
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS WRITTEN BY LEARNERS OF CATALAN AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE: FROM FORMATIVE NEEDS TO REFLECTION IN THE TEACHING OF NARRATIVE GENRES*

TEXTOS AUTOBIOGRÀFICS ESCRITS PER APRENENTS DE CATALÀ COM A LLENGUA ADDICIONAL: DE LES NECESSITATS FORMATIVES A LA REFLEXIÓ EN L'ENSENYAMENT DELS GÈNERES NARRATIUS

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Abstract: In this article we analyse autobiographical narrative texts written by university students studying Catalan as an Additional Language at a CEFR (2020) B1 level. The goal is to analyse the formative needs related to the writing of this genre in order to foster metadiscursive reflection in the classroom that will allow students to improve their written output. To this end, we analyzed a corpus of 39 autobiographies at both the macrotextual level (i.e., rhetorical moves) and the microtextual level (i.e., deictic elements which channel the narrative's organization). Our results show that the problems that these texts present for students are related to awareness of the elements that define the genre (i.e., the sociocultural dimension) as well as the text's narrative-temporal anchoring and the narrator's deictic positioning (i.e., the pragmatic and textual dimensions). Thus, we propose a kind of competence-oriented teaching of genres in which the discursive and grammatical features that have a bearing on a text's discursive coherence and cohesion are integrated at the same level.

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Key words: discourse competence, formative needs, Catalan as Additional Language, Self-referential genres, deixis, metadiscursive reflection.

Resum: En aquest article analitzem textos narratius autobiogràfics escrits per estudiants universitaris que tenen el català com a llengua addicional, d'un nivell B1 de CEFR (2020). L'objectiu és analitzar les necessitats formatives en la redacció d'aquest gènere per tal de fomentar a classe una reflexió metadiscursiva que permeti millorar-ne les produccions escrites. Per fer-ho, hem analitzat un corpus de 39 autobiografies tant a nivell macrotextual (moviments retòrics) com microtextual (elements dítctics que vehiculen l'organització narrativa de les autobiografies). Els resultats assenyalen que els problemes que presenten aquests textos estan relacionats amb la consciència dels elements que defineixen el gènere (dimensió sociocultural), així com amb l'ancoratge narrativotemporal i el posicionament dítctic dels narradors en el text (dimensió pragmàtica i textual). Per tant, proposem un ensenyament dels gèneres competencial en què s'integrin, a un mateix nivell, els trets discursius i els gramaticals que influeixen en la coherència i la cohesió discursives.

Paraules clau: competència discursiva, necessitats formatives, català com a llengua addicional, gèneres autoreferencials, dixi, reflexió metadiscursiva.



1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we analyse autobiographical narrative texts produced by university students who were taking a trimester-long B1-level (CEFR, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2020) course in Catalan as an Additional Language (AL). The students mostly came from Spanish-speaking backgrounds, though there were also students from other European countries as well as Africa and East Asia. Thus the language profile of the students was collectively rather varied.

Autobiographical narrative texts have been the object of study within various disciplines including history, anthropology and linguistics. In linguistics, the genre has been examined from a sociocultural perspective in relation to the study of secondary students' beliefs or representations regarding language learning with a goal to improving teaching (Martí Climent & Garcia Vidal 2020), as a self-reflective activity intended to make students aware of their language learning process (Casas-Deseures 2020) or for the purpose of analysing the discourse strategies that they deploy (Ruiz Àvila 2005).

As a genre, autobiography belongs to the family of narrative genres (Bhatia 2004; Ciapuscio 2007), a family which also includes biography as well as history. The most

prominent feature of autobiographical texts is their sequential narrative, although there also typically appear embedded within the narrative descriptive passages or argumentative elements which seek to evaluate past decisions taken in the course of what is being narrated.

The aim of this study is to analyse the formative needs of students learning Catalan as an AL when it comes to writing autobiographical texts. If these needs can be identified, strategies can be devised that will raise the students' awareness of the features of this genre and thereby improve the quality of their texts, quality understood here as an integrated whole in which text and grammar are dealt with simultaneously.

2. NARRATIVE MACROSTRUCTURE AND TEXTUAL DEIXIS

As noted, the dominant feature of autobiography as a genre is the narrative sequence, which corresponds to the way in which the «I» narrates her/his life story and the key moments that marked it and that merit mention. As Ruiz-Ávila puts it, «los discursos autobiográficos son prioritariamente narraciones resultantes de un proceso de selección de las acciones más significativas [...]» (2005: 15). Ruiz-Ávila goes on to say that, in the macrostructure of the autobiographical narrative, what stands out is «el establecimiento de núcleos temáticos» (2005: 18), which can be analysed if we study the rhetorical structure of autobiographical texts by examining the moves in the narrative that maintain its unity of theme and action and underpin the narrative's progression from one phase in the life story to another (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993).

It is also important to analyse, as noted above, the inscription of the narrative «I» and the deictic elements related to the narrative structure of the texts, since, as noted by Gee (2011), deictics help to provide cohesion to the discourse and link it to the context, whether endophorically or exophorically. In fact, when problems related to deictic reference occur, they frequently affect the comprehensibility of the text: «If listeners do not correctly figure out what deictics refer to, using contextual information, then they do not understand what is meant or they misunderstand it» (2011: 9).

