

Training of university teachers in interdisciplinary postgraduate courses. Difficulties in writing the Thesis Plan

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Abstract

Introduction: Postgraduate studies allow university graduates to continue their professional development, even in disciplines different from their previous studies. To this end, postgraduate courses require students to prepare a thesis plan as a prior step to completing a thesis, a central requirement of this educational level. These requirements involve knowledge that is not always provided in the various graduate courses. **Objective:** In this context, in this paper we present an analysis of the main writing difficulties identified in Thesis Plans written by university teachers from different areas of knowledge within the framework of a master's degree in university teaching training in Argentina. **Method:** For this, 13 thesis plans presented to pass the final Master's Seminar are compiled and adopted as units of analysis. An exhaustive correction of each Plan is made; then, the difficulties encountered are categorized into microstructural, macrostructural and superstructural (Van Dijk, 1980) and in turn subcategorized. **Results:** The results show a significant amount and variety of difficulties in the three categories in all the students. **Conclusion:** From the amount and variety of difficulties found, the need to design and implement comprehensive teaching practices to complete the thesis is concluded.

Keywords: writing; postgraduate; learning difficulties; educational sciences.

Formación de profesores universitarios en posgrados interdisciplinarios. Dificultades en la escritura del plan de tesis

Resumen

Introducción: Los estudios de posgrado permiten a los graduados universitarios continuar su desarrollo profesional, incluso en áreas disciplinares diferentes a las de sus estudios previos. A tal fin, los posgrados exigen a los cursantes la elaboración de un Plan de tesis previo a la realización de una tesis, requisito central de este nivel educativo. Estos requerimientos suponen conocimientos que no siempre se proporcionan en las diversas carreras de grado. **Objetivo:** En

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este contexto, se presenta un análisis de las principales dificultades de escritura identificadas en Planes de Tesis elaborados por profesores universitarios provenientes de diferentes áreas del saber en el marco de una maestría de formación en docencia universitaria de Argentina. **Método:** Para ello, se compilan 13 Planes de tesis presentados para aprobar el Seminario final adoptados como unidades de análisis. Se realiza una corrección exhaustiva de cada Plan y a continuación, las dificultades encontradas son categorizadas en microestructurales, macroestructurales y superestructurales (Van Dijk, 1980) y subcategorizadas. **Resultados:** Los resultados dan cuenta de una cantidad y variedad importante de dificultades en las tres categorías en todos los cursantes. **Conclusión:** De esta cantidad y variedad de dificultades se concluye la necesidad de diseñar e implementar prácticas de enseñanza integrales para culminar la tesis.

Palabras clave: escritura; posgrado; dificultad de aprendizaje; ciencias de la educación.

Introduction

Writing at the university is characterized by the production of discursive genres of a scientific and professional nature, such as reports, articles, monographs, theses, among others (Swales, 2004). Discursive genres are understood as the relatively fixed types of utterances that circulate within social spheres of verbal communication (Bakhtin, 2002). Likewise, texts are conceived as verbal productions empirically carried out in different formats that vary according to the particularities of the communicative situation in which they are produced (Bronckart, 2004). Thus, in each social communicative production, the articulation of three aspects is expected: thematic content, verbal style, and composition.

In this sense, the production of academic texts also follows canons. In the case of graduate level education, in order to obtain master's and doctoral degrees, a written and defended thesis is expected as the final product. For this, thesis writers need to present an appropriately structured text, according to the guidelines of a given discursive community (Swales, 1990). However, the previous and fundamental step to writing a thesis is writing

a thesis plan, which also follows specific patterns. In the genre in question, the following is expected: an introduction that contextually presents the research problem and the objectives; a review of the background and the theoretical framework; the selected method; and a schedule of activities. Although the goal is appropriate, its attainment is a real challenge for the actors involved and has been the subject of numerous reflections (Arnoux, 2009; Carlino, 2013).

In a review of the literature in Spanish on graduate level writing, Chois and Jaramillo (2016) observed a greater number of studies conducted in Argentina compared to other countries. The authors noted that 32 of the 39 projects analyzed focused on students' written production. In addition, they found students' writing and reading problems among the most frequent, as do other graduate level studies (Pozzo, 2019; Borioli, 2019).

