

# Exploring Digital Genres in L2 Spanish: A Multimodal and Discursive Analysis of Learner Blogs

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## Abstract

Digital composition and intelligent writing assistance have become relevant areas of research in computer-assisted language learning (CALL). The advent of computer-mediated communication and Web 2.0 technologies (e.g., blogs, wikis, social networks) has transformed everyday communication and fostered the emergence of new digital genres. Although some studies have examined the linguistic and non-linguistic conventions of digital genres, the specific micro- and macro-textual features of blogs as produced by second/additional (L2) language learners remains underexplored. Furthermore, L2 blog production has not been widely investigated in relation to the reflective use of (intelligent) writing tools, which could shed light on how learners (re)produce genre conventions when composing in digitally mediated environments.

This study analyzed the multimodal and discursive features of L2 learner blogs and gauged students' perceptions of digital tools. Twenty-one students enrolled in the intermediate Spanish level 1 at a Canadian post-secondary institution participated in the study. The data consisted of a learner-blog corpus produced as a rehearsal task, and students' responses to pre- and post-task questionnaires about the blog task and the use of (intelligent) writing tools. The micro-textual analysis of students' blogs involved a qualitative observation of the multimodal and hypertextual elements, while the macro-textual analysis entailed the quantitative analysis of blog text using manual counting and part-of-speech (POS) tagging. The students' responses to the questionnaires also followed a mixed-methods analysis through frequency tables and inductive thematic coding.

The findings showed that, at the macro-textual level, learners produced hybrid blog distributions that combined narrative and multimodal elements in dynamic layouts. These results illustrate how learners appropriated the blog genre and highlight the potential of blogs to foster authorship and digital literacy. At the micro-textual level, students combined descriptive and narrative discourses, while demonstrating ownership and audience awareness by selecting multilingual resources that aligned with their interests and those of their potential readers. Furthermore, students viewed the blog task as an opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience in three main areas: language use, digital skills, and task appreciation. In addition, they reported using (intelligent) writing tools mainly to revise spelling, vocabulary, and conjugation, which suggests that they perceive such tools primarily as corrective resources, possibly due to their concern with linguistic correctness. These findings highlight a pedagogical opportunity to shift the focus from linguistic

correctness to a more holistic approach that engages students in exploring digital tools and genres to activate their technological skills while supporting their own language learning.

This study may be relevant for teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers seeking to integrate blogs and writing tools into the L2 classroom. Specifically, it offers pedagogical recommendations in relation to task design and implementation, the role of teachers navigating the evolving landscape of (intelligent) technologies, and the reflective use of such technologies in language education. These insights can help educators reimagine the L2 classroom as a space where learners not only reflect on their own learning but also explore personal interests while activating the technological and linguistic skills necessary to participate effectively in our digitized society.

## Résumé

La composition numérique et l'aide à la rédaction intelligente sont devenues des domaines de recherche pertinents dans l'apprentissage des langues assisté par ordinateur (ALAO). L'avènement de la communication assistée par ordinateur et des technologies *Web 2.0* (les blogs, les wikis, les réseaux sociaux, etc.) a transformé la communication quotidienne et favorisé l'émergence de nouveaux genres numériques. Bien que certaines études aient examiné les conventions linguistiques et non linguistiques de ces genres numériques, les caractéristiques micro- et macro-textuelles spécifiques aux blogs produits par des apprenants d'une deuxième langue (L2) restent peu explorées. De plus, la production de blogs en L2 n'a pas fait l'objet d'études approfondies en lien avec l'utilisation réfléchie d'outils d'aide à la rédaction, ce qui pourrait permettre de comprendre comment les apprenants (re)produisent les conventions de genre lorsqu'ils composent dans des environnements numériques.

Cette étude a analysé les caractéristiques multimodales et discursives des blogs en L2, et a évalué leur perception des outils numériques. Vingt-et-un étudiants inscrits au cours d'espagnol intermédiaire de niveau 1 dans un établissement d'enseignement supérieur canadien ont participé à l'étude. Les données comprenaient un corpus de blogs produits par les étudiants dans le cadre d'une tâche d'écriture de répétition ; et leurs réponses à des questionnaires pré- et post-tâche sur l'utilisation d'outils d'écriture (intelligents). L'analyse macro-textuelle des blogs a consisté en une observation qualitative des éléments multimodaux et hypertextuels, tandis que l'analyse micro-textuelle a impliqué une analyse quantitative du texte à l'aide d'un comptage manuel et d'un balisage des parties du discours. Les réponses des étudiants aux questionnaires ont également fait l'objet d'une analyse mixte à l'aide de tableaux de fréquence et d'un codage thématique inductif.

Au niveau macro-textuel, les résultats ont montré que les apprenants ont produit des blogs hybrides combinant des éléments narratifs et multimodaux dans des mises en page dynamiques. Ces résultats illustrent la manière dont les apprenants se sont approprié le genre du blog et soulignent le potentiel de ce dernier pour favoriser la création littéraire et la culture numérique. Au niveau micro-textuel, les étudiants ont combiné des discours descriptifs et narratifs, tout en démontrant leur familiarité avec le genre et leur conscience du public, en sélectionnant des ressources multilingues correspondant à leurs intérêts et à ceux de leurs lecteurs potentiels. En outre, les étudiants ont considéré la rédaction de leur blog comme une occasion d'élargir leurs

connaissances et leur expérience dans trois domaines principaux : l'utilisation de la langue, les compétences numériques et l'appréciation de la tâche. Ils ont également déclaré utiliser des outils d'écriture principalement pour réviser l'orthographe, le vocabulaire et la conjugaison, ce qui suggère qu'ils perçoivent ces outils avant tout comme des ressources correctives, peut-être en raison de leur préoccupation pour la correction linguistique. Ces résultats mettent en évidence la nécessité de repenser l'approche pédagogique en passant d'une méthode axée sur la correction linguistique à une approche plus globale, qui encouragerait les élèves à explorer les outils et les genres numériques pour activer leurs compétences technologiques, tout en favorisant l'apprentissage des langues.

Cette étude peut être utile aux enseignants, aux chercheurs et aux créateurs de programmes scolaires qui souhaitent intégrer les blogs et les outils d'écriture dans l'enseignement des langues secondes. Elle propose plus précisément des recommandations pédagogiques concernant la conception et la mise en œuvre de tâches, le rôle des enseignants dans le paysage en constante évolution des technologies, ainsi que l'utilisation réfléchie de ces technologies dans l'enseignement des langues. Elles peuvent aider les éducateurs à repenser la classe de L2 comme un espace dans lequel les apprenants peuvent non seulement réfléchir à leur apprentissage, mais aussi explorer leurs intérêts personnels, tout en développant les compétences technologiques et linguistiques nécessaires pour participer efficacement à notre société numérisée.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Statistics Canada (2023), 12.7% of the Canadian population speak languages other than French and English (the official languages) at home. The 2021 census also reported that 3.9% of all Canadian workers used a non-official language at work (Statistics Canada, 2025), a trend that has increased over the last three decades, primarily due to immigration. The proportion of immigrants in the 2021 Canadian census was the highest since Confederation, surpassing the previous record of 22.3% in 1921 (Statistics Canada, 2022). This diversity has created a rich tapestry of linguistic, cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds, making the context of this dissertation highly multicultural and multilingual.

Classrooms across the country similarly reflect this diversity, bringing together learners with varied linguistic backgrounds, life experiences, and communication needs and expectations. What is more, advances in technology have significantly influenced language learning and have played a pivotal role in transforming L2 writing practices (Vinall et al., 2023, p. 500). Consequently, language education must aim to develop meaningful, relevant, and inclusive communication skills that extend beyond grammatical competence, encompassing not only mastery of the language (Stockwell, 2022) but also the ability to communicate effectively and ethically in digital spaces (Godwin-Jones, 2015).

The present study was conducted in a Spanish language course at a Canadian bilingual university, where Spanish is a third or additional language (L3) for many students. However, because it is unclear whether participants were bilingual and since the pedagogical implications of this study extend beyond L1, L2, or L3 contexts, the term “L2” will be used to refer to a second or additional language, following the convention adopted in Yuen and Schlote(2024) study. This thesis examines the integration of blogs into the L2 classroom and explores the use of (intelligent) writing tools as a way to enhance students’ learning experience, to strengthen task-based practices, and to foster multimodal skills, sociocultural awareness, and digital literacy.

## 1.1 Overview

Research on technology-enhanced language teaching has evolved alongside technological developments. From early work on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Bax, 2003; Chapelle, 2001; Levy, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Van den Branden, 2006; J. Willis, 1996) to more recent inquiries into digital

genres (Elola & Oskoz, 2019; Gjesdal & Gjerstad, 2015; Heyd, 2016) and technology-mediated tasks (Chapelle, 2014; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Ziegler, 2016). These research areas are more relevant than ever as technological advances have not only transformed the way we carry out daily activities, but also the types of activities that we do in our daily lives (Vandergriff, 2016).

Among the most impactful developments is the emergence of the *Web 2.0*, which has reshaped the way people interact, participate, and communicate online (Sykes et al., 2008). Digital tools such as blogs, wikis, and social networks enabled users to create, curate, and share content through new outlets and modes (Godwin-Jones, 2015). These “new forms of communicative, cultural, expressive, and social activity” (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 560) gave rise to digital genres that have redefined what it means to read, write, and communicate on the web (Vandergriff, 2016). As a result, *multiliteracies*, *multimodality*, and *multilingualism* have become key concepts for understanding contemporary communication.

The concept of *multiliteracies* broadens “the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 61), which encompasses a wider array of skills and practices essential for learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Closely related is the concept of *Multimodality*, defined as “the use of different modes in an integrated fashion to communicate meaning” (Elola & Oskoz, 2017, p. 53), which shifts the focus beyond linguistic elements to include the non-linguistic conventions embedded in digital genres. Within the context of this thesis dissertation, *multilingualism* also has a significant role because it takes into account the fact that multilingual speakers “have the possibility of using resources from different languages when they communicate” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022, p. 343). Therefore, providing students with opportunities to activate, practice, and develop multimodal and multilingual skills could help them transcend the limits of traditional literacy and become multiliterate citizens. Within the realm of L2 education, this evolution calls for a pedagogical shift away from an exclusive emphasis on linguistic accuracy toward fostering a diverse skill set that equips learners to engage effectively within dynamic, digitally mediated contexts. This (new) form of citizenship is particularly relevant given the capabilities of intelligent writing assistance technologies, which have created a new spectrum of pedagogical challenges and affordances for L2 teachers and learners, especially regarding writing practices (Godwin-Jones, 2022). In response, teachers are faced with the important task of understanding how these

technologies can improve learning (Johnson, 2023) and preparing students to engage with them ethically and reflectively (Bates, 2019).

Despite these notions, many language teachers remain reluctant to incorporate digital tools into their classrooms (Oskoz & Elola, 2020). There are still “conflicts and tensions between the reality of contemporary communication (more multimedia-based and multimodal) and the long-held belief and practice of writing (print-based linguistic practice)” (Yi et al., 2020, p. 1), which has resulted in the prevalence of traditional writing tasks in many language programs, particularly at the post-secondary level.

Numerous studies have examined the pedagogical use of various digital tools and genres, including chats (Sotillo, 2009; van Compernelle & Pierozak, 2009), wikis (Ducate & Steckenbiller, 2017; Pellet, 2012), discussion forums (Ware & O’Dowd, 2008; Whitworth, 2009), social networking sites (Liaw & English, 2013; Lightbourn & Caws, 2021; Matachana López & Narváez Burbano, 2022; Tagg & Seargeant, 2016), and blogs (R. T.-H. Chen, 2015; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; L. Lee, 2010; Murray & Hourigan, 2008). However, to the best of my knowledge, little research has explored the particular characteristics of these genres as produced by L2 students, especially in the presence of (intelligent) writing assistance. Investigating these features could provide valuable insights into how learners interpret genre conventions and improve our understanding of how students use writing assistance tools in L2 digital composition.

## 1.2 The Current Study

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to contribute to pedagogical approaches that effectively integrate digital multimodal genres into second and additional language learning by examining how learners compose blogs within a structured educational context. This study focuses on two interconnected dimensions: 1) the multimodal and discursive features of L2 students’ blogs, and 2) learners’ perceptions of blogging and their experiences with (intelligent) writing tools for language learning. The first dimension contributes to the literature on the genre-specific characteristics of blogs produced by L2 students as this could inform how learners perceive the blog genre and how they appropriate it in terms of multimodal distribution and discursive organization. The second dimension provides insights into students’ blogging practices and their use of writing assistance tools to revise their L2 texts. With the aim of exploring these two dimensions, I focused on three main research questions:

1. What macro-textual features are observed in blogs produced by learners of Spanish?
2. What micro-textual features are observed in blogs produced by learners of Spanish?
3. What are students' perceptions of blogs and writing assistance tools with respect to their prior familiarity, habitual practices, and experiences completing the blog writing task?

My first research question focused on the macro-textual features of students' blogs. Specifically, I examined how learners formatted or personalized their blogs, the types of elements they inserted, whether they incorporated multimodal elements, and the general layout of their blogs. My second research question examined the micro-textual organization of students' blogs, or the types of discourse they used. For instance, I examined whether the discourse was narrative or theoretical, and whether it involved the audience. Finally, my third research question explored students' perceptions of and familiarity with the blogs and with writing assistance. This analysis also examined the students' habitual use of these tools, and their perceptions of the blog writing task.

### 1.3 Thesis Outline

Chapter 2 provides a brief historical overview of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), including computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the emergence of the *Web 2.0*. It also situates the present study within the broader landscape of digital education in Canada. Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of new genres of writing in the *Web 2.0* era. It begins with an exploration of the general characteristics of writing on the Web and then reviews empirical research on the use of chats, wikis, discussion forums, and social networks in language education. Special attention is devoted to blogs and blogging as a digital genre, including a more in-depth review of pedagogical research on the use of blogs in L2 teaching and learning.

Chapter 4 turns to the role of intelligent writing tools and reviews L2 research on automated writing evaluation (AWE), automated writing corrective feedback (AWCF), machine translation (MT), and generative AI (GenAI). The literature review transitions to the task-based language teaching (TBLT) pedagogical framework in Chapter 5. This chapter reviews prominent definitions and characteristics of tasks, addresses typologies (i.e., pedagogical and real-world tasks), and explains the role of task implementation in the language curriculum. The chapter concludes with a focus on technology-mediated TBLT and the five critical elements for integrating tasks and technology into the L2 classroom.

Chapter 6 presents the theoretical framework integrated into the study's methodology. First, it outlines the research questions, followed by a presentation of the theoretical foundations that underpin the study and inform the investigation. Next, the chapter describes the methodological procedures, including the context and participants, in-class practices, task contextualization, and intervention design. This latter details the procedures for each phase of the study. Subsequent sections address data collection, including the compilation of the dataset and anonymization procedures. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis, divided into two subsections: a genre-based analysis of student blogs and an analysis of self-reported student reflections.

Chapter 7 presents qualitative and quantitative data results, which are organized according to the three research questions: 1) the macro-textual organization of the students' blogs, 2) the micro-textual organization the student's blogs, and 3) the students' familiarity with blogs in general, their perceptions of the class blogging task, as well as their habitual use and perceptions of writing assistance tools for language learning. Chapters 8 and 9 present the discussion and conclusions of the study. Namely, Chapter 8 discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature, highlighting contributions to L2 genre pedagogy, digital literacy, and technology-mediated task design by drawing on examples from the corpus and the students' self-reported perceptions. The conclusion section addresses the pedagogical implications of the study, acknowledges its limitations, and proposes avenues for future research, particularly regarding the integration of digital tools and writing assistance into L2 teaching.

This study may be valuable for teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers as it offers insights for reevaluating the role of the learner in the L2 classroom and for reconceptualizing the role of the classroom in our digitized society. This can be done by recognizing the learners' potential as active participants in their own learning process, promoting their agency, and valuing their sense of ownership. Moreover, it poses an invitation to view the language learning environment not only as a place to teach linguistic forms, but as a space for promoting the pragmatic use of language and for fostering multiliteracies.

# Chapter 2: Historical Perspective on CALL

## 2.1 Overview

Although traditional forms of written expression (essays, compositions, argumentative texts, etc.) remain relevant in academic contexts, they may seem disconnected as they can be misaligned with learners' communicative needs and interests in today's digital societies (Pascual, 2018). In this sense, there is a growing need to revamp language learning curricula in post-secondary institutions by normalizing digital practices and interactions (Lightbourn & Caws, 2021). Therefore, teachers and curriculum designers are called upon to balance conventional and digital genres to enable students in a broader range of meaningful literacy practices that support both academic development and real-world communicative competence. The present dissertation aims to contribute to this pedagogical challenge. To situate the study within the broader context of digital education in Canada, this chapter first provides an overview of key national statistics and summarizes the post-pandemic educational landscape.

## 2.2 Contextual Considerations for Digital Education in Canada

The first national survey on online learning and digital education in Canada was conducted by independent Canadian researchers in collaboration with the Babson Survey Research Group (BSRG) and the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) (Bates, 2018). The total number of participating institutions was 203, which was considered "highly representative of types of institution, provinces and size of institution with a response rate of 69%, covering 78% of all Canadian post-secondary students" (CDLRA, 2017, p. 2). The results of this first survey indicated that between 2011 and 2016, there was an 11% increase in the number of institutions offering online courses (CDLRA, 2017). By 2016, 85% of Canadian public post-secondary institutions were offering at least "some online learning for credit" (CDLRA, 2019, p. 2).

The results also showed that, regarding the use of technology to support learning, nearly all the surveyed institutions used a Learning Management System (LMS) in their courses, along with some other type of technology. Additionally, all but two of those institutions relied on the Internet to deliver distance courses (Bates, 2018). Results from the survey report suggest that while the LMS at each institution remained the main resource in online learning, the use of synchronous technological tools for course delivery and interaction was significant (CDLRA, 2017).

Although the results show that nearly all participating institutions had integrated technology into their education programs to some extent, national survey researchers reported few references to adaptive learning, competency-based learning, and artificial intelligence (AI) in the responses. The researchers argue that this is because “these technologies or approaches have yet to prove their worth or to appeal to Canadian instructors.” (CDLRA, 2017, p. 32). A later 2019 national survey revealed that most Canadian institutions offered online education and used video technology to deliver courses. Interestingly, roughly half of the institutions that responded to questions on technology reported using social media and mobile technology (Johnson, 2019), which was consistent with results from the previous year. These results reveal that, even a few years ago when technology was already widely adopted, fewer than half of postsecondary institutions in Canada had integrated it into their classrooms.

However, integrating technology into the language classroom poses challenges for teachers and students alike. Teachers in the digital age are called upon to harness the potential of web technologies to transform language education into an effective community of practice that connects students to the world and engages them in authentic, active, and experiential L2 learning (Pellet, 2012; Vandergriff, 2016). This transformation requires methodological changes and time investments to channel its pedagogical potential (Pellet, 2012). Undoubtedly, students are also affected by these changes. In a longitudinal study of over 200 students, Murray et al. (2020) found that nearly 80% of surveyed students expressed concern that technology was distracting them from their academic work and interfering with their learning.

To address these and other concerns, the Canadian Ministry of Education has issued new rules regarding the use of cellphones in schools, and to date, several provinces have restricted or banned cellphones from the classrooms (Stechyson, 2024). In Ontario, students in K-6 “are required to keep phones on silent and out of sight all day, including non-class times like lunch and recess, and students in grades 7-12 are banned from using phones during class time unless teachers give them permission” (Stechyson, 2024). These policies have caused confusion, fear, and concern among teachers and students alike, as they are not easy or safe to enforce for the former, and are seen as unnecessary and even unsafe by the latter (D. Chen, 2024). It is unknown whether these policies will ever be extended to post-secondary institutions, but, for now, it is possible to say that exploring and understanding the potential of web technologies (mobile or

otherwise) can empower teachers and institutions to create a safe and motivating learning environment (L. Lee, 2017).

Harnessing the potential of technology and understanding its affordances and limitations alike have become increasingly important since the onset of the COVID-19 health crisis, which prompted a rapid transition to Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL). This unprecedented situation brought digital literacy to the forefront, as ERTL became the primary mode for ensuring educational continuity during the disruption. Although some countries implemented tailored methods, resources, and policies to enable continuity in teaching and learning practices during the disruption, not all the countries had equal access to these resources (UNESCO, 2022b).

Moreover, many educational institutions closed their facilities to students and staff in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 (UNESCO et al., 2020). While some closures lasted only weeks or months, others extended for nearly a year (UNESCO, 2022b). A survey conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank (2020) reported that by August 2020, students in 108 countries had missed approximately one quarter of their regular in-person instruction during the academic year. Beyond disrupting access to education, these closures compelled instructors and learners to rely extensively on digital environments, reshaping pedagogical practices and accelerating the integration of technology-mediated approaches to language teaching and learning.

In Canada, the 2020 National Report stated that emergency remote teaching placed a “considerable burden upon faculty and students” and accentuated the need for affordable learning devices, high-speed Internet access, and personalized attention for students with accommodations and disabilities (Johnson, 2020, p. 4). Building on these findings, the 2021 National Report revealed that online assessment practices, faculty attitudes toward online practices, and student access to technologies were among the most prevalent challenges faced by faculty and students (Figure 2) (Johnson, 2021).

At the same time, the experience of emergency remote teaching and learning during the pandemic further emphasized the importance of creating “flexible, accessible, and quality educational experiences for the future, regardless of delivery mode” (Johnson, 2021, p. 16). Many Ontario institutions have recognized “the potential for improving the post-secondary experience through the use of digital technologies” and are working to increase digital learning opportunities (eCampusOntario, 2022).

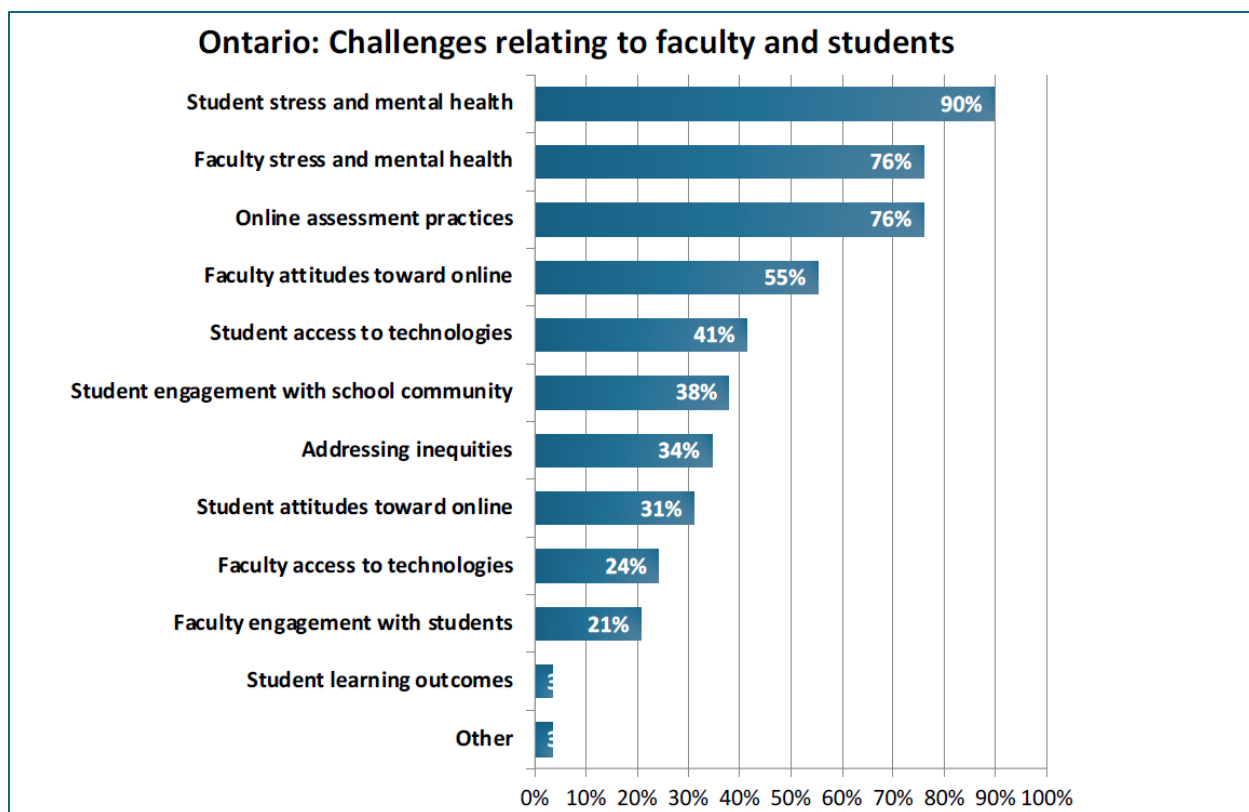


Figure 1. Challenges from Covid-19 for faculty and students (Johnson, 2021), used under CC BY-ND 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>).

These insights underscore the need for studies that contribute to evidence-based best practices in the use of digital communication in education, particularly within frameworks that promote critical, responsible, and ethical engagement with technology. In this context, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) provides a research lens for understanding how digital tools and genres can support meaningful interaction, writing, and learning in second-language contexts.

## 2.3 Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and its implications for language teaching and learning have been well-researched in language education for decades (Arnold & Ducate, 2019; Bax, 2003; Chapelle, 2001; Hubbard, 2009; Levy, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). This dissertation falls within the field of CALL because it examines the use of digital tools and genres for language learning. Specifically, my study connects with two key areas of CALL research: computer-mediated communication (CMC) and intelligent writing tools, which will be discussed in [section 2.3.1](#), and [Chapter 4](#), respectively.

The advent of CALL is generally dated between the late 1960s and early 1970s, when “computers had evolved enough to support multiple terminals that allowed interaction with the computer via keyboard” (Otto, 2017, p. 12). In this section, I present two representative models that tracked the early development of CALL. One has been divided into stages (Warschauer, 2000; Warschauer & Healey, 1998) and the other into categories (Bax, 2003). The dates and description of uses provided by these researchers align with general trends and the fact that “new ideas and uses of computers [were] being introduced in combination with those used previously” (Warschauer, 2000, p. 65).

On the one hand, Warschauer and Healey (1998) divided the history of CALL into three stages (or phases): *Behaviouristic*, *Communicative*, and *Integrative* CALL. The first stage was originally dated 1960s and 1970s, and it focused on repetitive behavior, mainly drill and practice. During this period computers were considered ‘mechanical tutors’ that “never grew tired or judgmental and allowed students to work at an individual pace” (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p. 57). This stage was later called *Structural CALL* (Warschauer, 2000), dating its development to the 1970s and 1980s. Some aspects were reshaped by describing a formal structural system for learning the language with a grammar-based approach that added accuracy as the objective. Today, examples of this stage can be seen in exercises integrated into language learning applications (apps), such as *Duolingo* or *Busuu*, as well as in practice exercises designed by teachers on learning management systems (LMS) such as *Moodle*, *Canvas*, and *Brightspace*. While these types of apps and repetitive exercises are not disagreeable, language learning must also aim to develop digital and social skills beyond linguistic skills.

The second stage in Warschauer and Healey’s (1998) model is *Communicative CALL*. This phase features implicit rather than explicit grammar and focuses on language use and communication in authentic social settings, rather than on the mere use of forms and prefabricated language. Warschauer’s (2000) updated model dates this period between the 1980s and 1990s and proposes using more communicative exercises that shifts the focus from “what students did with the machine” to “what they did with each other while working at the computer” (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p. 57). In my experience, this usage coincides with the language practices that many postsecondary institutions continue to emphasize in their language learning programs today. However, labeling a practice as ‘communicative’ still needs to be contextualized in terms of the individual and social competencies that are desirable in the digital world.

In this respect, the third stage includes—at least in theory—a broader scope of computer use to encompass social interactions and an emphasis on having “students learn to use a variety of technological tools as an ongoing process of language learning and use” (Warschauer & Healey, 1998, p. 58). This third stage is called *Integrative CALL*, and it is chronologically dated in the ‘21st century’ in Warschauer’s (2000) model. This phase aims to integrate the development of digital skills as part of the language learning process. Warschauer and Healey (1998) argue that “learning to read, write, and communicate via computer has become an essential feature of modern life in the developed world” (p. 58). Finally, *Integrative CALL* encompasses the use of multimedia and the Internet and includes a more socio-cognitive view of language as it shifts the focus towards authentic language use in context. According to this view, interactions should focus on helping students “enter new communities and familiarize themselves with new genres and discourses” (Warschauer, 2000, p. 65).

On the other hand, Bax’s (2003) analysis of early CALL development revised the chronological periods, nomenclature and definitions presented in Warschauer and Healey (1998) and Warschauer (2000). Bax’s revised model (Figure 4) incorporates additional pedagogical dimensions (e.g., type of task, type of feedback, teacher roles and attitudes) that provide valuable pedagogical and curricular considerations. For instance, instead of referring to ‘phases’ or ‘stages’, Bax refers to *approaches*. According to Bax (2003), these three new approaches (i.e., *Restricted CALL*, *Open CALL*, and *Integrated CALL*) emerge as an attempt at providing a more generalized, coherent, and flexible terminology that aligns better with uses and practices.

*Restricted CALL* describes the use of computers as a system with closed drills and practice, that provides feedback in terms of accuracy (e.g., correct vs. incorrect), and that defines the role of teachers as monitors. This “restricted” approach is broadly dated from the 1960s to the 1980s. The second approach (*Open CALL*) includes simulations, games, and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the types of tasks, with more flexibility or ‘openness’ in learner/teacher roles and a greater focus on developing varied linguistic skills. The third approach, and probably the most relevant to the present study, is the *Integrated CALL* approach. Firstly, the new terminology (from *Integrative* to *Integrated*) that differentiates this approach from Warschauer’s (2000) nomenclature shifts the focus to student interactions mediated by technology by embedding computers (or technology) in teachers’ and learners’ realities, classroom life, and course agenda. A bit over two decades ago, Bax (2003) had coined the term ‘normalisation’ to

describe “the stage when the technology becomes invisible, embedded in everyday practice” (p. 23). This is the stage in which I believe we are currently situated with regards to our relationship with technology.

Content	Type of task	Type of student activity	Type of feedback	Teacher roles	Teacher attitudes	Position in curriculum	Position in lesson	Physical position of computer
<i>Restricted CALL</i> Language system	Closed drills Quizzes	Text reconstruction Answering closed questions Minimal interaction with other students	Correct/incorrect	Monitor	Exaggerated fear and/or awe	Not integrated into syllabus—optional extra  Technology precedes syllabus and learner needs	Whole CALL lesson	Separate computer lab
<i>Open CALL</i> System and skills	Simulations Games CMC	Interacting with the computer Occasional interaction with other students	Focus of linguistic skills development Open, flexible	Monitor/ facilitator	Exaggerated fear and/or awe	Toy Not integrated into syllabus—optional extra Technology precedes syllabus and learner needs	Whole CALL lesson	Separate lab—perhaps devoted to languages
<i>Integrated CALL</i> Integrated language skills work Mixed skills and system	CMC WP e-mail  Any, as appropriate to the immediate needs	Frequent interaction with other students Some interaction with computer through the lesson	Interpreting, evaluating, commenting, stimulating thought	Facilitator Manager	Normal part of teaching—normalised	Tool for learning Normalised integrated into syllabus, adapted to learners' needs <i>Analysis of needs and context precedes decisions about technology</i>	Smaller part of every lesson	In every classroom, on every desk, in every bag

Figure 2. CALL approaches proposed by (Bax, 2003, p. 21)

Nevertheless, and despite its pervasiveness, technology has still remained somehow relegated outside the sphere of education (Bates, 2019; Oskoz & Elola, 2020). In fact, the emergence of CALL found resistance from many teachers who felt that “the technology was not worth their time or attention, and that students would be better served by books and face-to-face instruction within classrooms” (Chapelle, 2014, p. 324). While this opinion may have been challenged by the shift to ERTL, some teachers still favor banning digital tools from classrooms or institutions, especially in light of current AI applications, because of concerns regarding academic integrity and ethical use (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023). These fears and prohibitions contribute to the idea that learning takes place outside of students’ real lives, which denies the fact that they actually live in a digital age (Bates, 2019). The essential role of technology in our daily lives requires us to prepare students to communicate efficiently and successfully in a multilingual and multicultural world, hence, it is important as language educators to promote linguistic and technological training and awareness. This will enable students to successfully create and interpret meaning in each language community in which they wish to participate in our globalized world (Byrnes, 2014).

### 2.3.1 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

The arrival of microcomputers in the 1980s gave rise to different terms to describe interactions with technology: Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI), Computer-Mediated Instruction (CMI), Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), to name a few (Hubbard, 2019; Levy, 1997). Due to its widespread use in professional journals and organizations, CALL provides insights into the relationship between humans, computers, and materials in the context of language education. Of these relationships, I am particularly interested in social interactions via computers because they gave rise to computer-mediated communication (CMC), a widely explored area in language teaching and learning.

Vandergriff (2016) defines CMC as “the process of human-to-human digitally mediated communication, no matter whether a computer is used or not” (p. 4). For language teachers and learners, CMC has provided valuable opportunities for interactions via computers in language labs or through personal computers, even before the emergence of the Internet. Among the benefits of CMC, we can find opportunities for collaborative learning (Zawacki-Richter & Latchem, 2018), social interaction (Kern, 2006), and negotiation of meaning (Blake, 2000). CMC allows students to connect not only with classmates and the teacher, but also with speakers of the target language and culture who are not in the same geographical location, which allows for the completion of tasks that are “not confined by distance” (Chapelle, 2003, p. 24).

According to Hubbard (2009), there are two dimensions to CMC: *time* and *modality*. *Time* refers to whether communication occurs synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous communication occurs in ‘real time’ (Chapelle, 2003; Warschauer & Healey, 1998) and messages are sent and received simultaneously, while in asynchronous communication electronic messages are “stored on a server to be produced and accessed anytime, so the process of communication can be spread out across hours, days, weeks, or months” (Chapelle, 2003, p. 23). *Modality*, for its part, has to do with the mode of communication (e.g., text, audio, video) (Hubbard, 2009).

On the one hand, synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) allows students to interact at the same time, to have conversations in real time in chat(room)s, digital murals, instantaneous messages, etc. These types of computer interactions provide benefits when we intend for students to engage online simultaneously and to interact spontaneously with less time to pause, reflect, revise and edit their messages before sending them (DuBravac, 2013). Such spontaneity may help in “developing an underlying linguistic competence available to the learner

regardless of the modality” (Hubbard, 2009, p. 11), because the reception and production of information happens instantaneously or in real-time. SCMC also offers possibilities to connect with people in different locations, which is beneficial for language learning since it narrows the distance with target languages or communities. However, there are difficulties when participants are located abroad and/or in different time zones or in areas where the Internet connection is not reliable.

On the other hand, in asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC), students can post a comment on a discussion forum or a bulletin board for classmates to access the posted information with ‘a delay’ between the moment in which the message was sent and the moment in which the interlocutor reads it and/or responds to it (Hubbard, 2009). ACMC gives learners time to analyze and comprehend the input and provides a flexible window of time in which they can edit, revise, and produce their responses. Another benefit of asynchronous interactions is that the lack of rapid or instantaneous exchanges allows for more detailed responses (DuBravac, 2013), which may be desirable depending on the task objectives. Blogs typically fall into this category (ACMC) because there is a time lag between when posts are written and when readers access or respond to them. Although blogs facilitate interaction between authors and readers, the delayed nature of this exchange sets them apart from SCMC, in which communication occurs mostly in real time.

In addition to the above-mentioned considerations and affordances of CMC, there is no doubt that the “widespread access to the Internet led to various forms of networking and telecollaboration” (Stockwell, 2022, p. 13). The Internet, as defined by DuBravac, is a “loosely connected global network of computers that allows individuals to communicate and collaborate in ways never before possible” (2013, p. 3). This means that along with other information and communication technologies have not only permeated the way we do things but have also brought about new tasks and new uses for technologies (Vandergriff, 2016). As a result, many technological applications in language learning have been mediated by the Internet, which has enabled individuals to create new social practices and engage in novel ways of interacting (Davies, 2011). Since most CMC tools are hosted on the Web, their applications for language learning have reached unprecedented possibilities with the emergence of the second generation, also known as *Web 2.0* or the social web. It is crucial for teachers to examine the purpose, context, roles and implications of using CMC for language learning in order to harness its potential. An overview of the concept of *Web 2.0* is

presented in the next section, and the chapter concludes with key concepts of multimodality, multiliteracies, and multilingualism as they relate to the context in which my research takes place.

### 2.3.2 The Web 2.0

The *World Wide Web*, a subset of the Internet (DuBravac, 2013), has transformed the field of global communication and information and opened up new avenues for technology-mediated language teaching and learning. This interface allowed “solitary users” to navigate the web “without contributing to its development, interacting with other users, or personalizing their experience” (DuBravac, 2013, p. 43), so it was not considered a very dynamic system. The *Web 1.0*, as the first interface of the *World Wide Web* is commonly referred to, quickly gained popularity around the world in the 1990s as it hosted an extensive repository of multilingual and multimedia content (Otto, 2017, p. 17).

This gave language teachers the possibility to “create and disseminate electronic and digitized learning materials in more efficient ways” (Sturm et al., 2009, p. 369). For instance, Web 1.0 applications made it possible for language teachers and learners to explore (or consume) content and materials—mostly text-only and read-only—that were produced in other communities, cities, countries; and to connect with people in other geographical locations via the computer. The incursion of search engines proved to be useful tools for teachers and students alike as it made it easier and faster for them to “find, analyze, and synthesize information from foreign sites, constructing their own knowledge about their target language and culture” (Otto, 2017, p. 17). The expanded access to information and communication helped teachers reach a broader learner population, find and share authentic resources, and plant the seeds of online education as connectivity increased opportunities for learners to interact with peers and instructors.

The second generation of the *World Wide Web* (the *Web 2.0*) quickly surpassed its predecessor because it ‘upgraded’ users from consumers of content to producers of content by giving them new ways to connect, interact, edit, create, share, and link information (Godwin-Jones, 2021). O’Reilly (2005)—who is credited with coining the term *Web 2.0*, claimed that the second generation of the Web has the power to ‘harness collective intelligence’ because it has given users a new role in participating and creating of content, which has made Web sites more dynamic and their pages more interconnected. This innovative ‘architecture of participation’ has stimulated collaboration and participation among users (p. 3), which has resulted in new opportunities for language

teaching and learning by providing richer user experiences through creating, editing, publishing, sharing and collaborating on the Web (Sturm et al., 2009).

The *Web 2.0*—also known as the social web—has yielded valuable pedagogical implications for language education (Cappellini et al., 2017; Oskoz & Elola, 2014) because it has extended teacher–student interactions “beyond the two-dimensional models of instruction to multidimensional networks” (Sturm et al., 2009, p. 368) in which teachers are no longer required to be physically present or face-to-face to interact with their students. What is more, teachers were provided with more sophisticated tools to help students connect with the target cultures, languages, and communities by integrating real and authentic use of oral and written language in their lessons through music, videos, films, authentic web sites, newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, etc. Consequently, for learners, the *Web 2.0* meant they were able to access more varied and authentic content, to participate in growing online communities, and to create their own web-based pages and documents (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). With this, learners gained access to personal writing platforms such as blogs, forums, social networks, to name a few, where they acted as co-constructors of knowledge and as creators of digital content (Otto, 2017).

The use of technology in post-secondary education seems to be following the increasing tendency in the last decade with teachers and institutions promoting curriculum enrichment through technology-mediated tasks. This is a crucial element of education in the digital age because digital composition transforms learners into active producers of content. They not only use new technologies, but also diverse modes of communication to convey meaning through text, audio, video, images, and more (Yi et al., 2020). This combination of semiotic resources is facilitated by *Web 2.0* tools that allow users to “publish text and digital artifacts, such as photos and videos, with greater ease and convenience than ever before” (Vandergriff, 2016, p. 21). Within this multifaceted educational landscape, digital genres represent important sites where learners can experiment with different registers, explore diverse modes of interaction and communication, and develop meaning-making strategies that reflect the complexities of contemporary discourse.

## Chapter 3: New Writing Genres in the L2 Classroom

### 3.1 Overview

As of October 2024, there were over 5 billion Internet users worldwide (about 67.5 percent of the world's population) (Petrosyan, 2024a). Nearly 32 million are in Canada, “which is equivalent to nearly 94 percent of the country’s population” Petrosyan (2024b). These statistics indicate a high prevalence of access to and reliance on the Internet in Canada, suggesting that many of our daily activities are technologically mediated. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that there is a high likelihood that our student population is somehow permeated by Web practices. The previous chapter provided an overview of online and digital education in Canada, as well as some considerations for teaching and learning in the digital age. It was also discussed that the new participatory dimension of the *Web 2.0* has reshaped writing processes and products by providing students with opportunities for self-correction, remakes, and review processes that allow them to make decisions about their own learning experiences (Chapelle, 2008).

As discussed in the previous chapter, social networking—which has grown with the *Web 2.0*—has created a need to be aware of platform-based communication as new syntactic values, genres, and styles come to the forefront of our language learners' literacy needs (Lotherington et al., 2009). While it is true that communication has not completely abandoned text-centric products to make room for multimodal ones, the ubiquity of technology demands that we become digitally literate in order to “function adequately in today’s society” (Murray et al., 2020, p. 250), where knowledge of offline genres may simply not be enough. According to Vandergriff (2016), the traditional concept of text has changed in three main ways:

- texts are no longer stable as they can constantly be edited and modified – even “disappeared”, therefore, changed; plus
- texts are commonly hyperlinked so they can give access to other texts in the network of texts; and
- texts are less and less text-based exclusively for now there is a combination of modes that make texts highly multimodal.

For this reason, embracing the pedagogical power of writing on social web applications (e.g., social networking sites, wikis, blogs) and the new digital genres that derive from them (tweets / X messages, Wikipedia entries, blog posts) can situate students at the center of the L2 writing

experiences and help them connect with culture and language inside and outside the classroom (Pellet, 2012). This chapter summarizes empirical research on using digital genres and tools in L2 classrooms. Many of these studies are based on sociocultural theory, which views learning as a mediated process that occurs through social interaction and the use of cultural artifacts. In technology-mediated environments, genres and platforms are key means through which learners construct meaning, develop stances, and engage with real or imagined audiences. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a conceptual bridge to the present study, which conceives blogs and writing tools as mediational resources within a sociocultural framework (see [section 6.2.1](#) in Chapter 6).

## 3.2 Digital Genres

One of the most cited definitions of the term *genre* was provided by Swales (1990): “A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (p. 58). In his perception, the basis of genres is the communicative purpose, which in turn is made possible through moves or “text segments made up of linguistic features” (Vandergriff, 2016, p. 71). In other words, genres are “abstract, socially recognised ways of using language” (Hyland, 2007, p. 149) composed of similar prototypical features such as purpose, content, style, structure, and intended audience (Swales, 1990). Since text and genre influence each other (M. Gonçalves, 2014), genre-specific writing is important because “writers need to demonstrate a sense of belonging to a discourse community by designing their texts according to the norms established in this community in order to deliver messages efficiently” (Feng & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2022, p. 59).

Given that the *Web 2.0* has helped turn web users into “consumers and producers of digital genres”, their participation in online communities has encouraged L2 use and development like never before (Vandergriff, 2016, p. 71). In this sense, the term *genre*, is more closely related to a functional concept that focuses on communicative purposes and effects, rather than on rigid or formal concepts related to textual or linguistic features (Heyd, 2016). Therefore, instead of talking about *text types*, we talk about (new) *types of writing* or *genres* that we use to connect with each other (Vandergriff, 2016). Given that digital genres rely heavily on multimodality, “the line between reading and writing has become blurrier” (Vandergriff, 2016, p. 69), as we no longer “wread” print-based content, but digital content as well. In addition, the semiotic resources we use in digital genres (e.g., emojis, symbols, non-verbal cues), have created “new rituals and ways of signifying

meaning in online contexts” (Davies, 2011, p. 229). Many of these new genres have moved away from text-based computer-mediated communication (Heyd, 2016) and brought multimodality to the center.

Nevertheless, multimodal digital communication has raised concerns among some members of the academic community because of its impact on formal language, particularly with regard to language standards and language variation (Spilioti, 2016). These concerns are usually associated with prescriptive teaching practices that seek to protect language standards. However, as many studies in this chapter show, the benefits of using *Web 2.0* technologies and digital genres are worth the challenge since they contribute to fostering learners’ autonomy (Vandergriff, 2016), help students explore authentic language use (van Compernelle & Pierozak, 2009) and allow them to connect with native speakers of the target language (Sotillo, 2009), which contributes to improving their writing skills (Y.-C. Wang, 2015).

Considering that genre pedagogy has the potential to help students explore language beyond linguistic conventions, this thesis dissertation argues for the integration of digital genres as valuable additions to language learners’ “writing repertoires” (Elola & Oskoz, 2019, p. 249). These tools and genres can serve as powerful means for students to explore different types of texts and to communicate effectively in academic, social, and professional settings in the digital world.

### 3.3 Digital Writing Tools

Considering that in the context of digital communication, a digital tool is “the physical means that we employ to produce meaning” (Elola & Oskoz, 2019, p. 248), it is crucial to decide how and for what purpose it is appropriate to integrate a particular technological tool into our language classroom. While many of us may be familiar with the basic equipment commonly found in our classrooms, it is also important to become familiar with the affordances and limitations of digital tools so that we can offer students diverse means to express themselves. A diverse approach to the means of conveying meaning enhances language learning because it allows individual differences and preferences to be taken into account, as “learners progressively develop strategies enabling them to take advantage of the different potentialities offered by the various modes, appropriate the tools at their disposal and adapt them to their own objectives” (Guichon & Cohen, 2016, p. 515).

Digital tools can be examined in terms of “characteristics that might make them suited for developing either local (vocabulary, editing, grammar) or global (content, structure, organization) aspects of learners’ writing” (Elola & Oskoz, 2019, p. 244). Most of the digital tools explored in L2 writing are usually integrated into university learning management systems—also called course management systems (CMS) or virtual learning environments (VLE), which facilitates their integration into language classroom practices, at least from an administrative and operational point of view. The rest of this chapter describes the pedagogical use of five commonly used social web technologies (i.e., chats, wikis, discussion forums, social networking sites, and blogs) for second/additional language learning. Blogs will receive special attention, as they are the writing tool under study in this dissertation.

### 3.3.1 Chats

Chatting or text chatting are used to refer to “any kind of synchronous communication over the internet” between groups of people (many-to-many) or directly (one-on-one) (DuBravac, 2013, p. 127). While communication via chats is considered to be primarily text-based, these forms of communication have become increasingly multimodal and contributed to create “a kind of semi-speech that is between talking and writing” (L. Lee, 2009, p. 128). This flexibility adds conversational capabilities to written discourse. Online chatting normally occurs synchronously, so there is not much delay between the time a message is sent and the moment it is responded to (sometimes both actions happen almost simultaneously). This feature requires spontaneous responses on the part of learners, similar to those in spoken exchanges (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 13), which results in chat users tending to write “briefly and informally with abbreviations, unconventional punctuation and misspelling” (L. Lee, 2009, p. 129), something that has sparked debate concerning language normativity in digital communication (Spilioti, 2016).

In academic settings it may not be necessary to approach text chats as an external tool as they are already integrated into many learning management systems (LMS) like *Moodle*, *Blackboard*, *Canvas*, etc. As for language teaching and learning, it is believed that the use of these CMC tools does not require much additional technological training as it is very likely that people use text chats in their everyday lives. According to DuBravac (2013), there are two main types of chats that can be used for L2 learning purposes: *open chats* and *closed chats*. *Open chats* are hosted on public servers, which can be used to let students interact with an open community on the web where they can find native speakers and be exposed to authentic expressions and online conventions. This is

said to be beneficial for language learners as it brings them closer to authentic language use beyond the classroom (L. Lee, 2009; van Compernelle & Pierozak, 2009). Difficulties with *open chats* are that learners may not have the knowledge to choose the right language level, the appropriate content, or to take the necessary digital safety measures. Therefore, it is important for teachers to plan accordingly and help students become aware of the digital behaviors expected in their online interactions. However, in *closed chats*, teachers have more control over language use, they can establish specific online practices, decide on the number of participants, the target culture(s) and the topics, among other factors. Challenges may arise when the approach is too controlling to the point of over-focusing on correctness and standardization of language (Spilioti, 2016). Other challenges related to the use of chats and chat rooms are terminology, acronyms, conventions and the (n)etiquette (Godwin-Jones, 2003), which can be difficult to understand and to deal with for learners and teachers alike.

Several studies have been conducted using synchronous and asynchronous chat interactions in both public (*open chats*) and private (*closed chats*) environments. Most studies have focused on feedback, collaboration, and negotiation of meaning during online exchanges. For example, Sotillo (2009) analyzed transcribed audio and chat logs collected from exchanges between tutors and English as a second language learners to determine how learners noticed grammatical or lexical features in their output during their chat interactions. The author analyzed instances in which learners noticed an error in their output and self-corrected it or asked for direct or indirect feedback from their tutors. This negotiation is said to be important in language learning because it increases awareness of positive and negative evidence of linguistic forms, provides opportunities for corrective feedback, and “draws learners’ attention to linguistic gaps in their knowledge” (2009, p. 88). According to the researcher, negotiated interaction also contributes to output modification and the development of learner-initiated repair moves, which is beneficial for language learning.

The exchange between tutors and learners took place online via instant messaging, where participants worked together to complete a series of tasks that were not monitored by the researcher or the instructor. The tutors were not asked to provide any specific type of feedback, but they were instructed to “encourage learners to use the L2 (...) in both voice and text-based chats” (Sotillo, 2009, p. 93). Among the results of her study, Sotillo found that learners did notice linguistic forms while interacting with their tutors, and that of the 98 language-related episodes (LREs) identified in such interactions, learners initiated more LREs than their tutors in both voice chats (24

to 13 respectively) and text-based chats (33 to 28). Another interesting finding of this study is that the text-based modality provided learners with more opportunities to notice linguistic forms.

As for real chat communication in authentic contexts, van Compernelle and Pierozak (2009) provided valuable pedagogical considerations for authentic language learning. The authors studied public chat discourse in French under moderated and non-moderated conditions. This study was conducted in light of the differences between informal language use in public chats and the normative or prescriptive language use that is often encouraged in educational settings. The analysis focused on linguistic features related to orthographic variations, which includes “new orthographic norms” (p.114); and sociolinguistic and pragmatic variation, both of which are present in online chat discourse. First, the researchers provided a classification table of intentional orthographic variations in French (i.e., accent suppression, vowel deletion, and acronyms, among other features) in online contexts. These orthographic variations can pose challenges for a language learner navigating the Web and encountering authentic language use. Van Compernelle and Pierozak suggested that when exploring electronic discourse, teachers and learners “should be able to first know what types of variation exist (...) and interpret orthography appropriately based on the context of occurrence” (p. 116). In terms of sociolinguistic and pragmatic variation, the authors analyzed features of discourse related to:

- the second-person pronouns in French (*tu* vs singular *vous*),
- the first-person plural pronoun (*on* vs *nous*),
- and the omission of the negative particle *ne*.

Some of these variations are said to indicate “the (perceived) relationship and degree of familiarity permitted between the interlocutors” (van Compernelle & Pierozak, 2009, p. 117). In the case of the second-person pronoun, the form *tu* is considered less formal (more familiar, informal) than the form *vous*. Similarly, the use of *on* instead of *nous*, and the omission of the negative particle also gives an indication of more informal discourse. Blattner and Williams (2009) also investigated linguistic variability in French on discussion forums.

These insights on sociolinguistic variation are relevant in the context of teaching and learning Spanish because it also has two second-person singular pronouns (*tú* and *usted*) and two second-person plural pronouns (*vosotros*—predominant in peninsular Spanish, and *ustedes*—more common in Latin America) that are used depending on the type of relationship between the

speakers (e.g., family members, friends, boss–employees, student–teachers, etc.). Interestingly, the authors found that the more formal variants were more common in moderated chat discussions, while informal variants were preferred in unmoderated chats. For example, the use of *vous* was more prevalent in moderated chats, which “indicates a certain level of deference and/or social distance between the participants and the interviewee”, while the use of *tu* was more prevalent in non-moderated chat discussions, which allowed users the possibility to interact with ‘a shared sense of familiarity’ (Blattner & Williams, 2009; van Compernelle & Pierozak, 2009).

These considerations regarding linguistic variants contribute to expose students to socio-situational and context-dependent factors where they can develop linguistic and pragmatic competence in the target language. In a study conducted by Lee (2009), pragmatic functions were found on formal and informal registers using the pronoun *tú* to address someone the student had only met one via email, in which case, the formal pronoun *usted* was preferred. Her study consisted of real-time (synchronous) information exchanges via chat between native and non-native speakers of Spanish to complete a series of task-based activities. The exchanges took place in the LMS *Blackboard* chat room, where 15 native speakers and 15 non-native speakers were complete various two-way interactive tasks on different topics (Christmas, home schooling, traveling). The tasks included information gaps, exchange of opinions, and questions (among others) leading to either a closed outcome or to multiple outcomes. Closed outcomes in tasks are thought to “promote negotiation of meaning and form” (L. Lee, 2009, p. 132) because interactions through information exchange are necessary to complete the task, whereas multiple outcomes “allow free responses that may not necessarily require precise information to complete the task” (p. 133).

An interesting finding of this study is that it provided opportunities for corrective feedback, where different types of responses from learners were coded for data analysis: 1) instances where learners acknowledged the error but did not reformulate; 2) instances where learners repeated the native speaker’s recast (using the target form); and 3) instances where learners corrected their utterance immediately after receiving the direct or indirect feedback. In terms of linguistic and pragmatic awareness, Lee’s study suggests that the chat environment allowed for the use of linguistic and non-linguistic cues similar to those people use in face-to-face interactions (greetings and goodbyes, discourse markers, smiley faces, etc.), which reinforces the affordances of CMC for language learning. Moreover, while challenges in terms of linguistic accuracy and paralinguistic

awareness were observed, there was a notable presence of negotiation of meaning strategies that allowed learners to perform confirmation checks, to clarify information, to reformulate their utterances, and to ask for help, among other strategies. These negotiation skills are crucial in authentic communicative exchanges, not only in the L2, but also in the L1.

### 3.3.2 Wikis

Wikis have been defined as editable websites, usually contributed to by multiple authors, who do not need to have knowledge of HTML (DuBravac, 2013) or advanced technological expertise. The term is said to derive from the Hawaiian word for ‘quick’ or ‘fast’ (*wiki*) (Ching-Wen et al., 2012; DuBravac, 2013), which does not necessarily correspond to the speed of communication or interaction in the platform. One of the most salient features of wikis is that they are primarily collaborative, meaning that several authors edit, write, and share content on the platform, whether synchronously or asynchronously. This collaborative writing allows for the social construction of knowledge, and the co-creation of content often results in “the production of more accurate, diverse, and thorough informational texts” (Sykes et al., 2008, pp. 529–530). While collaborative writing is said to be less concerned with accuracy and more concerned with meaning than collaborative face-to-face writing (Vandergriff, 2016), studies have shown learners also focus on linguistic elements and text structure when collaborating through wikis. Thus, wiki products are consistent with the general characteristics of digital genres, which, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, are said to be “more on communicative purpose and effect than on rigid textual and linguistic features (Heyd, 2016, p. 89).

Wikis also offer language learners the opportunity to write for an authentic audience, and to develop literacy skills that go beyond “the linear structure posited in traditional academia” (DuBravac, 2013, p. 164) to achieve learning goals that go beyond the realm of the assignment. In other words, when working with digital genres, students’ creations are not confined to the classroom. They can choose to publish their work online, meaning they are writing not only for their teachers and peers, but also for a larger community. Another advantage of working with wikis in L2 teaching and learning is that there are several sites that host them at low or no cost for educational use (Sykes et al., 2008), and many LMS also have wiki pages built-in. The use of wikis can be paired with voice or text chat discussions that contribute to the creation of the collaborative product and the achievement of a common goal. Additionally, because wikis do not necessarily follow a linear or chronological order, they can be navigated as “an online book” with multimedia components,

clickable content, and links that “encourage students to explore topics far and wide” (Pellet, 2012, p. 227).

In light of concerns about students sharing their work and ideas publicly, wikis—like many other *Web 2.0* platforms—offer privacy and control features that allow co-authors (and/or teachers) to manage access to wikis used for educational purposes, so that learner content and privacy can be protected. These features also provide teachers and students with “the ability to explicitly track all registered user contributions to a wiki document (e.g., additions, deletions, alterations, etc.)” (Sykes et al., 2008, p. 531). This feature is useful for observing and analyzing the production process, making adjustments where necessary, and maintaining the work in an academic environment.

Studies conducted with wikis are diverse in terms of languages and purposes. Pellet (2012) affirmed that most studies on educational wikis either analyze their usefulness in supporting writing processes or in promoting collaborative learning. Therefore, I focused on studies that addressed content, culture and a collaborative writing mediated by wikis for L2 learning (the most prominent were for English, French, German, and Spanish). With the aim of studying the development of content knowledge in L2 French, Pellet (2012) integrated wikis into the syllabus and course objectives of two advanced content-based courses (*Langue et Société* and *Le français moderne*) at the undergraduate level. A total of 30 students participated in her study and engaged in collaborative activities for developing content knowledge in modern French and French sociolinguistics. An interesting aspect of the research procedure in Pellet’s study is that she devoted a class to note-taking strategies and used notes to promote active reading. Students shared responsibility for assigned course readings and shared notes with their group members. Students also presented content within their groups, and final papers for the course were uploaded to the wiki as a shared portfolio that showcased the knowledge and expertise that students had gained. Another interesting aspect of this study is that students were asked to cite their sources, something I have not explicitly found in other wiki projects.

The results of this study suggest that “the collaborative work led to class cohesion and learning communities within groups” (Pellet, 2012, p. 234), and since the wikis were hosted on a public platform, students had a real sense of authenticity and ownership because their wikis could potentially be accessed on the Internet. Students also reflected on and provided feedback on the use of wikis in the course, mainly highlighting the benefits of using the wiki as a repository of

material to review for tests. Interestingly, they also expressed the need for more participation and feedback from the instructor in order to gain confidence in their writing accuracy.

While Pellet's stance focuses on the benefits of collaboration in the reading and writing web, there are other studies that explore writing and culture. Ducate and Steckenbiller (2017) introduced L2 German students to authentic writing and culture from German-speaking countries. Wiki assignments were used for students to share information with their classmates on specific cultural topics. The researchers' approach was based on the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), and the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines for integrating culture into L2 instruction. The methodology consisted of "actively engaging" students in "analysing authentic cultural documents to learn more about the products, practices and perspectives of the target culture" (p. 202), also known as *the three Ps* in the ACTFL Culture Standards for Language Education. The researchers' goals were to measure the extent to which students' knowledge of topics related to the three Ps increased and to see if students enjoyed the culture-related project. A total of 192 participants took part in the study, and the tool of choice was the wiki because it offered open access, it was easy to use and edit by all participants.

For the project, learners were asked to read and prepare content related to a short reading extracted from newspapers, magazines and websites and adapted to the level of proficiency, without eliminating multimodal/navigational components in order to preserve the authenticity of the material. This is an important pedagogical choice, since technological elements (links, images, videos, etc.) allow a broader understanding of the content of the topic and facilitate the expansion of knowledge by visiting sources related to the original document. Similarly, students were required to include "at least one picture, audio file, video, or a link to another website to present the topic in a coherent and easily accessible manner" (Ducate & Steckenbiller, 2017, p. 209) in their wiki posts, which undoubtedly has an impact on the practice and/or development of students' digital and multimodal skills, as they need to know how to use the software and how to convey meaning beyond the use of text.

Although students' perceptions of the project were "overwhelmingly positive" (Ducate & Steckenbiller, 2017, p. 212) and they "felt they learned much that they would not have learned from their textbook alone" (p. 211), nearly 35 students who participated in the study claimed to be dissatisfied that some classmates did not know how to view, edit, or post to the wikis. This

suggests that further software training or technical support from the instructor was needed before students were exposed to working with the CMC tool. Other challenges to teaching culture mentioned by the authors relate to teachers' concerns about the amount of cultural knowledge they have, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the amount of classroom time needed to integrate and teach culture in their classrooms. The results of this study indicate that the overall knowledge of the 3Ps has improved, particularly with regard to practice.

For his part, Wang (2015) asserted that wikis can be beneficial for "the construction of disciplinary knowledge" (p. 500). He investigated this web-based tool as a means to improve students' business English writing and collaborative skills in work-related contexts. His research took place over the course of 12 weeks in an elective *Business English Writing* course, which "aims to develop students' abilities to deal with content specific to various areas of business and to equip them with the essential language skills needed for academic study and professional development" (p. 503). A total of 48 participants were divided into experimental and control groups, and since it was found that the participants had no previous exposure to wikis, the researcher and instructor provided some practice sessions to help the learners familiarize themselves with the wiki technology. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is an important step in the pedagogical integration of web-based technologies in the classroom. Learners may have technological knowledge or skills, but the are specific demands of language learning tasks require the use of digital tools that they may still be unfamiliar with, even if these tools have been available on the Internet for decades. DuBravac (2013) recommends starting with an icebreaker activity when integrating new technology into a language-learning task, so that teachers can assess students' comfort with and knowledge of the digital tool.

The writing tasks in Wang's study consisted of two writing assignments for which students were required to write a business letter. The experimental and control groups completed a pre- and post-task test, and for the experiment they were expected to work together to plan, draft, compose, revise, and edit their writing assignments: the experimental group used a wiki for working and interacting, while the control group did so face-to-face. After the experiment, students completed a survey to record their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the use and impact of wikis in their writing performance. Writing performance in Wang's study is defined as "the written production of a *writer's ideas* based on a *specific purpose* with clear *organization*, relevant style and content, taking the *audience* into consideration and employing appropriate grammar and

mechanics” (Y.-C. Wang, 2015, p. 503) (emphasis mine). The analysis of students’ writing performance was based on format/layout, purpose and audience, organization, content and style, and structure and grammar, which were provided as guidelines in the task instruction. However, I wonder if it would have been beneficial to add a genre-based criterion to the rubric used to assess the business letter, since it is not very specific in terms of integrating the knowledge developed during the collaborative process using the wiki and/or the business-related content students acquired throughout the experience. For example, genre-based criteria could include the proper use of headings and closings in business letters or the use of formal language. In any case, the learners’ perceptions and experiences were addressed in a post-experiment survey conducted with the participants.

