

## Written Comments on Undergraduate Theses Written in Spanish as a First Language and English as a Foreign Language<sup>I</sup>

Roxanna **CORREA PÉREZ\***

Mónica **TAPIA-LADINO\*\***

Beatriz **ARANCIBIA GUTIERREZ\*\*\***

\* Master's in Education at the Catholic University of Santísima Concepción (UCSC), Chile (2007). Associate Researcher at the Center for Research in Education and Development at UCSC. She has works published in Scielo and WOS Journals in the field of Applied Linguistics. Contact: rcorrea@ucsc.cl.

\*\* PhD in Linguistics at the Catholic University of Santísima Concepción, Chile (2001). She has participated in research projects on writing in higher education in Chile. In 2013, she did postdoctoral research at the Universidad de California, Santa Barbara. She has published on academic writing in different leading journals. Contact: mtapia@ucsc.cl.

\*\*\* PhD in Linguistics at the Catholic University of Santísima Concepción, Chile (2009). She is a member of the Center for Research in Education and Development at the Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción. She has published her work at Scielo and WOS Journals in the field of Applied Linguistics. Contact: barancib@ucsc.cl.

### Abstract:

This study examines written comments of nonnative-speaking teachers of English and native-speaking teachers of Spanish on undergraduate theses of nonnative-speaking students of English and native-speaking students of Spanish. The aims of the study were to analyze the characteristics of the feedback provided applying the categories of corrective and genre-oriented types of comments, and to study whether these types of comments vary through the thesis drafts. This is a descriptive qualitative study with quantitative aspects and an exploratory scope. The material was collected from the dialogic cycle of receiving and providing feedback during the university students' thesis writing process. Out of this process we collected 1241 written comments that were analyzed applying the categories mentioned before. The results showed that genre-oriented comments were more abundant in theses written in Spanish than in those written in English. However, Spanish teachers also provided more corrective comments than English teachers did.

### Keywords:

Feedback. Genre-oriented comments; Written comments.

*Signum: Estudos da Linguagem, Londrina, v.24, i. 1, p. 52-68, Apr. 2021*

*Received on: 10/01/2020*

*Accepted on: 22/12/2020*

---

<sup>1</sup> This study was carried out thanks to the funding of FONDECYT- program to the Project Fondecyt [1180586] (2018-2020) named: Eficacia de los comentarios escritos de ajuste al género (CEAG) en escritos académicos: estudio experimental en tres disciplinas en dos universidades regionales.

# Written Comments on Undergraduate Theses Written in Spanish as a First Language and English as a Foreign Language

---

Roxanna Correa Pérez; Mónica Tapia-Ladino; Beatriz Arancibia Gutierrez

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of feedback as a tool of formative assessment and its potential to foster students' learning has been widely studied (DUIJNHOUWER, 2010; BITCHENER *et al.*, 2011). Most of these studies consider feedback as a key aspect that provides information to reduce the gap between learners' initial performance and the specific standard or "master goal" (DUIJNHOUWER, 2010, p. 37) required. According to Bitchener *et al.* (2011), due to the importance of providing feedback on students' theses (final paper to graduate), it is relevant to identify the type of feedback offered and how it is provided. Sommers (2013) adds that the feedback teachers or supervisors provide allows students to foster the development of their abilities to write, especially if this feedback alludes to multiple dimensions of text such as organization of ideas, use of language, or organization among others; this feedback may motivate a wider variety of answers from the students.

This study was carried out in the context of two Chilean universities and considered students majoring in the teaching of English as a second language and students majoring in teaching Spanish as a mother tongue. Consequently, this study examines feedback provided by nonnative-speaking teachers of English to nonnative writers of English and feedback provided by native speakers of Spanish to native writers of Spanish in terms of corrective and genre-oriented comments. We are interested in researching L1 and L2 feedback contexts because most of the studies carried out in L2 and L1 are oriented to investigate corrective feedback in writing. Therefore, this study intends to be a contribution in this area proposing a way to analyze written comments from a genre perspective in L1 and L2 contexts.

The type of writers and feedback providers of the study are natural participants in the process of the thesis writing in the English and Spanish pedagogy programs of the universities studied. The reason to choose corrective and genre-oriented comments was because the first is the most reported in L2 writing research (FERRIS, 2004; ELLIS, 2009; HAN; HYLAND, 2015) and the second we proposed in research carried out in 2016. In this study we found that some comments supervisors provided referred to the specific characteristics of the type of text that is required for acceptance by the potential community where the text will circulate (TAPIA-LADINO; ARANCIBIA; CORREA VENEGAS, 2016). Thus, communicative purpose, prototypical sections (e.g. introduction, literature review, method, analysis, conclusions), grammar lexical patterns, and organization of the text are some of the aspects the supervisors referred to in their comments to help the students produce a text according to the discourse genre required. Following Askehave and Swales (2001, p. 197), we understand communicative purpose as aims that are "recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre." In this context this concept can be considered as the discourse of a particular community which may go beyond the experts in the field.

The theses supervisors' aim is that through this type of comments, genre-oriented comments, students can learn how to adjust their text to the genre type required. This study follows Christiansen

and Bloch's (2016) ideas about written comments as a systematic practice of providing feedback. In this sense, its contributions are to understand the role of these comments and provide information that can help teachers to improve their teaching practice. This improvement may happen in the context of teaching a particular genre. In this context the research represents a contribution because it studies written comments across three consecutive drafts in the context of writing a thesis.

