foreign language thesis abstract i) other	
26.	Do you think the thesis abstract will be a part of final theses and other pieces of writing in the future? a) yes b) no c) I do not know. d) other	required/mark only one option
27.	Your commentary:	not required

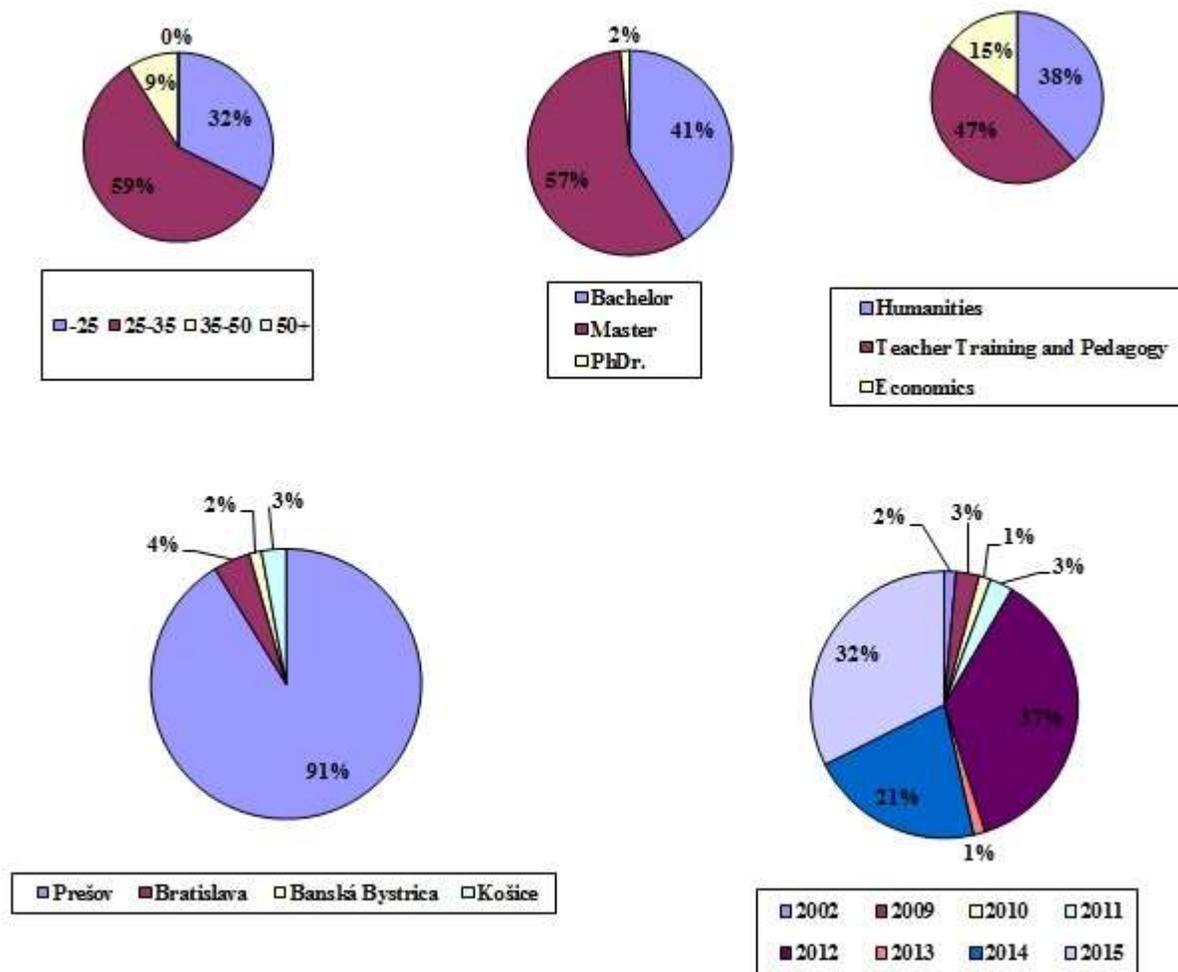
The questionnaire was in the above form sent electronically to individual students and alumni of various Slovak universities by the author; it was also sent collectively to Prešov University students' email addresses with the help of Vice-rector for International Affairs at Prešov University. Since the pivotal aim of the present survey was to reveal the process of writing English thesis abstracts in the Slovak academic setting, the English version of the questionnaire would negatively limit the sample of the participants; consequently, the Slovak language seemed to be more apt in the analysed context here. Furthermore, the sole condition for filling in the given questionnaire was participants' final thesis written in the Slovak language. The collection of responses had lasted from February 2016 to April 2016 and a total number of participants reached sixty-eight. Their profile along with the quantitative results is discussed in detail in the following section.

