Peer Feedback in an Online Dissertation Writing Workshop

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Abstract:
The article examines 'in-text feedback' and 'overall feedback' (KUMAR; STRACKE, 2007) on dissertation chapter drafts as well as students' opinion about giving and receiving feedback, both before and after taking part in the peer revision activities proposed in an online dissertation writing workshop. It used a mixed method approach. The comments were categorized using qualitative analysis; then, the categories are quantified and differences between proportions were analyzed using a Z test to determine if the difference between categories were statistically significant. In addition, students' opinions on feedback were qualitatively analyzed. As regards the in-text comments, with statistical significance, most of them consisted of basic feedback, referred to the textual model (mainly linguistic aspects) and had a directive pragmatic function. In the overall peer feedback, the textual model also prevailed but comments also included issues linked to the communicative situation and the research and a higher level of substantiated comments was noticed. This can be related to what students affirmed about the feedback received before and after the workshop: the perspectives of their peers allowed them to objectify the text or even delve into a critical evaluation of their own dissertation work. Additionally, peers' comments allow them to redo the writing actions that took place in the making of their first draft (e.g. drafting the paragraphs, structuring the discourse, thinking about whole sections) but this time, actions were informed by different perspective, which led to an improvement of the text at different levels.

Keywords:
Virtual learning; Dissertation writing; Peer feedback.

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INTRODUCTION

According to numerous studies published both in English (BEACH, 2002; LUNDELL; BEACH, 2002; DELYSER, 2003; GARDNER, 2007; LOVITTS, 2008; LEE; MURRAY, 2013; SIMPSON *et al.*, 2016; PENG, 2018) and Spanish (CARLINO, 2005; AVENDAÑO CASTRO; PAZ MONTES; RUEDA VERA, 2017; ESCALANTE GÓMEZ, 2010; MARTÍN TORRES, 2012; SÁNCHEZ JIMÉNEZ, 2012), postgraduate students face difficulties in finishing their dissertations. Among the factors that make it difficult to produce the preliminary or final work during their candidature are the difficulties encountered by students in writing (CAFFARELLA; BARNETT, 2000; D'ANDREA, 2002; CARLINO, 2005) and dealing with the task on their own, generally performed in isolation and without didactic support (DELAMONT, 2005; MCLAUGHLIN; SILLENCE, 2018). Considering this scenario, several studies have shown that feedback from peers, teachers and supervisors would contribute to different aspects of the dissertation process (from experiential and epistemological to specifically textual dimensions) (CAFFARELLA; BARNETT 2000; CAN; DELYSER, 2003; KUMAR; STRAKE, 2007; MAHER *et al.*, 2008; FERGUSON, 2009; LASSIG *et al.*, 2010; WALKER, 2011; CARLINO, 2012; EAST; BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN, 2012; KOZAR; LUM, 2013; BASTURKMEN; EAST; BITCHENER, 2014; ROULSTON *et al.*, 2016; ÁLVAREZ; DIFABIO, 2017, 2018, 2019; KUMAR; AITCHISON, 2017; DRESSLER *et al.*, 2019; YU, 2019). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of studies examining dissertation writers' experience of peer feedback activities and their perception of these activities (MAHER *et al.*, 2008; FERGUSON, 2009), which include both giving and receiving feedback (YU, 2019). To the best of our knowledge there is no Latin-American study that has analyzed both, the feedback and the students' perspective on peer-review activities. Therefore, this study analyzes 1) peer feedback (PF) on dissertations chapters' drafts and 2) students' viewpoints about giving and receiving feedback before and after a postgraduate writing workshop.

FEEDBACK IN POSTGRADUATE DISSERTATION WRITING

Although the focus of the current research is PF, it is relevant to consider some prior studies about peer review and interaction, as well as thesis supervision, both in face-to-face and virtual environments. Studies about peer review and interaction show the merits of this kind of pedagogical activity. Research about thesis supervision brings adequate categories to analyze feedback.

In the frame of a postgraduate writing seminar in the Social Sciences, DeLyser's study (2003) highlights that peer comments on dissertation chapters, when done following certain guidelines, can help students overcome the fear to share their drafts and contribute with the development of a critical eye.