As it was mentioned before, research related to thesis writing has been oriented to study corrective feedback, mainly in L2 writing. This study considers the role of feedback including linguistic aspects and comments oriented to the specific genre to be achieved. We state the following research questions: (1) Do teachers provide Genre-Oriented Comments (GOC)? (2) Are corrective comments more predominant than GOC? (3) Do comments change in type and quantity through the consecutive drafts?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Feedback is considered a significant aspect in the learning and assessment process both for first (L1) and second (L2) language development writing. Particularly, feedback given to written assignments has been the focus of a wide range of studies in both L1 and L2 writing research (HYLAND, 2010; BITCHENER; FERRIS, 2012; SOMMERS, 2013; CHRISTIANSEN; BLOCH, 2016). Hyland (2010) and Sommers (2013) note that students see the action of providing feedback as a way of receiving individualized attention and a manner of establishing 'long-term' communication between teacher and student. Bitchener and Storch (2016, p.73) understand feedback as "a form of assistance"; the authors add that this assistance needs to promote dialogue and be oriented to the writer's needs. This concept of feedback as assistance relies on Vygotsky's (1997) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), because it fosters the student's current level of development, before a learning experience, and the potential level of improvement after receiving feedback that could promote a motivational or cognitive behavior in the context of a written task to keep improving. Referring to the role of comments, Christiansen and Bloch (2016, p. 1) state "that the analysis of teacher comments can provide important insight into both understanding the role of commenting and changing pedagogical practices." As the provision of comments is a recurrent practice, it is relevant to know the type(s) of feedback teachers give in the context of written assignments. One of the feedback modalities in the development of communicative abilities is written responses or comments during the process of producing a text. Such comments motivate changes to the text in subsequent drafts. The cycle is repeated and continues until the participants perceive the text to be appropriate and adequately expressed in terms of its meaning and the expectations of the audience (YUGDAR TÓFALO, 2012).

Bitchener, Young e Cameron (2005), Ferris (1997), Ferris *et al.* (2013) e Bitchener e Knoch (2015) have carried out studies related to the impact of oral or written comments on undergraduate or post graduate students' final texts. These authors report that undergraduate students tend to incorporate most of the comments provided by their supervisor teachers, as them as experts in the field. In the process of writing a thesis, a natural practice is that supervisor teachers offer feedback to the students' written production. The aim is to help the student writers to improve their work and to develop the genre conventions of senior thesis or dissertation (BITCHENER, 2009). Some previous research on academic writing in a second language (PALTRIDGE; STARFIELD, 2007) have studied what is expected of students' writing. The authors found that the supervisor's comments given to students constitutes a factor, among others, that influences the way a dissertation is written.

Research on written comments mainly proceed from studies on the use of corrective feedback (use of language) in academic written assignments performed in English as an L2 (FERRIS, 2004; ELLIS,

2009; BITCHENER; FERRIS, 2012). Investigation in which the task is the writing of a complex genre as a thesis is still infrequent. Nonetheless, professional experience points out that during the process of writing, supervisor teachers provide written comments as feedback, to guide the development of various aspects of the text. Hyland (2007, p.159) explains that the role of feedback is to provide “an explicit criterion about what is being aimed at, what is being assessed and where students need to improve to meet learning goals” . Thus, feedback oriented to genre features of the thesis helps students focus on relevant aspects of text with the aim of reaching genre standards.

Concerning the role of feedback in L2 writing, Hyland (2010) points out that the action of giving feedback promotes the understanding of writing as a process. In the case of L2 writers, Hyland (1999) explains that they value teacher’s comments, especially comments directed to grammatical aspects. According to the author, this happens because the major concern for an L2 writer is writing texts free of mistakes, as an indicator of the quality of the writing. In contexts in which the writers have to write multiple drafts, they prefer comments focused on the ideas and organization of the texts in the first drafts and on grammatical aspects of the language in subsequent drafts. In 2011, Bitchener *et al.* carried out a study whose main aim was to identify the best practices in supervisors’ feedback to thesis students. Related to thesis writers, they report that “sometimes supervisors found it necessary to provide some L2 writers with a greater amount of feedback on linguistic accuracy and appropriateness than was the case with most L1 students” (BITCHENER *et al.*, 2011, p. 6). The authors observed that L2 students considered feedback on language more effective than L1 students did. In the area of corrective feedback Ferris (2015, p. 4) explains that this type of feedback “needs to be individualized and adaptive in the sense that as students make progress in one area, you start focusing on something else.” This idea of orienting feedback towards students’ needs allows the student writers to reflect on the changes they need to make. In addition, this type of feedback engages students with the comments provided and they have the feeling that these changes are accessible.

From a different perspective, Wisker *et al.* (2003, p. 5) understand the instances of providing written or oral feedback as “learning conversations.” The authors define them as interactions between supervisors and students with two main aims of “focusing on students’ research proposal and conceptual frameworks to enable development of the appropriate research design and scaffolding, and to identify skills gaps in order to address these in future work on research methods” (WISKER *et al.*, p. 389). According to Bitchener and Ferris (2012), these ‘conversations’ should allow learners to become gradually independent of the supervisor.

Case studies exploring writing of L1 and L2 students are even less frequent in the context of providing feedback. Biber *et al.* (2011) studied the effectiveness of feedback for L1-English and L2-English writing development through the analysis of 306 articles that address this topic. They found that the focus of investigation has been on the writing development of native English speakers. The authors explain “Through the 1980s, equal interest was found in the influence of feedback for both L1 and L2 learners of English” (BIBER *et al.*, 2011, p. 18). These studies were mainly oriented to learners of English as L2 rather than writing development. As a way of promoting writing development, Nassaji and Swain (2000, p. 34) refer to the concept of Vygotskian perspective explaining that “negotiated help provided within the learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) is more effective than help provided randomly.” Thus, feedback provided in a gradual and tuned way is more effective than random feedback. In this sense, any type of feedback may provide scaffolding strategies of improvement.

In this context, we propose a different perspective to study feedback. We consider it as a way to transmit the genre to be acquired (TAPIA-LADINO; ARANCIBIA; CORREA, 2016). Therefore, we understand written comments as a pedagogical genre (BAZERMAN, 2004) which consists of electronic or

manual annotations with at least one word. We also consider the process of writing as a part of an activity system (RUSSELL, 1997) in which the text is produced. In the case of thesis writing, the activity system consists of a framework of dialogic interactions among the different prototypical components of the system of this academic genre: participants (students, supervisors, and informant teachers), purposes (personal academic and institutional goals), and resources (institutional regulations, physical spaces, and resources).