Deictic elements enhance the coherence and cohesion of the narrative discourse in this sort of text. Deixis here refers to textual deixis, which goes further than anaphoric deixis (which it also includes) since it allows the linkage between not only elements within the text but also elements in the mind of the narrator. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1980: 56) stresses the importance of the deictic system in discursive coherence and cohesion:

Le système de repérage déictique n'est pas le seul auquel puissent recourir les langues naturelles mais c'est sans doute, le plus important, et sûrement le plus original, car ce repérage a la particularité de s'effectuer non par rapport à d'autres unités internes au discours, mis par rapport à quelque chose qui lui est extérieur et hétérogène : les données concrètes de la situation de communication.

The use of verb tense can be regarded as a deictic property of texts because—to quote the Institute d'Estudis Catalans' official grammar of Catalan— «perquè localitza una situació per relació amb el moment de l'acte de parla [...]: el passat indica anterioritat amb l'acte de parla» (GIEC 2016: 135). Tenses that are oriented relative to the moment of the speech act represent *absolute deictic values*, whereas tenses that have a recoverable meaning only in the context of the discourse can be labelled *relative tenses* (GIEC 2016: 908).

Pérez-Saldanya (2002) also states that

el temps és una categoria dística, que fa referència a la temporalitat externa de la situació designada, per tal com localitza aquesta referència directa o indirecta al moment de l'acte de parla. (Pérez-Saldanya 2002: 2574)

Thus, according to Torner & Li (2019: 160-161), in the case of the expression of verb tense, it is important to distinguish among *point o*, the point from which one is speaking (in the case of the narratives in our corpus, this usually refers to a time in the author's youth), the *time of the event* (TE) (in our corpus the different narrative moments that underpin the macrotexual narrative, to wit, birth, childhood, adolescence and young adulthood) and the *point of reference* (R), on the basis of which the TE is situated (whether anterior, simultaneous, in the past, or in the future as seen from the past):

[...] el evento denotado por el verbo se sitúa en relación con el punto de referencia, que bien es el momento en que se produce el acto de enunciación, bien es otro segmento temporal que, a su vez, se sitúa temporalmente en relación en el momento de enunciación.

The present article takes as its point of departure this notion of time as a deictic category, because we believe that doing so will help us to see how the students set up these deictic time relationships in their texts and also how they make mistakes in this regard.

This means that, as noted by Lyons (1997), what are involved here are an exophoric deixis, referring to the context where the speech act takes place, and a second deixis that is properly speaking endophoric or textual, a deixis that makes it possible to recover elements using the text itself. These elements are clearly closed linked to the text's discursive coherence and cohesion, and also with the other temporal structuring devices in the text. As Lyons (1977: 102) puts it,

As we have seen, anaphora presupposes that the intentional correlate of the referent should already have its place in the universe-of-discourse. Deixis does not: indeed, deixis is one of the principal means open to us of putting the intentional correlatives of entities into the universe-of-discourse and this fact alone would mark deixis logically, if not ontogenetically, prior to anaphora.

Temporal deixis is conveyed in Catalan by means of various tenses. According to the *GIEC* (2016: 908), the notion of absolute past time is commonly expressed by means of the periphrastic past (and more formally by the past simple),¹ whereas the remaining past tenses are relative tenses in which the relationship is anaphoric, that is, they refer to another past situation already designated previously in the text. Let us take a closer look.

- a) The periphrastic past (*passat perifràstic*), which is constructed using the auxiliary *va* 'go' + infinitive (e.g., *va cantar* 'she/he sang' lit. 'goes sing'). This past indicates that the situation described is a TE previous to the moment of speech (o), since it indicates a prior relationship (TE) relative to the moment of the speech act.
- b) The imperfect (*imperfet*), which marks a TE simultaneous to point R, is used to describe situations which happen simultaneously with the TE within a particular past context, as in *Cantava mentre caminava* 'she/he sang while she/he was walking'. According to the *GIEC* (2016: 917):

El caràcter imperfectiu d'aquest temps explica igualment el contrast que s'estableix, en textos narratius, entre el passat simple o el perifràstic i l'imperfet: amb el passat s'introdueixen els esdeveniments delimitats temporalment que fan avançar el temps de la narració tot atorgant-li un clar dinamisme: l'imperfet, en canvi, s'usa en les descripcions o les situacions estàtiques que no fan progressar l'acció.

- c) The present perfect (*perfet*), which indicates that the designated situation has occurred at least once in the past (TE) but is not yet finished, as in *ha cantat* 'she/he has [just/already] sung'. It continues to exist in the present moment (o), or, in the case of the autobiographical texts we will be looking at here, the period of the writer's youth, during «un interval que inclou el moment de l'acte de parla» (*GIEC* 2016: 907)
- d) The plusquamperfect (*plusquamperfet*) is a tense that signals anteriority relative to a past moment of reference (the TE is anterior to the moment R at which the speaker is speaking), as in *havia cantant abans* 'she/he had sung previously'.

1. Catalan also has a second parallel way to express the same past notion, the so-called simple past (*passat simple*), as in *cantà* 'she/he sang'. However, because it is largely reserved for formal or literary written texts and the B1-level students who wrote the corpus texts were likely unfamiliar with it, no examples of this form were found in the corpus.

- e) The conditional (*condicional*), as in *cantaria* ‘she/he would sing’, though not a past tense *per se*, is used in narratives to refer to a time that is future relative to the past moment when the speaker is speaking (TE).