Previous research on academic writing (Arroyo González & Gutierrez Braojos, 2016; Castro Azuara & Sánchez Camargo, 2016; Coronado-Hijón, 2017; Núñez Cortés & Errázuriz Cruz, 2020) has revealed shortcomings among university students. The difficulties are framed in the formal, structural, and discursive domains and in the role of author researcher (absence of the authorial voice).

We draw from the literature addressing academic writing at the university level in general (Cassany, 2009; Klein, 2007; Schere, 2020) and at the graduate level in particular (Eco, 1998; Giraldo-Giraldo, 2020; Nishida, 2020; Mendoza Ramos, 2014; Rodríguez Hernández & García Valero, 2015), and from the socio-discursive interactionism to characterize the textual genre (Bronckart, 2004).

On the other hand, three major categories were identified as appropriate criteria for the analysis of written productions (Fuenmayor, Villasmil, & Rincón, 2008): microstructure, macrostructure, and superstructure difficulties (Van Dijk, 1980).

Microstructure relates to the lexicon, grammar, and structure of the propositions in a text; therefore, it is of a local nature. It is made up of a set of mechanisms that allow for linearity in the text and connect its different parts (syntagmas, sentences, paragraphs, fragments) with each other and with the context. It comprises elements of cohesion (punctuation, connectives, discourse

markers, and verbal relations) which allow the articulation of ideas. It takes into account the grammar idiosyncrasies of the language in which it is produced and of semantics in its superficial sense (Cassany, 2009; Ilich & Morales, 2004; Van Dijk, 1980).

Macrostructure refers to the more global structure of the text, i.e., it represents a logical chain of ideas that are observable from the identification of the topic addressed and its thematic progression. It is materialized, especially, in the coherence between paragraphs and their coherence with the central idea presented in the text (Ilich & Morales, 2004; Rueda, 2007; Van Dijk, 1980). In addition, it is basically pragmatic and semantic in nature—in its deepest sense (Cassany, 2009).

With regard to superstructure, this is where the genre adequacy of the text is framed. In this sense, the problems of style and graphic presentation conventions are considered: margins, fonts, line spacing, etc. (Van Dijk, 1980).

Considering this context, the aim of this work is to identify the writing difficulties of the discursive genre thesis plan, considering the three main parameters described. These texts are expected to have a feasible and rigorous research plan for an interdisciplinary graduate degree—specifically, the Master's Degree in University Teaching at an Argentine public university (Gioffredo & Pozzo, 2015), being their primary academic space of circulation the seminar aimed to be passed and the school where the graduate program is taught, as well as the scientific community. By characterizing the difficulties of graduate students, it is hoped to provide more effective writing strategies (Pozzo, 2020).

Method

Design

This study is methodologically framed in a case study, approached from a descriptive perspective (Stake, 1998). In this regard, the case corresponds to the Thesis Seminar, taught by the first author of this publication as part of the Master's Degree in University Teaching of Universidad Tecnológica Nacional de Argentina in one of its regional

schools. This seminar is the closest support in terms of writing related to research, since there is no specific seminar for this purpose in the curriculum, which is consistent with what has been observed in other graduate programs (Coronado-Hijón, 2017; Nishida, 2020). This fact shows that it is assumed that a graduate professional has mastered writing or has, at most, slight difficulties. The work is based on the analysis of a textual corpus composed of 13 thesis plans collected in December 2019 with a complete cohort.

Units of analysis

The units of analysis of the present study are, as previously stated, the thesis plans. Their authors are professors at different university programs; seven are between 30 and 40 years old, and the other half, between 40 and 60. They are graduates of the following programs, in the numbers indicated: Nursing (2), Medicine (2), Chemical Engineering (1), Civil Engineering (1), Veterinary Medicine (3), Speech Therapy (1), Kinesiology (1), Marketing (1), and Sociology (1). As can be seen, the group was quite heterogeneous in terms of their specialization. Such multiplicity of disciplines is one of the characteristics of this master's degree, since it offers teaching training for professionals from different areas.

The thesis plans were produced following the model of the respective university, which consists of the following sections: justification of the chosen topic, theoretical foundation, objectives, method of data collection, feasibility, schedule, and bibliographic references. As can be seen, it responds to what is conventionally established (Pozzo, 2020). The plans were presented to the professor in charge of the above mentioned seminar to pass the course. It also becomes an element to evaluate them at the national level for formal acceptance as master's students.

Procedure

In order to proceed with the analyses, each text was coded, and the author's area of training is shown in Table 1. This information is presented for reference, since the link between writing difficulties and the area of academic training does not represent our objective.

