| ARTICLE

Argumentative Skills in Academic Literacy

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Resumen

Este trabajo se enmarca en las numerosas investigaciones sobre escritura académica que vienen desarrollándose en diversos países. Dentro de ellas, buscamos articular líneas de investigación que se ocupan de la alfabetización académica, de los géneros académicos y del papel de la argumentación en los mismos. Para ello, implementamos desde 2005 un programa de alfabetización académica en una asignatura de Humanidades de una universidad argentina, cuyo tramo final es la elaboración y exposición de ponencias grupales, entendidas como construcciones argumentativas que ponen en consideración resultados de investigación. En relación con éstas, este trabajo presenta resultados, en torno a la relación entre los productos finales, los procesos y los contextos de producción.

Palabras clave: alfabetización académica, géneros académicos, argumentación, lectura, escritura

Resum

Aquest treball s'emmarca en les nombroses investigacions sobre escriptura acadèmica que vénen desenvolupant-se en diversos països. Dins d'elles, busquem articular línies d'investigació que s'ocupen de l'alfabetització acadèmica, dels gèneres acadèmics i del paper de l'argumentació en els mateixos. Per a això, implementem des de 2005 un programa d'alfabetització acadèmica en una assignatura d'Humanitats d'una universitat argentina, el tram final de la qual és l'elaboració i exposició de ponències grupals, enteses com a construccions argumentatives que posen en consideració resultats d'investigació. En relació amb aquestes, aquest treball presenta resultats, entorn de la relació entre els productes finals, els processos i els contextos de producció.

Paraules clau: alfabetització acadèmica, gèneres acadèmics, argumentació, lectura, escriptura

Abstract

This paper is connected with many research works on academic writing which are being carried out in different countries. In our case, we tend to articulate research lines which mainly deal with academic literacy, academic genres and the role of argumentation. For such a reason, since 2005 an academic literacy program has been developed in a subject that belongs to the Humanity area at an Argentinian university. The last step in this program is the elaboration and exposition of group papers, taken as argumentative constructions which put research results for consideration. This paper presents some results obtained as regards the relation between final products, processes and production contexts.

Keywords: academic literacy, academic genres, argumentation, reading, writing

1. Introduction

Nowadays it is generally widely recognised that for students, embarking on university studies involves not only a hard process of learning increasingly complex subject content, but is also closely linked with the knowledge and mastery of various ways of communicating that subject knowledge. A major cause of academic failure is due to serious experienced by students in accessing subject texts, together with major limitations for demonstrating this accumulated knowledge within the formal boundaries of academic discourse in general, and particularly those of specific disciplines.

This undeniable connection between academic discursive skills and subject learning was ignored for a long time, both in the field of teaching and in research. University lecturers, despite receiving an new intake of students year after year with ever greater difficulties in handling oral language, reading and writing, used to think -and in many cases still do- that such problems were nothing to do with them. But neither did they stop to think that these problems were not only concerned with the skills that students should have learned at secondary school, but that they were also due to students' lack of knowledge of the specific skills involved in constructing, circulating and legitimising scientific knowledge in the academic sphere; these essential skills have to be learnt, and therefore taught.

Fortunately, this attitude has been changing over the last few decades in some countries, particularly in English-speaking ones (USA, United Kingdom and Australia), where definitive action has been taken by institutions to address what has come to be known as *academic literacy* (Lea and Street, 1998) by means of specific writing programmes integrated into the university syllabus (Russell, 1990; Chalmers and Fuller, 1996, and others).

Another issue to bear in mind, in terms of insertion into academic life, is the body of knowledge that students bring with them from their previous studies. In the Argentine context, for example, despite syllabus renovation programmes implemented since the 90s, in actual fact, the concept of stable, reproducible knowledge still prevails. This has many implications, including a lack of attention to the development of *critical thinking* and *argumentative skills*[1].

Some of the surveys carried out by our research team over the last few years (Padilla *et al.*, 2004, 2006 and 2007) have highlighted that not only has no explicit teaching been done at any level of the education system, but that also no institutional contexts for critical discussion have been promoted. This means that spaces have not been provided for students to have their own voice and on which to base their views. In contrast, in many cases attitudes still persist in focusing the use of the legitimate view on the teacher, implying an adherence, largely and unquestioningly, to the transmissive model of knowledge. In the case of the university and particularly in the area of humanities and social sciences, this is embodied by the traditional academic dichotomy of the *theory class* (the lecture) and the *practical class* (the application of theoretical knowledge). This adherence seems to be based on a series of assumptions, such as:

- Students lack any kind of disciplinary knowledge, therefore it has to be transmitted.
- Since they lack this knowledge, they are unable to give their own point of view on what is being taught, so they must reproduce as faithfully as possible the teacher's understanding of the discipline and demonstrate what they have learnt by applying this theoretical content to practical situations.

