

LEARNERS' DISCOURSE NEEDS IN EVERYDAY-LIFE WRITTEN GENRES

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Abstract

Learners' discourse needs in everyday-life written genres

Language learners' discourse competence at a threshold (B1) level has not been empirically studied. Research is necessary to determine their degree of competence in different genres and to detect areas for improvement in discourse production. Everyday-life genres usually written at B1, such as (auto)biographies, are not sufficiently explained as sociocultural practices. For these reasons, we study a family (self-referential narrative one) of everyday-life written genres in a corpus comprising 18 autobiographies by learners of Catalan and 18 accounts of experiences by learners of Spanish. Different areas of learning needs are identified, related to three discourse dimensions: becoming aware of the literacy practice the learner is participating in (*sociocultural* dimension); making proper self-reference in the text and time-anchoring the events in it (*pragmatic* dimension); and adhering to the narrative structure (*textual* dimension). Though our results are in general agreement with previous studies on *textual* learning needs, we identify new problems on the *sociocultural* and *pragmatic* dimensions, thanks to our plurilingual and multidimensional discourse competence approach. We translate these needs into indicators of achievement that teachers can use with learners in a communicative assessment process. Our proposal helps to develop learning activities that both foster and assess plurilingual discourse competence.

Keywords: plurilingualism, genres family, writing assessment, Catalan, Spanish

Résumé

Besoins discursifs des apprenants de langues dans genres de la vie quotidienne

La compétence discursive des apprenants de langues à un niveau intermédiaire (B1) n'a pas été étudiée empiriquement. On a besoin des recherches pour déterminer leur compétence en différents genres et pour détecter des besoins de production discursive. Des genres de la vie quotidienne demandés dans un B1, comme les (auto)biographies, ne sont pas expliqués en tant que pratiques socioculturelles. Donc, nous étudions une famille de genres (écrits narratifs autoréférentiels) de la vie quotidienne dans un corpus de 18 autobiographies en catalan et 18 récits d'expériences en espagnol. Les besoins identifiés relèvent des trois dimensions du discours: la prise de conscience de la pratique de l'écrit à laquelle on participe (dimension *socioculturelle*); la réalisation adéquate du procédé autoréférentiel et l'ancrage temporel des événements (dimension *pragmatique*); et le respect de la structure narrative (dimension *textuelle*). Bien que nos résultats coïncident avec d'autres recherches sur les besoins d'apprentissage *textuelles*, nous identifions des nouveaux problèmes aux dimensions *socioculturelle* et *pragmatique*, grâce à notre approche plurilingue et multidimensionnelle de la compétence discursive. Nous traduisons ces besoins en indicateurs de rendement pour partager avec les apprenants, dans un processus d'évaluation communicative. Notre

proposition permet créer des activités d'apprentissage favorisant la compétence discursive plurilingue et son évaluation.

Mot clés: plurilinguisme, famille de genres, évaluation de l'expression écrite, catalan, espagnol

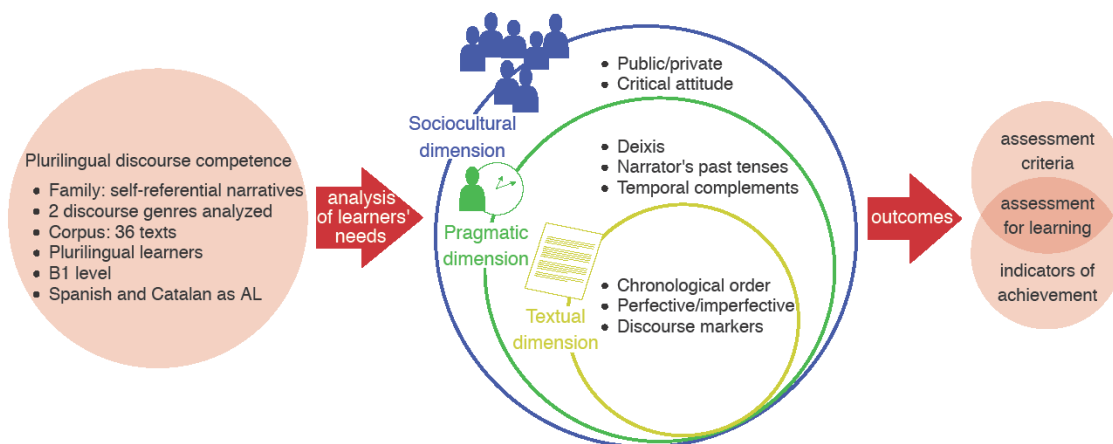
Resumen

Necesidades discursivas de aprendices de lenguas en géneros de la vida cotidiana

La competencia discursiva de aprendices de lenguas en un nivel intermedio (B1) no se ha estudiado empíricamente. Faltan investigaciones que determinen su grado de dominio en diferentes géneros e identifiquen necesidades de producción discursiva. Géneros de la vida cotidiana solicitados en un B1, como las (auto)biografías, no se explican como prácticas socioculturales. Por estas razones, estudiamos una familia (la narrativa autorreferencial) de géneros escritos de la vida cotidiana en un corpus de 18 autobiografías de aprendices de catalán y 18 relatos de experiencias de aprendices de español. Identificamos diferentes necesidades de aprendizaje, relacionadas con las tres dimensiones del género discursivo: toma de conciencia de la práctica en que se participa (dimensión *sociocultural*); realización adecuada de la autorreferencia y del anclaje temporal de los eventos (dimensión *pragmática*); y respeto de la estructura narrativa (dimensión *textual*). Aunque nuestros resultados coinciden con estudios previos sobre necesidades *textuales* de aprendizaje, identificamos nuevos problemas en las dimensiones *sociocultural* y *pragmática*, gracias a nuestra concepción plurilingüe y multidimensional de la competencia discursiva. Traducimos estas necesidades en indicadores de logro que compartir con los estudiantes en un proceso de evaluación comunicativa. Nuestra propuesta contribuye a desarrollar actividades de aprendizaje que promuevan la competencia discursiva plurilingüe y su evaluación.