First, an exhaustive textual correction of the thesis plans was carried out in terms of linguistic, discursive, and academic convention inadequacies of the genre. The next step was to analyze the errors and categorize them. From the analysis, three main areas of difficulties present in the students' texts were established: microstructure, macrostructure, and superstructure, detailing in each case the type of error presented.

Data Analysis

The difficulties found were reported considering the frequency of their occurrence in the written texts for an overview of the problem (Table 2).

In order to better interpret the data, a descriptive record was made of the most recurrent difficulties faced by the students when writing a thesis plan. Throughout the analysis, fragments were selected to exemplify the discussions carried out. These fragments were reproduced as they appear in the texts of the corpus, identified by their respective numbers.

Results and Discussion

Based on the corrections made to the texts, the main writing difficulties of the students were identified and classified into three major categories and subcategories. Thus, a total of 64 items were obtained (Tables 2, 3, and 4).

In the following sections, we characterize and discuss fragments of the corpus that represent the most recurrent difficulties to the students. In some cases, possible solutions are also proposed.

Microstructure Difficulties

Microstructure difficulties refer to occurrences within the limits of the sentence. The most relevant problems from this perspective, on the one hand, are related to the inadequate use or omission of punctuation and accents. On the other hand, there are *stylistic* problems which compromise the accuracy of information in the text or its appropriateness to the genre, even influencing aspects of its macrostructure. The most evident problems within the above-mentioned categories are indicated and exemplified below.

Table 1.
Coding of the Texts and Program of the Students-Authors of the Texts

Text code	Program of the student-author of the text
1	<i>Marketing</i>
2	<i>Nursing</i>
3	<i>Medicine</i>
4	<i>Chemical Engineering</i>
5	<i>Kinesiology and Physiatry</i>
6	<i>Civil Engineering</i>
7	<i>Nursing</i>
8	<i>Medicine</i>
9	<i>Speech Therapy</i>
10	<i>Veterinary</i>
11	<i>Sociology</i>
12	<i>Veterinary</i>
13	<i>Veterinary</i>

Table 2.
Microstructure Difficulties

Categories	Subcategories	Text code													Total	%
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
Punctuation and Accent mark	Comma: omission; improper use.		1	5	1	6	1	3	3	3	4	1	8	1	45	32,1
	Colon: omission.	3	1	1	1			1	1	1	1		1		11	7,9
	Semicolon: absence; inappropriate use.					1		1	1	3				1	7	5,0
	Accent: omission; inappropriate use.		3	1	1	1	1	3	2	8	2	1	6		29	20,7
	Parenthesis: unnecessary use.				1					1					2	1,4
	Quotation marks: unnecessary use.						1								1	0,7
	Ellipsis: unnecessary use.												1		1	0,7
Style	Capital letters: unnecessary use.	1								2	1	1		5	3,6	
	Capital letters: omission.		1											1	0,7	
	Sentence connectors: omission.						1			1		4		6	4,3	
	Sentence connectors: unnecessary or inappropriate use.					1					1	3		5	3,6	
	Sentence fragments.		1	1		3						1		6	4,3	
	Construction of objectives without the use of infinitive verbs.		1											1	0,7	
	Close repetition of the same term.			2				2						4	2,9	
	Use of colloquial language.			2	1	1		2	1				3	10	7,1	
	Lack of verbal correlativity.			1						1				2	1,4	
	Inappropriate use of relative pronouns.									1				1	0,7	
	Absence of nominal or verbal agreement.			2			1							3	2,1	
TOTAL														140	100%	