The results of Wang’s study showed that while there was improvement in business writing performance in both groups, it was more significant in the experimental group than in the control group. The two areas in which more improvement was observed were organization and purpose and audience criteria. The researcher attributes this improvement to the use of wikis, arguing that the online learning environment gradually helped students develop a sense of audience while writing and supported the planning and drafting process, thereby improving the organization of their texts (Y.-C. Wang, 2015). He also concluded that students enjoyed the learning experience because they felt comfortable using the wiki tool, they took control over their own learning, they collaborated with peers, and they became “more confident about writing in business English” (p. 508). Overall, learners’ perceptions on the use of wikis were found to be positive. However, although it was not the focus of the study, I wonder if the role of wikis as a digital genre could have been further explored. The key components chosen for writing the business letter (purpose, organization, content and audience, etc.) could have been examined in terms of their impact on the (para)linguistic choices writers make to interact and express their ideas online. Thus, the clear guidelines on the use of having a specific audience and purpose in mind, as well as the focus on organization, style, and grammar, could have been used as an opportunity to expose students to the linguistic and multimodal features of the wiki and to go beyond the scope of the writing assignment by integrating digital literacy skills.

Other studies have focused on learner perceptions. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) conducted an exploratory study to examine the effectiveness of implementing wikis, forums, and blogs in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course at the university level, and it is based on learners’

perceptions regarding the use of the three *Web 2.0* tools. The researchers' rationale for simultaneously integrating wikis, blogs, and forums into the classroom follows the "day-to-day" use of online writing tools like emails, chats, text messages, etc. on the part of learners in their real-life communications (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010, pp. 185–186). A total of 61 students belonging to three sections of an upper-intermediate English course, participated in the study. The three sections followed the same course design, and the main objectives of the course were to improve learners' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills in English. The analysis was conducted through a mixed-method approach that included a survey, an interview, and the qualitative analysis of learners' writing products before and after the intervention.

In the experiment, students used wikis to collaboratively translate reading excerpts from the textbook from the L1 (Japanese) to the L2 (English); forums were used to discuss topics of their choice with their classmates; and blogs were used to complete "an optional free writing activity", and the participants had some practice sessions to familiarize themselves with the introduced tools. An interesting aspect of the researchers' approach was that they kept students' identities anonymous in the online activities. This was done to "free" students from "their fear of making mistakes" and to encourage "improved rates of productivity" (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010, p. 190). To some extent, however, it may be beneficial for teachers to keep some sort of record of students' online edits and posts in order to identify instances or areas where help is needed, to provide feedback (Elola & Oskoz, 2010), or to monitor learners' contributions and interactions in order to promote a safe and respectful environment during virtual collaboration. For students, though, it is possible to set a private permission feature so they cannot see other groups' contributions and focus on their own group's writing (Li, 2021).

The results of Miyazoe and Anderson's (2010) study showed a generally positive perception of wikis as the preferred tool for students, followed by blogs and forums. Students also reported that the wiki translation activity helped them to master reading and translation skills. The semi-structured interviews were used to establish a correlation of terms in the students' responses, in which wikis showed a strong connection between the words *wiki*, *fun*, *useful* and *translation*. This last term may allude to the nature of the task they had to complete with this tool (a translation from English to Japanese), but also to the positive perception of using it. However, there was also an association with the word *difficult*. While it is unclear whether this perception was related to a lack of training, the authors believe that it did not discourage learners from participating (using the tool). The

qualitative analysis of written production was only conducted for the forum and blog posts, which are described in other sections below.

In Spanish, Elola and Oskoz (2010, 2016, 2019; 2014, 2016) have conducted some of the most representative studies on digital writing and the use of web-based tools for L2 Spanish teaching and learning. Their 2010 study combined the use of wikis and chats in an advanced Spanish writing course where the researchers investigated potential differences between individual and collaborative writing, learners' perceptions of both types of writing, and students' approach to collaborative writing mediated by social tools (wikis and chats). The tasks consisted of writing two argumentative essays: one collaboratively, and the other individually. For the analysis, Elola and Oskoz (2010) examined the essays using a complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) approach (see more about this approach in Housen et al., 2012) to identify differences between the individually and collaboratively produced essays, while questionnaires were used to collect students' opinions and perceptions. The participants were eight undergraduate Spanish majors who were paired as closely as possible to match their proficiency levels. They were trained in the use of oral and written chats and wikis. The course met once a week for 2.5 hours and the learners received a detailed schedule of activities that specified different stages in the drafting process and the task completion. During the drafting process, students received feedback from their teacher in the wiki on the form, structure, organization, and content of their essays. A course textbook was also used in class "to illustrate genre and writing conventions" (p. 54) and to introduce linguistic forms.

The researchers found an interesting difference between individual and collaborative writing was the stage at which learners corrected their texts (editing, vocabulary, grammar): at the end of the writing process for individual writing, and during the writing process for collaborative writing. Regarding the web tools, learners worked on topic development, shared work, and negotiated the structure of the essay in their real-time interactions in the chat, while content, grammar, vocabulary, and editing were the focus in the wiki. Finally, in terms of students' perceptions, learners expressed preference for writing individually because of the freedom and autonomy it offered, but they appreciated that collaborative writing contributed to improving the overall quality of their products, and that discussions with their partners help them structure and organize their essays better. An interesting consideration that sums up the main pedagogical implications of this study is that having access to online tools that facilitate collaborative work does not mean that we have to *forcefully* integrate them *fully* into our L2 classrooms. On the contrary, it is imperative that

we reflect on when and for what purpose we integrate a technology and what type of work (individual, pair, group, teacher-student, etc.) is more fruitful in the learning experience.

### 3.3.3 Discussion Forums

Blattner and Williams (2009) define discussion forums as “a web-based bulletin board with discussion threads organized by themes and/or topics” (p. 264). Discussion forums, also known as bulletin boards, Internet forums, or threaded discussions (DuBravac, 2013), are virtual communication environments in which people interact primarily asynchronously. Discussion forums are thought to increase opportunities for participation compared to face-to-face conversations (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Whitworth, 2009), as people who are not comfortable with interacting face-to-face can find in forums a tool for interacting without the pressure of social exposure—although this can also be said about other *Web 2.0* tools. Forums contain hierarchical levels (DuBravac, 2013), which typically include topics, threads, and replies, and messages are automatically logged (usually with a date) so that participants can view posts in chronological and thematic order (Whitworth, 2009). For language learning, this allows participants to view threaded messages and contribute or respond appropriately to any given conversation, knowing previous contributions and the main thematic component. Discussion forums also allow the insertion of multimedia components (e.g. images, audio, video, files), which enriches the semiotic component of users' contributions.

Another common feature of online forums is the presence of a moderator (e.g., the teacher, a researcher, an assistant). Depending on the applications available in each forum host/platform, moderators can control anonymity, restrict certain types of interactions, and limit access to the forum by setting open/close dates for allowing posts. The role of the moderator (or host) in educational forums includes providing examples of appropriate and meaningful contributions, setting the tone, monitoring participation, and ensuring that students contribute equally. Consistent with the digital citizenship considerations presented in the previous chapter, it is important for the moderator to outline specific roles, responsibilities, and considerations for participants to interact appropriately in the forum environment. In addition, task instructions and guidelines such as post length, quality, and frequency should also be clarified (DuBravac, 2013), as they affect student engagement. For example, the required posting length (number of words or number of sentences) can be set according to the type of writing task (e.g., a summary, an opinion, a reaction); the quality of the post can involve students responding or reacting to a classmate's

post or to a trigger (a video, a news item, a short reading, a podcast, etc.) provided by the moderator; and the frequency, can be based on contributions at the end of a module, or a weekly reflection on what was learned, etc. Importantly, learners should be instructed to post on a specific date and/or within a specific time window as it is believed that they “may be more willing to participate when they know exactly when they need to post” (DuBravac, 2013, p. 154).

Most of the studies I found on the use of discussion forums in language learning were conducted more than a decade ago. My guess is that online forums appeared with great force at the turn of the century as an alternative to the use of email communication in L2 classrooms, but that boom quickly dissipated with the rapid development of the *Web 2.0*, which provided more social, dynamic, and interactive environments. Some examples of studies on the use of online forums have focused on L2 pragmatic awareness (Whitworth, 2009), knowledge building (Manegre & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2023), peer feedback (Ware & O’Dowd, 2008), scaffolding (Cheng, 2010), and learner perceptions (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010, 2012). Many of these studies have explored the affordances of online forums for integrating performance assessment, collaborative writing, and L2 writing skill development.

On the one hand, Whitworth (2009) analyzed written discourse in two authentic forums in English to explore whether the sociocultural practices (rules, norms, hierarchy, structures) that are commonly present in traditional (i.e., offline) communities of practice (CoP) are present (or not) in online communities. Her study analyzed common pragmatic functions (e.g., greetings, farewells, etc.) in two topic-based online forums to see if these constructs would be observed in users’ interactions. She found that there are pragmatic conventions in online communities that somehow correspond to those often present in offline CoPs. Whitworth affirms that exposing language learners to these authentic online CoPs helps them develop communicative skills suitable for the context, since it is not only necessary to know the linguistic forms of the target language, but also to understand “how to conduct oneself with language” (2009, p. 295).

Regarding peer feedback, Ware and O’Dowd (2008) analyzed asynchronous online discussions between two groups of students, each working in one of two conditions: *e-tutoring* and *e-partnering*. In the former, students were encouraged to provide corrective feedback on their peer’s errors or to give them suggestions for improvement; in the latter, students were not explicitly required to provide feedback, but they could do so if they wanted to or if their peers requested it. Researchers also analyzed feedback strategies and participants’ attitudes regarding the presence

or absence of form-focused feedback in their exchanges. The two-phase study involved the participation of 26 students from Spain and the US in the first phase, where interactions were only in English; and 72 from Spain, the US, and Chile in the second phase, where interactions were conducted in both English and Spanish. The participants were post-secondary advanced learners of L2 English and L2 Spanish who were native speakers of the other language. That is, L2 English learners were native Spanish speakers and vice versa. Both groups completed a series of structured writing tasks in Phase I and more flexible writing tasks in Phase II. The writing tasks were completed using online forums embedded in the course LMS.

The results showed a greater percentage of language related episodes (LREs) in the e-tutoring condition compared to the e-partnering condition. However, the researchers were surprised to see “so few LREs in the e-partnering condition because student surveys had earlier revealed their preferences for having at least some focus on form” (Ware & O’Dowd, 2008, p. 48). I would venture to say that since students in the e-tutoring conditions received more detailed instructions and training on how to identify areas of improvement and how to provide feedback, they felt more prepared and were probably more confident to correct and give recommendations to their peers. As for the lack of feedback in the e-partnering group, the researchers argue that it may be due to time constraints, or an intention to maintain the flow of the conversation, or to a sense of “discomfort with taking on a role they might see as more fitting for a teacher” (p.49). In this regard, it is important to note that while the sociolinguistic approach—learning that occurs with scaffolding from peers and tutors—is seen as a framework for collaborative learning, students may need more exposure and training in how to provide feedback and to reflect on their L1 so that they feel more comfortable teaching or correcting their peers. Another finding is that the focus of feedback in the bilingual e-tutoring forums (Phase II) was on morphosyntactic elements, followed by affective moves and then lexical items. The researchers suggested that since the learners were interacting asynchronously in the discussion forums, they may have had more time to pay attention to morphosyntactic features when composing their posts and responding to messages.

With regards to student perceptions, Miyazoe and Anderson’s (2010) found that forums were the third most attractive medium of instruction after wikis and blogs. Students viewed forums as spaces that to think critically, express their opinions, and produce written material to be read by their peers, reflecting a sense of socially constructed knowledge and collaborative learning.

Furthermore, the use of the web tool *textalyser* (<http://textalyser.net/>) provided valuable insights in terms of text analysis: reading ease, grade level, word count (including lexical density and diversity, character length, letters, sentences, syllables, etc.), among other features. The researchers analyzed the texts produced both on the forum and on the blog to compare linguistic changes over time (e.g., word count per sentence, lexical density, readability index). The results showed improvement in sentence complexity, readability, and complexity in both tools, but the forum texts changed the most overall. Moreover, it was observed that writing style also varied in the forum and blog products, which may suggest that using different writing tools simultaneously can contribute to a better understanding of the writing genre features (e.g., style).

A subsequent study by the same researchers (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2012) also examined students' perceptions and writing skills. This time, 61 undergraduate EFL students in Japan participated, working in two LMS environments: one was built as a repository of materials for students to access the course content; and the other facilitated peer interaction through blog, wiki, and forum activities. Students voted on the topics to be discussed in the forum interactions, and there were one or two moderators who volunteered to take on this role. These results mirrored those of the 2010 study in that the students' order of preference for the writing tools was wiki-blog-forum. In the textual analysis, blogs and forums showed similar levels of readability and a strong connection between "thinking" and discussion forums. Of particular relevance to this dissertation, the study revealed that students demonstrated an awareness of writing style, showing a preference for a more formal style in forums and a more informal style in blogs. The discussion of formal and informal writing in blogs is presented in the final section of this chapter.

In addition to supporting the development of L2 writing skills, forums have been shown to be effective tools for incorporating writing into performance-based assessment tasks. Since the present thesis dissertation is framed within the task-based approach, the approach proposed by Abraham and Williams (2009) to implement a technology-enhanced integrated performance assessment (TIPA) in the language learning curriculum seems appropriate (see more on the performance-based assessment in the task-based approach in González-Lloret, 2016). This approach to renovating the curriculum is interesting because, instead of focusing on the traditional four skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking), the performance assessment

concentrates on the three main modes of communication: the *interpersonal*, the *interpretive*, and the *presentational* modes.<sup>1</sup>

The first mode is closely related to the negotiation of meaning in conversations; the second mode is characterized by the cultural interpretation of meanings that emerge in oral or written communication; and the third mode is related to the oral or written presentation of information and ideas to diverse audiences. The highlight of Abraham and Williams' study is the assertion that online forums are a "versatile tool" (p. 323) that can be used in the implementation of a performance assessment approach for language learning because it is suitable (to a certain degree) for the different modes of communication.

Collaborative writing was also examined by Strobl (2014), who compared individual and collaborative writing at the advanced L2 German level with regards to the final written product and on the writing process. The task consisted of participants (n= 48) writing a synthesis—either in groups or individually—based on a series of written sources in the target language. In her analysis, Strobl used, on the one hand, the CAF model (and an adapted taxonomy from different sources) to analyze the students' final product (i.e., the syntheses written collaboratively or individually); and on the other hand, she qualitatively analyzed language and non-language related discussions in the forums and on the comments via *Google Docs* in order to gain insights into the collaboration. Prior to completing the writing task, students received instruction on the peer review process, and the teacher modeled and explained synthesis writing. During the task, social interaction and discussion were facilitated by the online forum for the collaborative group, while *Google Docs* was used by both groups to write and revise their products. Students working individually had access to a sample synthesis provided by the teacher to compare and improve their own work, while students working collaboratively were instructed to contribute to a common goal in their groups. This was achieved through a "jigsaw exercise" where participants had to learn about a given topic (written source) and share their knowledge with their peers in the online forum. This method is useful not only for promoting responsible online interaction, but also for encouraging students to become "experts" on a topic and teach their classmates information they need to know. These types of activities empower learners and give them a sense of autonomy, while fostering cooperation. The results of the study indicated that final products written collaboratively scored

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<sup>1</sup> Originally described in the 1996 National Standards for Foreign Language Learning Project and now summarized in the [ACTFL World-Readiness standards](#) (ACTFL, n.d.)

higher on content selection and organization, but no significant differences were found between the two conditions in terms of complexity, accuracy, fluency, cohesion and coherence. Moreover, a linear and more structural-based process was found in individual writing, while collaborative writing had a more “recursive writing style” that included changing order, deletions, and dynamism.

Interestingly, Strobl’s (2014) analysis of the writing process simultaneously looked at the writing and the reviewing phases. The researcher affirms that these two phases are not easily distinguishable in asynchronous collaborative environments because some members may be revising work while others are producing content, so writing and revising may occur simultaneously. Strobl also surveyed students’ perceptions, which showed that while they perceived challenges in terms of uneven collaboration, increased workload, and different styles and paces, they generally found collaboration fruitful. Regarding online forums, most students (90%) said they preferred individual rather than collaborative planning in the forum, and 70% preferred individual rather than collaborative writing. This also supports the importance of combining individual and collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom.

### 3.3.4 Social Networks

When we brainstorm ideas related to social networking, it is likely that interrelated terms come to mind: social media, computer networks, *Web 2.0*, *Facebook*, etc. What these terms have in common is the idea of people connecting through networked environments where they can share, post, view, interact, etc. Network-based language teaching (NBLT) emerged as a form of CALL that used locally or globally networked computers for language education (Warschauer & Kern, 2000), extending learners’ interactions beyond the classroom and promoting a sense of community building (DuBravac, 2013). Social networking has been possible through a variety of tools (e.g., online forums, wikis, blogs, etc.), and more recently through social media platforms (e.g., *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Skype*, etc.). The main difference between the type of social interactions mediated by digital tools—as those described in this chapter—and interactions on social media platforms is that tasks performed with web technologies are prepared by teachers and usually carried out within the institution’s LMS environment, whereas in social media, the key component is that the tasks are expected to take place in “a vast space open to any possible configuration of interaction” (Lamy & Zourou, 2013) within authentic, non-academically-restrictive scenarios.

For this dissertation, I have adopted the definition of social networks as “an online service or site through which people create and maintain interpersonal relationships” (Krebsz & Dwivedi, 2024, p. 102), while social media refers to “artefacts with a networking dimension” (Lamy & Zourou, 2013, p. 1). This means that the concept of social networking is inherent in social media, which occurs via social networking sites (SNSs). In this section, I focus on social media platforms, which according to Barrot (2021a) are “technologies [that] allow individuals to produce and share user-generated content and interact with one another within a web community” (p. 2). The most prominent modes on SNSs are, to some extent, the audiovisual mode and the textual mode. Interactions on the platform are often asynchronous, though responses from users/followers/friends are expected rather quickly (Elola & Oskoz, 2019). These social yet personalized capabilities make social media closely linked to students’ personal lives and communication practices (Lightbourn & Caws, 2021), hence their pedagogical value as a tool for developing digital citizenship, enriching writing processes, promoting real-life exchanges, interacting in authentic contexts, and increasing sociocultural awareness. These affordances can be extended to language learning across diverse instructional levels and learning contexts where social media can become “a venue for a variety of socially engaging learning activities and for edutainment purposes. Edutainment is a form of entertainment designed to educate people” (Barrot, 2021a, p. 2).

Despite these affordances, there are some concerns that arise with the use of SNSs in the classroom. Privacy, online safety, Internet access, and institutional constraints are among the main concerns for educators using this type of learning technology (Terantino, 2011). As seen in the previous chapter, ensuring student privacy and safety online—especially when videos are created by students or teachers—is a primary focus of digital citizenship. Therefore, it is important for us to understand how to enable privacy settings on social networking sites, so that we can train students to do the same. Providing clear instructions and guidelines for students to be aware of the type of content they share, and the potential audience of their videos can help them develop a more critical view of how to use these sites. In addition, these practices encourage them to look at their own personal social media accounts through the same critical lens.

Barrot (2021a) conducted a comprehensive review of 396 scientific documents published between 2008 and 2019 on the use of social media in language teaching and learning. Nearly 60% of the studies were found to take place in higher education settings, and the target languages explored in most of them were English (68.9%), while very few (2.3%) focused on Spanish. The researcher

suggests that this may be because the use of social media began in English-speaking countries and later expanded to many non-English-speaking regions. I am hopeful that the global reach of the social web and the growing interest of teachers and researchers in educational technologies will help to gradually increase these numbers for languages other than English. Barrot also found that collaboration, peer/group discussion and content management were among the most common uses of social media in language teaching. His analysis also reported that social media were found to have a positive impact on language learning and teaching in 298 of the 396 studies. Previous studies described in this chapter have focused on the positive impact of technological tools in L2 writing, student perceptions, and learner interaction and collaboration, which mirrors Barrot's findings in his systematic literature review.

Despite their popularity, Manca (2020) focused her review of literature beyond *Facebook* and *Twitter* (now X) in language education. She concentrated on research using *Instagram*, *Snapchat*, *Pinterest*, and *WhatsApp* and found that half of the studies (22 out of 44) used them for language learning purposes. *WhatsApp* was the most researched (18/22), followed by *Instagram* with two studies. She did not find any studies on the use of *Snapchat* and *Pinterest*. These results are somewhat similar to those reported in 2018 by Solmaz (2018), who did not find any studies on the use of *Instagram* or *Snapchat* in the context of language learning in his review of research conducted between 2011 and 2017. Barrot (2021a) reported on the 17 most popular platforms as of July 2020 and asserted that the ones that have been explored the most in language education were: *Facebook* with 202/396 studies, followed by *Skype*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube* with 76, 52, and 44 studies respectively.

Since, Barrot's (2021a) writing, the ranking of the five most popular social media platforms has changed slightly. As of April 2024, the top 5 social networks by number of monthly active users are: *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *WhatsApp*, and *TikTok* (Statista, 2024). Given their current popularity and unique characteristics, I decided to focus on studies that examined the use of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube*. Given the social nature of these tools, I am including studies in my dissertation that have explored sociocultural components rather than those that have focused primarily on language skills.

#### 3.3.4.1 Facebook

Facebook is considered "the most successful social network site (SNS) in the world" (Tagg & Seargeant, 2016, p. 339) and it is currently ranked the most used social network globally (Statista,

2024). Founded in 2004 as a way for students to connect with each other, the site eventually became a worldwide platform (Tagg & Seargeant, 2016) where users can join communities with shared interests, befriend people, post on each other's "walls", create profiles, upload content, and write updates. These activities often lead to community engagement as reactions and comments are often posted by users in the public sphere (if one owns a public account) and/or the private circle (close friends or selected contacts in a private account). While it is still highly rated by users around the world, it has become clear that young(er) people are not as interested in *Facebook* as they are in other social networks such as *Snapchat* or *Instagram* (Elola & Oskoz, 2019).

While Elola and Oskoz (2019) affirm that grammar, spelling, and vocabulary are the primary linguistic aspects of L2 writing developed through social networking tools such as *Facebook*, other studies have focused on social interaction and interpersonal communication. One such study was conducted by Liaw and English (2013), who reported on interpersonal and interactional dynamics observed on a telecollaboration project involving 18 French and 48 Taiwanese students of English. The project consisted of students working collaboratively on an institutional course-based website to complete a series of tasks designed to develop intercultural communication skills through multimodal asynchronous communication (i.e., video, audio, image, text). The tasks were an individual self-introduction and a group presentation on a selection of works of art. While online forums were available to promote interaction and communication among the students as an optional task, it was found that the learners decided to create a *Facebook* group to have a space to discuss ideas and communicate without teacher supervision.

The students' written production in both platforms (the institutional one and *Facebook*) was analyzed using a qualitative and a quantitative approach: a functional text analysis guide and a statistical analysis software respectively. The systemic functional linguistic approach was based on three main variables: field, tenor and mode. The authors describe field as *what* is being talked about (the topic or actions described); tenor as *who* is talking (participants, language users); and mode as *how* (the way and channels of communication). Hence, the qualitative functional analysis focused on the three systemic variables: *field* (what the texts were about) was identified through word frequency, *tenor* was identified in interpersonal communication (relationships observed), and *mode* was investigated in the communicative strategies used by writers/speakers to involve the audience. As for the statistical analysis of the texts from both platforms, the researchers used the

*Textalyser* tool to obtain complexity factors, word count, and readability factors, among other quantitative data.

The quantitative results obtained in *Textalyser* indicate that in the self-introduction task, the French students shared more information about themselves than the Taiwanese participants. For this task, students were allowed and encouraged to comment on their peers' introductions in the online forum, but no one posted a comment. As for the artwork task, the French participants did not post any comments on the Taiwanese students' group presentations, while the Taiwanese participants posted a total of 36 comments on the French works. Overall, the lexical density in the French group was higher than in the Taiwanese group (60.8% vs. 49.9%), but the readability of the Taiwanese group texts was slightly easier. These results contrast with the students' interactions on *Facebook*. The two groups together posted a total of 134 messages, 563 comments and 690 *Likes* on the social network. The interactions occurred in greater numbers for the Taiwanese group (86 messages and 449 *Likes*), while the French group commented slightly more than their foreign peers (283 comments versus 280 respectively). The statistical analysis showed that *Facebook* posts scored higher in readability and average sentence length, but lower in lexical density. This may indicate that the learners used the social network as a platform to communicate in a more informal and less restrictive way.

As for the qualitative analysis, it was found that for both groups, the topics (*field*) of family and friends played an important role in the self-introductions. However, the choices were different when selecting the works of art to present: the French group selected works by individual artists, whereas the Taiwanese group selected mainly collective, traditional or folk masterpieces. According to the researchers, the lexical choices in the institution's website "denoted participants' individual and collective identities and world experience" (Liaw & English, 2013, p. 169), represented in a more formal approach to art by the French group, and a more social one in the Taiwanese group. As for *tenor*, the focus of the analysis was on the use of pronouns, first names, and negotiation as indicators of closeness or distance between the participants. Contrary to what was observed on the institutional website, the students established closer and more frequent interactions on the social network as both groups posted considerably more than on the course website, and while the French participants initiated the communication on *Facebook*—they created the *Facebook* group, both groups began to take more evenly distributed turns posting when the two groups when became involved in planning a trip to visit their peers' city and presumably to

meet them in person. Interestingly, participants continued to communicate via *Facebook* even after the project ended. Finally, regarding the *mode*, it was observed that the texts on the institutional website were assignment-centered, and no interactive dialogue seemed to be pursued. In contrast, *Facebook* posts were a combination of text, images, videos, and emoticons, suggesting a greater interest in connecting with peers through “closer to verbal communication” (p. 171). There are two interesting takeaways from this study: First, the low lexical density and the non-formal/non-academic language use reported in students’ *Facebook* texts contrasts with the sociocultural connectedness and fruitful interactions that participants displayed while communicating on the SNS. To me, this means that we need to carefully determine the purpose and role of the digital tool(s) to be used so that it/they can meet the linguistic, social, cultural, and/or technological goals of our course. Second, in addition to the reported impact of the tool (online forums vs. social networks) on students’ communication style, sense of ownership, interactions, and socialization processes, it was possible to see how virtual exchanges offered an opportunity to spark students’ curiosity and interest in exploring other languages and cultures in person.

According to Tagg and Seargeant (2016), there are “three issues that are central both to the site [Facebook] and to socially oriented linguistics” (p. 340), namely *identity*, *audience design*, and *community*. *Identity* has to do with how people present themselves online; *audience design* refers to the idea of potential readers that users have in mind—which influences their choice of language; and *community* refers to the sense of belonging that users create to align and connect with virtual communities. On *Facebook*, these aspects are observable because users have the choice to identify themselves as individuals through one or more images (profile and status pictures), through a memorable quote (info status), or through topics of interest, to name a few options. The audience is represented by public users or private internauts belonging to the person's group of friends; however, even if the audience consists only of friends, they may come from different spheres of the user's life, so the way of addressing them is likely to be different. In terms of community, there are several ways in which a user can participate and interact in a virtual community. This can be done by creating or joining (open or closed) interest groups, through the marketplace, or within specific socio-cultural communities.

Tagg and Seargeant (2016) conducted a case study to exemplify how identity, audience, and community are constructed on Facebook. Data was collected over a three-month period from the

participant's *Facebook* page, where interactions occurred in five different languages, with English and Greek being the most dominant ones. The researchers conducted a multilingual textual analysis of language function and form to identify constructions related to *identity*, *audience design*, and *community*. By analyzing the informant's status posts and people's comment replies, Tagg and Seargeant were able to identify *identity*-building in status update responses, in which friends showed affiliation to the topic of discussion and were using distinctive discursive features (friendly tone, language play, emojis, exclamation points, etc.) to express themselves. These elements provide an idea not only of how the participant's friends present themselves online, but also of how they connect with each other. Interestingly, it was found that commenters merely interacted with each other. Their comments were mostly a 'duologue' where they posted a reaction to the main status update (the central node) and the informant (the one who posted the status) responded to some of them individually. This, among other interactions, indicated that the expectations for this particular *community* "appears to be that comments should orientate around the node user (the status updater) and that interaction between commenters which does not directly include the node user should be avoided" (p. 349). Finally, *audience design* was observed in the way the study participants used style-shifting and code-switching to address different friends. The analysis of multilingual exchanges showed that language choice was influenced by the topic, and that readers did not always respond in the same language as the status update, but rather in the language(s) they shared with the participant. This finding is interesting from a linguistic point of view, as it suggests that both the post author and the readers establish a tone and style of communication that is appropriate to the characteristics of their audience.

#### 3.3.4.2 *Twitter (X)*

The social networking site *X* (formerly known as *Twitter*) first appeared as a microblogging platform in 2006. People post "short bursts of content", which were originally called *tweets*. The platform has users around the globe—including artists, politicians, educators, athletes, and so on—who *tweet* in many different languages (Squires, 2016). When users access *X*, they see a timeline (feed) of *tweets* (posts) on their Home page. These posts are organized in reverse chronological order, with the most recent *tweets* appearing at the top and the older loading as the user scrolls down (Squires, 2016, p. 240). Posts have a maximum of 280 characters, and users can "retweet, favorite other people's posts, and use hashtags to connect their tweets to a larger topic or community" (Elola & Oskoz, 2019, p. 247). Despite its perceived popularity, *X* is not among the top 5 most used SNSs in the Statista 2024 list (Statista, 2024) and is "probably the least examined digital tool for L2

language instruction” (Elola & Oskoz, 2019, p. 247). However, some studies have looked at how this tool affects social, cultural and linguistic practices in the L2 classroom. I will focus on two studies that used *X* to investigate sociocultural issues. Since these studies took place before *Twitter* became *X*, I will use the former to maintain the authors’ terminology.

Lightbourn and Caws (2021) explored the impact of *Twitter* in a first-year university French course. The aim was to promote students’ written interactions in real-world a context, and to identify factors that may influence their participation and overall experience of writing on this social network. Ten participants completed tasks on *Twitter*, answered two questionnaires (one before and one after the task), and some participated in a semi-structured interview. Participation in the project was optional—although it could be used to replace a graded component—and the tasks were based on posting *tweets* about everyday topics where learners could develop their writing skills and interact in a real online context. The framework and analysis of Lightbourn and Caws’ case study was based on the socio-interactional, the socio-critical, and the ergonomic approaches. The first (the socio-interactional approach) is based on the understanding that everyday communication involves interaction between people with the aim of co-constructing meaning. In L2 learning, this means that the completion of communicative tasks grounded in real life promotes interactions in authentic contexts (e.g. on social media), which play a crucial role in helping students become real language users. The socio-critical approach examines the sociocultural factors that influence the academic and non-academic use of technology. These include the habits of use, and the relationships people establish with technology in order to perform real-life tasks effectively. As for the ergonomics framework, it alludes to how the pedagogical affordances of tools and tasks can be adapted to fit the particular needs and interests of learners in specific learning contexts. This approach stems from socio-cultural theory, as it is believed that platforms such as the social web have the potential to contribute to learning if they are used for this purpose. The socio-interactional analysis in Lightbourn and Caws’ study focused on students’ social presence and participation on *Twitter*, the topics they discussed, and the intended audience (users/readers). The socio-critical analysis of the study was based on the learners’ level of (dis)satisfaction with using *Twitter* to complete the task(s), as well as their positive or negative perceptions of the task, the tool usage, and the interaction with peers. Finally, the study’s ergonomic analysis was based on a needs analysis and preferences regarding students’ language proficiency, knowledge of the tool, and learning styles, which was done to understand the learner profile.

The results indicated that participation and experience varied from learner to learner. The main factors that influenced participation were previous training, age, learning styles, and attitudes toward digital technologies. According to the researchers, the participants' educational and linguistic backgrounds played a role in the lower levels of engagement and participation observed. Nearly half of the participants were reluctant to interact in the target language to avoid making mistakes. As a result, these students had a lower social presence and participation on *Twitter*. Age was another factor that influenced participation, as students over 35 years old seemed more interested in posting about school-related topics than their younger classmates (30 years old and younger), who posted more free-form tweets on a variety of non-academic topics.

In terms of learning styles, it was found that students who preferred a more active and participatory approach (learner-centered) detached more easily from the task constraints, interacted more freely, and seemed more personally invested in the social media task beyond the academic requirement. Students who preferred a more traditional (language based) learning experience, wondered if they would benefit from using *Twitter* without a formal language learning activity, or if a social media task would help them learn something. Finally, learners' perceptions of the use of digital technologies positively or negatively influenced their willingness to explore the use of the social networking tool. Those who favored the use of technology expressed satisfaction with the task, were motivated to participate, and explored the affordances of *Twitter*. On the contrary, those who disapproved of the use of social media showed little engagement with the tool and participated less. This study calls us to consider sociocultural approaches to shed light on the factors that influence students' online written interactions, their technology habits, and how to accommodate learning preferences with on- and offline tools.

Another interesting approach to the use of *Twitter* in the language classroom was provided by Gonçalves and Sánchez (2016), who studied language variation through a corpus of tweets posted in Spanish in different geographical locations, and then used machine learning to analyze the data. The tweets were collected over a five-year period (2010-2015), and researchers used various software applications to: 1) identify the language in which the tweets were written, 2) geolocate the origin of these posts, and 3) classify the words in the dataset based on specific lexical features. The analysis was based on a list of 46 selected concepts (e.g., *gas station*, *peanut*, *beautiful*) with 331 common Spanish words that corresponded to them. The software delimitations resulted in a total of 106 million posts written in Spanish (most of them geolocated in Spain and some Latin American

countries), among which 4 million instances of the selected words were found. After mapping out the selected concepts and the dominant words, the researchers created a matrix from which they were able to conclude that two main global varieties (or *superdialects*) could be identified: one corresponds to “an international variety” located in densely populated areas; and another one located mainly in rural areas. The researchers associate what they call “international Spanish” with a *superdialect* that is present in the mass media and in urban areas, while the other *superdialect* is mostly associated with rural areas and has more heterogeneous characteristics compared to the international one. Gonçalves and Sánchez explain that information and communication technologies, immigration, and tourism may have a role in the “uniformization of the active lexicon”, which is particularly visible in urban centers where the globalization of Spanish is more evident.

For teachers of Spanish, there is no doubt that lexical varieties are more or less notorious, depending on the different regions where Spanish is spoken by native or non-native speakers. While it would probably be too ambitious—and perhaps unproductive—to attempt to teach *all* the lexical variations, user-generated content in social networks is a door to discuss the richness and diversity of languages. This can be done, for example, by making generalizations not only between varieties of Spanish, but also between students’ own language(s), as the same phenomenon occurs in at least two widely spoken languages in Canada (English and French). Furthermore, the use of authentic corpora contributes to “increased efficiency in the identification of linguistic features that are characteristic of a language variety” (Miller, 2020, p. 77), which is an enriching exercise for teachers and students to analyze, discuss, and approach language learning. While data-driven learning (DDL) may sound new to some of us, it emerged in the 1980s as a method of exploring language using corpora to allow learners to analyze patterns of use, generate hypotheses, and draw conclusions, which would give them more control over the language learning process (Allan et al., 2023). The vast amount of user-generated content on SSNs offers multiple opportunities for exploring DDL in and beyond the language classroom.

#### 3.3.4.3 YouTube

Ranked second in the number of active users worldwide (Statista, 2024), *YouTube* is “the globally leading video-sharing website and one of the iconic environments of the social media era” (Androusoopoulos & Tereick, 2016, p. 354). It was launched in 2005 with the slogan “Broadcast Yourself” (Bou-Franch et al., 2012, p. 501), which provided a platform for people to create and

share short videos online (Terantino, 2011). Although *YouTube* is not a social networking platform like *Facebook* or *Twitter* (Androutsopoulos & Tereick, 2016), it has been viewed by some researchers as an outlet for sociocultural expression through the dissemination of user-generated content on a variety of topics: from religion, environmental issues, gender activism, and language use, to politics, work demonstrations, self-learning tutorials, advertising, and so on (Androutsopoulos & Tereick, 2016; Bou-Franch et al., 2012; Matachana López & Narváez Burbano, 2022; Terantino, 2011). Moreover, the participation of individuals, groups, and organizations in posting content on *YouTube* as part of their social or commercial practices has contributed to the globalization of media (Benson, 2015), which has played a role in the increasing presence of languages other than English online.

While primarily used for entertainment, *YouTube* is also a platform that allows for identity construction, negotiation of meaning, and exchange of opinions with no apparent purpose other than to interact with other *YouTubers* (Bou-Franch et al., 2012). The interface of this social networking site displays each video on a separate page, and video uploads have a designated space for adding authorship, for inserting the video description, and posting and replying to comments once the video is published. In addition, as users navigate the site, related videos appear on the right side of the screen, making it easy to access other video posts related to the same topic. While *YouTube*'s formatting may seem primarily video-based, people can also react using *Like* and *Dislike* buttons; share, download, and edit content; subscribe to topics of their interest; comment on other users' (video)posts; engage in threaded discussions; express opinions, and so on. Despite being available for nearly two decades, *YouTube* remains one of the most underexplored SNSs in language education (Androutsopoulos & Tereick, 2016; Bou-Franch et al., 2012). I confirmed this while searching for empirical studies to include in this dissertation, as I had difficulty finding research that have used student—or teacher—created *YouTube* channels (or videos) to explore language and/or culture-related learning activities. However, I was able to find some sociocultural studies that have focused on using *YouTube* as a corpus of authentic language to explore linguistic variation, audience engagement and interaction, discourse structure, and language use in context.

For example, a study by Matachana López and Narváez Burbano (2022) explained how people position themselves on *YouTube* in terms of “the correct” Spanish in the United States. The researchers analyzed how linguistic ideology was disseminated on a *YouTube* channel aimed at

Spanish speakers in the US. While the channel’s creators claim their goal was to make the *Latinx*<sup>2</sup> community more visible and promote ideas of equality and identity diversity in the country, the researchers found linguistic ideologies in the videos that contradicted an inclusive and egalitarian stance, as the videos posted reinforce the idea of a hegemonic standard variety that people *should* speak: the Peninsular variety—known as *Castillian* Spanish or Spanish from Spain. In this sense, while the channel’s creators claim to be encouraging linguistic diversity, they are instead promoting the predominance of a certain variety and, in turn, reinforcing stigmatization and social hierarchy (Matachana López & Narváez Burbano, 2022). In light of these findings, it is worth asking whether teaching *only* a standard or international variety may do more harm than good.

Considering that Spanish is spoken as an official language in about 21 countries—and as a second language in many regions across the US—it may be counterproductive to focus on a standard variety, especially if we ignore the motivation, need, and interest that students have in learning the language. For example, suppose a student wants to spend a year in Argentina. There are definitely a handful of differences from the “the standard variety” that may become apparent as soon as they board their flight to go there. For this particular student, an exploration of authentic resources on the social web would allow them to familiarize themselves with specific linguistic (vocabulary, expressions, pronunciation) and pragmatic (greetings, social dynamics, requests for information) features. In this sense, the participatory Web and the massification of information and communication have played a positive role in language teaching and learning, as they have given us access to a number of authentic language and cultural encounters. Nevertheless, we must not forget that language standardization, correctness and policing have also proliferated in social networks; thus, promoting an inclusive approach to language variation in our classrooms can be a valuable exercise for students and teachers alike to raise awareness of the similarities, differences and particularities of the target language and culture.

This awareness is particularly important in the context of social media, where multiple languages converge. Benson’s (2015) study on translanguaging seems appropriate for this discussion. He defines translanguaging as “a range of practices that involve moving between or across languages, including code-switching, [and] multi-party conversations in which more than one language is used” (p. 91). In his study, translanguaging occurred when both English and Chinese were present

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<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of this gender-neutral form, see *The Our Languages blog* by the Government of Canada: <https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/blogue-blog/latinx-eng>

in *YouTube* videos (including L2 subtitles or translations), which he suggested prompted linguistic and cultural discussions in the video comments. Therefore, he aimed at finding evidence of translanguaging and interactional relationships among commenters in a dataset of videos with Chinese-English interactions. The video collection was created by searching for well-known videos in the context of the study (Hong Kong) and then by selecting suggested videos that appear on the right-hand side of the *YouTube* interface. The researcher then focused on videos with 500 or more comments, and categorized them into ten translanguaging genres (e.g., Chinese speaker singing in or teaching English and vice versa, English speaker talking about Chinese culture, English fansubbed song, among others). A total of 2,840 comments related to language or culture were extracted and coded according to 1) a taxonomy of interactional acts, 2) an exchange structure framework, and 3) stance marking categories.

The analysis showed that opinion and information processes were the most common acts of communication in the comments, which in theory are associated with interaction processes. In general, one could argue that *YouTube*'s commenting function is an invitation to video content creators and consumers to share and respond to information, so the findings were consistent with this perception. As for stance markers, verbs such as taught, learned, explained, etc. were found. According to Benson (2015), this stance marking “signals the degree to which commenters orient to commenting as a cognitive activity, in which information is a negotiable commodity” (p. 97). This exchange of information and negotiation of meaning in relation to language and culture is triggered by translanguaging in *YouTube* videos, according to the researcher. Moreover, he suggests that the genre of translanguaging may also play a role in the frequency and proportion of comments related to language and culture. For example, comments on the genre *Chinese speaker singing in English* had a large number of comments related to the singer herself, but few comments related to lingua-cultural aspects. This study offers an opportunity to consider engaging students in multilingual discussions—or in the analysis of those discussions—as a point of departure for understanding linguistic and cultural perspectives. In a multilingual and multicultural context such as that of Canadian post-secondary institutions, students can explore the ways in which the target language and culture are represented in *YouTube* videos and gain insights into the languages they share with other classmates.

Finally, Terantino (2011) describes the benefits of integrating *YouTube* into language teaching and learning as a means to “bridge the gap between satisfying the particular educational needs of the

students and meeting the demands of foreign language education” (p. 10). The researcher presents *YouTube* as a pedagogical tool to “satisfy” the needs of language teachers and students through examples of fun videos that bring language and culture closer to students, videos created by student and teachers to engage learners in the target language, and other collaborative projects using *YouTube*. Although his article does not report experimental research, it highlights the pedagogical potential of YouTube for addressing students’ needs in the digital world. These needs are summarized in a list of digital natives’ educational preferences, adapted from Prensky’s (2001) description of digital natives (p. 11). While these principles were published more than two decades ago, they still show some resemblance to the preferences of today’s students, who want to:

1. receive information at twitch speed,
2. be able to multi-task,
3. have hands-on activities,
4. have graphics before text,
5. have random access to information,
6. be networked socially,
7. play games rather than do serious work, and
8. have frequent rewards.

It could be argued that most of these wants are commonly met in our modernized educational context, or at least that we have the necessary tools to address virtually all of them. A simple example of using *YouTube* videos in our courses is to align them with the content objectives. If there are a number of required readings as part of the curriculum, it is very likely that there is a video on *YouTube* related to that topic—we just have to make sure it comes from a credible and reliable source. To illustrate, one of the modules in my advanced Spanish course (Figure 3) was based on the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). As part of the learning resources in this module, I integrated *YouTube* videos posted on the official UNESCO channel that provided information and explanations in Spanish on various topics included in the 17 objectives (Figure 4). These videos introduced learners to spoken examples of various forms of Spanish, accompanied by online and offline comprehension and expression exercises.

ESP3992 - Español avanzado II

Course Admin Content Assignments Announcements Zoom Grades Calendar Classlist Class Progress Glossary

## Módulo 1: Desarrollo sostenible

Search Topics

- Overview
- Bookmarks
- Course Schedule
- Table of Contents 260
  - Calendario académico por módulos
    - Hidden
    - Módulo 1: Desarrollo sostenible 4
      - Hidden
    - Módulo 2: Arte hispanoamericano 4
      - Hidden
    - Módulo 3: Derechos humanos 4
      - Hidden

Add dates and restrictions...

En este módulo exploraremos el alcance y las implicaciones de la economía sostenible.

Upload / Create Add Activity Bulk Edit

Semana 1: del 10 al 16 de enero Web Page

Semana 2: del 17 al 23 de enero

Figure 3. Course module sample for advanced Spanish course

**OBJETIVOS DE DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE**

Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible - qué son y cómo alcanzarlos

UNESCO en español 118 k suscriptores

58 k 58 k 58 k 58 k 58 k

5.5 M de vistas hace 7 años

¿Qué es la Agenda 2030 para el desarrollo sostenible? ¿qué objetivos plantea? Te lo explicamos en seis minutos en esta animación realizada por el Centro UNESCO del País Vasco - UNESCO Etxea, con apoyo de los Ayuntamientos de Vitoria-Gasteiz y Bilbao, y la Agencia Vasca de Cooperación al Desarrollo. El audiovisual pretende dar a conocer la Agenda 2030 y los ODS en su contexto global y local, y de qué manera nos interpela, contribuyendo a crear una sociedad más informada y consciente, así c ... más

7,077 comentarios Ordenar por

Figure 4. Institutional video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCKH5xk8X-g>)

### 3.3.5 Blogs

This last section of the chapter is dedicated to blogs. I have chosen to focus on this tool because of its versatility and adaptability to different pedagogical needs, tasks, and contexts. I will first describe blogs as a digital tool and then as a digital genre. Then, I will describe some experimental studies on the use of blogs for language learning.

Web logs or weblogs (commonly referred to as ‘blogs’) are *Web 2.0* tools that emerged in 1997 (Blood, 2000) as online journals that users created and edited with their own ideas (Campbell, 2003). Communication in blogs occurs mainly asynchronously, and advanced technological knowledge is not necessary to create entries and/or to personalize entries (DuBravac, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2003). Blog posts contain longer written texts than other digital tools (Elola & Oskoz, 2019), they appear in reverse chronological order, and they usually cover a diverse range of topics that can be grouped in sub-registers (e.g., travel blogs, news blogs, opinion blogs, etc.) (Biber et al., 2015). As for blog authors or *bloggers*, they can create their private or public blog space(s) and personalize them with multimedia features such as links, hyperlinks, audio, video, and images (L. Lee, 2010; Rivens Mompean, 2010). Most blogging platforms are free, and some are multilingual (Murray & Hourigan, 2008). Although blogs are primarily textual and visual (Elola & Oskoz, 2019), multimodality has contributed to the development of audioblogs, videoblogs (vlogs) and photoblogs (phlogs) (Negueruela-Azarola, 2009).

Compared to other social tools like social media, wikis, and forums, blogs are more author-centric. Miyazoe and Anderson’s (2010) table below (Table 1) provides general characteristics of these three digital tools (forums, blogs, and wikis). Structure, management, editing, work mediation, and mood-related orientation are features that denote the author-based features of blogs. Thus, blogs “provide a new medium of individualized self-expression” (Sykes et al., 2008, p. 530), offering learners a personal web space for creation, editing, organization, sharing, and commenting. This level of autonomy should not be taken as an indicator that blogs are not social tools. On the contrary, blogs are highly interactive and networked platforms because one of their main features is the comments section (Godwin-Jones, 2003), where readers can react to content, express their own opinions, and respond to comments posted in their own entries. These interactions define the dynamics in the blogosphere: blog authors connect with online communities to exchange ideas (Pascual, 2018), and assume an active social role while expressing themselves (Elola & Oskoz, 2019).

Table 1. Miyazoe and Anderson's (2010) table with characteristics of forums, blogs, and wikis (p. 186)

Table 1

Characteristics of forums, blogs, and wikis.

	Forums	Blogs	Wikis
Time orientation	Past and present	Past to present	Present
Presentation	Threaded	Reverse chronological	Final product
Structure	Controlled by moderator	Controlled by author	Open
Administrators	One/many	One	Many
Editing	Not allowed	By creator	By many
Consciousness orientation	Process	Process	Product
Work mediation	Collective	Individual	Collective
Activity orientation	Exchange	Express	Change
Mood-relevant orientation	Cooperative	Individual	Collaborative

Many of the studies described in the previous sections have highlighted the potential of social software to promote and enhance collaborative learning. While it has been found that scaffolding and social interactions is considered critical for learning (Ching-Wen et al., 2012; Li, 2021), we must acknowledge that some students are not always comfortable working in groups. In fact, many of them prefer individual writing because it gives them more control over writing style, language use, content, organization, and decision making in terms of time management and personalization (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). In this sense, blogs can be easily adapted to promote both self-expression through personal blogs, and/or to foster co-construction of L2 knowledge through collective blogs, comments, and reactions (L. Lee, 2010).

This hybrid nature is precisely one of the most attractive pedagogical features of blogs: micropublishing in blogs can occur individually and/or collectively depending on the author(s)' needs, preferences, purposes, style, etc., which makes it a very flexible and adaptable digital tool. In a language course, for example, the curriculum can be designed with modules or assignments that require the creation of individual and collective blog entries. Individually, students can use blogs as a personal journal or as an electronic portfolio to showcase their course work (Godwin-Jones, 2003); collectively, students can create a collaborative blog on a topic of common interest to explain, argue, describe, or persuade readers. When using blogs individually, students personalize content and make decisions about their own work schedule and language use. When using blogs collaboratively, students can negotiate entries (posts), content, and style. Both types of blogs can be kept as public or private, so the types of audiences can be tailored to the level of privacy desired in the course.

Whether blog writing involves individual and/or collaborative work, it is essential that students become aware that the integration of digital tools involves a series of social and linguistic genre-based conventions that define the production and interpretation of texts (M. Gonçalves, 2014). Since genres—traditional or digital, influence both the production and reception of texts, students need to understand the type of product expected, as well as the linguistic and non-linguistic features associated with different digital tools. For Hyland (2007), “the reader’s chances of interpreting the writer’s purpose are increased if the writer takes the trouble to anticipate what the reader might be expecting based on previous texts they have read of the same kind” (p. 149). This means that when writers communicate their ideas through a particular tool (e.g., chat, forum, wiki, blog), they are expected to convey their message with certain characteristics that readers associate with that specific genre.

#### *3.3.5.1 The Blog as a Digital Genre*

People who partake in social web communication are generally aware of the linguistic and paralinguistic characteristics of each genre, which sets expectations for writers and readers alike. For example, when we read the news in online newspapers, social media, or print sources, our expectations as readers vary not only in terms of the formatting or register, but also in terms of our navigability and interactivity (e.g., the ability to post comments, access to hyperlinks, visualization of advertisements, etc.). While these variable characteristics make it difficult to provide an exhaustive classification of digital genres, it is possible to identify and describe a genre by its layout, its function, and its linguistic features (M. Gonçalves, 2014; Pascual, 2018).

The blog genre, in particular, is considered a highly interactive genre because it facilitates exchanges between authors and readers, as well as among readers themselves (M. Gonçalves, 2014). Blogging is one of the most common written digital genres used by students in their personal lives (Elola & Oskoz, 2019) and a valuable channel for individual authorship and for networking with online communities in the public domain (Sykes et al., 2008). However, this influence of public and private perspectives makes it challenging to construct a fixed or universal model of blogs and blogging (Murray & Hourigan, 2008), which is further exacerbated by the scarcity of information about the source, authorship, and purpose of communication on the Web (Biber et al., 2015). For instance, users may find documents that are familiar to them (e.g., a newspaper story, a Wikipedia article, a website), but they may ignore the register category assigned to such documents. The register is important because it has a direct impact on discourse. Biber et al. (2015) explored the

composition of web registers (or genres) through Web-As-Corpus (WAC) research. The researchers adopted the term *register* instead of *genre* because to them, the former denotes “a systematic functional association with the situational context” (p. 13), while the latter is mainly associated with conventional (rather than functional) genre-based perspectives. In this dissertation, however, I retain the term *genre* because it is more commonly used in the literature, and it is more easily associated with specific types of online and offline written products.

Relevant to my study is a subsequent web corpus analysis conducted by Biber and Egbert (2018), in which they analyzed a random sample of 48,000 web documents, yielding eight registers (general categories), and 25 sub-registers (sub-categories). The largest category was the narrative category with 36% of the documents (17,692 texts); it is claimed that the prevalence of narrative texts follows the prominence of recounting past events in online discourse. Biber and Egbert (2018) classified the blog within the Narrative register, and the travel blog as one of its sub-register categories. Within these narrative sub-registers, the personal blog occupied the second place with 2,957 texts, while the travel blog occupied the fifth place with 371.

Based on the researchers’ analysis, narrative registers are characterized as being produced in written formats, by single authors (or sets of authors), for a general audience, and with the purpose of narrating past events. These characteristics are relevant to my study because the blog sub-genre examined in this dissertation is the *Travel Blog*. This type of blog was chosen because, compared to other sub-registers, the travel blog can be more easily related to students’ past or future experiences (e.g., completed trips or travel plans). In addition, it allows students to share (personal) experiences and opinions with an adjustable level of involvement: learners have the option to talk about themselves or to publish from a third person perspective. It also engages learners in creating texts for a specific real purpose and with a realistic audience in mind (e.g., authentic travelers interested in a specific destination). Travel blogs are composed of travel posts that provide readers with “a description of the place and the experiences that a person lived, so that others can make the most of their experiences or can enjoy themselves by reading on topics they are fond of” (Pascual, 2018). Working with a specific digital genre on a specific topic and for a particular purpose may provide learners with a framework for identifying genre-based structures and reproducing discursive features. Therefore, it is important to investigate, as a first step, how students interpret different digital genres, and how they use linguistic and semiotic resources to develop genre-based communication in their L2.

Research has reported on the pedagogical benefits of working with blogs for language learning, as they contribute to learners' autonomy, motivation, personal reflection, and self-expression (Comas-Quinn et al., 2009; L. Lee, 2010; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Rivens Mompean, 2010; Vurdien, 2013). Blogs have also been found to help create contextualized, student-centered learning environments (Noel, 2015), refine students' ICT competencies (Murray & Hourigan, 2008), and promote student interaction, community building, and collaborative writing and learning (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; L. Lee, 2010; Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Rojas Álvarez, 2011; Vurdien, 2013). For instance, Rivens Mompean (2010) conducted a study with 19 students of French language teachers who were learning English as a foreign language in France. She examined students' motivation and interactions, as well as their reflections on the teacher's role and feedback. The task consisted in students practicing written expression by keeping a blog in groups of three or four. The approach was both quantitative and qualitative to analyze students' blog contributions and comments, as well as the quality, originality, and complexity of the blog's content. The researcher found that blogs were useful at both the personal/individual level and the interactional/collaborative levels. On the one hand, blogs served as a motivational tool to produce authentic content in which students wrote about a topic of interest and integrated different modes of communication (e.g., pictures, links to *YouTube* videos); on the other hand, they served as a collaborative space for (co)creating, posting, commenting, and responding to peers' information. Other findings were related to the instructional and constructivist approach to the blogging task: learners showed engagement in the task beyond the required (instructed) number and content of posts; and peer collaboration went beyond cooperative work, as more advanced learners helped those with weaker skills (scaffolding).

Murray and Hourigan (2008), for their part, focused not only on *socio-cognitive* approaches to language learning, but also on *expressivist* ones. The former places emphasis on group work where learners can develop their problem-solving and higher order thinking skills, while the latter is related to the writer's "creative voice", their written fluency, and their self-exploration (p. 87). The researchers wanted to draw conclusions about the use of blogs as spaces for individual expression, so the task was for students to reflect on their own language learning process and create a blog to share their experiences. This means that the students were free to express themselves and produce content on the blog without any restrictions other than focusing on discussing their language learning experiences. The participants in the study were 42 students enrolled in a language and technology course. The researchers found that the participants'

language performance was low in terms of punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary, which they attributed to the learners' focus on communication rather than accuracy. They also found interesting differences between language levels: intermediate students posted more descriptive content, while advanced students posted more critically reflective content.

Lee (2010) also investigated students' reflective and interactive writing using blogs. The participants were 17 students enrolled in an advanced Spanish course. They were required to keep a personal blog and to post entries based on a series of specific tasks (i.e., assigned readings, free topics, podcasts, and oral recordings) over the course of one semester. The blogs were intended to serve as a space for sharing ideas and interacting with peers. Interestingly, the students reported that they had not used blogs for language learning before, so they received some training on how to use the blogging platform to be used. The teacher provided detailed feedback on the grammar and vocabulary in the students' blog entries, and they corrected errors after review. The purpose of Lee's study was to examine the affordances of using personal blogs and to measure student perceptions of its use and the role of task and feedback. To do this, she analyzed the blog entries and conducted a survey and some interviews. She found that over 80% of the participants preferred writing on blogs to writing on a piece of paper, and they expressed that blogging was "more fun and less stressful" than traditional formal writing (p. 219). Students also reported that using blogs regularly was beneficial for improving their language learning skills, especially their writing skills. Feedback from the teacher and peers was also found to be motivating and useful for students, encouraging language improvement and reflective thinking. They also agree that blog tasks promoted "the meaningful use of the target language" (p. 220) and the development of their language skills. Additionally, students showed positive attitudes toward using blogs for peer interaction and felt more engaged in the task because their audience was not only the teacher, but also their classmates. This, according to Lee, is an indicator of self-awareness in L2 writing.

Other studies have focused on students' perceptions and motivations for using blogs. Ozkan (2015) found that 88.6% of the participants in his study thought blogs were useful for individual writing, while a relatively higher number of participants (95.5%) found wikis more useful for collaborative writing in language learning. Similarly, Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) investigated learners' preferences for the simultaneous use of forums, blogs, and wikis for language learning, and they found that students believed that wikis, blogs, and forums were useful tools for improving their L2 writing skills—with blogs being their second preferred web tool. Miyazoe and Anderson also

reported a strong correlation between the words ‘blog’, ‘write’ and ‘myself’, and a higher lexical density in blogs, indicating a richer development of vocabulary compared to findings in forum posts. What is more, the findings suggest that learners “may have begun to acquire some level of differentiation in their writing styles between forum and blog postings” (p. 191), which is significant in terms of considering genre-based knowledge development for L2 writing.

Next, I would like to provide a more detailed review of a study that shares three main elements with my study: blog exposure, blog creation, and students’ perceptions taken pre- and post-task.

Ducate and Lomicka (2008) implemented two blog projects with French and German students at the university level. The two projects together lasted for one year: during the first semester, students read authentic blogs; during the second semester, they wrote blogs. Ducate and Lomicka’s study aimed at analyzing students’ self-expression, their progress in reading and writing blogs, and their reactions to blogging. A total of 29 students participated in the first semester’s project (20 students of German and nine students of French), and 21 students participated in the second project (ten students of German and 11 students of French). Data was gathered from several sources: pre- and post-semester questionnaires, written reports, the final presentation, students’ blog posts and comments, and focus group interviews.

During the first semester, students read authentic blogs written by native speakers. In this project, students used weekly worksheets to complete a series of activities, such as summarizing information about the blog author, recording the number of entries the student read, and writing a brief summary of selected content and comments. At the end of the semester, students presented the blogger and the topic of their choice to their classmates. For the second project, students posted weekly entries about the class readings and commented on their classmates’ posts. Both the students’ blogs and their comments on other students’ blogs were assessed using a rubric. For the blog posts, the rubric focused on three main aspects: content, organization and coherence, and grammar and spelling. For comments, there were two aspects in the rubric: content and discourse strategies for showing (dis)agreement. In general, the project was found to help students improve their reading and writing skills, as well as their L2 vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge. These improvements were deduced from the qualitatively analysis of blog data, focus group interviews, and questionnaires.

Interestingly, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) described eight steps in the process of reading and writing blogs, which included exploring blogs, selecting bloggers and topics, and constructing a

foreign language blogging community and identity. This last step is relevant to my dissertation as I also intend to discuss the impact a blogging task can have on students' self-perceptions as L2 learners, and their potential interactions with(in) the language learning community. The researchers focused on two students from their study to draw conclusions about the findings. One of the students did not seem to be very involved in class discussions, but she was very expressive and enthusiastic in her blog posts. While the other student participated a bit more in class, he was not as involved as he was in his blog postings. According to the researchers, both students shared personal feelings and ideas that would have not have otherwise come up "due to the restrictive nature of many class discussions," which indicates that blogs "offered a forum where students were comfortable expressing themselves more openly than in class, perhaps because they had more time to think about what they wanted to write and due to the personal nature of blogs" (p. 18).

As for students' perceptions, the questionnaires revealed that about half of the participants were familiar with blogs, while very few of them read blogs regularly, and almost none of them had used them for academic purposes. Most of the students agreed that blogs can be useful for interacting with native speakers and for practicing language skills. In addition, a sense of community in the was built among classmates because everyone was required to comment in the target language on each other's blog posts. Ducate and Lomicka's study supports the importance of exposing and preparing students to understand and deal with the genre-based correlations through reading and writing (multimodal) texts.

As seen in this chapter, most of the studies of the use of *Web 2.0* technologies have focused on collaborative writing and social interaction, which makes sense given the nature of the Social Web. However, as many of these studies show, learners also value the opportunity to work independently due to time constraints, personal preferences, the difficulty balancing different paces and styles. This literature review also revealed that very few studies have examined the genre-based features students create when composing with digital tools. Therefore, we lack a perspective from which to observe what learners understand about digital genres, how they interact with(in) them, and what they can produce in different genre-based contexts, tasks, and situations. This seems particularly relevant in light of artificial intelligence and its unprecedented creative capabilities.

## Chapter 4: L2 Writing and (Intelligent) Writing Tools

### 4.1 Overview

The rapid and far-reaching capabilities of digital tools—adapted to or created to be used in language learning—have led many teachers to question whether formal language learning will still be necessary in the future. In this regard, Godwin-Jones (2019) presents three possible scenarios: 1) language learning will no longer be needed, 2) language learning will be needed but not formal instruction, and 3) a blend between formal and informal instruction will be needed in language learning. Regarding the first scenario, the author argues that while developments in artificial intelligence have become widely popular because of their impact on digital language services, the social component and the multimodal features inherent in real language communication are still not achieved by these tools/applications despite their software sophistication. Regarding the second scenario, Godwin-Jones explains that it is true that so-called “self-instructed learners” can definitely gain exposure to the L2 (even unintentionally) by engaging in online communities (e.g., gaming platforms, discussion forums, audio-video streaming). However, he also affirms that it can be challenging for informal or independent learners to select and organize available resources, to find and access materials in languages other than English, and to adapt the content available online to different levels of proficiency. Finally, regarding the third scenario—to which this dissertation subscribes—suggests that “formal language instruction will persist only if we as language educators embrace technological progress and provide opportunities for our students to engage in extramural language development” (Godwin-Jones, 2019, p. 4). In other words, while language education will still be important in the future, it is crucial to integrate online resources into formal instruction in order to successfully address the varied needs of second/additional language learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is a common conception that the worlds of work and education have been greatly impacted by advances in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). Many are being considered at risk of being replaced, either partially or fully by machines, while others are being transformed. For instance, jobs related routine and repetitive tasks, such as data entry, basic manufacturing, and warehouse sorting, are becoming automated through technologies like robotics and automated software systems. Self-checkout machines in supermarkets, for example, have reduced the need for traditional cashiers, and automated assembly lines in many parts of industry now perform tasks that were once done manually. What is more, automation has changed the nature of many other

professions rather than replacing them. Journalists, for instance, now use AI tools to assist with fact-checking and data analysis, yet they remain essential for tasks requiring judgment, interpretation, and creativity. The same can be said about teachers who are seeking ways to enhance teaching practices through the integration of technology.