Similarly, Maher *et al.* (2008) showed that students who participated in a dissertation-writing group recognized two essential contributions of peer exchange. On the one hand, they started feeling

part of a scientific and discursive community. In this way, they understood the textual production within the framework of the conventional structure of academic writing, mainly of the dissertation. On the other hand, like DeLyser (2003) points out, writing was no longer understood by students as an activity performed in the private environment, but as a collective work.

Along the same lines, Ferguson (2009) looked at a writing group of doctoral students in the Social Sciences. She observed that, with groups from three to six students, this type of initiative encourages the development of basic skills for thesis writing. According to the author, students recognized that the group not only improves writing skills, but also promotes positive attitudes regarding the writing process such as motivation and confidence.

Likewise, Kumar and Aitchison (2017) report on a doctoral student writing program in which 20 students were provided with the resources to develop faculty-based doctoral writing groups. Both individually and collectively participants learnt skills and information which allowed them to improve their own writing knowledge and practices, and improved their capacity to lead the learning of others.

Meanwhile, Álvarez and Difabio (2017), in an online writing workshop oriented to dissertation writing, showed that peer interaction mediated by technologies fosters awareness on different aspects of thesis writing, which makes it possible to perform a metalinguistic reflection that would not be possible if working in isolation. This reflection encompasses not only global and macro-textual dimensions but also micro-textual aspects, including the acknowledgement of linguistic strategies and resources.

Yu (2019) also studied PF on postgraduate thesis, but with an original focus: the benefits of providing feedback. This case study of seven Master's students shows that PF increased awareness of the dissertation as an academic genre, enhanced academic writing skills, improved learning abilities based on seeking external assistance, and raised reflective and critical thinking as academic writers.

Studies about the interaction with teachers and supervisors can also be considered to identify diverse types of feedback analysis. Kumar and Stracke (2007) have analyzed supervisor feedback in dissertation drafts. According to the authors it is through feedback that the supervisee can understand that writing is a form of learning, an important part of PhD education. They included two types of data in their study: 1) 'in-text feedback' (IF), consisting of comments written by the supervisor in the drafts, mostly in the margins. These can best be described as spontaneous thoughts, expressed as if the supervisor was having a dialogue with the supervisee; and 2) 'overall feedback' (OF), consisting of a summary of the reviewer's main concerns about the complete draft and the individual chapters. Basturkmen *et al.* (2014) also examined supervisor comments on dissertation drafts from different disciplines. The study was centered on the focus of the comments and how they were made. Focus of the feedback included four categories: content, formal requirements, coherence and cohesion, and linguistic accuracy/appropriateness. To analyze the pragmatic function, the authors distinguished between referential comments, directives, and expressive utterances. Referential comments provide information, correction or include a restatement. Directives suggest or determine future actions, search for additional information or connections between ideas. Expressive utterances include positive or negative assessments about the writings. Results showed that the most frequent focus was content or linguistic accuracy. Meanwhile, the comments about linguistic accuracy or the formal requirements were presented by means of information or corrections (referential function), while the comments about content and coherence/cohesion were realized as questions or suggestions (directive function).

In sum, the literature review shows that interaction and feedback from peers and experts represent, as Chois Lenis, Guerrero Giménez e Brambila Limón (2020) indicate, didactic strategies that promote learning writing practices at the postgraduate level, including dissertation writing. Our work contributes to this growing body of research on postgraduate writing by analyzing both PF as well as students' perspective on revision activities before and after their participation on a workshop.

ON THE RESEARCH TRAIL

Context of the Study

The research was conducted on a postgraduate online workshop offered by the School of Philosophy and Literature and Language Studies of one public university in Argentina. The workshop was an accredited course, advertised by the Postgraduate Department on the institutional website and it used the university virtual platform and shared documents in Google Drive. The workshop lasted six weeks and it was organized in three stages.

During the first stage (one week), students participated in two online discussion forums. They introduce themselves in Forum 1 and reflected on the writing process and giving and receiving feedback in Forum 2. In the latter, they were asked if they usually gave or received feedback, from and to whom, and if they had ever had a negative experience in this regard. At the end of this week, students were given a document with the conceptualizations about writing and feedback (including different feedback types and ways of offering it) assumed in the course.