Table 3.
Macrostructure Difficulties

Categories	Subcategories	Text code													Total	%
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
Cohesion and Coherence	Inconsistency between ideas and/or objectives (and between paragraphs).	3	1	2	5	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	24	18,6
	Lack of cohesion between the end of one section and the beginning of another or between paragraphs.				1	1	1		1		2				6	4,7
	Incomplete/imprecise information.	3	1	1	11	2	4	4		2	3	3	5	2	41	31,8
	Incomplete sections.				1							1			2	1,6
	Sentences that are too long.	1	1						1		2				5	3,9
	Sentences that are too short.							2	1	1	2				6	4,7
	Paragraphs that are too short.					1									1	0,8
	Repetition of syntagmas/ideas.			1		1									2	1,6
	Different topics in the same paragraph or sentence.		1	1	1										3	2,3
	Inadequate paragraph division (with respect to the subject).					2			1			2			5	3,9
	Absence of discourse markers indicating change of ideas between paragraphs.		1						1		1				3	2,3
	Absence of discourse marker to indicate the beginning of a sentence.	1													1	0,8
	Unnecessary use of discourse marker.		2												2	1,6
	Inappropriate use of personalization terms.			1	1										2	1,6
	Absence of compelling language.			1					1		3		4	1	10	7,8
	Inappropriate use of compelling language.				1										1	0,8
	Inappropriate use of terms denoting imposition/moralism.				1										1	0,8
	Topics placed in sections to which they do not correspond.	2			1					1	1			2	7	5,4
	Use of bibliographic references that do not correspond to the subject.				1										1	0,8
	Lack of focus on the problematization (there are several questions).						1								1	0,8
Use of different words as equivalents (example: "writing" and "literacy").			2	3										5	3,9	
TOTAL														129	100%	

Tabla 4.
Superstructure Difficulties

Categories	Subcategories	Text code													Total	%	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13			
Methodological options	Inconsistency in the classification of the type of research.	1			1											2	1,9
	Lack of definition of the type of research.			1			1									2	1,9
	Lack of information about methodological procedures.				1	1										2	1,9
	Weakness in the justification of the focus of the work.	1								1	1				1	4	3,8
	Failure to present the sample type.				1			1								2	1,9
	Number of informants chosen for the study not indicated or not justified.		1			1										2	1,9
	Absence of specific objectives.						1									1	0,9
Generic standardization (academic writing)	Omission of page numbers in citations.	1			1			1	1	1					5	4,7	
	Inappropriate use of quotation marks in long quotations.			1			1			2	1			1	6	5,7	
	Omission of parentheses where required.	3													3	2,8	
	Unnecessary and inappropriate use of initials of authors' names in the middle of the text.		1												1	0,9	
	Repeated use of authors' last names in the middle of the text.				3										3	2,8	
	Mixing of scientific writing standardization systems throughout the paper.			1		1									2	1,9	
	Incomplete bibliographic references.			4	4	3		2	1	4	1	2	1	1	23	21,7	
	Errors in the standardization of bibliographic references.	3	2		2	1		1	3	5	4	1		1	23	21,7	
	Inadequate margins.					1									1	0,9	
	Failure to clarify acronyms or improper use of acronyms.			1			1		2						4	3,8	
	Document references						1								1	0,9	
	with no mention of the institution that is the author of the document.						1								1	0,9	
	Absence of the "References" section.						1							1	2	1,9	
Use of sections out of the sequential order appropriate to the thesis project genre.			1									1		2	1,9		
Estandarización genérica (cronograma)	Metalanguage: absence of resources that distinguish metalanguage.	1							1						2	1,9	
	Inconsistency in the order of activities in the schedule.		2	1				1	2	1			1		8	7,5	
	Listing of repeated activities.							3							3	2,8	
	Absence of a schedule.											1			1	0,9	
TOTAL															106	100%	

It is observed that the most recurrent difficulties in textual microstructure are found in the subcategory of punctuation and accent mark. Of all the difficulties in microstructure, 32.1% correspond to problems in the use of the comma. In this respect, the omission or inadequate use of the comma is mentioned as an example. The following is one of the cases most frequently identified as comma omission problems.

- *The curriculum reform was based, among other things on the need to strengthen and enhance the graduate profile... (T6)*

The previous fragment shows the absence of the comma, since its use is required to separate explanatory/explicative expressions within the enunciation. In this case, "among other issues" is an explanatory expression.

The following example is characterized by the inappropriate use of the comma. The inappropriateness, in this context, lies in the use of the comma between the subject and the predicate.

- *Finally, it is concluded that the cell phone as an educational mediator, has a series of advantages/disadvantages and "myths"...(T1)*

Another problem found in the subcategory comma concerns the use of the accent mark and represents 20.7% of the microstructure problems. It is defined as its omission or inadequate use. Some cases of omitted accent marks are shown below (the words in bold correspond to the misspelled words, which mean something different due to the omitted accent mark).