In previous research (2016), the authors of this paper studied feedback in English as L2 and Spanish as L1 given to university students in the process of writing their seminar research projects in a google docs environment. In this study, 378 written comments given in 22 texts were analyzed in the light of second language feedback theoretical framework and the discourse genre theory. The results revealed that most of the feedback provided was explicit corrective, corrective with elicitation, and corrective with cued metalinguistic information.

In the light of the importance and potential impact that feedback has on students' development, it becomes relevant to know the type of comments supervisors provide. Some authors have classified written feedback or comments from different perspectives. Ellis (2009) proposes a typology for correcting linguistic errors in students written texts. The author proposes six strategies to provide written comments: direct corrective feedback (CF), indirect CF, metalinguistic CF, focus of CF, and electronic feedback and reformulation. Based on Ellis' proposal, this study considers three of the previous categories to analyze supervisors' corrective comments: direct, direct metalinguistic, and indirect metalinguistic.

In the case of written comments provided to dissertations, Bitchener (2009) proposes a genre-approach to comment students writing at postgraduate level. According to the author, a genre-approach provides "explicit understanding of how target texts are structured and why they are written the way they are (purpose & function)" (BITCHENER, 2009, p. 3). This way of commenting allows students to understand what is expected in each of the dissertation genre sections. Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014, p. 434) understand feedback as "messages about community expectations given to help students to develop their understanding of what is valued." Thus, written comments foster the acquisition of the target genre. In this regard, we propose the concept of genre-oriented comments (GOC). These are comments that allude to the characteristic aspects of the discourse genre to be achieved. In the case of the thesis genre, these comments refer to diverse aspects of the prototype sections of the manuscript, forms of academic attribution (citation system and voice), and discourse adequacy (grammar lexical patterns and style) (TAPIA-LADINO; ARANCIBIA; CORREA, 2016).

## **METHOD**

This study is part of a major research project aimed to study the role of written comments in the thesis writing process from supervisors' and undergraduate students' perspectives. This paper reports the analysis of 24 thesis drafts, half (12) written and commented in English by nonnative speakers of the language, and 12 written and commented by native speakers of Spanish. The objectives are (1) to study written corrective and genre-oriented comments that teachers use to provide feedback to the students writing and (2) find out whether the comments change through the development of students' consecutive drafts during one academic semester.

This is a descriptive qualitative study in the sense that data, written comments, are described following pre-determined concept categories as defined in the literature and emergent categories that emerge from the experts' validation process and the researchers' analysis of the written comments. The study also includes some quantitative aspects of descriptive frequency analysis. The study has an exploratory scope (MACKEY; GASS, 2005) because it has been hardly studied in the Chilean context. To ensure the ecological validity of the research,

the materials, participants, and setting of the study should approximate the real world that was being examined (STRAUSS; CORBIN, 1990). In this study, the material was collected from the dialogic cycle of receiving and providing feedback during the students' thesis writing process. No instructions were given to teachers about the quantity and mode of comments provided to the students' drafts.

## Participants

The participants of this study are eight thesis supervisor teachers all with PhD degrees from 2 different district universities. Four supervisors were native speakers of Spanish who guided and commented on theses in Spanish, and four were professors of English (who speak English as a second language) who guided and commented in their L2. All of them teach in Teacher Education programs in Spanish (4) and in English (4). It is important to mention that the university students, who wrote the texts commented by the supervisors, signed an informed consent before the research started. This consent received research ethics approval by the university ethical committee.

## Thesis Characteristics

At university level it is common to finish undergraduate studies with a final research project or thesis. This work informs the analysis and results of a research study in a discipline. This is a process in which an academic or supervisor, expert in a specific discipline, guides an undergraduate writer or a group of writers to develop their final research project which will allow them to give account of their knowledge to obtain an academic degree (VENEGAS, 2016). Therefore, the thesis is a genre (BAKHTIN, [1979] 2011) with a communicative purpose which communicates knowledge to a specialized audience in an academic disciplinary register (VENEGAS, 2016).

To build the corpus of written comments, teacher participants were asked to send a copy of the commented students' drafts to the researchers. This data was labeled with a code number that identified the university, teacher participant, major, and draft number. Comments and the part of the text alluded were organized into an Excel table. This process was carried out for each draft. Afterwards, the comments were categorized following the categories and subcategories of analysis explained in Table 2 and Table 3.

This study considered 24 drafts which included first, second, and third drafts of the final version of four theses written in English as a foreign language and four in Spanish as a first language. All drafts included written comments from the thesis supervisor teacher. Table 1 shows the average of comments every 1000 words in L1 and L2 theses by each draft.

**Table 1.** Average number of comments per 1000 words (C/1000)

	N°C	Total	C/1000	N° C	Total	C/1000	N° C	Total	C/1000
	D1	words		D2	words		D3	words	
L1	185	15.064	12.3	256	27.445	9.3	328	46.910	7
L2	119	7716	15.4	191	17.192	11	167	42.220	3.9

Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 shows that the average number of comments decreased from draft 1 to draft 3, in L1 and L2. In the case of L1 thesis the average number of comments decreased by 57% and in L2 by 25% in draft 3. As a whole, L1 teachers provided more comments than L2 teachers did (see Table 4). However, when calculating the average number of comments every 1000 words by each draft, L1

teachers provided an average of 28.6 comments every 1000 words and L2 teachers provided 30.3 (see Table 1). Therefore, when standardizing the number of comments, we can notice that the difference is lower and changes, that is, L2 teachers do provide more comments than L1 teachers as an average. To know if this difference was significant, we applied the U- Mann Whitney test. This is a non-parametric test that measures the heterogeneity of two independent samples, it allows to compare data that cannot be analyzed with parametric tests, like the T-Student test. The results were a P value higher than 0.05, therefore the difference is not significant.