During the second stage (three weeks), students were paired based on similarities of discipline. They were asked to revise their own chapter and their partner's chapter following three models of dissertation writing: 1) communicative interaction and situation model, which is concerned with the social relationships and the communicative roles of participants in an interaction and its context; 2) event model, which reflects the research process, the content and the extra-linguistic reality that the thesis refers to, and 3) textual model, which is related to the specific features of the writing in relation to certain discursive tradition, the various dimensions of linguistic communication, and its variants (CUBO DE SEVERINO; BOSIO, 2011). In this regard, we have set out to establish the general structure of dissertations and the moves and steps adopted in each of its sections (DUDLEY-EVANS; ST. JOHN, 1998; SWALES, 2004). "A 'move' in genre analysis is a discoursal and rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (SWALES, 2004, p. 228). Rhetorical moves are made of steps and a move can consist of a single step or a combination of them. Furthermore, it was promoted the recognition of verbalization resources and strategies employed to state the meanings that the writers intended to convey.

Based on these models, the three weeks of the second stage were organized as follows:

Week 1: students revised the chapters considering the communicative interaction and situation model as well as the event model.

Week 2: revisions were based on the textual model, specifically in the identification of moves and steps in the chapters.

Week 3: students analyzed the chapters based on the textual model but this time paying special attention to the language strategies and resources used in the draft.

To fulfill the revision activities proposed in this second phase, it was created for each student 1) a shared document in Google Drive to upload the dissertation chapter and 2) a discussion forum where revision activities were discussed with peers and professors. These two applications supported the required tasks: offering IF and OF to their partner's draft (KUMAR; STRACKE, 2007). The in-text feedback refers to all of the marginal comments added that can be considered as spontaneous thoughts, expressing the dialogue established between reader and writer. Global feedback takes the form of a message in which readers summarize their main appreciations about the text and its sections. Global feedback was shared in the discussion forum.

Finally, in the third stage (two weeks), each student rewrote her/his own chapter considering the feedback received. Similarly to what they did in the peer revision, they produced in-text and overall feedback for their own drafts. During this period, interaction with their dissertation supervisors and the workshop facilitators took place via email. In this and the previous phases, documents prepared by the teachers of the workshop and bibliography were shared with students in the virtual platform.

At the end of the workshop, a retrospective questionnaire of open questions, elaborated *ad hoc*, was provided to explore students' response to the contributions and limitations of the initiative, including questions about PF activities.

Method

The research was conducted on a 90-hour postgraduate online workshop taught by the first and third author from October to November 2017 in which 9 students participated: 8 from different doctoral programs (4 Education, 2 Language Teaching, 1 Psychology and 1 Law) and 1 from a Linguistic Master program. Four of them were under 40 years of age and the rest were over 50 years of age. Only two of the students were men. As a requirement to enroll, students were asked to have at least a complete draft of one of the chapters of their Spanish dissertation. This would ensure that they were advanced in their dissertation writing process and that they would have a draft to review as part of the workshop activities. All of them gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

This study used a mixed method design to analyze PF as well as students' opinions about giving and receiving feedback. The first analysis examined IF as well as OF from peers on dissertation chapters' drafts (shared documents in Google Drive). The second analysis explored students' viewpoints about giving and receiving feedback before and after the revision activities proposed in the postgraduate writing workshop. To do this, it analyzes interventions in the discussion Forum 2 (first week of the workshop) and the answers to a questionnaire completed once they finished the workshop.

Each IF and OF was analyzed regarding different dimensions (interweaving, focus, pragmatic function, and types of analysis). The *interweaving* dimension indicated if the comments showed a relationship with previous comments or not. Table 1 presents subcategories and examples of this dimension. Examples were translated by the authors.

Table 1. Subcategories and examples of the analytical dimension *Interweaving*

Subcategories	Examples
Interweaved [connected to previous comments]	'I will take into account these suggestions about quoting since I usually use the MLA format as a guide.'
Not interweaved [not connected to previous comments]	'…in general there are short sentences with a segmented style, easy to read.'