- *... allow to analyze that the students say about Nursing as a profession... (T2)*
- *These fundamentals make us wonder like teaching practices are like... (T7)*

- *A sustained increase has been observed in the I list of new students... (T10)*
- *It should be encouraged that an interdisciplinary team this in charge of mental health... (T5)*
- *... the gross rate for new students in the last 10 years I multiply by 4... (T10)*

The omissions of accent marks identified in the texts are found in interrogative pronouns or adverbs, vocabulary, and verb tenses that require its use. Its absence in the above examples compromises the meaning of the words and can even affect the meaning of the sentence.

If, on the one hand, the lack of the accent mark is identified, on the other hand, its inappropriate use is noticed:

- *... this investigation is projected from the qualitative paradigm, where instruments such as surveys and interviews... (T4)*
- *There is a profuse bibliography on the benefits of... (T10)*
- *... including also the type of test used... (T13)*

One of the inadequacies in this respect is in the use of the accent mark in relative adverbs (such as the relative adverb of place *donde*). This mistake is caused by confusion with the interrogative adverb *dónde*. As with the omission of the accent mark, its inappropriate use, in this case, can also compromise the semantics of the sentence.

The inadequate use of the accent mark even occurs with some tonic monosyllables and with singular nouns that should be accented only in plural form. Respectively, the Spanish examples show "da" and "examen" accented inappropriately. The use of the accent mark on "da" could be attributed to the hyper generalization of the rule for other monosyllables that carry it to differentiate the meaning.

Still in the area of punctuation and accenting, problems also arise in relation to colons and

semicolons. The former is characterized by omission, while the latter, by its absence or inadequate use. Taking into consideration the microstructure difficulties, the subcategory of colon accounts for 7.9%, while the problems related to semicolons, for 5%.

Some examples of the omission of colons identified in the texts are presented.

- *The Profile of the Graduate regarding the activities reserved for the two degrees, Nurse and Bachelor of Nursing will be analyzed. (T2)*
- *The information is systematically presented in two main bodies, one that refers to epistemological conceptions and the other, to didactic strategies. (T4)*
- *... there are different factors that influence academic performance; environmental conditions, aptitudes, interests, personality, study habits, motivation, ... (T10)*

The nonuse of colons, as the examples show, is characterized by the use of other punctuation marks in their place. In this sense, there are syntactic constructions in which colons are essential. Sentences with enumerations are examples of the functional importance of this mark. However, in the texts, we can identify enumerations preceded by commas or semicolons. Taking into account this masked use of the colon—meaning using other signs (that do not substitute it), we call such case a colon omission.

As for the *semicolon*, the first examples are related to the absence of this sign.

- *We can say then that it does not generate solutions, but rather trains the student to generate them, in addition to being able to be implemented in groups... (T11)*
- *The academic-administrative organization of the MV program depends on the FB, therefore, it adapts its academic actions to the General Academic Regulations of the... (T13)*

The use of semicolons is required for a longer pause between sentences. In the previous fragments, it is possible to notice, due to the context of the sentences, a longer interval between them. However, this interval is marked by the comma. Although this is a very recurrent punctuation mark in textual productions, it does not replace the semicolon.

While there are cases where the semicolon is absent, there are also cases where the semicolon is used inappropriately:

- *The idea of working under this premise arose after observing different classes in which student participation increased in the presence of this device; due to that, the reading of different texts that delved into the subject started, many of which... (T1),*
- *This model breaks away from the traditional methodology of the subject where the professor exposes the subject matter and students study it at home; with the Flipped Classroom model students come to class with knowledge of the topics that... (T10)*
- *Since the UDA began; students have questioned and complained about... (T5)*

The above excerpts exemplify the difficulties regarding the use of semicolons. They are mainly used in places that would require a full stop or comma.

As far as style is concerned, three types of difficulties are identified as the most representative. From this, the following subcategories are established: use of colloquial language, omission of sentence connectors, and sentence fragments. Of the three subcategories, the first represents 7.1% of the microstructure difficulties, while the last two occur less frequently and account for 4.3% each. It is evident, then, that occurrences in the category of style are less frequent than those relating to punctuation and accenting. The following examples show the use of colloquial language:

- *To give an example, in 2018 there were 3,208 enrollees. (T3)*
- *that's why its development was a great challenge for the teacher tutors. (T5)*
- *This project focuses on the analysis of the strategies of... (T7)*

In the analysis of the texts, some expressions are identified that do not adequately respond to the linguistic demands regarding the use of a formal language according to the textual genre of the thesis plan. Therefore, expressions such as *to give an example* and *that's why* require substitution by a more formal language. Respectively, they could be replaced by *for instance* and *therefore*. As for the omission of sentence connectors, some examples are presented below, followed by some considerations

