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The Impact of Peers' and Experts' Readership on the Revision of Thesis Excerpts

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This work focuses on the results of a thesis writing workshop designed to prepare graduate students to complete the writing of their graduate theses. Under the guidance of workshop coordinators, and in response to both didactic instruction and peer feedback and interaction, participants discuss and rewrite certain parts of their thesis work, including the title, subject specification (or abstract), and table of contents, as well as writing and revising the back cover of a possible book derived from the research. The structure of the workshop activities and exercises is outlined before I present my findings by highlighting the most common difficulties that graduate students face through the examination and comparison of their initial texts and subsequent revisions I propose that these workshops constitute an important support mechanism, helping participants become familiar with and adapt to the expectations of their respective scientific discourse communities.

The growing importance of graduate studies in recent years and the low percentage of students who complete them has prompted reflection on the process of composing theses, the difficulties that this activity presents for many students, and the most appropriate modes of pedagogical intervention.¹ Methodology workshops have attended to the consideration of writing problems in graduate theses, which are perceived as one of the causes of the abandonment of this stage of training by many students. Although in some degrees, such as those that correspond to Health Sciences, for example, the lack of explicit writing instruction in academic genres also affects the difficulties of completing the final thesis work, in others, from the humanities to the social sciences, the situation is different since students have

1 Our research and pedagogical intervention proposals are carried out within the framework of the project "Writing and production of knowledge in postgraduate careers" (PICT; E 14184, from the Agencia Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, 2005-2007)

been encouraged throughout their studies to compose essays or reports that can lead to conference proceedings or research articles. However, in all cases, the thesis, insofar as it is a more demanding text, forces the student to place themselves in the position of a writer responsible for producing new knowledge that must be displayed in a lengthy text which requires specific formatting and genre conventions. For this reason, various universities have implemented thesis workshops and writing workshops in which the texts produced—thesis proposals, presentations, summaries, table of contents, and chapters—are subject to various revisions based on critical reading by other students and instructors.

This collaborative interaction, which starts from the reading of different drafts of their peers' papers, advances the members of the group not only because they understand more fully the role of writing in the production and communication of knowledge and can in turn improve their own writing, but also because through this process they recognize the discursive strategies that they can apply to their own work in order to activate previous knowledge and consider varying research paths which offer different perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

Graduate capstone projects challenge the double dimension of writing, and of language in general, as a privileged semiotic tool for intellectual operations (Vygotsky, 1979) and as an instrument of communication. This inquiry is done in a new way not typically undertaken at previous educational levels. The many cognitive and discursive demands that the thesis writing process imposes on students requires systematic pedagogical treatment in learning spaces (Arnoux, Borsinger et al., 2004; Carlino, 2005; Pereira & di Stefano, 2007). At the graduate level, these spaces are in general workshops that typically combine theoretical reflection about discourse with reading and writing activities. In these spaces, the students progressively acquire genre knowledge, develop metacognitive strategies that allow them to regulate their work as writers, and acquire the expected ways of being within a scientific discourse community.

The main goal of these workshops centers around the mastery of genres including the "thesis proposal," "thesis," and the "thesis defense." For this reason, the workshop must ensure that students make the necessary and progressive revisions between the stages of research and textualization, characteristic of the process of composing an academic text (Rastier, 2003). Our starting point is to consider genres, following Bronckart, as "products of choices made among other possible ones, which are momentarily 'crystallized' or stabilized

by the use" (2004, p. 104)—in our case, of the academic community. Bronckart argues that all text production implies choices “relative to the selection and combination of structuring mechanisms, cognitive operations, and their linguistic modes of realization” (2004, p. 104). These choices, which are “the result of the work of social formations, seek to adapt the text to a given communicative medium or to make the text effective in a specific social situation” (Bronckart, 2004, p. 104), must be recognized by the students in order to respond to the demands of graduate writing. Learning the expected stylistic and compositional features of these institutional genres (Maingueneau, 2002) includes adapting to fairly rigid schemes that are regulated by the academic community, the mastery of which are required by students in order to produce an acceptable thesis.

Based on feedback to the drafts of sections of the thesis or of other similar texts which are assigned, the students reflect on the task, on the personal possibilities which are intertwined with their successful completion of the task, and on the revisions that must be made based on those established goals. The subsequent writing and revision stages are guided by the evaluations, reviews, and comments of peers and experts. This process tends to make the epistemic value of writing visible (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Flower, 1979; Flower & Hayes, 1996; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1992) and to facilitate the development of metacognitive skills (Flavell, 1996; Peronard, 1999) in relation to the texts that must be addressed in the graduate course. However, beyond the evaluation and revision of the requested texts, what is fundamentally sought is the advancement of students in the configuration of an increasingly adjusted representation of the thesis. This representation should include a clearly articulated central theme that assigns relevance, and an evaluative dimension that highlights the contributions in relation to a field of knowledge, the research steps, and the thesis structure. This representation of the thesis is evoked, referenced, manipulated, reconfigured by students in these encounters with different interlocutors.