Understanding deixis in the broad sense to indicate proximity or distance relative to the moment of speaking (point o), in this article we will show the relationship between past verb tenses and other deictic forms, namely demonstratives, adverbs and adverbials.

3. LANGUAGE TEACHING AND NARRATIVE GENRES

In connection with the teaching of narrative genres in the language classroom, the CEFR (2020: 67, 188) indicates that the narrative texts that B1-level students of any language should be able to write are «accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected texts». Regarding Catalan as an AL in particular, the Catalan government’s General Directorate of Language Policy published in 2003 a descriptive rubric for Elementary Level Catalan which corresponds to the CEFR’s B1 level, in which are set out the elements that must be borne in mind for the teaching of narrative texts (table 1), be they history, biography or autobiography (as noted above). This document sets out what it is expected that students will know and know how to use upon completion of this level.

Table 1. Elements to be considered in the teaching of narrative texts in Catalan as an Additional Language at the elementary level (CEFR B1) (Direcció General de Política Lingüística 2003).

	Sentence construction	Textual resources	Text structure	Associated genres
4.2 Narrative	Declarative sentences with predicative verbs Verbs in past: present perfect in combination with other tenses. Adverbs and adverbials of place and time Prepositional phrases of place and time	Narrator’s points of view: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perspective • personages • direct discourse • indirect discourse 	Chronological order of event. Narrative sequence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting the stage • core • resolution Temporal connectors: <i>when, while, then</i>	History Folktales Biography News

According to this rubric, therefore, students at this level should be able to handle a set of verbs in various past tenses, the structuring typical of narrative texts and the time connectors which articulate that structure.

Comajoan-Colomé & Pérez-Saldanya (2003) analyse narratives produced by students learning Catalan as an AL more specifically in connection with the acquisition of past tenses. These authors identify a certain relation between different past tenses and discursive context, linking different discursive planes to the absolute tenses (perfective past: simple or periphrastic past) and the relative tenses (imperfect, plusquamperfect and conditional). Along the same lines, Comajoan-Colomé (2005: 39) notes that «the distinction between absolute and relative tenses is based on whether the deictic relationship is with the moment of speech or with a reference point».

In the approach to discourse formulated by Bardovi-Harling (2000: 279, 282), any genre whose dominant feature is a sequential narrative has two parts, a foreground and a background. While in the former «the temporal point of reference of any one event in the foreground is understood as following that of the event preceding», in the latter «background events are often out of sequence with respect the foreground and the other background events», such that the narrative tense is determined more by the narrative context than by real time.

Comajoan-Colomé & Salaberry (2021: 16) regard this holistic approach to the teaching of narrative genres to learners of additional languages as a textual-cognitive approach, and Comajoan-Colomé & Llop (2021) present a didactic sequence for the teaching of tense and aspect in Catalan as an AL which is embedded within that approach.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this article we analyse autobiographical narrative texts by B1-level students who have previously learned to use the past tenses but who still produce deixis-related errors of the sort we have referred to, in other words, that bear on the relationship between absolute and relative tenses and between these tenses and other deictic strategies. This last aspect is of particular interest because usually errors related to past tenses in narratives produced by students of Catalan as an AL are treated as problems of aspect or verbal morphology rather than as something related to discursive deixis and the three dimensions of text analysis as defined in Bach *et al.* (2019):

The *sociocultural* dimension, related to the overall context, the identity or social and cultural role of the person responsible for the text, and the (critical) attitude s/he adopts in front of their discourse or the others' discourses as literacy practices; the *pragmatic* dimension, related to the conditions of the immediate context that determines the use of discourse genres; and the *textual* dimension, related to the internal structure of each genre and to the lexical and grammatical elements. (Bach *et al.* 2019: 6)

In the specific case of the texts under study here, we will centre our interest on analysing the use of temporal deictics (demonstratives, adverbs and adverbials, and temporal organization within the past) and their role in the maintenance of a temporal axis and a coherent and cohesive narrative.

Because we believed that our research goal would be best served by analysis of a corpus of real student work, we gathered two sets of autobiographic texts written by students doing degrees in Translation and Interpreting or/and Applied Linguistics at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona who were also taking a course in Catalan as an AL offered by the same faculty, during either the 2016-2017 or the 2017-2018 academic year. Needless to say, none of these students were native speakers of Catalan. As second-year students, they had already spent a full year immersed in a Catalan-speaking environment and taken two prior trimestral courses of Catalan; nonetheless, their mastery level at the outset of their second academic year was B1. They comprised in total 39 students, 33 women and 6 men, aged between 19 and 28, most of them from countries where the majority language is Spanish (26 from Spain, seven from Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Cuba or Ecuador), but a few from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Morocco, Gabon, Russia or China. Thus, collectively, the linguistic profile of the students was quite varied. Furthermore, several were already speakers of an additional language, mostly English (25 speakers), but also Spanish (13), French (9), German (5) or Italian (2).

The didactic sequence leading up to the collection of texts consisted of a 2.5-hour-long classroom session in which students reviewed the morphology of the past tenses in Catalan and then a 1.5-hour-long session in which students reflected on and discussed the elements comprising the sociocultural, pragmatic and textual dimensions of autobiography as a genre, as set out in Martín *et al.* (2018), and on its relationship with other narrative genres. The students agreed that the life story they produced should be headed by an attractive title, contain relevant information about the various life stages they had experienced and conclude with a closing that wrapped up the text. Finally, the students confirmed the need to give the text structure and order and double-check the language, in terms of not only the use of past verb tenses but also typography, spelling, morphology and syntax.