Palabras clave: plurilingüismo, familia de géneros, evaluación de la expresión escrita, catalán, español

Graphical abstract



1. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTION

In the teaching of additional (AL) languages (Judd et al., 2001), adult learners' discourse competence at a threshold level (B1) has not been empirically studied. This research is necessary not only to determine the degree of competence in different genres of discourse, but also to detect possible areas for improvement in discourse production. Everyday-life genres usually written at B1, such as (auto)biographies or accounts of experiences, are not sufficiently explained to the learners as sociocultural practices. The lack of a global learning approach to discourse genres as *textual*, but specially as *pragmatic* and *sociocultural* products, makes it difficult to understand and, therefore, to solve the problems that language students frequently face.

Accordingly, in this article we analyse the discourse learning needs in written discourse production of adult plurilingual students of Catalan and Spanish as additional languages (henceforth AL Catalan, AL Spanish). We study texts from everyday-life discourse genres, written by students at the threshold level (B1, Council of Europe, 2001 and 2018), namely autobiographies and accounts of personal experiences, genres that commonly form part of the learning activities at this level. There is also linguistic support for choosing these genres: both of them belong to the 'self-referential' family (Ciapuscio, 2007) or colony (Bhatia, 2004) of discourse genres.

Our assumption is that assessing the above-mentioned learning needs will enable us to select the elements to be shared with learners in different contexts —and languages— of adult education, which will in turn serve to steer their development of discourse competence in that particular family of genres, and to assess that development. Therefore, our research question is double:

- which are the discourse needs in everyday-life narrative genres that language learners write at B1?;
- are these discourse needs the same in different ALs?

To approach the learners' discourse needs analysis, after this introduction, we present the theoretical framework we follow (§ 2); the corpus, participants and categories of the study (§ 3); and the results obtained (§ 4), followed by their discussion and conclusions (§ 5).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To achieve our aim, —detecting learners' discourse needs in everyday-life written genres—, we first define the self-referential family of genres (§ 2.1) and then the three dimensions that we consider in the analysis of a genre (§ 2.2) in order to categorize the different types of learning needs. We contrast our proposal of genre analysis –and assessment– with the latest guidelines by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001 and 2018).

2.1. The self-referential narrative genres

A family of discourse genres is a group of genres that share communicative purposes (Bhatia (2004, p. 58). For Ciapuscio (2007, p. 409), genres must be understood and described in terms of families, oriented to the performance of social and individual tasks, whose members play specific roles in the tasks of the family. Autobiographies and accounts of personal experiences share many features: various works on Textual Linguistics (Adam, 1992; Adam & Lorda, 1999) have thoroughly described the macro-narrative function, as also have various pedagogical documents such as the *Plan curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (PCIC, 2006) which details the systematic procedures to be followed in a narrative text.

Apart from the narrative textual structure, the discourse genres we study share a common pragmatic purpose: to tell the story of the self-life (or a part of it). The main referent of the text is the discursive “I”, the narrating *self* or “I”-narrator who is writing: therefore we name this family of genres *self-referential* genres. In Figure 1 below, we depict the links between ‘autobiography’ and ‘account of personal experiences’ genres of interest here as well as other written genres from the same family.

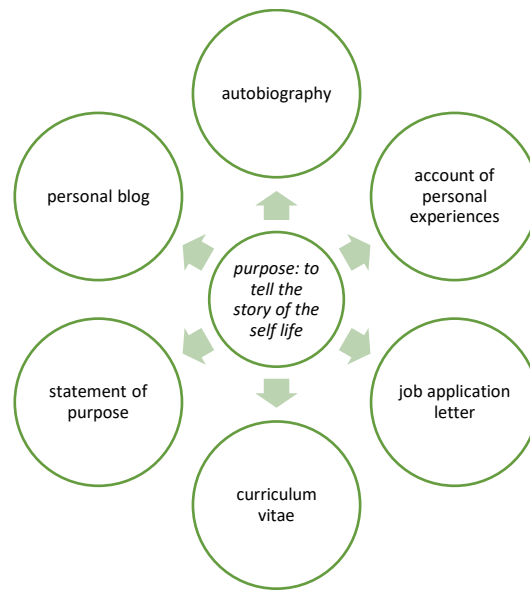


Figure 1. The family of self-referential discourse genres

Within this framework, we elicit the similarities between genres that are different from, and yet related to, each other. This allows us to carry out an analogical transfer (Dierendonck, Loarer & Rey, 2014) of knowledge and resources from one genre in which the learners are already competent to other genres of the family.

The self-referential genres analysed fall under the heading of *creative writing* as it is conceived of in CEFR (2018), more specifically under the skills needed to “write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text”, and to “narrate a story”. The descriptors in CEFR are so broad (“simple connected text”) that it is difficult to help learners to “connect” their written texts in each discourse genre they need to manage. Moreover, writing not only consists in connecting words, but also in adopting an identity and carrying out a social activity, where the genre is considered a manifestation of sociocultural practices (Bajtin, 1952-53/1979). Therefore, using written language is not an end, but a way to achieve broader social goals and cultural practices: it is, then, considered as a literacy practice (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000) with which social, cultural or professional aims are solved. Hence, only a multidimensional approach to assessing discourse competence allows us to point out the particular/situated indicators of achievement in each literacy practice.