The dimensions *focus* and *pragmatic function* were adapted from Basturkmen, Basturkmen e Bitchener (2014, p. 435). When analyzing *focus* it was considered "what aspects of writing the comment focused on" and, congruently with the way PF was structured in the initiative, this was done taking into account if the comments were addressing the communicative situation, the event or the textual model (CUBO DE SEVERINO; BOSIO, 2011, p. 437). The *pragmatic function* dimension referred to "the pragmatic (communicative) intention of the comments." Table 2 and 3 display subcategories and examples from our data for both dimensions.

Table 2. Subcategories and examples of the analytical dimension *Focus*

Subcategories	Examples
Communicative situation model	'I have tried to blend clarity with variety in compliance with the vocabulary of the experienced reader.'
Event model	'If it is a definition of the concept, it might be good to cite where you got it from. Or to add a quote on the concept "community".
Textual model [it encompasses the ones related to moves, steps and linguistic resources]	'…check if this word can be replaced with 'more' since it is used similarly in the following section (unify).'

Table 3. Subcategories and examples of the analytical dimension *Pragmatic Function*

Subcategories	Examples
Referential [information, correction or reformulation of the writing]	'…in general there are short sentences with a segmented style, easy to read.'
Directive [suggestions for future actions, elicitations of information or connection of ideas]	'…check if this word can be replaced by 'more' since it is used similarly in the following section (unify).'
Expressive [positive or negative responses]	'I agree with this reformulation. I was going to point out that the style of this sentence is too segmented.'
Commitment [Commitment with future action]	'I will take these suggestions about quoting into account since I usually use the MLA format as a guide.'

The dimension *type of analysis* considered if the comment provided a justification for the observation or suggestion made as well as if the feedback was addressed to a specific fragment or to a general dimension of the text. Table 4 presents subcategories and examples.

Table 4. Subcategories and examples of the analytical dimension *Type of analysis*

Subcategories	Examples
Basic feedback on a specific fragment of the dissertation	'Without comma'
Substantiated feedback on a specific fragment of the dissertation	'I agree with this reformulation. I was going to point out that the style of this sentence is too segmented.'
Basic feedback on a general dimension of the dissertation.	'Some footnote quotes are too long, and they could also be repetitive.'
Substantiated feedback on a general dimension of the dissertation.	'As a suggestion about the content, there might be several repetitions about the idea of diversity, heterogeneity, inclusive school, among other concepts. As reader, it seemed to me that I have read the same idea several times and I felt that the text was not moving forward to the evidencing of your hypothesis […]'

As the examples show, one comment could fall in more than one category or subcategory. The coding was done as follows: first, a researcher coded the texts and feedback; then, texts and comments were analyzed two or more times to obtain general results. After this, a second researcher revised the analysis confirming or questioning the categories. Finally, in an inter-rater reliability assessment, they deliberated about those few cases (about 2%) where they had different opinions until they got to an agreement.

The corpus was built up by 555 instances of IF, with a wide dispersion (range of IF between 28 and 331; D. S. = 9.57); and 29 instances of OF with small dispersion (range of OF between 3 and 12; D.S. = 3.63), giving a total of 584 instances of feedback.

The IF and the OF were quantified under four dimensions: interweaving, focus, pragmatic function, and type of analysis. Data was descriptively analyzed using tables; then, a Z test for proportions was applied using the STATS program (HERNÁNDEZ SAMPIERI; FERNÁNDEZ COLLADO; BAPTISTA LUCIO, 2014).

In addition to analyzing IF and OF, students' opinions on feedback were considered. On the one hand, students' entries in the online Forum 2 (first week of the workshop) were analyzed. As previously mentioned, in this forum students reflected on their previous feedback experiences. On the other hand, students' answers to a questionnaire administered at the end of the workshop were analyzed. Special attention was placed on a question that asked students if the IF and the OF received from peers and reviewing their final draft contributed to their dissertation as well as if they had faced any difficulty related to this type of tasks.