Once the guidelines for how the text would be evaluated had been negotiated with students, they were given the following instructions: «The Faculty is organising summer homestays for students. Homestay families will select a student to stay with them largely based on a self-written autobiography. Write an autobiography of 400-550 words that will persuade a family to choose you.» The students were given a week to complete the assignment. The resulting total of 39 autobiographies, consisting on average of 504 words, were then compiled into a single corpus, comprising altogether 19,665 words.² Analysis of this corpus was carried out at both macrotextual and microtextual levels, as we will now explain.

a) The macrotextual level

The narrative structure of these autobiographies was analysed by identifying the sequence of rhetorical moves which appeared. To do so we followed Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), who argue that each fragment of a text has a specific communicative goal. The sequence of seven rhetorical moves that tended to emerge in these student texts was as follows: a) title, b) introduction, c) birth, d) childhood, early adolescence, f) late adolescence, g) young adulthood (which coincided with the beginning of university) and g) closing.

b) The microtextual level

At this level we analysed all the temporal deictic elements present in the texts, including past tense forms, deictic expressions of the future seen from the past (i.e., conditionals), time-related adverbs and deictic demonstratives used to show distance or proximity in time.

In order to analyse these macro- and microtextual features, we used the ATLAS.ti software which permits the researcher to conduct qualitative data analysis by labelling text as a function of the categories which emerge in it, which in turn makes it a simple task to measure the frequency with which the phenomena under study occur. We were then able to identify forms that deviated from what would be correct Catalan and also quantify these phenomena in terms of frequency of occurrence.

2. This study was carried out in strict compliance with the ethics guidelines of our university and current Spanish and European legislation, and informed consent regarding the use of data was obtained from all participating students prior to the processing and analysis of data.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1 ANALYSIS AT THE MACROTEXTUAL LEVEL

As noted above, the autobiographical narratives analysed here were characterised by seven specific rhetorical moves. This does not mean that all seven moves were present in all texts, but they were present in most of them.

The first move was the title, which headed some 64% of the texts analysed. Although the pragmatic importance of including a title had arisen in the course of the prior discussion in class regarding the criteria for success, this feature was not present in 36% of the autobiographies.

A more in-depth analysis showed that most of the titles present were consistent with the rubric for evaluation negotiated with students for the pragmatic dimension, namely that the title must accurately reflect the content of the narrative. Nonetheless, most students simply titled their text «Autobiography» or «My autobiography». A few (7 out of 39) were a bit more creative, of which (1) and (2) below are illustrative.

- (1) *Els passos de tota una vida*
'The steps of an entire life' (T22)³
- (2) *La meua vida en paraules*
'My life in words' (T27)

By contrast, (3) illustrates a title which is entirely inappropriate. It confounds the nature of the text required, which was intended to approximate a real-life linguistic practice, with a simple classroom exercise.

- (3) *Primera pràctica*
'First practice exercise' (T27)

The second move, the introduction to the text, was present in 79.6% of the texts. Although most introductions were appropriate, as exemplified by (4), there were a few that were far removed from what had been discussed as an indicator of success in the sociocultural dimension. In (5) we see that the student refers to the exercise to

3. Each of the 39 texts making up the corpus was assigned a number. Hence this excerpt comes from text 22 of the corpus.

be handed in, without showing awareness that the text is personal, not academic, in nature, even though it will be evaluated in an academic context by the course instructor.

- (4) *Em dic E. i sóc de B., un petit poble de la província d'Osca, a Aragó.*
'My name is E. and I am from B., a small town in the province of Osca, in Aragon.'
(T20)
- (5) *Aquesta pràctica té com a objectiu de redactar una autobiografia. Tractaré d'escriure la meua a través d'una descripció personal per tal de fer-la més original i agradable de llegir.*
'This exercise has as its goal the writing of an autobiography. I will try to write mine by means of a personal description in order to make it more original and pleasant to read.'
(T13)

In general, the rhetorical move that followed the introduction was about the author's birth, a basic event in the student's life. This appeared in 84.6% of the texts. In this move, exemplified in (6), most students described facts related to the place and date of their birth and events surrounding it.

- (6) *La meua mare sempre em deia que, el dia del meu naixement, estava molt nerviosa perquè el meu pare estava treballant fora. A més, jo hauria d'haver nascut al febrer. Així que els primers dies de la meua vida, els vaig passar a la incubadora. Quina sort, oi!*
'My mother always said that on the day of my birth she was very anxious because my father was working in a different city. In addition, I was supposed to be born in February. For this reason, I spent the first few days of my life in an incubator. What luck, right?' (T02)

The next rhetorical move, present in nearly all (92.3%) of the student texts, referred to the author's childhood. Here the writer described events such as the birth of siblings, time spent with grandparents and other members of the family, childhood pastimes and first experiences of school. Excerpt (7) is a typical example.