So, the teacher ends up reinforcing deep-rooted school-based methods, detrimental to the students' ability to deal with academic texts, and promoting strategies such as *descriptive reading* (C.Padilla, 2004); that is, the important thing is to remember what the text says, but not to think about who says it, nor within which conceptual, ideological and historical context they say it, nor what evidence they provide for saying what they say, all of which is involved in an *argumentative reading* strategy.

In the European context, a number of documents produced as part of the European Space for Higher Education[2], have been questioning since the late 90s teaching models and strategies based on the transmission of knowledge by the teacher and passive learning by pupils. Such documents insist on the need to underpin independent learning, reinforce students' intellectual and social skills and their problem-solving abilities, and promote collaborative learning (López Meneses and Martín Sánchez, 2009:39).

For the purpose of studying this complex problem, since 2005 our team has set up a research-action experience[3] in one Humanities subject area (National University of Tucumán, Argentina) under an academic literacy programme that prioritises the development of argumentative skills as a an essential foundation for developing academic skills.

To do this, we started working with everyday argumentation before moving to academic argumentation in the humanities area. We focused our attention on the polyphonic and argumentative aspects of the texts, which makes it easier to then produce writing with similar characteristics. In particular, we set aside a longer period of time to gradually put together the written version of a group presentation (to be given later during a conference), understood as being the communication of the results of research work started by students in the second four-month term of the academic year and underpinned by a tutorial process.

In connection with these presentations, this study presents the ongoing results and the relation between the final products, the processes and the production context that made them possible; it also discusses the challenges facing both stu-

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[1] We understand these skills, in the instance of textual comprehension, as being able to recognise the thesis, of the writer's purpose, arguments, premises and evidence put forward; how the writer's position is contextualised in conceptual, ideological and historical frameworks, and how they construct a personal view. In the instance of production, such a verbalisation, both in oral and written production, of argumentation within the basic parameters of reasoning. We follow in part authors such as J.McMillan (1987), R.Mayer and F.Goodchild (1990), W.Huitt (1995) and R.Paul (1984, 1991) for conceptualising critical thinking; and various theories of argumentation: Ch.Perelman and L.Olbrechts (1970), F.van Esmeren, R.Grootendorst and F.Snoeck (2006), C.Plantin (2005), and others.

[2] UNESCO Declaration on Higher Education in the 20th century (1998), Bologna Declaration (1999), Prague Communiqué (2001), Berlin Communiqué (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007). See López Meneses and Martín Sánchez (2009).

[3] As part of the CIUNT 26/H430 Project (National University of Tucumán Research Council, Argentina), entitled *Prácticas discursivas críticas en contextos educativos* (Critical discursive practice in educational contexts), directed by Constanza Padilla.

dents and teachers in working with the argumentative side of this academic genre. Our objective with this opportunity is to show the epistemic productivity of the programme implemented, through a discussion of the results.

The starting hypothesis on which the research is based is that, while the cognitive challenges thrown up by academic argumentation cannot be resolved in a single year, significant progress is made by students who are able to capitalise on the various alternatives in the teaching and research process, compared to others who do not make as much progress as expected for a number of reasons (very limited cognitive and discursive skills, low level of academic commitment, problems with integrating into peer groups, and so on).

Key issues in state of the art research on this topic are discussed below, providing a context within which to frame our presentation of the teaching route taken in our ongoing academic literacy programme, particularly in terms of formulating the presentations, and allowing some of the results obtained to date to be discussed.

2. Writing at university

As mentioned earlier, research on writing at university has been given a great deal of attention for over three decades in the USA, while in countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Italy, it is a more recent trend.

The concept of "academic literacy" comes from British studies and has been used in the plural to stress the diversity of university writing practices and the power relations they entail (Lea & Street, 1998). It was later expanded to cover the variety of training activities implemented by universities to teach academic writing within the specific requirements of each discipline. In this sense, work in the USA on *writing across the curriculum* and *writing in the disciplines* in its role of promoting teaching methods in which students write to learn a subject, and methods that support learning to write based on the particular genres within a given field of knowledge (Bazerman *et al.,* 2005). These are the focuses that have caused research and action lines to be drawn in a number of universities, with the intention of studying, at the same time as encouraging, how writing styles typically found in the academic and professional spheres are acquired. (For a more thorough overview of this background, see Carlino, 2005; Carlino, 2006; Padilla and Carlino, 2010)