To analyze the forum and questionnaire data, answers were thoroughly read, and categories were assigned to different fragments through content analysis. In a recursive process, each fragment was compared to the categories already created to define if they were included or new categories needed to be created. The resulting categories included all of the different fragments analyzed. The first author conducted the full analysis; then, the third author reviewed it confirming the categories. As a final step in the procedure, relations were established between the main modalities of the PF to their peer's chapter, their reflections about feedback before and after the workshop and their perceptions about the effectiveness of the PF received during the initiative.

RESULTS

In this section, we first present the results related to the IF and the OF provided by the students to their peers' chapters. Then, we introduce findings related to students' perspective about the feedback before and after the revision activities proposed in the workshop. All of the examples were translated into English.

IF and OF from Peers

Overall, there were 584 instances of feedback and 555 of these were IF. Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of IF.

Most of the comments were associated with the textual model (84%) and were basic feedback with a directive function (e.g., 'The idea should be reinforced by an example'). From the comments that referred to the textual model, 96% of them corresponded to linguistic aspects and the remaining 4% to moves and rhetoric steps.

When categories were combined and arranged in descending order of frequency (Table 6), the first combination highly exceeded the rest ($z = 13.681$; $p < .01$), with more than half of the comments being associated with the textual model, having a directive pragmatic function and offering basic feedback.

Concerning the OF, as Table 7 shows, interweaving comments, non-existent in IF, were also the least frequent OF.

Table 5. Descriptive results per category of analysis within IF

Dimensions and categories		Frequency	Percentage
Interweaving	Interweaved	0	0%
	Not interweaved	555	100%
	Total	555	100%
Focus	Textual model	466	84%
	Event model	75	13,5%
	Communicative situation model	14	2,5%
	Total	555	100%
Pragmatic function	Referential	37	6,7%
	Directive	505	91%
	Expressive	13	2,3%
	Total	555	100%
Type of analysis	Basic feedback	420	75,7%
	Substantiated feedback	135	24,3%
	Total	555	100%

Table 6. Category combinations within IF

Category combinations	Frequency	Percentage
Textual model - Directive - basic feedback	350	63%
Textual model - Directive - Substantiated feedback	71	13%
Event model - Directive - Substantiated feedback	39	7%
Event model - Directive - basic feedback	31	5,5%
Textual model - Referential - basic feedback	22	4%
Textual model - Referential - Substantiated feedback	15	3%
Others	27	4,5%
Total	555	100%

Table 7. Descriptive results per category of analysis within OF

Categories		Frequency	Percentage
Interaction	Interweaved	2	7%
	Not interweaved	27	93%
	Total	29	100%
Focus	Textual model	15	47%
	Event model	11	34%
	Communicative situation model	6	19%
	Total	32*	100%
Pragmatic function	Referential	------	-----
	Directive	23	72%
	Expressive	9	28%
	Total	32	100%
Type of analysis	Basic feedback	9	31%
	Substantiated Feedback	20	69%
	Total	29	100%

* In this and the following category, the total is increased because three comments fell in more than one category.

Regarding the focus of the PF, Table 7 also shows that the distribution of percentages was more homogenous among the three types of models. In this regard, suggestions such as 'It could be advisable to

modify the subtitles of the sections since it is important to show to the specialized reader that you have to go away from an author's rather repetitive reading to tackle an hermeneutic understanding and thus deepen the analysis' were made about the communicative situation model. On the other hand, comments such as '... some ideas might be repeated… it seemed to me that I have read the same idea several times and I felt that the text was not moving forward to the evidencing of your hypothesis' referred to the event model.

The textual model showed statistically significant pre-eminence over the communicative situation ($z = 1.974$; $p < .05$). Additionally, the directive function prevailed again, in this case over the expressive ($z = 2.514$; $p < .05$). Finally, compared to the IF, there was a higher level of substantiated feedback ($z = 2.067$; $p < .05$), with the proportion practically inverted.