- (7) *Vaig créixer en un poble anomenat L, al sud del país. Fins que va néixer el més petit, l'A, vam estar vivint a casa del meu avi. I quan va complir un any ens vam mudar a un nou habitatge, a la mateixa zona. Els meus primers estudis de primària els vaig fer en un col·legi proper.*
'I grew up in a town called L., in the south of the country. Until my youngest sibling A. was born, we lived in my grandfather's house. And when I turned one we moved to a new house in the same area. I had my first years of primary education at a nearby school.'
(T10)

The next move was adolescence, which was described in 84.6% of the student autobiographies. Typically, in this move the author described their first good friends, their hobbies and interests (often connected with extracurricular activities or school subjects), their first loves and their first frustrations, as we see in (8).

- (8) *Vaig fer educació secundària obligatòria, batxillerat i un any de Filologia Espanyola a la U. En cap moment vaig destacar com a estudiant durant la meua etapa escolar. En canvi, més tard, després d'abandonar la meua faceta caòtica dels primers anys, vaig començar a interessar-me per algunes assignatures que m'inspiraven més que altres. Les assignatures de llengua i literatura espanyola, literatura universal i llatí van ser les assignatures que van atreure el meu interès.*

'I completed secondary school, baccalaureate and one year of a degree in Spanish Language and Literature at uni. At no time did I stand out as a good student during my schooling. Later on, however, after the chaotic phase of the first years, I began to become interested in some of my university subjects, which inspired me more than others. The subjects I took in Spanish language and literature, universal literature and Latin were the ones that most aroused my interest.' (T26)

The last stage in the autobiographies of these students was young adulthood, a period which coincided with their arrival in the university world and their first experiences away from home, in shared flats or student residences, as we see in (9).

- (9) *Així que vaig decidir venir-me a Barcelona a provar sort en dues universitats per mitjà de la prova d'accés específica. Era la primera vegada que estava lluny de casa de veritat, tot i que ja vaig viure un any fora. Els primers mesos van ser durs i tornava a casa cada vegada que podia, encara que els viatges són llargs i pesats perquè són 5 hores. Avui en dia, després de l'Erasmus m'he acostumat a ser més independent.*

'So I decided to come to Barcelona to try my luck at two universities, to which I had been admitted on account of my marks on the university access exams. It was the first time I had really lived far away from home, thought I had lived abroad for a year. The first few months were difficult and I went back home every chance I could get, though the five-hour trip was long and boring. Nowadays, after my Erasmus year abroad, I am used to being more independent.' (T10)

Finally, the last move to appear in most (82.1%) of the texts was the closing. Here the student writers, in accordance with the indicators of success negotiated previously, were supposed to clearly wrap up the text. Indeed, many students used the closing to offer an overall assessment of their lives up to that moment, the moment of writing, as can be observed in (10). In this regard, Labov & Waletzky (1967) note that, over and above their referential function, narrative genres serve an evaluative purpose.

- (10) *Estic acabant el segon curs i estic bastant content de l'experiència que estic tenint. El context amb el qual em trobo, la gent que vaig coneixent i les activitats també que es poden fer en aquesta ciutat són molt interessants. Espero acabar la carrera amb la mateixa il·lusió i perquè no, descobrir un altra cultura, ja sigui d'Erasmus o després dels estudis.*

'I am finishing my second year at university and am quite happy with the experience that I am having. The context in which I find myself, the people that I am getting to know and also the activities available in this city are of great interest. I hope to finish my degree with the same level of enthusiasm and perhaps even get to experience another culture, whether through an Erasmus exchange year abroad or after I finish my studies.'
(T25)

Nonetheless, about 20.5% of the texts did not feature a closing that really brought the autobiography together. Instead, the text either was brought to an abrupt close, as illustrated by (11), or it ended in a state of such temporal confusion that it would be impossible to understand the final paragraph as a closing were it not simply the last paragraph of the text. This can be seen in (12), which unexpectedly returns the reader to the period of the author's childhood.

- (11) *Ara mateix, visc entre Barcelona i Pamplona.*

'At the moment, I divide my time between Barcelona and Pamplona.'
(T02)

- (12) *La seva casa és molt mes grans i té jardin amb la qual cosa podiamos jugar tranquils a l'aire lliure, encara que no lamento res de la meva infància fins i tot els dies de pluja que no es podia sortir fora, sempre ens inventabamos jocs: cuinar amb totes les olles, netejar, amagatall, jocs de taula com risiko que duraven tot un dia!*

'Their house is much bigger and it has a garden with which thing [where] we could play in the open air, though I don't regret anything about my childhood even the rainy days when we couldn't go outside, we always made up games: playing with all the kitchen pots, house-cleaning, hide-and-seek, table games like Risk which lasted a whole day!'
(T16)

A close analysis of the rhetorical moves present in the student autobiographies reveals that most (roughly 72%) of the texts follow a logical narrative sequence, the stages of the author's life, which obey a chronological order from birth or childhood, through adolescence, up to the moment of writing. However, in about 28% of the texts the narrative jumps temporally back and forth (as illustrated by [12]) which often make it difficult to follow the narrative. This points to an area of formative needs which should be addressed when students are taught how to write such genres. This kind of temporal patchwork is even more dramatically exemplified in excerpt (13),

where the writer shifts from childhood (TE), to the present moment (o; in bold in the excerpt), and then back to childhood, all in the same paragraph.

