



THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADVANCED ACADEMIC WRITING IN COLLEGIATE SECOND LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: A GENRE-BASED APPROACHⁱ

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Abstract

This article aims to describe the development of advanced writing skills –realized in clausal complexity and in the use of specialized linguistic resources– in the writings of a group of college second language learners. This study is relevant in light of the difficulties that most intermediate language learners find in their transition to higher levels of proficiency. Traditional ways of approaching writing in collegiate contexts have adhered for a long time to the idea that people learn to write by writing. The application of a genre-based perspective in second language writing scaffolds the progression of second language learners towards a gradual construction of complexity in written texts as they are exposed to logical sequences of genres considered relevant to the target culture. The study examines second language learning through writing as a cumulative process of building up complexity in terms of the acquisition of an intermediate accuracy in semantics, grammar and lexis that is shown in the expansion of ideational resources through the presence of nominalizations and lexical choices that reveal a gradual progression towards more complex forms of semogenesis. A group of second language learners of Spanish enrolled in an advanced grammar class in the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile* are requested to write 12 written tasks, from which three were selected to explore the gradual progression from commonsense representation of experience in personal recounts to a more complex construction of reality in news reports and comments to editorial texts. The analysis of the written tasks shows a change in the semiotic experience of learners. This is explicit in the choice of lexical resources that construct a more technical and abstract network of concepts and

ⁱ EL DESARROLLO DE ESCRITURA ACADÉMICA AVANZADA EN PROGRAMAS UNIVERSITARIO DE INMERSIÓN EN SEGUNDA LENGUA: UN ENFOQUE BASADO EN GÉNERO

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the gradual selection of nominal phrases and grammatical metaphors to condense information in reports and expository texts.

Keywords: lexicogrammatical complexity, genre-based approach, advanced skills development, second language learning

Resumen:

Este artículo tiene como objetivo describir el desarrollo de habilidades avanzadas de escritura -realizadas en complejidad clausal y el uso de recursos lingüísticos especializados- en las escrituras de un grupo de estudiantes universitarios de segunda lengua. Este estudio es relevante a la luz de las dificultades que encuentran la mayoría de los estudiantes de lengua intermedia en su transición a niveles más altos de competencia. Las formas tradicionales de abordar la escritura en contextos universitarios han adherido durante mucho tiempo a la idea de que las personas aprenden a escribir escribiendo. La aplicación de una perspectiva basada en el género en la escritura de segundas lenguas contribuye a la progresión de los aprendientes hacia una construcción gradual de la complejidad de los textos escritos, ya que están expuestos a una secuencia de géneros considerados relevantes para la cultura de la lengua meta. El estudio examina el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua, a través de la escritura como un proceso de complejidad creciente en términos de la adquisición de una precisión intermedia a nivel semántico, y lexicogrammatical que se muestra en la expansión de recursos ideacionales, a través de la presencia de nominalización y opciones léxicas que revelan una progresión gradual hacia formas más complejas de semiogénesis. Un grupo de aprendientes de español como segunda lengua, inscritos en una clase de gramática avanzada en la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile se expone gradualmente a una secuencia lógica de géneros, de los cuales se seleccionaron tres para explorar la progresión gradual desde la representación de la experiencia de sentido común en textos de narración personal hacia la construcción más compleja de la realidad en informes de noticias y comentarios a textos editoriales. El análisis de las tareas escritas muestra un cambio en la experiencia semiótica de los estudiantes. Esto es explícito en la elección de recursos léxicos que construyen una red de conceptos más técnicos y abstractos, junto a la selección gradual de frases nominales y metáforas gramaticales para condensar información en textos de carácter informativo y expositivos escritos por los aprendientes.

Palabras clave: complejidad lexicogrammatical, enfoque basado en géneros, desarrollo de habilidades avanzadas, segundas lenguas.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe the progression of a group of intermediate second language learners towards the attainment of advanced writing skills in the context of a total immersion program of Spanish for Foreign Language Learners offered by the

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The importance of this study rests on the fact that the transition from intermediate levels of proficiency to more advanced competences is, in most cases, followed by a period in which the curve of learning increases at a slow pace as learners are introduced to writing in academic contexts (Schleppegrell, 2004; Frang, Schleppegrell & Moore, 2013; de Oliveira & Silva, 2016). Our study, consequently, seeks to detect the progression of Anglophone learners towards superior academic writing skills in Spanish. This is done through the identification of linguistic resources that progressively realize more complex ways of constructing field (Eggins, 2002; Ryshina-Pankova, 2015; Ortega, 2015) in written tasks, namely 'lexical relations' and the 'grammatical metaphor'. Both resources are considered relevant for the construction of more specialized knowledge required in academic contexts. The corpus of study, writing tasks, is generated in the context of an advanced grammar course with the gradual exposure of students to genres that are considered relevant in the target language. This approach to writing has evolved as a response to a number of perspectives that have dominated writing instructions for over a century, namely traditional rhetoric, cognitive and socio-cognitive perspectives and socio-semiotic approaches.