2.2. Multidimensional and plurilingual discourse competence

In the field of AL English there are many studies about the role of needs analysis in genre pedagogy (Hyland, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2012; Martínez Lirola, 2015; for example). In this paper, we undertake needs analysis from what can be called a plurilingual discourse competence (henceforth PDC) approach.¹ PDC encompasses three dimensions of analysis, from the overall context to the linguistic elements, in order to be able to determine the level of competence achieved in the use of discourse genres, as follows:

- the *sociocultural* dimension, related to the overall context, the identity or social and cultural role of the person responsible for the text, and the (critical) attitude s/he adopts in front of their discourse or the others' discourses as literacy practices;
- the *pragmatic* dimension, related to the conditions of the immediate context that determines the use of discourse genres;
- the *textual* dimension, related to the internal structure of each genre and to the lexical and grammatical elements. With regard to linguistic elements, ours is also a plurilingual approach.

Figure 2 below shows the interrelationship and interdependence between the three dimensions of analysis of a genre.

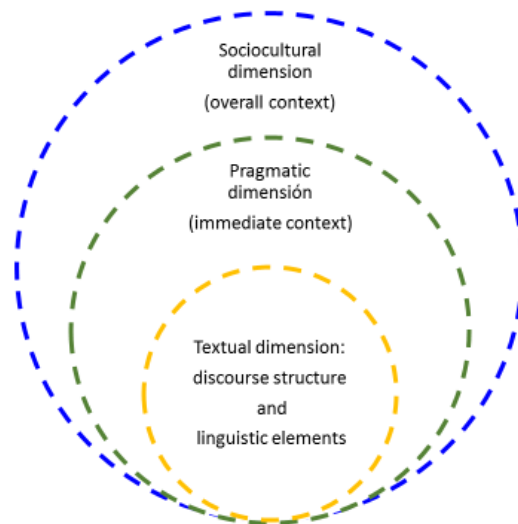


Figure 2. The three dimensions of PDC in which discourse genres need to be analysed (ECODAL research project)

¹ The final objective of ECODAL project is to construct a model that can shed some light on the development and assessment of PDC.

The approach taken by the CEFR (2018) includes the *pragmatic* and *textual* dimensions, but not the *sociocultural* one, therefore it provides no specific orientation for the construction of the discourse identity in each genre, for example, or the critical attitude adopted by the author. As for the critical attitude, the CEFR (2018) refers to it when describing pluricultural competences, but it does so only sporadically and mainly at the C1 and C2 levels, and limited to literary texts.² The CEFR (2018) thus does not anchor the above-mentioned written genres in the cultural and social context that helps to make sense of them.

Nevertheless, the CEFR (2018) does tackle ‘pluricultural’ issues, connected with the *sociocultural* dimension. Since ‘pluricultural’ and ‘plurilingual’ are two closely related concepts, we group together all that has to do with plurilingualism and criticism and include it in the *sociocultural* dimension. In this way, three fundamental aspects of PDC can be discerned in this dimension, whose development can be fostered: 1) the *community of practices* in which one is involved, and the genres that pertain to it; 2) *conscious participation in literacy practices*, and 3) the development of *a personal voice on the part of the learner, as a critical user of language*.

Finally, the CEFR (2018) itemizes five evaluation criteria (CEFR 2018, p. 174): *range*, *coherence*, *accuracy*, *description* (which incorporates narration) and *argument*. And it stresses the *pragmatic* dimension in connection with the topic of the discourse, that is, the thematic field, which at the B1 level consists of “familiar subjects within his [the student’s] field of interest”. As for the *textual* dimension, it highlights the connection of ideas within the text: “connected texts” and “linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence”. Due to these generalizations, in our needs analysis, we will look for the texts’ shortcomings in terms of the above key criteria from the three dimensions of PDC (Figure 2 above).

² At the B1 level, the CEFR (2018, p. 63) only mentions critical attitude in connection with the activity *reading for information and argument*: “Can understand short texts on subjects that are familiar or of current interest, in which people give their points of view (e.g. *critical* contributions to an online discussion forum or readers’ letters to the editor)” [our italics].

3. METHOD³

Our research is qualitative. Consistent with our plurilingual approach, we focus on the common learners' discourse needs in the two AL languages (Catalan and Spanish). The categories of analysis (§ 3.2) that systematize our study are organized around the three dimensions of analysis as defined above and subject to reliability (§ 3.4).

3.1. Description of participants

We present the learners of Catalan and Spanish which participate in our study.

3.1.1. AL Catalan learners: autobiographies⁴

One part of our corpus are autobiographies by 18 AL Catalan learners in their second-level course (academic year 2016–2017) in Translation degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Translation and Language Sciences at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. None of them had studied any Catalan before starting university but they had taken the mandatory level-one course in the previous year (2015-2016). They were from diverse origins, coming either from other parts of Spain or other East and West European countries, as well as from Africa and America. All of them reported having a good command of English, and most had knowledge of languages other than their native language, mainly German, French or Catalan sign language. As they were in a full immersion context, they were all able to achieve a B1 level in AL Catalan by the end of the first year.

The autobiography was the first major writing task of the course, its specific aim being to practise the past tenses. The instruction for the task was: *Write an autobiography using the three past tenses we reviewed in class*. The stipulated length of the text was 400-500 words, and the criteria to assess it: appropriate selection of information (coherence and cohesion) and accuracy in spelling, morphology, syntax, lexis and punctuation.

³ With regard to ethical aspects, this study follows the ethical standards of our university and the current Spanish and European legislation. On the one hand, for the corpus of Catalan learners, we have gathered all the ethical informed consents of the students; for the corpus of Spanish learners, we have the authorization of the direction of the Instituto Cervantes in Istanbul, where the texts were written, part of the corpus of the Bengisu Nergiz's thesis (read at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra on 24/07/2017).