2 Results

2.1 Profile of Participants: Block of Questions 1

Before analysing the quantitative findings of the principal part of the questionnaire in greater detail, it is essential to provide the profile of respondents here. A substantial majority of sixty-eight respondents pertained to the age group 25-35 (59 %), finished their studies at the University of Prešov in Prešov (91 %) in 2012, 2014 and 2015 (94 % altogether) in the fields of Teacher Training and Pedagogy (47 %) and Humanities (38 %). Moreover, what can be of benefit to this survey is the even distribution of respondents with Bachelor's (41 %) and Master's (57 %) degrees. All data provided by the participants in the first block of questions are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Profile of Participants: Questions 1-5

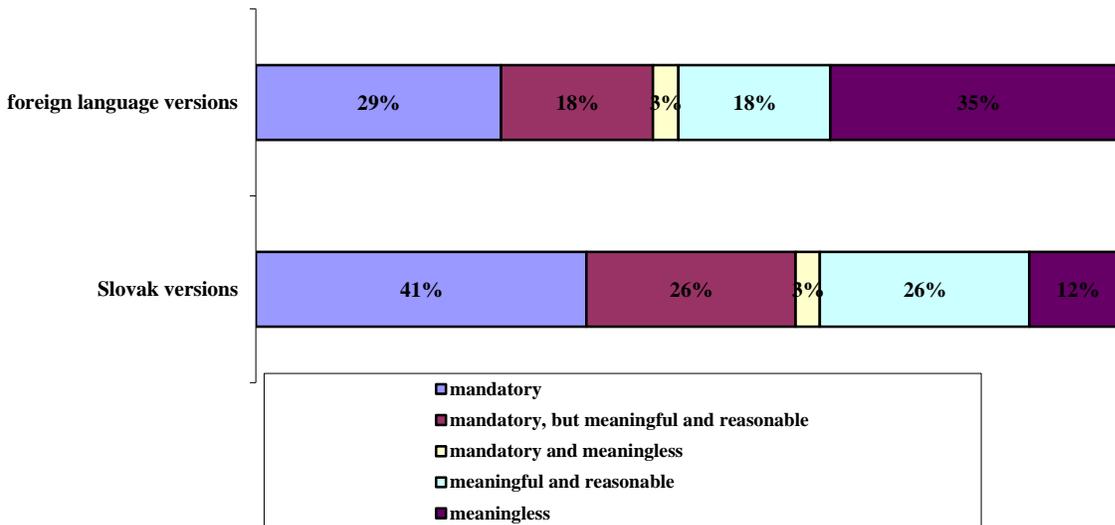


2.2 Quantitative Overview: Block of Questions 2

As mentioned above, the aim of the second block of questions was to investigate the participants' attitudes towards thesis abstract writing and their theoretical knowledge and previous experience with this type of genre. The first part of this block thus focused on the respondents' understanding of the subgenre of thesis abstract as such, written in both Slovak and foreign languages. The rationale behind this investigation is the fact that thesis abstracts, conventionally written in two linguistic versions, have become integral parts of the structure of final theses in the Slovak setting. Although there are a number of analyses revealing the rhetorical and grammatical-stylistic tendencies of particularly English thesis abstracts written by Slovak students (cf. Krajňáková, 2015), the attitudes towards writing them have not been investigated so far to our knowledge. The answers to questions 7 and 8 showed that the strongest motivation for writing thesis abstracts in both versions was naturally connected with the university requirements for final theses. However, along with *mandatory* option, the participants quite frequently opted for *meaningful and reasonable* choice; in particular in connection with

Slovak thesis abstracts where *meaningless* was the least recurrent choice. Concerning **foreign language thesis abstracts**, the option of *meaningless* (38 %) slightly predominated *meaningful and reasonable* (36 %) which stands for the main difference between the participants' perception of Slovak and foreign language abstracts in the Slovak university setting here (cf. Figure 2).