As at previous educational levels, the task of rewriting is essential. Even though rewriting could stem from the self-revision of these drafts, the observations and suggestions from other participants also shape this stage of the writing. The comments from others help in the transition from hetero-regulatory mechanisms to self-regulatory mechanisms (Cubero, 2005; Vygotsky, 1979). Daniel Bessonnat emphasizes that rewriting “involves interaction, intervention of the teacher-mediator or of the peers, who with their critical readings will relaunch the writing process” (2000, p. 9). In this way, these formative mediations, as Bronckart calls them, are deployed and focused on the teaching and learning of textuality, which inculcate newcomers

and contribute to the “emergence and development of individual processes of conscious thought” (2004, p. 99). In these formative mediations—in our case, of graduate studies—the student advances intellectually in carrying out their task not only due to the objections or contributions of others but also as a result of having to defend their points of view before an audience (Brown et al., 2000). This dialogic instance facilitates the subsequent representation of possible interlocutors when they must carry out their writing task alone; that is, it facilitates the internalization of intersubjectivity by considering and even integrating the points of view of others.

Claudine Dardy and colleagues (2002, p. 18), from a more anthropological perspective, warn that “a thesis is not just a one-on-one with a research project in which you have to find its Ariadna thread, but a long process of socialization triggered by ‘inscription.’” In another moment of reflection, she maintains that “the complete journey of the thesis can be considered as an initiation rite to the university world, as progressive learning and mastery of the signs of belonging to that environment, that is, an initiation journey” (p. 28).

This journey attends to the insertion of the thesis writer into a scientific discourse community. Jean-Claude Beacco defines the discursive community in general as that “institution that gains coherence from its discursive practices, whatever the nature of its social and technical organization” (2004, p. 117). From this perspective, the student will become part of a discourse community that produces knowledge in a specific area and that is also a social space defined by the investigation of certain topics, the circulation of certain genres, the legitimation rituals of the producers of texts, and the institutional instances of evaluation. Moreover, this community is defined by the condition of access to the materials, the ways of processing them, the verification mechanisms, and the ways of evaluating or referring to sources. It is also characterized by the “genre chains” that it admits or stimulates, that is, by those “successive elaborations of the same ‘semantic matter’ that are carried out under different genre forms” (Beacco, 2004, p. 117). For example, a conference presentation or proceedings that become a specialized journal article, or the thesis that results in the publication of one or more books.

The workshop renders visible to the thesis writer the community in which they are going to enter, and gives substance to and fosters the cooperative links that will sustain many of their future academic practices. Thus, those who participate must commit to generously and critically read the texts presented to them as participants in a community-initiation process. The instructors, advisors, and experts summoned must assume the role of guiding and controlling this entry so that it is as successful as possible.

The Group Impacted by the Pedagogical Experience

The participants of this study were students who attended the thesis writing workshop in a master's program in discourse analysis during 2004 and 2005.² Nine students participated in the first workshop and twelve students in the second. The students had undergraduate degrees from the disciplines of letters, communication, arts, anthropology, psychology, and law. The average age of participants was 39 in the first group and 37 in the second group. The students who attend this graduate program rarely present difficulties for the production of a written text, but they must acquire in this workshop the skills to produce a thesis proposal, a thesis, and a thesis defense. This can be observed in the responses to a survey given to them at the beginning of the workshop that allows the instructors to make a first diagnosis and organize the topics of the introductory class. One of the questions reads: "Thinking about the tasks involved in writing a thesis, in which aspects do you feel a) confident and b) not confident and why?" We will consider how students perceive their difficulties in relation to the answers to option b, in addition to supporting quotes from an open-ended question ("Explain in a text of about 20 lines at what stage of the thesis project you are") where they develop their writing insecurities. We selected those that seem most significant for the purposes of our argument.

In this initial stage, few students state writing problems related to the thesis. However, as the following example shows, some responses highlight the problems of the textual plan, the hierarchy of the information, and the academic style:

[...] Lack of organization of ideas. What should be highlighted? What ideas are substantially more important? The writing progress around my thesis requires "polishing," finding its own place.

In general, the difficulties are related to global problems, which show that they are unable to have the initial representation of a possible thesis that allows the development of a research proposal. Added to this is the insecurity regarding the genre called "proposal," which is exposed when they refer to the possible elements:

2 In the Master's in Discourse Analysis of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires, an 80-hour thesis workshop was planned and, when the plan was modified, a thesis writing workshop, also 80 hours, was added based on survey findings where students reported difficulty with writing.

- Present the hypothesis clearly / search for the state of the art (fear of not being able to specify or not being able to discover everything that has been done about the chosen problem / narrowing down the topic / methodology.
- In the delimitation of the hypotheses and its argumentation.