- (13) *Jo ho passava malament, trobava a faltar molt als meus pares. No tenia cap nen amb qui jugar aleshores m'avorria. Però ara que ja soc més gran no tinc cap problema. **A la meva ciutat visc amb el meu pare, la meva tia és la meva veïna. Això és un avantatge ja que estem molt a prop. La meva àvia també viu a prop de casa meva. Estic contenta de viure al costat de la meva família perquè els puc veure més sovint.** Vaig anar a una escola de monges que estava a poca distància de la meva casa quan era petita.*

'I was quite unhappy, I missed my parents a lot. There were no children to play with, so I was bored. But now that I am older I don't have any problems. **In my hometown I live with my father, my aunt is my neighbour. This is a great advantage since we live so close. My grandmother also lives nearby. I am happy to live next to my family because I can see them often.** I went to a convent school that was not far from my home when I was little.' (T₃₄)

5.2 ANALYSIS AT THE MICROTTEXTUAL LEVEL

As noted above, at the microtextual level we are concerned with the elements that organize time within the narrative, that is, verb tenses related to the past and deictic elements that make it possible to temporally situate a reference within the narrative structure of the text. Recalling Torner & Li (2019), point o is the writer's present vantage point (in this case, young adulthood), the time of the event (TE) in this case applies to the various moments subject here to macrotextual analysis (to wit, birth, childhood, adolescence and young adulthood) and the point of reference (R) is the moment in time relative to which an event is situated (previous, simultaneous, in the past, in the future seen from the past).

In the corpus we found that among the past tenses used (1,319 tokens altogether), the most frequently occurring was the periphrastic past (48.9%), as in (14); followed by the imperfect (39.1%), as in (15); and the present perfect (8.5%), as in (16). In all these excerpts the respective past tenses (in bold) are used correctly. This was not always the case, however: we will later discuss the errors that that tended to occur in the corpus, related not only to past tense usage but also to other, non-verbal deictic elements.

- (14) *Jo **vaig néixer** a l'Equador, l'onze de setembre de 1994.*

'I **was born** in Ecuador on the 11th of September 1994.' (T₀₆)

- (15) *Quan **tenia** 8 anys els meus pares van vendre la papereria i vam anar a viure a un altre poble. Els caps de setmana **anava** amb la bicicleta a jugar amb els veïns al bosc que hi havia al costat de casa. Ens **agradava** hi amagar-nos i fer hi curses amb les bicicletes.*
‘When I **was** eight, my parents sold the stationer’s shop and we went to live in a different town. At the weekend I **would ride** my bicycle and play with the neighbours in the wood that **there was** near my house. We **liked** hiding and racing our bicycles.’ (T11)
- (16) *Ara fa mes d’un any que sóc a Barcelona estudiant traducció i interpretació a la Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Al principi tenia una mica de por de que no m’agradés la carrera que havia triat o de no adaptar-me a viure en un lloc diferent a casa meva com es la residència en la que estic vivint ara. Però tot **ha anat** bé i Barcelona **s’ha convertit** en la meva segona casa.*
‘I’ve been in Barcelona for over a year now studying translation and interpreting at Pompeu Fabra University. At first I was a bit afraid that I wouldn’t like the degree I had chosen and wouldn’t be able to get used to living in the student residence where I live, which is so different from home. But everything **has gone** well and Barcelona **has become** my second home.’ (T18)

To a much lesser degree (1.1%), we also identified examples of the plusquamperfect, which narrates an action that is anterior to a past reference point, and which students at B1-level tend not to use habitually in their narrative texts. However, the tense is used correctly in excerpt (17).

- (17) *Jo sempre **havia pensat** que les ciències eren la meva especialitat, però vaig acabar enamorat de les llengües a mesura que anava descobrint l’anglès o el portuguès en nous llibres i pel·lícules.*
‘I **had always thought** that the sciences were my speciality, but I ended up being captivated by languages as I began to discover English and Portuguese in new books and films.’ (T03)

Finally, we found a few tokens (1.7%) of the conditional used to refer to the future as seen from a past reference point (TE), after point R, as seen in (18).

- (18) *Mai vaig pensar que **acabaria** estudiant Traducció i Interpretació, ja que em decantava més per la branca artística, perquè des de que vaig néixer anava a classe de ball i teatre.*
‘I never thought that I **would end up** studying Translation and interpreting, because I tended to be more inclined to the arts, since from a very early age I attended dance and theatre classes.’ (T04)

The corpus under study shows that, overall, these students’ mastery of verb tenses was quite good. Nonetheless, errors in the choice of past tense forms were

present in 18 of the 39 texts. In other words, some 46% of the students made at least one past-tense-related error. These errors involved all of the Catalan past tenses, albeit to varying degrees. The most common error (57.7%) involved the use of a different tense, usually the present perfect (44.2% of all errors), where the periphrastic past was required. When this error occurred, it reflected one of two problems.

- a) The writer failed to realize that she or he was narrating from a past perspective that was already finished without there being any explicit deictic element, showing that some they had not yet fully mastered the use of tenses. This can be seen in (19).

(19) *Quan vam arribar a Barcelona, **he anat** a quart d'ESO.*

'When we arrived in Barcelona, I **have gone** [should be *vaig anar* 'went'] to secondary school.' (T33)

- b) The mistake was directly linked to the presence of other non-verbal deictic elements. Such instances show the interrelation between verb tense as a deictic element in the broad sense and the non-verbal deictic elements which make it possible to situate the moments of the narrative. We identified 19 instances in the corpus of this sort of error, all related to the use of the present perfect. We will analyse excerpts (20), (21) and (22) by way of example.