Figure 2: Attitudes towards Thesis Abstract Writing: Questions 6 and 7

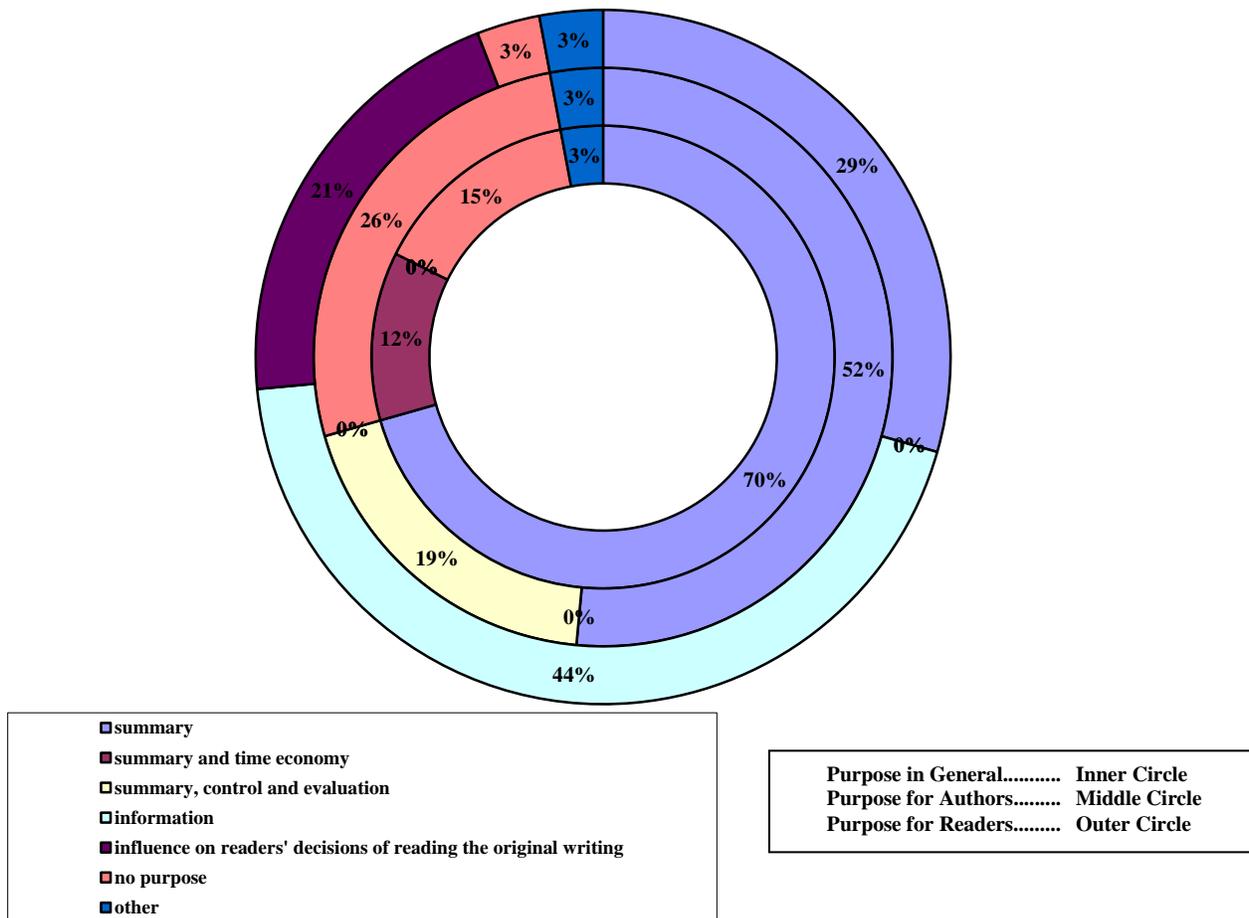


In line with the questions 7 and 8, the next three questions focused on the attitudes towards purposes of thesis abstracts in general, their purposes with regards to their authors as well as readers respectively. Although the questions were formed as open-ended and investigated three independent areas, the following recurring oppositions were identified: the purpose of *summary* and *no purpose* with the dominance of the former. As for the purpose of thesis writing **in general**, after the summary option, there was a strong *time saving* factor; the *other* option revealed “laziness to read the whole thesis” and “a source for study materials”. When investigating the purpose of thesis abstracts for their **authors**, the summarising element was extended on the possibilities to *control and evaluate* the original thesis as such. However, it is important to note here that *no purpose* stood for a very frequent option, too. Amongst the *other* purposes, the participants considered thesis abstracts a simple duty, but also a good way for preparing thesis defences. Finally, the question about the purposes of thesis abstracts for their **readers** seems to be more optimistic since *no purpose* was the least frequent option here. On the other hand, the dominance of summarising function was replaced by the purpose of *informing* the readership as well as of *influencing* their decision about reading the whole thesis. The *other* answers included “laziness to read the whole thesis” and characterised thesis abstracts as a way of “attract[ing] the readers' attention”.