For Bates (2019), the impact of such a dichotomy varies depending on the level of education: people with lower levels of education may be most affected in the workforce, while those at the other end of the spectrum—higher levels of education—are likely to find jobs where machines do not perform as well. However, Eloundou et al. (2024) caution against long-term predictions and affirm that “there is still no clear understanding of how ‘exposure’ to AI systems will translate to real-world impacts on labor demand, wages, inequality, job quality, and other key outcomes” (p. 1308). For the time being, Godwin-Jones’s (2019) description of a teaching and learning scenario in which formal language education integrates technology seems reasonable now that some traditional tasks as the ones mentioned above are becoming more usually completed through automation, while other social and pragmatic tasks will most likely continue to be enriched by human expertise.

Undoubtedly, integrating AI-enhanced learning scenarios into language education can be a challenging task, to say the least. However, the potential benefits of this technology are well worth the effort. A good starting point, according to Veletsianos (2023), is for educational institutions to establish clear guidelines for the use of AI, and to support teachers “in learning about and experimenting with the technology, rather than controlling and penalizing its use” (p. 3). The 2023 Ontario Report (Johnson, 2023) was innovative, compared to the reports presented in [Chapter 2](#) in that it included not only responses from post-secondary administrators and teachers, but also from other staff members, such as instructional designers and instructional developers. The report also went beyond topics related to digital learning (e.g., trends, technologies, and student and teacher attitudes and preferences) to include questions about AI. A significant number (85%) of respondents to the AI questions agreed that this technology will be normalized in education, while 86% reported that it will be used as a study tool by students. Nevertheless, it was found that there are still growing concerns about academic integrity and teaching practices. Figure 5 shows the statements with which respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed.

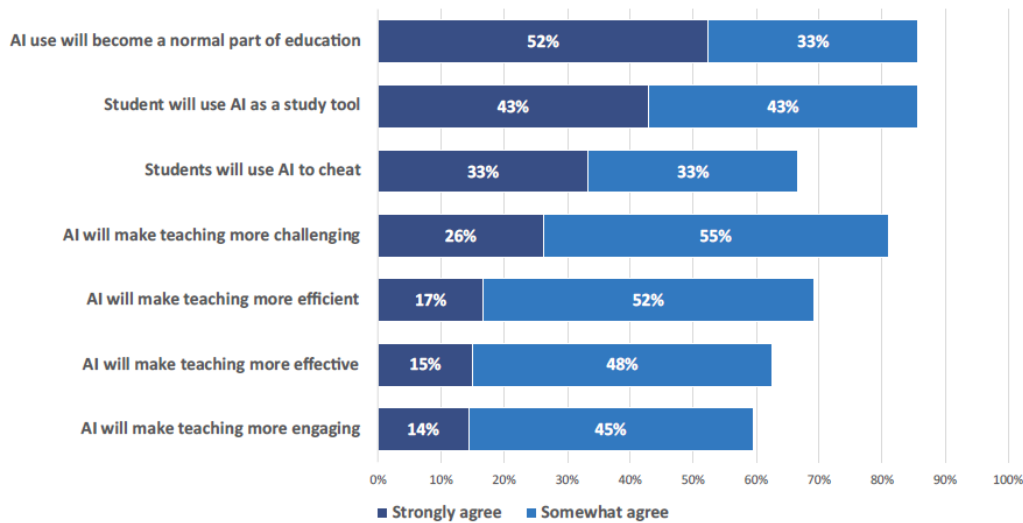


Figure 5. Potential positive and negative impacts of AI at post-secondary institutions (Johnson, 2023), used under CC BY-ND 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>).

Despite well-founded concerns, many surveyed teachers in Ontario claimed that “AI tools can be used to enhance teaching and learning, improve efficiencies, and offer new opportunities for students and instructors” (Veletsianos, 2023, p. 7). In order to better understand the potential of writing assistance tools to improve teaching and learning, it is first necessary to define some key concepts related to the field of AI, which have evolved since the 1950s (IBM, 2024c).

## 4.2 Key Concepts

### 4.2.1 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is “technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy” (IBM, 2024c). AI systems use automation to “optimize and solve complex tasks that humans have historically done, such as facial and speech recognition, decision-making and translation” (IBM Data and AI Team, 2023). AI technology can recognize human language, identify images, respond to voice and/or text requests, make predictions and recommendations, and perform other functions that mimic human behavior. This can be achieved through *natural language processing* (NLP), a field in the study of human language that combines computer science and computational linguistics to “deal with the problem of natural language of communicating with the computers” (Khurana et al., 2023, p. 3714). Natural language processing is embedded in many applications that are present in the recent literature on second/additional language learning because it allows

computers to “process and appropriately respond to human language” (UNESCO, 2022a, p. 10) as well as to translate from one language to another.

### 4.2.2 Machine Learning

Machine learning (ML) is a subset of AI that encompasses “a broad range of techniques that enable computers to learn from and make inferences based on data without being explicitly programmed for specific tasks” (IBM, 2024c). Machine learning can “imitate the way that humans learn, gradually improving its accuracy” (IBM, n.d.-b), which means that it can rely on human intervention (non-deep learning), or it can “ingest unstructured data in its raw form” (IBM, n.d.-b) including text or images and make decisions about it without human intervention. The latter is known as *deep learning* which uses deep neural networks that “closely simulate the complex decision-making power of the human brain” (IBM, 2024c).

### 4.2.3 Generative AI

Generative AI (GenAI) refers to “deep learning models that can create complex original content—such as long-form text, high-quality images, realistic video or audio and more—in response to a user’s prompt or request” (IBM, 2024c). Generative AI draws from training data to generate different variations of similar content in the original data to create new work. This work can be in the form of sentences, images, audio, video, etc. Popular generative AI tools like OpenAI’s *ChatGPT*, Google’s *Gemini* (formerly *Bard*), and Microsoft’s *Copilot* rely on deep learning models that identify and encode large datasets to understand and respond with relevant content to human queries. While research into the use of GenAI for language learning is still considered to be in its infancy (Joo, 2024), the potential of these AI tools for language learning is already expected to be beyond what we can imagine.

## 4.3 L2 Writing with (Intelligent) Writing Tools

Writing, according to Godwin-Jones (2022), “is a complex endeavor, combining low level (spelling, mechanics) and higher-level skills related to content organization, logical sequencing, and stylistic appropriateness” (p. 6). For L2 learners, writing presents additional challenges that go beyond the linguistics and land in social, cultural, and pragmatic knowledge. However, when students express themselves through writing, they have more opportunities to reflect on, edit, and reformulate they work. This can help them focus more easily on language forms and other conventions compared to speaking skills (Roca de Larios & Coyle, 2021). Since writing development helps L2 learners

improve their communication skills in general, the fact that there are “intelligent” tools that can revise, spellcheck, translate, and generate texts is causing both excitement and concern in the academic community because the role of such tools in formal education has not been clearly defined yet.

As discussed in [section 2.3](#), computer-assisted language learning applications have greatly contributed to transforming educational practices since the end of the last century. One of the most prominent concepts in CALL theory, research, and methodology has been the role of the computer as a tutor or tool. Levy’s (1997) work was significant in the *tutor* versus *tool* framework (Hubbard & Siskin, 2004). This framework explained that the role of computers as tutor or tool was differentiated by the assessment of student performance: “the tutor evaluates, the tool does not” (Levy, 1997, p. 180). Hubbard and Siskin (2004) summarizes the dichotomy as follows:

In the *tutor role*, the computer evaluates the learner, controls the learning process and temporarily substitutes for the human teacher. In the *tool* role, the computer does not evaluate; rather, it increases the efficiency or effectiveness of actions related to learning and may involve the teacher and learner both (pp. 448-449).

With the advent of AI devices and applications, the dichotomy between tutor and tool has converged into an exceptionally capable model. Computer systems have become increasingly effective at customizing and adapting interactions to meet the specific needs of users. For example, AI chatbots can take on the *tutor* role to “organize questions and answers with feedback for students” (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2021, p. 3). This allows students to work independently while teachers focus on more interpersonal activities. As *tools*, these conversational agents can help students produce content more easily, search for options and alternatives for specific words, learn cognates, monitor their writing process, and improve their overall writing performance (S.-M. Lee, 2022). Training and encouraging students to understand the capabilities and limitations of intelligent writing assistance can contribute to a paradigm shift in which digital tools do not necessarily do the work *for* learners, but work *with* them to achieve their learning goals.

In order to prepare students to work *with* AI technology, it is important to understand its capabilities and limitations. AI-powered applications have rapidly expanded beyond the text realm to include visual perception, speech recognition, behavior detection, realistic contextualization,

large data processing, and problem solving, just to name a few (Gkountara & Prasad, 2022; Oluwafemi Ayotunde et al., 2023; Ouyang & Jiao, 2021). These affordances have opened up promising avenues for language learners to explore other types of interactions and to improve their communication skills (Godwin-Jones, 2022). However, concerns have arisen about data bias, cyberattacks and the so-called *hallucinations* (Muñoz-Basols & Fuertes Gutiérrez, 2024), in which AI-generated content is inaccurate and fictional but appears plausible (IBM, 2024a). The unguided—or misguided—use of these technologies may give rise to many other risks. Some of them are summarized by Weidinger et al. (2021) in their taxonomy of social and ethical risks, among which we can find social stereotypes and discrimination, toxic language, privacy concerns, false or misleading information, fraud and scams, among others.

For this reason, many technology companies—like teachers should—encourage users to revise and verify information generated by GenAI applications (Microsoft, n.d.). This is important not only to avoid misleading or false information, but also to ensure the accuracy of information. For example, research has highlighted criticisms of machine translation due to output inaccuracies (S.-M. Lee & Briggs, 2021), especially when handling complex linguistic expressions and failing to capture contextual and pragmatic nuances (Alharbi, 2023; Alrajhi, 2022). Moreover, AI’s near-human translations and human-like assistance (Alharbi, 2023) have raised concerns about “the authenticity of submitted student writing, as well as the absence of learning accompanying copy and paste assignment completion” (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 6), implying that L2 students take the machine’s output at face value and use it in their own texts. When students do not revise content produced by or with the help of AI, they not only raise questions of authorship and authenticity, but they also miss out on learning opportunities and on the development of valuable skills such as critical thinking and metalinguistics (Godwin-Jones, 2022; Hellmich & Vinall, 2023). All of these limitations have—with good reason—led to controversy and reluctance in the teaching community towards the use of “intelligent tools” in the L2 writing classroom (Hellmich, 2021; S.-M. Lee, 2022).

Therefore, it is more important than ever to adopt a critical stance toward the use of AI in language education in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, not only because it contributes to the development of metacognitive skills (Gkountara & Prasad, 2022), but also because it helps foster digital citizenship to create a learning community where students understand the importance of evaluating their own writing processes. In this regard, the UNESCO K-12 AI Curricula Report (2022a), states that:

the world's citizens need to understand what the impact of AI might be, what AI can and cannot do, when AI is useful, when its use should be questioned, and how it might be steered for the public good. This requires everyone to achieve some level of competency with regard to AI, including knowledge, understanding, skills, and value orientation. Together, these might be called "AI literacy" (p. 11).

Hence, to foster AI literacy, it is necessary to have knowledgeable teachers and staff who can guide students in the appropriate use of writing assistance (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023; Liu & Yu, 2022) because there is "too much nuance, exceptions, and specialized expertise that go into writing that call for human judgment" (Microsoft, n.d.). Therefore, it is worth understanding the potential of AI technologies, regardless of whether teachers choose to integrate them into their classrooms.

This chapter presents empirical studies on the use of (intelligent) writing assistance tools for L2 language instruction. The sub-sections are organized according to Alharbi's (2023) categorization of AI-powered writing support systems for foreign language learning, within which the tools examined in this dissertation can be classified. His systematic review of the literature identified four main categories:

- Automated writing evaluation
- Automated written corrective feedback
- (AI-enabled) machine translation
- Automatic text generation

It should be noted that these categories are neither exhaustive nor precise, as intelligent writing tools and applications can perform more than one of the specified tasks; some text generators can create original work, but they can also be used as translators or text evaluators. Moreover, while Alharbi (2023) classifies automated writing evaluation (AWE) and automated written corrective feedback (AWCF) as two separate categories, several researchers affirm that automated written corrective feedback is facilitated via automated writing evaluation systems (Barrot, 2021b; Fan, 2023; Tan et al., 2023; Woodworth & Barkaoui, 2020). In Barrot's words (2021b), "AWCF refers to the information provided by an AWE tool to its users about the grammatical lapses in their written work" (p. 2). That is why the empirical studies involving the use of AWE and AWCF tools for language learning will be presented combined under one single category.

### 4.3.1 Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) and Automated Written Corrective Feedback (AWCF)

Assessing and evaluating student work can provide measures of learning indicators and learning opportunities for students. Corrective feedback (CF) and written corrective feedback (WCF) are ways in which teachers inform students primarily about lexical and grammatical errors. WCF can be focused or unfocused, depending on whether it concentrates on every error or on selected errors, and, according to Kang and Han (2021), it can also range from implicit to explicit. The former refers to “indirect feedback that indicates the existence of an error but without providing the correct form”, while the latter is “direct feedback that not only indicates the locus of an error but also provides the corresponding correct form” (p. 213).

Unfortunately, assessing student work in a meaningful way and providing valuable feedback can be difficult and time-consuming for teachers. In this sense, the advent of automated writing evaluation (AWE) and automated written corrective feedback (AWCF) has helped teachers to obtain and provide immediate feedback on students’ work, which has reduced the workload and time spent on correction. AWE has also enabled students to take a more active role in the revising and evaluating their own work (Tan et al., 2023). In addition, AWE systems have helped reframe the idea of assessment and feedback as a final step in the learning experience to include it as part of the learning process in which students can also take control and develop metacognitive skills to work with technology to assess themselves and plan strategies for improvement in constructing a final product.

Automated writing evaluation software integrates thesauri, rubrics, and dictionaries (Hockly, 2018; Warschauer & Grimes, 2008). Spellcheckers, such as those embedded in many word processors (e.g., Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc.), are also included in this category because they are considered to provide written corrective feedback. In a survey study on the use of dictionaries and other digital resources, Jin and Deifell (2013) found that the preferred online dictionaries and tools for students of Spanish were *WordReference*, Google (specifically *Google Translate*), and *SpanishDict*, in that order. Tight’s (2017) study partially supports these findings, but in their study, *Google Translate* ranked above *WordReference* and *SpanishDict*.

Regarding spellcheckers, Blázquez-Carretero (2023) conducted an interesting study comparing the effectiveness of a pedagogically designed spellchecker targeting the most common spelling errors made by Spanish learners to that of Microsoft Word spellchecker. The results showed that both the

pedagogic spellchecker (PSC) and Microsoft Word (MW) detected over 80% of the spelling mistakes made by learners in the corpus analyzed (60 essays). However, the PSC detected more errors related to L2 learning and was able to provide more quality feedback than the MW. For example, in cases of incorrect capitalization, the MW often accepted them as nouns, whereas the PSC flagged them as errors in the cases where this type of capitalization had been labeled as an L2 orthographic error in the database training. These and other software applications designed by teacher-researchers to provide written corrective feedback (e.g., text annotators) are valuable didactic tools for supporting students' L2 writing competence. Furthermore, Woodworth and Barkaoui (2020) affirm that “AWE systems should not be confused with online grammar checkers such as *Grammarly* ([www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com)) and *LanguageTool* ([languagetool.org](http://languagetool.org) [<https://languagetool.org/>])” (p. 236). The authors affirm that while certain grammar checkers offer instant feedback and metalinguistic explanations for some errors, “they cannot be moderated by the teacher, do not evaluate writing quality, and do not include any portfolio and class management tools” that some AWE systems possess (p. 237).

However, many studies on the use of AWE systems for second/additional language writing have examined *Grammarly* as one of the most commonly used AWE systems in academic settings, along with *Criterion* and *Pigai* (Feng & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2022; Liu & Yu, 2022). *Grammarly* has attracted the attention of researchers because it can “supply corrections and suggestions continuously and concurrently as a text is in the process of being written” (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 8). One such study was conducted by Ranalli and Yamashita (2022), who compared the affordances of *Grammarly* and the *Microsoft Word NLP* processor (MS-NLP) in terms of error flagging and timing of delivery. The researchers conducted two studies: one to examine the feedback provided by both tools in terms of error flagging, and the other to examine the timing of error flagging. Both studies compared the same texts produced by L2 learners. The first study compared 68 essays written in English by international students. The results showed that *Grammarly* flagged 1,412 items, while the MS-NLP flagged 780 items. Precision rates were higher for the MS-NLP than for *Grammarly* (.92 and .88 respectively). However, correction rates were slightly higher for the latter (.83) than for the former (.81). Some other differences the researchers observed were in the way the two systems classified error types, with *Grammarly* being the one with more error type categories.

Another aspect the researchers compared was flaggings related to the ten most common L2 written errors in English according to the *Cambridge Learners Corpus*, for which *Grammarly* produced over ten times more flaggings (856) than MS-NLP (81). In the second study, two short essays written by 20 students in an undergraduate English as a second language course were collected. Each student wrote one essay using the MS-NLP, and the other using the *Grammarly* plug-in activated in the MS Word. For the MS-NLP tool “only spelling and “format consistency” errors (e.g., missing or extra spaces) would be identified”, while for the *Grammarly* plug-in “only the spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure checks were activated” (Ranalli & Yamashita, 2022, pp. 11–12). The timing difference for both tools was measured based on whether the flagging occurred when the writer was typing or if it occurred earlier in the text. This is to say that the researchers measured “the elapsed time between (a) completion of the text that would be flagged and (b) the flagging itself” (p. 12). It was found that only 21% of flaggings occurred at the point of inscription with *Grammarly*, while in MS-NLP were about 87%. The scale tips the other way for flaggings earlier in the text with roughly 79% for *Grammarly* and 11% for MS-NLP.

Overall, *Grammarly* was found to provide “a much larger and more diverse set of error types representing both common problems for L2 writers of English” (Ranalli & Yamashita, 2022, p. 13) compared to MS-NLP. For its part, MS-NLP provided considerably more feedback during the point of inscription (9/10 vs about 1/5 for *Grammarly*), which the researchers believe is beneficial for learners because it provides fewer distractions during the writing process.

For their part, Liu and Yu (2022) investigated the impact of automated feedback in students’ L2 writing. Their study investigated how students engaged with AWE. The participants were 24 learners of English as a foreign language whose proficiency level ranged from lower intermediate to lower advanced. They completed two writing tasks of 300 words each, which consisted of analyzing visual data and then summarizing and reporting the information, using a novel AWE system with features comparable to those of *Grammarly*. According to the researchers, what distinguishes the system used in the study from others is that the one used in their study provides three types of feedback: direct word-level feedback, indirect word-level feedback, and indirect sentence-level feedback. Direct feedback included a more detailed description of errors (e.g., explanations and suggestions from which students could choose), while indirect feedback was less explicit (e.g., general quality and brief explanation of errors). At the end of the project, participants were asked to reflect on the impact of the AWE tool and to write a 500-word journal in English.

The researchers used eye-tracking technology, stimulated recall, and the reflective journals to analyze the effects of feedback explicitness and accuracy on the student engagement. The researchers conceptualized students' engagement with automated feedback based on three main elements derived from the literature: attention allocation, cognitive effort expenditure, and revision response. The first one refers to "whether and how much a learner allocates attention to the automated feedback provided" (Liu & Yu, 2022, p. 81); the second focuses on "the cognitive capacity allocated by the learner to form or test a hypothesis of the underlying rule(s) of the automated feedback" (p. 81); and the third element reflects the learners' processing of automated feedback as observed in their revisions and incorporation of the output.

The results were mixed in terms of the type of feedback students received on their writing. Indirect sentence-level feedback was the most common type of feedback with a total of 438 instances, while direct and indirect word-level feedback were observed in 150 and 109 instances, respectively. The most critical factor for engagement was explicit feedback—observed in indirect sentence-level feedback—because of its perceived impact on learning, as it made participants more engaged in the revision "by drawing upon their previous linguistic knowledge and experience to figure out the underlying rule for each instance of feedback and evaluate its accuracy" (Liu & Yu, 2022, p. 92). Direct word-level feedback, in turn, helped students to accept word suggestions, whereas indirect word-level feedback was more challenging because it required self-editing. This contrasts with observations regarding indirect sentence-level feedback, which allowed students to revise various aspects of their writing, including the mechanics, the content, and the organization.

Regarding the three elements considered to analyze students' engagement with automated feedback, the results show significant differences in terms of participants' engagement. It was found that students spent more time (allocated attention) on indirect sentence-level feedback (39.59 seconds), followed by indirect word-level feedback (21.61 seconds) and direct word-level feedback (16.14 seconds). Overall, students demonstrated less cognitive effort expenditure to understand accurate feedback than inaccurate feedback, and the average time spent reading the AWE alerts (or flags) was 32.39 seconds. As for revisions using the feedback provided, it was found that participants integrated 75.12% of the total feedback provided by the AWE tool, with direct word-level feedback having the highest rate (91.94%), followed by the indirect word-level feedback (72.75%), and indirect sentence-level feedback (71.85%). Interestingly, less than a quarter of the revisions students made (22.59%) were related to the content of their texts. This limited presence

of content-related revisions supports the popular notion that automated tools “may largely induce surface revisions because of its [their] limited technological capacity to evaluate and provide content-sensitive feedback” (Liu & Yu, 2022, p. 93). This assertion has implications for my intention of having learners reflect on the use of automated tools for L2 writing and be able to shift their focus from the formal mechanics of language to also consider the content and the audience they are likely to encounter when communicating through digital genres.

In this regard, Feng and Chukharev-Hudilainen (2022) offered an alternative to the use of AWE from a genre-based perspective. They assert that genre-specific feedback “is needed beyond grammar and mechanics” (p. 58) so that learners can produce writing based on the conventions and characteristics of specific genres to achieve their specific communicative purposes. The participants were 13 graduate students from diverse areas of engineering: environmental, civil, electrical, etc. These students were asked to write a research abstract of their projects in English. The first and final drafts of their abstract were created during a three-week academic writing workshop. The aim of the study was to investigate how genre-based AWE system feedback affected learners’ awareness of two linguistic features: lexical bundles (word sequences), and grammatical categories of verbs (tense, aspect, and voice) commonly present in research abstracts. Feng and Chukharev-Hudilainen extracted genre-based features from 480 articles in the field of engineering to analyze the presence of these two linguistic features. From this compilation approach, they defined lexical bundles as the presence of four-word phrases, while grammatical verb categories would be detected through “tense (present, past, and future), aspect (simple, progressive, and perfect), voice (active and passive), and the use of modal verbs” (p. 63). The researchers used the targeted criteria to adjust the feedback provided by the AWE system to the students.

The instruments of analysis for this study were questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and the students’ first and final drafts. The researchers analyzed and compared the students’ drafts (initial vs final) and documented moves, correct lexical bundles and verb categories. Regarding the latter, eight out of the thirteen participants reported they noticed the use of grammatical categories during their interactions with the AWE tool and did their best to integrate what they learned from it to improve their written products. What is more, students improved the correct use of verb categories from 33.3% in their first draft to 71.4% in their final versions. Students indicated in the questionnaire that grammatical feedback was clear to them and that it allowed them to revise and reconsider their verb choices. As for the second linguistic feature, it was found that students

increased the use of lexical bundles related to specific moves in abstracts from two in the first draft to thirty in the final one. Again, students agreed that feedback was clear to them and that it allowed them to revise and reconsider the appropriateness of their sentences. However, the semi-structured interviews showed that while the AWE tool helped students notice lexical bundles, more than half of the participants agreed it was challenging for them to integrate revisions and improve their drafts based on the feedback received.

All in all, findings suggest that awareness of the two targeted linguistic features can help students to achieve genre-based communicative purposes, which was facilitated by interactions with the AWE system. This interaction was a noteworthy aspect of this study as the system highlighted and underlined lexical bundles in red but did not assign them to a specific move or category. It was the student who was responsible for marking each highlighted segment with different colors depending on the particular move they thought it belonged to (i.e., green for introduction moves, blue for methods moves, pink for results, and yellow for the discussion/conclusions move). Then, the system verified for the student if the selection was correctly designated: if it was correct, it would change to the selected color; if it was incorrect, it would remain in red. I believe this type of learner-tool interactions promote a sense of critical thinking and contributes to the development of analytic skills for learners apply their knowledge in combination with the tool's output to revise and refine their own work.

So far, most of the reviewed studies have examined either the impact of a single type of feedback or the contrast between traditional and electronic feedback. To counter this trend, Tan et al. (2023) examined different types of feedback and the combination of them. The purpose of their study was to investigate the effects of different types of feedback on learners' writing performance, while also gauging learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of different types of feedback. The participants were 122 students enrolled in an English writing course at a university in China. Since they had no previous exposure to electronically generated feedback, the intervention devoted some time helping them become familiar with the characteristics of the platforms to be used. The students completed a test at the beginning (pre-test) and at the end (post-test) of the semester. The pre- and post-experimental tests were based on the same writing topic as the writing task of the intervention, which consisted of writing a 200-word composition in 50 minutes. At the end of the task, four questionnaires (one for each group) and a semi-structured interview with nine participants (three from each experimental group) were completed.

For the intervention, students were divided into four groups, each of which focused on a different type of feedback:

- Self-feedback: students revised their written work themselves individually
- Automated written corrective feedback (AWCF): students used *1Checker*<sup>3</sup> (an online writing tool that provides immediate feedback) to access suggestions and explanations on spelling, vocabulary, grammar and style
- Asynchronous computer-mediated communication feedback (ACMC): students accessed a shared document to submit their drafts for peer-revision, to access the feedback received, and to revise their peers' work and provide feedback
- A combination of automated written corrective feedback and asynchronous computer-mediated communication feedback

The group assigned to self-feedback was the control group, and the other three groups were the experimental groups. The researchers then used the CAF (complexity, accuracy, and fluency) model to assess students' writing performance. Complexity was described as the extent to which “a learner can produce elaborated language” (Tan et al., 2023, p. 7280) and was measured using the *WordSmith Tools*<sup>4</sup> analysis program. Accuracy was defined as “how well the target language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language” (Tan et al. citing Skehan, 1996, p. 23), and was measured based on the analysis of error-free clauses. Fluency was described as “the production of language in real time” (citing Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 139), and was measured using the *1Checker* software to determine the average number of words and clauses in the texts.

The results showed that the group that received combined feedback (AWCF plus ACMC) performed better on the CAF analysis than the other groups. No significant differences were found among the four groups in terms of complexity, but there were some notable differences in terms of accuracy. It was found that the AWCF plus ACMC group scored the highest in accuracy, followed by the AWCF group and the ACMC group. The control group received the lowest score in the accuracy analysis. As for fluency, the results showed that the students in the ACMC group and in the combined AWCF plus ACMC group wrote more words and more clauses per text compared to the students in the control group and the AWCF group. Overall, Tan et al. (2023) considered that the

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<sup>3</sup> See the *1Checker* website at <http://www.1checker.com/>

<sup>4</sup> The researchers did not include a URL, but this one was found on a web search with the entry *WordSmith Tools* <https://lexically.net/wordsmith/>

results of the study do not indicate a significant impact of electronic feedback in “helping learners to produce longer texts” (p. 7281), but there was indeed an impact on “producing more error-free clauses” (p. 7283).

Finally, in relation to learners’ perceptions, students in the combined group expressed more positive opinions towards the effectiveness of the type of feedback they were assigned because it seemed to have influenced their sentence complexity, accurate grammar, and error-free clauses. Students also reported that this type of feedback helped them improve the quality of their texts. The group that received automated written corrective feedback appreciated the immediacy of corrections—which helped them to revise and improve their texts—while the ACMC group praised the ability to exchange comments and drafts with their classmates. A limitation of the latter type of feedback is that some students had concerns about the linguistic competence of their peers to provide corrections, the delay in receiving feedback, and the number of corrections. This study was interesting to me because the researchers were able to explore different approaches to feedback, some of which included peer review. I think that it would be beneficial to integrate these varied types of feedback into our assessment practices so that we can adapt them for specific purposes, tasks, contexts, and/or for diverse learner populations.

### 4.3.2 Machine Translation

Most of the studies on the use of machine translation (MT) in the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching have examined the relationship between MT (with *Google Translate* being the most commonly used tool across studies) and student-generated L2 texts. In their systematic review of the use of machine translation by language learners, Jolley and Maimone (2022) showed the self-reported use of MT by students, as has been found in a number of studies. In the case of students’ use of MT to produce L2/L3 texts in Spanish as a second or additional language, Cristino Pena (2011) reported 33%, Clifford et al. (2013) reported 71%, Fredholm (2015) reported 63%, and O’Neill (2019) reported 82.3% of students who admitted to using this technology in their writing process. Jolley and Maimone (2015) themselves conducted a study that focused specifically on the use of *Google Translate* by post-secondary Spanish learners, and found that 97.66% of participants used it at some point. Their study shows that students use MT in L2 writing tasks in two main ways: to conduct pre-writing and revisions, and to “translate individual words or short phrases compared to paragraph-length or longer segments” (p. 30).

Given the frequent use of MT in second language learning, research has explored its potential for developing metalinguistic awareness (Abraham, 2009), improving and assisting with vocabulary and writing checks (Alrajhi, 2022; Hellmich, 2021), and correcting errors at the phrase and sentence level (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023), among other grammar-based revisions (S.-M. Lee, 2022; S.-M. Lee & Briggs, 2021). Moreover, some researchers have found that L1 translation is helpful in L2 writing because it contributes to multilingual awareness by allowing students to compare and contrast their L1 and L2/L3 texts to examine patterns and word clusters to gain lexico-grammatical insights (Abraham, 2009), to become familiar with language use, to reduce the cognitive load (S.-M. Lee, 2022), and to understand that language is more than grammar rules (Godwin-Jones, 2022).

However, despite the pedagogical benefits of L1-L2 translation presented in the literature, there is still a widespread reluctance in the teaching community to integrating MT into language classes due to concerns about L1 interference, especially since it has been found that some errors in MT translations have been found to be caused by the L1 input (S.-M. Lee, 2022). Other concerns about the use of MT in the language teaching have been related to linguistic inadequacy in terms of contextual and pragmatic functions (Alrajhi, 2022), inaccurate translation of complex language utterances (e.g., idioms) (Godwin-Jones, 2015), and a high concentration on lexico-grammatical aspects (Groves & Mundt, 2015). This is particularly problematic as there appears to be a widespread belief among students that “MT tools offer more language output [than other assistance tools] and require no or minimum cognitive processing” (Alharbi, 2023, p. 2). Learners’ lack of engagement in analyzing the output of the MT can be detrimental to their own learning.

Research suggests that students do not generally use MT to translate large chunks of text, but rather to look up words or phrases (Hellmich, 2021; Hellmich & Vinall, 2023). It should be noted that the phrase-based statistical machine translation (PBSMT) technique, which was widely used prior to 2016 (Briggs, 2018), was reported in the literature as having “a number of problems with MT output quality, such as literal translation, mistranslation of idiomatic expressions and colloquial language, and incomprehensibility of cultural nuances” (S.-M. Lee & Kang, 2024, p. 2). However, more recent studies indicate that MT system accuracy has improved in recent years (Godwin-Jones, 2022; S.-M. Lee, 2022), and that they have become more reliable and accessible in a wider range of languages, making it more attractive to language learners and practitioners (Klimova et al., 2023). The emergence of neural machine translation (NMT) as an improved version of MT contrasts with the previous technique in that “NMT performs translations based on the content of the entire

sentence as opposed to parts of the sentence which PBSMNT relies upon” (Briggs, 2018, p. 5). Klimova et al. (2023) reported on the benefits of NMT for written and oral production and comprehension in their review study. The authors found that advanced learners benefited the most from the use of this tool because they were more able to critically analyze the output of the machine than novice learners.

Abraham’s (2009) study on the use of web-based translation in Spanish examined “the potential of translation tasks for promoting students’ awareness of grammatical and lexical features in L2 learning” (p. 68). He analyzed audio-recorded offline interactions between students as they completed a writing task using machine translators and online dictionaries. The participants were 16 third-year Spanish students at a university in the United States, and the task consisted of working with a peer to evaluate and correct 12 sentences that the researcher had previously translated from English to Spanish using a translation website. Students had to discuss whether the sentences had been translated correctly, and they negotiated corrections if they believed the translations were incorrect. Participants were not allowed to use dictionaries or any other Internet-based tools, they had 25 minutes to complete the task, and their conversations were recorded for later analysis of their interactions.

Similar to the procedures presented in Sotillo (2009) and Ware and O’Dowd (2008), Abraham analyzed language-related episodes (LREs)—or instances in which the participants discussed language—produced by the eight pairs of students who participated in the study. During the analysis, Abraham coded LREs based on whether the student pair correctly or incorrectly solved the linguistic problems (i.e., grammatical, lexical, or spelling problems). A total of 118 LREs were found, of which 66 (55.93%) were classified as grammatical problems, followed by lexical (41.53%) and orthographic (2.54%) ones. The most common types of grammatical LREs with more than half of the occurrences (37 instances = 31.4%) were related to word order, followed by verb tense and verb phrase. In the lexical category, the most common type of LRE was word choice (30.51%), while in the orthographic category, spelling was the most common. The analysis led to the conclusion that the students were able to successfully correct 63% of the grammatical or lexical issues discussed in the LREs. Based on these results, the researcher affirms that indeed the off-line translation task contributed to the students’ awareness of the linguistic problems detected on the translator’s output. Besides these positive results in relation to language awareness, the collaborative aspect of this study is also valuable because students had to discuss and decide

whether the translated sentences were correct, and if they were not, they had to negotiate with their peers and produce the correct translation. There were also instances where learners discussed lexical and grammatical features of the target language in the target language, which is also very enriching from a metacognitive perspective.

Lee has conducted several studies to measure the effects of MT on L2 English writing. Two of these studies have looked at editing and revision processes of students' texts using *Google Translate*. Lee and Briggs (2021) examined pre-editing and post-editing processes as methods of text revision. The researchers used a multitask approach where 58 university students were asked to first write a half-page essay (considered the source text) in their L1 (Korean) and then translate it themselves into their L2 (English). For this task, the students were allowed to use dictionaries and spelling checkers. Students were then instructed to retranslate the source text using Google Translate, and finally to compare their L2 text with the MT output and produce a final revised version. The evaluators used specific error categories (12 error types) to examine the error corrections students made from their L2 texts to the revised texts after using the MT. The results showed a decrease in 10 of the 12 error types. Interestingly, it was found that the lack of error detection on the part of some students who participated in the study could be attributed to intralingual interference.

In a subsequent study, Lee (2022) investigated whether L2 text revisions varied depending on the students' proficiency levels, while also examining the extent to which students benefited from using machine translation to revise their L2 texts. The participants were 80 university students in an English writing class in Korea, who completed the writing tasks over the course of one week. The final task consisted of students writing an ungraded essay on a specific topic, following four main steps similar to those described in Lee and Briggs (2021):

1. Students write the short essay in their L1
2. They produce their own translation of the L1 text to English (the L2)
3. They translate the L1 text to the L2 using *Google Translate*
4. Students produce their final revised L2 version

The researcher used quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze the students' texts. A six-point scale rubric for assessing English writing was used to categorize students into groups based on their written products. Students with the highest scores (6 on the scale) were assigned to Group 6, while those with the lowest scores were assigned to Group 2. Group 1 does not appear among

the categories used to group students. Although the author did not explicitly justify the absence of this category, it can be inferred that her decision may relate to the writing rubric used, on which the classification scale appears to be based. The rubric uses a six-level scale (1–6), where a score of 1 indicates writing with frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure that significantly impede comprehension and minimally developed or unclear ideas.

Lee also conducted an error analysis and classified grammatical errors into global and local errors depending on whether these errors hindered the intended meaning. For example, the author classified verb tenses and sentence structure as global errors, while local errors were related to word forms, articles, and prepositions. Finally, the qualitative analysis was based on interviews with students to measure their perceptions on the use of MT and its benefits and challenges in writing their texts.

The results showed that the level of proficiency did have an impact on students' text improvement. Students with higher proficiency levels made more changes to their texts and showed more improvement in their revised versions, while students with lower proficiency levels did not make many significant changes to their texts after receiving the machine's output. As for the number of total global and local errors, Group 2 produced the highest number of total errors, and Group 6 produced the lowest. This is surprising considering that Group 2 produced the shortest self-translated L2 texts, while Group 6 produced the longest. Overall, it was asserted that MT contributed to the improvement of students' final versions, but the integration of changes varied for both lower-level and higher-level groups. In addition, in the case of the lower-level students' texts, errors were found at both the global and local levels, with the former type of error being the one that was most often left unresolved, even though the MT output offered better alternatives. Higher-level students, on the contrary, were able to notice and correct more errors, which contributed to the improvement of their texts at all grammatical levels. This means that higher-level students were more successful at critically analyzing the MT output, while students in lower-level groups were less confident in judging the MT output.

In terms of students' perceptions, the use of MT was viewed favorably overall. Text quality and opportunities for text improvement were the most frequently mentioned benefits. Challenges were also reported as students felt that the MT output was inaccurate and contained errors, so they were concerned about using it in their texts. Students also claimed that it was difficult to make improvements to their original L2 version (i.e., their own translation) by comparing it to the MT

version because in some cases the two versions were completely different. The task also made students question the amount of MT output that was appropriate to use in their final draft. This aspect of the results is interesting to me because I have had in-class discussions with my students about the ethical use of writing assistance tools in their academic assignments. While a common belief among colleagues is that students use these tools *all the time* without regard for academic integrity, our discussions have revealed that many students question the misuse and overuse of these tools for completing assignments within the student community. An example of an in-class reflection on the use of writing assistant tools for L2 Spanish writing is provided in [section 6.3.1.2](#).

For her part, Hellmich (2021) examined actions and cognitive processes involved in the use of MT for learning French as a foreign language. The methodology consisted of analyzing screen recordings of 26 students completing a writing composition task in French, which was followed by a retrospective recall and a post-task interview. During the retrospective recall, the researcher discussed excerpts from the screen-recording with students to have them narrate specific moments of the task they completed. Then, during the semi-structured interviews, the researcher gathered more information about attitudes, behaviors and reactions to the task completed or the recall. Data analysis was conducted by identifying critical incidents, which the author defines as “the actions (practices with MT tools) and cognitive processes (motivations to use MT tools, knowledges of MT tools) that supported or hindered MT use and written text production” (n. p., section 2.3).

The results showed that almost all the participants (23 out of 26) used MT to produce their texts, with *Google Translate*, *Reverso Translate*, and *Yandex* being the most used ones. Moreover, it was the students’ actions and the learners’ cognitive processes when using MT that played a key role in contributing to or hindering the completion of the writing task. On the one hand, students’ awareness of errors and limitations in MT output supported L2 writing when learners cross-referenced translations and analyzed the output. This double-checking gave students the opportunity to reflect on the appropriateness of the machine’s output and to cross-reference their findings. On the contrary, the lack of output analysis and the amount of input students gave the MT hindered the writing process. Too little input was associated with less reliable translation results, while too much input caused the machine to miss errors in students’ texts. If we add to these limitations the lack of output analysis, the result is that language learning opportunities may be missed. These findings have made a valuable point about the importance of pedagogically

developed practices for integrating MT into language learning to promote student awareness on how to use MT wisely and to situate it as a mediator in their own learning process.

A subsequent study conducted by Hellmich and Vinall (2023) aimed to compare students' use of MT with teachers' beliefs about students' use of MT. Students' use of MT was also examined using computer tracking to analyze writings, while teachers' perceptions were collected via a qualitative survey. Teacher data was collected from 165 participants who were either professors, lecturers, or graduate students who taught languages at various universities in the United States. Participants were provided with some key definitions and then answered a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions on an electronically distributed survey. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the closed-ended questions, while code categories were used for the open-ended questions. Student data was collected from three post-secondary institutions in the U.S. A total of 26 French learners and 23 Spanish learners (for a total of 49 language learners) agreed to participate in the study. A method like that of Hellmich (2021) was applied: students completed a short writing task while their screen was being recorded and then participated in a post-interview and a retrospective recall exercise. Iterative rounds of coding were also applied to the student data (i.e., completion videos, retrospective recalls and post-interviews) in order to classify information into code categories.

The results were presented in two main aspects: MT input and MT output. The former referred to "what is or should be put into MT tools", and the latter referred to "what is done with the output of MT tools" (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023, p. 6). Regarding MT input and teachers' perceptions, most of the teachers surveyed (95%) agreed that students use MT to look up words, while 89% believed that students use it to look up phrases and 82% reported that they believe students translate their entire texts with MT. As for the type of input that teachers felt was appropriate for students to enter into the MT, about 75% felt that the insertion of individual words was acceptable, but not so much the insertion of phrases (about 50%) or sentences (about 10%). The results of this section were found to be consistent with instructors' policies regarding the use of MT in the classroom, which in some cases (37% of those who reported having policies) meant prohibiting or discouraging "the use of MT beyond individual words" (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023, p. 7). In this respect, it would be preferable to train students in the use of bilingual or monolingual dictionaries (depending on the proficiency level) so that they can get a more accurate context for their translation.

For student MT input, Hellmich and Vinall (2023) found a correspondence between students' use of MT and teachers' beliefs, with students using MT mostly to translate individual words (59%), followed by phrases (26%) and sentences (15%). Some students used the MT tool as a grammar checker to revise sentences they had written in the target language. However, the researchers found that this strategy "was not particularly successful in terms of catching errors or successfully negotiating meaning in student-composed texts" (p. 8). In this case, too, it would be beneficial to teach students how to choose the appropriate writing support tool for their different writing needs. For example, students can use a grammar checker to revise their self-generated sentences and receive immediate feedback that they can revise and contrast.

One point of divergence between students' reported use and teachers' beliefs was the perception of the appropriate use of MT tools. The researchers reported that about one-third of the students were influenced by their teachers' policies regarding the appropriateness of MT use. This means that if their teachers believed that only word-level translations were appropriate, students would use the MT tool for that. More importantly, some students would disregard some translations that could lead to potential learning (e.g., cognates) for fear of violating academic integrity because some words would be considered beyond the students' level of knowledge. With regards to MT output, it was found that students reviewed the MT's output by scrolling over it, cross-referencing, adjusting, etc., in over half of the instances (158 over 302). This partially contradicts the beliefs reported by instructors as many of them suggested that students usually do not engage significantly with the MT output. This statement was true for 144 out of the 302 instances in which students engaged with MT tools, as they did not review the MT's output but they "immediately copy/pasted or transferred [it] to their composition documents" (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023, p. 13). In a third of the cases where students analyzed MT output, they looked at different options, alternative definitions, and other examples to find a better match. These types of student actions are highly representative of the ways in which the use of writing assistance tools can contribute to the development of students' meta-linguistic skills.

Finally, Alrajhi's (2022) appears as one of the very few research articles I have found that combines writing genres and machine translation for L2 learning. Similar to other studies presented above, one of the objectives in this study was to contrast the translations produced by the students with those produced by Google Translate. In addition, Alrajhi aimed at examining the quality of texts produced with *Google Translate* in completing four genre-based writing tasks and to report on

students' perceptions of using the MT tool for writing in the four genres. According to the researcher, this will help to identify for which L2 writing tasks *Google Translate* may be a more effective writing assistance tool.

The study took place in a Saudi university and involved the participation of 41 students enrolled in an advanced English course. An interesting aspect of this study is its mixed-methods approach, which included proficiency tests, workshops, writing sessions, questionnaires, discussion groups, and individual interviews. Data was collected over a seven-week period, during which students were given eight computer-mediated writing tasks. Prior to completing each writing session, students were given a genre-related task (narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive) and asked to produce a text in their L1 without the use of any writing support tools. After students completed their L1 text, they were asked to translate it into English on their own. They were then allowed to use *Google Translate* to compare its output with their own translations. After each L1 writing and L2 translation/contrast task, students reflected on the output produced by the MT tool. According to the researcher, this mixed approach provided a more holistic view of the participants' L2 level, their performance, and their views and attitudes towards using MT.

The researcher used two writing assessment tools called *1Checker* (<http://www.1checker.com/>) and *VocabProfilers* (<http://lex tutor.ca/vp/eng>) to analyze both student-generated texts in the L2, and texts produced with *Google Translate*. The researcher analyzed three main elements in both student-generated texts and texts produced with *Google Translate*: literacy (grammar accuracy and number of errors per word), content (information through content words), and style (different vocabulary categories such as lexical density and word-bands). Qualitative data collected from student interviews and questionnaires was analyzed through a thematic analysis, in which two researchers independently coded the data and developed major themes.

Overall, higher literacy and content quality were found in the persuasive and the expository genres, while style scored the highest in the narrative and the descriptive genres. The results showed that the most salient differences between the student-generated texts and the texts produced with *Google Translate* were in the narrative genre. This is particularly relevant to my study because, as discussed in [section 3.3.5.1](#), the blog is considered a narrative digital genre. Interestingly, apart from the presence of fewer grammatical errors and error probabilities in *Google Translate* narrative texts, there were no significant differences in other writing parameters, such as the use of content

words, function words, K1 and K2 words,<sup>5</sup> and off-list words, as was the case for the other three genres (descriptive, expository, and persuasive). I agree with the researcher's assertion that "these findings show that narrative GTTs [Google-translated texts], relatively speaking, have reached a similar level of style and content and a higher level of accuracy as compared with texts produced by learners at B1 level" (Alrajhi, 2022, p. 317). In addition, the total number of words in the narrative genre was the highest in both student-generated texts (273.2) and *Google Translate* texts (295.7) compared to the other genres, suggesting that the narrative genre may allow for greater text productivity. Overall, the results of the linguistic analysis showed that MT was more reliable when working with the persuasive, expository, and descriptive genres, but not so much with the narrative genre.

As for students' views and attitudes toward the use of MT, it was found that, in general, their perceptions of the use of *Google Translate* were generally positive. Students believe that the output provided by the tool could potentially "enhance various linguistic components in their written texts" (Alrajhi, 2022, p. 314), so they showed interest in continuing to work with MT to improve their L2 writing skills. Another strength of the use of MT highlighted by the students was in relation to lexical items that they were not familiar with or could not remember at the time of writing. Access to lexical items beyond the students' knowledge seemed to be valued across genres, providing "increasing efficiency and confidence in L2 writing" (p. 315). For the narrative genre, students observed that *Google Translate* provided more grammatically correct sentences, helped them learn advanced vocabulary and new phrases, and contributed to improved style. However, some shortcomings of the tool were accuracy with idiomatic expressions and poor performance in linking content ideas in a way they could not do on their own.

These findings suggest that genre influences students' perceptions and attitudes toward the use of MT, making it more useful in certain writing scenarios than in others. Therefore, it is important to guide students in identifying the benefits and limitations of MT, which may vary depending on the type of task, students' proficiency level, and specific learning outcomes. Machine translation can be useful for building students' lexical, grammatical, and syntactic competence, while creativity and content ideas could be explored using other content-generating tools. However, genre-based

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<sup>5</sup> The author uses "K1 and K2" to refer to "the most commonly first and second (more advanced) thousand used words respectively" (Alrajhi, 2022, p. 310).

writing with MT and other writing support tools is still underexplored (Alrajhi, 2022; Chung & Ahn, 2022), so part of my research intends to advance in this discussion.

### 4.3.3 Automatic Text Generation

Most—if not all—of the writing assistance tools discussed above have been permeated by AI in recent years. These AI-enhanced writing tools are popping up in our electronic devices with suggestions (and sometimes automatic and/or unwanted changes) for writing our emails, chats, social media posts, academic work, and so on. While these tools “help improve and speed up your writing by generating content and proofreading for [writing basics](#), such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation” (Microsoft, n.d.) (original linking), recent advances have enabled them to generate content in the form of text, audio, video, and images. The sophisticated text-based generative tools are based on *large language models* (LLMs): “AI systems built from huge collections of data analyzed by machine learning and resulting in an ability to deal with human language in increasingly effective ways” (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 11). However, while many AI systems initially relied on supervised learning, new advances have introduced LLMs that can use raw data without human intervention (unsupervised learning). These new generative pre-trained (GPT) systems, are capable of providing highly sophisticated language services that can summarize large amounts of information, write essays, create poems, compose songs, among many other “on-demand creations” (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 6).

*ChatGPT* (by OpenAI), *Gemini* (by Google), and *Copilot* (by Microsoft) are among the GenAI systems that have gained attention recently. These computer programs are basically conversational agents “designed to simulate oral and/or written conversation” (UNESCO, 2022a, p. 10), which is possible through *natural language processing* (NLP) capabilities that allow these to interact with people anytime, anywhere, and to provide fast responses to users’ questions (IBM, 2024c). What make these conversational tools (e.g., chatbots, intelligent assistants, virtual agents) interesting—and perhaps frightening at the same time—is that the texts they generate “are often indistinguishable from those written by humans, particularly in terms of flow and textual coherence” (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 12). The rapid pace of change and the still-unimagined capabilities of artificial intelligence can make it difficult for teachers to keep up. Since the presence of AI in students’ lives is inevitable, it is better to embrace its potential now than to close our eyes and brace for the impact. As García-Peñalvo (2023) affirms, banning or denying the existence and the use of AI technologies such as ChatGPT “will do absolutely nothing to stop the tsunami effect that has already begun” (p. 1).

Research in this area is becoming increasingly relevant as it is believed that the next generation of chatbots will offer even more advanced functionalities “with their understanding of common language and complex queries, their ability to adapt to a user’s style of conversation and use of empathy when answering users’ questions” (IBM, n.d.-a). However, this apparent empathy may not be grounded in awareness or accountability. As abovementioned, there is a risk that these pre-trained systems may generate misleading, biased, or factually incorrect information, which could have harmful consequences, especially when users depend on AI-generated content for decision-making or emotional support. From a pedagogical perspective, this emphasizes educators’ responsibility to foster critical AI literacy. Students must learn how to use digital tools and how to question them. As discussed in [section 6.2.4](#), teaching students to be responsible digital citizens requires explicit instruction on how to identify false or misleading information, recognize biased outputs, examine stereotypes reproduced by algorithms, and critically evaluate sources. Educational institutions can play a central role in this effort by integrating these principles into their curricula and promoting awareness campaigns that encourage reflective and ethical engagement with generative AI.

In this section, I will concentrate on chatbots because of their emerging role for language learning (Kwon et al., 2023) and for assessing student performance on specific curricular and content competencies (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2021). According to some studies, chatbots can be used to help L2 students to notice spelling and grammar errors (Pereira & Barcina, 2019), to improve punctuation (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2021), and to increase motivation (J. Huang & Mizumoto, 2024), among others. Genre-based research on the use of GenAI is also beginning to grow, namely for teaching and learning argumentative writing (Guo et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023). While some challenges to using AI feedback to improve students’ L2 writing have been related to the amount of detailed information, the lack of clarity, cognitive overload, and overcorrection (Barrot, 2021b; Ziqi et al., 2024), the benefits seem to increase when students are trained to analyze feedback (Ziqi et al., 2024), and when human and AI feedback are combined (Escalante et al., 2023), or when different teaching methodologies are integrated.

Vázquez-Cano et al. (2021) explored two approaches to teaching L2 writing: traditional writing on paper and writing through chatbot interactions. Their quasi-experimental study contrasted the two learning scenarios for teaching Spanish punctuation and then measured students’ perceptions on the use of chatbots for learning. The authors highlighted the importance of punctuation as an

important element that contributes to the interpretation and correct production of texts, while regretting that it remains one of the least addressed aspects in first language instruction. The participants were 103 students enrolled in a blended course that combined face-to-face and online learning, which was facilitated by a virtual learning environment. There were five distinctive phases in this study:

1. All the participants received five face-to-face lessons where they learned and practiced punctuation,
2. All students were given a pre-test on Spanish punctuation,
3. The participants were divided into control and experimental groups (51 and 52 students respectively),
4. The intervention tasks, which had to be completed in the course of two weeks, were assigned to both groups, and
5. Students completed a post-test on punctuation with increased difficulty for both groups.

The intervention tasks were designed to provide the same content and exercises, but in different formats. The control group received a PDF dossier with the theory and practice exercises, while the experimental group received the same information through a chatbot system. The researchers customized the chatbot output by using a “drag and drop” system adapted to meet the teaching and learning needs. Students interacted with the teaching material for two weeks and then took the same final punctuation test (the post-test). Participants in the experimental group also interacted in an academic forum to share their views on using the chatbot for educational purposes. Results indicated that, while the researchers did not find significant differences in punctuation performance between the two groups after administering the pretest, there was a significant improvement in punctuation, with a notable correct use of periods, colons, and commas for students in the experimental group compared to the control group. In addition, the experimental group also expressed positive perceptions about using chatbots, particularly in terms of “higher rates of feedback and support” (Vázquez-Cano et al., 2021, p. 11), and in terms of having a more dynamic, interesting, and motivating learning experience. Some students praised chatbot’s interactive and conversational nature, saying it allowed them to engage more with the feedback. These results highlight the valuable contribution of a customizable chatbot for pedagogical purposes. This interactive tool allowed the teachers to create a learning environment that progressively adapted the content according to students’ strengths and needs, providing targeted

practice and feedback. However, there were some linguistic inconsistencies in the use of *tú* and *usted* (informal and formal *you* singular forms respectively) in the feedback pop-ups provided to students. This calls for caution when designing and/or adapting digital tools for classroom use, as customized input also constitutes learning opportunities or challenges for students.

With regards to genre-based use of chatbots for teaching L2 writing, Guo et al. (2022) described pedagogical considerations for using a chatbot called *Argumate* to teach argumentative writing in the EFL classroom. *Argumate* is a chatbot system “designed to scaffold students’ argument creation” (p. 53). Its database consists of 400 arguments (40 pro and 40 con) for each of the following main topics: online learning, nuclear energy, artificial intelligence, online shopping, and social networking. Because the development of argumentation skills involves social interaction, debate, and collaboration, the researchers suggested that the use of a conversational agent could address the challenges of finding ideal practice peers in the classroom and to help students to overcome difficulties in the argumentative writing process. Namely, the conversational agent facilitates the production of persuasive arguments, which “is one of the major rhetorical purposes of argumentative writing” (p. 53), as it allows students to negotiate their stance and attempt to convince their interlocutor of their point of view. The chatbot analyzes the student’s stance and suggests a similar argument in the same line of thinking, helping the student to generate more ideas.

On the other hand, *Argumate* can help students create counterarguments by providing them with opinions that contradict or challenge their views. With this, the researchers believe that the conversational agent helps students build counterarguments that contribute to the development of more complex discourse and increase awareness of the value of diverse points of view. While argumentation can be perceived as a writing genre that is more appropriate for teaching at advanced levels, the capabilities of a chatbot system like the one described by Guo et al. can be adjusted to a variety of levels by providing clear task instructions regarding the length of the written interaction, the level of involvement, the use of specific linguistic structures, and so on. Another advantage of using chatbots for education, according to the researchers, is that these systems can be integrated into messaging applications that students frequently use (*Facebook Messenger*, *WhatsApp*, etc.).

As mentioned above, perhaps one of the most well-known GenAI tools is *ChatGPT*. The following studies have explored the use of this tool for L2 writing, and their contributions relate specifically to

engagement with the chatbot and the integration of its feedback into students' writing. For example, Ziqi et al. (2024) examined the strategies L2 students used to engage with the feedback provided by *ChatGPT* and the barriers they encountered in acting upon the feedback generated. Their study was conducted with 45 university students in an undergraduate academic writing course delivered in English. Before completing the main task, the participants received training on how to use *ChatGPT 3.5* to receive corrective feedback on their drafts and to make revisions to their essays. The training also included the following: "(1) addressing academic integrity concerns associated with employing *ChatGPT* for academic assignments, (2) familiarising participants with university guidelines governing the use of *ChatGPT* for academic purposes, and (3) providing guidelines and examples for writing reflective journals to document their feedback experiences with *ChatGPT*" (Ziqi et al., 2024, p. 7). These are valuable steps in maintaining an open discussion with students about the responsible use of not only generative AI, but of technology in general. The first aspect of the researcher's training of participants helps to ensure fairness and transparency in the assessment; the second helps to build a trustworthy educational environment; and the third invites students to take a responsible and analytical role in their own learning process. These considerations are consistent with the core concepts of digital literacy and digital citizenship discussed in [section 6.2.4](#).

Participants in Ziqi et al.'s study were asked to write a 250-word essay explaining whether they agreed or disagreed with the idea that AI technologies could replace human workers. They were not allowed to use the chatbot's help while completing the writing task, which took place in the classroom. Once students completed their essays, they were allowed to revise them with *ChatGPT* and receive feedback from it. Students were encouraged to interact with the chatbot and ask additional questions, seek more information, and request more examples related to the feedback they received. The research methodology consisted of analyzing students' revision strategies based on two levels of revision (form-focused and content-focused) and analyzing whether students accepted, ignored, or engaged in discussions about the revisions received from the chatbot. In addition, the researchers analyzed the barriers students encountered in incorporating the feedback they received by focusing on "assessing and understanding learners' negative attitudes towards using AI-generated feedback" (Ziqi et al., 2024, p. 9). This was done by identifying expressions of disagreement and confusion about the feedback and then using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which "proposes easiness and usefulness as variables predicting new

users' intentions for continuous use" (p. 9) to analyse students' justifications for not acting upon the feedback received by the chatbot.

It was found that the feedback *ChatGPT* provided to students was 62% content-focused and 38% form-focused. Students accepted more than half of the total feedback received (62.2%), while they rejected the rest after arguing with the tool and ultimately deciding not to make the suggested changes or by ignoring the feedback without further interaction (22% and 16%, respectively). The results also showed that most feedback rejections involved content-focused feedback, which, according to the researchers, is an indicator that "students prefer generative AI feedback on grammar, spelling, and text structure errors over non-error feedback such as content clarity and logical coherence" (Ziqi et al., 2024, p. 10). As for barriers to using *ChatGPT*, students identified misinterpretation of their intended message (67.02%) and information overload in the feedback they received (63.04%) as the most significant challenges to using the chatbot to assist them in writing their essays. Students also identified too tedious or repetitive formulations in the feedback (28.26%) and the lack of clarity in the output (22.34%). Other negative aspects mentioned by the students were the extraneous and irrelevant feedback from the chatbot (10.64%) and too general descriptions without a specific focus on the students' mistakes (8.70%). These findings suggest that students' acceptance of the feedback provided by the conversational assistant may depend on whether it focuses on content or form, which allows us to give students reasons to reflect and decide on the purpose they want the tool to serve in their writing process. This gives me the opportunity to emphasize the importance of encouraging students to analyze, revise, and reflect on their interactions with GenAI so that they can adopt a critical stance when interacting with the feedback provided by such technology.

Another recent study on the use of *ChatGPT* was conducted by Escalante et al. (2023) who evaluated the efficacy of using *ChatGPT* for providing feedback on students' essays and to investigate their preferences and perceptions of human-generated feedback versus AI-generated feedback. The researchers conducted two studies: Study 1 was conducted with 48 students of English who completed weekly writing tasks (300-word paragraph on diverse topics) for a period of six weeks. Students were given a pre- and a post-test before and after the intervention, respectively. The whole group was divided into a control group (which received feedback from a human tutor) and an experimental group (which received feedback teachers obtained from *ChatGPT*). An interesting aspect of the researchers' methodology was that the chatbot was

prompted to assume the role of “a professional language teacher who is an expert on providing feedback on the writing of English language learners” (Escalante et al., 2023, p. 7) and to provide easy-to-understand feedback to comment on the students’ writing targeting specific pre-entered areas (e.g., language level, grammatical accuracy, development of ideas, etc.). Students revised the feedback they received and then submitted their final product. In Study 2, a group of 43 students received both human-generated and AI-generated written feedback on each of their weekly writing assignments. Once a week, after completing each task, the students expressed their preferences and perceptions through a questionnaire that included open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The results showed that, in terms of language improvement, no significant difference was observed in the post-test results among both groups (human-generated vs AI-generated feedback). In terms of student preferences, the second study found that, on average, students showed very similar preferences for the two types of feedback. Students emphasized aspects such as interaction, clarity, and helpfulness in developing both speaking and writing skills with human feedback, while consistency, specificity, comprehensibility, and availability were emphasized with AI-generated feedback. In all, the researchers concluded that a combined approach that includes human and AI-generated feedback can be beneficial for L2 students in their writing process.

As the research review in this chapter shows, most of the studies on the use and effects of (intelligent) writing assistance in the field of L2 writing have been published in the last two years. However, most of the studies have focused on the writing of essays (S.-M. Lee, 2022; S.-M. Lee & Briggs, 2021) and mini-essays (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023; Ranalli & Yamashita, 2022), compositions (Tan et al., 2023), and technical or academic reports (Feng & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2022; Pereira & Barcina, 2019), and very few have focused on writing genres such as argumentative texts (Guo et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023), or other traditional genres (Alrajhi, 2022). Therefore, digital genres (e.g., blogging, digital storytelling, CVs, opinion pieces, infographics, etc.) continue to be a rich avenue for pedagogical exploration. One approach to this can be the integration of pedagogical writing tasks that integrate writing support technologies. The present thesis dissertation aims to contribute to this discussion by exploring the use of writing assistance tools, such as those discussed in this chapter, in the creation of a blog by L2 learners of Spanish.

# Chapter 5: Task-Based Language Teaching

## 5.1 Overview

Thus far, this literature review has examined key principles of computer-mediated language learning, as well as empirical research on the integration of digital genres and writing tools in language education contexts. However, it is also important to recognize that “no matter how exciting new technologies for language learning may seem, they can become nothing more than entertainment unless their design, use, and evaluation are guided by viable educational and language developmental rationales” (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 3).