⁴ Texts from AL Catalan corpus are referred in the examples below as T_CA; the participants are anonymized with a number: T1_CA, T2_CA, etc.

3.1.2. AL Spanish learners: accounts of personal experiences⁵

The second part of the corpus were texts written in AL Spanish, within an Instituto Cervantes test in Istanbul in 2012 (Nergiz, 2017).⁶ In order to make both parts of the corpus similar in size, we selected randomly 18 AL Spanish texts out of a total of 100. The participants, Turkish learners of Spanish, reported knowing English as an additional language. The instructions for the text were (our translation from the original Spanish):

ISTANBUL

A place to experience? A place to enjoy?

Welcome to Hispano-Survivor Turkey, a monthly magazine published in 20 countries around the world in which Spanish-speakers who are living or have lived in a foreign country talk about their experiences abroad, offering information, advice and opinions.

Have you ever lived in a foreign country? Did you speak the local language?

Write a text consisting of 20–22 lines in which you talk about

- How long you lived in that country
- The reasons why you went there and the goals you set for yourself
- What year you arrived and how old you were when you lived there
- What you did while living there
- What the country and the city where you lived were like at the time (the impressions you had of the people, local customs, etc.)
- How you felt while you were living there
- What was hardest for you while there
- How you view your experience abroad overall

The students were also told that their texts would be assessed in terms of coherence, grammatical accuracy and lexical range.

⁵ Texts from AL Spanish corpus are referred as T_ES; the participants are also identified with a number.

⁶ The texts in Spanish analysed here form a subset of the corpus that provided the data for Nergiz doctoral thesis (2017). This thesis analysed three types of morpho-syntactic errors, related to either the use of articles, prepositions or grammatical agreement.

3.2. Categories of analysis

We categorize the problems identified in both corpora according to the theoretical framework presented above. Thus, our needs analysis takes into account the three dimensions (*sociocultural*, *pragmatic* and *textual*) of genre analysis from a PDC perspective. As these dimensions are interdependent, we focus on the impact that the problems found in the texts might have in each of the three dimensions.

The results of our analysis show learner problems related to three categories:

- conceptualization of the literacy practice of self-referential genres (*sociocultural* dimension)
- spatial and temporal placement of the “I”-narrator (*pragmatic* dimension)
- thematic development and textual cohesion (*textual* dimension)

As already underlined, though the problems identified can be categorized into one of the three aspects above, they may also have repercussions on the other two.

3.3. Reliability

The reliability of our study was supported by two features of its design. Firstly, though the data stemmed from corpora of two different languages, the two analyses were carried out in such a way that results from one language could be correlated with those from the other language. Secondly, the analysis of the two corpora was carried out independently by three researchers, all of them full bilinguals with considerable experience in discourse analysis in both languages. The three resulting analyses were compared, and they showed considerable consensus regarding categories of discourse features, thus not only guaranteeing the reliability of this study but also facilitating the creation of a common grid of criteria and indicators of achievement, as we will show in the conclusions.

4. RESULTS

Our analysis allowed us to detect problems of various types, some of them not directly linked to the kind of genre; when this was the case, we did not include these errors in our study.

4.1. Learning needs related to the conceptualization of the literacy practice

Though both of our genres belong to the same family, their scope is different. While the AL Catalan autobiography is a private communicative activity, the AL Spanish account of experiences is a public activity in which the learner has to adopt the role of a non-native Spanish speaker using a public medium of communication and giving information about living in a foreign country.

In both genres, the learners must first consider the implications of the written text, and then execute the task from the position of a narrator in the first person in order to learn about the narrative perspective in this activity. If the learner does not reflect upon these factors, s/he may have difficulties either with the narrative perspective (§4.1.1), or with self-references and critical attitude (§4.1.2).

4.1.1. Private vs. public perspective in the self-referential family of genres

In some cases, the learner seems not to have realized that they are required to produce a text from the private and not from the public sphere. This lack of awareness emerges at the beginning and end of some of the texts, resulting in an introduction and/or conclusion not fully appropriate for the task. This is illustrated in (1) below, an opening line that seems more appropriate for an academic, expository text than for an autobiography.

- (1) Aquesta practica té com a objectiu de redactar una autobiografia. Tractaré d'escriure la meva a través d'una descripció personal per tal de fer-la més original i agradable de llegir.
(T13_CA)

This exercise has as its goal writing an autobiography. I will try to write mine by means of a personal description in order to make it more original and pleasant to read.

The same problem arises in the accounts of experiences. The excerpt below (2) seems the beginning of a personal letter, rather than an account of experiences from a magazine. The student ignores how to present themselves and which perspective to adopt.

- (2) Hola, me llamo XXX. Soy una soñadora. Yo creo que cuando tendré cincuenta años yo habré viajado todo el mundo. Soy turca, pero viví en París, YYYY and ZZZ cuando era niña. (T03_ES)

Hello, my name is XXX. I am a dreamer. I think that when I am fifty years old I will have travelled [all around] the world. I am Turkish, but lived in Paris, YYY and ZZZ when I was a girl.

Other texts show an ending not appropriate to the genre: in both autobiographies and accounts of experiences, the learner sometimes does not clearly delimit the conclusion, abruptly ending the text. Example (3) is the closing of an autobiography; example (4), of an account of experience. In neither case does the writer provide a general evaluation of his/her life experience, nor does s/he incorporate a conclusion, something essential in both genres.