Some responses mentioned the difficulties of choosing a research topic based on the expectations of the graduate level, which requires reaching a certain level of originality, raising a relevant topic appropriate for a thesis, and making a contribution to the field of knowledge to their discipline (a problem that is accentuated when appealing to different disciplines). We emphasize that these are typical institutional requirements, particularly at the doctoral level³ but such requirements reflect also on the master's level and have an impact on future thesis writers:

- Assess the originality of the contributions that my thesis can make / I am still at the moment of searching for relevant issues or a problem on which to focus my attention. In other words, I have a starting point but I still do not fully see the point of arrival.
- Find a topic of interest for law and for discourse analysis, with the appropriate interdisciplinary approach / in the planning of the work / in the writing of the thesis / in the theoretical framework.
- Consider questions and concerns about the definition of the work plan and the assessment of the difficulties that carrying it out may present to me / I think I have defined the topic or, rather, the area. However, I have many doubts about its relevance and the viability of the project.

Others point to theoretical and methodological difficulties, especially when defining the main research problem, which allows them to select readings and materials, define the scope of the work, ascribe to a specific area of knowledge, and evaluate possible progress.

- Regarding the analysis of the corpus since I have not found an adequate qualitative methodology. / There is a complex search for what I want to achieve, there is a lot of theoretical material. Sometimes I wonder if there is so much or if I am the one who thinks that everyone talks about the same thing. / On the other hand, I have gathered corpus despite not knowing yet what is the required amount of data.

3 Umberto Eco, in his now classic 1977 manual, referred to these requirements, pointing out that a thesis has to say things that have not yet been said about an object or to review things that have already been said but with a different perspective.

- I have some problems of a purely theoretical nature / I lack sufficient awareness to define whether the theoretical support is always necessary.
- I feel insecure in the knowledge of the current state of the theories and empirical analyses/ in regards with the ways of verification of my methods of analysis and my conclusions / in the confrontation between the texts and the social practices in which they are inscribed.

All this increases when the field being addressed does not have either fixed ways for analysis nor established formats for research and communication of results in relation to most of the topics, as happens, for example, in STEM. Rather, there are many exploratory options on which students can base their first hypotheses, but in these instances students themselves have to find their own approach to them.⁴ Students are forced to make methodological choices that are adjusted throughout their work. Many of these students are not even part of research teams nor collaborate with faculty members, and consequently must define the field and the problem of their project alone or with the sole support of their faculty advisor. Although the workshop includes sessions focused on methodology, and the students discuss with graduate students who are about to defend and with guest researchers who show different approaches, progress mostly occurs when students must produce texts by themselves. It is the articulation of these theoretical, methodological, and analytic perspectives that results in their peers commenting on and responding to their work in ways which help to guide how they approach revision and rewriting. Moreover, the majority of the students that take the course do not have an advisor yet; something that generates anguish:

- Constructing and working with a corpus. / I do not have a faculty advisor and I feel that I need one as soon as possible to have a qualified interlocutor who can assess what I have done so far.

Faced with this situation and as a preliminary step to assigning a faculty advisor, the workshop introduces audiences with differentiated expertise. In this learning instance, students interact with their peers, with specialists, with the workshop's instructor, with faculty advisors, with the students who have completed the thesis and are awaiting the defense, and with recent graduates or with experienced readers. This interaction enhances the acquisition and activation of knowledge in terms of genre and strategy, as well as the discipline-specific knowledge of the field in which the project is inscribed.

4 In "El análisis del discurso como campo interdisciplinario" [Discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary field], Chapter 1 of *Análisis del Discurso. Modos de abordar materiales de archivo*, Buenos Aires, Santiago Arcos, 2006, I referred to methodological aspects of discourse analysis, an area in which the workshops that I review here are developed.

These interactions happen within the workshop and in various one-on-one meetings.

Modes of Intervention

In some graduate programs from other areas of knowledge, the first activities of the workshop focus on making students aware of the peculiarities of a complex written text and even on providing support tools for specific tasks with writing such as systematizing the use of transition devices, punctuation rules, citation practices, paragraph construction, footnote formatting, etc. In other cases, the primary focus is on the characteristics of discipline-specific texts. In all cases, it is considered that these learnings should lead, on the one hand, to automate some aspects so that in the writing process they leave free cognitive resources to attend to more significant tasks required by the text and, on the other, to solve more easily the rhetorical problems that may arise.

The study's participants attend a thesis workshop in a graduate program at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. As a result, the pedagogical intervention has a particular focus: the written exercises that are designed and carried out are not intended to evaluate or advance academic written competence, but rather constitute support for the student to define their research and build a global representation of their thesis that allows them to integrate the results and feedback obtained. Although the genres which correspond to this educational level are addressed, beyond analyzing and reflecting on generic features of these genres, what is primarily sought is the ability for students to refine the cognitive-discursive operations necessary for the different stages of preparation and writing of the thesis.