- *... will be compared with the results of the classes in [*] this technological device was not present. (T1)*
- *This study will be carried out with an institutional political approach due [*] the fact that the problem of abandonment will be analyzed in a context... (T3)*
- *... methodological proposals have been carried out in order [*] bring central concepts closer to the student... (T4)*

In the previous fragments, the lack of the connectors *which*, *to*, and *to* respectively is evident. Although their absence can be inferred by the reader, it is an issue that deserves attention, since this gap is one of the causes of interference in reading fluency. Consequently, it also affects the quality of the text. A careful review of the writing can avoid inconsistencies of this type.

Similar to the problem of omission of sentence connectors is the category of sentence fragments. Although both are related to the structure of sentences, they are considered separately, since the first deals specifically with connectors in sentences, while the second considers structural problems that hinder the clarity of information

within the sentence. Thus, the focus is on syntax and semantics, although, as this is a category of microstructural problems, semantic aspects are only considered at the sentence level and not at the textual level¹. Some examples of sentence fragments are given below.

- *This project were to be carried out by means of a cross-sectional descriptive study, which sought (sic) to collect [*] (T7)*
- *[*] To answer the question. Do hospital internships represent the objectives set out in the curriculum? (T5)*
- *The distance between the universities that we have and the agenda [*] Just as writing is a process, developing more inclusive higher education institutions is not a situation you either have or not, but one of the goals of a democratic country. (T7)*

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences which, for that reason, denote an imprecise and/or confusing meaning of the statement. Just like the omission of sentence connectors, sentence fragments also require textual revision.

The difficulties discussed at the microstructure level are related to the communicative turn promoted in Argentina by the 1994 Education Reform, whose main feature in the field of language teaching was to switch the focus from sentence structural grammar to textual grammar, with emphasis on the discursive aspect of language use. In recent years, it has been observed in national and international studies (Zárate Fabián, 2017) that university students continue to have difficulties with sentence morphosyntax in their academic writing, which highlights the need to focus again on grammar teaching. This focus, however, is not to be reimplemented within the

¹ Textual semantics is part of the macrostructure; therefore, it should not be confused with sentence semantics, which is the one that considers only the meaning of the phrase, thus framed in the microstructure.

mechanical boundaries of grammar teaching as an explanation-drilling exercise, but as a grammatical reflection that takes up morphosyntactic content in articulation with discursive reflection at the beginning of university education (Schere, 2020).

1. Macrostructural Difficulties

As mentioned, the macrostructure is directly related to the global cohesion of the topics dealt with in a text. Thus, for the analysis, two types of difficulties present in all the texts have been retrieved, as shown in Table 1. These are, on the one hand, the difficulties to connect ideas, as included in the item inconsistency between ideas and/or objectives (and between paragraphs) and, on the other hand, incomplete or imprecise information. In addition, due to the thematic proximity, the lack of cohesion between the closing of one section and the beginning of another or between paragraphs is also included in the analysis. These three items account for more than half (55%) of the difficulties found in the macrostructure. These problems were the most frequently cited by students surveyed in the context of a study on the appropriateness of academic discourse by young university students in the province of Córdoba, Argentina (Borioli, 2019). In this aspect, students mentioned having difficulties to find cohesion between ideas, to articulate contents and authors, and to use connectors. In our corpus, these types of problems are also observed, as can be seen in the following paragraphs.

In terms of discourse, the difficulties to link ideas were present in three predominant ways: between what is proposed and the outlined objectives; between paragraphs; and between the closing of one section and the beginning of another. To illustrate this type of difficulty, the first section of T8, called Justification, is taken as an example. This section is developed over two pages that add up to 19 paragraphs. Although there is no expected number of paragraphs for each section, an overuse of very short statements that are not thematically linked is observed. In this sense, two short propositions stand out, which do not have connectors that can link them and make the text fluid:

- *With all these evaluation stages completed, the student passes the subject.*
- *[*] Year by year the number of students who pass is of approximately 90% and the 10% who do not, mostly correspond to students who have dropped out of the course or did not pass the online MC assessment. (T8)*

The first paragraph in the previous example is inappropriately made up of a single sentence. This sentence could close the previous paragraph, which lists the stages that the students in question must complete in order to pass a subject. Also, in addition to the microstructural problems, the second paragraph of the selected fragment lacks an initial connector that relates the previous ideas to the statistical data.