- (3) La seva casa és molt més grans i té jardí amb la qual cosa podíem jugar tranquil·la a l'aire lliure, [...] fins i tot els dies de pluja que no es podia sortir fora, sempre ens inventàvem jocs: [...], que duraven tot un dia! (T16_CA)

Their house is much bigger and has a garden with which thing [where] we could play in the open air, [...], even the rainy days when one couldn't go outside, we always invented games: [...], which lasted a whole day!

- (4) Volví a los EEUU solo para visitar a mi hermano y mi tía dos veces en XXX and en XXX. (T12_ES)

I returned to the US only to visit my brother and my aunt two times in XXX and XXX.

4.1.2. Self-references and critical attitude

By not considering carefully the sociocultural aspect, the student may have trouble building the discursive identity of a narrator (the “P”-narrator). As already noted, the texts in our Spanish corpus were hypothetically going to be published in an online magazine. This genre requires that the writer recognizes and selects, based on various social and cultural criteria, only those personal experiences that are relevant. Social aspects will have value when they are of interest to prospective visitors to the place referred to; cultural aspects will be relevant if taken as pieces of advice. Some

of the texts reflect a lack of this ability to discriminate between what is relevant and what is not. The example in (5) below illustrates this shortcoming.

(5) Cuando era estudiante, no tenía mucho dinero, era mi otro problema pero trabajé en un café y gané dinero, no mucho pero suficientemente [emoticono] (T11_ES)

When I was a student, I didn't have much money, it was my other problem but I worked in a café and earned money, not much but sufficiently.

In the autobiographies, the lack of critical attitude originates when the learner does not keep a distant questioning position vis-à-vis their own life as narrated: it is necessary to place oneself in front of one's own biography, as though it were the another person's biography, in order to develop the "self/auto" biography perspective proper to the genre.

4.2. Learning needs related to the narrator's spatial and temporal location

Appropriately using deictic grammatical and lexical devices is a recurring difficulty in the two genres analysed. The needs here identified are linked to the confusion between the actual time of the "I"-narrator and the time of the events narrated (temporal deixis) as well as the spatial deictic forms referring to the place where the writer finds him/herself.

4.2.1. Grammatical deixis

In writing autobiographies, learners in our corpus lose their perspective by not marking their presence in the text according to the narrative's order and structure. We find errors related to both the *textual* and the *pragmatic* dimensions; an error may be relevant to more than one level of analysis, since a pragmatic problem of this sort has a linguistic correlate and vice-versa.

In both additional languages, these problems bear on the use of the demonstratives of proximity (*aquest* in Catalan / *este* in Spanish), instead of the demonstratives of distance (*aquell* in Catalan / *aquel* in Spanish).⁷ In (6) *aquests* 'these' is used instead of *aquells* 'those', the correct form.

⁷ For a better understanding of this point, a short reference to the deictic system in both languages may be helpful. In Catalan the paradigm has two members (adverbs: *aquí* – *allà*, pronouns: *aquest* – *aquell*), whereas in Spanish it has

- (6) Però va ser un canvi positiu, ja que vaig fer molts bons amics i tinc molts bons records d'aquests anys. (T18_CA)

But it was a positive change, since I made many good friends and I have very good memories of these years.

Similarly, when the AL Spanish learners have to resort to textual anaphora, they tend to use the demonstrative *este* instead of *ese*, which results in confusion for the reader about the sort of reference intended, as shown in (7).

- (7) Por eso tenía problemas para comunicarme con la gente. Depende de estas razones me sentí muy extranjero en *este* país. (T05_ES)

As a result I had difficulty communicating with people. It depends on [Because of] these reasons I felt very foreign in this country.

4.2.2. Lexical deixis

The excerpts below show how deixis bears on different levels of the language (morphological, lexical and semantic), and on different syntactic categories (verbs, adverbs and adjectives). When writing self-referential narrative genres, the learner may experience problems with some verbs or adverbs that connect the place of the time narrated with the place from which the writer is writing. In (8) the student confuses the Catalan verb *venir* 'come' with *anar*⁸ 'go' and the adverb *allí* 'there' with *aquí* 'here'.

- (8) Però quan estava a l'últim any del batxillerat vaig decidir *anar* a Catalunya a estudiar *allí*. (T07_CA)

But when I was in the last year of secondary school I decided to go to Catalonia to study there.

three (*aquí* – *ahí* – *allí*; *este* – *ese* – *aquel*), in both cases ordered here from close proximity to greater distance, roughly corresponding to 'here' – 'there' and 'this' – 'that'.

⁸ In Catalan *venir* is used to express displacement towards the speaker or the addressee, and *anar* towards a place different from that of either one, analogous to that between *come* and *go*.

The same confusion arises in the Spanish texts, when learners lack a good command of the deictic forms used to refer to places and spaces, far away from those of the narrator. In (9) *aquí* 'here' is used instead of the correct choice *allí* 'there'.

- (9) Tuve una problema. El publico transporte no era comun. Era comun en el centro de ciudad. Porque la mayoría de gente tenia su propio coche. Pero me gusto quedarme *aquí*.”
(T09_ES)

I had a problem. Public transport was not common. It was common in the centre of the city. Because most people had their own car. But I liked staying here.

In other cases, (see 10), the AL Catalan learners use the adjective *vinent* 'coming' inappropriately in a past context instead of the correct *següent* 'following'.

- (10) D'aquesta manera vaig fer el trasllat de l'expedient de XXX a la XXX. Vaig començar el curs *vinent* a l'altra universitat. I ara estic cursant el segon any de la carrera de XXX.
(T07_CA)

In that way I got my records transferred from XXX to the XXX. I began the coming academic year at the other university. And now I am in my second year of a degree in XXX.

Something similar happens with the Spanish verbs *venir* 'come' and *llegar* 'arrive', misplaced in (11).