The materials produced by the student writers are later read and discussed during the workshop or in one-on-one meetings with tutors. Typically, they consist of different genres associated with the thesis project or to a related pedagogical goal and allow for rewriting. This rewriting responds, to a large extent, to the interpretations, questions, and discussions made in one or another dialogical situation, which brings into play the knowledge of the participants and their perspectives on the problem addressed. The role of the diverse points of view at play within the framework of the workshop also has a positive impact, as previously noted, on the communicative dimension of the revision writing, as it facilitates the construction of imagined readers and the implementation of strategies that consider their expectations.

We must emphasize that, although the training in revision is developed throughout schooling (Arnoux, Nogueira et al., 2004), it requires a broad mastery at the graduate level. Students must be able to go through the various

strategies that make up the continuum that goes from explanatory revision—schematically, saying “the same” in another way—to imitative revision, or, in other words, saying something else in the “same” way (Arnoux, 2004; Fuchs, 1994). That is, they must be able to choose, at one point in the process, from among different possibilities within a paraphrastic family (Culioli, 1990) or to expand the excessively condensed segments of their text in an intradiscursive way by considering the discourses of another audience and the appropriate “ways of saying” of the discipline. But rewriting also requires the ability to reshape your own text based on a tighter genre representation and on the potential objections from the intended audience. In this, the verbal interaction based on the writings in the framework of the workshop, in the one-on-one meetings with tutors, or in the written feedback of the readings are all essential.

To define the pedagogical sequence of the workshop, the team that I lead combines the results from two analyses: the results from the participatory observations of the members who collaborate with the workshop coordinator to assess the dynamics of each session and the analysis of the texts and revision strategies followed by the students. The latter constitute the textual traces, in individual work, of a collective effort. A relative mastery of academic writing that we have referred to allows us to better evaluate the impact of reading and rewriting in the intellectual process that will partially culminate in the thesis.

The function of the different activities planned in the workshop is intended to support this process by stimulating in the students a series of complex operations that are required to successfully master the genre of the thesis. These pedagogical activities simulate different parts of the thesis work, which requires considering a diverse array of texts and genres. I address, among other elements, title, specifications of the topic, literature review, research questions, objectives, bibliography, summaries, presentation, back cover, analytical table of contents, chapters, and the role critical readers play in these texts. This discursive diversity models the thesis from different frameworks and by readers who have followed the student writer through these different steps and who share the conversational history of the workshop.

When a thesis proposal or chapter is completed, an expert reader who has *not* participated in that conversational story is called to assess the text and provide feedback, which in most cases is written but can also be oral. We believe that for the pedagogical work of the workshop to be more effective, some types of feedback should be combined: written feedback in digital texts with their own interactive features, and oral feedback, via telephone or face-to-face exchanges. It is also worth noting that our workshops generally include the participation of three experts, all with different roles, in addition to the thesis supervisor.

Proposed Written Exercises: An Analysis of Some Results

In this section, I discuss and illustrate some of the pedagogical topics that the workshop focuses on, including developing titles, the back cover of a possible book, and the table of contents. What I hope to highlight is how the peer and experts' critical reading intervenes in what, to my knowledge, is fundamental in the workshop, that is the construction of a global representation of the thesis that allows integrating and prioritizing the final writing.

Title and Specification of the Topic

The title is especially important in specifying the topic and in defining the thematic axis of the text, which in turn lends relevance to the different sections of the project. The proposal of the title and its explanation of the thesis as well as the interpretations of the title made by their peers allow students to recognize imbalances between the global representation of the research and the textual segments that constitute it. These imbalances have to do, in general, with a foreseeable lack of clarity in the objectives of the task to be carried out. The title section of the text is changed the most as it undergoes a series of modifications until the moment of presentation of the project and even later when the thesis is delivered (in our graduate program, a quarter of the students request approval for changing the title when presenting the final work).

Below are some examples of title revisions based on the interactions promoted in the workshops with peers and coordinators or in the one-on-one meetings with the tutors.

(1)

a. Discursive analysis of selected poems and the short story "Evita vive" by N. P.

b. Poetry and body. The conformation of a poetic writing as a sensual body and the treatment of bodies in the poetry of N. P. (1980-1992).

The above example shows a transition from a broad title that resembles a school prompt (1.a) to defining a focus that already implies certain hypotheses about the importance of the body as it is represented in the poetry of N. P. and the links with other poetic writing (1.b). Thanks to the workshop interactions, two areas of improvement for the text emerged. The first one was regarding the limited integration of the story into the proposal, evidenced in the writer's difficulty to narrow the topic. The second one was about the need

to further delimit the corpus. These ideas led to the transformations that we see in 1.b in which the relationship between poetry and body constitutes the focus. This information is included in the subtitle along with the stage of the poet's production as indicated by the dates.