Since the late 19th century, with the setting up of obligatory schooling the main aim of literacy focused on teaching children to read and write (Barton, 2007). Efforts, inspired by traditional rhetoric, concentrated on the development of elementary skills such as sound letter correspondence and on the application of language rules to writing. This approach to literacy development advocated for a result-centered pedagogy, a perspective focused on the principles of traditional rhetoric oriented to generate a product detached from individual endeavor. The shift towards a pedagogy centered on process writing was supported by studies conducted by Britton, Burgess, McLeod and Rosen (1975). They lay the foundations for the writing models developed in the 1980s and 1990s by Flower and Hayes (1981) and Scardamalia and Bereiter (1992). These models, eminently cognitive, conceived written competence as an individual construction (Kintsch, 2009). During the 1990s, the models generated in the 1980s began to be questioned, as constructivism has been identified with minimal guidance in instruction.

In the early 2000s, provocative visions challenged the sustained dominance enjoyed by Anglophone paradigms from the United States and England on the *teaching-learning* of writing. For Atkinson (2003) and Hyland (2003, 2007), it is fundamental to question how the teaching of writing should be understood from the Anglophone perspective. From this tradition, it is suggested that the fundamental trait that should characterize a good academic writing is its clarity and efficiency. Parallel to the reality observed by Atkinson (2003) and Matsuda (2003) and Rose and Martin (2012), Dreyfus, Humphrey, Mahboob and Martin (2016) and Humphrey (2017) claim that teaching literacy and writing should not rest solely on individual abilities. Indeed, the foundation of learning a mother tongue from the Systemic Functional Linguistics, hereafter SFL, rests on the seminal interaction between caretakers and the child. This

constitutes the basis of the 'resocialization process' (Halliday, 1978; Colombi, 2009) that is enacted in second language classrooms through the scaffolding teachers and peers provide to learners to face comprehension and production of institutionalized discourse in instructional contexts.

The remainder of the paper has been organized as follows; first the theoretical background provides an overview of research conducted in the area of second language writing focused on lexicogrammatical aspects that indicate progression towards higher stages of proficiency in written production. Additionally, the section provides a theoretical framework to comprehend the development of advanced productive skills from the perspective of SFL perspective. Section 2 describes the methodology used in the generation of a corpus of study. The corpus of written tasks allows for the observation of the transition of learners from congruent representation of meanings in text seen through personal recounts to more metaphoric construction of meanings in news reports and comments to newspaper editorials. Section 3 shows the analysis of the corpus of written tasks examined in light of the presence of more technical concepts, taxonomic relations and grammatical metaphors. Both linguistic features point to the development of more advanced proficiency in second language writing. Finally, conclusions are outlined.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. The development of advanced skills in second language writing: grammatical and lexical complexity

A widespread issue debated in second language learning is the ultimate attainment of native-like skills in adult learners. Normally, learning another language may become a rather slow and laborious process in intermediate stages as the path towards advanced written proficiency is necessarily characterized by the incorporation of uncommon sense linguistic choices. These correspond to selections of lexical grammatical features realized in technical and abstract vocabulary and in the expansion of nominal elements that enable the condensation of information present in genres of written transmission (Schleppegrell, 2004; Bulté & Housen, 2014; Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; Martin & Maton, 2017).

Complexity in second language writing has long been defined (Christie & Martin, 2007; Schleppegrell 2004; Colombi, 2015; Ryshina-Pankova, 2015) as a descriptor of language progress and development. In this regard, Bulté and Housen (2014:43) claim the existence of an *absolute linguistic complexity* and a *relative complexity*. Absolute complexity refers to the objective complexity of a linguistic unit while relative complexity is associated to learners' related variables affecting perception (age, stage of cognitive development, motivation, etc). From a more operational perspective, Mazgutova and Kormos (2015) argue that complexity is expressed in a range of lexical variety and grammatical sophistication. From a Systemic Functional perspective, Schleppegrell (2004: 96) states that the interaction of lexical and grammatical meanings