- (11) El año pasado me fui a Estados Unidos para trabajar [...] Cuando *vine* el aeropuerto, estaba lleno de gente [...]. (T09_ES)

Last year I went to the United States to work [...] When I came to the airport, it was full of people [...].

4.2.3. Use of prepositions with complements of time

The problems of both spatial and temporal positioning are also related to the use of temporal prepositions, as shown in (12), where the student is probably applying the rules of prepositions from other AL they have learnt. Other errors occur when a preposition is omitted in a complement that requires it, as exemplified in (13).

(12) A Perú, vam estar *per* sis anys més. (T02_CA)

In Peru, we were there for six more years.

(13) Vivía en Barcelona de España *un mes*. (T10_ES)

I lived in Barcelona of Spain one month.

4.2.4. Past tenses: time-anchoring

Of greater interest are the problems with the temporal positioning of a text when verb tenses are selected to refer to chronological times different from the present of the narrator. In some of the autobiographies the learners have difficulty narrating a future time from the past. They use a periphrasis for the future instead of the conditional (see 14). This may be due to two different causes: either interference from Spanish, where this use of a periphrastic form is correct; or a loss of temporal positioning, as the students lose the past reference because, when they are writing, they already know whether their hypothesis has been confirmed or not.

(14) Per exemple, sempre he sabut que *anava a estudiar* llengües i precisament que *anava a estudiar* XXX. (T13_CA)

For example, I have always known that I was going to study languages and specifically that I was going to study XXX.

There are also some breakdowns associated with the *textual* and *pragmatic* dimensions of analysis (see Figure 2) when, having failed to ground their narrative in the moment of writing, the students fail to use the appropriate past form. For example, in the conditional structure in (15), the appropriate forms would be *si yo fuera ... tendría* ‘if I went ... I would have’.

(15) Pensaba que si yo voy a París *tendré* una experiencia inolvidable. (T03_ES)

I thought that if I go to Paris I will have an unforgettable experience.

4.3. Learning needs related to thematic development

Textualizing events through time, in a chronological order and with coherent thematic development, is the last category of difficulties in our analysis.

4.3.1. Organization of events in time

As explained, both the CEFR (2018) and the PCIC (2006) (also the instructions issued by the Secretariat of Language Policies of the Catalan Government) state that students at the B1 level should be able to appropriately follow thematic development when writing an account of events. Our corpus data show some lack of this ability, in both autobiographies and the accounts of experiences. In (16), we highlight with italics temporal disjunctions in the narrative (boldface in the translation). It seems reminiscent of an oral rather than a written narration. The error concerns both the *sociocultural* and *pragmatic* dimension, and it manifests itself clearly in the students' choice of linguistic components.

(16) Anava cada dia a classe amb el meu germà [...] i m'encantava jugar a fet i a amagar al pati. *Sempre he sigut una nena tranquil·la a classe encara que em distreia molt.* (T01_CA)

*Every day I went to class with my brother [...], and I loved playing hide-and-seek in the schoolyard. I **have always been** a calm girl in class though I often got distracted.*

Example (17) illustrates a poor structure in the sequencing of the account, as there is a change in the reported time with no indication of the transition from one moment of the narration to the next (marked here with \emptyset); this case is not attributable to the traces of orality but to an error in the *textual* dimension.

(17) Jo anava a l'escola i la meva mare em portava i em venia a buscar després d'acabar les classes. \emptyset La meva mare va descobrir que m'agradava molt pintar i quan tenia deu anys em va portar a una escola de l'art (...). (T07_CA)

I went to school and my mother took me and picked me up once my classes finished. \emptyset My mother discovered that I liked drawing very much and when I was ten she took me to an art school.

In the accounts of experiences in AL Spanish, the students follow the directions on the topics to be dealt with in the same order as they are provided, which in the weaker learners' texts can

yield an awkward text structuring into a disjointed series of one-line paragraphs with no use of anaphors or discourse markers to connect them, as in (18).

(18) Cuando tenía 20 años, vivía en Inglaterra de 19XX-19YY por estudiar Inglés.

Me quede con una familia en su casa

No fue fácil vivir. Tenia que cuidar sus dos hijos. Eran muy traviesos.

Podia ir a la escuela por la mañana que estaba muy cerca de la casa.

Geralmente hacia frio. Todo ese verano no podia ver el sol. Lluevia mucho. [...]

(T07_ES).

When I was 20, I lived in England from 19XX-19YY to study English.

I stayed with a family in their house

It wasn't easy to live. I had to take care of their two children. They were very mischievous.

I could go to school in the morning which was very near the house.

Generally it was cold. All that summer I couldn't see the sun. It rained a lot.

Difficulty in structuring the information into paragraphs is one of the weak points we have identified as an important learning need. Sometimes the students do not separate the ideas into paragraphs, which results in a simple string of unconnected sentences, as below in (17, Catalan) and (18, Spanish).

(19) Així, vaig decidir allargar la meva estada i continuar estudiant una mica més. Els meus pares i la resta de la família estaven sorpresos per la preocupació de no saber quina carrera escollir, i també per la llunyania del país; però finalment s'hi van acostumar. Després, vaig haver de buscar-me la vida perquè l'estada d'au pair va finalitzar. Buscant altres possibilitats de quedar-me a Barcelona i gràcies a la motivació que em van inculcar uns amics catalans. (T10_CA)

Thus, I decided to extend my stay and continue studying a bit more. My parents and the rest of the family were surprised by my preoccupation with not knowing which degree to do, and also by the distance of the country; but in the end they got used to it. Then, I had to find a way to make ends meet because my au pair period ended. I looked for other possibilities to remain in Barcelona and thanks to the motivation that some Catalan friends instilled in me.