The corpus of the study consisted of 1241 comments collected from the students' commented drafts. Each draft was registered in an Excel spreadsheet and the written comments, together with the alluded text of the students, were ORGANIZED respecting their original form. The information was coded by supervisor teacher, university, and major, draft delivery (1, 2, or 3), and written comments order (comment number). In a second phase, the data were coded according to the categories and subcategories of analysis. It is important to mention that only written verbal comments were considered for the analysis. Thus, marks, colors, or word control content change were not included.

### Categories of Analysis

The categories applied to describe the written comments were *Corrective* and *Genre-Oriented Comments*. These categories emerged from a theoretical revision based on typologies proposed to classify written comments to the process of writing academic texts (STRAUB; LUNSFORD, 1995; FERRIS, 1997; ELLIS, 2009; DUIJNHOUWER, 2010; HYLAND, 2010). In a first phase, three experts in academic writing research validated the categories proposed. In a second phase, a group of five academic experts in the field, validated them once again to define them and add preciseness. All the experts received a matrix with each category and subcategories, their corresponding definitions and examples of comments that illustrated each of the categories. The preliminary proposal considered 10 categories and 30 subcategories; after the experts' validation, five categories remained. The categories that were not considered were those that experts agree could characterize the same phenomenon. Out of the five categories consolidated of the main research, this paper considers two categories with their respective subcategories.

The third phase of the validation process was to pilot a sample of draft 1 written comments. This procedure was carried out following Duijnhouwer (2010), who proposes to analyze small samples of the corpus by each researcher first and then audit these results within the research group. This procedure allowed the researchers to identify and correct possible errors or differences in the coding of the information in the categories and subcategories and stabilize the corpus. To establish the reliability and validity of the written comments' classification, two external collaborators help us to code the comments to compare their classification with the one of the researchers. With the help of the Inter-rater reliability (IRR) package of the R software, version 3.1.3, Fleiss Kappa coefficient was estimated, which establishes the agreement inter collaborators and researchers in the application of each category. The lowest K value was .83 (corrective comments) while the highest K value was .88 (comments oriented to genre); this indicates that the level of agreement was particularly good and therefore reliable.

The definitions of the criteria of analysis applied were adapted following Ellis (2009) for corrective feedback. The author defines this type of comments as those that allude to any failure or mistake in the use of the language at any level, like grammatical or lexical issues, word, or sentence order, among others. The GOC category is proposed by the authors of this study (2017). GOC allude to the distinctive aspects of the discourse genre to be achieved which also includes linguistic aspects such as grammatical lexical patterns suitable for a particular genre; that is, these linguistic characteristics reflect

the way a particular genre is communicated. GOC are written comments the supervisor teacher offers to consecutive drafts, to promote the discourse conventions of a thesis in the student's text, in terms of discourse adequacy, academic attribution, and the prototypes sections of this genre. This type of comments main objective is to ensure that students' writing resembles as closely as possible to what the academic community regards as a thesis. Table 2 shows the subcategories for corrective comments.

**Table 2.** Corrective categories

Category	Subcategories	Definitions
Corrective Comments	Direct (D)	The correct form is provided
	Direct Metalinguistic (DM)	The correct form is provided, and an explanation is offered
	Indirect Metalinguistic (IM)	A clue is provided to solve the problem without giving the correct form

Source: own elaboration.

In the case of genre, we decided to consider it as a macro category due to diversity of data found and the wide range of aspects considered in this study for this category. Therefore, the final categorization of GOC is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Genre oriented comments

Macro category	Category	Sub-categories
Genre Comments	Prototype sections	Theme: relevance, pertinence, sufficiency of the content.
		Text organization: internal organization of the text.
		Communicative purpose: The micro or macro purpose of each part of the text.
	Academic attribution	Citation system: The use of citation to construct disciplinary knowledge by reporting or referencing prior research. Voice: To distinguish the writer's from cited authors 'voice'
	Activity System	A way to account for dynamic and ecological interactions between genres and their contexts of use (RUSSELL, 1997).
Discourse adequacy	Lexical grammatical patterns suitable for a particular genre. Style: The way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific genre of thesis writing.	

Source: own elaboration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of written comments provided by L1 and L2 participant teachers is 1241 comments from which L1 comments are 23% higher than L2 comments. Table 4 displays the number of written comments by drafts and by L1 or L2 supervisor teachers.



**Table 4.** L1 & L2 Number of written comments

L1&L2 Drafts	Total L1	Total L2	Total (L1 &L2)
1	185 (24%)	119 (25%)	304 (24%)
2	256 (33.3%)	191 (40%)	447 (36%)
3	328 (42.7%)	167 (35%)	495 (40%)
Total	769 (61.5%)	477 (38.5%)	1241 (100%)

Source: own elaboration.

As it was mentioned before the difference in the average of comments by every 1000 words of the text produced in L1 and in L2 is not significant. (See Table 1)

### Corrective Comments

The total number in this category is 560 corrective comments in L1 and L2 drafts, which represents 45% of the total amount of comments analyzed. L1 comments represent 69, 6% of them and L2 31%. Thus, we may say that L1 supervisor teachers tend to provide more corrective comments than L2 teachers do. This is an interesting tendency as most studies about providing feedback (HYLAND, 2003; FERRIS, 2004, 2015; HYLAND, 2004; FERRIS *et al.*, 2013; HAN; HYLAND, 2015) indicate that when correcting L2 student writers, supervisor teachers tend to provide direct corrective comments oriented to the use of the language. In this case, we can observe a different tendency; supervisor teachers do provide comments oriented to the language, but they are not predominantly direct corrective comments, but instead L2 supervisors tend to provide indirect metalinguistic comments. (IMC)

Table 5 shows the evidence of the sub-categories of corrective comments in each draft, commented by L1 and L2 supervisor teachers. As mentioned before, the category of corrective comments refers to those comments, which allude to any fail or mistake in the use of the language at any level.