is crucial in the construction of expanded nominal groups and the selection of low-frequency lexical items that enable the construction of abstraction and generalization. In this context, language has a twofold power, on one hand, it serves as a tool for socializing, thus building up dynamic portraits of reality that show human beings involved in actions. On the other hand, language enables users to theorize and reflect on natural and social phenomena, for example: education, crime, illness, among others; however, the process of learning to express uncommonsense meanings is not spontaneous, but acquired through writing. In this respect, Halliday (2004) and Martin and Rose (2007) claim that the ontogenetic process of second language learning is very similar to the process of language evolution from childhood to maturity in mother tongue learners. This process is characterized by the expansion of meanings in the learners' system. Expansion of meanings is shown in the ability a child gradually acquires to construct more complex metaphoric realities by the use of more technical and abstract lexical items in writing. Accordingly, lexical complexity in second language writing is observed in the construction of a network of concepts carefully intertwined to the social purpose of genres. The presence of technicality in writing, consequently, not only expresses lexicogrammatical competence in learners, but also a semantic expansion in their potential. This enables their progression towards more sophisticated representations of reality in writing through the inclusion of lexical resources such as repetitions, synonymy, opposition, part-whole relations (Body, arms, hands), hyperonymy relations (Houses: Igloo, apartment building, cottage) and the presence of extended nominalizations. These resources are coherently interwoven to the social purpose of the writing activity in each social context.

1.2. Grammatical complexity

The progression of learners from intermediate to advanced levels of writing proficiency is usually characterized by a shift from focus on common sense lexicogrammatical features to metaphorical meanings. Ortega (2015:82) states that broadly speaking complexity may be referred to a degree of sophistication shown in the choice of grammatical resources expressed in production tasks. Regarding the characteristics of more advanced syntactic selection, Ryshina-Pankova (2015) points out to the fundamental role that nominal constructions play in writing. In fact, the author claims that the presence of nominalization highlights a semantic leap from a direct representation of active experience as expressed in the following example: (1) Economy grew 5% during this year in Chile. Active experience is metaphorically represented in the second clause (2) Chilean economic growth reached 5% this year. Clause (2) shows a metaphorical shift that involves the reinterpretation of a semantic sequence, congruently representing an actor + process construction, as a group: Chilean economic growth [Classifier \wedge Epithet \wedge Head]. Incongruent or metaphorical constructions express a change in grammatical category. The example illustrates that grow in clause (1) is construed as a process, and reconstructed as an entity (abstract noun) in clause (2). The change of emphasis to more abstract construction of meaning in text types of

factual and evaluative genre families is coherently realized in lexicogrammatical features that enable language users to pack meanings in condensed constructions, namely: abstract nominal groups, verbs that link nominal structures and technical and abstract vocabulary (Schleppegrell, 2004:94).

The following example corresponds to a writing task that seeks learners to respond to an opinion column. Responses to texts are relevant in the academic environment as Plans of Study in tertiary contexts in Chile consider reviews as part of their evaluations. In everyday life, text responses are frequently used in electronic interactions occurring in newspaper blogs.

Text [1.1]

Señor Álvaro Vial,

Recién leí su artículo publicado en El Mostrador->Blogs y Opinión titulado "Hay lucro... ¿Y qué?". Quiero contarle que me gustaron sus palabras y análisis sobre el desarrollo de la educación superior en el país. Es un hecho y un logro que Chile ha visto un crecimiento de educación tan notado (sic). Estoy de acuerdo que instituciones privadas sino (sic) también públicas dan más oportunidades a los jóvenes estudiantes hoy que unos 20 o 10 años atrás.

[Mr. Alvaro Vial

I just read your article published in El Mostrador in the section blogs and opinion, titled "there is profit...so what?". I want to say that I liked your words and analysis on the development of tertiary education in the country. It is a fact and an achievement that Chile has seen a growth in education so noticeable (sic). I agree that private institutions but also public ones (sic) provide more opportunities to Young students today than 20 or 10 years ago]

The posting opens by addressing the author of the column: "*Señor Álvaro Vial*" and directing his attention the article written by him and published in an electronic newspaper. The next stage is the expression of positive evaluation of the content of the opinion column: "I liked your words and analysis..." It is relevant to observe that the learner builds up a degree of solidarity with the author of the original text by expressing a positive appreciation of the analysis the author of the column had done of the tertiary education in Chile. Attention must be drawn to the syntactic shift from a congruent variant to the construction of the phenomenon as a thing. The text as it is actually expressed in the positive evaluation written by the learner: "I liked your words and analysis..." This is followed by the presence of abstract nominal groups: "...on **the development of tertiary education in the country**".

Figure 2: Metaphoric constructions in second language

Congruent constructions	<i>Quiero contarle que me gustó como la educación terciaria se desarrolló en su país</i>
Metaphoric constructions	<i>Quiero contarle que me gustaron sus palabras y análisis sobre el desarrollo de la educación superior en el país</i>

Along the second phase of the generic structure aiming to establish the writer's own reaction to the text, we notice the learner praises the positive attainments that Chilean education has obtained: "It **is a fact and an achievement** that Chile has seen a growth in education so noticeable". Furthermore, the learner elaborates her optimistic evaluation by specifying reasons for a positive development of tertiary education in Chile: "I agree that private institutions but also public ones **provide more opportunities** to young students today than 20 or 10 years ago". Regarding the inclusion of more complex structures in writing, Text [1.2] demonstrates the presence of resources that allow tracking down the issue being discussed as an abstract and more technical phenomenon –tertiary education in Chile. As the text unfolds, there are choices of nominal phrases around which arguments are built up: "...Chile has seen **a growth in education** so noticeable". Accordingly, the blog posting seeks to provide its readers with informed arguments to continue an online debate over a social agenda. The blog post illustrates the learners' progression towards making correct choices from the context of culture to build up arguments that present the construal of reality through abstract entities (Humphrey, 2017; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014).