(20) He vivido alguna vez en España. Hablaba la lengua de España. Cuando estaba allí, era muy feliz. El tiempo que estuviste en ese país era verano de 20XX. Vivía en Barcelona de España un mes. Quise vivir allí porque mis amigos siempre me estaban diciendo que Barcelona era muy fantástico. Por eso decidí ir allí. Tenía 20 años cuando estuve allí y el año era 20XX. Hacía muchas cosas. De primero, fui allí porque quise mejorar mi español en un curso del idioma. (T10_ES)

I have lived some time in Spain. I spoke the language of Spain. When I was there, I was very happy. The time that I was in that country was [the] summer of 20XX. I lived in Barcelona of Spain one month. I wanted to live there because my friends were always telling me that Barcelona was very fantastic. For that reason I decided to go there. I was 20 when I was there and the year was 20XX. I did many things. First, I went there because I wanted to improve my Spanish in a language course.

4.3.2. Past tenses

The use of past tenses is a recurrent problem. In the AL Catalan corpus⁹ some students mix up the *pretèrit perfet perifràstic* tense, used to describe a far distant past, and the *pretèrit perfet*, which refers to a much more immediate past, as in (21).

(21) *He nascut* el XX d'agost de 19XX [...]. Tres anys després, el dia del meu aniversari va passar un cop d'estat que va iniciar els canvis polítics i socials. (T17_CA)

I have been born on XX August 19XX [...]. Three years later, on my birthday a coup d'état occurred which initiated the political and social changes.

In other cases, they do not use the *pretèrit imperfet* in Catalan when the context would naturally require it because the nature of the action is habitual or prolonged, as in (20).

⁹ In Catalan there are three basic ways to describe actions happened in the past, the two most common tenses being the *pretèrit perfet* 'present perfect' (*he cantat* 'I have sung'), which situates a completed action in a period that has not ended or has not yet elapsed, and the *pretèrit perfet perifràstic* 'periphrastic perfect tense' (*vaig cantar* 'I sang'), if the past timeframe is over. There is also another form parallel to the *pretèrit perfet perifràstic*, unusual and reserved exclusively for very formal or literary registers, the *pretèrit simple* 'past simple' (*cantí* 'I sang'). Finally, to describe habitual or prolonged actions within a past context the *pretèrit imperfet* 'past continuous' (*cantava* 'I would always sing' or 'I was singing') is used.

(22) En qualsevol cas, treballar com periodista em [...] va fer descobrir que no era el que jo vaig creure. Amb aquesta experiència jo vaig poder descobrir que el que jo volia i vull fer és [...]. (T14_CA)

Anyway, working as a journalist [...] I discovered that it was not what I thought. With that experience I was able to discover that what I wanted and want to do is [...].

In the Spanish corpus, mistakes of this kind concern the use of *pretérito imperfecto* instead of the *pretérito indefinido*.¹⁰ The time complement in (23) (“por un año”) indicates a finished action, as does “en mi vida” in (24), and they require a *pretérito indefinido*, not an *imperfecto*.

(23) Vivía en Londres por un año cuando tenía 22 años. (T14_ES)

I lived in London for a year when I was 22.

(24) Era mi mejor experiencia en mi vida. (T14_ES)

It was the best experience in my life.

The opposite problem arises when an action is presented as finished (*pasé [paseé]* in 25) and yet the intention in the narration is to describe a habitual activity which would require the imperfect tense (*paseaba*).

(25) Cuando *pasé* in la calles, *estuve mirando* a otras personas. (T09_ES)

When I walked down the streets, I was looking at other people.

4.3.3. Discourse markers

Finally, another type of the error is the improper use of consecutive discourse markers to signal sequence in time instead of temporal discourse markers, which are better suited to the self-referential narrative genres. In (26), the student uses the discourse marker *doncs* ‘therefore’ instead of a temporal discourse marker that expresses time like *llavors* or *quan* ‘then’, or even a concatenation of narrative events linked together with the conjunction *i* ‘and’.

¹⁰ Verbal inflection in Spanish gives information about whether an action in the past is seen as concluded (perfect aspect in the conjugation of the past simple, e.g., *vine* ‘I came’) or still underway and therefore without temporal limit (imperfect aspect, the one that expresses the past continuous, e.g., *venía* ‘I [habitually] came’ or ‘I was coming’).

(26) Del 20XX al 20XX he participat a un club de voleibol. *Doncs*, solia anar-hi per les tardes amb la meva millor amiga. (T06_CA)

From 20XX to 20XX I have participated in a volleyball club. Then, I used to go there in the afternoon with my best friend.

In the texts from the Spanish corpus, some learners overuse structures characteristic of oral narration, such as the construction *es que* 'the thing is' or *pues* 'so' instead of the conjunctions *porque* 'because' and *entonces* 'so', which would have been more appropriate in the written contexts in (27) and (28) respectively.

(27) No fue difícil ir a la escuela *es que* la transportación es muy fácil in Suiza. (T11_ES)

It was not difficult to go to school, the thing is the transport is very easy in Switzerland.

(28) Pensaba que si yo voy a París tendré una experiencia inolvidable. *Pues* cuando tenía 18 años fui a París. (T03_ES)

I thought that if I go to Paris I will have an unforgettable experience. So when I was 18 I went to Paris.

Moreover, students also show difficulty in using Spanish recapitulative connectors with the lexical base *fin* 'end' such as *en fin*, 'anyway' or 'in the end', *al final* 'in the end', *en definitiva* 'in conclusion, in short' and *finalmente* 'eventually', 'in the end' with their respective pragmatic-textual functions. These discourse markers are also usual in the narration of personal experiences. Some learners in our corpus overuse the form *al final* 'in the end' with the conclusive value of *en definitiva* 'in conclusion', as in (29).