In relation to this last point, research in connection with academic, specialist and professional genres (Parodi, 2008) and with addressing explicit training in higher education is highly relevant. Significant advances have been made in theoretical discussions based on empirical evidence obtained from various textual corpuses (Swales, 2004; Halliday and Martin, 1993; Bhatia, 1993; Martin and Veel, 1998; Gotti, 2003; Bhatia and Gotti, 2006; Candlin and Gotti, 2007; Hyland, 2000; Parodi, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, and others). These texts put forward a *continuum* (Parodi, 2008) between highly specialised genres circulated amongst experts and academic genres with varying degrees of asymmetry between experts and learners, as a means of introducing beginners to academic culture. They also highlight the differences shown by these genres in the various disciplines or even within the same discipline (Bhatia, 2004; Parodi, 2007b). However, they also show that some very specific genres are relatively homogeneous in different scientific disciplines. Similarities and differences are derived, to a great extent, from the ways in which scientific work is approached,

whether it is linked to quantitative or qualitative paradigms or to inductive or deductive methods that "prescribe" and legitimise various ways of doing science (see Padilla, 2008; Padilla and Carlino, 2010).

In connection with these issues, sufficient research has yet to be done on the more or less central role played by argumentation in the various classes of academic texts, and on their connection with the way in which learning takes place in the various disciplines. Despite this, studies on scientific research in the area of physics and of socio-scientific issues (Kelly y Bazerman, 2003; Erduran and Jiménez-Aleixandre, 2008; Buty and Plantin, 2008; Andriessen, 2009) and some research in the area of history and law (Pollet, 2004) give a glimpse of the relations between the methods of argumentation, disciplinary learning and academic communication that students have to learn.

The French-speaking sphere in particular has seen some interesting research on writing in relation to knowledge building, applying a number of examples of academic writing by students (Delcambre and Reuter, 2002; Pollet, 2004). In connection with this, some studies have also done their utmost to ascertain the problems with some academic genres *(écriture de recherche, mémoires)* (Pollet and Piette, 2002; Crinon and Guigue, 2002, and others), addressing the distance between students' writing culture and the academic skills expected of them. Added to this is the growing importance given to disciplinary variation when considering these problems (Delcambre, Donahue and Lahanière-Reuter, in press; Delcambre and Reuter, in press; Delcambre and Lahanière-Reuter, in press).

Likewise, previous studies on academic writing in the Spanish-speaking world include the recent group publication coordinated by Parodi (2010) on various theoretical and applied issues in academic and professional literacy undertaken in Latin American and some Spanish universities, also from the perspective of discipline-based reading and writing.

In the Argentine context, some pioneering research has been done by Arnoux and her team, who produced the first of a major group of studies to appear in the 90s on the difficulties and issues faced by students in understanding and writing academic texts (Arnoux, Alvarado, Balmayor, Di Stéfano, Pereira and Silvestri, 1996; Arnoux and Alvarado, 1997; Arnoux, Di Stefano and Pereira, 2002; Pereira and Di Stéfano*,* 2003). Their work was continued by other research teams (such as Hall, 2004; Padilla, 2004a and 2004b, Vázquez and Miras, 2004). Arnoux's group led the way in addressing reading and writing at university level and triggered a series of specific teaching initiatives, setting up the first writing workshop in an Argentine university (Di Stefano, Pereira and Reale, 1988) and developing numerous training activities through the Argentine UNESCO Chair.

Contrasting studies carried out by Carlino (2004, 2005, 2006 and others) aiming to find out what happens at universities in the English-speaking world where writing skills are addressed (in terms of teaching staff, institutions and the nature of the teaching provided), compared to the situation in Argentina, have served to begin the process of questioning our practices and methods. Carlino in particular (2005) not only promotes this questioning, but also puts forward concrete actions, carried out in university classrooms, for including reading and writing skills as a way of supporting disciplinary learning. It is specifically the method of preparing presentations, itself inspired by the contributions of Australian teaching professionals (Zadnik

and Radloff, 1995; Legget; 1997), that we have focused on particularly as a guideline for developing our own academic literacy programme.

The concepts of reading, writing and argumentation, skills that form the backbone of our educational programme, are an explicit part of our teaching activities through a consideration of models of reading (Goodman, 1996; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983), writing (Flower and Hayes, 1996; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1992) and argumentation (Perelman and Olbrechts, 1970; van Esmeren, Grotendorst and Snoeck, 2006; Plantin, 2005, 2007; Masseron, 1997). All these contribute to using metacognitive activities in general (Flavell, 1970; Martí, 1995) and metalinguistic activities in particular (Castelló Badia, 2000; Tolchinsky, 2000). Both are necessary to optimise academic reading and writing practice, insofar as they enable a distancing from the text and an awareness of the need for constant revision and rewriting.

In particular, we consider studies on argumentation to be essential, as they help to conceptualise academic discourse as the product of a process of scientific argumentation put forward for consideration in disciplinary spheres for ratification and circulation. In this sense, we have taken into account the contributions made by the theoretical concepts outlined above, which, despite the differences between them, are useful for putting a teaching plan into place.