**Table 5.** L1& L2 Corrective comments

Drafts	Direct Corrective		Direct Metacognitive		Indirect Metacognitive		Total	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
1	22(51%)	18(37.5%)	1(2%)	1(2%)	20(46.5%)	29(60%)	43(11%)	48(28%)
2	130(78%)	48(68.6%)	5(3%)	3(4%)	31(18.7%)	19(27%)	166(42.7%)	70(41%)
3	156(86.7%)	36(67.9%)	1(0.6%)	1(1.9%)	23(12.8%)	16(30%)	180(46%)	53(31%)
Total	308(79%)	102(58.8%)	7(1.8%)	5(2.9%)	74(19%)	64(37.4%)	389(100%)	171(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

As shown in the table above, the highest percentage of corrective comments in L1 and in L2 corresponds to Direct Comments (DC) and the lowest to Direct Metalinguistic Comments (DMC). The first are comments in which the supervisor teacher provides the correct form, and the latter are those comments in which the correct form is provided together with an explanation about the use of the language.

In the subcategory of DC, the results of L1 and L2 teachers show that they provide more DC than DMC and IMC, with L1 DC being 20% higher than L2 DC. L1 DC increase almost 36% from draft 1 to draft 3, while L2 DCs increase a 3% to draft 3. Some examples of DC are the following: (1) *Redactar en pasado.* / "Write in past"; (2) No capitalization is needed (vocabulary)

In the case of DMC, the trend observed is that comments tend to diminish from draft 2 to 3, both in L1 and L2 theses (2,0 % appr.). Some examples are the following: (1) *Me gusta más la palabra evolución, que es menos valorativa*/ “I like the word evolution better, which is less judgmental”; (2) “Rephrase, starting with...The environment does not contribute to the teaching of pron.”

A similar situation happens with IMC, which tend to decrease towards draft 3, in both L1 and L2 theses. IMC offer a clue to solve the problem without giving the correct form. Even though this type of comments decreases in draft 3, it is interesting to notice that L2 comments are 18% higher than in L1. Some evidence of these comments follows next: (1) *Queda un poco ambiguo.* / It is a bit ambiguous; (2) You need to reword this. To make it sound less harsh.

As we have shown L1 DCC are higher than L2 DCC. This may be explained by the fact the Spanish supervisors are L1 users of the language. Therefore, they have a higher proficiency in Spanish, and in its use in thesis writing context. And as the thesis circulates among the supervisors’ peers, they expect the thesis to be free of linguistics errors.

### Genre-oriented Comments (GOC)

As already stated, GOC point to a clear understanding of what is expected or required in each of the sections of the thesis genre. The total number of GOC is 681 comments in L1 and L2 theses. They correspond to 55% of the total comments analyzed. These are comments that do not refer to the linguistic aspects in the students’ texts. Table 6 shows the distribution of GOC by number of drafts.

Table 6. L1 & L2 Genre-oriented comments

GOC drafts	L1	L2	Total
1	152(75.2%)	51(25.2%)	202(29.7%)
2	95(50.0%)	96(50.5%)	190(28%)
3	171(59.6%)	116(40.4%)	287(42.1%)
Total	418(61.4%)	263(38.6%)	681(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

It is evident that the number of GOC in L1 is 23, 2% higher than in L2. However, it is interesting to notice that GOC in L1 decreased by 15, 5 % from draft 1 to draft 3 and L2 GOC increased by the same percentage (15, 6%) from draft 1 to draft 3. In general terms, GOC increased almost 13 % in L1 and L2 from draft 1 to draft 3. Tables 7 and 8 show in detail each of the categories of GOC by L1 and L2 drafts.

Table 7. L1 Genre-oriented comments

L1 Drafts	Prototype Sections	Academic Attribution	Activity System	Discourse Adequacy	Others	Total Genre
1	124(81.6%)	17(11%)	1(0.7%)	8(5.3%)	2(1.3%)	152(36.4%)
2	47(49.5%)	30(31.6%)	2(2.0%)	16(16.8%)	0(0%)	95(22.7%)
3	110(64.3%)	37(21.6%)	2(1.2%)	20(11.7%)	2(1%)	171(40.9%)
Total	281(67%)	84(20%)	5(1.2%)	44(10.5%)	4(0.96%)	418(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

**Table 8.** L2 Genre-oriented comments

L2 Drafts	Prototype sections	Academic attribution	Activity System	Discourse Adequacy	Others	Total Genre
1	22(43%)	15(29.4%)	3(5.9%)	10(20%)	1(2%)	51(19.5%)
2	50(52%)	39(40.6%)	0(0%)	7(7.4%)	0(0%)	96(36.4%)
3	48(41.4%)	57(49%)	4(3.4%)	6(5%)	1(0.9%)	116(44.4%)
Total	120(45.6%)	111(41.8%)	7(1.5%)	23(9.6%)	2(0.8%)	263(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

This macro category shows that from draft 1 to draft 3, L2 comments increase more (25%) than L1 comments (4,8%). Within the categories, we can observe that prototypical sections evidence the highest percentage of comments in L1 (67, 1%) and L2 (47, 1%). These comments refer to the different sections of a thesis alluding to the following aspects or subcategories: theme, text organization, and communicative purpose. Most of the comments allude to the theme of the section referring to the relevance, pertinence, or sufficiency. For example: (1) *Vincular con el objeto de estudio que se está delimitando.* / Link with the object of the study, which is delimited, (2) I do not see a hierarchical structure in your literature review. This is very important in order to organize the content.

It is important to note that the results show an initial tendency towards what Bitchener (2009) calls a genre-approach, which corresponds to comments that refer to the prototypical sections of a thesis. Moreover, the findings evidence a difference with Bitchener and Basturkmen (2010). In this case, comments oriented to the different sections of the thesis are the highest both in L1 and L2 theses. It was also possible to evidence that in the category activity system the number of comments both in L1 and L2 thesis are low. As previously mentioned, the category of prototype sections considers six different subcategories which are described in Table 9.