In the combination of the categories, the results related to OF, in descending order of frequency, are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Category combinations in OF

Category combinations	Frequency	Percentage
Textual model - Directive - Substantiated feedback	8	28%
Communicative situation model - Directive - Substantiated feedback	5	17%
Textual model - Directive - Basic feedback	4	13,5%
Event model - Directive - Substantiated feedback	4	13,5%
Textual model - Expressive - Basic feedback	2	7%
Event model - Expressive - Basic feedback	2	7%
Event model - Expressive - Substantiated feedback	2	7%
Others	2	7%
Total	29	100%

None of these differences were statistically significant, a result that is not surprising due to the scarce numeric range among the types of comments.

Student Perspectives About Feedback Before the Peer Review Activities in the Workshop

As previously mentioned, students initially participated in an online forum answering a series of questions related to their previous experiences about giving and receiving feedback. Four categories emerged from the analysis of these answers: 1) benefits of feedback; 2) focus of feedback; 3) relational level; and 4) actors. Next, each category is characterized including examples taken from students' contributions.

Nine of the ten students mentioned in the online forum the benefits of feedback. Five of them highlighted that accessing comments –in many cases, with different perspectives– allowed them to improve their texts ('it lets us improve the scientific texts because the watchful eye of a colleague, a supervisor or an expert detects the required coherence, cohesion and adequacy'). Four students considered that it was a central component of their learning process ('In my opinion, feedback is one of the most productive learning instances in academic life'). Two of them recognized how the author's own vision and critical thinking could be modified by the comments, which could lead to improving the drafts ('it led me to have a less *kind look* towards my texts and to value the comments as a means to improve them. It is also part of refining our own criteria, to define which comments are worth considering and which are not'). One student mentioned the self-control derived from feedback ('you start to control your own actions based on the feedback received and you also look for feedback that addresses those issues that you cannot control'). Another participant highlighted the importance of the collaborative work that feedback activities entailed, which could influence

their research in a positive way ('when working collaboratively, at the time of searching for information, one usually finds bibliography and sources with themes that another colleague needs').

Another aspect highlighted by the students was the focus of the comments. Three of them claimed to have received comments about the content, the framework of the research or the concepts ('questions that allow me to see where clarity was needed in my conceptualizations and arguments'). Two participants declared to have obtained feedback referred to the general structure of the dissertation such as including an index ('the suggestions to start elaborating an annotated index, which efficiently guided me to start the writing task'). Two other students mentioned suggestions about the work with the literature ('the guidance of the supervisors about the selection of bibliography was essential').

As regards the relational level, three of the five students who mentioned this issue considered necessary to adopt a positive attitude when giving and receiving feedback. In this sense, a student stated that, when asked for feedback, s/he tried to emulate her/his supervisor who had always be respectful and aimed for improvement ('I have tried to imitate the stance that my supervisor has always had when she was giving me feedback and making comments, always respectful and seeking the thesis's growth'). Meanwhile, two students referred to the negative feelings associated with critical comments ('I admit that I had some negative reactions to the negative feedback during my process').

Eight of the ten students mentioned from whom they have received feedback (actors). Five of them mentioned their supervisors ('As regards the feedback, I consider it more and more necessary, even if I only get it mainly from my supervisor'). Three students mentioned professors of their postgraduate courses ('The feedback with the team of professors from the Methodology postgraduate course was and still is very positive, a fact that influences the writing of my dissertation'). Two referred to the comments from reviewers and also from the audience in academic events ('I have received feedback in different situations such as colloquiums or works related to the topic of the dissertation and, in general, I have preferred the critical feedback'). Only one student declared having received feedback from colleagues at work ('the work environment, which makes it possible to share and constantly receive new feedback from colleagues and friends who are involved in the same task').

Student Perspectives About Feedback After the Peer Review Activities in the Workshop

Six categories emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire completed by the students at the end of the workshop: 1) benefits of feedback; 2) focus of feedback; 3) relational level; 4) response to feedback; 5) problems with feedback; and 6) benefits of the digital environment. The first three categories are in line with findings related to the forum interventions. Therefore, results are reported relating data from both instruments.