1.3. Lexical Complexity

Bulté and Housen (2012) and Mazgutova and Kormos (2015) state that lexical complexity may refer to a degree of elaboration and size interpreted as lexical diversity and sophistication. Regarding diversity and sophistication Bulté and Housen (2014) established a measure of lexical complexity based on three variables, namely lexical diversity or variation in the use of word types, lexical richness variation in a number of word types and lexical sophistication, variation in number of basic versus advanced items. From a SFL perspective, lexical complexity is conceptualized as a feature closely matched to informational and analytical genre families. In this regard, genres of the evaluative kind are characterized by the presence of lexical choices that accentuate the construction of technicality through the choice of semantically specific lexis. Technicality according to Halliday (2004: 64) may be explained through lexical choices assuming specific semantic values in particular areas of knowledge. Text 1.2 shows the presence of items such as *universidades, enseñanza superior, educación privada* to discuss the state of affairs of Chilean tertiary education; in this context, word choice embodies condensed semantic information that inevitably assumes cultural implications when word choice constructs the field of specific areas of knowledge. Additionally, the example also illustrates the shift of focus from an active configuration of experience:

“...las universidades se desarrollaron y progresaron...” (line 2) towards a more reflexive construction: “...el desarrollo y progreso de la universidades...” (line 2).

Text [1.2]

[1] *Le escribo esta carta para **apoyar** sus dichos pero también para **mitigarlos**.*

[2] *Usted respalda la idea de que **el desarrollo** y progreso de las **universidades***

[3] *y más generalmente **el desarrollo** de la **enseñanza superior**, fueron posibles*

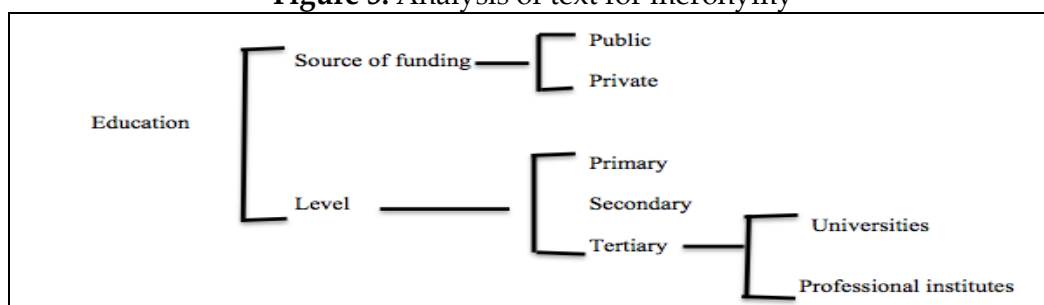
[4] *gracias a la llegada de los privados. **La creación** de la **educación privada***

[5] *permitió dar acceso a todos a la **educación***

I'm writing this letter to support your claims but also to mitigate them. You reinforce the idea that the development and progress of universities and more generally the development in tertiary education were possible thanks to the arrival of private interests. The creation of private education provided access to education for everybody.

The presence of more lexically condensed items is enriched by the occurrence of lexical taxonomies to classify the phenomena under discussion. Regarding the construction of lexical classifications, Martin (1992) and Martin and Rose (2007) identify two lexical resources to build up taxonomies, namely, meronymy and superordination. The first are defined as compositional relations or relations of having (the circulatory system is composed of the heart, veins and arteries). The second called superordination corresponds to class-member relations or relations of being (four wheeled animal drawn carriage: bullock cart, horsecars). Figure 3 shows the presence of composition relations related to education, taxonomy based on part to whole relations or relations of having.

Figure 3: Analysis of text for meronymy



Regarding education in Chile, the comment mentions the word *enseñanza superior* (line 3), thus leaving implied the existence of a primary and secondary level of

education. The text also makes reference to the source of financing, in this regard, the identification of private institutions: *educación privada* (line 4); leaves implied the existence of public tertiary institutions being part of the educational system in Chile.