In Text 12, a fragment is selected which also includes a short paragraph weakly articulated with the preceding paragraphs.

- *According to this, the students who demonstrate to have passed the totality of the subjects of the program will be granted the title of General Veterinary Doctor.*

In this case, as it is a separate paragraph, it is necessary to recover the context of the deictic word *this* in order to fully understand the meaning of the idea. It could be adapted through the following substitution: *According to this organization, the students [...].*

As an example of a difficulty of articulation between the closing of one section and the beginning of another, a fragment of Text 10 is presented, retrieved from the last paragraph of a section called Background, prior to the Objectives:

- *In addition, Broglia (2011) refers to the impact that this work will have on teachers, since it will generate a new experience that fosters group and interdisciplinary work and direct contact with the clinical case 'on the stretcher.' (T10)*

In this case, the section could have a closure that articulates what has already been studied and what is pending, in order to justify what the student proposes as the objectives of their thesis.

Next, we describe another macrostructural difficulty that was also present in all the texts analyzed: Incomplete or imprecise information. This category refers to resorting to previous studies on a topic without indicating the source of information:

- *This is how many essays highlight the compelling qualities of case studies or problem solving while others cover the implementation of new technologies. (T4)*

In this fragment we can see the absence of any specific reference to which essays and which texts the author-writer describes.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, academic writing is characterized by incorporating both the voices of authors who are specialists in the subject, as well as the writer's own voice. This articulation of voices is perceived in the literature on the subject as one of the great challenges in graduate level writing (Borioli, 2019; Castro Azuara & Sánchez Camargo, 2016; Giraldo-Giraldo, 2020; Nishida, 2020; Rodríguez Hernández & García Valero, 2015). The difficulties refer to lack of knowledge of the citation format and difficulty in constructing a discourse that reflects the author's voice and, at the same time, a dialogue with the authors reviewed.

Incomplete information is displayed at the beginning of the Methodology section of Text 10:

- *Qualitative, interpretative, or ethnographic methodology, due to the fact that it uses non-numerical data collection to find or finetune research questions in the interpretation process (Sampieri, 2008, p 8). Longitudinal study (follow-up study of a group of subjects). (T10).*

The wording is telegraphic and, therefore, not articulated inwardly, nor is it articulated with the whole of the section. In the last phrase, no verbal proposition has been constructed. In this case, different from the fragment of Text 4 mentioned above, the student has relied on a bibliographical reference. In spite of this, the telegraphic and paraverbal form implies the lack of own elaboration with respect to the citation, emptying the argumentative resource of citing sources of its potential.

It is understood that the practice of resorting to arguments without scientific backing or resorting poorly to sources is common in the oral discursive genres within work settings, especially among teachers referring to what happens, although without citing sources. The academic work embodied in writing also implies, precisely, testing the consensus in professional communities and seeking scientific support to back it up. In this sense if some authors and dates had been cited, the selected fragment of Text 4 would be more appropriate.

2. Superstructure Difficulties

Finally, in the third major category, superstructure difficulties, the inadequacies related to the academic textual genre of the thesis plan are pointed out. Thus, for genre standardization problems, the most outstanding points are discussed: the schedule, in-text citations, and references; the sum of these categories represents 56% of the superstructure difficulties. These three components account for a large part of the genre identity in the internal architecture of the thesis plan.

Academia requires the circulation of written work with a uniform aesthetic, in which the same font, a justified margin, black font, and the use of boldface only in titles, among other aspects, prevail. However, the students do not necessarily master these required forms when writing their own texts. This is consistent with the findings of Arroyo González, & Gutierrez Braojos (2016), who point out deficiencies in the progress of writing processes throughout the university training.

These aspects surround the formative context in which professors see the need to teach writing

during the thesis workshops, with a main focus in the practice of research strategies in parallel to the teaching of linguistic strategies particular to academic settings. It is clear that there is no content without form.

In this sense, Di Stefano and Pereira (2012) refer to the graphic materiality, natural in the academic field, which, however, is often presented as alien to its members, particularly among students, even at the graduate level. In this sense, the schedule of a thesis plan, although it can be presented in very singular ways, maintains fixed components related to the stages of a research. From this type of text, we expect a list of activities sequenced in chronological order that generically describe each step necessary for the research. These steps are confronted in their opposite axis with the time that the projected progress will cover.