(20) *La meva mare sempre **ha esta** ocupada, però sempre em prestava molta atenció.*

'My mother **has** always **been** busy, but she always gave me plenty of attention.' (T23)

In (20), though the time being narrated (TE) is a finished past time, the narrator uses the present perfect, no doubt due to the presence of the temporal adverb *sempre* 'always', which makes it possible to locate the point of reference at different moments of the narrative, even a past moment that persists into the present. But because the TE is a finished past, in this instance what is required is the imperfect tense (*estava*).

(21) *L'any passat (al primer trimestre del segon curs) **he anat** d'Erasmus amb 13 estudiants de la meua universitat.*

'Last year (the first trimester of my second year) I **have gone** [should be *vaig anar* 'went'] on an Erasmus year abroad with 13 students from my university.' (T08)

In this example the student has failed to realize that the time context is completely finished: the year was over at the time of writing, because in fact it was written

in January of the following year. However, the Erasmus stay abroad occurred in the first term of the current academic year, hence the confusion over tense.

- (22) *Vaig fer un curs per aprendre a ensenyar anglès com a llengua estrangera. Gràcies a aquest curs **m'he adonat** que realment m'agrada i era capaç d'ensenyar.*

'I took a course to learn to teach English as a Foreign Language. Thanks to this course, I **have realised** [should be *em vaig adonar* 'realised'] that I really like teaching and was capable of doing it.' (T11)

Here the narrator explains that in a previous TE she/he took a course, and that thanks to having done so she/he realised that she liked teaching and was able to teach. Because these two facts remain true at the moment of narration, the student loses her/his bearings and errs not only in terms of the verb tense (present perfect where it should be periphrastic past) but also in the demonstrative deictic, thanking «this course» instead of «that course».

With reference to this sort of error, the *GIEC* (2016: 1172) states that «entre l'adjunt o el complement temporal i el temps expressat pel verb s'ha d'establir una relació de concordança; altrament l'oració no estarà ben formada». Surely this sort of error can be explained, following Bardovi-Harling's (2000) hypothesis regarding discourse, as a mixing up of the foreground and background of the narrative, which are both very near in temporal terms to the student writer in these instances.

Another error that crops up in the corpus is the use of the imperfect for the periphrastic past. This substitution accounted for only 9.6% of the cases observed, and the authors tended to be among the students whose command was weak relative to the class as a whole. This sort of error is exemplified in (23).

- (23) *Malgrat que vaig néixer en la capital, **passava** quasi tota la meua infància en una comunitat molt a prop de A., en el poble B.*

'Even though I was born in the capital, I **spent** [should be *vaig passar*] nearly my entire childhood in a community very close to A., in the of village B.' (T35)

Also of infrequent occurrence (13.5%) is the use of a different tense where the imperfect is required, as illustrated in (24), where the writer erroneously uses the present. Such errors are probably due to a simple oversight on the part of the student.

- (24) *Majorment vaig ser la meua mare qui em va educar, ja que el meu pare **sol** passar-se tot el dia treballant en alguna cosa del seu hospital o altres coses.*

'Mostly it was my mother that raised me, since my father **tends** [should be *solia* 'tended'] to spend the whole day working on something at his hospital or other things.' (T23)

A further 5.8% of the tense-related errors involved using the periphrastic past (25) or imperfect (26) instead of the present perfect.

- (25) *Hem viscut moltes experiències que ens **van unir** molt.*
 ‘We have been through many experiences that **united** [should be *han unit* ‘have united’] us.’ (T37)

In excerpt (25), since what is being narrated is a set of events that occurred fairly recently and are still fresh in the mind of the writer, the present perfect employed for the first verb (‘been through’) should have been applied also to the second (‘have united’).

- (26) *A partir d'aquest moment sempre **buscava** viure en llocs més àrids, perquè no suporto bé el fred (s'imagina, un alemany qui tingui fred!).*
 ‘Ever since that moment I **sought** [should be *he buscat* ‘have sought’] to live in very arid places, because I can’t stand the cold (imagine, a German who gets cold!).’ (T35)

Here, as in (20), the confusion must be attributed to the presence of the temporal adverb *sempre* ‘always’, which seems to require the imperfect.

Finally, it is of interest to note, given their connection with textual deixis, the instances in which the TE needs to be projected onto a future reference point R. Here the student writers tended to apply one or the other of two erroneous strategies. The first was to use the imperfect, as in (27). This reflects a calque from Spanish, since the future in that language is referred to from a past viewpoint using a verbal periphrasis, as in *Iba a decirte* ‘I was going to tell you’. The other strategy was to simply use the future tense, as in (28). In fact, of the 22 forms in the corpus that should have appeared in the conditional, half were constructed using either the future indicative or the imperfect, an error which tended to be committed not only by those students who were native speakers of Spanish but also by those who knew some Spanish as an AL.