Considering the differences between the individual questions, the *summarising* purpose was the most frequent option especially in the attitudes towards thesis abstracts **in general** and their purposes for the **authors**; however the function of thesis abstracts to *save time in general* was recurrent, too. In case of the purposes for the **readership**, along with the *summarising*

element, the purposes of *informing* the readers and *attracting their attention* were noticeable in the responses; what is more *no purpose* was chosen least frequently here. On the other hand, *no purpose* of thesis abstracts was seen mostly for their **authors** (cf. Figure 3).

Figure 3: Purpose of Thesis Abstract Writing: Questions 8-10

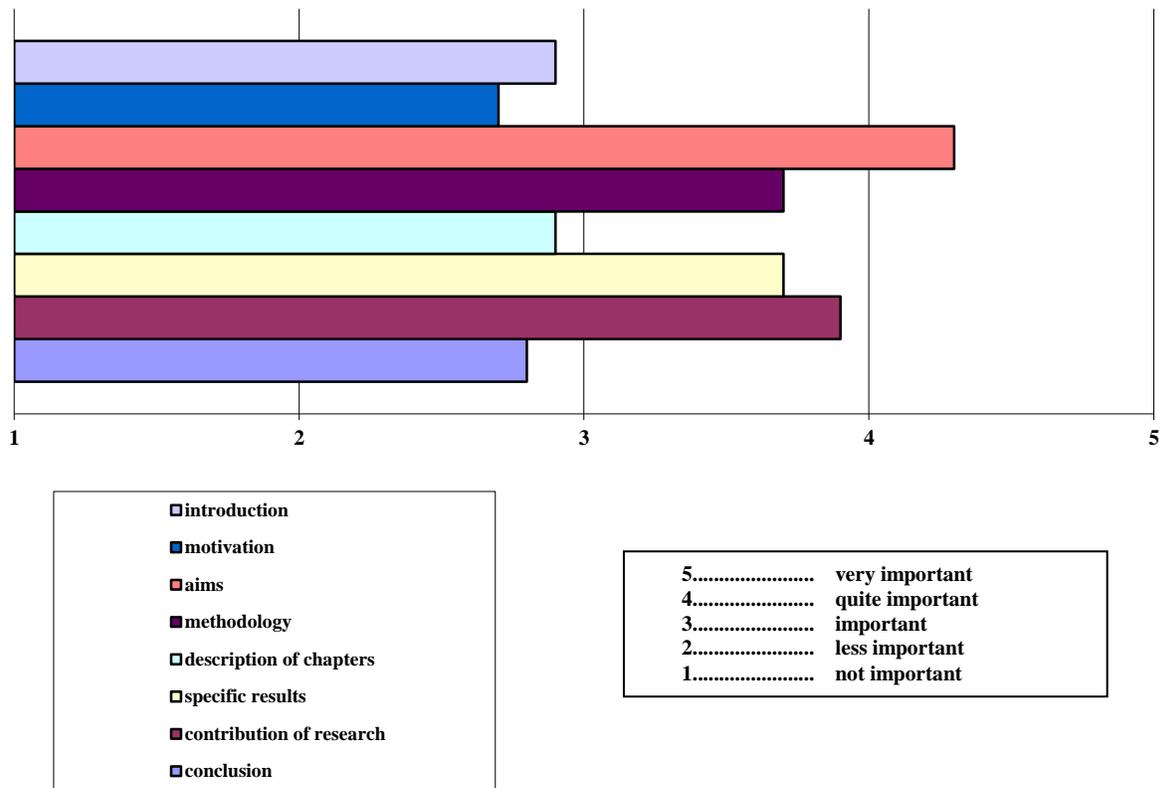


The attitudes towards thesis writing are to a large extent influenced by the participants' previous theoretical and practical experience with the genre. In the Slovak university setting, the textual type of thesis abstract is supposed to be of **linear** and **informative** type as indicated by the university regulations⁶. The linear type of abstracts follows the rhetorical structure of the original writing in the conventional moves of **Motivation, Problem Statement, Methodology, Results** and **Conclusion** (cf. Koopman, 1997) and since thesis abstracts should be informative, the main emphasis is to be put on the element of Results (Čmejrková, Daneš and Světlá, 1999, p. 75). Although the primal aim of university regulations and writing guidelines is to help students write a quality thesis and its parts, it is proven that the writing reality in the Slovak university setting displays a certain deviation from the writing norms (cf. Krajňáková, 2014, 2015). One of