However, the corpus shows that, out of the total number of texts analyzed, eight had some kind of problem to develop the schedule. One of the subjects did not even include this section. In turn, the other difficulties within this subcategory are related to the inconsistency in the order of the proposed activities, representing 7.5% of the total superstructure difficulties. It is considered a representative value, since it is only behind the problems related to the references. Selected examples of the most paradigmatic cases are presented.

Text 2 includes 13 activities in its schedule, some of which overlapped: "Collection and analysis of documentation relevant to the object of research," "Analysis of previous research on the thematic axes of the research," and "Initial bibliographic collection, exploration and analysis of the data collected online." Item five of the schedule projected "Interviews with key informants," while item eight proposed "Pilot testing of the interview" and item nine "Construction of the referential framework." This case shows the lack of temporal coherence between the steps to be followed in the research. Here, the formal structure of the presentation indicates difficulties in understanding the research process. To a lesser extent, the same difficulties appeared in other texts of the corpus.

In relation to References, they are conceived as the standardization predetermined by the

norms of academic writing used in the university in question: authors, works, documents, websites, among others. From this perspective, the problems arise from the absence of references (or part of them) throughout the text, such as author, year, or page. 21.7% of the superstructure difficulties are represented by this category.

Likewise, in the standardization of references, in the last section of the text, superstructure difficulties account for the other 21.7%. In this sense, there are different inconsistencies: mixing of APA and Vancouver norms, out-of-place information, incomplete information, references to text that were not included in the thesis plan or omission of cited texts, lack of alphabetic order, and, in one of the cases, total omission of this section.

In this sense, Núñez Cortés & Errázuriz Cruz (2020) indicate a lack of knowledge, on the part of students, of the discursive conventions in university settings before and throughout their higher education studies. On the other hand, Giraldo-Giraldo (2020) noted that more than 80% of Colombian graduate students surveyed about their writing difficulties claimed to know the norms of academic writing. This indicates that awareness of the criteria of different academic discursive genres is not a guarantee of their correct application. In other words, the difficulties reported at different levels of writing do not necessarily imply a lack of awareness of the rules, but rather a gap between knowing and applying.

In this sense, going to university does not guarantee the evolution of writing skills (Arroyo González & Gutierrez Braojos, 2016). As Navarro (2019, p. 26) states, "unfortunately, the discursive genres in training are usually mastered through spontaneous practices of enculturation and very rarely made explicit for teaching purposes or, even less, included in a curriculum." This reinforces the need to consider teaching academic writing at the university level as an explicit curricular activity, starting with undergraduate programs, "transversally to all subjects" (Coronado-Hijón, 2017, p. 28).

Based on the above, the superstructure of a text provides a first approach that allows us to notice basic problems with respect to the contents related to the development of the scientific spirit

itself. At the same time, it contextualizes the top-down analysis to reach the textual macro and microstructure and to project the most appropriate strategies to overcome these difficulties.

Final Considerations

In this article, we have analyzed the final productions of graduate students for the thesis plan. In this instance, although the mistakes related to the microstructure, in its grammatical sense (syntax, coherence between sentences, punctuation, among others), could be corrected by a proofreader, for example, the problems related to the genre textual adequacy are of more complex resolution, since they refer to the research action itself.

The difficulties related to the adequacy to the textual genre of the thesis plan point to a pertinent question that embodies the concerns of professors dedicated to the teaching of academic writing in graduate institutions. In this regard, Navarro (2019) proposes a "genre based didactics" that consists in the explicit and intentional teaching of academic reading, writing, and orality. This allows students from disadvantaged social sectors to have the same opportunities as those from families with greater cultural and, in particular, semiotic capital.

It is necessary to indicate that each of the three major levels that have been taken from Van Djik (1980) to guide the classification of difficulties overlap, as the same author makes explicit. That is to say, in the analysis of a schedule, microstructural aspects are noted, such as spelling or syntactic errors, and also macrostructural problems, such as those of connection between one item of the schedule and another. Beyond this interconnection, distributing them in this way is useful in order to focus on each difficulty at a time.

As the literature on the subject has shown, humanities programs include much more writing practice than health or science programs. In the present case, there is only one participant from the humanities field; therefore, it is not possible to draw conclusions in this regard, but we could consider what Moreno et al. (2009, p. 1) expressed:

"one learns to write [well] by writing." A future study could contrast the perspective of the professors and the students about the difficulties when writing the thesis plan

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