2. Methodological framework

2.1. Overview

The aim of this study is to identify the presence of linguistics resources that progressively realize incongruent ways of constructing reality in written tasks, namely through the choice of more technical lexical items and the presence of grammatical metaphors. Both resources considered relevant in this study to measure the attainment of more advanced skills. The sample of writings examined in this article corresponds to students who enrolled in an advanced grammar class during the second academic semester, from August to December of 2016. The study adheres to a qualitative paradigm of a descriptive type. This enquiry seeks to determine the progression of language learners from commonsense construction of reality in personal recounts to the construction of more metaphorical negotiation of meanings in news reports and text responses in the process of logogenesis of the written texts (Rose & Martin, 2012) in a second language context. The method will now be presented in more detail.

2.2. Participants

Participants consisted of a group of 15 international exchange students enrolled in courses taught by the Program of Spanish as a Foreign Language offered by the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*. Students in the sample came from a wide range of disciplines in the humanities, sciences, and fine arts as informed by the teacher responsible for the class. Previous to the beginning of the study students signed up a written consent to allow the researchers to observe and analyze their writings for research purposes. The study took place over approximately one academic semester of 2017. The syllabus of the class required the presentation of 12 written assignments. From this total, our study focused on the observation of students' lexicogrammatical progression throughout a logical sequence consisting of three genres, namely personal recounts, news reports and blog responses to editorial texts. The total number of written tasks analyzed corresponded to 30 texts (10 texts per written task). Participants in this study spoke English as their first language. It is important to highlight that this study only considered the writings of Anglo speakers, a total of 10 students out of the total of 15 enrolled in the class. This decision obeyed to the need to control the possible bias that may have caused the choice of speakers whose languages stem from the Romance branch, such as Portuguese and French. The names that identify the author of the texts analyzed correspond to fictitious name make sure ethical requirements that protect identity are complied with.

2.3. Procedure

Participants in the study were part of the course Advanced Grammar offered by the Program of Spanish for Foreigners hosted by *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*. This specific class prepares foreign students to face writing tasks in the Chilean academic context. The course was planned around a sequence of genres that are commonly used in academic contexts. From this logical sequence, our study, as stated earlier, focused on the observation of students' progression in three genres, namely recounts of weekend activities, news reports and blog responses to editorial texts. The writing tasks were then analyzed under the lens of the ideation base (Martin & Rose, 2007; de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Rhyshina-Pankova, 2015) to identify the presence of ideational resources realized in the lexicogrammatical stratum through the occurrence of lexicogrammatical resources that indicate progression towards more complex use of language. Every text is divided into clauses and analyzed in terms of the configuration of elements within the clause.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The progression towards advanced skills in writing: results of the analysis of three written tasks

The exposure to a wide range of genres considered relevant to the Chilean culture constitutes the foundation of the second language learning process. Genres when explicitly taught and model foster the creation of linguistic awareness about the social function texts have in different contexts. In the particular case of second/foreign language learners at intermediate levels, it is fundamental to ponder the level of proficiency they have reached. According to the description provided by the CEFR (2001/2011) for the different proficiency levels, individuals who have reached an upper intermediate level of proficiency are referred to as independent users of the target language. Independent users can comprehend and write texts going from concrete to more abstract perspectives. The description by the CEFR emphasizes the ability that language users have at this level to themselves in technical and more specialized discussions. The analysis presented in this section, illustrates the examination of a sample of 30 written tasks as explained in section 2. The example included in this section throws light over the recurrent presence of features of lexicogrammatical complexity that show the progression of learners towards more advanced stages of writing proficiency. Authored by a single student called David, to protect his anonymity, the analysis reflects the systematic presence of linguistic choices that enables us to observe the evolution of learners, from a congruent representation of reality instantiated in personal recounts towards metaphorical constructions of meanings instantiated in news reports and comments to editorials.

3.1.1 Recount of events

The following text [1.3] shows how the learner construes reality in the context of an international soccer game between Chile and Uruguay in 2017.

Text 1.3: Recount of event: soccer game Chile versus Uruguay

Para el partido entre Chile y Uruguay, fui a la Cantina California con Laura y Gabi para cenar, tomar unas chelas y mirar el partido. Decidimos salir al pie (sic), aunque sabíamos que llegaríamos tarde, pero por este razón vimos algo en la calle que no veríamos si no fuéramos al pie. Chile anotó un gol en el primero (sic) tiempo mientras estábamos caminando y en la calle había autos tocando sus bocinas, gente gritando en restaurantes y gente aplaudiendo a nuestro alrededor. Observando este gol me hizo emocionado llegar al restaurante para ver el resto del partido (sic). Cuando llegamos a la cantina, casi no había espacio para nosotros. Encontramos una mesa en la esquina de la terraza tan cerca de la televisión que era difícil verla totalmente. Si tuviéramos un taxi, llegaríamos en tiempo (sic) y obtendríamos una mesa mejor pero no notaríamos la celebración en la calle (sic).