**Table 9.** L1 & L2 Prototype sections

Drafts	Theme		Text org.		Communicative purpose		Total	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
1	67(54%)	16(72.7%)	50(40%)	3(13.6%)	7(5.6%)	3(13.6%)	24(43.8%)	22(18.3%)
2	37(78.7%)	31(62%)	5(10.6%)	18(36%)	5(10.6%)	1(2%)	47(16.7%)	50(41.7%)
3	47(42.7%)	34(70.8%)	47(42.7%)	10(21%)	16(14.4%)	4(8%)	110(14.5%)	48(40%)
Total	151(54%)	81(67.5%)	102(36%)	31(26%)	28(10%)	8(6.7%)	281(100%)	120(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

In general terms, the distribution of comments related to these subcategories show a similar tendency in terms of quantity. As is shown in Table 9, the subcategory theme has the highest percentages, both in L1 (54%) and L2 drafts (67,5%). Thus, supervisor teachers tend to provide more comments related to the pertinence, sufficiency, and relevance of the ideas. Likewise, Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014) found in their study that written comments (WC) oriented to content were the second higher in quantity after linguistic corrections or comments. The authors note that this tendency towards content might be a way that supervisors use to let the students know their expertise on the topic. Paltridge and Starfield (2007) explain that student writers need to persuade these experts that they can be part of the community.

Following Hyland (1999), academic attribution is the use of citation to construct disciplinary knowledge by reporting or referencing prior research, aiming at distinguishing the writer's from cited authors' voice. This category includes two subcategories: citation system and voice. Citation system category refers to the appropriate use of APA conventions in this case, and voice relates to the appropriate

distinctions of the writer's from cited authors' voice. The distribution of comments by each subcategory is displayed in table 10.

**Table10.** L1 & L2 academic attribution

Drafts	Citation System		Voice		Total	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
1	9(52.9%)	15(100%)	8(47.1%)	0(0%)	17(20%)	15(13.5%)
2	15(50%)	35(89.7%)	15(50%)	4(10.3%)	30(36%)	39(35.1%)
3	20(54.1%)	53(92.9%)	17(45.9%)	4(7.0%)	37(44%)	57(51.4%)
Total	44(52.4%)	103(92.8%)	40(47.6%)	8(7.2%)	84(100%)	111(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

As it can be observed, most of the comments in L1 and L2 drafts refer to citation system, with comments in L2 40% higher than in L1. The comments of voice and citation system in L1 are quite balanced; nevertheless, the opposite situation happens in L2, considering that the evidence of voice type comments is reduced (7%). Thus, L2 teachers seem more interested in the citation system and L1 teachers in the citation system and voice. This tendency may show the importance supervisor teachers give to different aspects of the thesis writing and their interest on focusing students' attention on these genre features 'for admission to an area of study' (PALTRIDGE; STARFIELD, 2007, p. 4). Some evidence of these subcategories is the following comments: (1) *¿Esta definición es original? / Is this definition original?*; (2) *Please, make sure you use APA style all the way.*

In the case of the activity system category, evidence is scarce: 2% in L1 and 1.5% in L2 texts. Activity system refers to the dialect relation between genres, subjects, motives, and means (BAZERMAN, 2004; RUSSELL, 1997). In the case of the thesis genre, the activity system considers supervisor teachers and students (subjects); the production and improvement of student thesis in relation to what is expected by the academic community (motive); and the mediational means including the physical space of the classroom or tutor's office in this case and the discussion of the feedback provided. The interaction of these components constitutes the system.

Even though the examples of this category are limited, it was included to note that they are present in both L1 and L2 theses. Some examples of this category are the following: (1) *Yo les prestaré un libro en que sale bien explicado/ I will lend you a book in which it is well explained*; (2) *Or let's discuss (it) in our next meeting.*

As it is evident, most of the comments imply a conversation or discussion with the guide or supervisor teacher. Thus, the comments foster interaction among the subjects involved with the aim of improving students' texts. In this sense, Bazerman (1994, p. 175) states that in "the mutual creation of social moments" the subjects (guide teachers and students) share, by way of genre, the understanding of where they are, and what they can do.

Discourse adequacy subcategory refers to the lexical-grammatical patterns suitable for this genre and style. Style is the way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific genre of thesis writing. This subcategory also shows a low percentage of evidence, 10, 5% in L1 and 9, 6% in L2. The highest percentages correspond to those in draft 2 L1 (16, 8%) and draft 1 L2 (20%). Some examples are: (1) *The language is now more scientific in nature (concise, precise, clear, and unambiguous). It roughly covers the contents I expected.*, (2) *Evite la frecuencia del uso del "nos", trate de usar el impersonal/ Avoid the frequency use of 'we', try to use the impersonal.*

Most of the comments refer to style and the avoidance of personal discourse. These aspects are the ones considered as subcategories; the data related to them is in Table 11.

**Table 11.** L1 & L2 Discourse adequacy

Drafts	Lexical-grammatical patterns		Style		Total	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
1	1(12.5%)	4(40%)	7(87.5%)	6(60%)	8(18.2%)	10(43.5%)
2	5(31.3%)	4(57.1%)	11(68.8%)	3(42.9%)	16(36.4%)	7(30.4%)
3	3(15%)	2(33.3%)	17(85%)	4(66.7%)	20(45.5%)	6(26.1%)
Total	9(21%)	10(43.5%)	35(79%)	13(56.5%)	44(100%)	23(100%)

Source: own elaboration.

In both cases (L1 & L2), the comments related to style are more frequent; especially in L1 drafts, style comments are almost 23% higher than in L2. In contrast, comments oriented to lexical-grammatical patterns are 23% higher in L2 drafts. This tendency of orienting L2 comments towards linguistic accuracy, understood as the correct use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary; as this study is focused on written production, linguistic accuracy refers to grammar and vocabulary only. Appropriateness of the text is also found in Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014), Bitchener and Ferris (2012), Hyland and Hyland (2010). Authors such as Hyland (2004) and Paltridge and Starfield (2007) emphasize the importance of style and point out that the way writers organize or “shape their arguments” (HYLAND, 2004, p. 134) impacts on the reader and/or on the academic community they want to be accepted in.