3. The presentation as an argumentative construction

Why teach students to prepare presentations at university? Is it too demanding a process for students in terms of cognitive difficulty? What are the advantages compared to other academic practices?

Nobody can deny that preparing presentations is time consuming and involves major cognitive commitment, both for students and for teaching staff. However, we believe the advantages outweigh the drawbacks, particularly with regard to their discursive, epistemological and argumentative potential. The following are especially important:

· The dual nature of this academic genre challenges both writing and verbal skills. Although the final step in the process involves standing up and making an oral presentation in public, followed by questions and discussion, this is the outcome of a complex process of a number of written versions that have been pondered and revised over a prolonged period of time (text plan, successive drafts, summary or abstract). This brings to the fore the procedural, provisional and improvable nature of writing.
· The act of making a presentation to an auditorium also gives the work a finished and reviewable aspect in terms of the process of knowledge elaboration, as the communicative purpose of this writing project culminates and materialises in front of a live audience. Delivery is therefore no longer focused just on the teacher, and the objective is not just that of gaining a pass mark for the course. At the same time, this socialising of constructed knowledge is tested during the questions and discussion time, when the audience can ask for more detailed ex-

planations, support, evaluate the contribution and open up new issues.
· The freedom to choose the presentation topic from various alternatives is a definite plus for the students and boosts their motivation. In some cases, their decisions are related to a profound interest that originally influenced their choice of academic subject area or that has emerged over the course of their university studies.
· The presentation, as a product of a process of theoretical and/or empirical research, is the gateway to research as a process of knowledge elaboration: theoretical knowledge as the result of thorough and critical study of bibliographic sources, and empirical knowledge as the outcome of a process of probing reality or of comparing and contrasting theories.
· In relation to this, and from the argumentative point of view, the presentation sets a three-fold challenge: *demonstrative argumentation* that requires articulating between theoretical framework, issues or hypothesis, data and conclusions; *persuasive argumentation* that seeks the way to communicate these results more effectively, according to the virtual readers of the written version and the listeners at the orally-delivered presentation; and a *dialectic argumentation* that opens up to other points of view, based on an uncertain and renewable concept of scientific knowledge[4].
· The presentation, as we approach it, as the product of a group activity involving from two to four students, commits them to various levels of responsibility. This ranges from having to manage each other's roles within the group through to being aware of the importance of the commitment they have taken on in respect of the role assigned to them. Working in a small group is a productive method of knowledge elaboration - when handled properly - as it entails interacting in order to cooperate, discuss and reach agreement.

4. The academic literacy programme

Our experience since 2005[5] is inspired by the contributions of Arnoux, Di Stefano and Pereira (2002) and Carlino (2004, 2005), among others. The *Textual Understanding and Production Workshop* is run every year as a first year subject in the Arts degree course in the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts in the National University of Tucumán (NUT), Argentina, and has been partially documented in several publications (Padilla –coord-, 2005, 2007, 2008; Padilla, Douglas and Lopez, 2009). The workshop is currently being run with some changes (for example, the students have a greater degree of independence) as part of a fourth-year subject area in the Arts degree course (NUT) - *Psycholinguistics*. The programme, embedded in the first year of the course, consists of two major stages:

· The first (taking place in the first four-month term of the academic year) focuses attention on reading and writing media texts using everyday argumentation. This part of the programme draws on various argumentation

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[4] We are partially following the approach set out by C. Martínez (2005a and b). *Ratio* is uppermost in the demonstrative dimension and in the persuasive, *pathos* (See C.Martínez, 2005a). A third dimension, *ethos*, invites reasoning that is more related to responsible and competent intersubjectivity (See C.Martínez, 2005b).
[5] The Course Leadership team is currently as follows: C. Padilla (coordinator), A. Ávila, S. Douglas, E. Lopez, C. García and V. Hael. Colleagues I. Jorrat and M. Ocampo took part previously.

theories (including those of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1970; van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Snoeck, 2006; and Plantin, 2005, 2007)

· The second (delivered in the second four-month term) concentrates on reading and writing academic argumentative texts. As stated earlier, the final assignment on which the pass mark is awarded consists of writing and verbally delivering a group presentation as part of an open conference. This is understood as being the communication of the results of research work started by students in the second part of the academic year and is underpinned by a tutorial process.

4.1. Preparing presentations: a gradual process

When the experience was started in 2005, the course team thought about preparing a monographic text that enabled students to learn how to use basic study and research tools, an essential part of understanding and producing academic texts. However, a major concern was the lack of circulation that such texts enjoy in university life, a fact that might deter a genuine commitment to the task.

At that point, we were fortunate enough to find out about Carlino's experience (2005) of producing presentations as part of a university course, culminating in their delivery at an open conference proceedings. This led us to rethink the suitability of a monographic work and to assess the feasibility of undertaking an experience similar to hers.