From this perspective, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerges as a valuable pedagogical framework for maximizing the potential of technology in the classroom because it places the learner at the center of the learning experience, reevaluates the long-standing dominance of grammar-based curricula, and promotes language use in context through tasks anchored in the real-world. This chapter examines the basic theoretical and pedagogical foundations of the task-based approach, highlights essential considerations for task design and implementation, and explores its implications in learning environments that integrate technology.

As an introduction, we can review three general dimensions that, according to Van den Branden et al. (2009), can be identified in language education in general:

- *Holistic versus discrete learning*
- *Teacher-centered versus learner-driven education*
- *Communication-based versus form-focused instruction*

The first distinction consists in approaching learning either from a *discrete* point of view, where language is understood as “a complex system that must be broken down into smaller units” (Van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 2) that the student must master before being immersed in language use (e.g., vocabulary, grammar rules, etc.), or from a *holistic* point of view, where the learner is directly confronted with language use situations, where they “integrate various subskills and different kinds of linguistic knowledge” in order to communicate in complex situations (p. 2). The second dimension relates to the role of both the teacher and the learner in the learning process. As the name suggests, in the *teacher-centered approach*, the teacher ‘steers’ and guides learning in a particular direction, whereas in the *learner-centered approach*, it is the students who determine

the content and resources to be used or targeted based on their needs and interests. Finally, the nature of instruction can vary depending on whether the focus is placed on communication, form, or both. In *communication-focused instruction*, the goal is to achieve “adequate mutual understanding of meaning intentions” or to reach the communicative purpose, whereas in *form-focused instruction*, the attention is placed on “accuracy and complexity on the linguistic forms that students produce” (p. 3).

For decades, language learning researchers and educators have advocated for a more “holistic, learner-driven pedagogies” that help students develop autonomy and “complex functional abilities” (Van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 8) that allow them to actively participate in their own learning processes. This relatively new direction toward more holistic language learning pedagogies (Chapelle, 2008; González-Lloret, 2015; Van den Branden, 2006) seeks to revise popular approaches from the 1950s and 1960s that relied heavily on discrete, teacher-centered, and form-focused language instruction (Skehan, 2003). A more holistic approach to language teaching is desired because “it is in holistic language work that key language learning processes take place” (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 8). We can help students achieve complex and holistic learning is through “challenging tasks that they would likely also encounter in real life, inviting them to work together, and develop new insights and skills through exploratory talk and intensive interaction” (Van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 4). Therefore, one of the goals of my dissertation is to explore these types of real-world tasks and provide a pedagogical rationale for their integration into post-secondary education.

### 5.1.1 Features of Tasks

Since the early stages of TBLT, second language researchers have focused on the process of acquisition. Second language acquisition (SLA) has been studied through various lenses, including cognitive, psycholinguistic, and sociocultural interactive approaches, among others. From a cognitive perspective, Skehan (1996) notes that research focuses on “the psychological processes typically engaged in when learners do tasks” and analyzes “how attentional resources are used during task completion; the influence of task characteristics on performance; and the impact of different conditions under which tasks are completed” (p. 5).

Ellis (2009a), examines the psycholinguistic perspective and the sociocultural theory (SCT). The psycholinguistic approach conceptualizes language acquisition as “the product of processing input and output” (p. 110). This approach seeks to identify task characteristics that have a

“significant impact on the way learners process language in performance” (p. 110). In contrast, sociocultural theory “views language as socially constructed through interaction of one kind or another” (p. 110). SCT emphasizes how learning emerges from participation in meaningful activities that consider learners' needs, interests, and contextual conditions.

As we will see in the next section, the term 'task' encompasses a wide range of possible definitions. Consequently, many theorists have started by defining the key characteristics of tasks in the field of language learning. Ellis (2003) outlines the following ‘criterial features of a task’ (p. 9):

1. *A task is a workplan* that should provide a roadmap for learner activity (e.g., resources, activities, etc.)
2. *A task involves a primary focus on meaning*, so it should seek to “engage learners in using the language pragmatically rather than displaying the language”
3. *A task involves real-world processes of language use* that reflect what learners will have to perform in the real world and the language they will be exposed to (receptively and productively) in real-world communication
4. *A task can involve any of the four language skills*, so tasks may require students to read, listen, speak, and/or write as part of the workplan
5. *A task engages cognitive processes* that “influence but not determine the choice of language” (p. 10), so learners can choose what forms (linguistic or otherwise) to use
6. *A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome* that constitutes the “non-linguistic outcome of the task” although language use can be involved

These criteria can help us understand the general characteristics that we should look for in a task before implementing it into our classroom. For more specific characteristics, Candlin (2009) proposes to consider seven key features of tasks “whatever the emphasis” and “whatever the orientation of the tasks” (p. 27):

- **Input:** the way in which information is presented to the student (oral, written, etc.)
- **Roles:** the specification of what is expected of participants “in relation to the accomplishment of the task”
- **Settings:** classroom organization, sequences, and student arrangements (e.g., individual, pair, or group work)
- **Actions:** the “procedures to be followed in the understanding, execution and accomplishment of the task”

- Monitoring: the input selection and any necessary assistance or adjustments
- Outcomes: the criteria and goal(s) of the task
- Feedback: “the evaluation of the task” in terms of the content, the process, etc.

A complementary perspective is provided by Samuda and Bygate’s (2008) description of the general features of a task (Figure 6), which combines elements from both set of features outlined above. For example, it shares with Ellis’ critical features the holistic use of language (cognitive processes), the meaningful outcomes (primary focus on meaning), and the notion of phases (a work plan). Similarly, with Candlin’s key features, it shares the focus on meaning, it includes individual and group work as well, it pays attention to input material, and there is evidence of some sort of sequencing.

### **Concept 1.3 General features of a task**

1. It involves holistic language use.
2. It requires a meaningful target outcome or outcomes.
3. It necessarily involves some individual and group processes.
4. It depends on there being some input material.
5. It is made up of different phases.
6. It is important for teachers – and at some point the learners – to know what is being targeted in the language learning purpose.
7. The conditions under which it is implemented impact on process and outcome and can be manipulated and variously exploited.
8. It can be used for different pedagogic purposes at different stages of learning.

*Figure 6. General features of a task by Samuda and Bygate (2008, p. 16)*

## **5.1.2 Definition(s) of Task**

The different meanings that the term *task* can have, along with the many contexts in which it can be used, has made it difficult for scholars to agree on a single definition (Ellis, 2009a). Table 2 presents some of the most relevant definitions found in the TBLT literature, within which it is possible to identify some of the key features mentioned in the previous section.

Table 2. Some prominent definitions of 'task'

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Long, (1985)	“by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people <i>do</i> in everyday life, at work, at play and in between” (p. 89)
Willis (1996)	“[a task is a] goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (in González-Lloret, 2015, p. 2)
Nunan (2004)	“a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form” (p. 4)
Van den Branden (2006)	“A task is an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” (p. 4)
Samuda and Bygate (2008)	“a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both” (p. 69)

In my view, the main takeaway from these features and definitions is the idea of engaging learners in activities that allow them to achieve a meaningful, real-life outcome while using language. This view aligns with contemporary language proficiency standards used in post-secondary education in Europe and North America. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has recently adopted an *action-oriented approach* on the premise that “language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 29). Although it is stated that the European framework “does not prescribe any particular pedagogic approach” (p. 29), it is possible to identify some similarities between the ‘methodological message’ of the CEFR and the task-based approach. This is particularly clear when it comes to specifying what is meant by the proposed action-oriented approach:

Above all, the action-oriented approach implies purposeful, collaborative tasks in the classroom, *the primary focus of which is not language*. If the primary focus of a task is not language, then *there must be some other product or outcome* (such as planning an outing, making a poster, creating a blog, designing a festival or choosing a candidate). Descriptors can

be used to help design such tasks and also to observe and, if desired, to (self-)assess the language use of learners during the task (p. 30) (emphasis mine).

Other standardized language frameworks are moving toward “can do” statements. For instance, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards—which are widely used as a reference in the United States—describe “what students need to know and be able to do as they learn another language” (ACTFL, 2024, p. 8). These standards are organized around five goal areas also known as the five Cs of the *World-readiness standards for Language Learning*: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. ACTFL has recently published new proficiency guidelines that complement the five Cs standards. The *Can-Do statements* introduced in the proficiency guidelines are intended to show “the skills and functions that can be carried out with full control at each sublevel” (ACTFL, 2024, p. 8) to promote learner autonomy, goal setting engagement, and motivation.

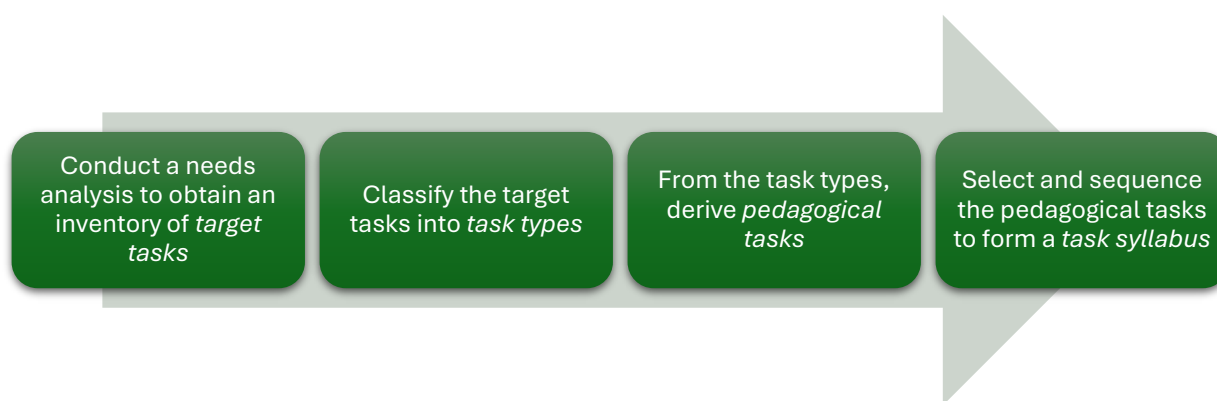
In Canada, there are two official benchmarks for measuring proficiency in the two official languages, English and French. These benchmarks primarily used for immigration, employment, and social integration processes. The *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB) provides a “descriptive scale of language ability in English” (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2012, p. 5), while the *Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadien* (NCLC) does so for French. According to Pawlikowska-Smith (2012), the CLB’s standards are task-based, learner centered, and competency-based. The latter focus on “what the learner **can do** in English” (p. 9) (emphasis in the original). However, it is not clear whether this benchmark guides language learning curricula in higher education; at least, that is not the case at the university where this study takes place, where the CEFR is followed as a reference framework. Revisions and updates to language benchmarks and standards seem to reflect an institutional commitment to maintaining a current and comprehensive proficiency scale—one that assesses students not only from a linguistic perspective, but also from a performance perspective.

Since this dissertation aims to promote the use real-world tools to prepare learners for real-world tasks, Van den Branden et al.’s (2009) definition of tasks as “the hundred-and-one things people do—identifiable as bounded recurring activities that people engage in—in order to reach real-world (and very often non-linguistic) ends, and for which they need to use language” (p. 6) seems appropriate.

## 5.2 Towards a Task-Based Curriculum

As discussed in the previous section, one of the tenets of TBLT is the importance of what students *can do* with the language. Learning by doing is supported by experiential learning theories, which assert that declarative knowledge is acquired through experience, and so to learn a language it is necessary to use it by “doing as many realistic, authentic, and relevant things with it as possible” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 34). However, it is also true that the field of education “is one of the few areas where the one-size-fits-all approach survives, in the form of state education, especially when beholden to centralized, mandated curricula and so-called ‘standards’” (Long, 2015, p. 10). Unfortunately, this tendency still exists in many post-secondary institutions in North America, so this section discusses considerations for developing a task-based curriculum for language teaching.

In this sense, it becomes imperative to promote courses organized around tasks that are “compatible with the SLA theory and research findings about how people learn languages” (Long, 2015, p. 110). González-Lloret (2015)—one of the most prominent TBLT researchers—affirms that the main goal of TBLT is “language acquisition and not just communicative effectiveness” (p. 3), so its main concern is related to “how tasks and a task-based syllabus can promote language acquisition” (p. 4). Contrary to a common belief that TBLT does not care for discrete knowledge or linguistic structures, TBLT “invokes a symbiotic *combination of implicit and explicit learning*” (Long, 2015, p. 8) that does not disregard form and recognizes it as beneficial for language acquisition (González-Lloret, 2015; Van den Branden et al., 2009). In his seminal work, Long (1985) provided some basic steps for developing a TBLT curriculum (p. 91):



Long defines *target tasks* as “tasks identified [through needs analysis] as required in order for an individual to function adequately in a particular target domain, be it occupational, vocational, or

academic” (p. 91). Target tasks are related to students’ needs, wants, and interests. They relate to activities that students do in their everyday lives and are therefore meaningful to them. These *target tasks* can be organized into *task types*, which are high-level categories that share common characteristics with *target tasks*, but at a superordinate level of detail. In the case of the study in this dissertation, although an in-depth needs analysis was not conducted, the starting point was research on the importance of digital communication for most language learners today (see chapters 2 and 3). For university-level students, it would be very useful to develop the ability to effectively communicate online using diverse genres and modes that can be useful in their courses (e.g. writing an email, commenting on a discussion forum, chatting online). Each of those specific tasks can be identified as *target tasks* and can be organized into an umbrella category (*task type*) called “communicating on-line”. In this case, the use of technology is integral to the task and influences the processes for achieving the task goal, so it should not be considered “a mere instrument or tool” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 37). The integration of technology-mediated tasks in language teaching and learning has brought about a new dimension in the field of TBLT. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The third step in Long’s (1985) work describes *Pedagogical tasks*. These tasks are simplified versions of *target tasks* and are facilitated by teachers to provide “a number of simplified, but transparent, concrete exponents of task types for classroom use” (Long, 1985, p. 92). These tasks provide a gradual increase in the level of difficulty, which should not be confused with linguistic complexity (Long, 2015). Again, there are important implications of technology-mediated tasks, so a distinction between *pedagogic language tasks* (PLTs) and *pedagogic technology tasks* (PTTs) (González-Lloret, 2015) is included below. In addition, Chapter 6 describes how these two types of pedagogical tasks have been integrated into the implementation of the target task in the present study.

The last step in Long’s implementation is forming a *task syllabus*, which is “the final sequence in which selected *pedagogical tasks* are presented to the classroom language learner” (Long, 1985, p. 93). At this stage it is important to make sure that “task types are adequately represented by the pedagogical task chosen” (p. 93). Long’s four main steps above have been adapted and complemented by other researchers across the years, especially in response to current needs and developments in language education. I will be using Long’s proposed steps to structure this

section, so I will discuss needs analysis, types of tasks (pedagogic and target tasks), and task implementation.

### 5.2.1 Needs Analysis

For Long, “since languages are widely regarded as less critical than mathematics, science or (L1) language arts, it is vital for second and foreign language programs to be well motivated, well designed, and successful” (Long, 2015, p. 10). He suggests that the key element to achieving all three is the *needs analysis* because it helps teachers identify student needs and interests, which better informs course development. In his words, “to be rational, relevant, and successful, language course development should begin with an identification of learners’ goals and an analysis of their present or future communicative needs to achieve those goals” (Long, 2015, p. 11). For Van den Branden et al. (2009), needs analysis “informs goal description and goal selection” (p. 6), which is important for planning the pedagogical intervention since different learners have different needs.

In the context of technology-mediated tasks, needs analysis must go beyond understanding the types of tasks students perform in real life, because the goal of needs analysis is to “gather information about not just the tasks, but the technological tools involved in the task; the participants’ skills and literacies; as well as their accessibility, resources, and support” (González-Lloret, 2014, p. 37). This means that teachers must strive to understand not only their students’ linguistic needs, but they also must be aware of their technological and contextual needs. In González-Lloret’s words, “as technologies become more ubiquitous, finding what the learner needs to do with the language is as important as finding through what medium this needs to be accomplished and how each affects the other” (p. 37). This last point is particularly relevant in a digital teaching environment, as technology is not neutral, as it brings specific dynamics, interactions, communications, products and processes to a particular tool or environment. This is especially the case in multilingual and multicultural contexts such as the one in which this thesis takes place.

### 5.2.2 Types of Tasks

In Long’s (1985) pedagogical roadmap for building a task-based curriculum, once a needs analysis has been conducted to identify *target tasks*, we must proceed to classify them into *task types*. However, as I mentioned earlier, Long’s concept of task types is an umbrella category under which we classify *target tasks* that share common characteristics. In the TBLT literature, different types of

tasks are described according to general classifications that can be different depending on the type of language focus (focused/unfocused), the type of outcome, the language skill involved, the source of the task content, and the context. Some common types of tasks in language pedagogy are presented in Ellis (2022), including *focused / unfocused*, *open-ended / closed-ended*, *input-based / output-based*, *teacher-generated / learner-generated*, and *pedagogical / real-world* tasks.

*Focused tasks* aim to “induce learners to process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example, a grammatical structure” (Ellis, 2003, p. 16), but still maintain a focus on meaning, and on achieving the outcome. It is worth noting that although these types of tasks may be confused with grammar *exercises*, they differ in that “an exercise is premised on the need to develop linguistic skills as a prerequisite for the learning of communicative abilities, while a task is based on the assumption that linguistic abilities are developed through communicative activity” (Ellis, 2009a, p. 112). *Unfocused tasks*, on the other hand, allow learners to choose from different linguistic forms in order to achieve their communicative goal, which is not designed with a specific linguistic outcome in mind. *Teacher-generated* and *student-generated* tasks can be differentiated by the source of the content. In *teacher-generated tasks*, the content to be discussed (e.g., the picture to be described, the conversation to be role-played, the audio to be listened to, etc.) is generated or selected by the teacher. In *student-generated tasks*, it is the students who, for example, draw the picture to be described, create the dialogue to be acted out, or record the audio to be listened to. Content is also linked to tasks that involve input and output. In *input-based tasks*, students practice receptive skills such as listening or reading, while in *output-based tasks*, students are expected to engage in written or oral production. Input-driven tasks are considered to be particularly beneficial in the early stages of language learning because learners may not yet have sufficient repertoire to produce language in the L2 (Ellis et al., 2020), so receiving a lot of (authentic) input provide them with opportunities for incidental learning (Ellis, 2022; González-Lloret, 2015).

While some tasks may be preferred based on the type of skills they target (receptive, productive, or both), the type of outcome can also guide the type of task choice. In a *closed-ended task*, there is a clear, specific *correct* outcome. This is the type of task students engage in when, for example, they listen to a recording and fill in an information gap where both the teacher and the students know the audio will give them the correct answer. In *open-ended tasks*, however, there are multiple possible outcomes. This is the case when students are given a situation where they have to make

choices and defend their point. For example, we can show students a picture of a group of people who are planning their next vacation. The goal is for students to work individually or collaboratively to come up with different accommodation options that would meet the group's specific needs and interests. If we wish to integrate technology, we can ask students to search the web and find suitable suggestions and/or teachers can provide a list of reliable websites to ensure appropriate content. Students would then present and persuade the group to choose their option. The outcomes and arguments can be as varied as the number of students.

While the needs analysis is a solid starting point for identifying what students need and want to do with the language, understanding the orientation, the focus, and the outcome of different types of tasks can help us better determine when and how to integrate them into our courses, whether as *pedagogical* and/or *real-world* tasks.

#### 5.2.2.1 Pedagogical Tasks

Pedagogical tasks can be defined as “the activities and the materials that teachers and/or students work on in the classroom or other instructional environment” (Long, 2015, p. 6) to help learners “activate and develop their language skill” (Nunan, 2010, p. 138). These pedagogical tasks aim to “facilitate and scaffold student learning, bringing learners to the point at which they can perform the target task successfully without assistance” (González-Lloret & Rock, 2022, p. 39). Nunan (2010) divides pedagogical tasks into *activation tasks* and *rehearsal tasks*. *Activation tasks* aim at ‘stimulating’ language forms and functions students have been learning, while *rehearsal tasks* aim at giving students ‘direct rehearsal’ of a real-world type of task (p. 139). Ellis (2009a) asserts that rehearsal tasks have shown to be beneficial for subsequent performance as they allow for planning and practice to complete the same task a second time. The present study was conducted under rehearsal task conditions.

At this point, it is important to make the distinction between *task rehearsal* and *task repetition* because these two terms have been used synonymously within TBLT theory (G. Bui & Yu, 2021; Tabari & Golparvar, 2024). According to Bui and Yu (2021), one of the key differences between these two conditions is the individual's awareness of a subsequent performance. That is to say that in *task repetition*, learners are not aware that they will repeat the task, whereas in *task rehearsal* there is an awareness of future performance(s). Task rehearsal allows learners “to prepare through practice before actual execution, armed with an awareness of potential subsequent iterations” (Tabari & Golparvar, 2024, p. 3). This preparedness is designed to mirror, at least partially, the

communicative and cognitive demands that learners may encounter outside the classroom. Some studies have measured the effects of both *task repetition* and *task rehearsal* for oral and written proficiency (G. Bui & Yu, 2021; Ellis, 2009b; Nguyen & Newton, 2020; Stroud, 2021; Tabari & Golparvar, 2024). *Task repetition* has shown overall writing performance with regards to syntactic complexity, accuracy, lexical complexity, and fluency (Tabari & Golparvar, 2024). *Rehearsal tasks* have also been found to positively affect fluency and accuracy (Tabari & Golparvar, 2024), and to improve attention to language form (Nguyen & Newton, 2020, p. 590). While performance results tend to be positive from both approaches, in the context of my study I am more interested in providing learners with a low-stakes environment in which they can experiment with genre-specific conventions, explore different modes of communication, and test the capabilities of digital tools before creating a final product that may or may not necessarily be similar to the previous one.

In this technology-mediated context, González-Lloret (2015) makes a valuable contribution to the concept of pedagogical tasks by making a distinction between *pedagogic language tasks* and *pedagogic technology tasks*. The former takes into account the linguistic, contextual, and/or pragmatic needs that the students may have when completing a task, while *pedagogic technology tasks* take into account the skills and knowledge students need to perform tasks in digital environments that are different from—or have no equivalent in—physical environments (e.g., attaching a document, linking content, uploading photos or embedding videos, etc.).

I decided that task rehearsal was more appropriate for the multimodal context of my study because I wanted students to be aware of the connection between the task and its "real-world" version, as I intended for them to create their own blogs using a real platform and a real audience. At the same time, I wanted them to have the confidence and peace of mind that comes with knowing they were in the rehearsal stage, so a polished version was not expected.

#### 5.2.2.2 Real-World Tasks

While *pedagogical tasks* can be associated with preparing learners for later performance through activation or repetition, *target tasks* can be described as what learners “do with the language in the world outside of the classroom” (Nunan, 2010, p. 137). This is essential because “it is only through real contexts and natural discourse that classroom-learned language becomes meaningful for real-world communication” (L. Lee, 2009, p. 128). *Target tasks* are commonly referred to as *real-world tasks* because they are seen as having a meaningful connection to learners’ real lives (González-Lloret, 2015; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Long, 1985, 2015). At the turn of the

century, with the advent of e-mail, Web sites, video games, and telecommunications, among other technologies, computer-assisted language learning practices began to offer alternatives for connecting language learning with students' real-world practices. In the wake of these technological changes (and challenges) in the real world, Warschauer (2000) noted:

we will fulfill the promise of computers in the classroom when we allow and encourage students to perform the most real tasks possible, taking advantage of the power of modern information and communication technologies to help try to change the world in ways that suit students' own critical values and the interests of humankind (p. 66).

It seems to me that such a promise has yet to be fulfilled as many language teachers remain lethargic about the impending incursion of increasingly intelligent technology into our teaching practices. This may be partly due to the assumption that real-world tasks involving technology may not be entirely useful in the context of foreign language learning, because students may not have a real need to use the target language online or outside the classroom. Ellis et al. (2020) suggest that “what is needed for general purpose learners are pedagogic tasks that draw on interesting and familiar content” (p. 13). However, I believe that real-world tasks also have a tremendous learning potential even in the foreign language (FL) context, especially through technology-mediated real-world tasks that are typically not geographically bound and can connect learners anywhere, anytime to authentic, diverse linguacultural communities online. Therefore, we must encourage students to avoid passively inhabiting the walls of the classroom and participate in the target linguacultural communities physically (if possible) or online (Vandergriff, 2016).

Furthermore, if we agree that a task “is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world” (Ellis, 2003, p. 16), then the tasks we design should be as real and authentic as possible. Willis and Willis (2007) propose three levels at which classroom tasks (or pedagogical tasks) should mirror real-world tasks (p. 136):

- *Meaning*: “learners produce meanings which will be useful in the real world”
- *Discourse*: “learners realize discourse acts which reflect the real world”
- *Activity*: learners “engage in a communicative activity which reflects very directly the way language is used outside the classroom”

While these three levels clearly emphasize the use of language for real purposes, it is important to be aware that technology is not neutral (Chapelle, 2014; González-Lloret, 2015) and that each student is unique. Therefore, we must carefully select technology and real-world tasks because (as discussed in [section 3.3](#)) the digital tools we use can determine genre characteristics, type of discourse, potential audience, and other contextual elements. This is also true because “one person’s real world is another’s unknown territory” (Chapelle, 2014, p. 330), so we must ensure that tasks (whether target or pedagogical) are relevant to learners’ interests, and that they match their technical and linguistic goals and skills (Sauro, 2014).

### 5.3 Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching

So far, this chapter has described how the TBLT framework has been situated in language pedagogy over the last forty years and outlined some approaches to integrating tasks into the (second/foreign/additional) language curriculum. As technology has become ubiquitous in language education in many parts of our globalized societies, it is imperative to consider how technologies and tasks are intertwined. A better understanding of this relationship can help us to “explore how the integration of technology can enhance or facilitate the benefits of task-based language teaching (TBLT) as well as addressing how TBLT can serve as a framework in which to ground research conducted in CALL contexts” (Ziegler, 2016, p. 137).

[Section 2.3](#) explored the foundations of CALL, the emergence of computer-mediated communication (CMC), and the affordances of *Web 2.0* technologies, which served to situate this study within the field of educational technology. Now, faced with the reality that technology-mediated language learning is no longer exclusively facilitated by computers, we must strive to understand the critical role that (emerging) technologies are playing in the development of new and more complex real-world tasks, such as paying bills, applying for jobs, making reservations, navigating physical and virtual spaces, and so on. In response to these transformations, the 2020 publication of the CEFR—which modified the 2001 edition, incorporated an *online interaction* component to the descriptions of the *Mediation* component. The rationale for this is that “there are emergent properties of group interaction online that are almost impossible to capture in traditional competence scales focusing on the individual’s behaviour in speech, signing or in writing” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 84). This suggests that online interactions—whether written or oral—cannot be seen simply as another way of doing the same things, but as part of the competencies

that students need to develop in order to interact in the real world, regardless of language proficiency.

Furthermore, the CEFR includes a *Goal-oriented* section for online transactions and collaboration through a progression scale where “the move towards higher levels expands from basic transactions and information exchange at the A levels towards more sophisticated collaborative project work that is goal-oriented” (p. 86). The descriptors are ‘*can do*’ statements, and the scale is based on tasks that range from simple to complex (depending on the proficiency level) and progress from ‘reactive to proactive participation’ where learners engage in online tasks individually, cooperatively, and collaboratively.

These changes and considerations have been incorporated so that stakeholders aim to prepare students for the demands of digitally mediated societies. In our role as teachers, it is important to consider that “we may not be able to transplant theories directly from traditional face-to-face tasks to those mediated through technology” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 43), especially in contexts where tasks previously did not require the use of technology but now do (e.g., applying for a job). See González-Lloret (2015) for some useful examples of how some ‘traditional’ tasks have been transformed in the light of technology.

This transformation of real-world tasks has also brought about change in the materials that teachers use in the classroom, as the use of *realia* has shifted from handling paper-printed restaurant menus, transportation schedules, and newspaper clippings to accessing them online (Godwin-Jones, 2021). If we believe that course materials must provide authentic input and practice for students, then we must agree that students’ needs, wants, and interests provide fundamental information for curriculum design (Long, 1985) because it makes them more invested in completing the task (Chapelle, 2014). The use of technology must be supported by reflection and needs analysis to “gather information about not just the tasks but also the technological tools involved in the task and the participants’ skills and digital literacies, as well as their accessibility, resources, and support during and after learning” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 20). Experience can tell us that even when teaching the so-called *digital natives*, we find that some of them “may lack the necessary technical skills to exploit the multi-modal resources made available to them” (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 19). Therefore, we need to design tasks “according to their age, context, technology skills, digital literacies, and access to technology” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 20) to better meet their individual (and eventually collective) needs.

Undoubtedly, enabling students to use technology effectively would require that teachers be at least moderately familiar with its use(s). Despite the efforts of the educational community, “teachers often lack training in how to handle tasks in a technologically mediated environment while the emphasis on learner-centredness can leave them uncertain of their own role” (Ellis et al., 2020, pp. 19–20). One possible first step to overcoming this situation is approaching teaching with an open mind about technology about and investing in our own digital literacy. This will prepare us to feel more empowered and comfortable navigating technology-mediated TBLT. The next step, then, is to understand that the use of technology in language teaching could be irrelevant “if its application and use are not grounded in sound and empirically supported approaches to language learning and teaching” (Ziegler, 2016, p. 137).

In the early 2000s, Chapelle (2001) provided a set of task evaluation criteria that intended to guide teachers in identifying key features of CALL tasks. The six criteria for her framework were:

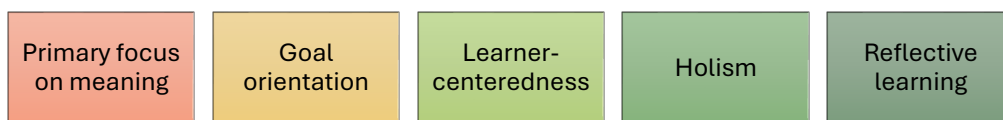
- *Language learning potential*, which means that the CALL activity “needs to show that learners have improved in their control of the aspects of the target language focused on the activity” (pp. 68–69)
- *Learner fit*, which refers to “the extent to which a CALL task engages learners in language at a useful level of difficulty in a way that is appropriate to their individual characteristics” (p. 80)
- *Meaning focus*, which is “evident through the learners’ development of coherence through a topic other than the form of the target language” (p. 85)
- *Authenticity*, which refers to evidence that “learner’s performance in CALL tasks correspond to what one would expect to see outside the CALL task” (p. 88)
- *Positive impact*, which addresses the “positive influence of CALL activities on language classrooms” (p. 90)
- *Practicality*, seeks to “evidence suggesting that hardware, software, and personnel resources prove to be sufficient to allow CALL to succeed” (p. 93)

The advances in technology over the past two decades and their impact on the tasks we perform in our daily lives have called for reflection on the assessment of task-based teaching and learning. González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) proposed an updated set of definitional features of technology-mediated tasks that “are intended to promote advances in theory, research, and practice by

codifying a common set of concepts” (Chapelle, 2014, p. 328). These five elements have been used to inform the design of the Web 2.0 task conducted for this dissertation.

### 5.3.1 Five Critical Elements for Task-and-Technology Integrations

According to Van den Branden et al. (2009), a common issue observed in SLA research is that participants are asked to complete tasks that are guided by research questions that “focused on formal properties of the output produced during task performance, or on the acquisition of particular linguistic forms” rather than on how (or whether) the proposed task helps learners to “acquire language ability and apply it in performing a variety of authentic tasks to criterion” (p. 8). In many of the studies presented in previous chapters, the written or oral production activity (e.g., compositions, wiki entries, essays, video comments, etc.) was referred to as a *task*. However, it is not clear whether these tasks were designed according to the criteria of the task-based approach, or at least it is not always described as such in the methodology. Be that as it may, given the importance of reflecting on how technologically mediated tasks are conceived and implemented in language classrooms, the blog writing task designed for my study was informed by González-Lloret and Ortega’s (2014) five key elements for conceiving tasks in the world of new technologies:



*Primary focus* on meaning emphasizes the importance of meaning, over language form, so that language learning is ‘incidental’. This does not mean that language structure is not present, but it should be ‘implicit’ rather than the primary goal. *Goal orientation* entails that “the task plan must offer a language-and-action experience” (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 6), which means that there is a communicative purpose for the task that is realized in the task outcome. In addition, the task must address students’ wants and needs to encourage them to use their own (non)linguistic resources (*learner-centeredness*) to achieve the goal(s) of the task(s). These tasks must be authentic and involve real language use in order to integrate form, function, and meaning in a *holistic* way. Finally, since the ‘experiential learning’ perspective in this framework “involves cycles of reflection and self-reflection” (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, p. 6), the tasks must provide opportunities for *reflective learning*. The criteria proposed by Chapelle (2001) and González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) share almost all of the essential features outlined, with the difference that

Chapelle's criteria included *practicality* and *positive impact*, which were omitted in González-Lloret and Ortega's criteria, which added *goal orientation*.

The task feature criteria presented in this section has become an integral part of technology-mediated TBLT framework. This framework promotes a new conception on the reciprocal relationship between tasks and technologies where “tasks and task-based curricula acknowledge and embrace the integration of technology as not only a medium but also as an opportunity for learning by doing, providing opportunities for learners [sic] to improve their digital literacy and real-world technology skills” (Ziegler, 2016, pp. 137–138).

### 5.4.1 The Task Implementation

Task implementation in this thesis refers to the steps followed during the lesson(s) to reach the task outcome. There are several approaches to the implementation of tasks in the classroom, which may vary depending on the teacher or the task objective(s). The implementation process is usually divided into phases, which consist of “breaking down the overall task into a series of interlocking steps” to make the task “more manageable” (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 14). In general, the literature divides the task process into three main stages that reflect the chronology of the implementation a task into a lesson: before, during, and after. Two well-known designs for the implementation of tasks in the second/additional language classroom have been put forth by Willis (1996) and Skehan (2014) are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Two models for task implementation

	<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
Willis's (1996) task cycle model	Pre-task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to topic and task</li> </ul>	Task cycle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Report</li> </ul>	Language focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Practice</li> </ul>
Skehan's (2014) implementation phases	Preparedness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Repetition</li> <li>• Familiarity</li> </ul>	Task processing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time pressure</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Information pressure</li> <li>• Negotiability and mediation</li> </ul>	Post-task <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-task activities</li> <li>• Post-task exploitation</li> </ul>

The present thesis explores learning processes in the three main phases of task implementation by following Willis's (1996) task cycle model.

#### 5.2.3.1 Willis's model

Willis's (1996) model is divided into three main phases: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. In the first phase, there is an introduction to the topic and task, and students are exposed to authentic input in the target language. In this phase, the teacher “explores the topic, presents the task, provides instructions, and highlights the words and phrases that are important for the task” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 4). This conception differs from other approaches to pre-tasking where activities of planning and repetition take place (H. Y. G. Bui, 2014; Foster & Skehan, 2009; Nitta & Baba, 2014; Ortega, 2009). In any case, it is generally acknowledged that planning plays a key role in task performance. For example, Ellis (2005) divides the planning process into *Pre-task planning* and *Within task planning*—before and during the task is performed, respectively. During the *pre-task planning*, we can find a *rehearsal* stage, in which learners have the opportunity to “perform the task before the 'main performance'” (p. 3). *Pre-task planning* also involves *strategic planning* as it allows learners to become familiar with “the content they will need to encode and how to express this content” (p. 3). As for *within-task planning*, Ellis includes two dimensions that are time-dependent: *pressured* and *unpressured planning*. For Willis, however, planning does take place *before* the main task, but it occurs *during* the task cycle.

The *task cycle* itself has three components: *task*, *planning*, and *report*. The *task* stage is no longer centered on the teacher but on the learner(s), as it provides “a vital opportunity for [them] to use whatever language they can muster, working simultaneously, in pairs or small groups, to achieve the goals of the task” (J. Willis, 1996, p. 53). This means that students use the language they have available in their inventory to interact with input and output, trying to communicate without focusing on form. Teachers are thus encouraged to “have self-control and courage to stand back and let the learners get on with the task on their own” (J. Willis, 2009, p. 227), which is especially important for some of us who, in an effort to ‘facilitate,’ may end up ‘interfering’ with unnecessary corrections or suggestions. According to Willis (2009), briefing and correcting, is more desirable after the task has been completed so that students have the opportunity to try to figure things out for themselves.

The second stage in the task cycle is *planning*. In this phase, students organize what they are going to say/write, experiment with the language, and seek support from resources, peers, and the

teacher to find appropriate ways to communicate their ideas. This is the time when students strive for accuracy and complexity, so it is at this stage that teachers can act as consultants, suggesting ways to improve students' work, correcting selected errors, and providing access to other resources. It is also the time to explain the (forthcoming) *report* stage and to clarify its purpose, so teachers can “help learners plan their reports effectively and maximize their learning opportunities” (J. Willis, 2009, p. 230).

The third and final stage in the task cycle is the *report* stage, where students share what they have accomplished in the task in oral or written form (e.g., a class presentation, a written comment, etc.). At this stage, students consider the characteristics of their audience and strive for accuracy and fluency in order to report appropriately. Teachers act as facilitators to introduce the presenters, moderate the discussions, manage time, summarize, etc., and encourage students to do their best to get the message across, even with some linguistic inconsistencies. They can give some feedback on content and form, but should focus mostly on positive aspects or what students did right.

The final phase is *language focus*, where students engage in language analysis activities that help them review and understand the linguistic features of the task and practice them through structured activities that target vocabulary, grammar, pragmatic functions, among others. Thus, the teacher “explains important patterns and aspects of the language, and brings to learners’ attention language items” (González-Lloret, 2015, p. 4). In other words, the pedagogical goal of this stage is to promote reflection and awareness by encouraging “attention to form, in particular to those forms that proved problematic to the learners when they performed the task” (Ellis, 2003, p. 258).

Overall, this chapter introduced TBLT as a pedagogical framework that meaningfully integrate technology, genre, and learner-centered instruction. The theoretical and methodological framework presented next further complements this pedagogical orientation and underpins the design, implementation, and analysis of the present study.

# Chapter 6: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

## 6.1 Overview

As discussed in the literature review, there is a growing need to explore how new and emerging technologies influence task-based language learning, whether they are used as stand-alone tools or in combination (Ziegler, 2016). This study contributes to that discussion by examining blogs as genre of writing in the L2 Spanish classroom, while also considering learners self-reported use of (intelligent) writing assistance tools within the blog-writing task.

This chapter first presents the research questions, situating them within the conceptual and pedagogical concerns identified in the literature. It then introduces the theoretical considerations that ground the study, providing a framework that informs its methodological orientation. Next, the chapter outlines the intervention design, describing the procedures for conducting the study across three main phases: a pre-task, a main task, and a post-task. It then details the data collection process, including the compilation of the dataset as well as the anonymization and data protection procedures adopted to safeguard participants' identities.

Finally, this chapter presents the analysis methods from three complementary perspectives: the macro-textual analysis of the semiotic resources found in the students' blogs; the micro-textual analysis of the types of discourse that students used; and the analysis of the students' self-reported reflections on the use of (intelligent) writing assistance tools.

### 6.1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) have guided this study:

RQ 1: What macro-textual features are observed in blogs produced by learners of Spanish?

The first research question addresses the macro-textual component of travel blogs, as described in Gonçalves (2014) genre parameters. This component focuses on the overall textual organization of blogs (e.g., titles and subtitles, content layout, and multimodal elements) to explore the macro-textual characteristics of blogs produced by L2 students. This question examines how students, within the context of a rehearsal task, employed macro-textual features when producing their travel blogs.

RQ 2: What micro-textual features are observed in blogs produced by learners of Spanish?

The second research question examines the micro-textual component of Gonçalves's (2014) genre parameters, which relates to the discursive organization of blogs (i.e., interactive discourse, interactive report, theoretical discourse, and narration). This question seeks to explore the types of discourse students favored when creating a personal travel blog as a rehearsal task.

RQ 3: What are students' perceptions of blogs and writing assistance tools with respect to their prior familiarity, habitual practices, and experiences completing the blog writing task?

The third research question explores students' familiarity with blogs and writing assistance tools, their reported use of these tools while completing the blog task, and their overall experience with the blog-writing activity. This question aims to shed light on the students' perceptions and practices throughout the task, which includes their prior knowledge and habitual use of writing assistance tools and their reflections after creating their blogs with no restrictions on the use of such tools.

The next section presents the theoretical framework that structures the present investigation. This framework informs the methodological choices that follow, which are described in relation to the study design, data collection processes, and analytical procedures.

## 6.2 Theoretical Framework

These questions are examined through an integrated theoretical framework that draws on applied linguistics, sociocultural theory, literacy studies, and digital pedagogy. Taken together, these perspectives conceptualize second/additional language learning as a socially situated, mediated, and multimodal process, embedded within specific cultural, technological, and institutional contexts (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than viewing language development as the individual acquisition of decontextualized forms, this framework foregrounds learners' participation in meaningful communicative practices mediated by tools, genres, audiences, and semiotic resources.

Within this orientation, blogging is examined not simply as a technological tool or writing activity, but as a pedagogically situated digital genre that mobilizes multiple competencies simultaneously. These include linguistic, digital, multimodal, social, and intercultural competencies, all of which are central to contemporary L2 communication. The framework therefore integrates higher-level theoretical perspectives—socioconstructivism, sociocultural theory, multiliteracies, multimodality, and multilingualism—with domain-specific pedagogical approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and an ecological view of digital (including intelligent) writing tools. This combination provides a coherent conceptual basis for analyzing blogging tasks in the L2 Spanish classroom and for interpreting learners’ textual productions and perceptions.

### 6.2.1 Socioconstructivism and Sociocultural Theory

From a socioconstructivist perspective, cognition emerges from the dynamic interplay between social, cultural, and individual factors involved in the co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Within this framework, humans appropriate and repurpose cultural artifacts to regulate mental functioning, a process conceptualized as mediation (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Learning, therefore, is not solely an individual cognitive activity but a socially mediated process that unfolds through interaction with others and engagement with the sociocultural environment. As social learners, individuals construct knowledge through scaffolding, dialogue, and collaboration with tutors and peers, which support development within meaningful activity contexts (Li, 2021).

Closely aligned with this view, sociocultural theory (SCT) places mediation at the center of cognitive and linguistic development. Such mediation is not limited to physical environments where people interact face to face, but also extends to networked spaces that provide learners with opportunities to collaborate, connect with communities of practice beyond their immediate context, interact with diverse audiences, and co-create meaning (Rivens Mompean, 2010). Tasks framed under this approach “promote social learning and collaboration as well as experiential and meaningful learning” (Oskoz & Elola, 2014, p. 118).

The blogging task implemented in this study constitutes an exploration of socioconstructivist practices as students engage with diverse semiotic resources at the macro-textual level to situate their products within the conventional features of the blog-genre. This involves the integration of various meaning-making modes such as images, videos, text formatting, and hypertextual resources. At the micro-textual level, learners make linguistic choices that allow them to connect

with their intended audience, drawing on diverse types of discourse to fulfill their communicative purposes. Blog writing is thus conceptualized as a process of genre appropriation, in which learners experiment with and gradually internalize the conventions of a digital public writing genre in the target language.

These meaningful, learner-centered tasks align with the pedagogical principles discussed in the TBLT framework. By fostering such learner-centered environments, we facilitate meaningful connections across temporal-spatial boundaries (Ozkan, 2015), creating interconnected educational communities situated not only in the classroom but also in real world contexts.

### 6.2.2 Multi-Competencies in the Digital Age

In contemporary digitally permeated societies, communication and learning are characterized by an increasing complexity of modes, tools, and interactional spaces (Lotherington et al., 2009; Vandergriff, 2016). As a result, “becoming literate is not just a matter of learning how to decode and put to paper letters and words, but rather a matter of mastering processes that are deemed valuable in particular societies, cultures, and contexts” (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, p. 172). New literacy studies perceive literacy “a social practice and not merely an individual or cognitive one” (Thorne, 2013, p. 222), which have shifted the attention toward the understanding how reading, writing, interacting, participating, and constructing meaning occur online (Mills, 2010).

The notion of multi-competencies provides an overarching lens for understanding how learners engage with language and meaning in such environments. These multi-competencies encompass linguistic, digital, social, cultural, technological dimensions that are deeply intertwined in digital communication practices. In the context of L2 education, this perspective highlights the need to foster communicative competence, genre knowledge, and pragmatic skills so that learners can successfully participate in global communities characterized by specific sociocultural practices, beliefs, and values (Davies, 2011).

Blogging tasks exemplify the convergence of these competencies. From a linguistic perspective, blogging in the L2 requires learners to draw on the target language’s system and conventions to communicate in writing. This involves making appropriate lexical, grammatical, and discursive decisions, including tense, aspect, and register choices, to effectively convey meaning to the intended audience. At the same time, from a paralinguistic and semiotic perspective, learners use their multimodal skills to design digital compositions. These include decisions about layout,

images, hyperlinks, visual emphasis, and the use of writing tools or resources that shape how messages are produced and interpreted. This study, therefore, situates blogging within a broader ecology of digitally-mediated literacies where multiliteracies, digital literacy, multimodality, and multilingualism interplay to capture the complexities of learner's meaning-making process.

### 6.2.3 A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies for Digital L2 Writing

The term *multiliteracy*, first introduced by the New London Group (NLG) (1996), constitutes a fundamental pillar in this theoretical framework. The multiliteracies perspective emerged in light of “the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (p. 63) that brought about important transformations in contemporary societies. This perspective called for a reconsideration of what was understood as literacy, broadening it into a more inclusive literacy pedagogy that takes into account cultural and linguistic diversity as well as the growing influence of digital and multimedia forms of communication (The New London Group, 1996).

Multiliteracies extend the scope beyond traditional reading and writing literacies to include the ability to communicate and collaborate through digital tools, manage social relationships online, share content across platforms, and locate and critically interpret information (Vandergriff, 2016). This expanded view takes into consideration global linguacultural diversity as well as the digital and multimodal dimensions of contemporary communication (Thorne, 2013), which is relevant for L2 learners whose communicative practices increasingly occur in networked environments.

The NLG proposed four pedagogical principles (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013, p. 126), summarized by Lin et al., (2022) as follows:

- *Situated practice*, which fosters learners' semiotic experience of learning in immersion within a community
- *Overt instruction*, which are teachers' scaffolding to learners' meaning making by introducing metalanguage
- *Critical framing*, which concerns learners' reflective and critical practice towards what they have learned
- *Transformed practice*, where learners transfer and re-create meaning and discourses

These components resonate with task-based and genre-oriented approaches to L2 writing, including the blogging task examined in this study, as technology-mediated practices involve

communicative demands that go beyond conventional literacy. In online environments, meaning-making becomes multimodal, discourse conventions evolve, authorship is reconfigured, and learners interact within culturally diverse communities (Kern, 2006).

#### 6.2.4 Digital literacy and Digital Citizenship

Digital literacy constitutes a key dimension of multiliteracies and multi-competencies. Broadly defined, digital literacy refers to the skills and dispositions needed to access, evaluate, and create digital content (Bates, 2019). However, in educational contexts—particularly in second/additional language education—digital literacy encompasses more than technical proficiency. It involves the ability to use digital tools to connect with others, to expressing oneself, to collaborate, and to engage in socially meaningful ways across cultural and linguistic boundaries (Vandergriff, 2016).

Martin and Grudziecki's (2006) definition is particularly relevant to this dissertation as it the ability and awareness to use digital technologies to find, evaluate, integrate, and transform information, but also to create media artifacts, communicate with others, and reflect critically on these practices in situated contexts. This expanded understanding positions digital literacy as inherently social, ethical, and reflective.

This emphasis on ethical, responsible, and context-appropriate engagement with digital technologies is at the core of digital citizenship (DuBravac, 2013). This concept envisions the student not only as a skilled and knowledgeable user of technology, but also as a responsible social actor whose values, attitudes and beliefs can be adapted to different on- and off-line environments (Ollivier et al., 2023). Learners are, therefore, social actors who responsibly interact with technology in specific contexts and situations with both competence and ethical awareness. In this dissertation, digital citizenship is not treated as a separate instructional goal, but as an integral dimension of learner's active participation in digital writing practices and spaces.

Ribble's (2021) framework of digital citizenship, structured around nine elements grouped under respect, education, and protection, provides a conceptual reference point for understanding the ethical and social dimensions of blogging tasks. It frames blogging as a digital practice involving public or semi-public authorship, audience awareness, and the negotiation of rights and responsibilities in online communication. From this perspective, engaging L2 students in blog writing not only provides an alternative way to use the target language in real contexts but also promotes awareness of how language and digital tools are used in socially responsible ways.

### 6.2.5 Multimodality and Semiotic Design

Multimodality represents another cornerstone of this theoretical framework. Contemporary communication is increasingly characterized by the integration of multiple semiotic modes, including written language, images, sound, layout, color, and movement (M. Gonçalves, 2014). As Cope and Kalantzis (2013) note, literacy pedagogy must account for both multilingual and multimodal dimensions of meaning-making. Within this view, multimodality can be defined as “the complex relationship that develops between multiple tools and modes when they are co-deployed in different combinations, in learning situations to work toward particular objectives” (Chanier & Lamy, 2017, p. 430).

In digital contexts, non-verbal cues and other semiotic resources play a crucial role in transmitting nuance and emotion (Muñoz-Basols et al., 2024). These semiotic resources encompass a broad array of modes for constructing meaning (Davies, 2011), in which language is no longer the sole vehicle for communication but rather one resource among others, such as images, graphs, emoticons, and similar forms. For language education, these new forms of knowledge building, meaning making, and social interaction call for greater attention to digital genres in L2 contexts as this semiotic richness provides students with opportunities to communicate using a wide variety of semiotic resources (Vandergriff, 2016). What is more, web-based communication has enabled “new forms of discourse; new forms of authorship; new forms of identity construction; new ways to form, choose, and maintain learning communities and affinity groups” (Kern, 2006, p. 183), which provides learners with meaningful environments for targeted practice, social interaction, and self-expression (Stockwell, 2022).

In this study, blogs are conceptualized as multimodal digital genres (see [section 3.3.5.1](#)). When creating blog posts, learners can include images from the web or personal sources, add hyperlinks, and adjust formatting elements such as font, size, and color. These elements work together with the written text in the target language to create meaning. Drawing on social semiotic frameworks (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Satar et al., 2023), the multimodal analysis examines how learners orchestrate semiotic resources in relation to genre conventions and audience expectations. This approach offers a more comprehensive account of social presence and communicative competence in digital contexts (Satar et al., 2023).

## 6.2.6 Multilingualism and Plurilingual Perspectives

Multilingualism provides an essential contextual and theoretical backdrop for this research. In Canada, “one in five Canadian households were multilingual in 2021” (Statistics Canada, 2023, para. 5), being English and/or French one of those spoken languages in 97.8% of the multilingual households outside Quebec. This linguistic diversity is a defining characteristic of society and educational institutions, particularly at the university level, where students come from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, bringing diverse repertoires into the L2 classroom.

From a pedagogical perspective, teaching Spanish as an additional language in multilingual contexts fosters intercultural awareness and sensitivity to sociolinguistic variation. Beyond the classroom, an open stance toward multilingualism is increasingly important in digital environments. While English has historically dominated online spaces, *Web 2.0* technologies have expanded opportunities for multilingual communication, language exchange, and participation in diverse discourse communities through access to authentic linguistic and cultural artifacts (Benson, 2015; Kern & Malinowski, 2016).

Developing multilingual or plurilingual competence in such digital environments involves navigating not only multiple languages, but also genre conventions, rhetorical style, and multimodal practices (Sykes et al., 2008). Guichon and Cohen (2016) identify three key literacies to foster in multilingual language learners, including “the ability to communicate using different mediational [sic] means; the ability to cooperate in net-based interactions; and the ability to create different forms of information such as web pages” (p. 515). Blogging tasks, situated at the intersection of language learning, digital communication, and genre-based writing, provide an enriching context in which to examine these competencies.

## 6.2.7 Linking Theory, Pedagogy, and Research Design

To operationalize these theoretical perspectives, this study draws on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as its primary pedagogical framework. TBLT emphasizes authentic, goal-oriented tasks that prioritize meaning-making, interaction, and learner agency (Ellis, 2003; Ellis et al., 2020; D. Willis & Willis, 2007). The travel blog task analyzed in this study aligns with TBLT principles by engaging learners in a meaningful writing activity that allows them to express themselves, negotiate their public or private presence, orient their writing toward audiences beyond the teacher, and make strategic linguistic and semiotic choices in the creation of their multimodal products.

Adopting an ecological perspective and a sociotechnical view, this study examines digital genres and writing tools, including (intelligent) writing technologies. From this standpoint, these tools are conceptualized as mediational artifacts that support genre-based writing processes without displacing learner agency (Bouakaz & Khalid, 2025; Salwei & Carayon, 2022). These decisions reflect learners' efforts to regulate and shape their communication and language-learning processes through mediation (Levi & Poehner, 2018). Thus, the reported uses of digital and intelligent tools by learners in this study provide insight into the implementation of blogging tasks in digital environments, while maintaining an analytical focus on task performance and pedagogical design.

The integrated theoretical framework presented above, anchored in a TBLT pedagogical orientation, inform the analytical focus of this study's [research questions](#). Socioconstructivist, multilingual, and multimodal perspectives guide the macro-textual analysis (RQ1) by focusing on learners' semiotic choices and their awareness of the diverse linguistic and cultural resources available to them for creating meaning in their blogs. These perspectives enable an examination of how students select and orchestrate linguistic and non-linguistic elements (e.g., layout, images, hyperlinks) to align their texts with the conventions of the blog genre and address an intended audience. Informed by sociocultural and multilingual perspectives, the examination of micro-textual features (RQ2) centers on how learners engage their audience through linguistic choices in a plurilingual writing context. This analysis includes discourse types, verb constructions, and other textual resources students use to narrate, describe, and interact with readers. Finally, digital and multiliteracy frameworks support the exploration of students' practices and perceptions of blog writing and writing assistance tools (RQ3). Through these frameworks, learners are viewed as reflective agents who evaluate the capabilities, limitations, and ethical implications of digital tools when creating multimodal texts for a plurilingual audience. Taken together, these perspectives provide a robust and coherent framework for understanding blogging in the L2 classroom as a socially situated, pedagogically grounded, and multimodally rich genre.

## 6.3 Methodology

The rationale for this dissertation stems from the connection between the needs and opportunities identified in my teaching practice and my research interests in the pedagogical integration of educational technology in language learning. Accordingly, this study adopts an action research approach, as it allows the teacher-researcher in a dual role to take an “investigative stance toward their own classroom practices” (Burns, 2009, p. 289). Banegas and Consoli (2019) note that action research is particularly appropriate for practitioners whose goal is “to intervene in their professional practices by changing something about them and to examine the extent to which their intervention produces positive changes in the educational context under investigation” (p. 176).

While traditional writing tasks retain important pedagogical value, students also benefit from engaging in a wider range of activities that allow them not only to practice and develop their writing skills, but also to combine multiple modes of communication in their texts. One way to achieve this is through multimodal composition (Elola & Oskoz, 2023). Following procedures similar to those described by Pellerin (2018), I integrated digitally mediated tasks into the intermediate Spanish curriculum as part of students’ habitual classroom practices, serving both formative and summative assessment purposes. Among these activities, the travel blog entry constituted a low-stakes, bonus writing task that students could complete to enrich their course experience. Although optional, this task encouraged learners to engage in digital and genre-based writing practices. It served as the primary data source for the present study.

It is to note that prior to the study reported in this dissertation, I conducted a pilot study in the fall of 2022 as part of my comprehensive examination. This pilot study was also conducted in an Intermediate Spanish course that I, and it also involved a travel blog writing task implemented as a rehearsal task. A preliminary analysis of the micro-textual and macro-textual characteristics of blogs was carried out, and the results, insights, and procedures emerging from this pilot study were subsequently refined and expanded to inform the design and implementation of the present study.

### 6.3.1 Context and Participants

The study reported in this dissertation was conducted at a public Canadian university. According to the university’s official website, students at this post-secondary institution come from over 145 countries, and although the predominant languages of instruction are English and French, the convergence of many other languages and cultures creates a linguistically and culturally diverse

classroom environment. The study took place in my Intermediate Spanish I course in the fall of 2023 and received approval from the university's Research Ethics Board (REB) (Appendix A) prior to data collection.

The Intermediate Spanish I course objectives (Appendix B) have traditionally focused on developing and practicing the four conventional language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—as well as developing the linguacultural competencies necessary for effective communication in various social and academic contexts.<sup>6</sup> While these components remain essential, such an orientation tends to privilege formal linguistic competence and may leave limited room for engaging with contemporary forms of communication that extend beyond print-based texts.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, language use in the 21st century increasingly involves multimodal, digitally mediated, and audience-oriented practices. For this reason, the course contents were slightly modified to go beyond linguistic-focused objectives by incorporating the practice and activation of digital and multimodal skills, particularly through the creation of the travel blog, and the reflective use of digital tools for writing tasks. Classroom practices included two elements to increase awareness on 1) the reflective approach to the use of writing tools, and 2) the exploration of different digital genres. On the one hand, students informally debated the use of online tools in the language classroom. The idea was to encourage them to become active participants in the ongoing conversation about the impact of digital tools in education by considering implications beyond the usual concerns about cheating or academic integrity (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023). On the other hand, it helped them explore different digital tools and genres to expand their possibilities of using Spanish in various writing spaces. Although this dissertation only analyzed students' blog entries and self-reported reflections, it is worth mentioning two activities that shaped this course's classroom dynamics: in-class reflections on the use of (intelligent) writing tools, and the student-led analysis of authentic blogs.

#### *6.3.1.1 Contextualization 1: The Hierarchical Organization of Blogs*

Before asking students to (re)create writing in a particular genre, we tried to at least familiarize ourselves with it in class. As seen in Elola and Oskoz's (2010) study, it is important for teachers and students to discuss the structure and organization of the particular genre in class. In the case of the blog creation for this study, students were grouped with other classmates to freely search

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<sup>6</sup> As per course objectives stated in the department's course syllabus.

online blogs of interest to them and to complete an analysis and classification table (Appendix C) to record their findings. The analysis table was an adaptation of the hierarchical framework of web registers and sub-registers (Figure 7) developed by Biber et al. (2015).

In this learner-directed analysis, students identified the communicative purpose (e.g., narrating events, describing information, expressing opinions) of each blog they selected—students were allowed to classify blogs into more than one category—and recorded any additional components or features they observed (titles, advertisements, images, hyperlinks, etc.). The purpose of this task was twofold: 1) to have students gain genre-specific knowledge by associating discursive purposes with the blogs they collected; and 2) to help them become familiar with other observable non-linguistic or multimodal features of this genre. Ducate and Lomicka (2008) affirm that allowing students to choose the blogs they want to work on helps “increase their motivation towards the task” and gives them “a sense of ownership” (p. 15).

Mode	Originally written							Originally spoken
Participants	Single author or co-authors						Multiple participants	
Purpose	To narrate events	To describe information	To express opinion	To use facts to persuade	To explain instructions	To express lyrically		
Register	Narrative	Info. Description/Explanation	Opinion	Info. Persuasion	How-to/Instruct.	Lyrical	Interactive Discussion	Spoken
Sub-registers	-News report -Sports report -Personal blog -Historical article -Travel blog -Short story -Novel -Biography -Mag. Article -Obituary -Memoir	-Describe a thing -Info. Blog -Describe a person -Research article -Abstract -FAQ (info) -Legal terms -Course materials -Encyclopedia article -Tech. report	-Opinion blog -Review -Religious blog -Advice -Letter to editor -Self-help -Advert.	-Description with intent to sell -Persuasive article -Editorial	-How-to -Recipe -Instruction -FAQ (HT) -Technical support	-Lyrics -Poem -Prayer	-Discussion forum -QA forum -Responses	-Interview -Transcript -Speech -Script
Reader comments?								
Spoken quotes?								

Figure 7. Situational parameters used by Biber et al. (2015) to code register characteristics of web documents

### 6.3.1.2 Contextualization 2: In-Class Reflection Practices

One of the priorities in my courses is to create a welcoming and safe environment for students to feel comfortable engaging in conversations about their own learning. Hellmich (2021) suggests that students benefit when teachers model and explain of how, for example, machine translation works and how to analyze its output, so I decided to set aside a few minutes in a couple of sessions to informally discuss with students their views on the use of some writing assistance tools and to explore their use. First of all, I was surprised to learn that many students were against the use of such tools in academia, and that some of them even claimed that these tools should be banned from classrooms. When asked why, a common argument was that it was unfair for those who tried to complete assignments using their own knowledge to receive lower grades than their classmates who clearly used writing assistance to complete their work.

In light of this, as a practical exercise for a subsequent discussion, I took a short text that is commonly used as part of the traditional course material to practice the contrast between the imperfect and the preterit tenses in Spanish, and I deliberately modified this *fragmento* so that it contained basic errors that we had previously reviewed with the students in class. Here is the adapted text with the incorrect verb usage in purple:

*Ayer **viajábamos** a Salamanca. **Decidimos** caminar desde la estación de autobuses porque **era** sol. **Caminamos** hasta **llegar** a la catedral, pero **era** cerrada. Entonces **fuimos** a una hacienda que **tuvo** una arquitectura preciosa. Allí, **tomamos** muchas fotos mientras mi hermano **hablaba** en español con algunos locales. Yo **fui** muy cansado por el viaje.*

Before class, I entered the text into four different tools that I was familiar with and that had come up in a brainstorming session with the students in class: *LanguageTool*, *Reverso*, *SpanishChecker*, and *ChatGPT*. When I entered the text into the four online tools, I was surprised by the results: only one of the four tools found all the mistakes. *LanguageTool* and *Reverso* (Figures 8 and 9) congratulated me because there were no errors at all. *SpanishChecker* found two of the six errors and gave me a short explanation of what I had done wrong (Figure 10). *ChatGPT* was the only one that found all the errors and gave a clear explanation of why my verbs were wrong (Figure 11). I took screenshots of all the results and eagerly brought them to class to discuss my findings with the students.