Concerning the benefits of the PF received, four students mentioned in the forum that they highly valued being able to access their peer's perspective ('My peer's point of view helped me consider how a person from another disciplinary area perceives my academic writing, to see whether it is understandable and whether my sentences are well-written or not'). In this sense, it seems that, according to the participants, the difference between the author and the peer's perspective about the dissertation (mainly based on disciplinary differences) can help improve the text. Also, two students considered that PF allowed them to take some distance from the text, achieving greater objectivity in order to assess its modification ('a perspective different from mine allowed me to redo the paragraphs so as not to discredit previous research, placing myself in a more objective position in the development of the text'). Results from the forum and the questionnaire indicate that students positively valued peer's contribution, highlighting the benefits of accessing a different point of view to improve their textual production.

The focus of PF was mentioned in the questionnaire by four of the nine students. Three of them commented on their peers' contributions regarding the structure or linguistic level of the text – cohesion and coherence, accuracy, and linguistic appropriateness – ('she only made contributions about form'). Only one student mentioned that his peers referred to issues related to the research and its development ('It helped me see the truly 'hermeneutic' methodology, and re-think the dissertation as a whole, not only that chapter'). Considering what the participants expressed, the focus of the feedback received before the workshop would differ from the one elaborated during this formative experience. While the former focused mainly on the research components and the concepts, during the workshop, the focus of a good part of the comments had been on the structure and the linguistic resources.

Regarding the relational level, two students mentioned the importance of the way in which the PF was given in order to care for the receiver ('a small drawback at the very beginning was how to give feedback, i.e., what expressions should be used so as not to affect my colleague's emotions negatively'). Closely related to this, other two students considered that an open attitude was necessary to be able to receive the feedback in a good way and act accordingly ('I feel that this way of working requires an open, positive attitude and an attitude of acceptance'). Thus, these appraisals are similar to those expressed by the students before starting the workshop since in both instruments they acknowledged not only the good predisposition and the care needed when making comments, but also the need for an open attitude towards criticism when receiving feedback.

In addition to the aforementioned themes that also appeared in the data collected at the beginning of the experience, students mentioned new topics in their answers to the questionnaire. Six of them referred to how to proceed with PF. They explained the actions carried out depending on the PF received. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that these actions were usually represented by the prefix 're', meaning repetition. For example: 're-work some paragraphs', 're-structure the discourse', 're-think these whole parts', 're-view issues that I had considered closed and forced me to re-do them', 're-configure the chapter', 'I have paid attention to each of the comments and re-written what was necessary according to them', 're-think my academic writing style'. Thus, the PF would lead to redoing actions associated with the writing process in order to achieve a more suitable textual production.

Another new category arising from the questionnaire refers to the problems associated with giving and receiving PF. This was mentioned by three students. Two of them highlighted time-related complications due to the large number of responsibilities ('My main problem was the time. It is difficult to juggle courses, to study for other courses, production of the dissertation, teaching, work and family'), and another student mentioned difficulties related to the way her peer elaborated the feedback ('I didn't find the comments challenging. I would have preferred the corrections to be more demanding').

In addition, three students referred to the benefits of using digital technologies for giving and receiving feedback. According to one of the students, the main benefit was related to the possibility of overcoming the feeling of 'loneliness' associated with the dissertation writing process thanks to the bond of trust produced when working with peers through a shared document ('The online environment is a surprisingly useful tool, mainly due to the fact that you can read and work with the document from any mobile device, at any time, and, at the same time, the creation of trust in a relationship that significantly deletes that feeling of loneliness involved in writing a dissertation'). Another student considered that the digital environment made it possible to provide detailed contributions ('The contributions were boosted by the online learning component since when you work in such detail with complex texts the most helpful thing is the use of editing tools like Google Drive'). Another student declared that the forum allowed for constant interaction ('I appreciate the existence of the forum since our personal doubts or expectations are shared and the forum helps clarify all kinds of issues that do not find a specific place').

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study analyzed, on the one hand, the IF and OF provided by peers on dissertation drafts in the frame of an online postgraduate writing workshop. In this workshop, as Aitchison (2009, p. 907) points out in relation to writing, feedback was "the subject and the object, the medium and the means of activity". Moreover, it studied students' perspective on giving and receiving feedback before and after participating in the revision activities proposed in the workshop.