(2)

a. The legal discourse and the concept of interpretation in law in rulings on transsexuality (according to publication in the legal repertoires of the magazines "La ley" and "El Derecho" during the years 1952/2004).

b. Legal speech. Transsexuality in the repertoires of Argentine jurisprudence (years 1966 to 2004). From punishment to recognition of rights.c. Jurisprudence and doctrine. Analysis of the discourse on transsexuality in the Argentine legal repertoires (1966-2004).

Item 2.a shows how articulating the area of knowledge in the title can be a problem, especially for students whose undergraduate programs are more or less far from the graduate space. The initial segment, "the legal right," although it exposes the will to change, appears detached or, at least, not articulated with the rest of the title and is very broad—even more extensive than in the reformulations. Item 2.b seems to delimit the scope of the topic, however, the main question regarding the sources is not yet evident. It seems a simple thematic path with a prior delimitation of the field, in which the third phrase interprets the meaning of the path. The collective reading of the specification of the topic, which accompanied the revision of the title, permits the reader to understand vacillations and uncertainties. I present here the first specification:

The rulings to be considered, which constitute the jurisprudential discourse, address demands for a change of name and gender in the public registry and in the documentation (and in some cases the authorization to undergo sexual reassignment surgeries). Such demands are raised by people who define themselves as transsexuals insofar as they do not identify with the gender that the public documentation attributes to them in consonance with the genetic sex that is expressed in the genitals.

The rulings that are legally and socially relevant in relation to the various issues resolved by the Courts appear in the legal repositories. The chosen journals turn out to be the most

widely disseminated and consulted in the legal environment, and the ones that have had the greatest temporal continuity. The initial cut-off date coincides with the public diffusion of the first news from abroad on the subject. An attempt will be made to review all the material available to date.

The specification describes the materials to be addressed in the thesis, indicates that a first survey has been carried out, and then points to specific legal problems to which the thesis writer assigns significant importance. This leads to item 2.c, which shows a new specification in which to display the phrase “discourse analysis” intended to facilitate the recognition of how the research is represented and, above all, how the legal problem is still missing.

The initial revision of the specification of the topic shows the progress in reflection:

This thesis seeks to examine the changes that legal discourse has introduced in the representation of transsexuality over a diachronic axis (1966-2004). The data sources will be the jurisprudence (rulings) and doctrine (comments on rulings) that contain the treatment of the issue raised by the transsexual, considering the specificity that sustains them as genres of the legal field. Finally, the study inquires into the underlying vision of law and justice present in the texts analyzed, that is, whether it reflects a formalistic/legalistic orientation or one grounded in principles of equity.

(3)

- a. Actants, participants, or thematic roles in the historical school discourse.
- b. The first Peronist period in the textbooks of Argentine History: A linguistic-discursive study.
- c. The first Peronist period in the Argentine History textbooks (1980-2000): A linguistic-discursive study.

Item 3.a is an expression of desire, where an attempt is made to articulate the genre and the theoretical problems that interest the student but prior to the knowledge that resulted from the analysis. The second revision (3.b) already shows a refinement of the corpus and a more global perspective of the approach to the texts, which will allow the student to make other choices during the course of the thesis. In the third reformulation (3.c), the time

period is delimited, which results from the work with the corpus and the progress made in the representation of the thesis.

(4)

a. The technological imagination at the end of the 20th century: Robots, cyborgs and supercomputers in U.S. science fiction cinema.

b. Humanoid robots in transpositions from literature to U.S. science fiction film between 1980 and 2005: Semantic and ideological variations.

c. Humanoid robots in four transpositions from literature to U.S. science fiction cinema of the last three decades: Semantic and ideological variations.

d. Transpositions of four science fiction narratives to U.S. cinema in the last three decades: The case of the humanoid robot figure.

e. Transpositions of four science fiction narratives to U.S. cinema in the last three decades: Around the figure of the humanoid robot.

The collection under item 4 shows a shift and significant narrowing of the targeted topic. The writer has progressively defined the axis: from the study of technological imagination at the end of the 20th century, where it planned to address three cases, it went on to focus on humanoid robots within the framework of the transposition from literature to cinema before, finally, focusing on the problem of transposition. Robots became a case example and then, later, the figure to be privileged. The transpositions have been limited to four and the dates have given way to the "last three decades." All these changes arose from the dialogues with the peers, with the instructor, and the tutor, in which each phrase was being deployed and questioned.

The traces of this process are evident in the displacement and switching of places in the title of the two phrases that function as foci: "humanoid robots" and "transposition." In the abstract of (a) the central focus is the figure of the intelligent automaton whereas in (b) and (c) the transposition makes the focus more generic. However, the articulation is still missing. This is done in (d), since the robots are presented as the example, but from the reading carried out by the tutor who explicitly tried to interpret the task that the student was supposed to carry out, the last change was made and can be seen in title (e) with the revision "around the figure."