For the soccer game between Chile and Uruguay, I went to the bar California with Laura and Gabi to have dinner, drink beer and watch the game. We decided to go on foot, although we knew that we would be late, but for this reason we saw something in the street that we would have never seen if we had not been on foot. Chile scored in the first half while we were walking in the streets. There were cars honking their horns, people screaming in restaurants and people applauding around us. Observing the goal, made me excited to arrive to the restaurant to watch the rest of the game. We found a table in the corner of a terrace so close to the television set that we could hardly see it at all. If we had taken a taxi, we would have been on time to get a better table, but we would have missed the celebration in the street.

Text [1.3] illustrates what Martin (1992:293) calls iconic account of events. The characterization of the field is construed through a description of what occurs in the streets during the TV transmission of a soccer game in Chile. Activity sequences in the account of events are realized linguistically through temporally ordered chains of process, participants and circumstantial roles. The orientation phase is marked in text by an opening that places a temporal circumstance in thematic position: “**For the soccer game between Chile and Uruguay**, I went...” This feature is fundamental to establish the field of the recount, a set of activity sequences focused on watching a soccer game.

It is interesting to observe that soccer frequently represents more than a sport or entertainment. Soccer often defines the identity of its followers. Consequently, the events that are narrated by the learner in the phase corresponding to the recount of events incorporate a large number of activities to the narration of events. These are realized linguistically through traditional actions associated to massive sport events such as bar gatherings to drink, eat and watch the game: “I went to the bar California with Laura and Gabi to **have dinner, drink beer and watch the game**”. What seems interesting to observe in the writing is the construing of activity sequences by the learner. He uses a denomination of beer that is traditionally used in Chile: “*tomar unas chelas*”. The latter, as mentioned before, indicates a conscious choice of linguistic resources to build up the speaker’s membership to the culture (Martin, 1992:121). Such sequences occur on the learner’s way to the bar and were deemed more relevant than what actually happened in the bar. The fact that the learner and his friends had been walking in direction to the bar after the first scoring of a goal, allows him to construct a network of taxonomic relations of subordination. These whole/part relations built up around activities that are traditionally associated to sport events in one culture are brought to attention by the learner as they are not probably the way in which people celebrate victory in their own culture: “...*en la calle había autos tocando sus bocinas, gente gritando en restaurantes y gente aplaudiendo a nuestro alrededor.*” From the perspective of proficiency descriptors, independent users of a second language –upper intermediate level–usually exhibit features of breakdown such as failure in the use of complex sentence constructions. The presence of infelicities as Schleppegrell (2012) calls errors is a natural process in the learning of a second language and this may not be crucial if meaning making is not affected. Indeed, in the example [1.3] the learner evidences problems using the Subjunctive Mood in Spanish; however, the process of meaning construction is unaffected as the use of ideational resources assists the learner in the process of logogenesis of a cohesive portrait of reality in the written recount.

3.1.2. The report on a news story

The following text [1.4] shows the configuration of meanings corresponding to a descriptive report that demands the learner to choose a piece of news that (1) classifies the phenomenon being informed and (2) provides a description of the phenomenon discussed in the original text. The first phase of a descriptive report offers a classification of the phenomenon discussed in the news story. The phenomenon referred in the two first lines of the report classifies the issue in discussion as pertaining to the control of the possession of firearms in Chile. Text [1.4] places a temporal circumstance in thematic position to build up the field of the description of events. Unlike the recount, the descriptive report presents activity sequences associated to abstract entities, example: “**Santiago** has started a campaign to involve **authorities of the community** in a strategy to prevent the trafficking of guns in the country”.

Text 1.4: Report on a news story: Gun control campaign

*Desde el mes pasado, Santiago inició una campaña para involucrar a las autoridades de la comunidad en una estrategia para prevenir **el flujo de armas hacia el país**. Activo ONG, la organización detrás de la campaña, dijo que en **Chile** hay 754.000 armas registradas y al menos de una veintena de permisos para llevar a la defensa personal (sic). Sin embargo, según Emol.com, "cada día 7 personas son detenidas por **porte ilegal de armas de fuego**." Entre **las comunas** que registraron mayor cantidad de casos **a nivel nacional**, se encuentra en primer lugar **Coquimbo**, seguido por **La Serena, San Bernardo, Puente Alto**, además de **Valparaíso** y **La Florida**, en el cuarto lugar.*

Since last month, Santiago has started a campaign to involve authorities of the community in a strategy to prevent **the trafficking of guns in the country**. ONG active, the organization behind the campaign, declared that in Chile there are 754.000 registered weapons and at least twenty permits to carry guns for personal defense. However, according to Emol.com, "every day 7 people are arrested for **illegal possession of firearms**." Among **the counties** that recorded the highest number of cases **nationwide**, we found **Coquimbo**, followed by **La Serena, San Bernardo, Puente Alto**, in addition to **Valparaiso** and **La Florida**, in the fourth place.