- (27) *Amb 18 anys vaig rebre una bona notícia: **anava a tenir** una cosina xinesa, tota la família estava molt emocionada, desitjant l'arribada de la petita.*
 ‘When I was 18 I received some good news: I **was going to have** [should be *tindria*] a Chinese cousin. The whole family was excited and looked forward to the arrival of the little girl.’ (T09)
- (28) *Em va agradar molt l'idea de poder veure com **serà** aquesta carrera per a decidir que si continuo en aquest camí o no.*
 ‘We very much liked the idea of being able to see what the degree **will be** [should be *seria* ‘would be’] like to decide whether to continue down that path or not’. (T35)

With regard to our analysis of non-verbal deictic forms, of the 244 such forms we identified in the corpus, the students used a wrong form in 17% of cases. These errors show that, even when the students do not make mistakes in verb tense, they may use deictic elements that situate them near to and not distant from the moment of writing (TE), by using, for example *aquest* ‘this’ instead of *aquell* ‘that’ for a finished, distant time, as can be seen in (29), (30) and (31).

- (29) *Per a mi, va ser molt important aquest temps perquè realment vaig conèixer a la meua família equatoriana i part de la meua cultura també.*
 ‘This period was very important for me because I got to know my Ecuadoran family and part of my culture, too.’ (T29)
- (30) *L’any que va marcar la meua vida va ser el 2016. L’estiu abans de començar la universitat crec que és el millor de tots, ja que és l’any que gaudeixes més perquè t’adones del que vindrà i perquè és un any ple de vivències. Al setembre d’aquest mateix any, vaig començar els meus estudis de Traducció i Interpretació a la Universitat Pompeu Fabra a Barcelona.*
 ‘The year that marked my life was 2016. The summer before you start university I think is the best summer of all, because it is the year you enjoy most because you realise what is coming and because it is a year of life experiences. In September of this very year, I started coursework in translation and interpreting at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.’ (T20)
- (31) *Aquesta situació va ser difícil per mi perquè jo no vaig tenir la oportunitat de fer el que volia i em trobava, per tant, estancada.*
 ‘This situation was very difficult for me because I didn’t have the opportunity to do what I wanted, so I felt stuck.’ (T14)

Finally, there was one case (32) where the error was related not to a demonstrative, like most such errors, but rather to the adjectival participle *vinent* ‘coming’, which could be used in a discourse that was direct or produced at the moment of utterance (o) (young adulthood):

- (32) *Vaig començar el curs vinent a una altra universitat.*
 ‘I began the coming academic year at the other university.’ (T07)

In this case, the student use *vinent* not with reference to a past TE but the projection from past into the future mandates the use of *següent* ‘following, next’.

6. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A STUDENT-CENTRED METADIS-COURSE-ORIENTED TEACHING OF GENRE

The macro- and microtextual analysis performed here allows us to identify various needs related to teaching B1-level students how to write narrative texts. These needs can be grouped into the three dimensions noted above, and are related to textual coherence and cohesion and the deictic elements which create them. The utility of identifying such needs is that they can be used to orient teaching strategies which will enhance student mastery of the narrative genre by making them pay closer attention to the relationship between the foreground and background of the narrative. The main formative needs that can be gleaned from our scrutiny of the corpus are as follows.

On the one hand, even when the genre is discussed at a theoretical level in class prior to the writing of a narrative text, the students may not perceive the task to be a real communicative practice and may therefore be unaware of the need for an appropriate title that will draw a reader's attention. By the same token, some students may not have internalized the idea that their texts must have a communicative closing that serves to bring together the full text. It is also important that student writers understand the importance of producing coherent and cohesive texts, free of abrupt shifts in the temporal structure that can obstruct easy comprehension of their narrative.

On the other, students may struggle when it comes to conceptualising the genre of autobiography in terms of temporal-narrative anchoring. Though most of the student texts analysed here revealed a reasonably firm mastery of the three main verb tenses used in Catalan to narrate events in the past, students often showed difficulty projecting into the future from within a past context and avoided using the plusquamperfect tense, or misused it, no doubt due to inadequate familiarity with its use. In general, such problems connected with the deictic vantage point from which the narrator is writing are indicative of a need to reinforce the concept of deictic anchoring, whether temporal or spatial,⁴ in narrative texts.

In order to improve the teaching of narrative genres, it is necessary to foster comprehensive metadiscursive activity in the classroom that integrates communicative and grammatical competence as a holistic whole where, as noted by Bernárdez (2008), language is not dissociated from sociocultural practices, but, at the same time, where grammar is not neglected as an element which has repercussions in all the textual dimensions of the genre. It is important to devise a model for the teaching of texts

4. Student writing also revealed many problems with spatial deixis. However, this issue falls outside the scope of the present paper.

that, as Ciapuscio (2010: 15) stresses, does not simply relegate the role of grammar to the stages of textual revision, but rather integrates it into the entire productive process, from the first stages of writing, and which therefore makes possible, as argued by Nassaji (2017: 81) an approach in which grammar is integrated in the communicative teaching of language with specific strategies that «must be oriented, whenever possible, and depending on the context, to the needs of the learners and the goals of teaching».

For this reason, we propose that a competence-based model should be applied to the teaching of genres, a model that focuses on fulfilling, in the sociocultural dimension, the need to produce texts related to the student's private context; in the pragmatic dimension, the deictic position of the student relative to her/his narrative and the time of events described (which takes into account the axis comprising, within the past, anteriority, simultaneity, and from the past, posteriority); and finally, in the textual dimension, the coherent and cohesive development of the autobiographical narrative. By bearing in mind all these aspects as well as the needs we have detected here, we can help students write self-reflective texts —such as the autobiographical genres— in a way that is more clearly articulated and more pedagogical, while at the same time fostering research based on classroom practices, and classroom practices based on research.

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