As it was evidenced before, by providing GOC, L1 and L2 supervisors reflect their focus on the genre aspects of the thesis, especially prototype sections and the citation system. L2 supervisors' comments are more oriented to lexical grammatical patterns than L1 supervisors, which may be explained by the fact that L2 supervisors are L2 users of English and therefore have a higher concern to demonstrate their students' and their own proficiency in the second language.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has offered information about the written comments provided to students' thesis in L1 and in L2. The main objective was to analyze the characteristics of the feedback provided by L1 and L2 supervisor teachers from the perspective of corrective and genre-oriented comments. The research also aimed at investigating whether these comments changed during writing and feedback process. This has become relevant to us since most research in L2 has been oriented to analyze the impact of corrective feedback in the students writing and research in L1 is less frequent

As a conclusion and answering the first research question: Do teachers provide GOC? It is possible to conclude that supervisor teachers do provide GOC. Out of 1241 comments provided to the thesis in L1 and L2, the majority (55%) corresponds to GOC. In addition, GO comments in L1 are higher than in L2 thesis. This is evidence of teachers' awareness to guide the students to write a text which progressively adopt the characteristics of the genre to be achieved. Therefore, if we refer to the second research question: Are corrective comments more predominant than GOC? the data indicates that this type of comments corresponds to a 45% of the total comments provided. Consequently, GOC are more predominant than Corrective Comments

Referring to the third research question stated: Do comments change in type and quantity through the consecutive drafts? In the case of the quantity of GOCs, L1 supervisors provide more comments of this type in the first draft and L2 supervisors in the second. It is feasible to think that participants perceive first drafts as an important chance to modify the text in terms of its meaning and the expectations of the audience. Another way of explaining this is the fact that L1 students are native speakers of the language, so this may allow supervisor teachers to comment more on genre issues, rather than linguistics aspects. In

a study carried out by Bitchener and Basturkmen (2010) with 35 thesis supervisors of different disciplines, the authors find out that the participant supervisors prefer to focus on the macro topics of the writing, so students are not distracted and supervisors delay feedback on linguistic aspects.

Regarding the type of corrective comments L1 and L2 supervisors offer, the tendency in both cases is to provide corrective direct comments. However, L1 supervisor teachers provide more direct corrective comments (79%) than L2 teachers (59%) do. This is an interesting finding, because most of the studies related to feedback in L2 writing conclude that teachers correcting L2 writers tend to focus more on the linguistic accuracy of the students' text. If we consider that feedback should be oriented towards the students' needs (FERRIS, 2015), and it is well known that one of the main needs of L2 writers is to produce linguistically accurate texts (HYLAND, 1999; BITCHENER *et al.*, 2011), therefore L2 supervisors may easily think they need to provide feedback about the linguistics issues. However, when writers produce consecutive drafts, they prefer comments on ideas (HYLAND, 2003; FERRIS *et al.*, 2013); these preferences may also have an influence on the type of comments supervisors provide.

In relation to the findings in the subcategories of GOC, the evidence shows that on both L1 and L2 theses, the comments oriented to genre refer to the prototypical aspects of the thesis. In L2, comments related to academic attributions are more than 50% higher than comments in L1. In the category of prototypical section, the aspect most commented on is the theme of the thesis, that is, comments related to the sufficiency, pertinence, and relevance of the content studied. In this same line, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2010) found that supervisors' most frequent comments were related to gaps in theoretical understanding and coverage of the thesis topics and gaps in coverage of new literature available in the field. Our results are like the findings of Narvaja de Arnoux (2006) at postgraduate level, that on the main thesis students' problem is to state a relevant research problem. In this context, the results related to the content of the thesis show that the supervisors focus on the content accuracy and relevance of the thesis.

As an overall conclusion results indicate that there are some differences in the way L1 and L2 supervisor teachers comment. On the one hand, L1 supervisor teachers make more direct comments in the first draft, and L2 teachers make more comments of this type in the third draft. On the other hand, L2 teachers provide fewer corrective comments than L1 teachers provide.

It was also possible to find some similarities between L1 and L2 teachers: both supervisor teachers are oriented to provide genre-oriented comments. It is interesting to note that results show an important amount of genre-oriented comments. This may reveal the supervisor teachers focus on the production of a text that can progressively adopt the characteristics of the genre to achieve. According to Sommers (2013), this focus evidences the responsibilities supervisor teachers assume with their students' texts and how this commitment fosters students' improvement. Some of our previous findings reveal that students value the quantity and detailed comments teachers provide and consider them as a sign of the supervisor teachers' commitment with the task.

Finally, it is relevant to mention the dialogic and systematic characteristics of the written feedback provided; this may foster the learning or acquisition of any particular discourse genre. In these lines, and following Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014), this research evidences that comments to the consecutive drafts that students produce allow the students to enter into the practices and values of the academic community that thesis students aspire to be part of.