(29) *Al final* mi vida en Austria era difícil pero divertido con mis amigos. (T05_ES)

In the end my life in Austria was difficult but fun with my friends.

Apart from its semantic value, the connector implies intensification and mitigation subtleties, as well as politeness and impoliteness effects, of which these student writers are unaware. Discourse markers, therefore, are learning units which play a role in students' development of the discourse competence that we are assessing here.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis offers a picture of learning needs in two narrative genres, autobiographies and accounts of personal experiences. We have argued that PDC can be broken into three interrelated dimensions: *sociocultural*, *pragmatic* and *textual*. We have then identified which elements from these three dimensions demand specific didactic attention for their development. These elements are mainly related to the *sociocultural* features of the genre, the use of deictics, and issues of thematic development and textual cohesion.

Within the *sociocultural* dimension, we have shown that learners need to improve in their understanding of the nature of the discourse practice in which they are participating when they produce an autobiography or an account of personal experiences, in order to ensure that their written output is appropriate (to the private or public sphere, for example). Furthermore, we have highlighted the way learners deal with self-reference and critical attitude in the two discourse genres in question. The CEFR (2018) does bring in these content areas but does not systematize them. An appropriate starting point to approach that task, we suggest, would be to make PDC the backbone of the pedagogical endeavour by enhancing students' awareness and understanding of discourse genres and genre families as well as of the norms and rules of each genre as a manifestation of a sociocultural practice.

In relation to the *pragmatic* dimension, our analysis evidences gaps in learners' knowledge regarding deictic and time-anchoring resources. Consequently, their reference to past events is occasionally confusing. The sometimes faulty choice of demonstratives, verb tenses and morphological aspects reveals the need for an increased reflection on what it means to take space and time distance from the deictic centre of the "I"-narrator when giving an account of the past events of one's own life.

Our analysis of the *textual* dimension reveals difficulties related to thematic development – in both genres and in both languages –specifically in terms of anchoring events chronologically over the course of the narration, properly using verbal aspect to signpost finished vs. non-finished action and choosing suitable connectives in the text. These areas of deficiency have also been highlighted in previous studies on school and academic discourse genres at various levels of L1, but not AL learning.

As for studies on AL teaching and learning, our results agree partly with those of previous research on language learners' written productions that have focused on particular features of these texts. For learners of AL Spanish, for instance, Lucha and Díaz (2017) analyse lexical fluency and range, and Authors (2011) examine learners' problems in the use of anaphora, as already noted, to mention only two of the current lines of work in this area. These studies certainly do not leave out the language's discourse level, but none of them starts out from an overall approach to the study of particular discourse genres, as ours does, in a way that integrates their different dimensions into a unified whole. By contrast, our analysis shows the constant interactions that take place between these dimensions in the use of discourse genres, and consequently uncovers the need to be aware of them in order to deal with them effectively.

A further major contribution of our research is to prove that the problems detected are common to both of the languages featured in this study even though their linguistic forms obviously differ. These results suggest that the development of PDC must be approached in all its complexity, as here advocated for. In order to foster such development, we propose to translate the discourse needs identified here into achievement criteria and indicators, which in turn make up learning objectives for the family of the self-referential narrative genres.

Such a transposition to the classroom is possible inasmuch as the needs analysis we have carried out makes it easier to select which elements need to be shared with the learners, in order to steer the development of their PDC and then be able to assess it. Such elements are the criteria and indicators of achievement that we offer in Table 1 below.

CRITERIA	INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT
<p><i>Sociocultural dimension</i></p> <p>1. The learner is aware of the characteristics of the literacy practice</p>	<p>– S/He adopts the perspective (private or public) that corresponds to the desired self-referential narrative genre (autobiography/account of experiences)</p> <p>– S/He selects from his/her life or experience the most relevant events for the sociocultural practice to which the discourse genre responds</p> <p>– S/He distances him/herself from the narrated events of his/her life or experience in order to assess them critically</p>
<p><i>Pragmatic dimension</i></p> <p>2. The learner makes reference to the “I”-narrator (the self that reports) appropriately by means of grammar and lexical deictic devices</p> <p>3. The learner anchors chronologically in time the events s/he relates</p>	<p>– S/He uses grammatical deictic forms like demonstratives (<i>este, ese, aquel</i>) and verbal tenses correctly</p> <p>– S/He uses adverbial deictic devices correctly</p> <p>– S/He uses deictic verbs with lexical appropriateness</p> <p>– S/He uses prepositions suitable to the time complements chosen</p> <p>– S/He correlates tenses relative to the narrator’s deictic centre</p>
<p><i>Textual dimension</i></p> <p>4. The learner reports on his/her experience</p>	<p>– S/He organizes events chronologically and the narrative contains the prototypical components of such structures</p> <p>– S/He appropriately alternates between the perfective and imperfective past tenses</p> <p>– S/He uses temporal connectors appropriately</p>

Table 1. Criteria and indicators of achievement for the family of self-referential narrative genres in AL Catalan and Spanish writing

We think it should be possible to replicate our model in other learning-teaching situations, with activities leading to a reflection on the particular features of each discourse genre that the learners

are required to produce, in order to facilitate the modelling and assessment of the discourse practice, that is to say, in order to share criteria and indicators of achievement: the learning goals. In this way, a guide like Table 1 could be constructed and utilized from the very beginning of the learning process for any particular family of discourse genres; with the help of such a table, the learners will be able to be aware of the features that the text they are required to produce must have, and at the same time will have at their disposal criteria for its assessment. The creation of such guidelines would allow educators to share with each other and their students the concepts, resources and (critical) attitudes essential for orienting the development and assessment of plurilingual discourse competence.

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