Text [1.4] identifies Santiago in the role of actor linked to a material process with the goal of working with authorities of the communities in a plan to stop gun trafficking. In a similar way, the report introduces another two abstract entities; both the *ONG Activa* and the website of the newspaper portal Emol.com, in the role of 'sayer' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) provides some statistics related to the number of registered firearms and gun possession permits. The entities involved in the piece of news reported are described through the use of technical lexis linked to gun control: **trafficking of guns; gun possession permits; registered weapons; illegal possession of firearms**.

Consequently, advanced language skills can be observed in the progression towards a more metaphorical construction of reality in the logogenetic process of writing in Spanish. Text [1.4] shows the adoption of more specialized lexis related to gun control. Additionally, we can observe the incorporation of abstract entities: *Santiago, Activa ONG* involved in activity sequences focused on a specific semantic field related to gun control strategies. Furthermore, the presence of relations of superordination explicitly exemplified by the identification of *Chile* and the inclusion of cities: **Coquimbo followed by La Serena ...in addition to Valparaiso**" Superordination (relations of being) contributes the construction of a coherent piece of

writing, but it also shows the learners' progression in the control of more specific lexical items. The choice of city names most possibly assumes shared knowledge with the readers, deriving from the learners' sense of membership to the community.

3.1.3. Critical response: blog comment to editorial texts

Critical response texts (Martin & Rose, 2007) gather writers' stance on a particular phenomenon. Blog postings in response to editorials or opinion columns, most certainly portray readers' construal of their own understanding of social phenomena debated online. In the case of text [1.5], the text corresponds to a blog posting in response to an opinion column that discusses over the changes that has affected Chilean education after it was privatized. A text response comprises an evaluation and a reaction. The first phase of the genre corresponding to evaluation in text [1.5] initiates addressing the author of the column. The latter highlights the interpersonal character of the blog comment and establishes the arguability of the stance taken by the author.

Text 1.5: Blog comment: Democracy in Chile

Estimado señor

Gracias, señor, por su perspectiva refrescante con respecto a las cosas que suceden en Santiago. El fundamento de la democracia en este país se basa en la idea de que una persona tiene y puede actuar sobre sus propios derechos. Con una historia tan radical de la revuelta y las protestas en Chile puede ser difícil de detener las acciones abusivas de las clases sociales altas que se aprovechan de la libertad que les da el privilegio. Sin embargo, creo que la democracia de este país se le debe a sus ciudadanos comunes y movimientos sociales. Estos han tomado medidas contra las tradicionales oligarquías en un esfuerzo para poner fin a los abusos cometidos por estas castas.

Dear Sir

Thank you, sir, for your refreshing perspective on the things that happen in Santiago. The foundation of democracy in this country is based on the idea that a person has and can act on their own rights. With such a radical history of the revolt and protests in Chile it can be difficult to stop the abusive actions of the upper social classes who take advantage of the freedom that gives them the privilege. However, I believe that democracy of this country is due to its citizens and social movements. These have taken measures against the traditional oligarchies in an effort to put an end to the abuses committed by these castes.

Following the formal greeting, the learner praises the inspirational viewpoint of the editorial in the original text. The learner, then, takes the opportunity to expand the

author's view with his own perspective. The construction of interpersonal meaning through the use of a formal way of addressing the author of the column: "*Estimado Señor*" opens the interaction. The inclusion of the formal vocative indicates that the blogger overtly positions himself as an interlocutor in what he construes as a conversation. This first greeting is followed by a positive evaluation of the contribution that the editorial column makes to clarify the taking up of the streets by social movements: "*Gracias, señor, por su perspectiva refrescante con respecto a las cosas que suceden en Santiago*". This opening is clearly consistent with linguistic choices Chilean bloggers commonly make from the system to be coherent with the first stage of the genre, namely, evaluation. This stage is followed by a second phase identified as 'reaction', whose function is to contest or support the arguments displayed in the original text with new evidence.