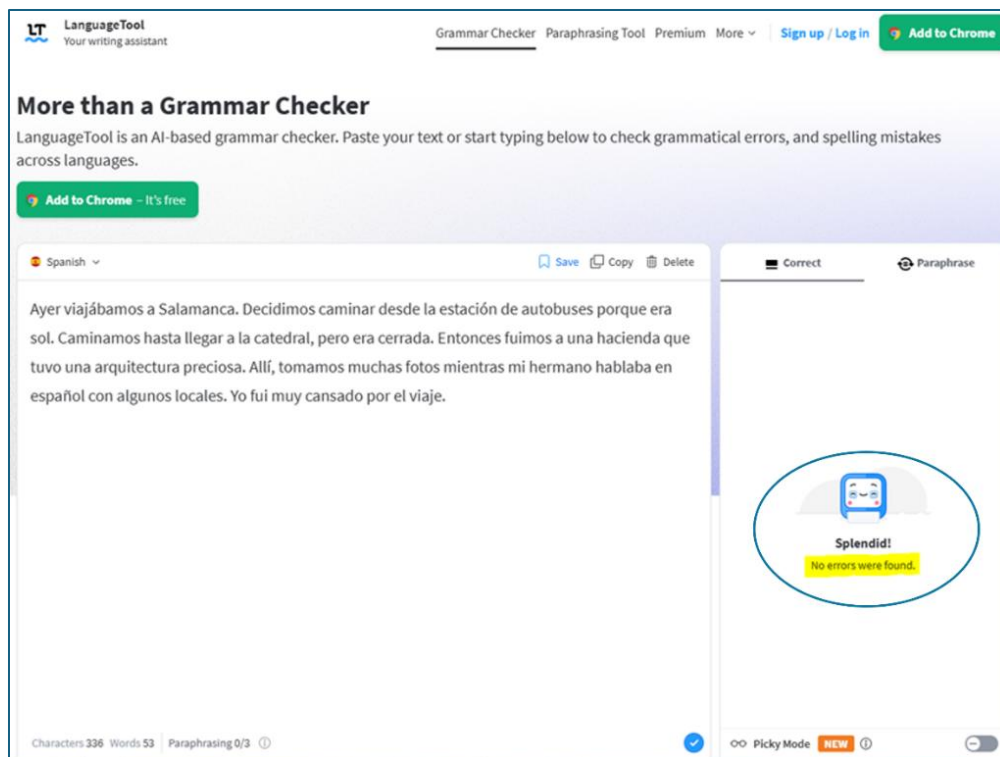


Figure 8. LanguageTool results with sample text

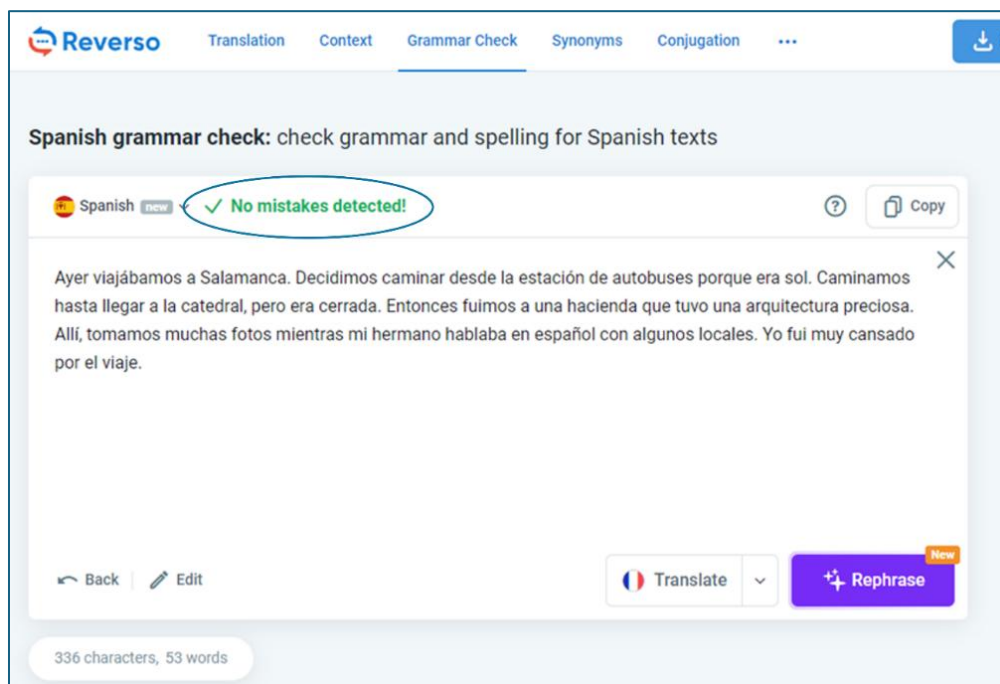


Figure 9. Reverso results with sample text

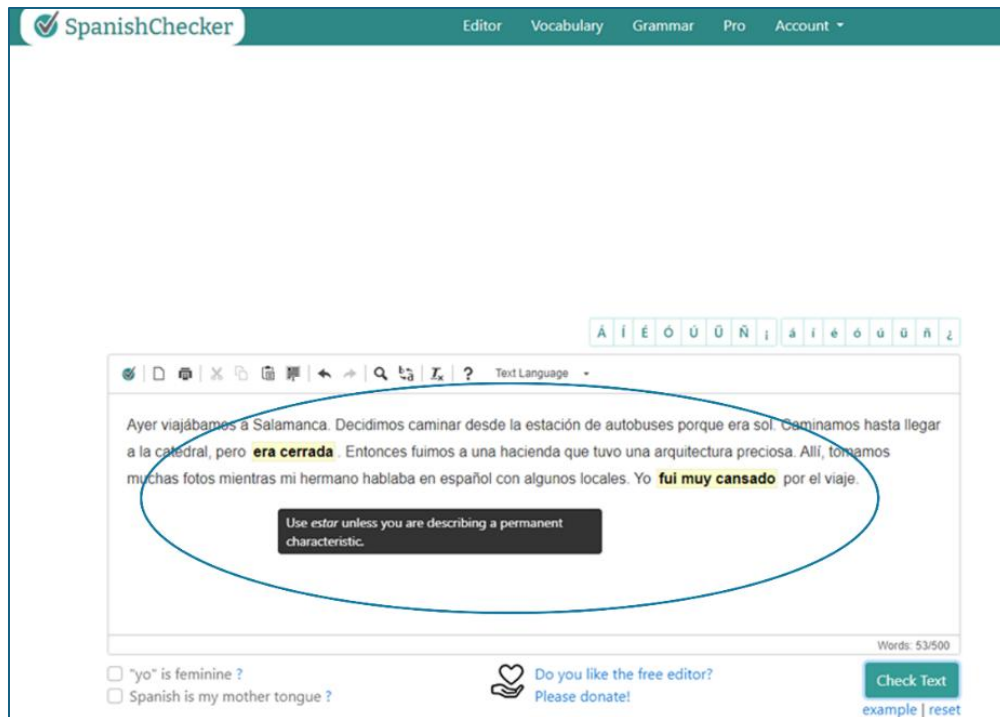


Figure 10. SpanishChecker results with sample text

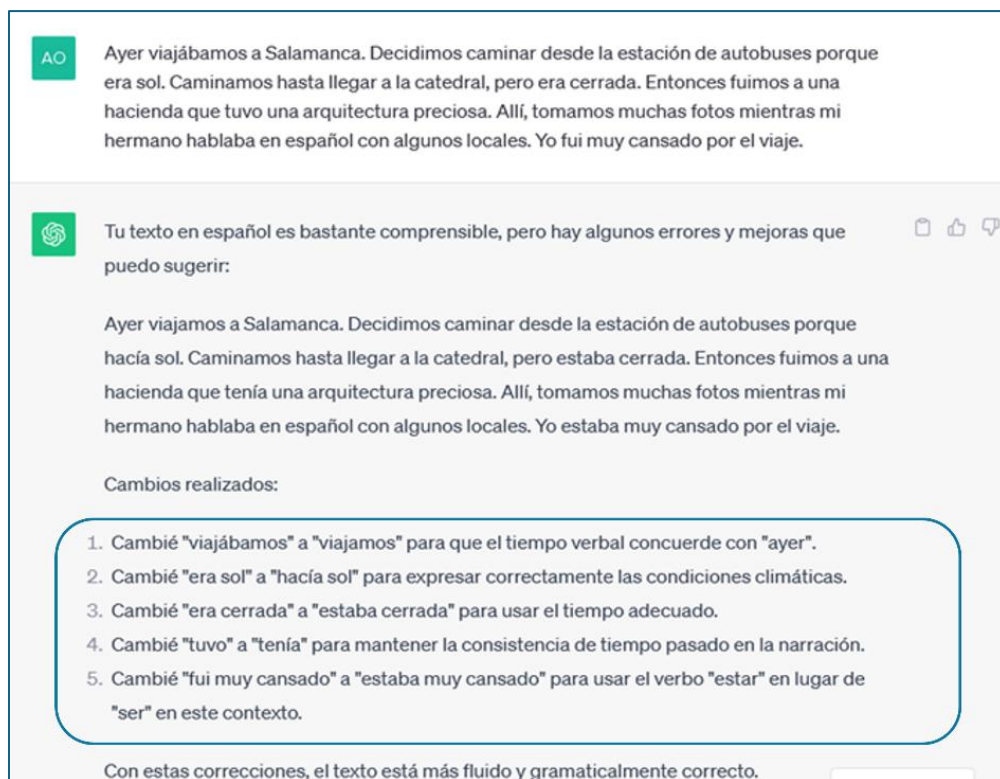


Figure 11. ChatGPT results with sample text

Once in class, I first showed the *fragmento* (adapted text) on the screen without any highlighting and asked the students to identify and correct mistakes (if there were any). Soon a few students started pointing out errors. We discussed the incorrect use of some verb forms and reviewed some basic grammar concepts from previous lessons. I then asked students if they thought online grammar/spelling checkers would catch more errors than they did, and they agreed. When they saw screenshots of the output I got from the writing assistance tools, they seemed shocked. Some students seemed proud because they had ‘beaten the machine’ by catching more errors, while some others seemed confused at the inaccuracy of the results. I steered the discussion towards highlighting 1) the value of students’ own knowledge and effort, 2) the possibilities and limitations of these tools when we use them critically and when we don’t, and 3) the importance of double-checking the output of any tool and avoiding over-reliance on them. This activity helped set the tone for subsequent in-class discussions about writing assistance.

As a recommendation, it may be more powerful to create a text with students and check it live in front of the class (if time allows) or to have different groups check the same text on different platforms. It might have a greater impact on students to see the results in real time and to share their insights with their classmates and teachers.

## 6.4 Intervention Design

### 6.4.1 Procedure

The research intervention was planned to align with the curricular focus of the course. Typically, when an activity required students to use a particular digital tool or genre, I would provide a demonstration of how to use it and/or show examples of possible outcomes or products. For example, we explored topic-related *Tweets* before writing our own (mock) posts, we read student-created short stories before writing our own, and we saw live demonstrations of how to use some websites to create digital mind maps before venturing out to do the same.

In this study, the task implementation gradually introduced students to the blog genre by allowing them to discuss its general features and encouraging them to reflect on the use of writing assistance tools to produce and revise their L2 texts. The implementation followed an exploratory design in that no control group was established and all students completed the task. The pedagogical sequence was organized around the TBLT three-phase task cycle presented in [Chapter 5](#), namely the pre-task, during-task, and post-task stages. While these phases followed the general

principles proposed by Willis (1996), the specific procedures adopted in this study include adaptations, particularly within the task cycle stage, which are described below.

#### 6.4.1.1 Pre-Task Phase

As in Willis's model, the pre-task activity was designed to serve as an introduction to the topic. The introduction consisted of three parts: students' reflecting on their knowledge of and experience with blogs and with writing assistance tools, a practical activity analyzing authentic blogs, and a *mise en commun* of the teacher's blog.

##### 6.4.1.1.1 Pre-Task Questionnaire

The self-reported reflection associated with the pre-task consisted of students completing an online questionnaire about their habits of using writing assistance tools, and their prior knowledge of and experience with blogs. The questionnaire (Appendix D) was embedded in the course learning management system (LMS) to facilitate completion and data systematization.

The first part of the questionnaire asked students to assess their own habits in using digital and paper tools (e.g., dictionaries, textbooks, etc.), the types of tools they typically use, and whether they trust the feedback they receive from such tools. There were five questions in this section:

- Three *Likert* questions (five to six levels: *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Rarely*, *Never*, and *Not applicable*),
- One multi-select question (students could select more than one option), and
- One open-ended question to allow students to add responses to the multi-select question if their answer was not included in the options provided.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with students' knowledge and experience with blogs. That is, whether students were familiar with blogs and the main features of blog, blogging platforms, and whether if they read and/or write blogs in their L1 or L2. The questions in this section consisted of:

- Seven *Likert* questions: four with a five-point *agreement* scale (*Totally agree*, *Agree*, *Neutral*, *Disagree*, and *Totally disagree*), and the remaining three questions had *frequency* scale (*Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Rarely*, and *Never*).

Once students had completed the reflection questionnaire, they moved on to exploring authentic blogs (see [Contextualization 1](#)). As mentioned earlier, this was a common classroom practice

throughout the course to help students familiarize themselves with a (new) particular tool and/or genre they were about to work with (e.g., *Twitter/tweets*, digital mind maps, *Padlet* posts). After the blog exploration was complete, students were introduced to the blog writing task. Since I usually modeled the activities to be completed, I presented my own travel blog entry (Appendix E) for a destination I had recently visited in my home country. My blog was created for the purpose of this task, and its layout followed the general sequential configuration identified by Gonçalves (2014) in her analysis of a travel blog (Figure 12).



Figure 12. The text layout of a travel blog (M. Gonçalves, 2014, p. 82)

Ducate and Lomicka (2008) found that when it comes to blogs and their technical aspects, students “would like more information on the blog functions before beginning to blog” (p. 23). The pre-task sharing in this study was designed to enable students to identify different functionalities of the blogging platform and present possible elements to be included. To this end, my blog entry (i.e., The teacher’s blog) featured different colors, fonts and sizes; highlighted sections; and inserted links, hyperlinks, personal and public images, as well as a *YouTube* video. Figure 13, which shows the layout of the teacher’s blog, the elements determined by the blog author are shown in blue, while the elements predetermined by the blogging platform (i.e., the placement of the blog’s name, the navigation buttons, and the comments) are shown in gray. The teacher’s blog purposefully

included a reference section—not commonly found on blogs—to promote a sense of responsibility and ownership of the consulted sources.

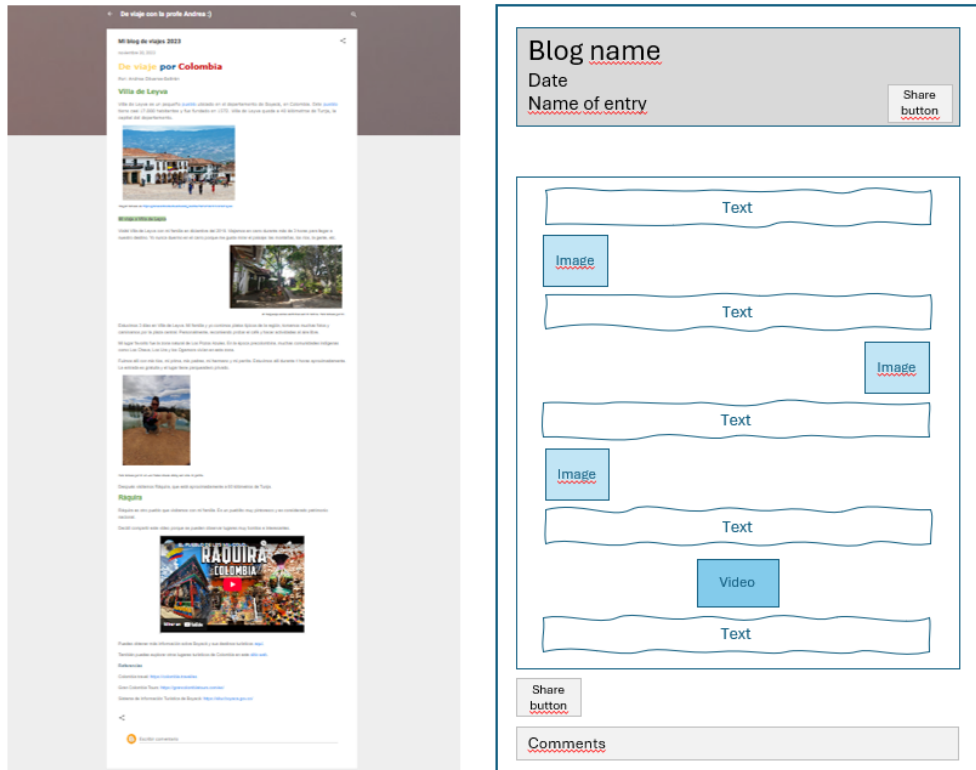


Figure 13. The teacher's blog layout

#### 6.4.1.2 Main Task Phase

There were two elements in the design and implementation of the main task that are consistent with two key features of a task highlighted in the literature review: a primary focus on meaning (Ellis, 2003) and the holistic use of language (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). On the one hand, Ellis's (2003) primary focus on meaning implies that there must be some kind of 'gap' that motivates students to fill it and encourages them to "choose the linguistic and non-linguistic resources needed to complete the task" (p. 9). Holistic language use, on the other hand, refers to allowing students to "decide on potential relevant meanings, and use the phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse structures of the language to convey these in order to carry out the task" (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 13). This task feature "circumscribe the range of linguistic forms a user will need to complete the task but allow the actual choice of forms to remain with the learner" (Ellis, 2003, p. 10), which is consistent with the importance of engaging cognitive processes in language tasks.

In the blogging task for this study, students' primary goal was to share personal experiences, information, and/or opinions about a memorable trip or travel destination of their choice. To accomplish this, they selected language-related and non-language-related resources that would enable them to present the information in the context of a travel blog writing task.

#### 6.3.1.2.1 The Travel Blog Task

To provide students with an example, I created my own blog entry. I used *Blogger* (<http://www.blogger.com>) because it is a well-known blogging tool available in over 40 languages, including Spanish. It allows users to easily personalize the page layout with colors, fonts, sizes, and more, as well as to insert multimedia components such as images, audio, and video (L. Lee, 2010). Once students had explored and classified authentic blogs on their own (see [Contextualization 1](#)), there was a brief *mise en commun* of my blog entry, and then the students were given the task description. These guidelines (Figure 14) asked them to think of a trip they had taken or wanted to take and then create their own travel blog entry about that destination, imagining that their audience would be their classmates. This was done to make students feel more familiar with their potential readers and less afraid of engaging with their public. Written tasks usually had a word limit to create balance among the students' products. For this task, the limit was 200-300 words.

### Actividad 4 – Mi blog en español

Escribe una entrada de **blog de viajes**. Si necesitas un ejemplo, puedes ver el blog de la profesora [aquí](#).

**Instrucciones:**

1. Piensa en un viaje que hiciste o que quieres hacer. Busca información sobre el lugar y crea una entrada de blog de viajes.
2. Imagina que tus compañeros son tu audiencia.
3. Utiliza la plataforma de [Blogger.com](#) o alguna otra que conozcas. Pide ayuda a la profesora si la necesitas.
4. El texto en tu blog debe tener entre 200 y 300 palabras.

**Inserta la URL o el link de tu blog aquí →**

Figure 14. The task guidelines

As with other writing tasks in the course, students were reminded that they could seek my support at any point in the writing process. This support was available not only for linguistic requests, but

also for advice and technical assistance, which is consistent with a sociocultural view of classroom dynamics (Grazzi, 2018). Students were also reminded that they could use any digital or non-digital resources they deemed helpful for completing their work. [Contextualization 2](#) shows an exploratory demonstration I conducted using (intelligent) digital tools to revise a common course text fragment. I used this activity to trigger a discussion about the effectiveness, limitations, and ethical use of such tools in academic writing. This approach aimed to raise students' awareness of the need to critically evaluate the tools' outputs and consider the implications of relying on them for revision. This type of reflective engagement is consistent with recent procedures by Ziqi et al. (2024), who highlighted that training students to use *ChatGPT* for written feedback can help improve their understanding of the pedagogical potential and ethical considerations of AI-assisted learning.

The students started working on their blogs during class time but had up to two days to submit their product in the LMS. The goal was to balance instructional time while avoiding restricting the writing task to the classroom. This approach allowed students the flexibility to complete their blogs in their own time and space, which may enhance motivation (Yousefifard & Fathi, 2021) and empower learners by giving them greater control over their own learning (R. T.-H. Chen, 2015). It should also be noted that in this task, the students also chose their own linguistic and non-linguistic elements (e.g., photos, videos, hyperlinks) to create their blog entry, so there were no requirements in terms of grammatical structures, vocabulary, number or type of resources, and so on. This approach focused the attention on the students and on the language they could produce at this point without paying much attention to specific structures, which is considered an essential approach in Willis's (1996) description of the *task* phase in her proposed *task cycle*.

An important consideration in designing the blog task was allowing students to choose whether their posts were private or public, which gave them control over their privacy and online identity. This option allowed them to participate in the activity without worrying about sharing personal work or becoming identifiable online. At the same time, it encouraged meaningful engagement with the writing task and exploration of the possibilities of digital genres. By offering this choice, I aimed to provide students with opportunities for authentic digital communication while considering ethical issues related to student autonomy and data protection.

The next in-task step in Willis's model is *planning*. In her model, *planning* allows students to prepare for a subsequent *report* stage, in which they present what they have done in the task. This

step was not included in the pedagogical implementation of my study because, as it was a rehearsal task, the goal was to demonstrate preparedness for a future designated task (Tabari & Golparvar, 2024). Therefore, it did not involve students presenting their blog products to the class.

#### 6.4.1.3 Post-Task Phase

In Willis's (1996) model, *Language focus* takes place after the task cycle. In this study, although students did not engage in structured activities targeting specific linguistic features after the main task, they received individual formative feedback (Elola & Oskoz, 2022) combining linguistic and non-linguistic comments on their blogs products in the LMS. Additionally, during the class session following the blog submission, students were asked to take some time to reflect on specific aspects of the task and to report their perceptions via a second questionnaire.

These pre- and post-questionnaires were used to record the students perceptions because they can “contribute to a better understanding of personal reflection” (L. Lee, 2010, p. 224). With this in mind, the post-task reflection was designed to prompt students to reflect on the following: 1) the blog writing task, 2) the writing assistance tools they used to complete the task, and 3) the task as a whole.

#### 6.3.1.3.1 Post-Task Questionnaire

Like the pre-task reflection, the post-task reflection was also an online questionnaire (Appendix F) embedded in the course platform. The first part of the questionnaire, focusing on the blog writing task, consisted of five *Likert* questions (*Totally agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Totally disagree*). The second part, focusing on the use of writing assistance for the blog task, had eight questions:

- Three multiple-choice questions,
- three *Likert* questions (*Totally agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Totally disagree, and Non applicable*),
- and two open-ended questions to add responses to the multi-select question if their answer was not included in the options provided.

The third and final section was intended for students to share their impressions of what they learned with the task itself, so it consisted of one open-ended question:

- “Please share something you learned with this task. / Veuillez partager ce que vous avez appris dans le cadre de cette tâche.”

## 6.5 Data Collection

On the last day of class, I told the students that I was doing research related to my teaching and that I would like to invite them to take part in the study after the course ended. I explained that they would receive an email invitation to participate once final grades had been submitted and all administrative procedures had been completed. Students were not informed during the semester that their work could be donated for my research, in order to avoid influencing their performance or their approach to the tasks. This approach helped ensure transparency and minimize potential power dynamics arising from my dual role as instructor and researcher.

In January 2024, after the semester had ended and the registrar's office had received the final grades, I sent an email invitation (Appendix G) to all students who had previously enrolled in the course. This ensured that no evaluative or contractual relationship remained between the students and the instructor. The invitation included an informed consent form (Appendix H) that outlined the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the potential risks and benefits. The invitation email and consent form were provided in both English and French, the institution's two official languages. Twenty-one students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study by allowing the use of their selected coursework for research purposes following the recruitment process. Participation was entirely voluntary and did not impact course evaluation.

### 6.5.1 Compilation of the Dataset

Data collection took place during the first week of February 2024. The collection involved three sources associated with the main blog-writing task. First, the URLs corresponding to the travel blogs produced by the students were collected. Only the 21 links associated with the participants who had provided informed consent were downloaded and included in the dataset. These links were compiled and stored in a separate document to serve as the primary corpus for the textual and multimodal analysis.

In addition, the pre-task questionnaire completion summary was downloaded, which provided aggregated results for the *Likert-scale* items in the form of response percentages for each question. Similarly, the post-task questionnaire completion summary was retrieved. This report included both quantitative results for the *Likert-scale* and multiple-choice items, as well as the qualitative data derived from the open-ended responses related to students' appreciation of the task. Together, these sources constituted the main dataset for the analysis reported in this study.

## 6.5.2 Anonymization Procedures and Data Protection

After retrieving the URLs of the blogs, I accessed each webpage and extracted only the written content to be tokenized for the micro-textual analysis. Multimodal elements, such as photographs, audio, video, and hyperlinks, were excluded so that this part of the corpus would consist only of textual data. Each text was then inserted into a *Word* document and assigned a generic numerical value to anonymize the data.

After compilation, I revised each text again and removed all personally identifiable information from the corpus. According to IBM (n.d.c), “personally identifiable information (PII) is any information connected to a specific individual that can be used to uncover or steal that individual’s identity, such as their social security number, full name, email address or phone number.” All this participant-related information was deleted from the retrieved texts, including student numbers and usernames. The resulting dataset was stored on a secured folder, in a password-protected computer accessible only to the investigator.

## 6.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of a mixed-methods approach divided into three stages: First, I conducted a macro-textual (RQ1) and micro-textual (RQ2) analysis of students’ blogs using both qualitative and quantitative methods described below. Then, I used cross-tabulation tables to organize students’ responses and identify tendencies associated with self-reported reflections on the use of blogs and writing assistance tools to complete the task (RQ3).

### 6.6.1 The Genre-Based Analysis

As discussed in [section 3.3.5.1](#), Biber et al. (2015) conducted a corpus-based analysis of web registers that yielded a classification of web genres (registers) and sub-genres (sub-registers). However, they did not provide specific criteria for a genre-based analysis that could be applied to travel blogs. Pascual (2018), on the other hand, used functional analysis to explore the linguistic and discursive features of travel blogs through a data-driven approach. Pascual compiled a corpus of 18 travel blogs from which he analyzed “the most important generic [genre-based] and discursive features of travel blogs (concerning structure, lexis, grammar, orthography or pragmatics)” (p. 262). However, his analysis did not explore multimodal features such as the presence of images, links, and colors, which are highly representative of digital genres, as discussed in previous sections of this dissertation. For her part, Gonçalves (2014) proposed an

analytical instrument called *the genre parameter*, developed to compare the genre-based features (at the linguistic and non-linguistic levels) of travel blogs and travel websites. Since her analytical approach proposes to describe digital genres beyond textual components by incorporating specific and recurrent features of genres, I decided to use her criteria to analyze the macro-textual (text layout) and micro-textual (discursive organization) features of travel blogs produced by students.

It should be noted that the dynamic nature of digital genres makes it challenging to establish fixed parameters because these genres may evolve over time, change from platform to platform, and adapt to different uses. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge that, from the beginning of this analysis until its submission, ongoing developments—particularly the rise of AI—may have reshaped these genres further.

#### *6.6.1.1 The Macro-Textual Analysis: The Text Layout of Blogs*

In short, the *macro-textual parameter* describes the global organization of blogs. While different blogging platforms allow for different layouts, there are some common features that seem to persist among them. First, important information (e.g., the host site’s logo and/or trademark) is usually located at the top left of the page. The top-left is considered a ‘privileged position’ because this is where the reader’s eye first focuses its attention (M. Gonçalves, 2014), so relevant information is typically displayed in this area. Second, the images and other elements that the author includes to convey meaning (e.g., photos, audio, video, links, hyperlinks, URLs, footnotes) are typically present in digital genres. Third, the content presented in the body of the text usually corresponds to the theme/topic/subject of the blog (i.e., travel), and its organization or distribution depends on the themes included by the author.

To answer the first [research question](#) (RQ1), related to the general blog organization observed in L2 students’ blogs, the analysis focused on three main elements presented in Gonçalves (2014) description of the macro-textual organization travel blogs:

- The personalization of titles
- The integration of multimodal (non-linguistic) elements that helped the authors to convey meaning
- The organization of content

#### 6.6.1.1.1 Personalization of Titles

This analysis was conducted by identifying titles in the blogs and tabulating a number one (1) or a number zero (0) on a spreadsheet (Table 4), depending on whether there was a title for the blog or not, respectively. The position of the title (i.e., upper-left, center, or upper-right) as well as visible changes in color, font and size were recorded. Any additional feature was manually inserted as additional observations. Data was then totaled for quantitative analysis.

Table 4. Table for title analysis

Blog	Title position	Default	Different color	Different size	Different font	Comments
Blog 1						
Blog 2						
Blog 3						
Blog 4						
Blog 5						
Blog 6						
Blog 7						
Blog 8						
Blog 9						
Blog 10						
Blog 11						
Blog 12						
Blog 13						
Blog 14						
Blog 15						
Blog 16						
Blog 17						
Blog 18						
Blog 19						
Blog 20						
Blog 21						

#### 6.6.1.1.2 Multimodal Elements

Five main elements were selected for this analysis (i.e., images, videos, URLs, links, and hyperlinks) because they serve as indicators of three main characteristics of digital genres: multimodality, hypertextuality, and nonlinearity (Gjesdal & Gjerstad, 2015). Multimedia components such as images, audio, and video were selected as multimodal elements because these are commonly used to convey meaning beyond words or text (Guichon & Cohen, 2016). URLs, links, and hyperlinks were selected because they are common elements that enable intra- and intertextual navigability on the Web. These elements are related to hypertextuality, which refers to “a compositional format characterized by nodes, links, and networks that allow readers multiple choices and different pathways through textual and/or multimodal components” (Ensslin, 2020, p. 1). In this analysis, URLs are identified as non-clickable elements in the students’ blogs

that display the address or location of another resource on the Internet, while links are clickable URLs that provide access or connect to another location in the same navigation area or externally (IBM, 2024b). A hyperlink has the same characteristics as a link except that it does not display the URL and can be inserted on text, images, icons, and more. A quantitative analysis was conducted to identify and quantify these multimodal elements (multimedia and hypertextual components). A spreadsheet was used to tabulate the number of items identified for each multimodal element. For example, if there were three different images in the blog, I would enter the number three (3) in the *Images* column of the spreadsheet.

Another important aspect of this analysis was identifying whether students included personal photos and/or videos, as this could indicate greater involvement in the task (Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Negueruela-Azarola, 2009). While the inclusion of personal multimedia was not anticipated in blogs where students discuss destinations they wish to visit, there is a possibility that they could incorporate these elements when recounting past experiences. Personal items were identified either because students claimed ownership of them through labels or captions or because students could be recognized in pictures or videos of themselves. After tabulating this information, I analyzed and grouped the most common topics of the images and videos, such as people, food, and places.

Finally, although it was not required, I noted whether students cited the sources of the multimedia resources they included and/or included a reference section. This was not an expected or required element, as blogs generally do not include a reference section. However, since our course has emphasized the importance of being responsible and critical about the sources we visit and reuse, I wanted to see if students would include a reference section. For the analysis, I used the same procedure I used to identify features in the titles to record these instances (Table 5). If an additional multimodal element was identified beyond what was expected or planned for analysis, an extra column was added to the list of features, and the information was tabulated accordingly.

#### 6.6.1.1.3 The Organization of Content

The textual layout analysis was based on the identification and location of (sub)titles, text, and specific multimodal elements (i.e., images, audio, and video) in the body of the students' blogs. For the present study, the distribution of these elements was contrasted with both the travel blog layout proposed by Gonçalves (2014) (Figure 12) and with the four main skeletal layouts (Figure 15) identified in a the pilot study that I conducted. In such a study, 33 out of 38 rehearsal travel blogs

produced by a group of L2 Spanish students followed similar patterns, from which four models emerged:

- **Model A:** The blog organization interspersed text and multimodal elements in sequence. That is, some text was presented, followed by an image or video, then more text, then another image or video, and so on.
- **Model B:** The distribution was in the form of text structured by subtitles throughout most of the body of the blog, and the multimodal elements were concentrated mainly at the end of the blog.
- **Model C:** The text wrapped around the multimodal elements in a sandwich fashion, with text mostly at the beginning and end of the blog, while the multimodal elements were concentrated in the middle of the body of the blog.
- **Model D:** The combination of text and multimodal elements was zigzagged, with an image or video framed either on the right and text on the left, or image/video on the left and text on the right.

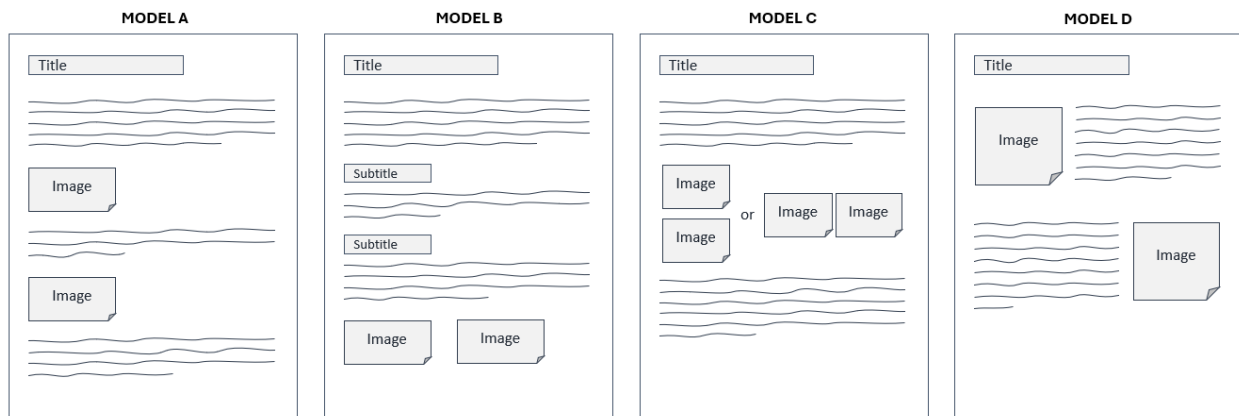


Figure 15. Four skeletal travel blog distributions found in a pilot study

The textual distribution analysis in the present study was done by first identifying the skeletal characteristics of each blog and then contrasting them with the four existent models. If a blog layout did not fit any of the layouts, it was omitted or placed in a separate category to determine if it would help establish another generalized pattern. This was done to see to what extent the corpus of student blogs fit into a particular genre-based organization.

### 6.6.1.2 The Micro-Textual Analysis: The Discursive Organization of Blogs

This analysis involved interpreting the discursive organization of the students' blogs. Gonçalves's (2014) classification of the discursive organization was based on Bronckart's (2004) specifications of four types of discourse in text genres: *interactive discourse*, *theoretical discourse*, *interactive report*, and *narration*. These four types of discourse correspond to the relationship between two main dimensions of written production: *actorial organization* and *temporal organization*. The former refers to the writer's degree of autonomy or implication in what they write, while the latter refers to whether the writer is describing or narrating events. These two dimensions intersect to make room for four types of discourse: *interactive discourse* when there is *actorial implication* and the writer is *exposing* events; *interactive report* when there is *actorial implication* and the writer is *narrating* events; *theoretical discourse* when there is *actorial autonomy* and the writer is *exposing* events; and *narration* when there is *actorial autonomy* and the writer is *narrating* events.

These four types of discourse were summarized by Jorge (2015) as follows: The *actorial organization* on the horizontal axis (divided into *implication* and *autonomy*) and the *temporal organization* on the vertical axis (divided into *exposing* and *narrating*). Therefore, the type of discourse analysis in my study was based on identifying the verb constructions representative of each type of discourse:

- *Interactive Discourse*: Present tense verbs with deictic value
- *Interactive Report*: Past tense verbs with deictic value
- *Theoretical Discourse*: Present tense verbs without deictic value
- *Narration*: Past tense verbs without no deictic value

The main distinction relevant to this thesis is the type of *actorial organization* observed in students' blogs because it determines the degree to which the writer intends to involve the reader in their speech. In Spanish, this distinction is expressed by the presence or absence of constructions with deictic value. According to Maldonado (2020), deictic expressions "encode a viewpoint that departs from the deictic center in such a way that at least the speaker and hearer establish joint attention toward some entity in a viewing field either in the extralinguistic context or in discourse" (p. 55). In this study of blogs, the deictic center is considered to be the student producing the speech (the speaker), and the intended reader is considered the hearer. Students' use of deictics to implicate their audience in relation to present-tense events are considered *interactive discourse*, past-tense instances are considered *interactive report*. Constructions in which the

writer expresses autonomy without involving the reader—and therefore does not use deictic expressions—are considered *theoretical discourse* or *narration*, depending on whether the entity or events narrated by the writer occurred in the present or the past, respectively.

#### 6.6.1.2.1 Identifying the Types of Discourse

While Gonçalves's (2014) analysis of the discursive organization of a travel blog employed a rhetorical-hermeneutic approach, for the micro-textual analysis in my study I decided to adopt a more lexico-grammatical approach for two main reasons. First, it allowed me to observe the subject-verb relationships that students established when communicating with their audience, as these choices affect the perceived level of engagement with the interlocutor. Second, it provided an opportunity to analyze students' textual production from a grammatical perspective to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement from a pedagogical point of view. To illustrate, we are going to imagine that a blog author wrote a), which can be translated as b):

- a) ***Te recomiendo*** visitar esta ciudad.
- b) **[I] recommend** that **you** visit this city.

The verb “*recomendar*” is conjugated in the present tense and is considered to have deictic value because it does not only involve the author (the implicit *yo* in the conjugation *recomiendo*), but also the reader themselves—through the indirect object pronoun *te* (*that you / to you*). Therefore, this verb construction is classified as an instance of *interactive discourse* because it shows *actorial implication*, meaning the writer *exposes* events in conjunction with the act of speech, as opposed to *narrating* them.

In order to identify the type of discourse in the blog corpus and to answer the second [research question](#) (RQ2), I followed this procedure: first, I extracted all the textual data from each blog site and pasted it into a word processor. I then removed any names or information related to the identity of the students and saved each body of text under a random number. I then revised all the compiled text and added or deleted punctuation as needed to facilitate sentence recognition during parsing. I did not correct spelling errors unless they were considered to interfere with the accuracy of the analysis.

For example, if the third-person conjugation of the verb *estar* is missing the accent mark (*está*), it can be taken as the determined pronoun *this* (*esta*). In this case, I manually added the missing accent mark to correct the sentence. Here is an example:

- a) *Mi casa **está** en las montañas.* → *My house **is** in the mountains.*
- b) *\*Mi casa **esta** en las montañas.* → *\*My house **this** in the mountains.*

Once data was clean, I introduced the texts one by one into the parser, and then I manually coded the verb constructions found into a spreadsheet. Then, verb counts for each type of discourse were calculated to determine the distribution across all blog texts. Table 5 shows an example of the verb classification for *Blog 1*:

Table 5. Example of manual verb classification for Blog 1

	Interactive discourse	Interactive report	Theoretical discourse	Narration	Impersonal
<b>Blog 1</b>	6	0	6	10	7
1	no creo que mucho* canadienses conozcan		son magnificas (las vistas)	nos dijeron que	se puede encontrar
2	me parece una visita obligada		es un lugar que	una madre osa y su bebé habian pasado	es posible practicar
3	déjame decirte		es el único lugar	viajé	hay varios cruceros
4	debes visitar		es transparente	era la tercera vez que visitábamos	se puede ver un barco varado
5	puede* visitar		los lugares que me gustaron son	me gustaron	es posible hacer senderismo
6	descubra*		creo que	visitamos	hay hermosas playas
7				podimos disfrutar	hay 2 lugares que me gustaron
8				alquilamos un chalet	
9				no los vimos	
10				vimos un zorro simpático	

#### 6.6.1.2.2 Part-of-Speech Annotation of Verb Constructions

The textual analysis procedures adopted in the present study were an enhanced version from the methods developed during the pilot study. During that earlier phase, students’ blog texts were examined through close reading and color coding to manually analyze verb constructions and identify the types of discourse described above. This method was also used in the present analysis, but to enhance reliability and cross-check my manual annotations, I supplemented my analysis with [Stanford CoreNLP](#). *Stanford CoreNLP* is a natural language processing (NLP) toolkit that provides automatic linguistic annotation of text (Manning et al., 2014). It supports multiple languages, including Spanish, and allows researchers to identify tokens, sentence boundaries, part-of-speech tags, and syntactic structures, among other features.

In an attempt to improve efficiency, and with pedagogical curiosity to leverage advances in generative artificial intelligence—which were unavailable at the time of the pilot study, an exploratory step was taken to examine whether large language models could complement the existing manual procedures. After ensuring that no identifiable or sensitive data were included (see the *Anonymization Procedures and Data Protection* section), I submitted a subset of three texts to *ChatGPT* using a structured prompt designed to elicit the tagging and classification of the same linguistic features examined in my manual analysis. The prompt used for this exploratory phase was as follows:

*“I am going to give you a text, and I want you to identify the verbs in it. Then I want you to give me a list of those verbs, specifying their verb tense and the subject that performs the action or to which it refers.”*


Since I was only interested in verbs, I asked the tool to make a table classifying the verbs found into five categories:

- Present tense verbs in the first and second person singular and plural
- Past tense verbs in the first and second person singular and plural
- Present tense verbs in the third person singular and plural
- Past tense verbs in the third person singular and plural
- Impersonal verb constructions

This last category was added because the results of my pilot study, which showed that the *Impersonal Discourse*—represented mainly by impersonal constructions, existential constructions, and the passive voice—was the third most common type of discourse identified in L2 students’ travel blog entries at the time.

However, after analyzing these three texts, I noticed some inconsistencies in the classification and counting of verbs. For example, *ChatGPT* correctly classified the invariable verb *hay* as an impersonal construction for texts 1 and 2, but then it classified this same verb under *Theoretical Discourse* (third person, present tense) for Text 3. The tool also showed inconsistencies in classifying the conditional and present perfect tense verbs. Moreover, *ChatGPT* would classify infinitive verbs in the *Impersonal Discourse* category affirming that “they are actions planned or desired, not conjugated to a personal subject yet” (Figure 16, bullet point two). However, my manual analysis had already identified some of these infinitive verbs as part of verbal compounds consisting of a conjugated verb and an infinitive form verb:


- a) (Nosotros) **vamos a cenar** en un restaurante. → **We are going to eat** dinner at a restaurant.
- b) **Me gusta ver** la tele. → **I like watching** TV.

 **Important notes:**

- "Me invitó" is technically past tense, but since it refers to the invitation *leading* to the trip plan, and to keep consistency with the focus on trip planning, I treated most verbs around the planning in present/future (except when clearly narrating a past event).
- Infinitives like *visitar, subir, unirnos, hacer, andar, ver, escalar, probar, conducir, practicar, relajarse* are counted under **Impersonal verbs** because they are actions planned or desired, not conjugated to a personal subject yet.
- "Sería" (conditional) is treated closer to present because it expresses a **future possibility** ("sería único visitar un parque acuático en invierno").

Figure 16. ChatGPT's note on the classification of infinitives

Another interesting finding in this exploration was that, for verb occurrences, *ChatGPT* initially did not count repeated verbs, even if they had different subjects. I instructed it to count each repeated verb and total the number of occurrences. However, it would sometimes list a given number of verbs but total a different number (Figure 17).

 **Table: Categorized Verbs with Repetitions and Total Occurrences**

Category	Verbs	Total Occurrences
Present tense (1st & 2nd person singular/plural)	hemos dicho (nosotros), estamos (nosotros)	2
Present tense (3rd person singular & plural)	es (él/ella) ×4, varía (él/ella), está (él/ella) ×2, desean (ellos), tiene (él/ella), ofrecernos (infinitivo con valor activo en presente)	9
Past tense (1st & 2nd person singular/plural)	decidimos (nosotros), teníamos (nosotros), nos alojábamos (nosotros), nos lo pasamos (nosotros), íbamos (nosotros) ×2, alquilábamos (nosotros), subimos (nosotros), hicimos (nosotros), visitamos (nosotros), nos dábamos (nosotros), tuvimos (nosotros), conocimos (nosotros)	14
Past tense (3rd person singular & plural)	estaba (él/ella) ×2	2
Impersonal verbs	hay (implícito en "situado al sur..."), está (impersonal en localizaciones), hacer (infinitivo), disfrutar (infinitivo), explorar (infinitivo), realizar (infinitivo), conocer (infinitivo)	7

Figure 17. ChatGPT results for Blog 1: Dots are verb instances (n=10)

Taking all this into consideration, I decided to reformulate the prompt (Figure 18) and provided the machine with specific information of how I wanted it to make the classification. This reformulation included feedback on previous classifications and clarification of the criteria for the five categories, with examples. To this new set of instructions, *ChatGPT* responded with a summary and a recap of the key instructions (Figure 19).

It seems that there are inconsistencies in the results. I need you to be more precise when you classify the verbs and when you count them. For example, you put the verb "unirnos" in the Impersonal category, but this verb is part of a verb construction that has a subject. Also, you counted 9 occurrences in the table for Text 2, but you listed 10 verbs. So, here is what I need you to do. I am going to give you a series of texts. For each one of them, I need you to make a table where you separate the verbs or verb constructions that you find.

The table must have five categories: The first category is called Interactive Discourse, and it is reserved for verbs in the present tense that refer to the first and second person singular and plural subject in Spanish (yo, tú, nosotros, vosotros, usted, ustedes). The second category is called Interactive Report, and it is reserved for verbs in the past tense that refer to the first and second person singular and plural subject in Spanish (yo, tú, usted, nosotros, vosotros, ustedes). The third category is called Theoretical Discourse, and it is reserved for verbs in the present tense that refer to the third person singular and plural subject in Spanish (él, ella, ellos, ellas). The fourth category is called Narration, and it is reserved for verbs in the past tense that refer to a third person singular and plural subject in Spanish (él, ella, ellos, ellas). The fifth and last category is called Impersonal Discourse, and it is reserved for construcciones existenciales such as those created with the invariable verb haber (hay/hubo/había), and for impersonal (e.g., se necesita un camarero) or passive tense constructions (e.g., el edificio fue construido en 1916).

Here are some additional remarks I would like you to consider:

- Do not classify infinitive verbs in the Impersonal Discourse category. Instead, if the infinitive verb has a pronoun attached (e.g., invitarme, ofrecernos, etc.) classify it according to their verbal compound (e.g., ellos quieren invitarme, ella desea ofrecernos, etc.).

- Conditional conjugations (e.g., sería, me gustaría, etc.) should be treated as present tense and classified according to the subject

- Present perfect constructions (e.g., hemos comido, he visitado) should be classified as past tense verbs

- Count repeated verbs for each different subject. For example, if the verb "trabaja" is used for both "su novio" and "mi hermana", it should be counted separately

Is that clear?

Figure 18. My reformulated prompt for ChatGPT

Crystal clear — thank you for the detailed and well-structured clarification.

Here's a quick summary of what I will do for each new text you send:

### ✅ Categories and Their Definitions

Category	Verb Tense	Subjects	Examples
Interactive Discourse	Present	1st & 2nd person (yo, tú, nosotros, vosotros, usted, ustedes)	<i>viaja, estás, comemos</i>
Interactive Report	Past (including present perfect)	1st & 2nd person (yo, tú, nosotros, vosotros, usted, ustedes)	<i>viajé, comimos, hemos llegado</i>
Theoretical Discourse	Present	3rd person (él, ella, ellos, ellas)	<i>trabaja, tienen, parece</i>
Narration	Past	3rd person (él, ella, ellos, ellas)	<i>viajó, dijeron, estuvo</i>
Impersonal Discourse	Any	Impersonal or passive constructions	<i>hay, hubo, se dice, fue construido</i>

### ⚠️ Special Instructions Recap

- ✅ **Infinitives** with pronouns are classified by their verbal construction (e.g., *quieren invitarme* → classified according to *quieren*).
- ✅ **Conditionals** (e.g., *me gustaría, sería*) are treated as **present tense**, and placed in the correct category by subject.
- ✅ **Present perfect** (e.g., *he comido*) is considered **past tense**.
- ✅ Repeated verbs are counted **per subject** (e.g., *trabaja* used for two different subjects = 2).
- ✅ **Infinitives alone** are **not** classified under **Impersonal Discourse**.

Figure 19. ChatGPT reformulation recap

However, after running the analysis again on the same three texts, I noticed that there were still errors in verb classification and verb counting. For example, *ChatGPT* classified 5 verbs as *Interactive Discourse*, 8 as *Interactive Report*, 5 as *Theoretical Discourse*, 2 as *Narration*, and 7 as *Impersonal Discourse* (Figure 20) in Text 1.

<span style="color: green;">✔</span> <b>Text 1 – Verb Classification Table</b>		
Category	Verbs / Constructions	Total
<b>Interactive Discourse</b> (Present – 1st/2nd person)	<i>me parece</i> (yo), <i>déjame</i> (tú → imperativo), <i>decirte</i> (tú → imperativo), <i>creo</i> (yo), <i>debes</i> (tú)	5
<b>Interactive Report</b> (Past – 1st/2nd person)	<i>viagé</i> (yo), <i>visitábamos</i> (nosotros), <i>visitamos</i> (nosotros), <i>pudimos</i> (nosotros), <i>alquilamos</i> (nosotros), <i>nos dijeron</i> (nosotros), <i>vimos</i> (nosotros) ×2	8
<b>Theoretical Discourse</b> (Present – 3rd person)	<i>es</i> (x2), <i>puede</i> (usted), <i>conozcan</i> (ellos, subjuntivo), <i>son</i> (ellos)	5
<b>Narration</b> (Past – 3rd person)	<i>era</i> (él), <i>habían pasado</i> (ellos), <i>fue</i> (él) [→ ¡qué suerte! does not contain a verb, but if we interpret <i>fue</i> as implied, it belongs here]	2
<b>Impersonal Discourse</b> (Impersonal / Passive)	<i>hay</i> ×3, <i>se puede</i> ×2, <i>es posible</i> ×2	7

Figure 20. ChatGPT analysis of Blog 1

When contrasted with my manual count, I noticed that I had six (6) instances of *Interactive Discourse*, compared with 5 of the chatbot (first row). Additionally, in *ChatGPT*'s analysis, the construction “*me gustaron*” is missing in the *Interactive Report* category. The same is true for “*son magníficas*” in the *Theoretical Discourse* row. What is more, the construction “*nos dijeron*” was classified in the *Interactive Report* category, when it should have been placed into the *Narration* category (third person, past tense).

Due to the unreliability of the resulting verb classification, I performed a POS tagging analysis on the same three texts using *Stanford CoreNLP* to see if the classification was more accurate. Figure 21 shows the tagging results for *Text 1*, which I then compared with my own manual color-coded annotations to see if there was a more accurate correlation. After comparing both results, the verb constructions identified in the POS output were manually entered into a spreadsheet (Figure 22) and categorized by subject pronoun and verb tense. This comparison allowed for verification of the automated results against the researcher’s manual analysis.

Part-of-Speech:

1	Descubra	la	Península	de	Bruce	
2	En	Julio	2023	,	viajé	con
3	Era	la	tercera	vez	que	visitábamos
4	Me	parece	una	visita	obligada	
5	Déjame	decirte	por	qué	creo	que
6	Primero	es	el	único	lugar	en
7	Las	vistas	son	magníficas		
8	Es	posible	practicar	submarinismo		
9	Hay	varios	cruceros	disponibles	(	por
10	Es	posible	hacer	senderismo		
11	Hay	hermosas	playas	de	aguas	cristalinas
12	Puede	visitar	las	cuevas	y	mas
13	Hay	2	lugares	que	me	gustaron
14	Son	Tobermory	y	Sauble	beach	
15	En	Tobermory	,	visitamos	Flower	pot
16	Para	aprovechar	al	máximo	nuestras	vacaciones
17	Durante	nuestra	estancia	,	nos	dijeron
18	No	los	vimos	,	qué	suerte
19	Pero	,	vimos	un	zorro	simpático
20	Por	último	,	he	aquí	un

Figure 21. CoreNLP POS tagging for Text 1

An additional category called “Other” was reserved for verbs that did not grammatically fit into any of the predetermined type of discourse categories (future tense verbs, nominalizations, etc.).

	Interactive discourse	Interactive report	Theoretical discourse	Narration	Impersonal	Other
<b>Blog 1</b>	7	8	6	3	7	5
1	no creo que mucho* ca	viajé	son magníficas (las vist	dijeron (nos dijeron que	se puede encontrar	para aprovechar
2	me parece una visita ob	visitábamos (era la ter	es un lugar que debes v	habían pasado (una ma	es posible practicar	he aquí
3	déjame decirte	me gustaron	es el único lugar		hay varios cruceros	
4	creo que es un lugar qu	visitamos	es transparente		se puede ver un barco v	
5	debes visitar	podimos disfrutar	son X y Y (los lugares q		es posible hacer sender	
6	puede* visitar	alquilamos un chalet			hay hermosas playas	
7	descubra	vimos (no los vimos)			hay 2 lugares que me g	
8		vimos un zorro simpátic				
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						

Figure 22. Manual count and classification from POS tagging for Text 1

More errors were found in *Text 2*, where words that were not present in the original text were added. In addition, *ChatGPT* classified one instance of the present perfect tense (i.e., *hemos comido*) in the *Interactive Discourse* (present tense) category, even though it acknowledged in the prompt reformulation recap (Figure 19) that it would classify it as past tense. In addition, it counted the verb *estamos* twice when it only appeared once in the text. In *Text 3*, *ChatGPT* listed five verbs into the *Theoretical Discourse* category but totaled six.

Table 6 shows a summary of the results of comparing two subsequent blog analyses (for a total of five texts). More inconsistencies were found in the form of incorrect verb classification, verb count, or in the classification of verbs that were not part of the student's texts. These discrepancies are highlighted in gray and marked with an asterisk (\*) in the table.

Table 6. Type of discourse classification ChatGPT v Manual count

Text	Method	Interactive Discourse	Interactive Report	Theoretical Discourse	Narration	Impersonal Discourse
Text 1	<i>ChatGPT</i>	5*	8*	5*	2*	7
	<i>Manual count</i>	6	8	5	2	7
Text 2	<i>ChatGPT</i>	3*	13*	6*	2*	0
	<i>Manual count</i>	1	15	5	4	0
Text 3	<i>ChatGPT</i>	4	1	6*	1	1
	<i>Manual count</i>	4	1	6	1	1
Text 4	<i>ChatGPT</i>	7*	4*	7*	13*	1*
	<i>Manual count</i>	11	20	16	21	2
Text 5	<i>ChatGPT</i>	8*	7*	7*	5*	2*
	<i>Manual count</i>	5	7	7	2	3

Considering these observations, I retained a combined approach consisting of manual color-coded annotation to identify verb constructions in the student blog corpus, complemented by count verification through *CoreNLP* POS tagging to increase reliability.

## 6.6.2 Students' Self-Reported Reflections on Blogging and Writing Assistance

In addition to analyzing the micro- and macro-textual features of students' blogs, this study used a pre-task reflection questionnaire to assess students' familiarity with blogs and to prompt them to self-report their use of intelligent writing assistance before completing the task. Only the questions relevant to understanding students' perceptions in the following four areas were included in this dissertation:

- students' habitual use of writing assistance tools,
- their prior knowledge of blogs,
- the use of writing assistance tools to complete the task, and
- their experience with the blog task.

### 6.6.2.1 Cross-Tabulation Tables

The selected questions from each variable were given a nomenclature to facilitate manual coding. The codes were assigned according to whether the questions in the questionnaire belonged to the pre-task phase (*Pre*) or the post-task phase (*Pos*). Then, a *W* was added to the writing assistance variables, and a *B* for the blog variables. Then, a number was added depending on the order in which they appeared in the questionnaire (1-3). For example, pre-task question 1 about writing assistance would be coded as *PreW1*. Table 7 shows a summary of the selected questions from both questionnaires.

It is important to note that since *Google Bard* was not selected in the pre-task questionnaire, it was not included in the post-task questionnaire. Moreover, items that did not receive a selection and thus had a zero (0) value for frequencies were eliminated from the statistical data analysis. For example, the “*Other*” option was retained for analysis in *PreW1* because one participant selected it, but this option was eliminated from statistical analysis in both *PosW1* and *PosW2* because no one selected this option.

Table 7. Selected questions for analysis and the codes associated with them

Phase	Variable	Code	Selected questions
Pre-task	Prior knowledge of blogs	PreB1	<i>I know some blogging platforms.</i>
		PreB2	<i>I know the characteristics/features of a blog.</i>
		PreB3	<i>I write blogs in my first language (mother tongue).</i>

	Habitual use of writing assistance tools	PreW1	<i>I use traditional tools (paper dictionaries, textbooks, notebook, etc.) to revise the texts I write in Spanish.</i>
		PreW2	<i>I use digital tools to revise texts I write in Spanish.</i>
		PreW3	<p><i>Select the digital tools (if any) that you normally use to revise your Spanish texts. Select all that apply.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or another text corrector</i></li> <li>• <i>WordReference, RAE, SpanishDict, or another online dictionary</i></li> <li>• <i>ChatGPT</i></li> <li>• <i>Google Bard</i></li> <li>• <i>DeepL</i></li> <li>• <i>Google Translate</i></li> <li>• <i>LanguageTool</i></li> <li>• <i>Linguee</i></li> <li>• <i>Reverso</i></li> <li>• <i>Other</i></li> <li>• <i>None</i></li> </ul>
Post-task	The experience with the blog task	PosB1	<i>I felt prepared to complete the blog task.</i>
		PosB2	<i>I am more familiar with the blog genre (characteristics/features) now.</i>
		PosB3	<i>I am more interested in writing blogs now than before taking this class.</i>
	The use of writing assistance tools for creating the blog	PosW1	<p><i>Select the digital tools you used when writing your travel blog (if you used any).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or another text corrector</i></li> <li>• <i>WordReference, RAE, SpanishDict, or another online dictionary</i></li> <li>• <i>ChatGPT</i></li> <li>• <i>DeepL</i></li> <li>• <i>Google Translate</i></li> <li>• <i>LanguageTool</i></li> <li>• <i>Linguee</i></li> <li>• <i>Reverso</i></li> <li>• <i>None</i></li> </ul>
		PosW2	<p><i>For what purpose did you use digital tools? Select all that apply.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>For revising word spelling.</i></li> <li>• <i>For revising verb conjugations.</i></li> <li>• <i>For revising text structure.</i></li> <li>• <i>For looking up words.</i></li> <li>• <i>For verifying the meaning of Spanish words.</i></li> <li>• <i>For translating text (sentences, paragraphs, etc.).</i></li> <li>• <i>For obtaining content ideas.</i></li> <li>• <i>For producing text (sentences, paragraphs, etc.).</i></li> <li>• <i>I did not use digital tools for completing this task.</i></li> </ul>
		PosW3	<i>I feel the use of digital tools helped me learn Spanish.</i>

The students' responses to the selected questions of both questionnaires were manually entered into a cross-tabulation table (Table 8). A statistical frequency and distribution analysis of the data was conducted to obtain to identify general tendencies, which would contribute to answer the third [research question](#) (RQ3).

Table 8. Cross-tabulation table sample for question PreW1

	<b>PreW1: I use traditional tools (paper dictionaries, textbooks, notebook, etc.) to revise the texts I write in Spanish.</b>				
<b>Participant</b>	1.5 Always	1.4 Often	1.3 Sometimes	1.2 Rarely	1.1 Never
1			x		
2			x		
3			x		
4	x				
5	x				
6			x		
7			x		
8				x	
9				x	
10			x		
11			x		
12				x	
13				x	
14				x	
15				x	
16					x
17				x	
18			x		
19			x		
20					x
21			x		
<b>Total:</b>	0	2	10	7	2

### 6.6.2.2 Thematic Coding

The post-task questionnaire included an important open-ended question regarding the task appreciation. To analyze the resulting open-ended responses, I employed inductive thematic coding. This method involved reading and re-reading the responses to identify recurring words, expressions, or ideas that could be grouped into broader conceptual categories. Through inductive coding, I grouped similar responses into categories reflecting common themes in students' learning experiences. For instance, statements such as "I learned new words," "I picked up new expressions," or "I discovered new ways to say things" were coded under the theme *Vocabulary*. The categories emerged organically from the data using this bottom-up approach, ensuring the analysis remained connected to the actual language and experiences of the participants. The results of these analyses are presented in the next chapter.

# Chapter 7: Presentation of Data

## 7.1 Overview

In this chapter, I present the results of the macro-textual and micro-textual analysis of the corpus of student blogs, as well as the mixed-methods analysis of students' self-reported use of writing tools and their experience with blogs and the blogging task. First, I will present the results of the macro-textual analysis, which consisted of analyzing the placement and design of titles, the presence of multimodal elements, and the textual organization of the blogs' content. Then, for the micro-textual analysis, I will present the results of the verb identification of the students' texts and the classification of these verbs into the five different types of discourse described in the methodology: interactive discourse, interactive report, theoretical discourse, narration, and impersonal discourse. The final section of this chapter presents the results of the pre- and post-task questionnaires regarding the blog experience and the use of digital tools to complete the task.

## 7.2 Macro–Textual Organization of Learners' Blogs

The macro-textual analysis aimed to answer [Research question 1](#). This analysis focused on three key dimensions: personalization, multimodality, and content organization. These elements were examined to determine the extent to which students appropriated the conventions of the blog genre and adapted them to communicate their intended message. Such choices may reflect learners' awareness of multimodal meaning-making and their ability to mobilize both linguistic and non-linguistic resources to communicate their message. In the context of L2 teaching, this is particularly significant, as it highlights how students use diverse semiotic modes to complement their linguistic knowledge and to participate in more authentic and pragmatically meaningful forms of communication.

As a general observation, of the 21 blogs in this study's corpus, 19 were created using *Blogger* and the remaining two using *Wix*. Before turning to the analysis of the macro-textual organization of learners' blogs, it is important to note that both platforms provide built-in, genre-oriented templates that shape the initial layout and design of the posts. However, the *Blogger* blogs displayed greater variation in global layout and formatting, whereas the two *Wix* blogs largely followed the platform's default template, resulting in more standardized visual structures (see Figures 23 and 24).

