

Academic discourse genres in a pedagogy program: descriptive profile of four cases

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe four discursive genres used in academic literacy activities (reading and writing) in a university in south-central Chile. The essay considers the methodological guidelines of Giovanni Parodi and colleagues in the establishment of a microcorpus. It is concluded that the four genres constitute epistemic practices that favor the development of linguistic skills and the possibility of insertion in specialized communities. Likewise, two key elements for the use of genres are their link with the learning outcomes of the curriculum and the opportunities for articulation with other subjects.

Keywords: Language; Writing; Reading; Higher Education; Teacher education; Teacher training.

Introduction

Reading and writing understood as epistemic practices (Stella, 2014) enable the learning and development of linguistic skills that students deploy at different moments of their school career. They are key tasks that require practice, since their development does not occur naturally. Therefore, the teaching of the specialized code and the specific skills of academic language in school requires more time (Uccelli *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, the current educational context requires the management of linguistic-discursive conventions specific to the academic register. Schleppegrell (2012), specifies that it is a language proper to formal spaces and differentiates it from everyday communication formulas.

Uccelli (2019) defines it as the language of science and school genres; it is conceived as a set of linguistic skills necessary for learning contexts.

In the context of academic literacies, research reports a series of problems associated with the processing and/or composition of specialized genres by university students (Concha *et al.*, 2013; Navarro, 2018). One of the difficulties detected lies in the correct appropriation of the register and, with it, the development of academic language skills (Uccelli *et al.*, 2015) that, specifically, materialize on a receptive and productive level (Figuerola, 2018). In the case of writing, it is essential to reflect on how academic language resources (ALR) are used during the textualization process, for example, discourse markers, specialized vocabulary, and nominalizations, among others.

This paper will delve into four discursive genres used in the teaching-learning process of students of a pedagogical career at a university in south-central Chile. For this purpose, it is taken into account that the purpose and pedagogical functionalization of the genre can be linked to an instructional approach, focused on the acquisition of factual and conceptual domains, and/or evaluative, characterized by a transactional object and certification of learning. This last point dialogues with what is proposed by Farlora (2015), who exemplifies with the academic-evaluative macro-genre essay-type test (PTE), which is understood as "a practice that controls the disciplinary relevance and that complexifies knowledge through reflection and recontextualization of the knowledge read" (p. 264). In this sense, it is proposed that the study of written genres in the different disciplines of the higher education curriculum makes it possible to reveal what conceptions of literacy prevail within the specialized communities and, in turn, to characterize how students move within them, how they acquire the academic register and what writing strategies they employ.

Now, the brief study aims to characterize four academic discursive genres, which are read and written within the disciplinary community; and it is reviewed from the formative purposes of the subject Communicative Competences (taught during the first semester of the first year of pedagogical training).

Development

The work takes as a reference the descriptive methodology used by Parodi *et al.* (2015), for whom discursive genres are understood as "highly complex and dynamic units, in whose conformation the cognitive dimension, the social dimension and the linguistic dimension are proposed as essential" (p. 42). The authors propose a corpus of genres, considering five dimensions of analysis: communicative macro-purpose, relationship between participants, mode of discursive organization, prototypical context of circulation, and modality.

- **Communicative macro-purpose:** This is understood as the general purpose on which the texts are configured, without disregarding the existence of other minor or specific purposes. For the research taken as a reference Parodi *et al.* (2015) recognize the following macro-purposes: to instruct, to consign, to regulate, to persuade, to guide, to invite, to ascertain, to offer. It should be clarified that these are not the only ones, as they vary to the extent that there are different genres. The case just described must be understood in a situated context.
- **Relationships between participants:** The relationships between the participants of a communicative exchange must be positioned from the notion of discursive community, in which there are different roles with dissimilar degrees of expertise. Parodi *et al.* (2015) consider four possibilities: expert writer (high degree of knowledge-expertise), expert reader (high degree of knowledge-expertise), semi-lay reader (intermediate degree of knowledge-expertise) and lay reader (lower degree of knowledge-expertise).
- **Discourse organization mode:** corresponds to the way in which the sequencing of the content of a genre is structured; they can be descriptive, narrative or argumentative in nature; "it is possible to establish that the modes of organization respond to relatively stable types of combination (...)" (Parodi *et al.*, 2015, p. 49).
- **Ideal context of circulation:** it corresponds to the discursive space in which texts belonging to a genre are mobilized. In the study conducted by Parodi *et al.* (2015) they identify contexts with greater and lesser degrees of specialization, among them: pedagogical, labor, scientific, and universal.
- **Modality:** this dimension attends to the semiotic mode used in the construction of the message. They are verbal and nonverbal, as well as monomodal and multimodal.