## REFERENCES

- ASKEHAVE, I.; SWALES, J. Genre identification and Communicative Purpose: A problem and a possible solution. *Applied Linguistics*, v. 22, n. 2, p. 195-212, 2001.
- BAKHTIN, M. *Estética de la creación verbal*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, [1979] 2011.
- BASTURKMEN, H. E. M.; BITCHENER, J. Supervisors' on-script feedback comments on drafts of dissertations: Socialising students into the academic discourse community. *Teaching in Higher Education*, v. 19, n. 4, p. 432-445, 2014. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.752728>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- BAZERMAN, C. *Constructing experience*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1994.
- BAZERMAN, C. Speech acts, genres, and activity systems: How texts organize activity and people. In: PRIOR, P.; BAZERMAN, C. (ed.). *What writing does and how it does it*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. p. 309-339.
- BIBER, D. et al. *The Effectiveness of Feedback for L1-English and L2-Writing Development: A Meta-Analysis*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University, 2011.
- BITCHENER, J. A Genre Approach to Understanding Empirically Based Thesis Writing. Good Practice Publication Grants. *AKO AOTEAROA*, p. 1-11, 2009. Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/62217343/A-Genre-Approach-to-Understanding-Empirically-Based>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- BITCHENER, J. et al. *Best Practice in Supervisor Feedback to Thesis Students*. Wellington: New Zealand: Ako Aotearoa, 2011.
- BITCHENER, J.; BASTURKMEN, H. The Focus of Supervisor Written Feedback to Thesis/Dissertation Students. *International Journal of English Studies*, v. 10, n. 2, p. 79-97, 2010.
- BITCHENER, J.; FERRIS, D. R. *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- BITCHENER, J.; KNOCH, U. Written corrective feedback studies: Approximate replication of Bitchener & Knoch (2010a) and Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken (2012). *Language Teaching*, v. 48, n. 3, p. 405-414, 2015. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444815000130>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- BITCHENER, J.; STORCH, N. *Written Corrective Feedback for L2 Development*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2016.
- BITCHENER, J.; YOUNG, S.; CAMERON, D. The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, v. 14, n. 3, p. 191-205, 2005. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222682464\\_The\\_effect\\_of\\_different\\_types\\_of\\_feedback\\_on\\_ESL\\_student\\_writing](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222682464_The_effect_of_different_types_of_feedback_on_ESL_student_writing). Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- CHRISTIANSEN, M. S.; BLOCH, J. Papers are never finished, just abandoned: The role of written teacher comments in the revision process. *Journal of Response to Writing*, v. 2, n. 1, p. 6-42, 2016.
- DUIJNHOUWER, H. *Feedback effects on student's writing motivation, process and performance*. 2010. Thesis (Doutorate) – Universiteit Utrecht, Utrecht, 2010. Available at: <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/43968/duijnhouwer.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.

- ELLIS, R. Corrective Feedback and Teacher Development. *L2 Journal*, v. 1, n. 1, p. 3-18, 2009. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/l2.v1i1.9054>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- FERRIS, D. R. [Interview given to] Laurel Waller. *MA TESOL Program*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2015.
- FERRIS, D. R. *et al.* Written corrective feedback for individual L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, v. 22, p. 307-329, 2013.
- FERRIS, D. R. The “Grammar Correction” Debate in L2 Writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime?). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, v. 13, n. 1, p. 49-62, 2004. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.005>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- FERRIS, D. The influence of teacher commentary on student revision, *Tesol Quarterly*, v. 31, n. 2, p. 315-339, 1997.
- HAN, Y.; HYLAND, F. Exploring learner engagement with written corrective feedback in a Chinese tertiary EFL classroom. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, v. 30, p. 31-44, 2015. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2015.08.002>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- HYLAND, F. Focusing on form: Student engagement with teacher feedback. *System*, v. 31, p. 217-230, 2003.
- HYLAND, K. Academic Attribution: Citation and the Construction of Disciplinary Knowledge. *Applied Linguistics*, v. 20, n. 3, p. 341-367, 1999.
- HYLAND, K. Disciplinary interactions: metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, v. 13, p. 133-151, 2004.
- HYLAND, K. *Genre and Second Language Writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- HYLAND, K. *Teaching and Researching Writing*. New York, Routledge, 2010. (Applied Linguistics in Action).
- HYLAND, K.; HYLAND, F. *Feedback in Second Language Writing*. Contexts an Issues. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- MACKEY, A.; GASS, S. *Second Language Research*. Methodology and design. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- NARVAJA DE ARNOUX, E. Incidencia de la lectura de pares y expertos en la reescritura de tramos del trabajo de tesis. *Revista de lingüística teórica y aplicada – RLA*, v. 44, n. 1, p. 95-118, 2006.
- NASSAJI, H.; SWAIN, M. A Vygotskian Perspective on Corrective Feedback in L2: The Effect of Random Versus Negotiated Help on the Learning of English Articles. *Language Awareness*, v. 9, n. 1, p. 34-51, 2000. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658410008667135>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- PALTRIDGE, B.; STARFIELD, S. *Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: a handbook for supervisors*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- RUSSELL, D. R. Rethinking Genre in School and Society. *Written Communication*, v. 14, n. 4, p. 504-554, 1997. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088397014004004>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- SOMMERS, N. *Responding to Student Writers*. Boston; New York: Bedford; St. Martin's, 2013.



- STRAUB, R.; LUNSFORD, R. *Twelve Readers Reading*. Reading to College Student Writing. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995.
- STRAUSS, A. L.; CORBIN, J. *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.
- TAPIA-LADINO, M.; ARANCIBIA, M.; CORREA VENEGAS, R. Hacia un modelo retórico-discursivo del macrogénero Trabajo Final de Grado en Licenciatura. *Revista Signos*, v. 49, n. S1, p. 247-279, 2016.
- VENEGAS, R. Hacia un modelo retórico-discursivo del macrogénero Trabajo Final de Grado en Licenciatura. *Revista Signos*, v. 49, n. S1, p. 247-279, 2016.
- VYGOTSKY, L. Interaction between learning and development. In : GAUVAIN, M.; COLE, M. (ed.). *Readings on the development of children*. New York: W. H. Freeman & Company, 1997. p. 34-41.
- WISKER, G. *et al.* From Supervisory Dialogues to Successful PhDs: Strategies supporting and enabling the learning conversations of staff and students at postgraduate level. *Teaching in Higher Education*, v. 8, n. 3, p. 383-397, 2003. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510309400>. Accessed on: 15 Jan. 2021.
- YUDGAR TÓFALO, G. Feedback and Process Writing: 'Dialog Boxes' as a Tool to Develop Written Conferencing Between Instructor and EFL Student Writers at an Advanced Level. *Humanising Language Teaching*, v. 14, n. 2, Apr. 2012.