From that moment, the team implemented a teaching plan that is delivered during the second half of the academic year and lasts one four-month term. All students attend a weekly session to work on theoretical and practical issues that are useful for the whole group. Students also attend a weekly meeting of the work groups (four students per group) led by each of the tutors, at which they receive more specific guidance. These face-to-face sessions are complemented by a virtual tutorial via e-mail.

This tutorial process in small groups enables the process to be monitored in a more personal way, a practice that is highly valued by students. E-mail tutorials are also very beneficial for both students and tutors, particularly during the stage when the presentation is gradually taking shape, as it significantly smoothes the assessment, revision and rewriting process of the various drafts. The tutor proposes changes to the written text using a password shared by the students and monitors successive rewrites until the final version is produced.

The complete itinerary consists of three major stages:

· First stage: the research process.
· Second stage: presentations are gradually prepared.
· Third stage: presentations delivered as part of an open conference.

4.1.1. First stage: the research process.

This stage consists of the following steps, outlined during the tutorial sessions: choice of topic, survey of the bibliography, putting forward questions and hypothesis, building the corpus, analysing and interpreting data and drawing conclusions.

In terms of choice of topic, an initial problem that cropped up at the beginning of the programme was how to decide on the amount of freedom given to students for defining their research topic. It was finally decided that a wide variety of alternatives would be suggested around a central axis that would allow for coordination between the two basic areas in the disciplinary field: linguistics and literature. This axis revolves around choosing a *discursive genre* (Bakhtin, 1984) or *text type*[6] of social circulation, related to various discursive practices (such as literary, political, journalistic, epistolary, legal, advertising, humorous or cybernetic discourse), with the common aim of investigating the specificity of this text type, by carrying out a survey of the theory on the topic and an analysis of a set of data gleaned from two groups of empirical sources: a written or oral corpus, and the views of the social agents who understand and/or produce these texts.

Students are thus initiated into a research process with a three-fold challenge: a bibliographic search for a theoretical study of the chosen topic; selection and analysis of a corpus of texts obtained from the social sphere, and field work to investigate the conceptualisations made by language users.

From a set of general outlines, students begin to define theoretical and methodological issues relating to the text typologies and their levels of analysis (functional, situational, structural, stylistic, etc.) and to basic issues in research methodology (quantitative and qualitative paradigm, data collection techniques, etc.). This enables them to make decisions in respect of their field work (study population, data collection techniques, etc.).

4.1.2. Second stage: writing the presentations

This stage involves a range of textual challenges: writing the various drafts; writing the final version, which might be longer and more detailed than the version to be presented; writing the abstract for inclusion in the Conference programme; producing diagrams to support the oral presentation with technology aids (OHP slides, PowerPoint, etc.).

To guide students in adapting to the required academic genre, we analyse sample texts, with reference to the IMRD&C structure (*introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusions*; Swales, 1990), but also stressing that this model comes from hard science and is particularly aimed at the research article.

We work on the *canonical parts* (Ciapuscio and Otañi, 2002) of this model with their *text segments or moves* (described by Swales, 1990) paying special attention to their three-fold argumentative aspect (demonstrative, persuasive and dialectic). In this sense, we emphasise both the articulation that should exist between these various parts to achieve consistent scientific argumentation, and their rhetorical function as explicit reading guides. In connection with the latter, we pay particular attention to the introduction category, as described in Swales' *optative moves and steps* (1990):

· *Establishing a territory* (claiming centrality; giving a general overview of the topic; reviewing previous research).

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[6] Although the term *text type* is not the exact equivalent of the pioneering term *discursive genre*, it is conceptually very close, insofar as it is understood as the empirical classifications carried out by members of a community, as a consequence of their every day interaction with commonly-used texts (see Ciapuscio, 1994 and 2000, who synthesises the positions of German textual linguists such as Werlich, 1975; Brinker, 1988; Gülich, 1986 and Heinemann and Viehweger, 1991).

· *Establishing a niche* (proposing an opposing view; indicating a gap or lacuna; formulating questions or hypotheses; continuing a tradition).
· *Occupying the niche* (highlighting intentions or objectives; announcing present research; announcing main findings; stating the structure of the article).

It should be stressed that the academic texts chosen for reading and analysis illustrate the teaching aims, that is, academic discourse. We therefore select scientific articles and papers on research related to ways of reading and writing practised by students from various academic cultures, and to the concepts and methods of teaching academic writing in different universities throughout the world[7]. With these texts we aim to make students more aware of the existence of a range of academic traditions that are dependent on a range of cultural and disciplinary domains.

Working with texts within their own discipline is particularly important as this helps them to be in a better position to deal with producing presentations, for which they must prepare a text that accounts for the results of their own research process, in line with the standards of the academic community to which they belong. In the text preparation process, we also emphasise the formal guidelines for conventions on citations, introducing the relevant voices for supporting their own arguments, adhering to voices of authority or distancing themselves from controversial views, by means of the various styles available to them.