⁶ Cf. <http://www.pulib.sk/web/data/pulib/subory/stranka/ezp-smernica2016.pdf>

the explanations for such a deviation can be determined by writers' different understanding of the genre of abstract and their own idea of what a quality abstract should include. And it is this idea that is aimed to be examined by question 11 in which the respondents were supposed to mark the importance of individual textual parts of abstracts by means of Likert scale ranging from *not important* up to *very important* (1–5). The averages of the scores of individual textual elements showed that the move of **Problem Statement** was considered most important by the sample. The position between *important* and *quite important* was achieved by the independent moves of **Methodology** and **Results** and an element of *contribution of research* which pertains to **Results**, too (cf. Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Importance of Moves in Thesis Abstracts: Question 11



These findings are quite surprising since the empirical results of the present author's previous analyses illustrated that the move of **Results** was one of the most neglected moves along with **Motivation** and **Conclusion** (Krajňáková, 2014, 2015). What is more, there appears to be a common tradition of **describing the individual chapters** of the original thesis in Slovak thesis abstracts, however, the respondents did consider it *less important* in the survey and it seems that in both cases, i.e. concerning **Results** and **chapter description**, there may be anticipated a change in thesis writing reality in the Slovak university setting.

One of the reasons for such outcomes may lie in the participants' previous experience and knowledge or according to the present survey due to lack of it as 65 % of the respondents stated that academic writing had not been a part of any courses during their university studies.

Consequently, these students had had to consult other sources of information in order to become familiar with the norms. Amongst those, the majority had searched the information *individually* (on the Internet, etc.); the information provided by their *supervisors* and by *other students and/or alumni* were evenly distributed in the findings⁷. Only 9 % of the respondents stated they had not been interested in such information or it had not been provided to them at all. On the other hand, no fewer than 94 % of the participants would welcome more information regarding academic writing in the future, in particular by means of distribution of writing guides and handbooks and through their supervisors. Approximately the same numbers of the respondents also suggest the information be presented during a one-off seminar and academic writing be an integral part of university studies⁸. As can be seen from the responses to questions 12 and 13, the students tend to rely on the *information provided* either by the *university* or by their *supervisors* when completing their final theses. It is thus assumed that the role of supervisors is rather influential in thesis abstract writing too; what is more, supervisors connect the issues of participants' previous experience with the investigation of the actual process of thesis writing in the Slovak university setting examined by the third block of questions.

2.3 Quantitative Overview: Block of Questions 3

Despite the above assumption that **supervisors** may be rather influential in thesis abstract writing, the two introductory questions in the third part of the present questionnaire revealed that only 32 % of the participants had cooperated with their supervisors with regards to writing their thesis abstracts, particularly their *Slovak versions* (27 %). Nevertheless, what seems to be interesting here are the areas the supervisors had considered important since the most recurrent answers covered the *statement of aims, contribution of research, specific results* and *grammatical-stylistic perspective* that are in line with the outcomes of question 11 regarding the importance of the individual textual elements in thesis abstracts. This happens to at least partially link the preferences of supervisors with students' opinions on academic writing as such; however, it has to be reminded here that this partial connection is predominantly related to academic writing in the Slovak language and thus foreign language thesis abstracts seem to be created without a direct supervisor's interference.

When speaking of foreign language thesis abstracts, the attribute **foreign language** can be at this moment here replaced by **English** since 100 % of the respondents stated that their foreign language thesis abstracts had been written in the English language. What is more, 97 % (66/68) answered that their English thesis abstracts had been **translations** of the Slovak thesis abstracts; in 3 %, English thesis abstracts had been written without following the original Slovak abstracts. Out of sixty-six participants, 92 % (61/66) specified the type of translation as **non-professional**, 5 % self-translated the Slovak originals with the final interference and correction from professional translators and 3 % identified the translations as solely professional mostly provided without any financial compensation for their translators.