Regarding, the lexicogrammatical features that show the progression towards higher levels of proficiency, it is interesting to observe that the construction of the reaction to the original text is articulated through a metaphorical construal of reality: "*El fundamento de la democracia en este país se basa en la idea de que una persona tiene y puede actuar sobre sus propios derechos*". The reconstrual of reality expressed through the metaphoric configuration of elements results in rank shift. The clause opening: *El fundamento de la democracia en este país* is the result of a reconfiguration of elements that enables the grammatical shift from an active construction of reality represented by the Chilean democracy in possession of a foundation: *La democracia en este país tiene un fundamento*, to a metaphoric construction that reflects on the source on which the foundation of democracy lies in Chile, namely individual rights. Another piece of evidence added to the comment highlights the importance of social movements in deterring upper social classes, to a certain extent, from abusive behavior rooted in their privileges. At this point, it is important to observe the presence of class/member cohyponymic relation (Martin & Rose 2007; Martin, 2009) represented in the choice of *clases sociales altas* and *ciudadanos comunes*. Both lexical choices, namely, upper social classes and ordinary individuals share a hyperonymy, that is to say, they are members of the Chilean social structure. Finally, it is also fundamental to observe the presence, at the end of the paragraph, of semantically burdened synonyms to identify upper social classes, namely: *oligarquias tradicionales* and *castas* suggest a degree of contempt to abusive behavior of privileged classes. Accordingly, the analysis of written tasks shows that upper intermediate learners of Spanish demonstrate a progression towards more elaborated construction of meanings. This is particularly observable in the objectification of the dynamic nature of reality realized in the choice of more technical lexicogrammatical resources and the expansion of nominalization.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to observe the transition of intermediate learners towards advanced writing skills in second language. Upper intermediate learners

enrolled in an immersion program of Spanish in the *Universidad Católica de Chile* were exposed to a progression of genres considered significant for the local culture. The transition of second language learners from congruent semiosis that characterizes early oral interaction towards synoptic meaning expressed in writing is observed in the presence of taxonomic relations and metaphoric patterns of meaning. The presence of more technical lexical choices, expressed in specific taxonomies, and grammatical metaphors contribute to the construction of a more abstract portrait of reality. This entails that writing is reorganized around more technical lexicogrammatical patterns aimed at discussing uncommonsense phenomena such as: drug trafficking, politics, economics, etc. In this context, most written tasks show a careful choice of linguistic resources coherent with the nature of each genre to which learners were exposed. This denotes the development of discourse semantic and lexicogrammatical awareness over the specific use of language required by the genres explored. These results are coherent with Matthiessen's (2006, 2009) findings over language learning in instructed settings. The author points out that language development is strongly dependent upon high levels of awareness about what he calls meaningfulness of grammar, an ability learners grow to perceive classroom language as more significant than just an input. This enables learners to engage in writing to learn, a process that implies meaning construction by learning through language and learning about language.

The analysis of the three tasks selected for this study shows an expansion of the semantic space in the learners' systemic memory, that is to say in the learners' mental lexicon (Mathiessen, 2006: 212). Regarding personal recounts of events, results showed that most learners were engaged in the construction of reality expressed through dynamic transitivity patterns, namely: participant + process + circumstances. The analysis of the written tasks showed that recounts of weekend activities provide learners with the opportunity to express a greater comprehension of the local cultural behavior. This is observed in the development of field awareness exposed in the selection of vocabulary closely related to free time activities (de Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Additionally, the comprehension of the culture influences positively on the learners' own construction of their membership to the Chilean culture. This is, in fact, observed in all personal recounts examined through the presence of degrees of lexical precision reflected in the choice of vocabulary commonly used by locals in their own narrative (de Oliveira & Schleppegrell, 2015). Additionally, traditional cultural weekend activities are narrated using expressions commonly adopted by youngsters as shown by examples provided earlier. Consequently, the analysis of personal recounts confirms what Halliday (1978), Painter (1986, 1991) and Achugar and Colombi (2008) assert about the process of language learning. This entails the development of the learner as a member of a culture. As a matter of fact, becoming member of a culture in the role of second language learner involves being exposed to social practices that reshape language use.

Regarding expository texts, the news report requested learners' attention to the discussion of issues relevant in the local and the international agenda. Similarly, the

critical response demanded the learners' construction of their personal stance over social, political or economic matters that were relevant to the local agenda. News reports and text responses enabled learners to build up their cultural membership to the Chilean society. In this regard, news reports and critical responses to texts show the construction of learners' expert knowledge on relevant political, social and economic issues affecting the Chilean society. This is observed in the presence of nominal expressions for naming the issues to be exposed and in the choice verbs of thinking for taking a stance. Unlike personal recounts, the linguistic choices of learners displayed in news reports and text responses attempt to construct a fair portrait of Chilean reality and reflect on it. Consequently, the exposure of learners to the writing of news reports and critical text responses allow the observer to trace their transition towards synoptic manners of constructing experience by building up themselves as participants in the institutional contexts of professions and citizenship.

In all, the progression of learners towards advanced proficiency in second language may be understood as a multidimensional process characterized by the mechanization of lower stratum elements conformed by the control of grammatical patterns coupled with meanings and the expansion of vocabulary related to quotidian situations. Once the access to vocabulary is automated, the development of advanced skills would be focused on the attainment of greater specificity in discourse semantic and lexicogrammatical strata through the increasing control of more technical and specialized ways of constructing knowledge throughout the exposure of learners to institutional genres.

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