We also work with students using agreed guidelines for setting quality criteria for the final versions and the oral presentations. These guidelines are expressed in the criteria for assessment of the process and the product, agreed by the course team in order to award marks to the written presentations and the final verbal presentations given at the Conference.

4.1.3. Third stage: giving the presentations at the Conference.

This stage involves another set of challenges: decisions on what to prioritise in the oral presentation, how the presentation turns are distributed and organised, good use of technological resources, etc. At this point we should stress that each group is given 20 minutes to give their presentation and 10 minutes for questions and discussion.

To round off the Conference, students each write an anonymous statement in which they make an overall assessment of the different stages they went through in the study programme over the past year. What is most striking about these statements is students' extremely positive assessment of the work undertaken in the second part of the year. The tutorial sessions are particularly appreciated, as the exacting and gradual process of preparing presentations is guided on an ongoing basis by tutors, providing a support structure for their entry into academic culture.

5. Results

A first question to bear in mind for a proper consideration of the results obtained in terms of students' academic writing is that it entails highly complex cognitive and discursive challenges, not just for them but for us, as teachers in charge of the experience.

In this role, we have gradually undergone a process of divesting ourselves of our own discursive and academic skills, in order to be fully aware of all the knowledge (conceptual, procedural and attitudinal) that students have to acquire and of all the assumptions we need to make explicit. As an example, it took us some time to realise the problems that some students were having in distinguishing the critical apparatus from the text corpus. For many of them, both one and the other were included in the category of bibliography, especially for those who had built a corpus using literary texts.

For students, the many challenges include the quantitative control of the writing involved in the research process and in turning their presentations into text, insofar as they are the opposite to what they expect: they write a lot at the research stage (bibliographic descriptions and extensive analyses of the corpus of literature), but when they come to write the presentation they face a major summarising process. They have to condense a whole research process involving a huge amount of effort into only a few pages, reaching the maximum level of compression in the abstract.

In respect of writing the presentations, from the argumentative point of view, the following achievements and problems have been observed:

- Although in the teaching input we emphasise the articulation between the various lines of argumentation (introduction, methodology, results and conclusions), few presentations manage to reach a high level in this respect. The majority show an imbalance between these parts: on the whole, a great deal more space is given to the theoretical framework, in terms of authoritative argument, and less to the actual analysis and interpretation of the data, as empirical evidence, which weakens the argument put forward in the conclusion. In some cases, the theoretical framework is used in a positive way for analysing the data and for drawing conclusions, but in other cases it is cut off from the rest of the text and not built upon for analysing empirical evidence.
- In terms of the introduction, we discuss the moves proposed by J. Swales (1990) at a theoretical level, stressing that when reviewing existing work on the topic (state of affairs), authors of academic texts usually point to both the contributions and the limitations of research in order to occupy the gap. However, the majority of groups do not take this rhetorical move into account in their writing. There is more of a tendency towards a strategy of justifying argumentation (Masseron, 1997) that does not include other points of view on the object of research, either because they are not conceptualised or because there is no perceived need for them to be included. In the cases where other diverging or controversial views are included, the problems are concentrated in the dialogue with these other voices, in terms of the thread of their own discussion, and in forming their own view, which they do not manage to do, perhaps due to lack of sufficient time given to thinking about the topic.
- In relation to this and in connection with handling bibliographic sources, there is a strong tendency to overuse the "copy and paste" function in the various drafts rather

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[7] For example, we work with the following articles: Cubo (2000) analyses modes of access to scientific discourse in Argentine university students; Kaiser (2005) contrasts the writing styles of university students in Venezuela and Germany; Carlino (2006) compares how writing is addressed in university degree courses in three English-speaking countries (USA, Canada and Australia) and in Argentina.

than formally specifying the source. These problems are partially resolved in the final versions. It would appear that some students have no problem with making other peoples' words their own, thus doing away with authorial sources, whilst others use an explicit quote but accepting its authority without question or without attempting at least to paraphrase it to show some development of thought.

- What students place the greatest emphasis on in their introductions is the centrality of the problem, in relation to the social, psychological, historic or political importance of the chosen topic. For example, a group working with oral storytelling emphasised the importance of studying the stories, insofar as they transmit a sense of shared identity and belonging... and they enable the features related to the social and cultural issues affecting people living in rural areas to be clarified... (2007)[8]. Students who worked with graffiti produced in during the era of the Argentine military regime (1976-1983) stressed the objective of providing useful tools for dealing with these sorts of messages and the attempts made to hide contextual information during that period of history (2007)[9]. Another group looking at blogs stated: "we propose to address the topic of blogs, a communication method that uses the Internet, in order to attempt an initial outline of how they function internally and the social function they might be fulfilling". (2007)[10]. One student who worked with fairy tales wrote: "in the current climate, in which reading to children is becoming rarer, I propose with this study to rescue the importance of fairy tales in forming children's personalities". (2009)[11]

- The majority of groups are quite clear in defining their *research proposals* and, to a lesser extent, to formulating *hypotheses* or *research questions*, which combined with under-use of data, diminishes the overall argumentative consistency of their writing.