The two passages below illustrate this process with the extended description of (a) and (d). The description of the first title started in the following way:

The figure of the intelligent automaton has a long history in Western culture, both in myth and in magic and in the origins of science such as in alchemy. The traces of that figure have been felt especially in literature. But it took on new forms and new meanings with the height of the industrial revolution and with the cultural predominance of modern science and technology, and with them it came to be incorporated into the imagination of the time, nurturing a new literary genre, science fiction.

This beginning requires a historical examination that would excessively expand the framework of the analytical work, although it may constitute an introductory section of the thesis. The specification of (d), on the contrary, focuses on a theoretical problem that will constitute the framework of the research:

Transposition can be defined as the passage of a text from one medium to another (passage from literature to film, from film to literature, from literature to comic, etc.). In the study of this semiotic phenomenon, it is a matter of seeing mainly what happens with the *continuities* and *semantic variations*⁵ that take place with these passages, of establishing how the text has been approached, if it has been looked through the lenses of genre or if another type of discursive chain has been implemented. My goal is to study a region of the contemporary mass culture, the U.S. science fiction genre, from this perspective of semiotic analysis, trying to see what kinds of readings are made of some classic texts of this genre in Hollywood cinema in the last three decades. I am going to limit the scope of the work to the study of a specific figure of the iconography of the genre, the humanoid robot, since this figure is central in what it does to the representations of the human in its relations with technology.

Based on these examples, we can see the procedures that the student writers must go through to define a topic whose first discursive expression is

5 The text has been italicized by the student writer.

found in the title. At the beginning, students tend to draw the interest of their first readers with an essayistic, metaphorical title that seeks to attract attention. In the course of their interactions, however, they realize the uselessness of creating a title if it is not accompanied by a representation of what is going to be done in the writing. The successive revisions show a more complete understanding of the students' own work and, therefore, a significant advancement in the development of the thesis.

The Back Cover

In the second section of the workshop, after submitting the thesis proposal, the first exercises continue to emphasize the construction of a global representation of the thesis while stimulating the recognition of its constituent parts. One of the exercises is to write a summary for the back cover of a book and propose the table of content for the thesis.

The first prompt is to write a back cover for the publication of the thesis as a book. The value of this exercise is that the back cover summary is a synthesis work but one that exists within the framework of a genre that is not typical of the development of the thesis and that accentuates the argumentative dimension of the work since it is part of an editor's paratext designed to stimulate purchase of the book. Activating this rhetorical component is interesting because it must be present in the introduction, in the conclusions, and in the subsequent thesis defense as well. The almost fictional situation of making the back cover of a book written from a thesis not yet completed disinhibits the author and in doing so facilitates their entry into the workshop revision scenario and the acceptance of criticism.

The review of the initial back cover carried out within the framework of the workshop by peers and coordinators and the resulting revisions help to illuminate the central aspects of the mental representation of the thesis, a representation of great plasticity that will be modeled throughout the entire course of thesis work. This dialogue with and around the thesis allows the author to return to it by making the necessary adjustments in thematic orientation, which the title can only partially address. This action in part justifies the thesis and makes it valuable in the research process and as a part of the writing.

Let us observe, as an illustration, a back cover draft and its revised version (the places in which the observations of the colleague who made the first reading were focused are indicated with italics). The title is "Media cuisine: Food discourse in Argentine periodicals (1940-1970)" [*La cocina mediática: el discurso alimentario en las publicaciones periódicas argentinas (1940-1970)*]. I want to emphasize that the author had advanced considerably in his research

because he had received a fellowship, something quite exceptional in the Argentine MA graduate system:

a. *Food customs in Argentina have changed a lot in recent years.* This study consists of a historical journey through the recipes and journalistic articles dedicated to food that appeared in the Argentine weekly magazines published between 1940 and 1970. As a result of this journey, *the discursive variations in the treatment of food in our country* can be appreciated. Taking into account contextual changes that occur in the period linked to technological developments (changes in the fuels used for cooking, the massive adoption of the electric refrigerator, among others) and food distribution (the appearance of supermarkets, for example), *the work inquires the processes that are reconstructed from the textual configuration of articles and cooking recipes.* These processes allow a glimpse of what Argentine society considered **appetizing** in its periodical publications. *The different modalities in which this sense is built throughout 40 years of our history are related to stylistic changes, the presence of citations to other media, and the matrices of the different intervening genres.*

The revision proposed after the shared reading and the questions, observations, objections of the participants in the workshop was the following:

b. What did Argentine magazines consider appetizing 60 years ago? Was it the same as 30 years later? To account for these concerns, this study analyzes the recipe pages and journalistic articles dedicated to food that appeared between 1940 and 1970 in Argentine weekly magazines. Considering the contextual changes that occur in the period linked to technological developments (changes in the fuels used for cooking, the massive adoption of the electric refrigerator, among others) and food distribution (the appearance of supermarkets, for example), the author inquires about how and what the magazines talked about when they referred to food. The stylistic changes, the citations to other media, and the matrices of the different intervening genres constitute the main pathway of the thesis to describe the changes in the social representation of the individual and non-transferable *sense of appetite.*

The revision better defines an intended audience to whom a representation of the content of the text must be proposed in order to draw their interest

to the analytical process. The sections marked with italics in the first example were the places in the text where the class discussions centered.