⁷ Note that question 12 enabled the participants to tick more possibilities.

⁸ Note that question 13 enabled the participants to tick more possibilities.

This partial result thus confirmed the assumption that English thesis abstracts were predominantly translated non-professionally. Furthermore, the answers of sixty-one respondents can be divided into two major groups, i.e. **author's or self-translations** (28 % = 17/61) and **non-professional translations** (72 % = 44/61) while the latter covered the most frequent option of translations done by non-professional translators (39 % = 24/61); by the authors, but with the final correction from non-professional translators (26 % = 15/61); by non-professional translators in cooperation with the authors (3 % = 2/61); translations provided by Google Translate (or a similar tool) and corrected by non-professional translators (3 % = 2/61) and translations provided by Google Translate (or a similar tool) and corrected by the authors (2 % = 1/61)⁹. Except for the authors in the role of **non-professional translators**, the other non-professionals were mostly defined by the participants as proficient non-native English speakers and students or alumni of philology.

The cardinal part of the questionnaire thus proved the hypothesis that English versions of thesis abstracts in the Slovak university setting could be more often than not regarded as non-professional including self-translations as well as translations done by other proficient non-native English speakers. What is more, since there was a considerable number of self- or author's translations of thesis abstracts, one might anticipate that these authors, i.e. the participants in the present questionnaire, could also become non-professional translators of Slovak thesis abstracts for other university students. This is partially connected with the subsequent and ultimate part of the survey which examined the position of respondents on the opposite side of written communication, i.e. as the readers or receivers of thesis abstracts.

2.4 Quantitative Overview: Block of Questions 4

Although the crucial part of this questionnaire was focused on the actual process of thesis writing, this process might be influenced by reading other thesis abstracts as well. Here, 77 % of the participants stated that they had read thesis abstracts before, in both Slovak and English languages. The importance of reasons however differed according to the linguistic version; the Slovak versions which had been read more than twice often than their English counterparts had most frequently provided the participants with inspiration for their own thesis abstracts and study materials for their own research. Another recurrent reason for reading the Slovak thesis abstract was the grammatical and stylistic correction of other students' abstracts. As to the English versions of thesis abstracts, the main reasons were the same, but in a different order, i.e. the most frequent reason seems to be the search for study materials and information for the participants' own research which was followed by the function of English thesis abstracts as sources of inspiration and the reason of grammatical and stylistic correction of other students' abstracts. The least frequent reason for reading both versions was commenting on the content of other writers' thesis abstracts. Finally, the last partially close-ended question in the questionnaire investigated the participants' opinion about the future of thesis abstracts in academic writing in the university

⁹ 73 % altogether due to rounding

settings which appears to be more optimistic than not (68 %), however quite a large group of the participants were not sure about the answer (26 %).

All in all, the quantitative results revealed that the participants regarded writing thesis abstracts as their duty; however they did agree that particularly Slovak versions were useful and reasonable in the context of academic writing, especially when bearing in mind the purposes of summarising and providing the readership with information on the original writing. As to the rhetorical structure of thesis abstracts, the respondents considered the moves of Problem Statement, Methodology and Results with research contribution the most important in the given genre and would welcome to be more educated in the area of academic writing in the future; they also suggested the supervisor should play an important role in the process of writing final theses and their components. Most importantly, the respondents of the sample confirmed the non-professional status of English translations of thesis abstracts done by the authors themselves or other proficient non-native English speakers. Last but not least, the participants were not only writers, but also readers of thesis abstracts, in particular when searching for information for their own research, being inspired to write their thesis abstracts and when correcting the grammar and stylistics of other students' abstracts. The quantitative outcomes also showed that the majority of participants felt positive about the future of thesis abstract writing in the Slovak university setting.

Interesting as the quantitative data may be, they still do not suffice the present aim of providing the overall picture of thesis abstract writing in the Slovak university setting, thus the above findings and statements are further discussed below in terms of their implications and suggestions for academic writing in the setting of Slovak universities.

3 Discussion

From the very beginning of the questionnaire and data interpretation, it is imperative to be cautious with generalisations since sixty-eight respondents would not be typically considered a large test pool; however for the present underlying aim of investigating the nature of foreign language versions of thesis abstracts in the setting of Slovak universities, the number of the participants appears to be apt.