As regards the IF, with statistical significance, there was a prevalence of comments referring to the textual model (mainly those referring to linguistic aspects), in the form of basic feedback and with a directive pragmatic function. Thus, our results are like what previous research found about professors' feedback (BASTURKMEN; EAST; BITCHENER, 2014), with linguistic accuracy being the most frequent aspect present in the comments. This also seems to be compatible with our participants' perspective since they mentioned that, during the experience, the focus of feedback was mostly placed on structure and linguistic resources. Contrary to this, most of the feedback received before the workshop was focused on the construction of the research components and concepts. This could be due, at least partially, to the fact that, in general, feedback had been previously given mainly by supervisors or other professors in the postgraduate program. As experienced members of a particular research community, they could provide deeper and more discipline-specific advice than the one provided by peers, more restricted to lower levels of the writing process.

In the OF, even though a higher percentage of feedback was still associated with the textual model, the distribution of the comments was more homogeneous between the three types of models and a higher level of substantiated comments was noticed. In this sense, similar to previous research (ÁLVAREZ; DIFABIO, 2017), the forums in the writing workshop seem to have favored the configuration of a particular discursive community (MAHER *et al.*, 2008) characterized by certain uses of language in relation to the postgraduate dissertation as a genre. Thus, even those students without a background in Linguistics gradually incorporated and used specialized lexicon. This dynamic allows defining peer revision as a positive and productive process by encouraging the development of a critical look (DELYSER, 2003) which might have an impact on the writings (ÁLVAREZ; BASSA, 2013; KUMAR; AITCHISON, 2017). Moreover, global revisions seem to raise more reflections on different dimensions of the dissertation, without a predominance of comments on linguistic aspects.

The aforementioned could be related to the feedback received before and after the workshop: according to the students the perspectives of their peers allowed them to objectify the text or even delve into a critical evaluation of their own dissertation work. Additionally, peers' comments allowed them to redo the writing actions that took place in the making of their first draft (e.g. drafting the paragraphs, structuring the discourse, thinking about whole sections) but this time, actions were informed by different perspectives, which led to an improvement of the text at different levels. These results are compatible with Yu's study (2019), which revealed that revision activities improve academic writers' skills as well as their capacity of reflection and critical thinking. In this regard, our participants also reflected on the role of feedback and they were more aware about genre moves, steps and linguistic resources. This awareness also allowed them to feel better prepared to be more critical of their own writing. Moreover, this type of rhetorical knowledge they began to exhibit most probably would have not come from their supervisors; unless the latter were trained in writing, their reflective ability to manipulate the dissertation genre is limited (BAZERMAN, 2007).

These findings bring us closer to solutions for the well-known problems of postgraduate students with the dissertation writing process: peers, teachers and supervisors' reviewing together might create a

'safe and supportive space' (FERGUSON, 2009) or community based on trust (ROULSTON *et al.*, 2016) and a locus for learning the 'working knowledge' required for successful outcomes (AITCHISON, 2009). In fact, a series of approaches to support postgraduate writing (e.g. special workshops, writing groups) are focused on the provision of feedback (e.g. LASSIG *et al.*, 2010; CAN; WALKER, 2011; KOZAR; LUM, 2013). When these initiatives are effective, the ongoing feedback (CAFFARELLA; BARNETT, 2000) helps redraft the text to shorten the distance between one's intentions and achievements (CARLINO, 2012). Effective feedback, according to the students themselves (EAST; BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN, 2012), deals more with the overall organization of the writing than with surface aspects and it also challenges thinking (content, flow, argumentation), prompting authors to find their own answers. Nevertheless, to improve the quantity and quality of PF explicit training is needed rather than assuming that postgraduate students know how to manage it (SIMPSON *et al.*, 2016; DRESSLER *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, because of the size of the corpus, the conclusions proposed are only provisional and they must be analyzed thoroughly in another study with a larger sample. Moreover, in order to continue this research, as Dressler *et al.* (2019) indicate, it is essential to study the changes performed by the students based on the feedback received from peers and experts, that is, to analyze their disposition to act on the information received and to use it to transform the text.

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