- In terms of the methodology section, the majority find it very difficult to decide which aspects they need to refer to in order to demonstrate the relevance of the sample selected and the appropriateness of the data analysis in terms of drawing up operational categories; that is, to prove the serious nature of the research. A number of students do not even manage to see this as a basic rhetorical step in the persuasiveness of the scientific argument, as this entails understanding that, in order to communicate research results, not only should the research itself be consistent, but that this consistency should appear evident to readers, thanks to the strategic use of rhetorical steps in academic writing.

- In respect of presentation of results, the majority, as we said before, do not make the most of their arguments, despite the fact that many of them are very significant. In this sense, several groups have difficulty in highlighting the evidence, perhaps supposing that the data speaks for itself; that is, it needs no explanation. This means they also struggle to integrate explanations of tables and diagrams into the body of their text, assuming that the diagram says it all, no guidance is required to read it. There are also problems with avoiding generalisations, bearing in mind that they are not working with representative samples. Some groups working qualitatively on interviews with social agents do not make the most of them, and in some cases they are relegated to the appendices of the written versions.

- Lastly, in terms of the *conclusions*, the most successful work, from the argumentation point of view, are those that can set up closure, using the discussion of the results and with reference to the initial hypotheses. For example, the presentation on blogs opens the conclusions thus: "From the above discussion and from interviews carried out we can form an idea of the social function that blogs might be fulfilling: alternative, non-institutional forms of communication showing the need to communicate and make a statement of identity in a certain age group: young people between 18 to 30 years old from a particular social and cultural class whose cultural capital is the availability of technology and shared itineraries, constituting them as an interpretative community. When we talk about alternative communication we mean they are artisan, non-official methods that do not depend on hegemonic means of communication" (2007).

Several studies show a divide between the results and the conclusions: these start abruptly, stating that the hypotheses have been proved without any further elaboration. Others make a summary of the research carried out without making any detailed assessment or do not show clearly to the extent to which the results have enabled the initial ideas to be proved. Only in a few cases is there an assessment of the *strong and weak points of the research* or of *further questions raised* as a result of the research carried out[12]. This would involve work on "meta-research", paying attention to the dialectic aspect of scientific argumentation, which has not yet begun to emerge in the majority of students.

6. Discussion

In connection with the research studies referred to in section 2 (*Writing in the university*) some of the data obtained from French and English speaking students should be considered, as they show some interesting similarities with the results obtained from our students.

Research done with French speaking students, in their analysis of the relationship between writing and knowledge construction, present student views that range from seeing writing as *transcription de la pensée* versus *construction de la pensée* (Delcambre y Reuter, 2002), or as *stockage* (storage) versus *élaboration* (Pollet, 2004), dependent on indicators such as work done with bibliographic sources and enunciative distance. In this respect, there is a greater tendency in students to think of writing as a way of transcribing thinking, the majority of which is other people's thinking (the authors of bibliography consulted), which they then incorporate into the text by a *stockage* process. In this sense, names, sources, characterisations and quotes are juxtaposed

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[8] *Lo escuché alguna vez* ("I heard it once", M.Zamora and G.Sala). It should be noted that these students are from a rural area.
[9] *The walls speak: graffiti during the military regime in Argentina* (C.Leguizamón, A.López, M.Porcel and P.Zúniga).
[10] *The emergence of blogs as alternative writing for young people* (A.Nieva and M.Giansierra).
[11] *Once upon a time...* (R.Gotter).
[12] For these categories, see C.Gnutzmann & H.Oldenburg (1991); G.Ciapuscio and I.Otañi (2002).

or accumulated with no visible reorganisation, critical thought or construction having taken place. Students thus tie themselves into reproducing the content of a discourse: they faithfully respect the order of the information obtained, replacing the connectors with dashes and eliminating any traces of reasoning. It becomes a mere process of reinstating knowledge, with no place for personal involvement and even less for discussion (Pollet, 2004: 83)[13].

As can be seen, these results are very similar to those obtained in our own research. However, these similarities need to be further examined, paying attention to the different writing routes taken by French speaking and Argentine students at pre-university level. The former practice the *dissertation* system, which is basically supposed to prepare students for academic writing, bearing in mind its argumentative nature. In the latter, this practice is as yet almost unknown, save for a few exceptions. This would entail directing research hypotheses more towards the specificity of academic and disciplinary cultures and, in relation to them, to considering the specificity of academic argumentation, compared to everyday argumentation.