Considering their variety, i.e. characteristics, the respondents predominantly represent the students or alumni of the University of Prešov in Prešov which is naturally the closest academic setting for the author of this study. Consequently a substantial majority finished their studies in the fields of Teacher Training, Pedagogy and Humanities which stand for the fundamental study programmes at the University. Despite the preponderance of present and former students of Prešov University, the findings of the questionnaire are aimed to be presented as such without focusing on a particular university setting. It is firstly because there is not a sufficient number of respondents from other universities to draw comparisons; secondly and more importantly Prešov University is still a part of the Slovak university setting which shares the same writing regulations with all Slovak universities, there is thus probable that similar opinions would be shared by students from different Slovak universities, too.

Since the primal aim of regulations is to regulate the norms for writing final theses and their textual components, it is not surprising that in the second block of questions the majority of participants considered thesis abstracts first and foremost their duty and some of them did even see no other purpose in writing such a genre. Naturally, one cannot avoid the attribute of mandatory when discussing the abstract in the Slovak academic setting, but in line with this, the students as well as scholars should be able to see its purposes and benefits, too. It seems that a better understanding of the meaningfulness of abstracts has long been reserved to the Anglophone academic settings, however as can be seen from the outcomes, the participants from the non-English speaking setting revealed certain awareness of the usefulness of this genre, too, particularly in connection with its native language version. The overriding purposes of abstracts were specified as follows: the summarising function important in general as well as for the authors of abstracts and the function of providing information for the readers of abstracts. Both characteristics are by all means present in the genre of abstract, but not only there, there are also annotations, summaries or résumés, all summarising and providing some kind of information, too. It is thus imperative to explicate the similarities and differences between individual academic genres to students and clarify further characteristics typical of the abstract solely. Since the answer of no purpose occurred quite often, especially in foreign language versions, another goal in the university studies should be raising the awareness of reasons and effectiveness of abstracts in both languages in real (academic) life.

Along with this, the rhetorical structure of different academic genres should also become a commonplace of university education. Although the participants identified Problem Statement, Methodology and Results including the contribution of research as the most important elements in the thesis abstract, one has to bear in mind that the abstract is an independent text type and thus should be accompanied by its own introduction, i.e. the move of Motivation, as well as by Conclusion. Nevertheless, one can see a certain movement towards a better understanding of thesis abstract writing which could be further supported by university courses covering the field of academic writing or stylistics in general. Since state exams in the Slovak university settings are nowadays witnessing a progressive transformation in which writing theses and their defences are more important for getting a degree than ever before, the importance of teaching and studying academic writing should be naturally raised, too. The abstract being a part of academic writing could be incorporated into education on a theoretical as well as practical level. For the educational purposes, the exercises could be based on research article abstracts which would represent a more reasonable and economical form in terms of the ability to compare abstracts with their original writings. For instance, the tasks could be focused on writing the abstracts of already written research articles and their further comparison with the original abstracts as well as on reading abstracts and subsequent deduction of the original structures of the abstracted pieces of writing.

However, not only students, but also supervisors should be aware of all the peculiarities of abstracts, because it is the supervisor who is, besides universities and their specialised academic course components, generally supposed to provide the above pieces of information

regarding academic writing to his or her student. Moreover, it is evident from the present outcomes that the requirements of supervisors directly corresponded to the opinions of the respondents concerning the rhetorical structure of thesis abstracts. The important role of supervisors in thesis writing is also supported by the statement that the participants would welcome to be informed on the writing norms in the future first and foremost through their supervisors. The other responses regarding providing information on academic writing in the future included the writing guide or handbook which is however already available on the Internet; in that case it might be more popularised amongst students. All the above implications and suggestions are connected with the abstract as a part of academic writing regardless of the language in which it would be written. The third block of questions was focused on the foreign language, i.e. English in this case, thesis abstracts and its results are discussed further on.