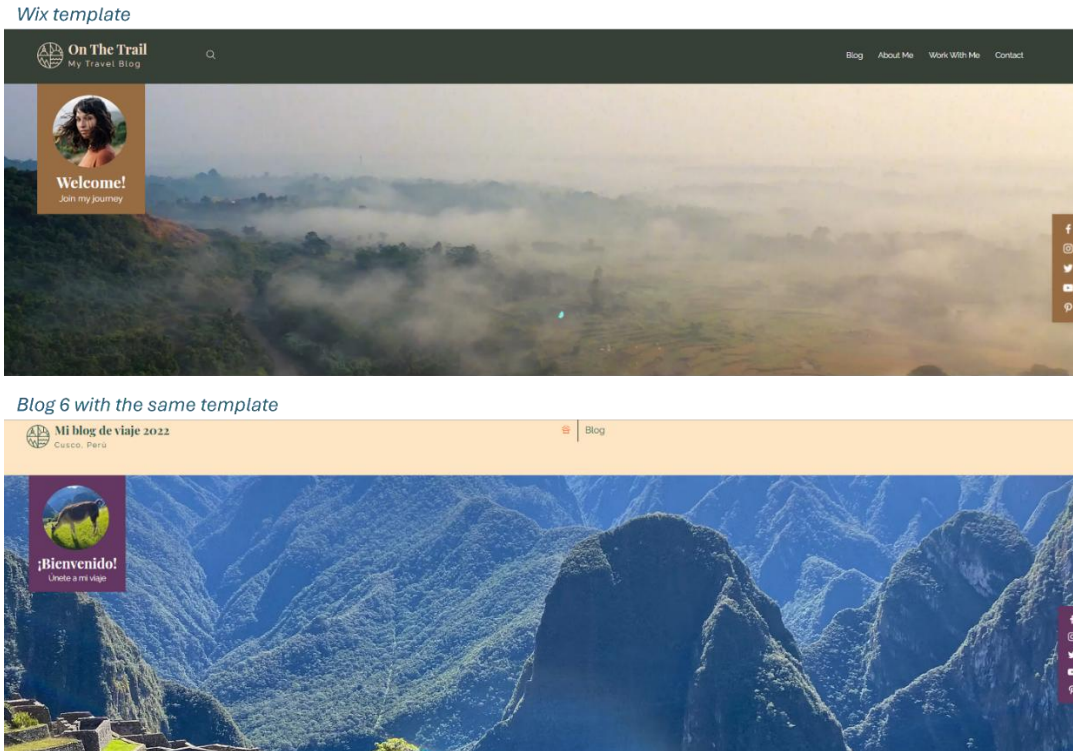


Figure 23. Wix homepage template on top and Blog 6 homepage below

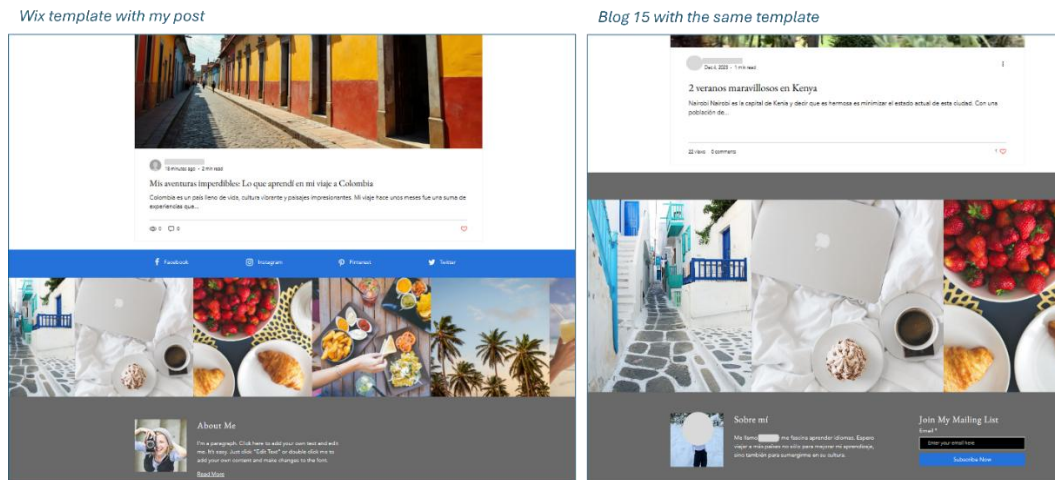


Figure 24. My Wix homepage template on the left and Blog 15 homepage on the right

## 7.2.1 Personalization of Titles

All of the blogs in the corpus had a visible default title, which is typically preset by the blogging platform. Of the 21 student blogs in the corpus, nineteen were created on *Blogger* and two on the *Wix* platform (i.e., *Blog 6* and *Blog 15*). Among the 19 blogs created with *Blogger*, three retained the platform's default title, while the remaining 16 added a more personalized title. Of these 16 titles,

nine showed manual formatting in terms of color (56%), ten had a different or larger font size (63%), and nine had a different font type (56%). The results of the analysis are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of title analysis

Blog	Title position	Default	Different color	Different size	Different font	Comments
Blog 1	Centered	0	1	1	1	
Blog 2	Upper left	0	1	1	1	Caps, underline
Blog 3	Upper left	0	0	1	1	
Blog 4	Centered	0	0	1	1	
Blog 5	Upper left	1	0	0	0	
Blog 6	Upper left	1	0	0	0	Wix blog
Blog 7	Upper left	1	0	0	0	Caps, underline
Blog 8	Upper left	0	1	1	0	Highlight
Blog 9	Centered	0	0	0	0	Caps
Blog 10	Upper left	0	1	0	1	Color background
Blog 11	Upper left	0	1	0	0	
Blog 12	Centered	0	1	1	1	Highlight
Blog 13	Upper left	0	1	1	1	Emojis
Blog 14	Upper left	1	0	0	0	
Blog 15	Upper left	0	0	1	1	Wix blog
Blog 16	Upper left	0	1	1	0	
Blog 17	Centered	0	0	1	1	
Blog 18	Upper left	0	0	0	0	None
Blog 19	Upper left	0	0	0	0	Caps, emojis
Blog 20	Upper left	0	0	0	0	Caps
Blog 21	Upper left	0	1	0	0	Underline
		4	9	10	9	


Seven of the blogs in the corpus featured at least two types of personalization, while four blogs (i.e., Blogs 1, 2, 12 and 13) contained modifications in all three areas: color, size, and font. Three out of the four blogs with modifications in all three areas also had additional features such as capitalization, underlining, highlighting, and/or emojis. Figure 25 shows three representative examples of title personalization. The author of *Blog 2* wrote all the titles and subtitles in capital letters on the left-hand side, and this is reflected in the third row of Table 9. For their part, the author of *Blog 12* centered both the title and subtitle of their blog and used a different type of font for each. Additionally, they highlighted the letters in the title and subtitle to match the colors of the destination’s flag: blue, white and red for the word *France* and red and yellow for the word *Perpignan*. *Blog 13*, for its part, included emojis in both the title and the three subtitles of its blog post. The title featured emojis of a sea wave, an umbrella, a sun and a boat, reflecting the ocean-side location of the destination. Similarly, the emojis in the subtitles relate to their respective

sections: landscapes are represented by a city, a mountain and a sunset; the temperature is represented by two umbrellas and a rainy city; and popular food is represented by a pot of soup, a shrimp and a fish.

*Blog 2*

**ESTADO DE FLORIDA**

Florida es un estado de la región sureste de Estados Unidos con una población superior a los 21 millones de habitantes. Es el tercer estado más poblado del país y el octavo en densidad de población en 2020. El clima de Florida varía de subtropical en el norte a tropical en el sur. Además de Hawai, es el único estado continental con clima tropical, situado al sur del estado, y con un arrecife de coral.



*Blog 12*

De Viaje por Francia

Por:

Perpignan!


Perpignan (en español Perpiñán) es una encantadora ciudad ubicada en el sur de Francia, en la región de Occitania, cerca de la frontera con España. Es capital del departamento de Pirineos Orientales, y tiene una rica historia y una mezcla única de influencias culturales. Esta ciudad tiene una fuerte influencia catalana (en catalán, Perpinyà)



*Blog 13*

¡Descubre Newfoundland con mi!

Texto de

Durante la semana de lectura 2023, fui al punto 




Figure 25. Samples of student titles on Blogger

As for the two blogs created with *Wix*, *Blog 6* had a main title, “*Mi blog de viaje 2022*,” and was organized into five short, dated entries describing the author's experiences in various locations. Rather than being composed of letters or words, the titles of each entry were composed of numbers that indicated the date of each experience narrated. These titles were larger in size and displayed a different color than that of the rest of the text. *Blog 15* contained a single entry titled “*2 veranos maravillosos en Kenya*,” which also had a larger font size and a slightly different color than

that of the rest of the text. This blog had four sub-divided sections, separated by centered subtitles in bold and line breaks. See these blogs' titles in Figure 26.

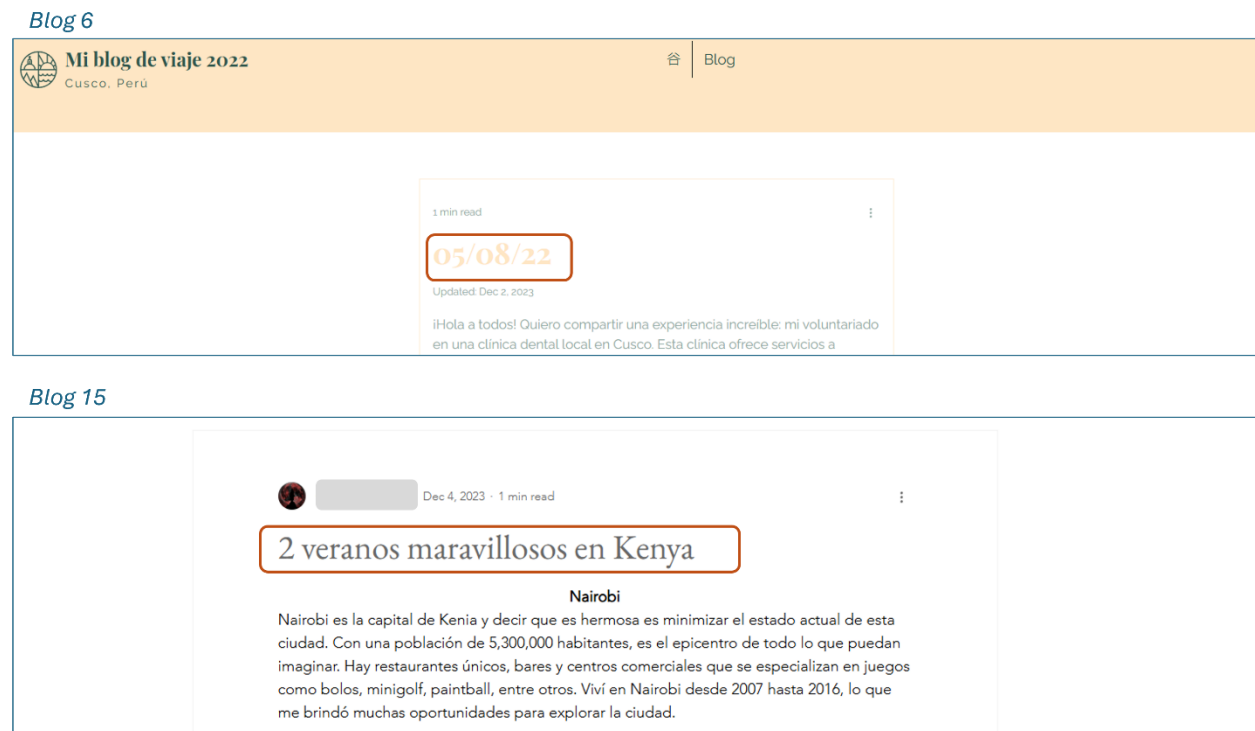


Figure 26. Samples of student titles on Wix for Blogs 6 and 15

In terms of the content and location of the titles, a total of 16 of all the titles in the corpus were located in the upper left corner, and the remaining five were centered. None of the titles were placed on the right-hand side of the blog or in any position other than the top. The titles' content varied, but all except for one included either the travel destination's name, the blog author's name, or both. For instance, four of the blogs in the corpus included the author's name in the title, but only one combined it with the destination's name. These authors used phrases such as "Travel/visit/discover [destination] with me / [author's name]." Other blogs used the inclusive "we" ("Exploramos la ciudad de Quebec"), the imperative ("Únete a mi viaje") or a question ("¿Quién viaja a Edmonton?"). Additionally, six blogs included the first-person possessive adjective *mi* (my), four of which were titles such as "Mi viaje a [destination]". Overall, the travel destinations were present in 90% of the titles.

## 7.2.2 Multimodal Elements

The elements analyzed for this section were the number of images and/or photos, videos, URLs, links, and hyperlinks. In addition, for multimedia components such as images, photos, audio,

and/or video, I analyzed whether these elements were personal (i.e., resources that students inserted for which they claim authorship, or that can be inferred from the description that were taken by them), or obtained from Internet sources (e.g., images from the web, social media posts, etc.). For the analysis of hypertextual elements, I explored where and for what apparent purposes students inserted URLs, links, and hyperlinks into their blogs. I paid special attention to the type of content these elements connected readers to. First, I will describe the results of the multimedia analysis, including the number and type of elements found. Then, I will describe the results of the hypertextual analysis.

### 7.2.2.1 Multimedia Components

A total of 113 images were identified in blogs, which amounts to an average of 5.4 images or photos per blog (see Figure 27). The corpus also contained a total of 12 videos, nine of which were classified as personal. None of the blogs included audio files.

Approximately two-thirds (62.8%) of the 113 images identified in the corpus were classified as personal photographs. This classification was based on either explicit student attribution or visual identification. In some cases, students indicated authorship directly by including captions such as "*Photo taken by me*" or similar statements. In other cases, photographs were deemed personal based on contextual and visual cues. These cues included the visible presence of the student and the informal, individualized characteristics of the image. These characteristics suggested personal authorship rather than the use of stock or externally sourced visuals.

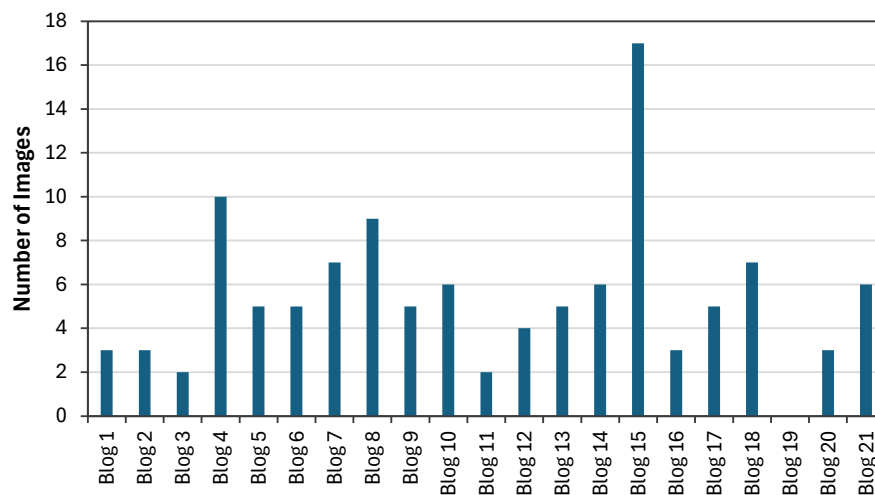


Figure 27. Number of images per student blog

*Blog 15* and *Blog 4* contained the highest number of photos, while *Blog 19* was the only blog that did not include any image/photo. The latter, however, contained the highest number of videos. Most of the non-personal photos and videos were taken from the Internet and depicted mainly the place(s) described by the author. For example, in some blogs there were images of flags representing the destination country. These were mostly located at the top of the blog (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Blogs featuring the flags of the destination countries

Another type of visual element found was *Instagram* posts, which were included in *Blog 3*. The author of this blog did not insert any image or video other than the embedded content from the social network. Figure 29 shows the *Instagram* posts embedded by the author of *Blog 3*.

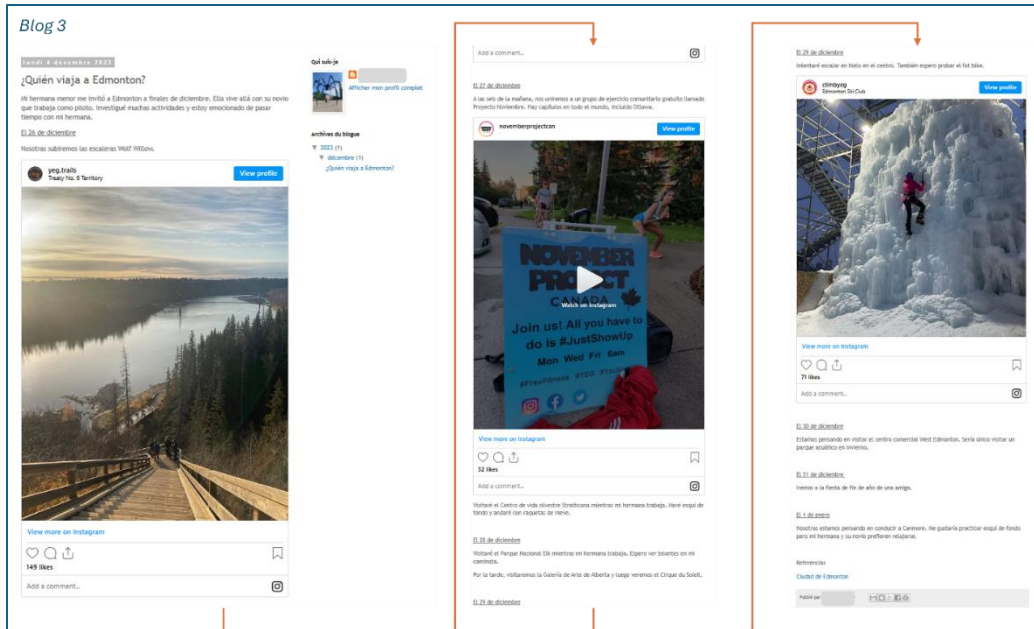


Figure 29. Instagram posts embedded by the author of Blog 3

As for personal photos, the 71 photos found could be associated with four main categories: self-portraits or photos of the blog author, photos of food, photos of places, and photos of other people or animals (Table 10). Photos of places were the most prevalent, accounting for 47 pictures (66%). These photos typically included natural landscapes, cityscapes, and important landmarks. The second most prevalent category was photos of the author, with a total of ten pictures (14%). The author of *Blog 5* inserted three of those ten self-portraits, which are shown in Figure 30.

Table 10. Results of the analysis of personal photos

Blog	Tot. images	Pers. photos	Classification of personal photos			
			The author	Food	Places	Other people or animals
Blog 1	3	3			2	1
Blog 2	3	2	1		1	
Blog 3	2	0				
Blog 4	10	9		2	6	1
Blog 5	5	5	3		2	
Blog 6	5	5	1		2	2
Blog 7	7	5	1		4	
Blog 8	9	9	2		7	
Blog 9	5	0				
Blog 10	6	1			1	
Blog 11	2	0				
Blog 12	4	2			2	
Blog 13	5	4	2	1	1	
Blog 14	6	0				
Blog 15	17	17		2	15	
Blog 16	3	3			3	
Blog 17	5	0				
Blog 18	7	6			1	5
Blog 19	0	0				
Blog 20	3	0				
Blog 21	6	0				
	113	71	10	5	47	9

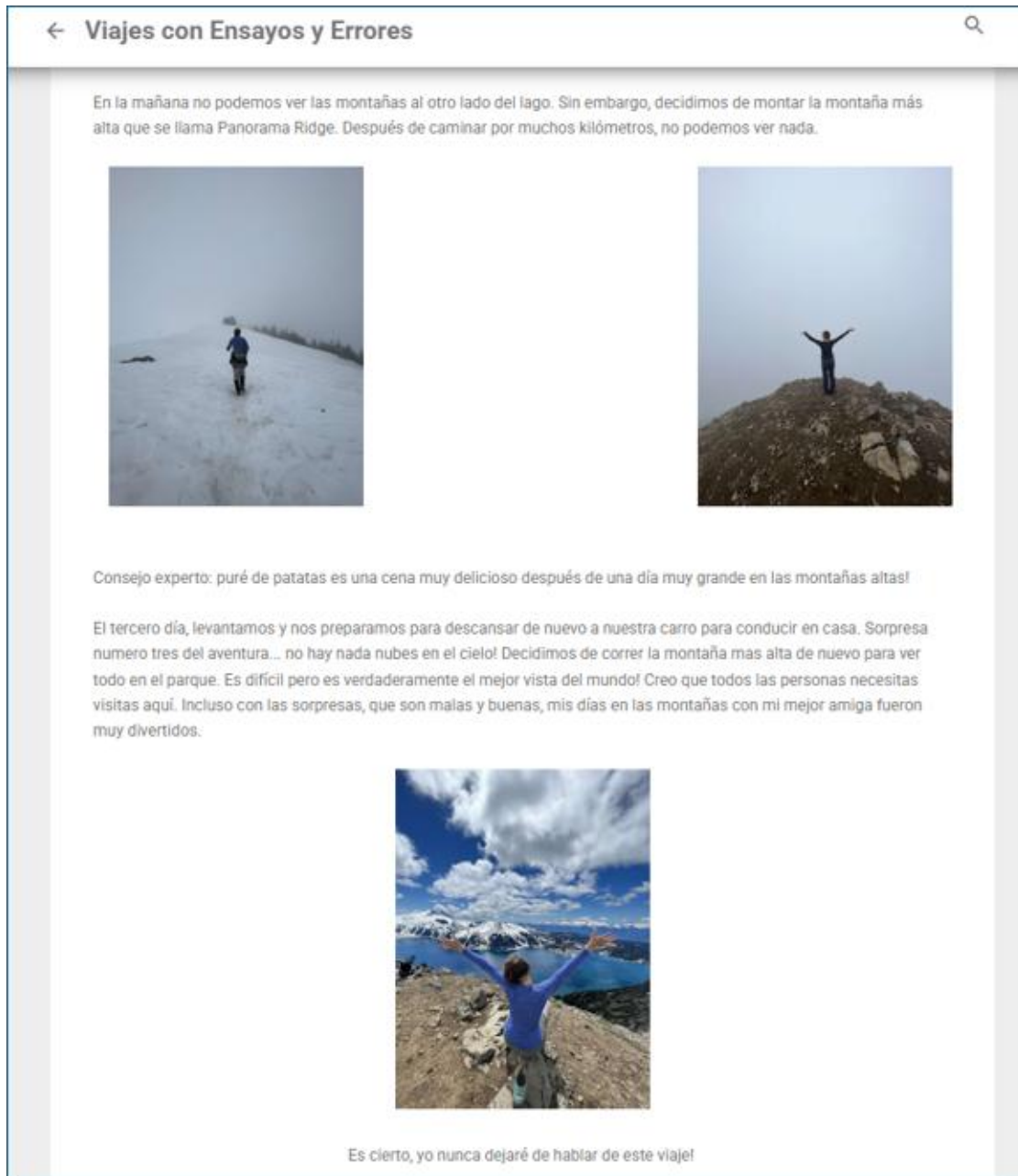



Figure 30. Blog 5 contained the highest number of self-portraits in the corpus


Photos of other people or animals came in third with nine pictures. Five of these photos belonged to *Blog 18* (Figure 31), whose author visited the destination as part of a field trip from their university to “*aprender sobre la macroecología en ecosistemas de África oriental,*” as the author claimed. Photos of food were the least prevalent category, with five pictures. The latter mainly showed local food and dishes that the author of the blog tried.

← Blog de viajes 🔍




Tanzania tiene una fauna increíblemente diversa en sus parques, con una megafauna impresionante que incluye animales como elefantes, jirafas, leones, hipopótamos y más.



Vimos muchos cebras en el safari en el parque Nacional de Ngorongoro.



Estos flamencos se bañan en el lago salado, y su color rosado se debe a los camarones de los cuales se alimentan.

Durante el viaje en el Serengeti tuvimos la suerte de ver un grupo de leones con sus cachorros. Los leones duermen la

Figure 31. Example from Blog 18, which contained approximately half of the animal photos in the corpus

The highest number of personal photos in a single blog was found in *Blog 15*, which contained a total of 17 photographs. These photos were distributed across the blog, capturing what the author was describing in the text as their personal experiences (Figure 32). All these pictures seemed casual and personal because of the elements photographed, the angle, the colors, and the lighting, among other characteristics. The highly personalized nature of this blog is evident not only in the number of images but also in the fact that it was the only blog that included a profile of

the blogger (Figure 33). No other blog in the corpus included a profile section, including *Blog 6*, which was also created with *Wix*.



Figure 32. *Blog 15* had the most images in the corpus

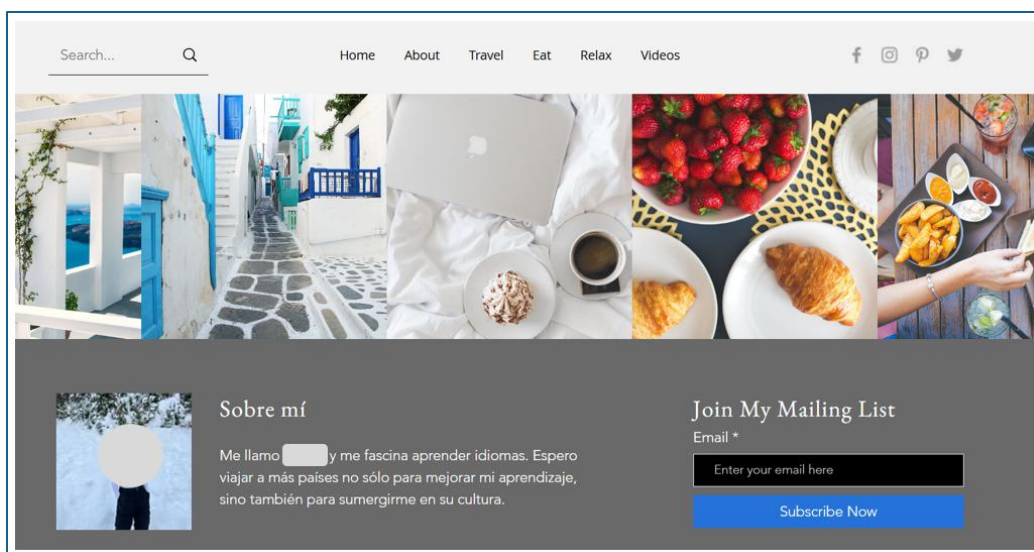


Figure 33. Profile of the author of Blog 15

With regard to the 12 videos found in the corpus, nine (75%) were identified as personal videos. All these videos pertained to the category *places* as they depicted physical locations that the blog authors visited and/or discussed in their blogs (Table 11). *Blog 1* contained three edited videos with inserted music and transitions into them (Figure 34), while *Blog 19* contained the highest number of personal videos ( $n = 4$ ), which was also the highest number of videos in the entire corpus (see a sample of *Blog 19* in Figure 35).

Table 11. Results of the analysis of personal videos

Blog	Tot. Videos	Pers. videos	Classification of personal videos			
			The author	Food	Places	Other people or animals
Blog 1	3	3			3	
Blog 2	0	0				
Blog 3	1	0			1	
Blog 4	0	0				
Blog 5	0	0				
Blog 6	0	0				
Blog 7	0	0				
Blog 8	1	1			1	
Blog 9	0	0				
Blog 10	1	0			1	
Blog 11	0	0				
Blog 12	0	0				
Blog 13	0	0				
Blog 14	0	0				
Blog 15	0	0				
Blog 16	1	1			1	
Blog 17	1	0			1	
Blog 18	0	0				
Blog 19	4	4			1	
Blog 20	0	0				
Blog 21	0	0				
	12	9	0	0	9	0

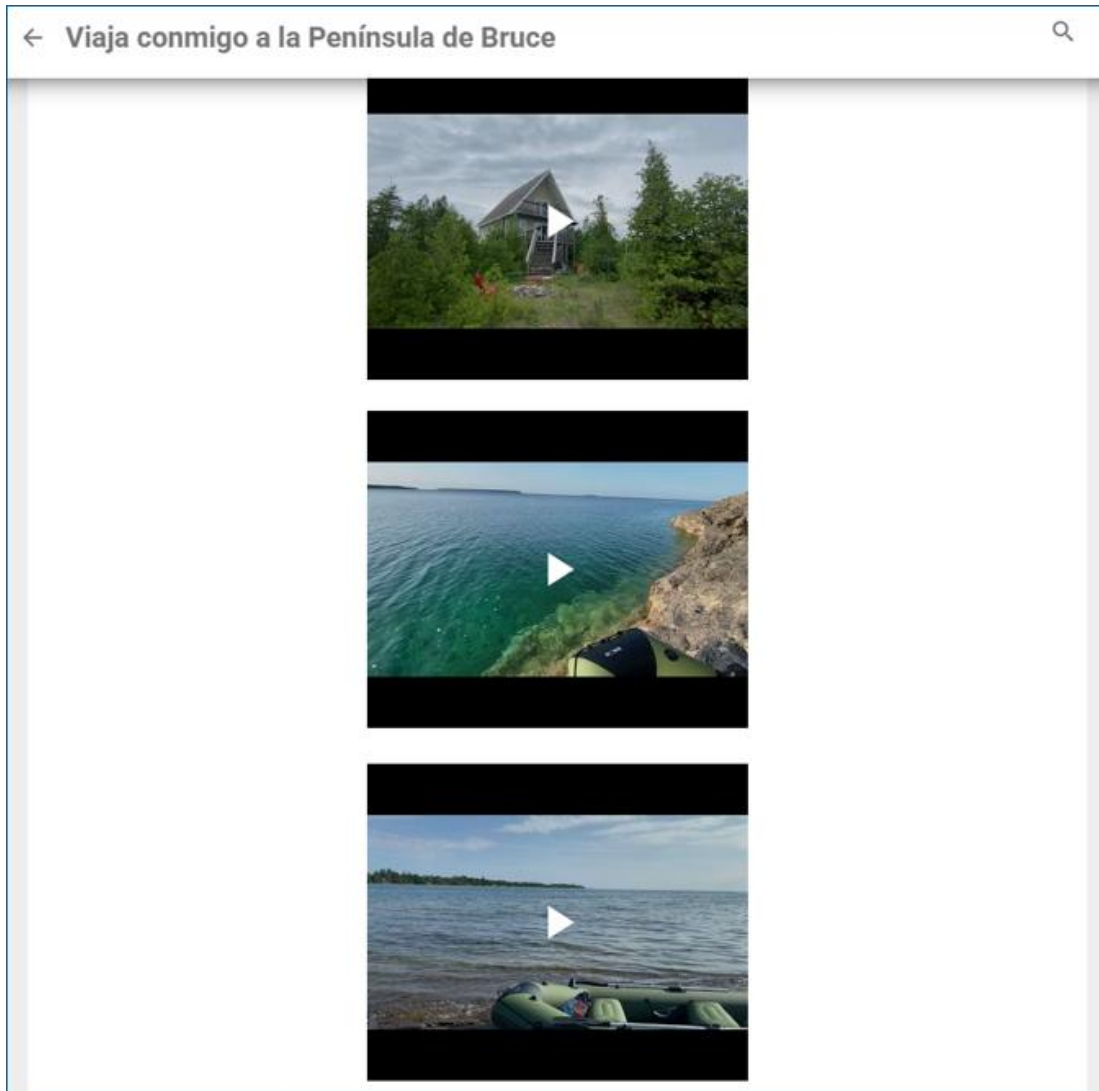


Figure 34. Example of edited videos depicting places (Blog 1)

Four of the nine personal videos in the corpus could not be played. These videos belonged to *Blog 8* (one video) and to *Blog 19* (three videos). The author of *Blog 8* said the video showed the view from their vacation home and called it one of their favorite videos from the trip. This video was classified under the *Places* category. The three non-playable videos in *Blog 19* were labeled “*Este video es de mio*” (*This video is mine*) below every video (Figure 38), so it was categorized as personal due to the declared ownership. However, it was not possible to establish what they displayed. I did not attempt to reach the blog authors to request permission to access their videos because of the privacy and anonymity constraints established in the ethics approval process.

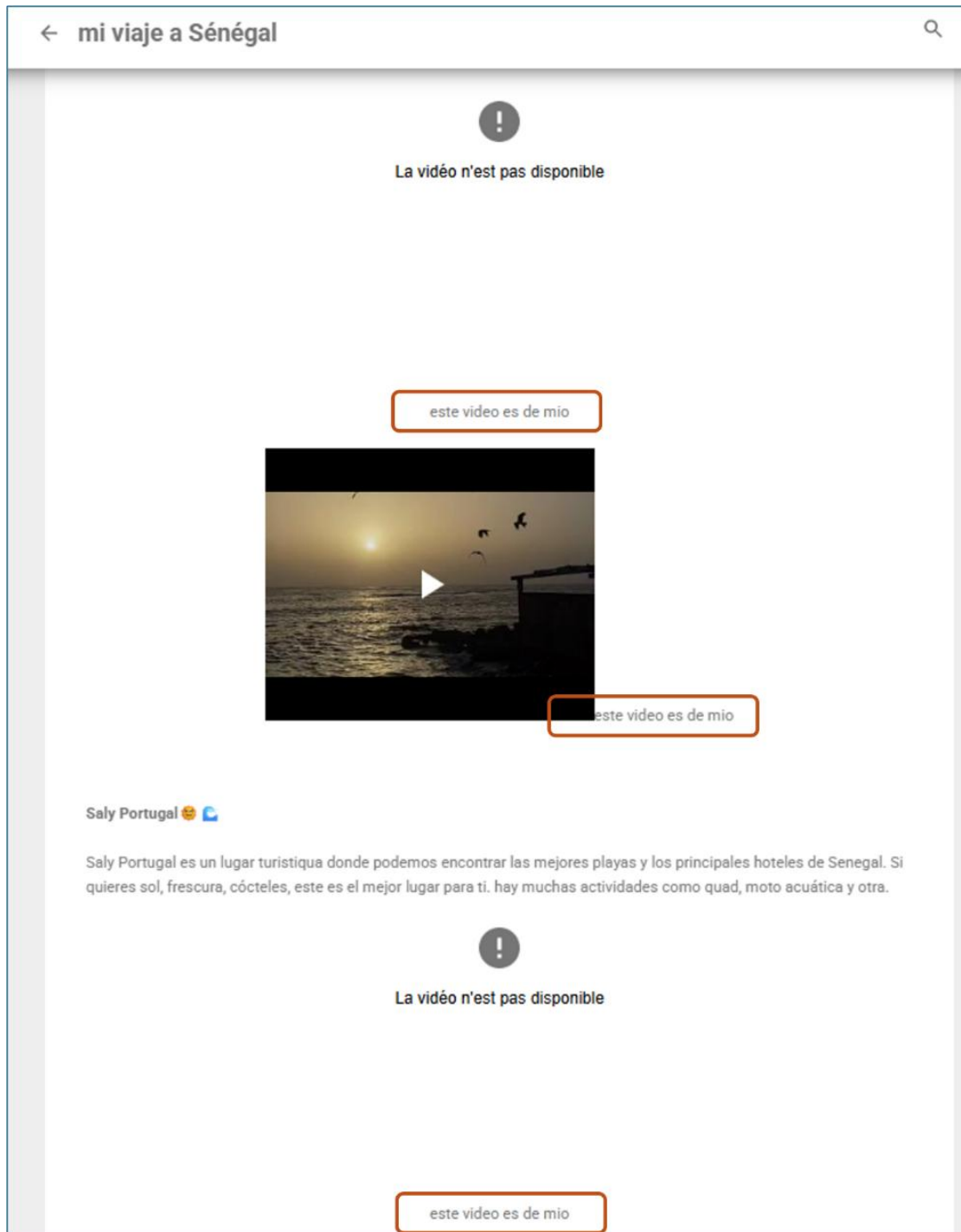


Figure 35. Blog 19 with videos that cannot be played but which show authorship

Out of the three non-personal videos found in the corpus, two were inserted from *YouTube* (Blog 10 and Blog 17), while the other one was taken from a post on *Instagram* (Blog 3). See these three in Figure 36 below.

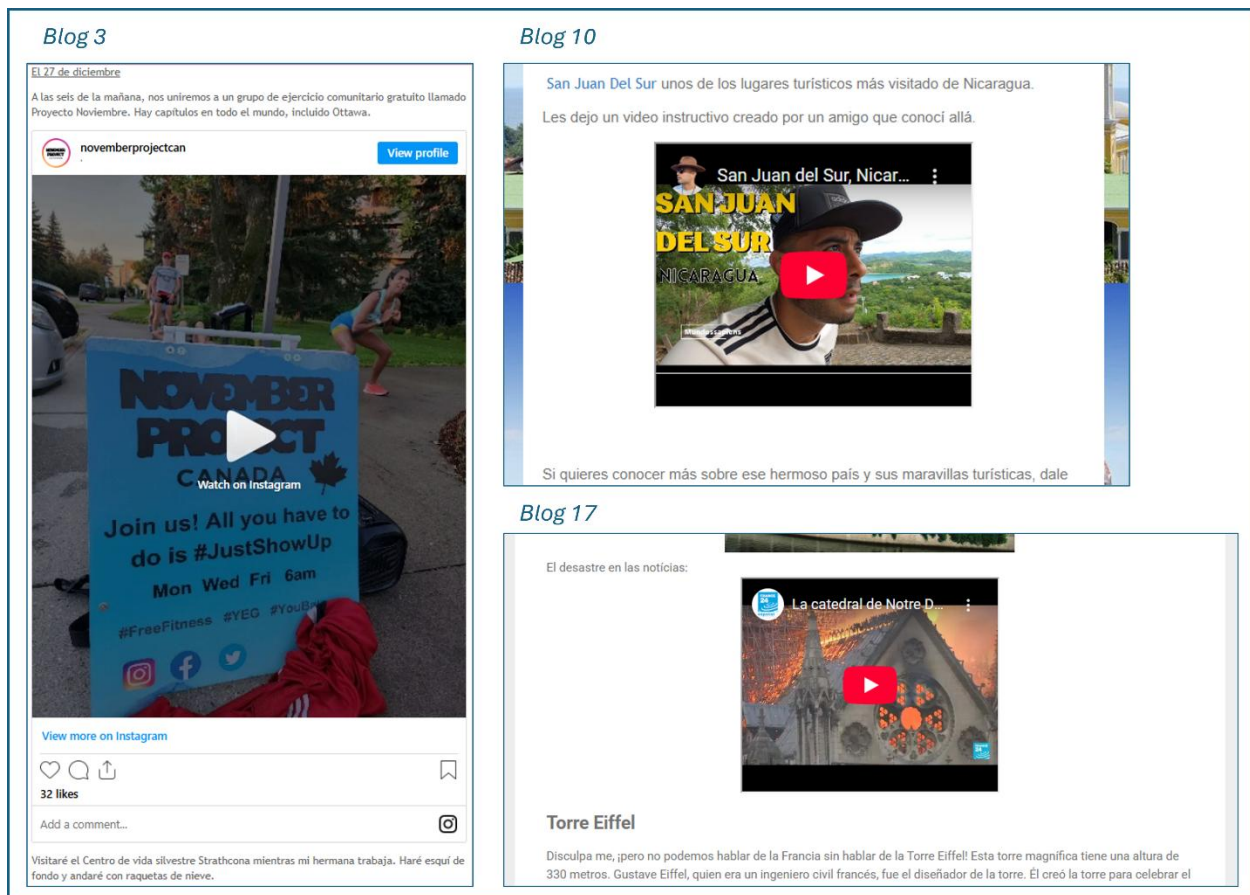


Figure 36. Embedded web videos

Finally, only two blogs featured a combination of photographs and videos. *Blog 8* included photos interspersed with text and ended with a video. *Blog 16* distributed content more evenly between text, images, and video. The latter appeared in the center of the blog, between two sections of text and images (Figure 37).

As for other types of elements, only *Blog 17* included an animated object (a waving flag). This image was positioned at the top of the blog entry, between the title and the author's name. The waving flag does not display the image source, and the animation plays on a loop. The static image of this animation can be seen at the bottom of Figure 28 above.

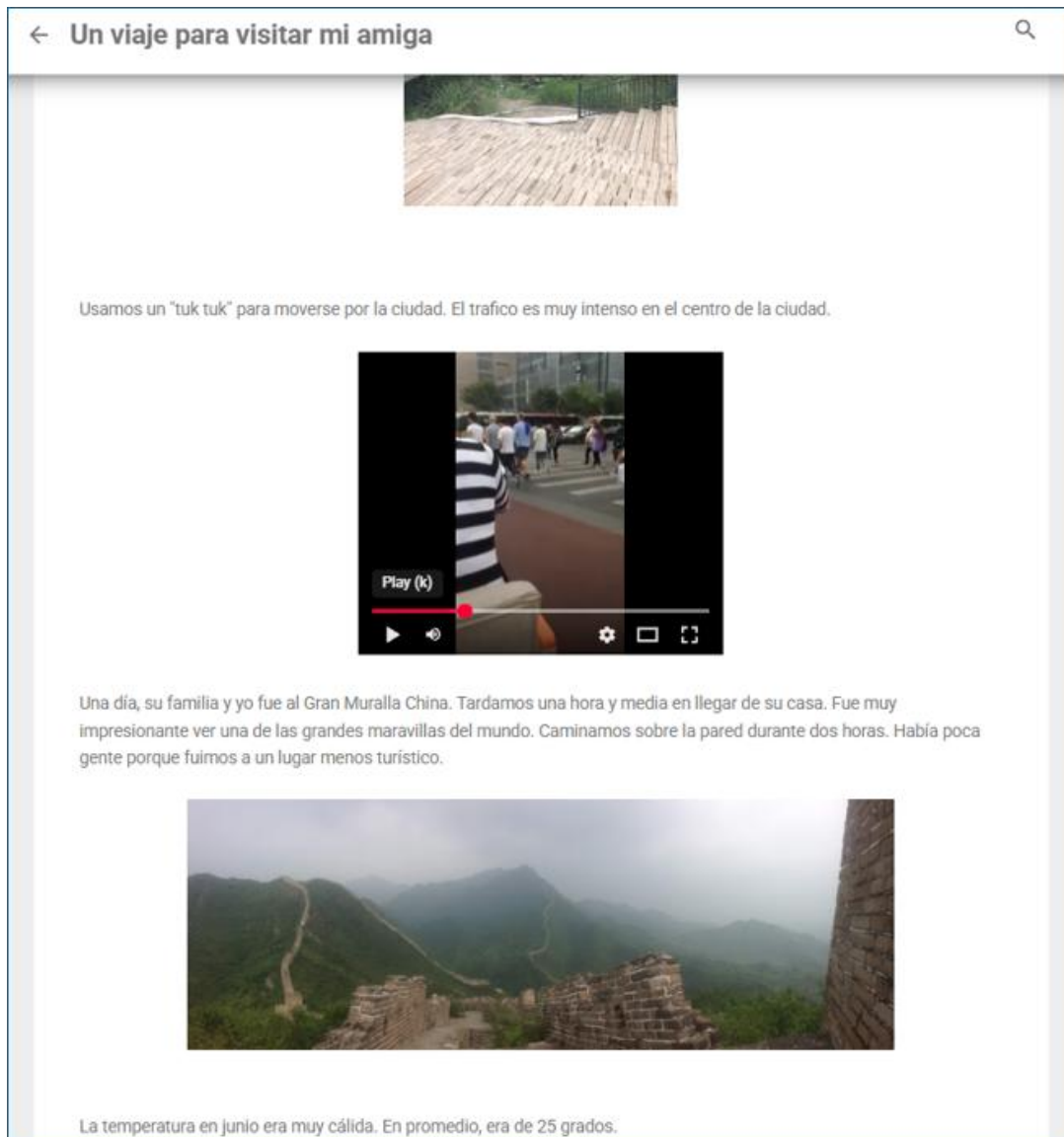


Figure 37. Example of blog combining image and video (Blog 16)

### 7.2.2.2 Hypertextual Components

A total of 63 elements were identified in the students' blogs (see Figure 38). Of these, 34 were links, 18 were URLs, and 11 were hyperlinks. *Blog 14*, *Blog 10* and *Blog 20* had the highest number of hypertextual elements, with eleven, nine, and eight elements, respectively. Eleven blogs contained only one type of element, while *Blog 10* and *Blog 20* were the only two blogs in the corpus that contained each type of element. Conversely, seven blogs did not include any hypertextual elements (i.e., Blogs 5, 6, 8, 13, 15, 16, and 19).

Most of the hypertextual elements found in the blogs provided definitions of specific content in the blog entry and/or added more information about what the author was talking about. Specifically,

authors inserted 38 hypertextual elements to provide additional information about the topic, and the remaining 25 were used to indicate the sources of content inserted into the blogs.

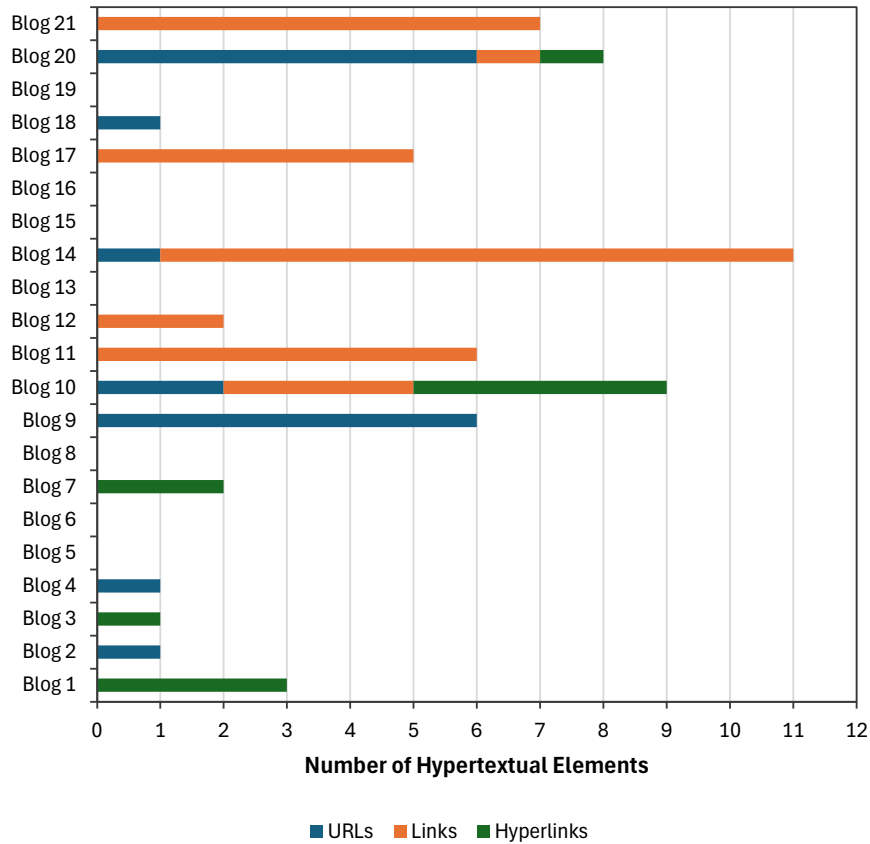


Figure 38. Number of hypertextual elements per blog

About one third of the hypertextual elements connected to content in Spanish or French. *Blog 10* inserted content in both French and Spanish, while *Blog 14* linked eight elements only in French. *Blog 20* was the blog with the most items inserted in Spanish, with seven. The rest of the linked content led to sites in English. As for the types of websites to which these elements were linked, most linked to private companies or organizations, such as *Google* products, *Wikipedia*, and *TripAdvisor*. Two elements linked to official websites, such as city hall and non-governmental organization websites, while two linked to other travel blogs.

Links and URLs were found more commonly as image footers or as references, while hyperlinks were found across the text in no specific position. A separated *Reference* section was found in six blogs. The links in some of these references specified information the link was leading to (*Blog 10* and *Blog 21*), while other links were pasted with no further information (*Blog 17*) (Figure 39).

## Blog 10



Si quieres conocer más sobre ese hermoso país y sus maravillas turísticas, dale Click [Aquí](#).

**Referencias**

Ciudades interesantes de Nicaragua: <https://nicaragua-travel-guide>

Referencias lugares gastronómicos: [https://www.Restaurants-Granada\\_Department](https://www.Restaurants-Granada_Department)

Sistema de Información Turística: <https://guia-de-viajes-de-nicaragua/>

## Blog 17



Como soy un estudiante en ingeniería, tengo mucha apreciación para la arquitectura francés. Cuando yo viajo a Francia, iré inmediatamente a una de estos tres edificios.

**Referencias:**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont-Saint-Michel>

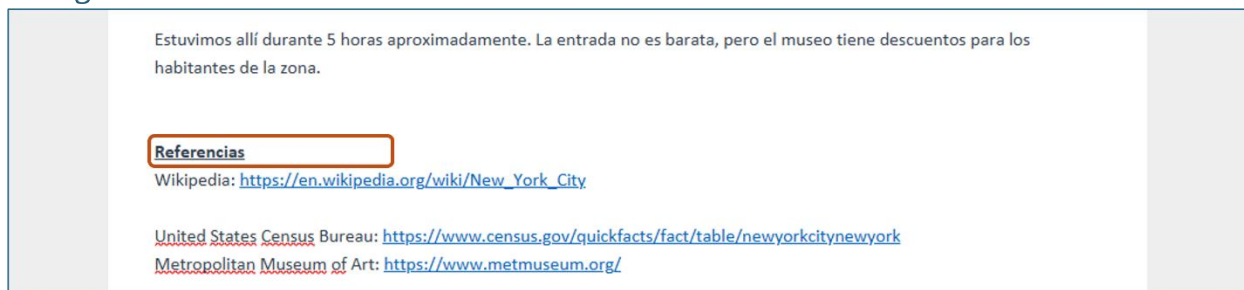
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Notre-Dame-de-Paris>

<https://www.euston96.com/roseton/>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eiffel-Tower-Paris-France>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7gcQ00srPw&t=42s>

## Blog 21



Estuvimos allí durante 5 horas aproximadamente. La entrada no es barata, pero el museo tiene descuentos para los habitantes de la zona.

**Referencias**

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City)

United States Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork>

Metropolitan Museum of Art: <https://www.metmuseum.org/>

Figure 39. Blogs with reference sections

Blog 14 had the highest number of links with ten, followed by Blog 21 and Blog 11 with seven and six links, respectively. Eight of the ten links in Blog 14 provided more information, while the remaining two served as image reference source (Figure 40). Four of the links in this blog connected with *Wikipedia*, two to *Google Search*, and one with *Tripadvisor*. The remaining three connected readers with official (national, governmental) and non-official (private) websites.



<https://parcdelaalleeelansole.com/>

Tenemos una muy grande diversidad de comida en Congo. Cuando estaba creciendo mi madres y mis tías cocinaban mucho para mi y mis hermanos, y tuve la oportunidad de probar varios platos porque está en nuestra cultura demostrar nuestro aprecio a través de la comida. Hay una lista de las mejores comidas.


- El saka-saka o pondu <https://latendresseencuisine.com/pondu-congo/>
- El liboke <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liboke>
- El moambe <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moambe>

Figure 40. Blog 14, which was the one with the most links

As for hyperlinks, *Blog 10* had the most with four, followed by *Blog 1* and *Blog 7* with three and two hyperlinks respectively. The hypertextual elements in these blogs primarily linked to news websites, informational sites, and other blogs. For example, *Blog 10* (Figure 41) had two hyperlinks inserted that led to a news site in French (top) and to an informational site in Spanish (bottom).

*Blog 10*

San Juan Del Sur unos de los lugares turísticos más visitado de Nicaragua.  
Les dejo un video instructivo creado por un amigo que conocí allí.



Si quieres conocer más sobre ese hermoso país y sus maravillas turísticas, dale Click [Aquí](#).






Figure 41. Hyperlinks to the content linked to on Blog 10

As abovementioned, two blogs in the corpus (*Blog 10* and *Blog 20*) integrated all three hypertextual elements: URLs, links, and hyperlinks. *Blog 20* integrated these three elements in their blog (Figure 42), mostly to provide references of the source of the information. *Blog 1* described above, also used hyperlinks to connect the reader with another blog that offered tips and recommendations to visit the same destination.

## Blog 20

Viaje en Italia

¿Alguna vez has deseado ir a un destino perfecto? Bueno, ¡tengo el viaje perfecto para ti! En este blog hablaré de las ventajas de viajar a Italia en tus próximas vacaciones.

Italia




Imagen tomada de <https://www.rickstoves.com/europe/italy> Clickable link

También puede visitar el Panteón de Agripa que es un templo de arquitectura romana que fue construido entre los años 118 y 125. Ahora es utilizado como una iglesia católica. Es un edificio muy impresionante.




Imagen tomada de [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pante%C3%B3n\\_de\\_Agripa](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pante%C3%B3n_de_Agripa) URL

Finalmente, Roma tiene muy museos romanos que puede visitar como el Museos Vaticanos, la Galería Nacional de Arte Antiguo, la Galería Borghese, la Galería Nacional de Arte Moderno, el Museo de la Civilización Romana y muchos más.

Puedes obtener más información para los viajes en Italia [aquí](#) Hyperlink

Figure 42. Blog 20 with all hypertextual elements

### 7.2.2.3 Number of Words in Relation to Multimodal Elements

On average, blogs contained 294 words, and the total word count for the corpus was 6,182 (Figure 43). Blogs 14 and 7 had the fewest number of words (164 and 181, respectively), which was lower than the required number of words for the task (200–300).

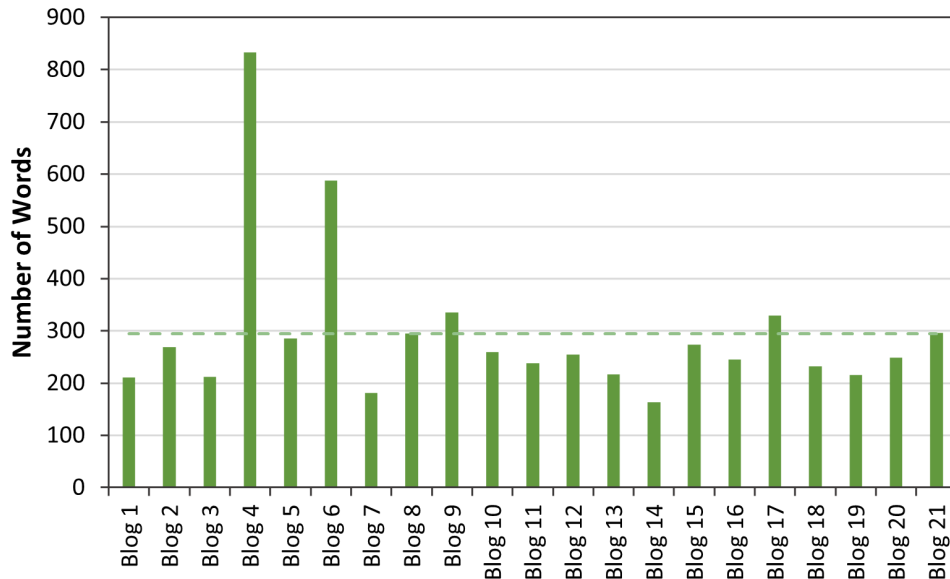


Figure 43. Number of words per blog

In addition, these two blogs displayed outlier characteristics in terms of multimodal elements (see Table 12). That is, *Blog 14* contained the largest number of links ( $n = 10$ ) and an above-average number of images ( $n = 6$ ). *Blog 7*, for its part, also contained an above-average number of images ( $n = 7$ ) and an above-average number of personal pictures ( $n = 5$ ). In terms of hypertextuality, this last blog contained only two hyperlinks.

Table 12. Examples of the highest and lowest number of words and number of multimodal elements

Blog	Number of words (Avg in corpus = 294)	Number of multimedia elements (Avg in corpus = 6)	Number of hypertextual elements (Avg in corpus = 3)
<b>Blog 4</b>	833	10	1
<b>Blog 6</b>	588	5	0
<b>Blog 9</b>	335	5	6
<b>Blog 17</b>	329	5	6
<b>Blog 7</b>	181	7	2
<b>Blog 14</b>	164	6	11

On the other hand, four blogs (i.e., Blogs 4, 6, 9, and 17) in the corpus had more words than the maximum required, ranging from 329 to 833 words. Table 12 above shows the total number of words, multimedia elements (i.e., images and videos), and hypertextual elements (i.e., URLs, links, and hyperlinks) for the blogs with words above and below the task requirements.

Interestingly, *Blog 4* stood out because it had nearly three times the required number of words and the second-highest number of images (Figure 44). What is more, three of the four blogs that exceeded the required word count (i.e., Blogs 6, 9, and 17) had fewer multimedia elements than the corpus average. Conversely, the two shortest blogs in the corpus had more hypermedia than blogs that exceeded the required word count, except for *Blog 4*. What is more, *Blog 14*, which is the blog with the fewest words in the entire corpus, had more multimedia and more hypertextual elements than the corpus average.

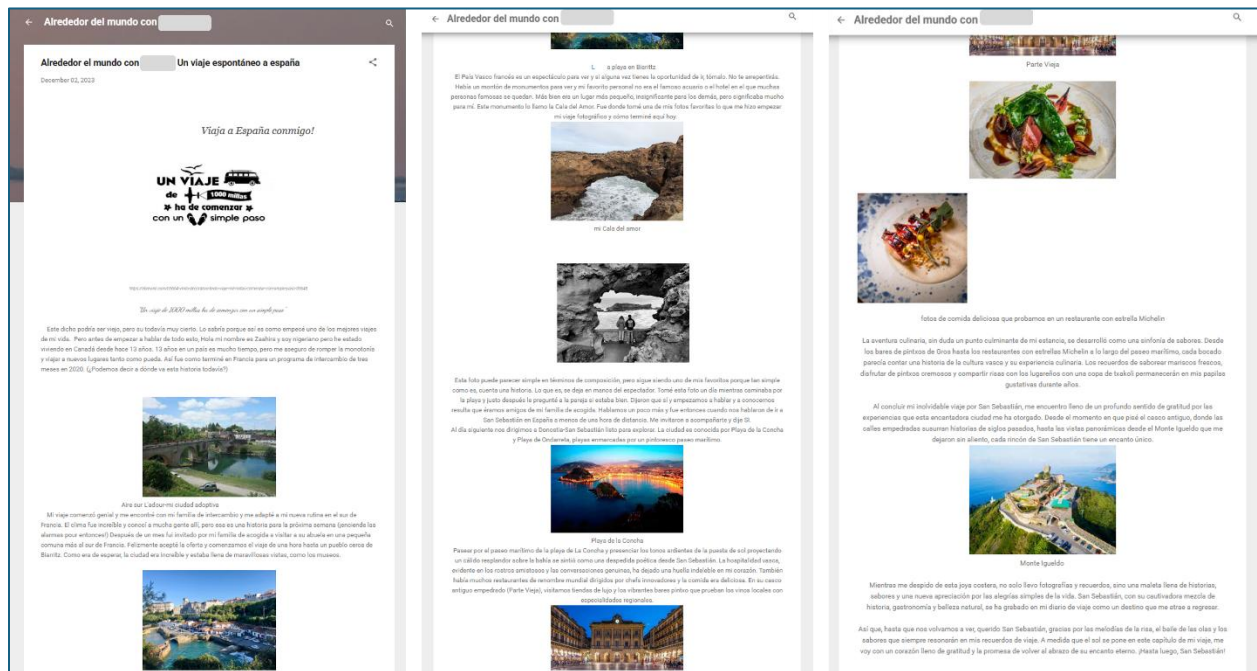


Figure 44. Blog 4 with distribution of text and multimodal elements

### 7.2.3 The Organization of Content

The distribution of content in the corpus of student blogs was quite varied, meaning that the majority of bloggers did not favor a specific layout. It was found that 15 out of the total 21 blogs could be associated with at least one of the four models identified in the pilot study (Figure 45).

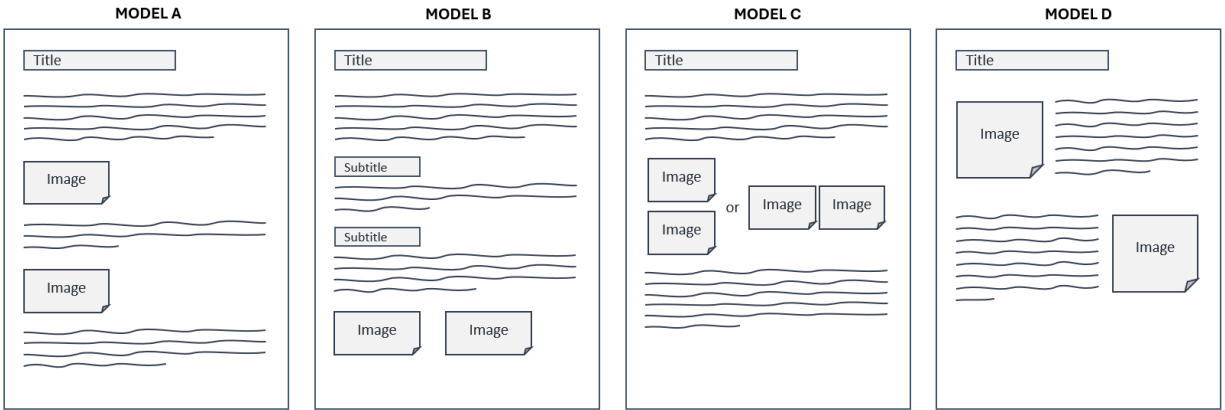


Figure 45. Common layouts found on students' blogs in a pilot study

The distribution of these 15 blogs into each model was as follows:

- Model A = 10 blogs
- Model B = 2 blogs
- Model C = 1 blog
- Model D = 2 blogs

The skeletal distribution of the remaining six blogs is considered hybrid because it combines the distribution types of at least two previous models, creating a new model (Figure 46).

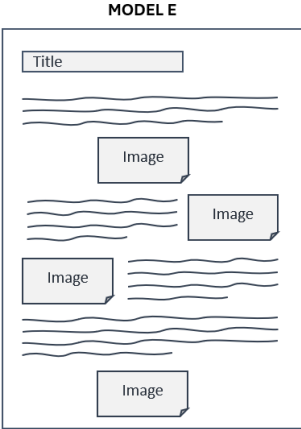


Figure 46. New skeletal model (Model E)

Blogs associated with the *Model A* had a consistent structure. They began with a title, followed by a paragraph commonly introduced by a subtitle (Figure 47). Then came multimodal elements followed again by text. This structure was repeated at least twice until the end of the blog, which concluded with a reference section in four of them.

In addition, seven of the *Model A* blogs centered the multimodal content. Even when there were two or three images, they were centered in the body of the blog. The remaining three blogs in this category had multimodal elements aligned to the left.