With regard to English speaking studies, there are some striking similarities in some of the results obtained in the research carried out by Kelly and Bazerman (2003) on argumentation styles in technical papers written by students on an oceanography course that involves intensive writing, with the aim of familiarising them with accepted scientific practice for developing scientific knowledge. In this way, classes and laboratory sessions include discussions on how scientists select a problem, how they use evidence to support a theory or a model, how observation is separated from interpretation and how all these elements come together in a scientific paper.

In data analysis, authors select the two best quality texts, taking as indicators the students' rhetorical moves, the epistemic level of the propositions (from propositions referring to specific data to more generalised theoretical propositions) and lexical cohesion, in terms of persuasive use of evidence.

The authors observe how these students use rhetorical moves strategically, reach higher levels of generalisation in the sections that require it (introduction, interpretation and conclusions) and how they use denser cohesive ties within the limits of the sections and sub-sections. It is also interesting to note that in the *introduction* of these papers, general constructs arising out of the course are presented, more than a review of existing work on the topic. The authors interpret this as students' need to define and explain the central constructs, rather than readers' need to understand the material being dealt with. The last move in the *introduction* is to establish the central thesis, rather than identify the contribution made by the study. To do this, students use the central constructs and apply them to the specific events examined in the paper.

These results are consistent with results obtained from the better quality texts in our corpus. Amongst other issues, they suggest that students from both experiences aim their achievements at the demonstrative and persuasive aspect of academic argumentation rather than at the dialectic aspect, which would enable a natural route to be taken when initiating students in scientific practice.

7. Conclusions

This study is part of extensive research work on academic writing that has been undertaken in the United States for three decades and more recently in other countries. These studies attempt to outline lines of research that deal with academic literacy, with academic genres and with the role of argumentation within these genres. To do this, since 2005 we have been running a research-action programme in a Humanities subject area in an Argentine university, where we implemented an academic literacy programme in which the final stage involves writing and presenting group papers. The papers are understood as argumentative constructions that report the results of research for their approval and circulation. This is why discussion work is fundamental, based on both theoretical sources and on data that enable hypotheses to be demonstrated.

The strategies we selected for promoting the processes of this kind of academic writing include argumentative reading of sample academic texts, which entails focusing attention on the rhetorical steps used by expert writers to frame their research, occupy a place in the scientific community and justify constructed knowledge by articulating between hypothesis, data and conclusions, and via discussion of the results of other research studies.

In this study, we have considered both qualitative and quantitative data from these presentations, obtained over the last five years, in relation with three fundamental aspects of analysis: the products, the processes and the contexts of production.

Although these results are provisional, some interesting conclusions can be drawn that should be reconsidered in the light of new analysis.

Firstly, producing this academic genre involves complex conceptual, procedural and attitudinal knowledge that obviously cannot be built up over one academic year. However, students who are able to make the most of this academic literacy make significant progress. The following advantages are especially important:

- Experiencing academic writing as an epistemic tool enables knowledge to be transformed and constructed (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1992) rather than simply reproduced.
- Being aware that this knowledge construction is regulated by standards sanctioned by the academic community, although with differing restrictions in the various disciplinary spheres.
- Dialectic feedback between reading and writing. Reading like writers, writing like readers is a skill built in the workshop, where returning to reading is encouraged after having travelled the route of reading and writing, writing and reading, reading for writing and writing for reading. Whoever reads texts with a critical eye, from an argumentative perspective, is able to leave linear reading behind and take a pragmatic and overall view, producing a more finished reading of the text. The writer who keeps the reader in mind, putting themselves in their place, anticipating their concerns or possible objections, taking them and guiding them through their reading, will be more effective. The feedback between reading and writing enables students to experience the epistemic side of these processes, which become more powerful as they interact.

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[13] The Spanish paraphrasing is our own.

- Recognising research as a valid and productive model of learning, as it allows greater commitment to knowledge, while demanding the development of scientific argumentation, an essential part of constructing academic knowledge.

Secondly, in respect of the expectations of effective learning of academic argumentation skills, this can be achieved only partially in one course year and under certain conditions. Students who manage to reach basic levels of academic argumentation are those who are able to acquire a degree of mastery in informal argumentation. Lastly, in relation to these levels, the best quality presentations are those that get closer to demonstrative and persuasive argumentation, showing incipient development of dialectic argumentation. Students at an intermediate level concentrate their efforts on persuasive argumentation, particularly in the oral version.

These conclusions lead to viewing academic literacy as both a challenge and a commitment that university teachers should take on as part of their subject area, since this is where they will see the benefits of approaching disciplinary teaching not as an illusory transmission of knowledge, but as a space for construction, research and discussion of knowledge in progress. To do this, they need to think of the student as a voice that can make an active contribution to the group learning process.

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