The choice of the four discourse genres was based on two criteria: (1) linkage with the learning outcomes of the program, and (2) articulation for the transversality of the

curriculum. The first one responds to the pedagogical foundations of the subject, i.e., what learning is expected to be developed by higher education students in the subject. The review considered an analytical reading of the description of competencies, prior learning, learning outcomes and evaluation system. The second criterion contemplates didactic opportunities for the articulation of methodologies between different subjects. This expresses the possibility that the same genre can be read and/or written in more than one knowledge area.

The genres chosen were: practice report, learning log, ministerial decree and scientific research article. A description of the generic profile follows:

Practice report:

Discourse genre whose communicative macro-purpose is to expose experiences of pedagogical practice and its learning environment. It establishes relationships between expert writer, expert reader and semi-literate reader. Its context of circulation corresponds to the pedagogical environment, since it focuses on the verification of a stage of the training process. Fundamentally, it uses an expository mode of organization, in paper and/or digital support with multimodal resources.

Learning log:

Discourse genre whose communicative macro-purpose is to reflect metacognitively on the learning process. It circulates in a pedagogical context, through relationships between expert writer, expert reader and semi-literate reader. It uses a descriptive-argumentative mode in the discursive organization, with the use of monomodal resources and in digital and/or paper support.

Decree (educational regulation):

Discourse genre whose communicative macro-purpose is to regulate procedures linked to an educational context. Its discursive organization responds to a descriptive-expositive typology. The circulation environment is universal and the relationship between participants is from expert writer to expert or semi-literate reader. Its support is digital and on paper; it uses predominantly monomodal resources.

Scientific research article:

Discursive genre whose communicative macro-purpose is to persuade about a certain scientific approach, supported by a theoretical review. The relationship between writer and reader is a high degree of knowledge (layman). The scope of circulation is scientific and in digital and paper support. The form of organization is fundamentally argumentative, with the use of multimodal resources.

It should be noted that two genres (practice report and learning log) are focused on written production, while the remaining ones (decree and research article) are oriented to reading.

Conclusions

As discussed in this review, discursive genres constitute epistemic practices that favor the development of linguistic skills and, thus, enable students to develop within the various specialized communities, all in a context with broad difficulties involved in the processing and composition of a text, both in its link with the development of cognitive skills of reading and writing, as well as in the key skills of academic language (Uccelli *et al.*, 2015).

Thus, working with literacies demands the insertion of varied genres within the curriculum and approaches focused on the process and transversality of reading and writing.

The genres reviewed in the course are installed as discursive forms that respond to linguistic and contextual parameters and, therefore, require correct scaffolding for their processing and composition. One of the tasks of interest is to question how the indicated genres favor or do not favor improvements at the level of academic literacy and, consequently, textual quality.

As a final reflection, it is suggested that the work on genres should be articulated with activities that promote metalinguistic awareness and reflection, with processual approaches and emphasis on feedback. On this point and, in particular, for writing, it is useful as an example to think about the effectiveness of the comments provided by teachers in written production dynamics. Consequently, the question arises: how representative are the written indications provided by the trainer of trainers during the revision task? This study is in line with the research developed by Tapia *et al.* (2015) on

genre adjustment comments (CEAG) and, therefore, invites us to think about feedback as a key task in the teaching of academic literacy.