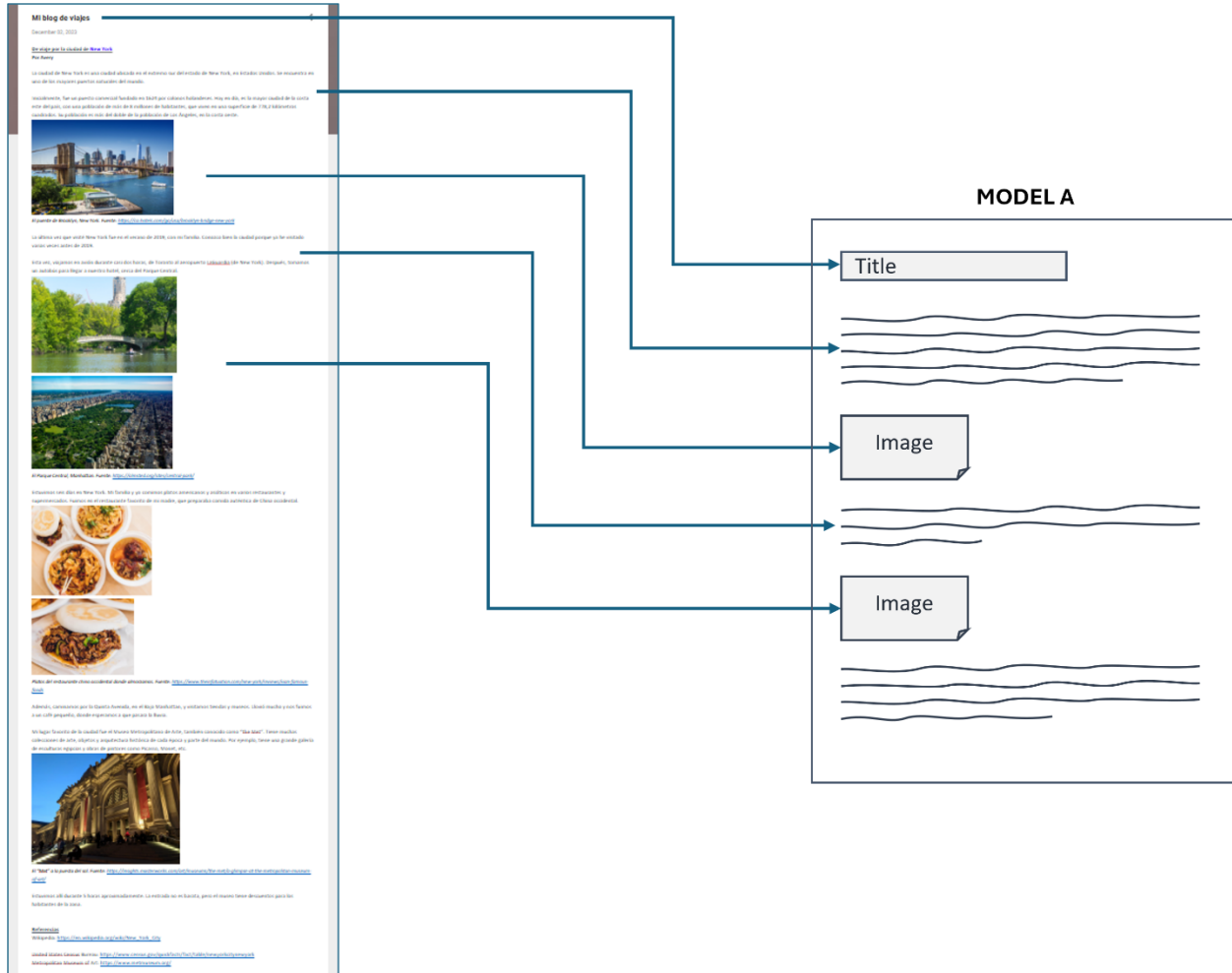


Figure 47. Blog sample of Model A

The two blogs in *Model B* were *Blog 6* and *Blog 7*. *Blog 6* was the blog created with *Wix* that had five separate entry pages. Each page began with a title containing the date, followed by two short paragraphs, and concluded with a picture matching what the author described (Figure 48). *Blog 7* started with the default title, followed by a paragraph and a photo. Another similar section followed. At the end of the blog, the author inserted five personal photos. This last blog was associated with this category because, despite the presence of two photos at the top of the blog, the author prioritized the inclusion of multimodal elements at the bottom.

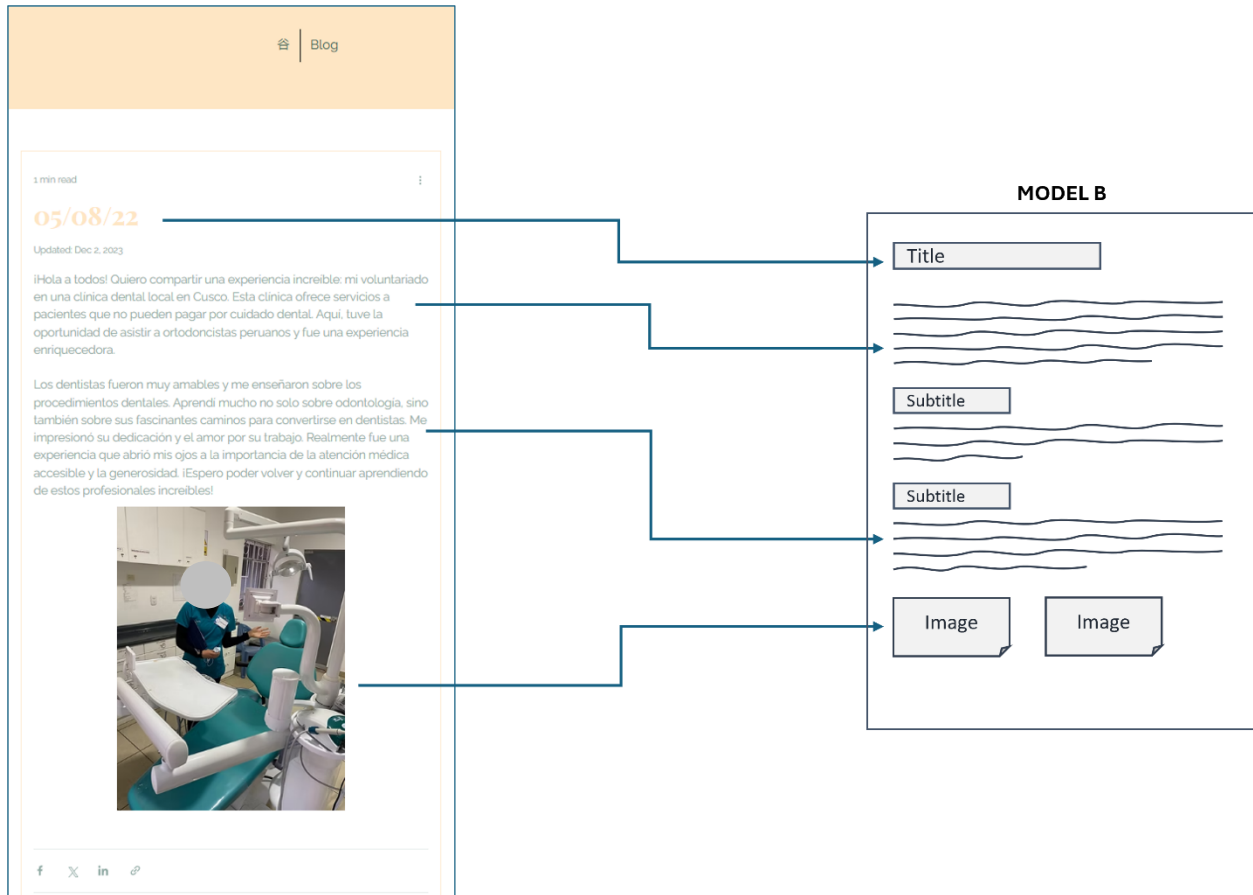


Figure 48. Blog sample of Model B

*Model C* is characterized by the presence of text or a paragraph at the beginning and end of the blog, with the multimodal elements concentrated in the middle. The only blog that followed this pattern was *Blog 19* (Figure 49), which started with the title, followed by two paragraphs. Then, three videos were inserted, followed by a short, two-line paragraph and another video. The blog closed with text.

Blogs 10 and 13 were associated with *Model D* because they alternated content, placing an image on the left and adding text to the right of the image, then intercalating with an image on the right and text on the left. Paragraphs and multimodal elements were distributed in a zigzag pattern that alternated between text on one side and images or videos on the other, and vice versa (Figure 50).

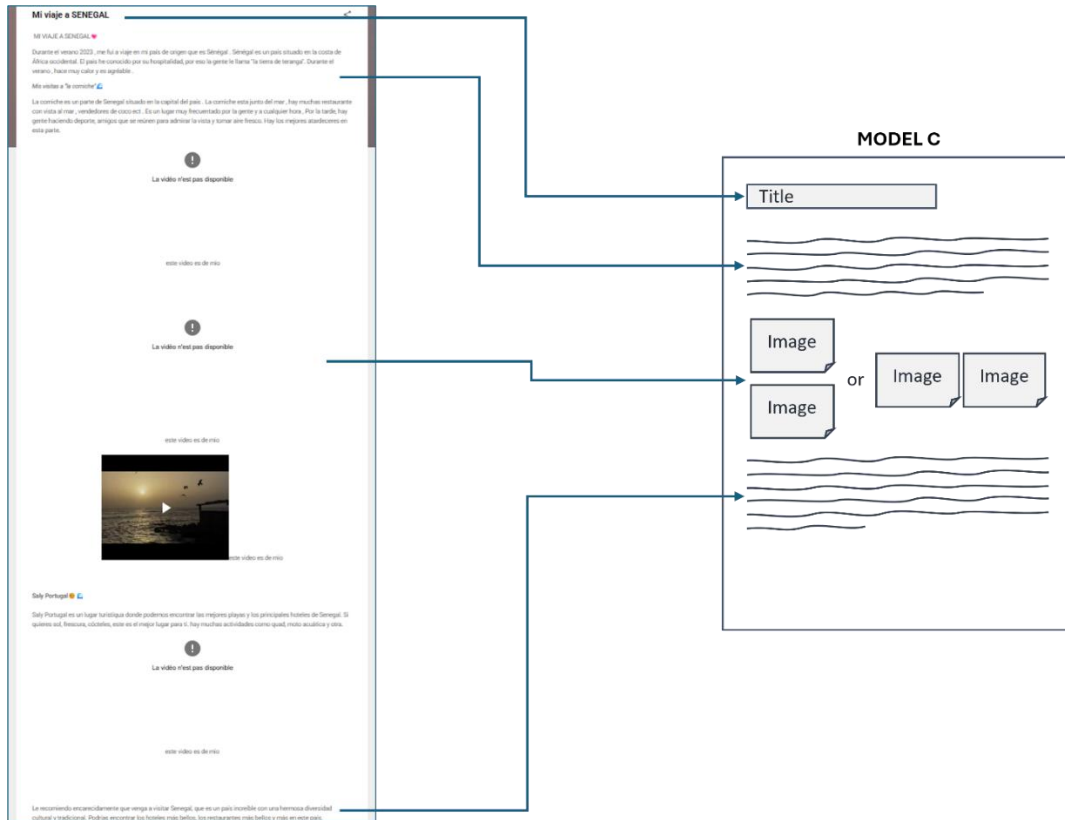


Figure 49. Blog sample of Model C

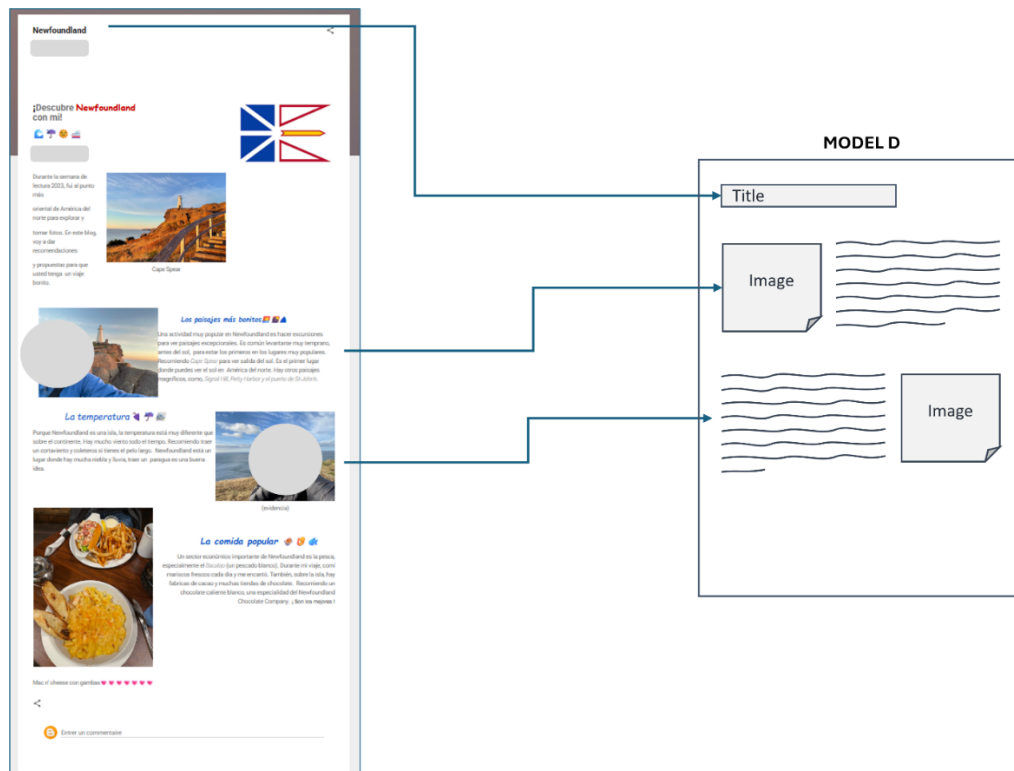


Figure 50. Blog sample of Model D

As mentioned earlier, the second most prominent model was *Model E*, which emerged due to the hybrid approach that several blog authors took when creating their blogs. Among these six blogs, one was created with *Wix*, which presented a distribution of text followed by a line break, then text on the left and a photo on the right, followed by another line break, and then an alternating distribution of text and images. The other blogs also combined paragraphs followed by an image, then either another paragraph or a zigzag distribution with text to the left and an image to the right, or vice versa (Figure 51). One of the blogs started right away with an image, which was uncommon in the other blogs. This same blog followed the first image with a subtitle and then another photo. Text did not appear until almost halfway through the post.

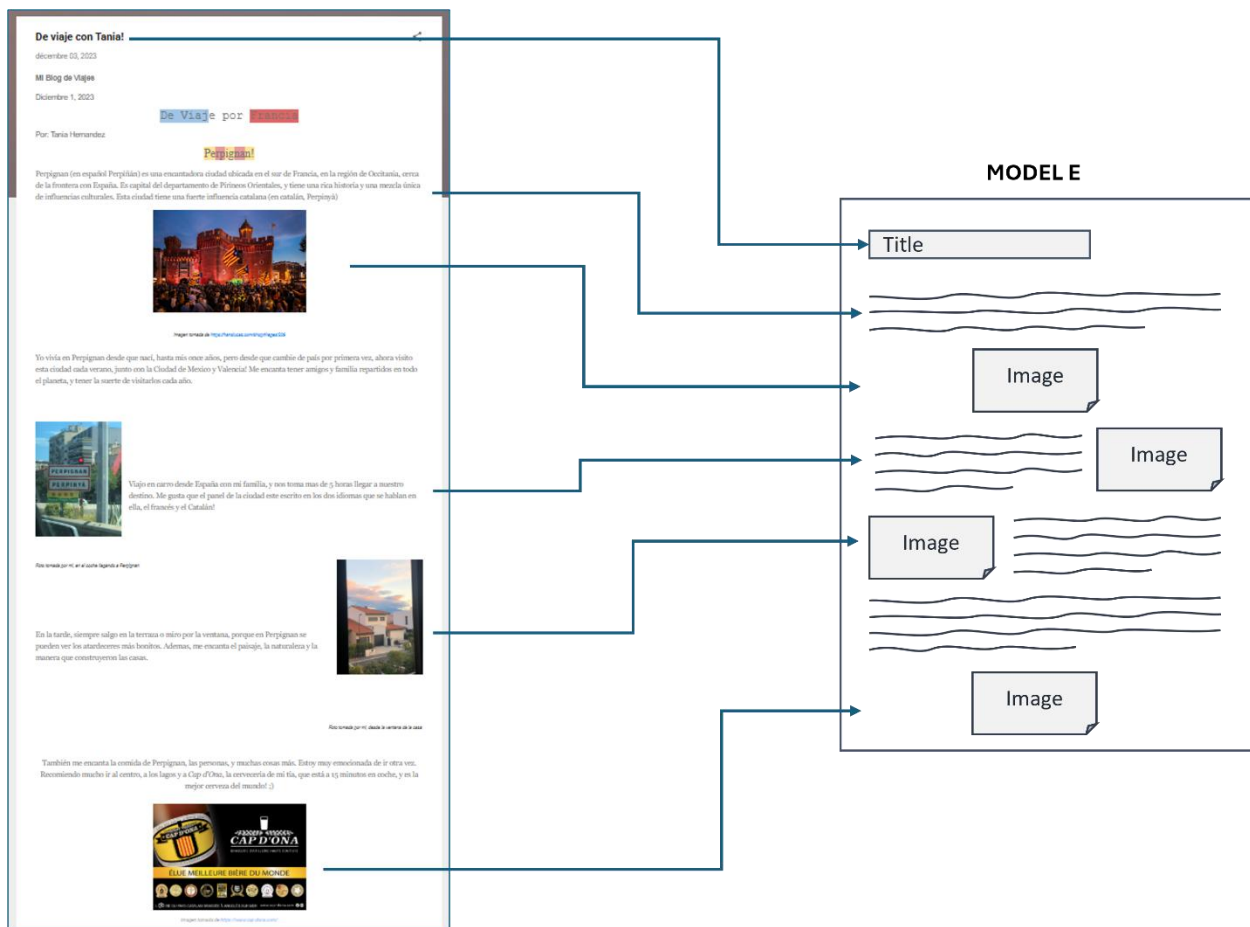


Figure 51. Blog sample of Model E

Overall, it was observed that students preferred to intercalate text and multimodal elements, whether by centering images and/or videos, organizing them alongside text, or both. The variety of students' choices regarding the distribution of textual and multimodal components made this blog corpus very rich in terms of content layout.

## 7.3 Micro–Textual Organization of Learners’ Blogs

This section presents the results of the micro-textual analysis ([Research question 2](#)), which consisted of identifying the discursive features of the students’ blogs. To reiterate, this micro-textual analysis involved identifying and manually classifying verb constructions according to their deictic or non deictic value, which could help associate it to a discourse type, as detailed in [section 6.6.1](#). In brief, each verb was classified into one of the following five categories: *Interactive Discourse*, *Interactive Report*, *Theoretical Discourse*, *Narration*, and *Impersonal Discourse*.

Analyzing micro-textual features provides insight into the discursive and linguistic resources students used to write their blog entries and convey their intended message. By examining the types of discourse present in the corpus, we can identify whether students primarily described events, narrated personal experiences, or adopted a more interactive stance aimed at engaging their readers. These discursive choices reflect the students’ authorial positioning and how they organized their texts, which could also serve as indicators of their emerging authorship within the blog genre. Furthermore, these patterns reveal students’ sociocultural and audience awareness as they adapt their language use to situate themselves within communicative contexts and communities of practice. From an L2 pedagogical perspective, this awareness is essential because it demonstrates learners’ ability to meaningfully use the target language to communicate with diverse, potentially multilingual audiences.

### 7.3.1 *The Two Most Prominent Types of Discourse*

The micro-textual analysis showed that the majority of blogs privileged *actorial autonomy*. This autonomous actorial organization was observed in the absence of deictics in most verbal constructions, which were used mainly to describe events in the present or to narrate events in the past that did not attempt at involving the reader. Table 13 presents a heatmap illustrating the most prevalent discourse types employed in students’ blogs, categorised by the number of entries coded under each discourse type. The table uses a colour scale to represent frequency patterns: cells with zero occurrences feature in red, indicating the absence of that discourse type, while higher frequencies gradually shift from yellow to orange to green. Green represents the highest number of entries for each discourse type. The heatmap shows that the two most prominent types of discourse in the corpus were *theoretical discourse* and *narration*. These can be seen in the right-hand side of the table, which has several green areas. Conversely, the two types of interactive discourse appear in red and yellow, indicating low frequency.

Table 13. Verb classification by type of discourse per blog

Blog	Interactive Discourse	Interactive Report	Theoretical Discourse	Narration	Impersonal Discourse
1	6	0	6	10	7
2	0	0	6	19	0
3	0	0	13	2	1
4	6	0	26	37	6
5	1	0	11	8	8
6	5	0	14	23	15
7	8	0	2	0	6
8	0	0	7	34	2
9	2	1	19	2	1
10	4	0	12	9	6
11	0	0	12	2	13
12	1	0	17	3	5
13	5	0	8	3	4
14	1	0	7	3	4
15	3	0	9	12	5
16	0	0	3	19	5
17	2	1	21	10	5
18	3	0	4	9	2
19	4	0	5	1	5
20	7	1	10	0	5
21	0	0	9	13	2

### 7.3.1.1 The Narrative Discourse

*Blog 4* had the most instances of *narrative discourse*, but also a high presence of *theoretical discourse*. Interactive and impersonal discourse were at least six times less frequent (Figure 52). This blog featured an alternative layout that intercalated text and images fairly evenly. The blogger primarily discussed their experiences traveling to different places, talking to different people, and recounting events that happened to them. They also described streets, cities, natural landscapes, and local food, such as *pintxos* and wine. Of the ten images inserted, seven were photos of places and two depicted plates of food. The remaining image inserted contained a slogan with graphics that seemed to evoke travel items such as a minivan, a plane with a banner, birds—probably seagulls, flowers or starfish, and some flip-flops. The only hypertextual element in the blog was a URL source placed below the slogan image (see Figure 53).

Blog 4	Interactive discourse 6	Interactive report 0	Theoretical discourse 26	Narration 37	Impersonal 6
1	viaja conmigo		mi nombre es	comenzó (mi viaje)	fue increíble (el clima)
2	podemos decir a dónde va esta historia todavía?		este dicho podría ser viejo	era increíble (la ciudad)	fui invitado por mi familia de acogida a visitar
3	si alguna vez tienes la oportunidad de ir		es mucho tiempo	estaba llena (la ciudad)	había un montón de monumentos para ver
4	tómalo		es una historia	era (no era el famoso acuario)	se sintió (pasear por X y presenciar Y se sintió como)
5	enciende las alarmas pour* entonces		es un espectáculo para ver	era (más bien era un lugar pequeño)	había muchos restaurantes dirigidos por chefs
6	no te arrepentirás		se quedan	significaba mucho para mí (el lugar)	se deja en manos del espectador
7			puede parecer simple (la foto)	estaba bien (la pareja)	
8			sigue siendo (la foto)	dijeron (ellos)	
9			tan simple como es (la foto)	hablaron de ir (ellos)	
10			cuenta una historia	me invitaron a acompañarte* (acompañar a ellos)	
11			evidente (la hospitalidad)	ha dejado	
12			los vibrantes bares pintxo que prueban* los vinos locales	era deliciosa (la comida)	
13			las calles empedradas susurran historias de siglos pasados	parecía contar (cada bocado parecía contar una historia)	
14			tiene un camino único (la ciudad)	me ha otorgado	
15			me atrae a regresar	me dejaron sin aliento	
16			lo sabría (yo)	se ha grabado	
17			soy nigeriano	empecé (así es como empecé)	
18			me aseguro de romper la monotonía y viajar	he estado viviendo	
19			me aseguro de romper la monotonía tanto como pueda	me encontré	
20			lo llamo	me adapté	
21			me encuentro lleno de	conocí	
22			me despido	acepté la oferta	
23			llevo fotografías y recuerdos	comenzamos el viaje	
24			me voy	tomé (fue donde tomé)	
25			hasta que nos volvamos a ver	me hizo empezar (lo que me hizo empezar)	
26			me voy con un corazón lleno de gratitud y la promesa de volver	terminé (así fue cómo terminé en Y)	
27				terminé (y cómo terminé aquí hoy)	
28				tomé esta foto	
29				caminaba (yo)	
30				pregunté (le pregunté a la pareja)	
31				empezamos a hablar y a conocernos	
32				éramos amigos	
33				hablamos	
34				dije	
35				nos dirigimos* para explorar	
36				visitamos tiendas de lujo	
37				pisé (desde el momento en que pisé)	

Figure 52. Verb classification for Blog 4

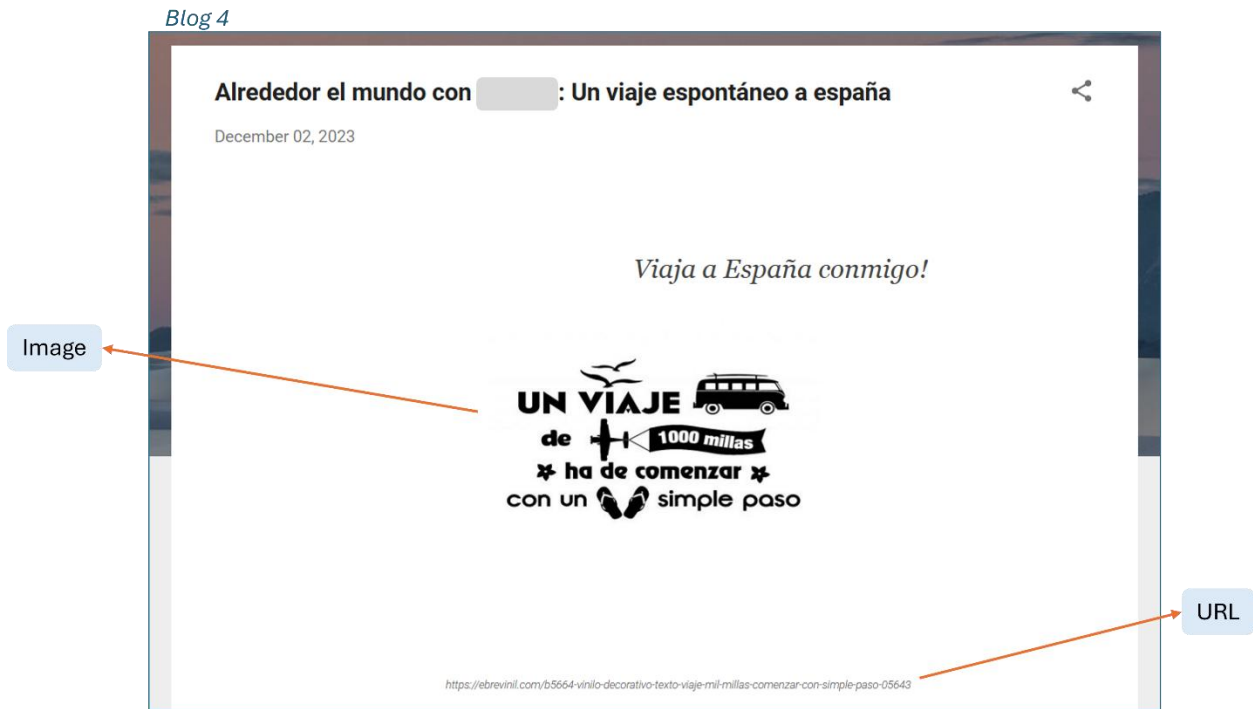


Figure 53. Thematic slogan in Blog 4

It is important to note that *Blog 4* had the highest number of verb constructions in the *narrative* category, followed by *Blog 8*. The author of *Blog 4* reported using word processors, online dictionaries, and *DeepL* to look up word meanings, structure their text, and check spelling and conjugation. In contrast, the author of *Blog 8* reported not using any digital tools for revision. Notably, there were two blogs in which no verb constructions were found for the *narration* category.

### 7.3.1.2 The Theoretical Discourse

*Blog 17* had the most verb constructions in this category (see Figure 54). Unlike most blogs in the corpus, the author of *Blog 17* did not describe personal experiences, but primarily provided descriptions of places, objects, and architectural styles. The author states that their blog is about buildings they want to visit one day (“*Este blog es sobre todo[s] los edificios que quiero conocer á [en] un momento de mi vida.*”) and that they is a student of engineering, hence, their interest in architecture. The organization of this blog is similar to that of *Blog 4*, with an alternation and a balance between text and multimedia. Furthermore, while this blog contained half as many images as *Blog 4*, the author included one *YouTube* video and five links, making it richer in terms of multimodal elements.

Blog 17	Interactive Discourse 2	Interactive Report 1	Theoretical Discourse 21	Narration 10	Impersonal Discourse 5
1	disculpa me*	empecamos* con el edificio	este blog es sobre	la arquitectura fue la inspiración para	situado
2	no podemos hablar de X sin hablar de Y		tiene una estructura* enorme	era muy popular	chapado en oro
3			este estructura es religioso*	tuvo un fuego* [incendio]	una ventana hecho* con vitral
4			tiene una estatua	rotó* [rompió] gran parte de	siguen construyendo la catedral hoy
5			este estatua es X	era un ingeniero	se terminó
6			el castillo que está en la película	fue el diseñador	
7			esta catedral demuestra	creó la torre para celebrar	
8			son (interesantes)	los arcos fue* la entrada	
9			la parte la* más interesante a* mi son	el país guardé* la torre	
10			tiene diseños intrincados	estaba (la torre)	
11			el plan es de* terminar		
12			esta torre magnífica tiene una altura de		
13			la torre continua* de* ser*		
14			siempre sueño en* X		
15			todo* los edificios que quiero conocer		
16			me encanta lo más*		
17			si me encuentro en esta isla, tomaré muchas fotos		
18			quiero ver la catedral		
19			soy un estudiante		
20			tengo mucha apreciación		
21			cuando yo viajo* a X, iré inmediatamente a		

Figure 54. Verb classification for Blog 17

### 7.3.1.3 A Combination of Discourses

Approximately half of the blogs in the corpus ( $n = 10$ ) favored *theoretical discourse*, while nine blogs favored the *narrative discourse*. Among these blogs, there were three that showed the greatest preference for *narrative over theoretical discourse* in the corpus: Blogs 2, 8 and 16. These blogs contained a very high number of verbs in the *narrative discourse* category, with 19, 34 and 19 constructions, respectively (Table 14). However, these same blogs scored very low in the *theoretical discourse* category. The table shows that *Blog 2* had approximately three times fewer instances of *theoretical discourse* than *narrative discourse*, whereas *Blog 8* had nearly five times more *narrative discourse* than *theoretical discourse*. The greatest discrepancy in this regard was observed in *Blog 16*, which had over six times more *narrative* constructions than *theoretical* ones. Interestingly, no use of deictics was found in any of these three blogs, so they scored zero in both interactive discourse categories.

Table 14. Ratios for narrative over theoretical discourse

Blog	Narration (N)	Theoretical discourse (ThD)	Ratio (N/ThD)
<b>Blog 2</b>	19	6	3.17
<b>Blog 8</b>	34	7	4.86
<b>Blog 16</b>	19	3	6.33

For blogs in which *theoretical discourse* was more prominent than *narration*, the ratio was much higher than for blogs in which *narration* was privileged. Blogs 3, 9, and 11 had ratios of thirteen to two, nineteen to two, and twelve to two, respectively. These ratios are presented in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Ratios for theoretical over narrative discourse

Blog	Narration (N)	Theoretical discourse (ThD)	Ratio (ThD/N)
Blog 3	2	13	6.50
Blog 9	2	19	9.50
Blog 11	2	12	6.00

The greatest discrepancy between the use of *theoretical discourse* over the *narrative* one was observed in *Blog 20*, which had ten verbs in the *theoretical discourse* category and none in the *narrative* one. Regarding the positionality of narrative verb constructions in blogs, those with few instances in of *narration* displayed the respective verb constructions in the first and second paragraphs. That is the case of *Blog 3* and *Blog 11* (Figure 55).



Figure 55. Location of narrative instances in Blog 3 and Blog 11

A balance between *narration* and *theoretical discourse* was observed in other blogs. In these cases, the presence of *interactive discourse* was more evident. Blogs 7, 20, and 13 are examples of blogs with moderate interactive discourse. Other authors did not engage the audience through *interactive discourse*; rather, they used other types of expressions to talk directly to readers, introducing them to the blog topic (Blogs 17, 18, and 20), inviting them not to miss future posts (Blogs 4 and 18), and thanking them for reading their blogs (Blog 16). Some excerpts of these blogs are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Blog excerpts showing expressions used by students to connect with the audience

Blog	Excerpt
<b>Blog 4</b>	<i>¡enciende las alarmas pour entonces!</i>
<b>Blog 16</b>	<i>Gracias por leer!</i>
<b>Blog 17</b>	<i>Este blog es sobre...</i>
<b>Blog 18</b>	<i>En este blog compartiré... ¡nos vemos en la próxima entrada del blog!</i>
<b>Blog 20</b>	<i>En este blog hablaré de las ventajas de viajar a Italia en tus próximas vacaciones. Pero en este blog voy a hablar de qué hacer en la ciudad de Roma</i>

As for other discourse combinations, *Blog 19* had the same amount of *theoretical* and *impersonal discourse*, though it had almost half as many verbs as average. The blogger briefly narrated their experience, described the place's features and activities, and engaged the reader with phrases such as "*If you want X, this is the best place, and I recommend [you] visit Y.*" They also used the inclusive *we* in the sentence "*It is a tourist place where **we** can find Z.*" As for multimodal elements, this blog did not include any pictures or hypertextual elements, but it was the blog with the most videos. The content organization consisted of two short paragraphs divided by subtitles at the top. The central part of the body contained three videos followed by a two-line paragraph and another video. It closed with another two-line paragraph. Figure 35 in [section 7.2.2.1](#) shows this blog.

Finally, only in two of the blogs (*Blog 7* and *Blog 11*) was it possible to observe that *interactive discourse* and *impersonal discourse* surpassed both the *narrative discourse* category and the *theoretical discourse* category.

#### 7.3.1.4 Language-Related Observations

Although linguistic accuracy was not the main goal of this dissertation, analyzing students' blogs provided a valuable opportunity to study linguistic patterns within the text. This analysis was motivated by the common assumption that longer texts contain more errors simply due to their length. To explore this issue in terms of error density rather than absolute frequency, I manually counted the number of errors in six selected blogs: three that scored above the corpus word count average and three that scored below. Then, I calculated the number of errors per 100 words for each blog to normalize the results. Based on these calculations, I established an average error rate per 100 words. This average served as a reference point to distinguish between relatively higher and lower error densities. Blogs with error rates above the average were categorized as having higher error density, and those below the average were considered to have lower error density.

However, in this study, no significant correlation was found between the number of words and the identified number of errors. In other words, it was not observed that the more students wrote, the greater the number of errors they made. Table 17 shows blogs ordered by number of words and presence of errors observed in three main categories: grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. The low or high presence of errors was determined through a qualitative review of each blog entry. During this process, I closely read every text individually and used a color-coding system to visually identify patterns (see Figure 56 below for an example). I highlighted verbal forms in green to support the analysis of discourse types and marked grammatical, spelling, and vocabulary errors in red. Blog entries with a high concentration of red highlights were classified as having a high number of errors, while those with fewer red markings were categorized as having a lower number of errors. This visual coding approach enabled consistent comparisons across blogs and facilitated identifying accuracy trends within the dataset.

*Table 17. Observed errors in relation to number of words*

<b>Blog</b>	<b>Total number of words in the blog</b>	<b>Relationship to corpus average (294.4 words)</b>	<b>Relative error density</b>
<b>Blog 4</b>	833	Above	Low
<b>Blog 6</b>	588	Above	Low
<b>Blog 9</b>	335	Above	High
<b>Blog 5</b>	285	Below	High
<b>Blog 15</b>	274	Below	Low
<b>Blog 16</b>	245	Below	High

For instance, blogs 9, 5, and 16 had a high number of errors primarily related to conjugation, spelling, and noun-genre/number agreement. However, two of these blogs had fewer than the average number of words. Conversely, blogs 4, 6, and 15 had the fewest errors, and two of these blogs had the most total words in the corpus.

Another interesting case was *Blog 8*, which was within the required range in terms of number of words ( $n = 295$ ). However, it contained the third highest number of verb constructions ( $n = 43$ ) and was also high in grammatical errors.

## Blog 8

Mi Viaje a Barbados

El **ano** pasado, **viaje** a Barbados y **fue** una **experiencia** que nunca **voy** olvidar. **Viaje** a Barbados con mis amigas, Alice y Bridgit y nuestras madres **estos fue** un viaje de solo **chias**.

**Quando** llegamos no **sabia que flicar**. El AirBnb que **alquilamos tenia** un balcón muy **largo** con una piscina privada. **De nuestra casa**, **podíamos ver** el **ocean** y **la agua era** transparente. **As** veces, **vimos** algunos peces, rayas y tortugas.

**Para llegar** a la playa **habia** un camino que **nos trague** directamente de **nuestras casa** a la playa.

La playa **era** increíble y **mismo** una cosa de mis sueños. **La agua** no **era** muy fría entonces **fuiamos** [a] **hadar para** mucho tiempo. También **habia paddle boards** entonces cuando **el mara estaba** calmo **podíamos andar** sobre ellos.

Cada noche, el **atardece era** tan linda. **As** veces **fuiamos** [a] nadar durante ese tiempo y no **puedo explicar en sentido**. **Mi encanta** la **playa** pero en la noche **es** tan lindo.

**As** veces el UV **era** 13 lo que **es** muy alto entonces no **podíamos ir** a la playa. Durante **eses tiempos escuchamos** mucha **musica** de Reggae como canciones de Bob Marley y nosotras **jugamos** juegos de cartas. Cuando **estábamos** con **muy** calor **nadamos** en la piscina.

**Fue** una experiencia que nunca **voy** a olvidar porque **fue** con mis mejores amigas y antes de esto **nunca tenia viajado** con amigas. También [me] **encanto** el país porque **hacer** viajes con solo **mulleres** a veces **da miedo** por causas de seguridad. En Barbados, siempre [nos] **sentimos** seguras. También, los ciudadanos de Barbados siempre **eran** tan educados y **hicimos** amigos con algunas personas que **trabajaron sobre el playa** local.

Ese video **es** nuestra vista desde nuestra casa. **Es** uno de mis videos preferidos del viaje.

Figure 56. Blog 8 with highlighted verb constructions and grammatical errors

In sum, this analysis revealed that students favored *theoretical discourse* and *narration* when writing their blogs. Some blogs stood out for their length and high level of narration (*Blog 4*), while others demonstrated high descriptive content (*Blog 17*). Next in preference was *impersonal discourse*, which was evident mainly through the use of the passive voice to provide historical facts, and the use of the invariable verb "hay" (*there is/are*) to denote existence. *Interactive*

*discourse* was present but to a much lesser extent than the previous three types, while *interactive report* was only found three blogs with one instance in each. *Blog 7* had the most *interactive discourse* in the corpus. This blog stood out for its high degree of interaction and multimodality, despite being one of the two blogs with the fewest words. Finally, a high presence of linguistic errors was found in several blogs, though no direct relationship was found between the number of words and errors made by students.

## 7.4 Students' Self-Reported Reflections on Blogging and Writing Tools

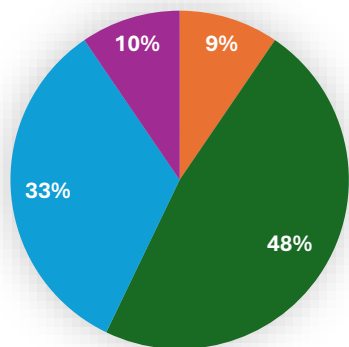
Students' responses offer insight into how they perceive the blogging task and how they use writing assistance tools. These results help contextualize learners' engagement with the blog genre and their familiarity with digital writing practices. The results also document the specific tools students used to complete the blog task, allowing for comparison with the tools they habitually use to revise other L2 texts. This information is particularly relevant to L2 teaching because it could inform decisions about integrating digital genres and writing tools while providing insight into students' interests and practices and the purposes that guide their use of such tools in technology-mediated writing contexts.

The responses to the questionnaires were grouped into four categories, two of which pertained to the pre-task and the other two to the post-task. The pre-task questions sought for information about students' prior knowledge of blogs (*PreB*) and their habitual use of writing assistance tools (*PreW*). The post-task questions measured students' experience with the blog task (*PosB*), and their use of writing assistance tools to complete the task (*PosW*).

### 7.4.1 Results of the Pre-Task Questionnaire

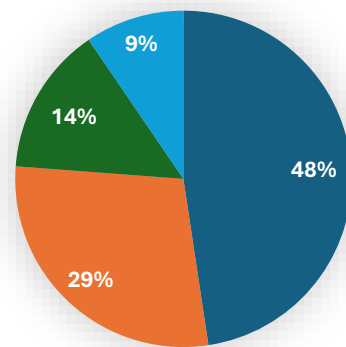
Regarding students' prior knowledge of blogs, the results for question *PreB1* (i.e., *I know some blogging platforms*) were mixed: 38.1% of students stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with knowing blogging platforms, while 33.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The remaining 28.6% were neutral. Regarding reported familiarity with blog features (*PreB2*), 61.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed with knowing the features of blogs, while 23.8% disagreed and 14.3% remained neutral. In addition, the majority of students (95.2%) reported that they rarely or never write blogs in their L1 (*PreB3*), while one student (4.8%) claimed that they sometimes do.

Concerning the pre-task questions about students' habitual use of writing assistance tools, almost half of the students (47.6%) reported that they sometimes use traditional tools (*PreW1*), while almost the other half (42.9%) affirmed that they rarely or never use them. Two students (9.5%) reported that they often use traditional tools to revise the texts they write in Spanish (Figure 57). Conversely, 76.2% of the students said they always or often use digital tools to revise their Spanish texts (*PreW2*). Three students (14.3%) said they sometimes use them and two (9.5%) said they rarely use them (Figure 58).



■ Always ■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Never

Figure 57. Students' declared use of traditional tools



■ Always ■ Often ■ Sometimes ■ Rarely ■ Never

Figure 58. Students' declared use of digital tools

When asked to select the digital tools they normally use (*PreW3*) (Figure 59), students selected *Google Translate* as the most common one with 20.3%, followed by *DeepL* with 18.8%. Word processors (e.g., *Microsoft Word* or *Google Docs*) and online dictionaries (e.g., *WordReference*, *SpanishDict*, *RAE*) each received 17.2% of the responses. *Reverso*, *ChatGPT*, and *Linguee* followed with 10.9%, 7.8% and 4.7% respectively. One student (1.6%) reported that they did not use any digital tools to revise their writing, while another student (1.6%) selected the *Other* option and explained: "Friends who are more advanced than me will peer review my work".

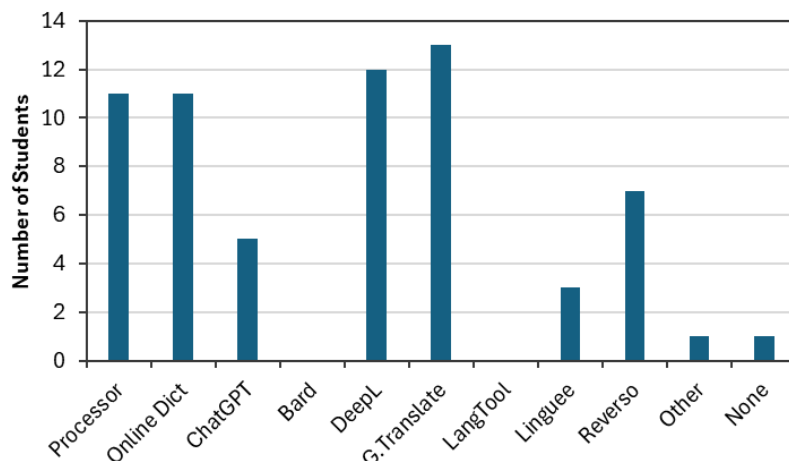


Figure 59. Digital tools that students normally use to revise their Spanish texts

### 7.4.2 Results of the Post-Task Questionnaire

The results of the post-task questionnaire showed that 85.7% agreed feeling prepared to complete the blogging task (*PosB1*). Regarding increased familiarity with the blog features (*PosB2*), 20 out of the 21 students who responded to the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (95.2%), while the remaining student chose the *Neutral* option. Mixed responses were reported regarding students' interest in writing blogs after this course (*PosB3*). Nine students (42.9%) agreed, seven were neutral (33.3%), three strongly agreed (14.3%), and two disagreed (9.5%).

The top five digital tools students reported using to write their travel blog (*PosW1*) were: *DeepL* (24%), word processors (20%), *Google Translate* (18%), *ChatGPT* (14%), and online dictionaries (12%). Three students (6%) said they used *Reverso*, two (4%) used *Linguee*, and one (2%) said they did not use any digital tool. Figure 60 compares students' habitual use of digital tools to the digital tools they used for their blog task.

When asked about the purpose for which they used these tools (*PosW2*), the most popular answers were to check the spelling (22.1%) and conjugation (18.6%) of words and to look up words (18.6%). The purpose of translating text (e.g., sentences, paragraphs, etc.) came in fourth with 14% of the responses, while 11.6% reported using digital tools to verify the meaning of Spanish words.

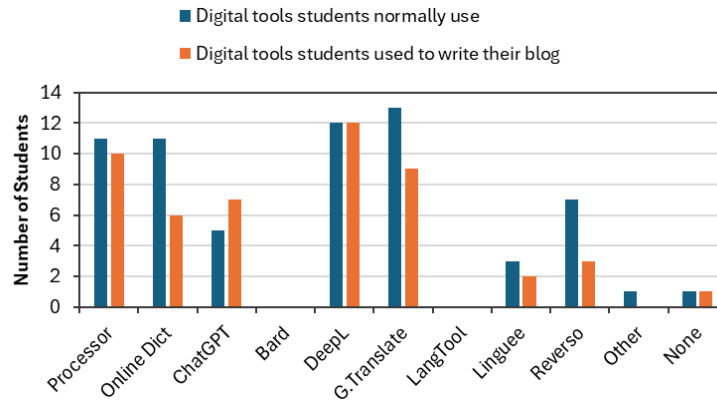


Figure 60. Digital tools students normally use compared to the ones they used for the blog writing

Other purposes such as revising text structure, obtaining ideas for content, and producing text were reported by 7%, 3.5%, and 3.5% of students, respectively (Figure 61). No tools were selected by the student who reported not using any tools (1.2%). Finally, regarding question *PosW3* on the usefulness of the tools, 76.2% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the digital tools helped them learn Spanish, while 19% were neutral.

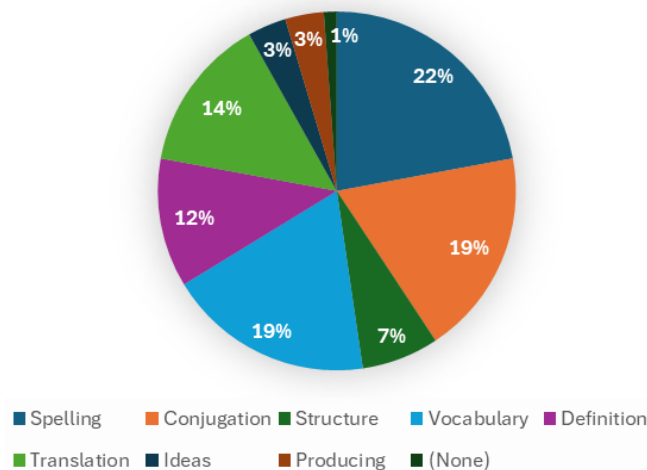


Figure 61. Purposes for which students used digital tools when writing their blog

Responses to the pre- and post-task questionnaires revealed that while almost half of the students (47.6%) reported sometimes using traditional tools to revise their Spanish texts, over three-quarters of the participants (76.2%) said they either always or often use digital tools for this purpose. The three most commonly used tools for text revision were *Google Translate*, *DeepL*, and word processors, in that order. For the blog writing task, however, students primarily used *DeepL*, followed by word processors. *Google Translate* dropped from first to third place in terms of usage

preference when writing the blog. *ChatGPT* appeared in fifth position for habitual use of intelligent assistance tools and moved up to fourth position for the blog writing task.

Finally, Figure 62 presents a contrast between the students' reported use of traditional tools and the use of digital tools to revise their Spanish texts.

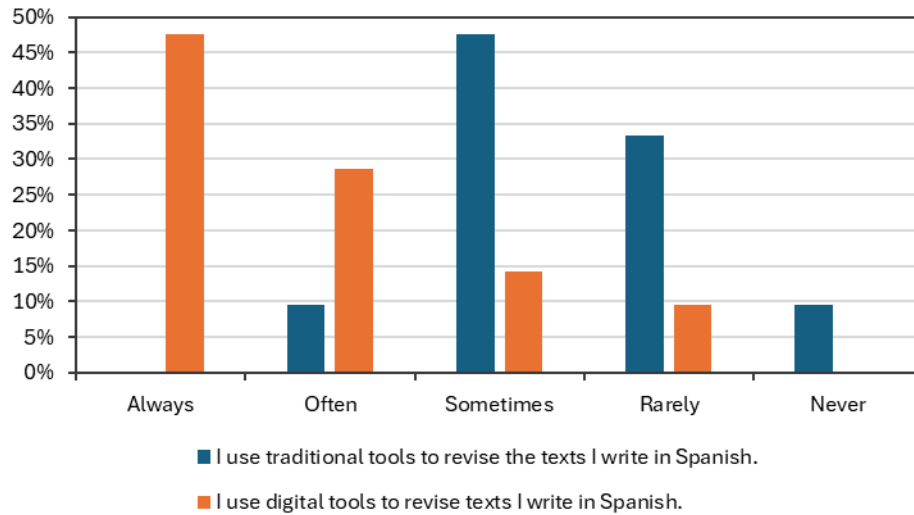


Figure 62. A comparison of students' reported use of traditional and digital tools

#### 7.4.2.1 Open-Ended Responses

The post-task included one final open-ended question (see Figure 63). Students could answer this question in the language of their preference.

Actividad 4 - Reflexión del blog

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Question 15

Please share something you learned with this task :) / Veuillez partager ce que vous avez appris dans le cadre de cette tâche :)

Previous Page Next Page Page 3 of 3

Submit Survey Save Responses

Figure 63. Post-task open-ended question

The inductive thematic coding described in the methodology resulted in three broad categories (language related, digital literacy related, and personal impact related). Within these three categories, sub-categories were created based on recurring words or expressions identified in students' comments. The broad categories with their sub-categories were as follows:

- *Language related*: new vocabulary, spelling and conjugation, and expressions and communication
- *Digital literacy related*: blogging, multimodality, and online communities
- *Personal impact*: task appreciation, topic interest, inter/intra-personal relevance

All 21 students answered the open-ended question. Each response could be associated with at least one of the categories presented below. For the purposes of this study, only the most representative examples are presented in Table 19.

Table 18. Codification of open-ended responses

Language	Digital literacy	Personal impact
<p><b>New vocabulary</b></p> <p>« J'ai appris (...), <b>des nouveaux mots</b> en liens avec le sujet de mon blog »</p> <p>"I would not have guessed that "We are thinking of driving" would <b>translate</b> that way"</p> <p>"aprendí que el idea que tiene en inglés <b>no va a sonido el mismo</b> [sonar igual] en español"</p> <p>"I learned knew [new] spanish <b>vocabulary</b> in the context of the content I wrote for the blog"</p> <p>« j'ai appris de <b>nouveaux mots</b> en espagnol »</p>	<p><b>Blogging</b></p> <p>« j'ai <b>découvert</b> blogger.com »</p> <p>"he aprendido cómo <b>funciona</b> la creación de un blog y los <b>sistemas tipo "sitios web"</b> que se usan para su creación."</p> <p>"no sabía que escribir un blog era muy <b>accesible</b> para todos"</p> <p>"I learned how to write my own blog through the <b>Blogger website.</b>"</p> <p>"I learned how to create a <b>website with my own url</b>"</p> <p>"I learned the <b>functioning</b> of a blog as well as the <b>key components</b> of a blog"</p> <p>"I was also reintroduced to the different <b>genres of blogs</b>, and some of them sparked my interest."</p>	<p><b>Task appreciation</b></p> <p>"It honestly <b>motivates me</b> to keep searching for blogs that i like, so that i could become a frequent reader"</p> <p>« j'ai découvert que <b>j'aime</b> créer des blogs »</p> <p>« <b>c'était une première pour moi</b> et j'ai trouvé ça super intéressant »</p> <p>"I learned how to create a blog, <b>I thought it was hard to do but this task proved me wrong.</b>"</p>

<u>Spelling and conjugation</u>	<u>Multimodality</u>	<u>Topic interest</u>
<p>“I was able to practice <b>conjugating verbs</b>”</p> <p>“I learned that my intuition for <b>how spanish words are spelled</b> have greatly improved over the semester.”</p>	<p>« j'ai appris quels étaient les <b>éléments</b> qui composent un blog (images, liens, biographie de l'auteur, texte, section commentaires,...) »</p> <p>“How to <b>embed</b> Instagram posts in a blog using html”</p> <p>“no sabía que se podían <b>agregar videos de YouTube</b> para mejorar la comprensión del tema”</p> <p>“I only wish it had <b>more options to add backgrounds or edit photos</b> in the blog to make it more visually appealing”</p> <p>« Grace à cette activité j'ai appris à <b>insérer des vidéos</b> et <b>photo</b> dans un document »</p> <p>“I learned how to structure my blog, e.g. <b>where and when to add images</b> under the text, <b>how to make it visually appealing</b> without too many images, etc.”</p>	<p>« j'ai réalisé qu'il pourrait être <b>intéressant</b> dans le futur de consulter des blogs avant de voyager »</p> <p>“Me gustó mucho porque pude hablar de <b>un tema que me interesaba demasiado</b>: la cultura del país de mi mamá.”</p>
<p><u>Expressions and communication</u></p> <p>“Because the vlog [blog] is not as formal I learned some <b>expressions</b> that I could integrate that are <b>not formal</b> enough for class but they will serve me well after”</p> <p>“[I learned] to <b>organize my ideas to be able to communicate</b> a certain attention to the story while my <b>audience</b> would be reading my content.”</p>	<p><u>Online communities</u></p> <p>“Aprendí que los blogs pueden ayudar a <b>describir</b> los <b>emociones</b> y podemos <b>comunicar con una comunidad</b> que también está interesado en el tema de tu blog”</p> <p>“I learned how to draw people in my imagination and <b>how to captivate them.</b>”</p>	<p><u>Inter/intrapersonal relevance</u></p> <p>“Cuando <b>no utilizo la tecnología</b> mucho, los métodos toman son lentos pero <b>aprendo más.</b>”</p> <p>“I explored more about different blogs and found other <b>blogs that I can now read especially in Spanish.</b>”</p>

Taken together, the results of the pre- and post-task questionnaires highlight the challenges and opportunities of integrating blog writing into second language (L2) learning. Before the task, the students reported having little familiarity with blogs and using traditional tools only moderately to

revise their Spanish texts. Yet, they expressed openness to using digital tools and relied heavily on *Google Translate* and other writing tools.

After completing the task, students also reported that they felt prepared to write a blog and had a better understanding of its characteristics. Post-task responses also revealed shifts in students' preferences for digital tools, showing a prevalent use of writing assistance for grammar-based revisions. Finally, the open-ended responses concentrated on linguistic, digital, and personal gains. These findings provide valuable insight into learners' genre-based perceptions and digital practices and set the stage for a deeper discussion of their implications in the next chapter.

## Chapter 8: Discussion

### 8.1 Overview

This chapter discusses key findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of L2 Spanish blogs. This mixed-methods analysis was two-fold: i) a genre-based analysis of the micro- and macro-textual organization of students' blogs, and ii) an analysis on students' self-reported reflections on blogging and the use of writing assistance tools. The results aimed to answer the three [research questions](#) of my study.

Overall, the results of the macro-textual analysis (RQ 1) revealed that students created what I can describe as dynamic and engaging multimodal texts. This was evident in how they structured their blogs, customized titles, inserted multimodal elements, and designed hybrid layouts. The micro-textual analysis of discourse types (RQ 2) indicated that *theoretical* and *narrative* discourse were the most prevalent in students' blogs. These types of discourse were primarily used to describe experiences and observations, as well as to recount events. The pre-task and post-task questionnaires complemented the genre-based analysis by capturing students' reflections (RQ3). In the pre-task, students reported a clearer understanding of blog characteristics and indicated greater use of digital tools compared to traditional ones. Post-task responses revealed a preference for grammar-focused revisions using digital tools, while reflections on the blogging task highlighted linguistic, digital, and personal gains.

### 8.2 The Genre-Based Analysis

Within the *Genres Textuels et Organisation de la connaissance* (GeTOC) project, Gonçalves (2014) developed « un instrument qui rende compte de [la] configuration mutable et changeante » (p. 78) of digital genres. This resulted in a genre-based parameter that served as a reference point for analyzing the micro- and macro-textual characteristics of a corpus of the L2 Spanish students' blogs. The macro-textual analysis provided information about the layout of the blogs, particularly with respect to the personalization of titles, the multimodal elements inserted by the students (or their absence), and the organization of the blog contents.

On the other hand, the micro-textual analysis focused on the most prominent types of discourse used by students and the perceived relationship the blog author established with the reader(s). These two components constitute the genre-based analysis of the corpus.

### 8.2.1 The Macro-Textual Organization of Learners' Blogs

Oskoz and Elola (2020) point out that incorporating digital writing tools into L2 instruction is inherently complex, in part because such tools evolve rapidly over time. Given that the present study was conducted in late 2023, it is important to acknowledge that some features and functionalities of the two blogging platforms used by the students may have evolved since the blogs were created. Consequently, the affordances observed in this study should be interpreted in relation to the technological context in which the task was implemented because the dynamic nature of these digital platforms may influence how students structure their work (Bedou & Hamel, 2021).

Figures 23 and 24 illustrate this view as *Blog 6* and *Blog 15* highlight the default formatting options and compositional affordances available *Wix*. *Blog 6* (Figure 23) featured a destination-themed background and an image tab on the left side that provided access to the blog entries, while *Blog 15* (Figure 24) listed the blog entries at the top and displayed the author's profile at the bottom of the page. Interestingly, although some students adhered to their chosen platform's default titles and themes, more advanced editing practices were evident in the *Blogger* blogs compared to the *Wix* blogs. Specifically, *Blogger* authors demonstrated greater personalization and varied textual organization, especially in formatting textual elements and distributing content across the page.

In terms of content presentation, *Blog 6* used a different color for each entry's title and followed distribution *Model B*, *Blog 15* inserted line breaks and followed distribution *Model A*. This shows that both blogs prioritized vertical, intercalated content distribution as *Blog 15* alternated text and images, while *Blog 6* kept text above images. As for word count, it did not seem that students selected a targeted number of words—a *Wix* AI feature further discussed in [section 9.2.3.1](#), because *Blog 6* almost tripled the minimum with 588 words, while *Blog 15* remained within the range with 274. Interestingly, none of the authors inserted hypertextual elements, such as links or hyperlinks, in their posts. This coincides with the characteristics of the blog entry that I received automatically from the *Wix* generator. However, *Blog 15* had the most photos in the corpus, which may suggest that the number of images was a personal decision rather than a pre-selected platform feature.

In terms of discourse type, *Blog 6* was highly narrative in the first person, while *Blog 15* maintained a slightly more uniform distribution. Since no follow-up interviews were conducted with the students, it was not possible to determine whether they used AI. However, the variety in the

distribution of elements and word count in one case and images count in the other could suggest that even if the authors of Blogs 6 and 15 used AI generation, they personalized their content to some extent, though not to the same degree as those who used *Blogger*.

In any case, the dynamicity of blogging platforms was primarily observed in *Wix* interface's ability to offer tailored customizations specifically for blog writing ([section 9.2.3.1](#)), which speaks to the tool's enhanced capabilities for genre-based composition. These features support the idea that AI-powered tools can write "coherently in a variety of genres" (Godwin-Jones, 2024, p. 6), and that the use of these and other AI tools like *ChatGPT* for specific genres is gaining momentum, as evidenced by studies exploring the use of these tools for argumentative writing (Su et al., 2023) and for email writing (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024). This is particularly important in the context of this dissertation because, as Godwin-Jones (2024) posits, AI affordances have changed the relationship learner-tool-environment, which in turn promotes "dynamically shifted ecosystems for language education" (p. 8). Since it is likely that non-human interactions will continue to significantly impact the way students use tools and resources in their daily lives and learning contexts, it is essential to teach them "the potential of digital tools and how to make use of them most effectively" (Oskoz & Elola, 2020, p. 21).

#### *8.1.1.1 Personalization of Titles*

The findings suggest that students took advantage of the intrinsic affordances of the platforms they used through to personalize the titles. Three main elements were observed in the analysis of titles: the position (e.g., top, bottom, left, center, right), the formatting (e.g., color, font, size), and the topics of titles. With regards to positioning, five titles were centered, while the remaining selected or maintained the left-hand side position. Whether knowingly or not, students favored the top left position, which is considered a "privileged location" because « l'œil du lecteur se fixe en premier lieu à cet endroit » (M. Gonçalves, 2014, p. 83). Interestingly, in *Blog 18* there was an absence of personalization not only in the title, but also throughout the body of the blog. Perhaps the student simply decided not to format the text or did not know how. In either case, they did not mention any difficulties with editing in their post-task questionnaire. However, the title of *Blog 18* was written with exclamation points, which may indicate some level of involvement on the part of the student, though not enough to add color or other formatting features. This lack of formatting contrasts with the rest of the corpus.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) assert that “colour has always been used as a semiotic resource” (p. 227). Most of the students’ blogs featured a variety of formatting options in their titles, including color, font, and size, which suggests that the students tried to make their titles visually appealing and differentiate them from the rest of their blog text. Furthermore, 16 of the 21 blogs showed evidence of capitalization, highlighting, and emoticon insertion, as illustrated in Table 10. Although students did not receive instruction on how to use the blogging platform’s formatting functions, it is likely that they noticed visual similarities in the iconography and location of the formatting options on *Blogger* and in common word processors, such as *Microsoft Word* and *Google Docs*. The buttons for changing the font type, the size, the style and the color are displayed from left to right in the three tools (Figure 64). Since nearly two-thirds of the students reported in the pre-task questionnaire that they disagreed or were neutral about knowing blogging platforms, it is interesting that most of them were able to format their blogs. This suggests that students may have applied prior knowledge and experience with other tools they commonly use for school work to format their blogs, indicating skill transferability (Ollivier & e-lang Project Team, 2018).