Apart from the questions in block 3 which investigated the role of supervisors, the core of this block pinpointed the way of creating English versions of thesis abstracts in the setting of Slovak universities. This part worked on the assumption that the majority of English abstracts would be non-professional translations of their Slovak counterparts. Initially, it is important to note that the previous section of the survey was more appropriate to the qualitative analysis than the present one since it contained a larger number of open-ended questions and basically investigated the attitudes, opinions and previous theoretical and practical experience of the respondents. As the third part examined the already finished writing activity, the qualitative implications and suggestions of the results seem to be limited, nonetheless the quantitative results spoke for themselves. The English versions of thesis abstracts were predominantly non-professional translations covering both author's or self-translations and translations done by other non-professional translators. A detailed view at the data appears to be more complex since it is often difficult to distinguish self-translations from translations done by other non-professionals and sometimes even non-professional from professional translations, because of many cases of **collaborative translations** (cf. Gambier, 2014) revealed by the survey. What is more, the self-translators could also become non-professional translators for other university students as was indicated by the respondents. This means that non-professional translations do not happen to be a one-off occasion, on the contrary, non-professional translators seem to practise their translation skills. Depending on the level of such practising, they might be becoming more and more professional in the field in the future and consequently lose their non-professional status at all. As to non-professional translators, another questionable issue is their most recurrent specification as **proficient** non-native English speakers, a term which is still widely discussed in linguistics, especially in Second Language Acquisition (cf. Jenkins, 2006) and which makes impossible for now to define the notion of a non-professional translator, too. Still, the important point here is that non-professional translators exist in the sociolinguistic reality of thesis abstract writing in the setting of Slovak universities and thus might be a fruitful subject to subsequent rhetorical, linguistic and translational investigation.

By way of conclusion here, let us compare the present results with the forthcoming research article of the author which analysed the way of creating English versions of thesis

abstracts in the setting of Ljubljana University in Slovenia. The pilot findings showed that the majority (93 %) of thirty respondents had translated the Slovene thesis abstracts themselves (60 %) or their thesis abstracts had been translated by a non-professional translator (33 %), which corroborated with the outcomes of the present research. Potentially, the non-professional nature of translations in non-English speaking university settings could be regarded as a typical feature of (students') academia which could give ample scope for new comparative and contrastive analyses within genre analysis, linguistics and translation.

Conclusion

The present survey amongst students and alumni of Slovak universities was aimed to reveal the sociolinguistic situation of thesis abstract writing in the chosen non-English speaking academic context. This general aim covered two main areas discussed in the article, i.e. the attitudes towards abstract writing and theoretical and practical experience with thesis abstracts and the actual writing process of English thesis writing. The additional two blocks of questions at the beginning and at the end of the questionnaire gathered general information about the participants and their opinion about the future of thesis abstracts. Out of these four parts, the process of creating English versions of thesis abstracts reified the motivating factor for this research since there was the primal need to test the hypothesis that English versions of abstracts were predominantly non-professional translations of their Slovak counterparts on which the present author aimed to work in her PhD thesis. The hypothesis was confirmed by 90 % of sixty-eight participants according to whom non-professional translations could be divided into the English versions translated by the authors themselves and by other non-professional translators, in particular proficient non-native English speakers. This result is moreover comparable with 93 % of the Slovene respondents who took part in the survey carried out by the present author which is a part of her forthcoming research article.

As to the part of questionnaire investigating the participants' attitudes and experience with thesis writing, which was due to logical reasons placed before the above mentioned section on English versions of thesis abstracts in the questionnaire, it can be summarised that thesis abstracts in both languages were naturally considered mandatory by the participants. Apart from the respondents' duty to write thesis abstracts, Slovak versions were at the same time regarded as more meaningful and useful than their English counterparts in the setting of Slovak academia. Their usefulness was seen in the summarising and informational features which represented the leading purposes of abstracts according to this survey.

The attitudes towards thesis abstract writing happen to be generally influenced by one's previous experience. Here, the data showed that the participants familiarised themselves with the writing norms individually (e.g. by way of consulting the information provided by the universities on the Internet), through their supervisors and other students and/or alumni of the given university. The role of supervisors was further examined in this part of questionnaire and showed that although only 32 % of the respondents had cooperated with them while writing thesis abstracts, the supervisors' requirements noticeably corresponded to the responses

concerning the importance of the individual rhetorical elements of abstracts. Accordingly, one can assume certain influence of supervisors on their students and thus not only students, but also supervisors should be familiar with the norms and conventions of thesis abstract and academic writing in general, too.

Naturally, some limitations of this study have to be considered; the sample presented here was relatively limited in number and the majority of participants were the students or alumni of Prešov University, therefore one has to be careful with generalisations of these data in the future. The sample is however sufficient for the present underlying aim of testing the hypothesis about non-professional translations of Slovak original thesis abstracts into the English language and enables the present author to work with this concept further in her PhD thesis.

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