In the first place, the readers noted that the opening sentence did not correspond to the selected historical time period, as the data points out, but rather sought a way to arouse interest simply by pointing out the study's relationship to the present. The discussion on what could be the main value of the study, which is central for the presentation of the research in different academic fields and, particularly, to *introduce* the thesis and to later defend the thesis in front of a committee, prompted the revision that led to the initial position *what is considered appetizing*, with the corresponding changes with respect to the years covered by the study.

Secondly, the result that is developed on the back cover ("to appreciate the discursive variations in the treatment of food in our country") was contested because it was too general and did not correspond to the scope of the investigation. In the revision, it was removed and replaced by the ending: "to describe the changes in the social representation of the individual and non-transferable sense of appetite." Likewise, "discursive variations" was replaced by "how and what the magazines talked about" that is more suited to the intended audience of an editor's paratext. It is worth emphasizing that the articulation of the thematic axis and the evaluative focus enable the student to build a global representation of the thesis. Symbolically, the fact that the most significant portions from that perspective open and close the reformulated text shows that this representation is being mentally defined.

Finally, the readers indicated the different meanings that stem from the passage "the processes that are reconstructed from the textual configuration of articles and cooking recipes. These processes allow a glimpse." In the workshop exchanges, the possible interpretations were discussed and the questions were highlighted: the textual configuration reconstructs the processes (What processes? Historical? Changes in representations?); or the processes are reconstructed by the researcher from the textual configurations (Do they uncover something? Or are they uncovered through analysis?). The overlaps of historical processes/changes in the representations/research process make the term "process" the place where the difficulty forms, especially because the transformations in social representations are slower than the related technological or commercial changes. This problem was partially solved in the decision to introduce the phrase "changes in the social representation of the sense of appetite." This revision separated the changes so that the core of the analysis—i.e., the discursive changes—were emphasized. The text orders the research process as follows: contextual data/survey of themes, styles, interdiscourse, genres/inferences from the interpretive activity based on specific aspects. The path that leads to this

order is also demonstrated in the last part of the back cover showing once again that “modalities,” regularities, or representations are derived from the study of discursive aspects, which was hidden in the predicate “are put in relation.”

Working on the written text allowed the student, in this case, to explicitly articulate the steps in the research process, which was what was really at stake and which the student writer seemed to hide under a discourse that only partially accounted for it. It is important to consider that insecurity or lack of confidence in methodological decisions, which in our example was crystallized in the term “process,” can constrain the student writer. Hence, both the readers’ responses and the one-on-one meetings with tutors are vital for helping students to understand how to express their methodological decisions. For a novice researcher who needs to show a certain expertise to others, the most fragile area of their image is that which has to do with methodology, particularly the type of research that dominates in the field to which I refer, in which there is no model to select and analyze the data. Thus, making the problem explicit and providing guidance for its solution is essential.

The Table of Contents

Regarding the table of contents of the thesis not yet written, to which I will refer briefly, the first presentation that the students make is a text or an outline full of potential chapter titles. The student must read it with the others, justify the sequence and proposed hierarchy, and synthesize the possible content of each section. This description and the questions from the other members of the group lead to a restructuring and significant changes in the subtitles as well as to an adjustment of the table of content that considers the thematic focus and the aspects that should be highlighted.

The first submissions, in general, do not account for the steps of the investigation or the writing, but after an initial critical reading of the table of contents, the most significant sections of one and the other are defined and the differences between the two orders are recognized. This is perhaps one of the most important functions of the tasks performed with the table of contents. On the one hand, the proposal that will guide the investigation is defined, which resulted from a topic and a main question. On the other hand, the writing schedule that will eventually lead to a more definite table of contents of the thesis is questioned based on the argumentative orientation, the construction of the figure of the enunciator, and the intended audience. The definition and differentiation of these two orders is a constant in the steps proposed by the literature about thesis writing (among others, Beaud, 1998). Some scholars have even proposed three steps (Fragnière, 1996): an indicative

proposal (based on the interview with tutors), a detailed operational proposal (after the first readings and which tends to plan the research tasks), and a writing proposal (which creates the final shape to the thesis).

Questions based on the first table of contents strengthen the journey, exclude unproductive directions, define the problem, and move toward what has not even been considered yet. On the other hand, these interactions activate the student writer's previous knowledge in relation to their subject, and help them recover ways of analysis, hypotheses, and interpretations that, because they were not yet mature, were left aside. Within the context of the workshop, the student is questioned by peers and experts about the points considered in the table of contents and this process helps to appeal to the knowledge and reflections that the student has made at different times about the subject but never considered up until that point.

Observe the first part of the following table of contents on "The female figure in Argentine graphic advertising:"

1. Female figuration and advertising
 - 1.1. Purposes
 - 1.2. Advertisements as a field of observation
 - 1.3. About periodization
 - 1.4. Approaches

Part I

A journey through advertisements

2. Beverages
 - 2.1. The '50s
 - 2.2. The '70s
 - 2.3. The '90s
3. Cigarettes
 - 3.1. The '50s
 - 3.2. The '70s
 - 3.3. The '90s
4. Clothing
 - 4.1. The '50s

The above excerpt shows the process of preparing the plan for the table of contents and does not present a global representation of the thesis as a whole or a more or less consistent work. This is typical of the initial stage of the research, where the student encounters difficulty in recognizing problems, lines of reflection, and differences between research plans and thesis proposals. In Chapter 1, the author addresses some of the introduction issues but does not highlight the problem from which it starts. Just as 1) is more focused on the final draft, the rest is an indicative plan prior to the readings and analysis of sources. The first part of the table of contents illustrates a common approach of students who include a historical section: they choose the simplest path, in this case, that of repeated diachrony around different objects. The exchanges based on the written text made it possible, within the framework of the workshop, to articulate the writer's hesitations and to encourage the articulation of the progress achieved that was not evident in the draft, thereby enabling subsequent reformulation.

Conclusion

I have analyzed the work that the students performed and the progressive and necessary adjustments they undertook in relation to the task, objectives, and materials of the workshop. I have also demonstrated how their research possibilities developed as a result of writing proposals designed for a thesis workshop and evidenced through the contrast between successive versions of their texts. Throughout the article, my goal has been to highlight the importance of working on texts written at the highest levels of the educational system where students must occupy the position of producers of knowledge and generate texts of high conceptual and discursive complexity. In the scope of a workshop, cooperative work on the texts produced allows us to reflect on the discursive mechanisms that generate certain reading effects as well as on the intellectual processes that shape the proposed text. The learning that is achieved from the discussion of the texts by the student or their peers is then integrated into the critical reading of the texts themselves, thus advancing on the path of greater autonomy.

Thanks to these dynamic interactions, these workshops fulfill the function of making the writing process observable, developing in the students a semi-otic awareness of the writing process, and demonstrating that writing is an object that can be modeled and transformed through the cognitive operations that the discursive space stimulates. Furthermore, these workshops constitute an important source of support for the student who is entering a scientific discourse community for which they must acquire mastery in areas such as

the disciplinary language, the accepted topics, the legitimate objects of reflection, and the ways of approaching them.

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Reflection

As I reread this article, I think that it provoked interest, first, because it responded to the concerns of an academic community worried, at that moment, about the problems of reading and writing in graduate education. During this time, there had been significant growth in graduate programs in different universities, which in turn required pedagogical strategies that would support the writing process of capstone projects. The difficulties that capstone projects generated were viewed as the major obstacle for the students to finish their studies. Secondly, the academic community was already sensitive to the need to reflect on the ways of impacting written production in higher

education—especially at the universities—and saw graduate education as a new challenge. Even though teachers could rely on the research and practice-based learning that had taken place since the beginning of the 1990s at the undergraduate level, graduate programs required catering to a different audience and the producing texts that exhibited greater complexity.

On the other hand, the field was also aware of the limitations of prescriptive initiatives and of the benefits of promoting interaction among writers that emphasized the epistemic function of writing. The workshop structure—the one that the article's experience replicated—had proven to be an adequate approach with which to address these concerns. Finally, the article expressed, once again, the importance of incorporating the knowledge developed by discourse analysis (DA), which many instructors ascribed to, and to make contributions to DA from a reflective and situated perspective that would respect the educational exigencies.

The article illustrates the results of a research trajectory focused on the analysis of the rewriting of students' texts, a process encouraged by the feedback of peers and experts. However, it is not limited to the feedback offered by the group members nor to the role of the instructors in the interaction. Instead, it demonstrates how using non-academic genres or sections of the capstone project could enable student writers to build a representation of the text that could orient the writing process.

Even though the pedagogical dynamics that I presented in the article are still productive (as are the synthesis activities based on different formats), subsequent opportunities have enriched my reflection and pedagogical interventions. These opportunities include collaborations with heterogeneous groups of people from different undergraduate backgrounds and areas of study or with diverse professional graduate students. These advances have led the field to explore how different disciplines and theoretical approaches choose to conceptualize knowledge. Another enriching opportunity has been creating alternative capstone projects beyond the thesis model (as subsequent ministerial resolutions have proposed). Last, we have benefited from critically reflecting on proposals for the internationalization of higher education and the regulation and control of academic discourse.

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