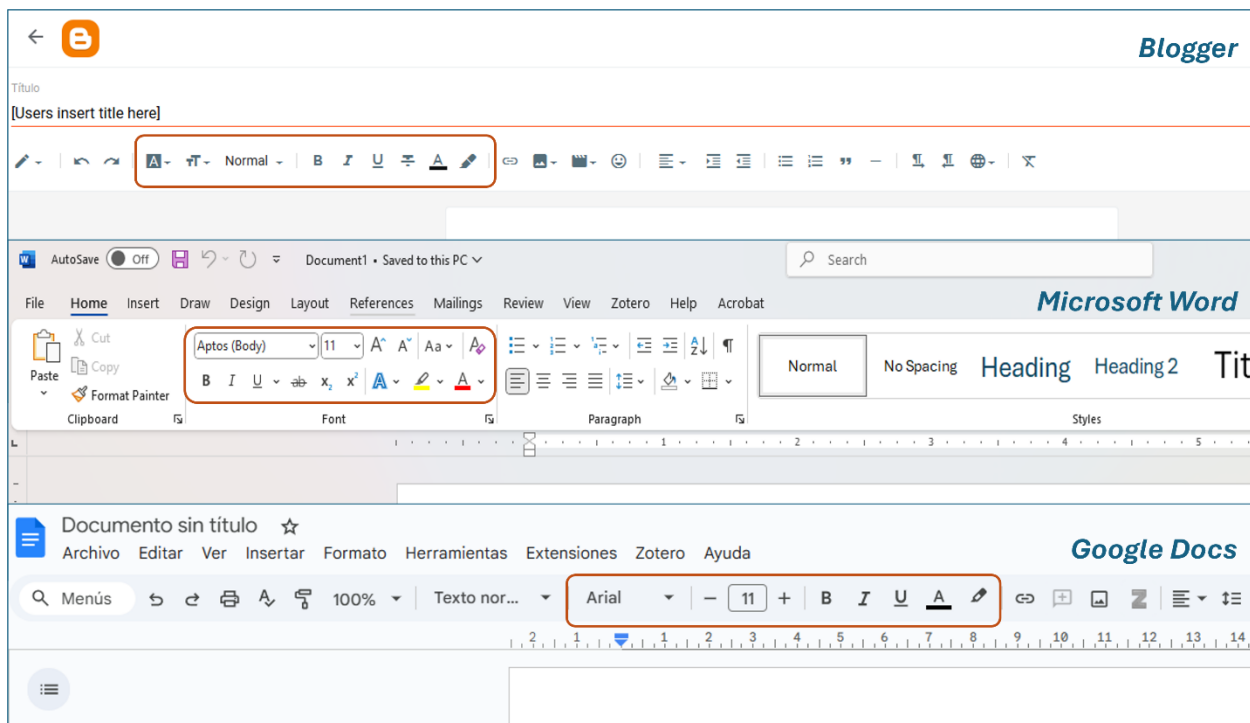


Figure 64. Formatting functions across tools

Skill transferability is an important component of digital literacy because as Ollivier (2018) points out, students may be comfortable using technology, but they are not necessarily equipped to “transfer these skills to different contexts such as their professional or educational environments”

(p. 12). Hence, providing learners with opportunities to expand their experience using other realistic resources can contribute to the learning experience as a whole because they facilitate the “transfer of skills or knowledge from a familiar domain to an unfamiliar one” (Sykes, 2022, p. 303).

The students’ decision to integrate diverse forms of formatting in their titles contrasts with Pellet’s (2012) findings from a study with wikis. Although wikis and blogs are different digital tools, both allow users to integrate various semiotic resources (Oskoz & Elola, 2020), and while these social tools’ capabilities change rapidly (Elola & Oskoz, 2017), what is interesting is that in Pellet’s study, students “refrained from visual enhancement (boldface, underline) and although reminded of its value, [they] rarely used it efficiently” (p. 236). In this study’s blog task, however, students intentionally attempted to communicate beyond the literal meaning of the words and to make their titles more attractive to readers by using diverse platform functions. These decisions may denote an awareness of the characteristics of digital communication, since online content visibility and readability « dépend[ent] notamment du contraste entre le fond et le texte, de la typographie, de la taille des caractères, de la justification des lignes, etc. » (Canivet, 2017, p. 40).

Finally, it was possible to identify specific topics in students’ titles. Bedou and Hamel (2021) found that students included four types of titles in their digital language biographies, one of which was the titles linked to a geographical place relevant in the students’ biography. The title content in almost every blog in my corpus directed the attention to the travel destination and/or to the author’s travel experience. This coincides with a genre-based characteristic of travel blogs (Pascual, 2018) as authors present and contextualize the place they are going to talk about from the very beginning of the blog. According to Pascual (2018), the usual cues to do so are the use of the first person, which was observed in most blogs in my corpus through the use of the first-person possessive adjective *mi* (*my*), the personal pronoun *conmigo* (*with me*), and through the presence of the author’s name in the title of the blog. In addition, some students used the imperative form and rhetorical questions to talk directly to the reader, which may be an indicator of the author’s intention to connect with their audience “to engage them from the starting point and to persuade them to keep on reading the post in depth” (Pascual, 2018, p. 271).

#### *8.1.1.2 Multimodal Elements*

This part of the macro-textual analysis discusses how students combined diverse semiotic resources or modes to convey meaning in their blogs. This multimodal approach to writing is “changing what it means to be a literate individual in today’s society” (Oskoz & Elola, 2020, p. 51),

as it is no longer enough for L2 students to learn how to read and write in the target language. That is, “just as second language (L2) writers or speakers work within a language or between languages by selecting from a widening range of lexical and syntactical options, so too the multimodal composer reviews and orchestrates language, images, music, sound effects, hyperlinks, and other resources for expression” (Cimasko & Shin, 2017, p. 388). Hence, this analysis sought to explore students’ multimodal composing, which Yi et al. (2020) describe as the use of “multiple semiotic resources, including both language and other modes (e.g., image, sound, video) into texts for representation and communication” (p. 2). The multimodal elements identified in the analysis were images, photographs, and videos. Hypertextual elements included URLs, links, and hyperlinks. Identifying these multimodal resources and their role in L2 students’ blogs can contribute to shedding light on the extent to which students can create genre-based products using blogs as digital tools ([Research question 2](#)).

#### 8.1.1.1.1 Multimedia Components

The results of the analysis indicate that students mostly inserted images. They also inserted videos, but to a lesser extent. All of the blogs in the corpus contained at least two images, except for *Blog 19*, which included none. Students’ emphasis on visual representation suggests they recognize that “image overshadows word in a variety of texts, on screen and off screen: there are more images on screen and images are increasingly given a designed prominence over written elements” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 317). Most photos and images in the blogs illustrated or referenced what the author was talking about, aligning with the purpose of images as a means “to reinforce the meaning of what is said, what is written, and so on” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 316), or to provide context (Bedou & Hamel, 2021). For example, the author of *Blog 8* captioned the picture of a house “*This is the house where we stayed,*” while the author of *Blog 13* captioned a picture of themselves with their hair blown by the wind, “Evidence,” while discussing strong winds at the location they visited. This combination of caption, image, and description suggests that students may have identified different purposes for verbal and nonverbal elements. Kress asserts that writing and image have “distinct potentials for meaning” as “each mode does a specific thing: image *shows* what takes too long to *read*, and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). It is worth noting that my blog, the teacher’s sample, also included captions indicating the image source or providing a brief description of the image. This may have influenced the students’ decision to caption their images.

Similar to findings in Bedou and Hamel (2021), students inserted two types of photos: personal photos and images obtained from the web. The images from the web mainly depicted places the blog author visited and most of them were captioned with the image source in the form of a link or a URL. This type of linking is important because, on the one hand, it gives readers the opportunity to track the origin of the image and explore its original meaning as these pictures can mean something different on someone else's website (Davies, 2011); and, on the other hand, it denotes a "fair use of external sources by acknowledging and crediting ideas, images," and other resources the student used in their projects (Elola & Oskoz, 2022, p. 588). The resemiotization and recontextualization of resources speak of the L2 writer's agency because they engage in "identifying and (re)mixing semiotic resources into multimodal texts entails processes of making authorial decisions in which writers negotiate meaning-making opportunities with operating discourses in the contexts of situation and culture of text production" (Cimasko & Shin, 2017, p. 388). As for personal photos, it was found that approximately two-thirds of the photos in students' blogs were personal photos. While over half of these photos also depicted the places visited, they also represented food, animals, and the authors' self-portraits. The inclusion of these types of personal photos bring the reader closer to the author of the posted content and to « recevoir avec plus de justesse le message de l'auteur » (Bedou & Hamel, 2021). The use of personal or web images to visually enhance their blog plays a role in multimodal composing because students use different modes "not only to support written words, but also to create meaning" (Elola & Oskoz, 2023, p. ii), which allows them to share their experiences with the audience through perspectives.

The authors' visits to various places were also represented through videos. There were three external videos and nine personal videos. External videos from social networks were accompanied by a reference or the source of the content, demonstrating "digital writing ownership" as the students recognized and credited "the reuse and remixing [sic] of semiotic resources" (Elola & Oskoz, 2022, p. 588) they found on the web. This "recontextualization" of authentic resources, in which students adapted and described the content to fit their own communicative intentions, contributes to raising "learners' awareness of contextual factors, which determine pragmatic contrasts" between authentic discourse and the author's voice (Sawin, 2022, p. 222).

The students' decision to insert *YouTube* videos and *Instagram* posts may be explained by the findings of Cimasko and Shin's (2017) case study, in which the participant's multimodal choices were influenced by her own experiences of social networking. Cimasko and Shin affirm that "the

audiences for such videos tend to be younger and that [the participant's] rhetorical decisions for the video needed to be aimed at them" (p. 408). For example, the author of *Blog 17* wrote about Paris and mentioned the Notre Dame fire in one section of their blog. They wrote "*Here is the disaster on the news,*" and immediately after, they inserted a *YouTube* video of a French news broadcast. The author of *Blog 10* also included content in Spanish and French on their blog. There may be several reasons why the authors decided to do so. Perhaps their target audience understands content in both languages, or they thought it best to include content in the original language of the destination, as in the case of *Blog 17*. It is also possible that the authors felt comfortable with these languages. In any case, the students' choices suggest that they are comfortable accessing and reusing content in more than one language. This perceived multilingualism "is a strength that can and should be recognized and fortified through increased modal diversity in communicative practice" (Nelson, 2006, p. 72). This means that their multilingual and multimodal choices « vient enrichir l'expérience d'exploration et d'expression de soi » (Bedou & Hamel, 2021, p. 5), not only because students make decisions in selecting and inserting content that fits their writing needs, but also because in doing so they are adapting their discourse to specific types of audiences. Additionally, it is worth noting that the teacher's blog included an embedded *YouTube* video, which may have influenced students' decision to use these types of videos. They may believe that these videos are actually part of blogs or wanted to meet the teacher's expectations.

The nine personal videos found in the corpus were recorded by the students themselves during their trips. According to Pellerin (2018), « les nouvelles possibilités de création de vidéos et d'artefacts numériques d'animation permettent aux élèves de développer des valeurs esthétiques et un sens de l'auditoire » (p. 103). In this sense, the fact that the students shared the videos they created on their blogs, depicting the places they visited and the things they saw, suggests that "multimodal communication offers a potential leveling effect, an alternative route whereby new understandings can be reached that are ultimately supportive of authorial expression in the L2" (Nelson, 2006, p. 71). Davies (2011) noted in her analysis of a blog that, since the videos posted by the author are placed below the written text, "the reader assumes the film clip is intended to be watched first" (p. 236). In this study, three out of four students first described the contents of their personal videos with text and then inserted the video clip. This could have been a way to guide readers toward what was coming next, so they knew what to expect in the video.

In Oskoz and Elola's (2016) study, "learners carefully selected and modified the images that would best reflect the meaning they were trying to convey" (p. 333) in their digital stories. Similarly, the student author of *Blog 1* in this corpus included three personal videos containing excerpts from various moments of their trip. The videos were edited with music and transitions, demonstrating a certain level of commitment to the task, awareness of an audience, and technical ability. In multimodal compositions, these forms of authorship "[involve] the agency of both the sign maker and the expectations of the receiver of the sign" (Cimasko & Shin, 2017, p. 389). In this case, the authors of the blogs are concerned not only with producing multimodal products using personal or public resources but also with how these products will be received by the audience. When selecting and transforming these resources, it is important to encourage an analytical and critical approach to technology use and affordances, as this could help students develop « un sens de la responsabilité et de l'autonomie au regard du développement de leurs compétences en littératie » (Pellerin, 2018, p. 103). This, in turn, would equip them to safely and critically access and (re)use information, strengthening their sense of responsibility and autonomy and helping them become better digital citizens (DuBravac, 2013; Ribble, 2021).

Unlike in Pellerin's (2018) study, in which students used voice recordings, none of the students in my study explored the audio or voice recording features on their blogs. The integration of audio and video have given rise to alternative forms like audioblogging and vlogging, which "include the primary objective of blogging through multimedia (i.e., audiofiles, pictures, and videos) as an addition to, or re-placement of, textual postings" (Sykes et al., 2008, p. 533). However, the absence of audio files could suggest that students may have been unfamiliar with the process of inserting these types of files, deemed them irrelevant for their blogs, or were unaware of these alternative forms of blogging.

#### 8.1.1.1.2 Hypertextual Components

One-third of the corpus did not include the hypertextual elements analyzed (i.e., URLs, links, or hyperlinks). These findings are similar to those discussed by Calzati (2016) as he also found a "very low degree of hypertextuality" (p. 6) in authentic travel blogs he studied. Interestingly, in the present study, a pattern emerged among blogs with a high number of multimodal elements, mainly images and videos, but no hypertextual components, like (hyper)links or URLs. Six of the seven blogs that did not display hypertextual elements, ranked in the top 10 with the greatest number of personal photos and videos inserted:

- *Blog 15* contained seventeen personal photos, the most in the corpus,
- *Blog 8* contained nine personal photos (the second highest), and one video,
- *Blog 5* and *Blog 6* contained five photos each, ranking fifth and sixth, respectively, and
- *Blog 19* had no images or photos, but it had the highest number of videos in the corpus ( $n=4$ )

While the “advent and popularization of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s opened up new avenues for hypertextual creativity, ranging from avant-garde experimentalism to more mainstream forms of interactive multimodal narrative” (Ensslin, 2020, p. 4), the abovementioned contrast between hypertextual and multimodal components suggests that some students may prefer visual or embedded resources to navigational ones. This could relate to their digital communication habits or how they perceive audience participation in blog writing. It is also possible that students find it easier or more comfortable to add multimedia than to insert hypertextual elements.

Regarding the presence and uses of hypertextual elements in the corpus, it is worth noting that the teacher’s blog contained links and hyperlinks, but not URLs. This is interesting because URLs were the second most common type of element in students’ blogs. However, according to Myers (2010), URLs are “seldom used in posts by experienced bloggers, because the expectation is that the reader will get to the page by clicking the link, not by typing the address into his or her browser” (p. 34). *Blog 20* had the most URLs and was one of two blogs that included all three types of elements. The URLs were mainly concentrated in the reference section, while the other two referenced the sources of some images. In this blog, the student spoke directly to the reader by asking questions and referring to the purpose of the blog, which is to provide advice for visiting the selected travel destination. The interactivity observed in this blog makes one wonder if the use of URLs indicates a lack of experience with blog-specific characteristics, as Myers (2010) suggests, or if the students thought that inserting the address would suffice to make it accessible like other inserted media.

As shown in the Results chapter, links and URLs were primarily found in image footers or as references. Over half of these elements seemed to provide more information, while the rest referenced the source of the inserted multimedia. This is important because “links allow the reader to retrieve sources while remaining within the same realm” (Calzati, 2016, p. 8). Thus, using links demonstrates students’ awareness of the importance of content interconnectivity. Myers’s (2010) analysis revealed that blogs primarily linked to other blogs, followed by web pages that are not blogs or media, and then mainstream media. My analysis partially coincides with this classification, as the fewest blogs linked to mainstream media; however, the majority linked to

other non-blog websites. Myers also found that *Wikipedia* was the most commonly linked website, which coincides with the findings of this study. In contrast, only two students in my corpus linked their content to blogs, the category with the most links in Myers's analysis. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that approximately half of the students either disagreed with or remained neutral about their familiarity with blogs. Additionally, the students wrote their blogs as part of an L2 task, which may have caused them to focus on well-known websites rather than other blogs. Six blogs had a separate reference section, which is uncommon in blogs but a clear feature of the teacher's blog.

Hyperlinks were the least common type of hypertextual element found in the corpus. This low presence may be due to the fact that creating a hyperlink requires more than just copying and pasting an address; it also requires users to highlight or select a specific item in their text and embed it into the selected content. *Blog 10* had the most hyperlinks, with four. The author of this blog alternated between embedding hyperlinks in the sentences and also in the word "*aquí*" (*here*). Both choices have interesting implications: on the one hand, by "embedding the hyperlink within the ordinary syntax of the sentence, the blogger manages to almost inhabit the voice of the other text within his own." (Davies, 2011, p. 235). On the other hand, using the deictic *aquí* "emphasizes the out-of-blog location of the video" (p. 235), demonstrating the author's ability to combine different uses of the same hypertextual element.

Interestingly, although most of the linked content was in English, five students also included content in Spanish and French. The author of *Blog 20* linked most of their content to Spanish sources, which is notable since their blog is not about a Spanish-speaking destination. This choice suggests that the student was invested in finding content in the target language, even though it was not related to their chosen travel destination. Furthermore, the author of *Blog 10* was the only one who included content in English, Spanish and French, which can be explained by their discussion of Latin American heritage in the blog. This alternation of languages and hyperlink referencing demonstrates the students' knowledge of the topic and their ability to navigate multilingual semiotics resources (Davies, 2011). This is relevant in the context of my dissertation because as Davies (2011) notes, "how bloggers exploit hyperlinks allows not only for textual cohesion and intertextuality, but also social networking" (p. 235). Nowadays, the social dimension of digital communication is crucial, as the *Web 2.0* "allows digital writers to make their works freely

available to reach far broader, more popular audiences than the consistently narrow, scholarly audiences” for which L2 students usually write in classroom tasks (Ensslin, 2020, p. 4).

### *8.1.1.3 The Organization of Content*

The last component of the macro-textual analysis focused on the student’s organization of their blogs. It is important to note first that, unlike Strobl’s (2014) study with online forums, in which students were instructed on how to build a “text skeleton,” the students in this study did not receive any specific guidelines on how to distribute content in their blogs. Thus, the students had autonomy over how to organize their text and other elements inserted. The results of the study showed that 71.4% of the blogs could be associated with one of the four models described in [section 6.6.1.1.3](#). Interestingly, the distribution in the remaining blogs followed a similar pattern, which gave rise to a *Model E* (see Figure 46 in [section 7.2.3](#)). These results contrast with those of Bedou and Hamel (2021), who found that the students’ products were similar in their organization. To the best of my knowledge, few studies have examined the textual organization of blogs. Therefore, this section discusses relevant implications of this exploratory analysis.

*Model A* was the most common type of content layout, with 10 blogs. This distribution style featured an interplay of titles, subtitles, text, and multimedia. Titles and subtitles were usually aligned to the left, while images and videos were centered in most of the blogs ( $n = 7$ ). In some cases, two or three centered images were interspersed with text and subtitles. The latter elements helped the students transition between different topics in their blogs. These findings resemble those of Bedou and Hamel (2021). Additionally, a (sub)title-based distribution was also the most common transition element in my pilot study, which may be due to the fact that students received a list of required elements that may have facilitated the structuring of content by theme or subtheme.

The second most common model was *Model E*, with six blogs. Interestingly, this model combined elements of Models A and D, and in some sections, an alternating distribution was evident. In others, a zigzag pattern emerged, with text on one side and an image on the other, or vice versa. Students combined different ways of organizing content, indicating that they spent time and effort structuring their blogs dynamically and attractively. This approach supports the idea that “web-based hypermedia came to be a sandbox for digital writers to experiment with different forms of interactivity, mono- and multilinearity, multimodal arrangements as well as, in the era of touchscreen technologies, new gestural manipulations” (Ensslin, 2020, p. 5).

On the other hand, two blogs were assigned to Models B and D. The two blogs in *Model B* prioritized displaying text and captions at the top and images at the bottom. For example, *Blog 6*, followed this pattern in all five of its posts: date at the top, then text, then image below. As mentioned above, this systematic pattern may be due to the pro-format established by the *Wix* platform. The author of *Blog 7* included two images interspersed with text and captions at the top and five images at the bottom. The two blogs in *Model D* featured a zigzag distribution of content. *Blog 13* (Figure 50), for instance, features a structured combination of text on one side and images on the other, with subtitles that organize the sections. This combination of textual and audiovisual representations “are examples of literacy practices less known or practiced in more traditional language classrooms” (Elola & Oskoz, 2023, p. iii).

Finally, *Blog 19* was the only blog classified as *Model C* (see Figure 49). Three of its four videos were concentrated in the central part of the blog. The top was reserved for two subtitled sections of text, and the bottom contained the remaining subtitled video and text. While most students explored different ways to present information, this student did not significantly vary the structure of their blog. Despite having the most videos and being one of the few blogs with emojis, the author did not include pictures or hypertextual elements that would allow interconnectivity with the web. This is important because of the interaction of semiotic components in multimodal composing “contribute to meanings that a multimodal text construes as a whole” (Yi et al., 2020, p. 2), and the use of diverse elements, such as photos and titles, enriches the digital narrative produced by L2 learners (Bedou & Hamel, 2021).

Lastly, as Gonçalves (2014) noted, along with the features of digital genres, it is important also to take into account the importance of « l'utilisabilité et l'interaction physique ou corporelle (entre l'utilisateur et le dispositif de communication). » In this respect, it is worth mentioning that some students decided the visualization format of their blogs as the *Blogger* platform allowed them to adapt and publish their content to fit into three different device displays: phone, tablet, or computer. This dynamicity was observed in *Blog 10*, for example (Figure 65). The student inserted a mosaic of images related to the blog's theme as the background, and they also included a title in a color matching the country's flag. The blog's content is more visually appealing if visualized on the phone because images, text, and video seem to appear more harmoniously than on the computer. On a computer, images appear disproportionate when scrolling down, the background mosaic is not integrated behind the text, and the gray navigation banner on the right reduces the visual space.

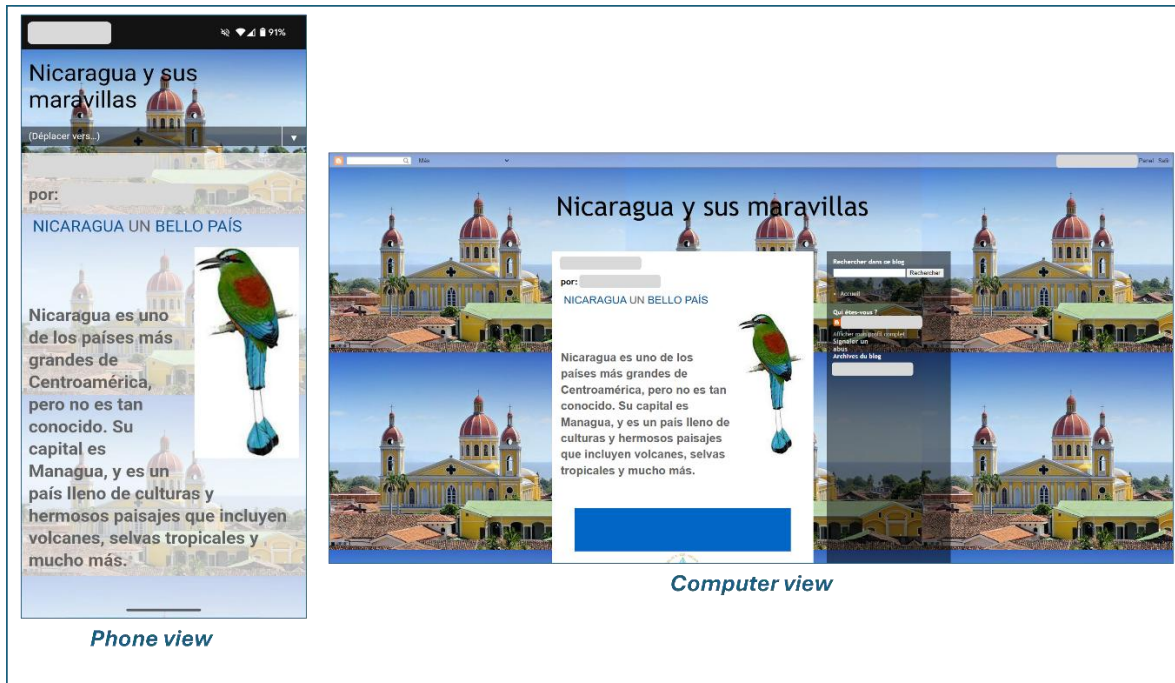


Figure 65. A comparison of the blog's content as viewed on a phone and a computer

Overall, this macro-textual analysis suggests that students attempted to engage their audience by incorporating textual and multimodal features into their blogs and by organizing them in an interactive, user-friendly manner. Some studies have found that students tend to adhere to the instructions or predetermined templates of the platforms they use (Bedou & Hamel, 2021; Pellet, 2012; Strobl, 2014); however, most participants in my study did not conform to these templates but rather created their own content organization. While there are some tools that provide more structured layouts—usually linked to the discursive genre (Biber et al., 2015), those offering greater flexibility seem to allow students to make their own decisions about how to organize and combine the various multimodal elements of their creations. This is important because “different modes offer specific resources for meaning making, and the ways in which modes contribute to people’s meaning making vary” (Jewitt, 2005, p. 316), and these decisions impact students’ autonomy (Vandergriff, 2016).

### 8.2.2 The Micro-Textual Organization of Learners’ Blogs

In the synthesis of her analysis, Gonçalves (2014) affirmed that the discursive organization of blogs consisted primarily of *interactive discourse*, *narration*, and *theoretical discourse*. There is a detailed description of the types of discourse in [section 6.6.1.2](#), but here is a brief summary (M. Gonçalves, 2014):

- *Interactive Discourse*: there is **actorial implication** and the writer is **exposing events**;
- *Interactive Report*: there is **actorial implication** and the writer is **narrating events**;
- *Theoretical Discourse*: there is **actorial autonomy** and the writer is **exposing events**; and
- *Narration*: there is **actorial autonomy** and the writer is **narrating events**.

The findings of my study partially support Gonçalves's (2014) assertion as the two most prominent types of discourse used by students were the *theoretical discourse* and *narration*. The presence of these two types of discourse coincide with Biber and Egbert's (2018) analysis of web genres where it was found that travel blogs scored high in non-technical descriptions—such as those identified as theoretical discourse in this study, as they “contain descriptions of the characteristics of travel destinations” (p. 80). *Narration* was also expected in travel blogs since these are considered a narrative sub-genre (Biber & Egbert, 2018). However, although Gonçalves's (2014) analysis highlights *interactive discourse* as part of the discursive organization of travel blogs, this type of discourse was found to be present nearly half as often as *impersonal discourse* (the third most common type of discourse in my study). These findings suggest that students favored *actorial autonomy* as they concentrated mainly on exposing and narrating events but were not as concerned with involving the reader through *actorial implication* discourse.

The interpretive analysis also revealed that the majority of blog authors in the corpus employed theoretical discourse to describe and report on places they had visited or planned to visit, which coincides with Murray and Hourigan's (2008) findings of blogs being more descriptive at the intermediate level. In my corpus, most students described the physical characteristics of places, using the third person in the present indicative most often. For example, the author of Blog 1 wrote: “...es el único lugar en Canada donde...; como el agua es transparente...” In Blog 9, the author wrote: “...es una región muy popular; la montaña Kilimanjaro tiene cinco zonas climáticas diferentes,” while in Blog 12 we read sentences such as: “...es una encantadora ciudad, (...) tiene una rica historia.” From a genre-based perspective, these findings differ slightly from those of Biber and Egbert (2018), who found that the present tense and the third-person pronouns scored low in their detailed grammatical and lexical analysis of travel blogs.

As for *narration*, it was found that students used the first-person singular and/or plural to talk about experiences they had had themselves or in the company of someone else. This coincides with Davies's findings (2011) on her blog analysis regarding a strong presence of “the first person narrative of the written text throughout the blog, and also with the way [readers] are drawn into the

local space of the blogger” (p. 237). This narration of experiences is consistent with narrative texts, as authors are “typically more concerned with recounting events than they are with establishing their stance or position in relation to a given subject” (Biber & Egbert, 2018, p. 80). Blogs 4, 6 and 8 contained the highest number of narrative instances using mainly the past tense:

- Blog 4: “Mi viaje comenzó genial, (...) Tomé esta foto un día mientras caminaba por la playa.” (*My trip started off great, (...) I took this photo one day while walking along the beach.*)
- Blog 6: “Los dentistas fueron muy amables y me enseñaron sobre..., Hoy tomé el tren.” (*The dentists were very kind and taught me about... Today I took the train.*)
- Blog 8: “vimos algunos peces, rayas y tortugas. (...) hicimos amigos con algunas personas.” (*We saw some fish, rays, and turtles. (...) We made friends with some people.*)

According to Bedou and Hamel (2021), the use of the past tense, as well as other linguistic markers, characterize narrative texts. What is more, Gonçalves (2014) found that the past tense was found mainly in the second paragraph of the travel blog. However, students in this study did not concentrate the use of any of the different past tenses in a specific section of their blogs.

Interestingly, the third most common type of discourse was the *impersonal discourse*. This was evident in students’ use of the passive voice and the existential *hay* to describe historical facts, descriptions, and to provide information about activities that could be done in the travel destination. For instance, the author of *Blog 11*—the one with the most instances of *impersonal discourse*, combined the use of the passive voice (e.g., *Fue fundado el 12 de diciembre de 1851; en 1918 el nombre fue cambiado*), the *hay* existencial (e.g., *hay muchos turistas; hay mucha comida*), and impersonal constructions with *se* (e.g., *Los tacos al pastor se encuentran en las calles; los tacos de birria se consumen para el desayuno*). These findings align with Gonçalves’s (2014) findings about the spatiotemporal organization of blogs, and with Biber and Egbert’s (2018) assertion that travel blogs focus “primarily on facts related to a geographic location” (p. 80).

While the *actorial autonomy* predominated in the blog corpus, this does not mean that students did not attempt to engage with the reader. As Myers (2010) affirm, “with blogs, the audience is always at least potentially there in the text” (p. 9). Students in my study used mainly (either explicitly or implicitly) the impersonal/familiar *tú*, followed by *usted(es)*, which help the writer to directly address the audience (Pascual, 2018). For example, there were expressions such as

“*déjame decirte*” (informal *you* singular implicit) in *Blog 1*, and “*sumérjense, disfruten, vayan*” (plural *you* form predominant in Latin America) in *Blog 7*. Other examples of *actorial implication* were found in *Blog 4*. The writer started by introducing themselves (i.e., *Hola mi nombre es [name] y soy [nationality]*), and at another point of the blog, they asked readers to set notifications for a future blog entry (i.e., *¡enciende las alarmas pour [para] entonces!*). This author also used humor to connect with the reader when asking “*¿Podemos decir a dónde va esta historia todavía?*” when making obvious the topic of the blog. According to Davies (2011), “this sense of the jokey colloquial gives the blog a direct, informal style, where one feels that the writer is attempting to transcend the fact that the audience could be global” (p. 234).

Moreover, *Blog 18* had a very interactive discourse, and it was constantly involving the reader in the blog narrative. At the beginning of the blog, the author wrote *¡Bienvenido a mi blog!*. Then, towards the middle of the blog, they wrote *En este blog compartiré algunos de los animales que he visto.*, and at the end, they wrote *¡nos vemos en la próxima entrada del blog!*. This constant reference to the blog may be an indication that the student was making an effort to frame their communication within this genre, which speaks of an awareness of the discursive conventions of online interactions (Davies, 2011; Myers, 2010). Six other blogs attempted to engage with their audience by addressing readers directly and giving them recommendations (e.g., *Blog 13: En este blog, voy a dar recomendaciones y propuestas para que usted tenga un viaje bonito.*); instructions (e.g., *Blog 10: Les dejo un video instructivo creado por un amigo que conocí allá.*); and ideas based on the readers’ interests (e.g., *Blog 15: Si la naturaleza te interesa tanto como a mí, [place] es el lugar ideal para visitar.*). The use of these linguistic resources “helps the writer to involve himself in the text both to convey information more clearly and to engage the reader as a fellow enthusiast” (Hyland, 2018, p. 20)

In terms of general language use, students primarily addressed their audience with the informal *you* (*tú*), the formal *you* singular (*usted*), and the plural (*ustedes*) forms. However, some students mixed the informal *tú* and the formal *usted* in the same text, which shows some inconsistency. This distinction may be problematic particularly for English-speakers, who need to be aware of the pragmatic differences between formal and informal register in Spanish (Pearson, 2018). For example, the author of *Blog 1* wrote “*es un lugar que **debes** visitar*” ([it] is a place **you must** visit—informal *you* implicit) and then wrote “[i]**Puede** visitar las cuevas y mas!” (**You can** visit the caves and more!—formal *you* implicit). Similarly, the author of *Blog 7* primarily used the extended Latin

American form of the plural *you* (*ustedes*), but in one sentence they used the indirect object pronoun corresponding to the peninsular form of the plural “*you*” (*vosotros*). The student wrote, “**Visiten** el Museo de la civilización que **os** exhibirá las cuatro estaciones y exposiciones sobre la historia de Quebec y/o Canadá” (my own highlighting). The verb *visiten* has the subject *ustedes* implicit, while the construction *os exhibirá* has the indirect object pronoun *os*, which corresponds to the *vosotros* form. In the post-task questionnaire, the author of this last blog declared using *ChatGPT*, *Google Translate*, and *Reverso*. However, the use of that particular sentence structure does not suggest that it was generated with the help of an AI tool. Rather, it may be the result of translating a single portion of the sentence or the verb construction. It is also possible that the student was exposed to both varieties of Spanish and did not edit their text for consistency.

The presence of errors despite the use of writing assistance being reported by 20 out of 21 students is interesting. Since students had ample time to create and revise their blogs, it is unlikely that they did not have enough time to proofread. However, since our course tasks and feedback did not always focus on linguistic aspects, it is possible that students were more concerned with creating an attractive blog and conveying their message and less concerned with grammatical accuracy. This could lead to a relevant pedagogical reflection regarding tasks and feedback, which “continues to focus on the linguistic aspects of multimodal texts and often ignores nonlinguistic elements” (Elola & Oskoz, 2022, p. 576). In this sense, as Davies asserts (2011), “in order to take full account of ways in which communication takes place online, we need to focus not just on linguistic features, but also upon multimodal aspects and the wider sociocultural context” (p. 242).

Overall, the micro-textual analysis of students’ blogs showed that they were able to use their blogs to narrate their travel experiences and describe the places they have visited or expect to visit. Since “the development of a blog entry requires an understanding of the rhetorical and linguistic characteristics of the digital genre” (Elola & Oskoz, 2022, p. 580), the findings of this analysis suggest that students understood and reproduced the (non)linguistic characteristics of blogs, which was reflected in their multimodal and narrative compositions. Nevertheless, while it is true that the students did not engage largely with interpersonal discourse, they did involve the audience through the use of diverse lexico-grammatical features (Pascual, 2018) that allowed them to connect with readers. This is still an indicative of students’ successful blogging since “bloggers use a range of devices, direct and indirect, that can make readers feel like they are being talked to, included in a group, and involved in the blog” (Myers, 2010, p. 77).

## 8.3 Students' Self-Reported Reflections on Blogging and Writing Tools

This section presents the results of the student questionnaires conducted before and after the blog writing task. It also provides insights gathered from an optional open-ended question. The pre-task questionnaire explored students' familiarity with blogs and their use of writing assistance tools for second language (L2) revision. The post-task questionnaire focused on students' experiences with the blog writing process and the digital tools they used to complete it. Finally, the open-ended question invited students to reflect on what they learned from the task, providing qualitative insights that complement the micro- and macro-textual analyses of student blogs.

### 8.3.1 Pre-Task Questionnaire

The results of the pre-task questionnaire ([section 7.4.1](#)) revealed that 95.2% of students rarely or never write blogs in their native language, while approximately one-third of students claimed to be familiar with blogging platforms. This discrepancy between blog awareness and actual use suggest that blogs are likely not among students' favorite platforms or applications. Despite the apparent lack of interest in blogs, research on their use in second language (L2) learning has been active over the past ten years (R. T.-H. Chen, 2015; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2018; Elgort, 2017; Yousefifard & Fathi, 2021). What is more, it appears that the use of blogs is shifting towards video blogging, or vlogging (Aldukhayel, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Regardless of the technology of choice, incorporating various digital tools and genres into language teaching and learning remains an effective way to strengthen students' technological and multimodal skills, given that these tools play a role « dans la création de nouveaux modes d'expression, de représentation de la pensée, d'actions et d'engagement qui, à leur tour, favorisent le développement de ces compétences multimodales en littératie » (Pellerin, 2018, p. 92).

One of the most relevant aspects of this study was investigating how familiar students were with blog characteristics. It was found that more than half of the students claimed to be familiar with blog features. Since the Spanish course curriculum at the institution where this study took place rarely includes digital writing activities, one could infer that student's reported knowledge of blog features likely comes from other language courses, probably from primary or secondary education. The hands-on experience afforded by use of diverse technological tools allows for has been found valuable in both school (Pellerin, 2018) as well as in post-secondary (L. Lee, 2010) education because it enables students to engage « de manière active et autonome dans des activités d'apprentissage » that foster the development of diverse skills (Pellerin, 2018, p. 102). Fathi and

Nourzadeh (2019) reported positive effects of using blogs for L2 writing. This finding reinforces the importance of exploring diverse communication tools and genres in post-secondary education to help learners “become digitally competent, and be cognizant of digital literacies” (Elola & Oskoz, 2023, p. iii).

In contrast to the reported infrequent writing of blogs, students reported much higher engagement with digital writing assistance tools in their daily lives. Although traditional tools were reported to be less frequently used, a significant number of students agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly use digital tools to revise texts in a second language. Figure 59 in [section 7.4.1](#) shows that the most frequently used tools students habitually use to revise their L2 texts were: *Google Translate*, *DeepL*, and word processors, followed closely by *Reverso* and *ChatGPT*. These results are similar to those reported by Jolley and Maimone (2015) and slightly different from those by Vinall et al. (2023). The former study showed that 97.6% of Spanish learners at the post-secondary level use *Google Translate* (GT), whereas the latter found that learners “used GT and Spanishdict equally” (p. 505) in their L2 writing tasks.

According to Wang and Wang (2025), “today’s writers have unprecedented access to learning resources based on large language models and advanced technologies, presenting both opportunities and challenges” (p. 1). The fact that over three quarters of the students in this study reported using digital tools in their daily lives to revise their L2 texts brings about the need to reflect on the pedagogical implications of integrating such technologies into their language-learning processes. On the one hand, given that it is not only impractical but almost impossible to stop students from using diverse digital technologies, we must recognize that these tools “help their users write texts in languages in which their own language proficiency would not be sufficient” (Klimova et al., 2023, p. 664). This ability to communicate beyond language concerns and constrains is important for students to have the opportunity to participate in tasks where they can interact and do things with the language in real-world contexts (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014) by using different modes of communication (Oskoz & Elola, 2020).

On the other hand, the rapid emergence of AI technologies calls for teachers that are prepared “to guide students in critically inquiring into the evolving linguistic, educational, and ethical implications of generative AI” (C. Wang & Wang, 2025, p. 1). This entails to help students develop competencies related to computer, information, and media literacy so that they can responsibly

choose which technologies to use and how to do it effectively (DuBravac, 2013) in order to actively participate in digital societies (Ollivier & e-lang Project Team, 2018).

### 8.3.2 Post-Task Questionnaire

With regard to the post-task questionnaire, the results ([section 7.4.2](#)) revealed positive perceptions with the blogging experience: 95.2% of students reported being familiar with blog characteristics, and 85.7% agreed that they felt prepared to complete the blogging task. These findings underscore the importance of combining genre knowledge with practical skills and confidence in producing genre-based products (Sauro & Sundmark, 2019). In other words, while students may recognize typical blog elements—such as an informal tone, narrative structure, and the use of images or links—it is crucial for them to effectively incorporate these features in L2 writing, particularly in academic or genre-based contexts (Strobl et al., 2019).

This suggests that students' increasing exposure to digital texts, calls for specific scaffolding to transform this exposure into productive competence (Klimova et al., 2023). Fostering students' multimodal and digital skills could contribute to making them « citoyens engagés et critiques à l'ère de la globalisation et du numérique » (Pellerin, 2018, p. 104). Technological training and support is crucial because “in the digital context, mastering diverse media and semiotic resources means that L2 writers will need to be able to negotiate a complex set of skills as well as be digitally competent and aware of current literacies” (Elola & Oskoz, 2017, p. 56). Hence, language education must provide learning environments that allocate for the needs of students who “read and write across media modes and genres” (Lotherington et al., 2009, p. 34) so that they can activate and develop their ability to write, organize, and publish in digital spaces using their multimodal skills (Lamy & Zourou, 2013; Vandergriff, 2016).

Furthermore, students' responses indicate mixed attitudes toward digital authorship. Almost half of the students said they would like to continue writing blogs after the course. One third reported being neutral, and 9.5% were not interested. Since working with blogs allows students to apply personal experiences and knowledge to academic settings (R. T.-H. Chen, 2015), integrating real-world tasks involving digital genres, such as blogs, could enhance their communication skills and willingness to communicate (H. Huang & Li, 2024).

Regarding students' reliance on digital technologies for L2 revisions, the post-task results showed that 20 out of 21 students reported using digital tools, primarily *DeepL*, word processors, and

*Google Translate*, to revise their texts. These findings align with those by Vinall et al. (2023), who posited that L2 writers “overwhelmingly rely on MT tools while writing” (p. 499). Interestingly, the use of *Google Translate* declined from being the most popular tool for habitual use to the third most preferred tool when writing the blog. This suggests that students may frequently use *Google Translate* for quick translations of words (Vinall et al., 2023) or to check short phrases at specific moments (Jolley & Maimone, 2015), but they may have considered the blog writing task to require a more cohesive and audience-oriented type of writing. For this reason, they may have relied more heavily on *DeepL*, as it is considered more accurate and context-aware (Klimova et al., 2023). This shift from the pre-task questionnaire, in which students most often used *Google Translate*, does not necessarily mean that students stopped using this tool, but just that they diversified their choices to adapt them to a writing task that is different to the ones they typically complete in their L2 courses.

In addition to analyzing tool selection, the post-task questionnaire also inquired about the purposes for which students use digital tools in the blog writing process. Students reported primarily using these tools to revise spelling, conjugation, and vocabulary, which suggests a focus on linguistic features. One reason for this may be that “the emphasis of feedback provision continues to focus on the linguistic aspects of multimodal texts and often ignores nonlinguistic elements” (Elola & Oskoz, 2022, p. 576), which may cause that students get more concerned with producing the formal aspects of language correctly than on the nonverbal conventions characteristics of digital genres like blogging.

These findings also align with literature presented in [Chapter 4](#) as previous studies revealed students’ frequent use of digital tools, particularly machine translation, for grammar-based revisions (S.-M. Lee, 2022; S.-M. Lee & Briggs, 2021), as well as for checking vocabulary (Alrajhi, 2022; Hellmich, 2021). However, few students reported using the tools to structure their texts, obtain ideas, or generate content beyond linguistic revision. For instance, the authors of blogs 9 and 17 reported using the tools to generate content. Their blogs contained more words than average and included both multimodal and hypertextual elements. On the other hand, the authors of Blogs 7 and 19 were among the only three who reported using digital tools to generate ideas. These blogs were rather short, with fewer words than average, and did not include any hypertextual elements. These findings may reflect an instrumental use of technology, valuing tools for their contribution to linguistic accuracy rather than their role in developing genre-based discourse or

textual organization (Chung & Ahn, 2022; Godwin-Jones, 2024). Interestingly, only one blog author (*Blog 12*) reported using digital tools only to revise spelling, to obtain ideas, and to generate content. This blog was well-written and had a non-linear structure. It also contained multimodal and hypertextual elements, showing an interesting balance between using digital tools as corrective aids and as generative collaborators.

The author of *Blog 8* was the only student who reported not using any tools to revise their work. This blog had the third-highest number of verb constructions, yet there were no instances of interactive discourse, which means that the author focused on recounting past events and describing places they visited. The student's reported lack of use of digital tools could indicate either confidence in their language ability or a greater focus on sharing experiences than on linguistic accuracy. This is evident in the numerous orthographic, grammatical, and lexical errors in their text, as illustrated in Figure 56 ([section 7.3.1.4](#)). Although writing assistance tools are considered to reduce L2 writing errors (S.-M. Lee, 2020), Elola and Oskoz (2023) argue that it is important to help students develop both their linguistic and multimodal competencies. In this case, the student could benefit from feedback on form and multimodality, as their blog contained a higher-than-average number of multimedia elements but no hypertextual ones.

In this study, more than three-quarters of the students reported that using digital tools helped them learn Spanish. While most writing assistance tools provide feedback at the word and sentence levels, few offer feedback at the structural or discursive levels (Strobl et al., 2019). Therefore, in addition to teaching language proficiency and multimodality, it is important to educate students on genre-specific conventions and intended audiences (Cimasko & Shin, 2017). This is particularly important in light of the fact that many AI systems have shown “remarkable abilities in areas such as summarizing, synthesizing, and authoring in conformity to specific genres” (Godwin-Jones, 2024, p. 5), so it is crucial to train students on how to evaluate, adapt, and reflect on the outputs of the writing assistance tools they use in their personal and academic lives.

### 8.3.3 Open-Ended Responses

Students' responses to the question asking them to share what they learned from the task varied. Notably, students answered this optional question in not only English and French, but also in Spanish. This could indicate their engagement with the target language and their involvement with the task. As described in [section 7.4.2.1](#), three main categories emerged from the coding of students' comments: linguistic gain, digital literacy, and appreciation of the task.

Comments in the language-related category primarily concerned new vocabulary, spelling, conjugation, and communication expressions. These findings resonate with those of Ducate and Lomicka (2008), who found that students reported that blogs helped them practice grammar and writing, and improve their reading skills and their vocabulary. Fathi and Nourzadeh (2019) also found that the use of blogs helped students edit and revise their texts and to “access the required grammar and vocabulary knowledge available online” (p. 83). Interestingly, some students recognized that the way to express certain ideas do not translate naturally from English into Spanish, which brings about metacognitive awareness (Pellerin, 2018) and suggests a greater attentiveness to phrasing and meaning in the target language.

Regarding communicative competence, students appreciated having the opportunity to use informal expressions, which are usually not emphasized in traditional or more formal classroom writing tasks. This mirrors findings by L. Lee (2010), who mentions that “in comparison to the traditional formal writing, students found blogging more fun and less stressful” (p. 219). Students in the present study also reflected on the need to structure their writing in a way that would engage a real or imagined audience, suggesting growth in both linguistic and pragmatic awareness in the context of technology-mediated communication. Comments in the second category also revealed an increased understanding of blog platforms, engaging with multimodal features, and communicating within a digital community, which mirrors findings by Bedou and Hamel (2021) where the sense of community within a social circle « l’apprenant se sent inclus dans la communauté linguistique » (p. 12).

The perceptions of these students are similar to the findings of L. Lee’s (2010) study, in which “students were also in favor of using multimedia (e.g., external links, photos, YouTube video clips) to support the text content” (p. 219). In the present study, several students noted that they learned how to embed multimedia content, such as images and videos. This is a key feature of *Web 2.0* tools as it allows “anyone with access to a computer [to] easily create and publish dynamic multimedia texts and be an author in a very real sense” (Nelson, 2006, p. 72). They also seemed to appreciate the opportunity to customize their blogs with features such as comment sections, author biographies, and visual design. Helping students making the most of these affordances can contribute to “abrir el camino para una enseñanza de la L2 más apropiada para nuestros tiempos” (López Sánchez, 2014, p. 282). For instance, the author of *Blog 3* reported in the post-task questionnaire that one aspect they found valuable about the blog task was that they learned how to

insert *Instagram* content on a blog using HTML. This technical training was not part of class instruction, which may be an indication that the student put some autonomous effort into developing new skills that would allow them to produce more varied semiotic content beyond image and video insertion. This decision not only allowed the student to give their blog a unique style—it was the only blog in the corpus with embedded social media posts—but also enabled the learner to develop a previously unknown skill, as they reported in the post-task questionnaire.

Another student also commented “*no sabía que se podían agregar videos de YouTube para mejorar la comprensión del tema.*” This suggests that some students were concerned with incorporating diverse multimodal resources to help readers understand the topic and receive the message, which shows that they did so “by developing greater awareness of criteria for success as writers and of the target genre conventions” as Han and Hiver (2018) posit. In this sense, we see how the « possibilités fonctionnelles, multimodales et multisensorielles contribuent à l’émergence de multiples modes d’expression, de représentation de la pensée et de multiples modes d’action et d’engagement » (Pellerin, 2018, p. 102). This, again, supports the idea that integrating multimodal compositions where students can intentionally choose layout, imagery, and interactivity to enhance their message, understanding that language “is just one among the many resources for making meaning” (Kress, 2011, p. 38).

The third category contained responses related to the students’ perceived impact of the task, and their appreciation of the task. The blog task seemed to have a significant personal impact on students, revealing their emotional engagement and meaningful connections to their lived experiences (L. Lee, 2017), which can help learners “to project a more ideal image of the themselves as more competent writers in future” (Yousefifard & Fathi, 2021, p. 925). An example of this is that many students expressed pride in creating a blog, while others reported a newfound interest in reading them, especially in Spanish. This sense of interest and achievement aligns with the goals of technology-mediated task-based language learning, in which engagement in meaningful, real-world tasks places learners at the center of their learning experience, helping to enhance their confidence and autonomy (Noel, 2015; Pellet, 2012). While students did not report any particular interest in using blogs in other academic setting, they mentioned that they would also be interested in reading blogs in the future, whether for personal interest, travel, or cultural exploration.

In conclusion, this study of student-produced blogs revealed that the students were able to reproduce the discursive and multimodal characteristics of the blogging genre. Notably, we observed how students employed digital and linguistic resources to narrate events, share experiences, and connect with a target audience by employing diverse modes and discourses. The reflective component, which included questionnaires about the use of digital writing assistance tools, provided insight into how students use these tools in their daily lives and their specific purposes for using them to create blogs. Furthermore, it was concluded that, while students primarily used the tools to review grammatical and lexical aspects of their texts, they also emphasized the educational value of blog writing in activating digital skills and increasing enjoyment of the task. This is relevant because the current digital landscape requires language teachers who can prepare learners to use digital tools more critically for language learning (Hellmich & Vinall, 2023), while developing an informed approach on the use of diverse writing assistance tools that contribute to improve students' meta-linguistic knowledge and help them "becoming informed consumers of language technology" (Godwin-Jones, 2022, p. 5). This approach could maximize the learning benefits of working with technology and situate its use as a mediator rather than a creator in students' learning process (Hellmich, 2021).

Overall, integrating blog-genre writing into this study provided a meaningful opportunity to expand L2 writing beyond traditional text-based formats and situate language use within authentic, digitally mediated contexts. Through the blogging task, students were able to activate and refine their multimodal competencies by making deliberate linguistic and non-linguistic choices to establish their authorial voice and connect with their intended audience through narrative and descriptive discourse. At the same time, exploring the use of (intelligent) writing tools into this genre-based task emphasized the importance of encouraging a reflective and critical approach to digital writing assistance. When used critically, these tools can be helpful partners for language development. Thus, combining blog writing with the reflective use of writing technologies may contribute to linguistic gains and the development of multiliteracies.

# Chapter 9: Conclusions

## 9.1 Overview

This exploratory study set out to achieve a dual purpose: i) to explore the multimodal and discursive characteristics of blogs produced by students of Spanish, and ii) to promote the reflective use of writing assistance tools among students. The results revealed that, based on the analysis of the corpus, students meaningfully engaged with the multimodal nature of the blogging task. They consistently used digital resources, such as images, hyperlinks, color, font variation, and emojis, to enhance their texts. In addition, while approximately half of the blogs followed a traditional linear layout, a significant number adopted hybrid formats combining conventional textual organization with more dynamic, visually integrated structures. For its part, the analysis of discursive organization showed that students predominantly used narrative and theoretical discourse. However, evidence of interactive discourse was also present through linguistic and non-linguistic strategies that established proximity with readers or the intended audience.

Finally, findings related to the reflective use of writing assistance tools suggest that learners primarily use digital tools for lexical and grammatical revisions, such as verb conjugation, spelling, and vocabulary searches. However, their reflections revealed benefits beyond linguistic accuracy. Students reported practicing digital literacy skills, becoming more aware of technological writing tools, and developing a positive appreciation for the task as a meaningful learning experience. Taken together, these findings underscore the pedagogical value of integrating digital genre writing tasks to foster language development and broader digital competencies in second/additional language learning.

This chapter summarizes these key findings and provides nine general pedagogical recommendations for effectively integrating digital genres, specifically blogs, into the L2 classroom. These recommendations are grouped into three main categories: 1) Enhancing students' learning experience, 2) Strengthening task-based practices, and 3) Guiding learners in evolving digital environments.

## 9.2 Pedagogical Recommendations

### 9.2.1 Enhancing Students' Learning Experience

#### 9.2.1.1 *Activating and Practicing Multimodal and Digital Skills*

The study concluded that students successfully created blog products that replicated the general multimodal and hypertextual features of travel blogs. The macro-textual analysis revealed that students incorporated different (hyper)textual and audiovisual resources into their blog products such as colors, different fonts and text sizes, links, hyperlinks, images and video, thereby activating their digital and multimodal skills (Elola & Oskoz, 2023; Kress, 2010). These enhanced modes of communication serve as a pedagogical illustration of how students can use multiple semiotic modes beyond text to convey meaning in their L2, while engaging in productive digital compositions that are characteristic of digital environments (Yi et al., 2020).

Additionally, although students reported infrequent use of blogs, their comments and responses to the pre- and post-task questionnaires revealed the pedagogical value of writing one. The fact that most students did not adhere to the blogging platform's prescribed format shows that they actively explored diverse content distributions, combined different semiotic resources, and repurposed various types of content in different languages to create their own products. This is valuable because students activated and practiced multimodal skills that they might not have otherwise explored in conventional writing tasks. These skills have the potential to lead to the development of digital competencies, such as creating a website, interacting with an online community, and embedding different types of multimedia in their compositions.

#### 9.2.1.2 *Promoting the Reflective Use of (Intelligent) Writing Tools*

The reflective use of writing assistance tools as a pedagogical component of the course gave students the opportunity to analyze, evaluate, and criticize the output of writing assistance tools like *LanguageTool*, *Reverso*, *SpanishChecker*, and *ChatGPT*. This practice course can help students develop a critical awareness about the appropriateness and accuracy of digital tools' output, the purposes for using technological support, and the content creation. I recommend conducting this exercise live in front of the class and with the participation of the students so that they can analyze, evaluate, and discuss collaboratively the appropriateness of the suggestions provided by digital tools. These activities can encourage learners to question the reliability of machine-generated output, to discuss the tools' affordances and limitations, and to position themselves as informed decision-makers in the writing process.

The results also showed that students reported using digital tools more often than traditional ones to revise L2 texts. They reported using AI-powered and non-AI-powered tools mostly for revising spelling, conjugation, and vocabulary rather than for generating content, receiving ideas, or structuring their texts. In this respect, another important avenue on the reflective use of writing assistance is to help students shift the focus from linguistic accuracy and encourage them to explore how these tools can support other areas of writing. For example, writing assistant tools can be used to analyze structure and organization and genre-based features, so students can take into focus other important aspects of (digital) composition beyond grammar.

### *9.2.1.3 Fostering Authorship and Ownership*

Several students commented on the novelty and value of engaging with the blog as a digital genre. They noted that this task challenged them to consider an intended audience, to plan a visual layout design, and to integrate multimedia elements such as images, hyperlinks, and videos. These reflections suggest that blog writing as a hybrid composition process can encourage ownership as they have to strategically integrate digital support with their own ideas, voice, and perspectives. Furthermore, students also brought their own multilingual practices to the table by inserting content in the language(s) of their choice. This speaks of the pedagogical potential of students' multilingual and multicultural competencies that can enable them to participate in diverse cultural communities (Vandergriff, 2016), including the target language community (Godwin-Jones, 2015).

It is also beneficial for teachers to initiate a dialogue with students about what is appropriate, acceptable, and ethical when using AI for academic work (Escalante et al., 2023). We can further explore authorship by enabling students to analyze and evaluate their experiences using the digital tools of their choice. Rather than passively accepting the tools' output, students can informally evaluate and report their insights on what they found useful and what they did not. For example, teachers can implement activities such as asking students to keep an AI reflective journal or to attach personal reports to composition tasks regarding their linguistic and stylistic choices when composing whether or not they are mediated by technology. These practices can encourage students exploring the functions, advantages, and limitations of AI tools. This allows them to retain control over their choices, to critically analyze the role of technology in their own language learning process (Bedou & Hamel, 2021), and to become active authors rather than passive recipients of automated feedback.

## 9.2.2 Strengthening Task-Based Practices

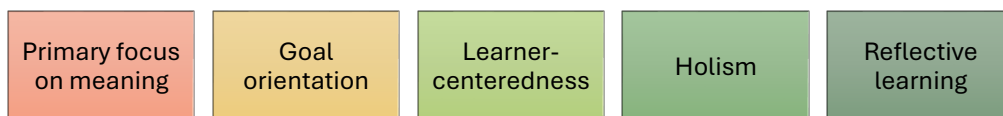
### 9.2.2.1 Incorporating Rehearsal Tasks

From a rehearsal task perspective, this task provided a low-stakes environments for task experimentation by allowing students to draw on prior experiences with other digital platforms and apply that knowledge to the context of blog writing. This may be an indicator of students' skill transferability across platforms (Ollivier & e-lang Project Team, 2018), which show their adaptability to using different tools despite not having received specific training on the technical functionalities of such tools. This is also an indication of students' activation of technological skills.

From a genre-based perspective, this blog rehearsal task provided students with authentic opportunities to experiment with digital platforms and to explore language form and function through the use of writing assistance tools. It was found that while students privileged narrative and theoretical discourse, they also showed understanding of *interactive discourse* through the strategies they used to connect with their audience (e.g., rhetorical questions, humor, visual cues). This suggest that the task, while did not involve public sharing, created in students an awareness on the importance of speaking to an imagined audience with whom they were connecting (Pellet, 2012). Moreover, this low-stakes task also created a space for learners to express themselves and to include personal information that they might have refrained from sharing on a real-world blog (publicly).

### 9.2.2.2 Designing and Implementing Rehearsal Tasks

For this section, I wanted to reflect on the successful implementation of the five criteria proposed by González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) to design effective technology-mediated tasks.



The *primary focus* of the blog rehearsal task was for students to talk about a trip. While it was not the main focus, this task required students to use a diverse range of linguistic structures that would inevitably be needed in its execution. The second step was *goal orientation*. This step addressed the students' interests because it allowed them to discuss a destination of their choice. However, the task could have been better designed if it had included a specific goal for creating the blog. For instance, students could have created the blog as part of an advertising campaign to promote their

chosen destination. *Learner-centeredness* was achieved by giving students control over the linguistic and non-linguistic choices they made in their blogs. Although I was present in most parts of the writing process, students had the ultimate decision on their composition process. Attention to form was given directly and indirectly after the blog was submitted. *Holism* was achieved by encouraging students to explore authentic blogs through the collaborative hierarchization of blogs, and a rehearsal task on a real blogging platform that integrated real-world processes and skills. Finally, I attempted to facilitate *reflective learning* through the pre-task and post-task questionnaires, which yielded valuable pedagogical insights into students' perceptions of the overall task.

These are my main pedagogical recommendations in the context of rehearsal task design and implementation:

- Adopt a needs analysis approach (González-Lloret, 2014; Long, 2015) to identify the types of target tasks required in the context of your course, and to determine which pedagogical tasks can best contribute to achieving the learning goals.
- Analyze how the task fits within your curriculum.
- Allocate time to expose students to different tools and genres.
- Plan ahead to allow sufficient time for exploring these tools in depth and helping students become familiar with the technological requirements of the task.
- Enhance the implementation phases by providing more exposure during the pre-task, allowing students to choose the genre and topic for the main task, and facilitating sharing, commenting, and preparing blogs for publication in the post-task.
- Work with drafts and final products to support iterative improvement

### 9.2.2.3 *Understanding Task Appreciation*

Another key finding was the task appreciation. Students reported positive perceptions regarding linguistic gains, digital skills, and appreciation of the task. Language-related comments suggest that the blog writing task helped students explore new vocabulary and expressions, and to practice spelling and conjugation. This reinforces the idea that blogs may provide L2 students with a space for “personal reflection and social commentary” (Negueruela-Azarola, 2009, p. 246) where they can incorporate language learning into their private and/or public online environments.

Furthermore, students alluded to the personal impact of the blog task as they mentioned that the task motivated them to find more blogs they like, and allowed them to talk about a topic of their interest, which speaks of the value of blogs as a way to integrate more fun and meaningful writing tasks into the L2 classroom (L. Lee, 2010; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). This continues to highlight the possibilities offered by blogs to promote ownership, self-expression, and creativity (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Rivens Mompean, 2010). The paradigm shift, from a teacher-centered and form-based instruction toward student-centered digital participation and self-reflection is crucial in the 21<sup>st</sup> century language pedagogy as it places students at the center of learning and “enables them to function confidently and effectively in a multilingual globalized environment” (Byrnes, 2014, p. 79).

## 9.2.3 Guiding Learners in Dynamic Digital Environments

### 9.2.3.1 Understanding and Critically Using (Intelligent) Writing Tools

Another pedagogical consideration lies in the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of digital platforms and writing technologies. As a teacher-researcher, I compared *Blogger*—the blogging platform I initially used to create my teacher sample—with *Wix*, a platform adopted by some students. While *Blogger*'s functionalities have remained largely unchanged over the past few years (see Figure 66 for a screenshot of the blog entry creation page), *Wix* now integrates artificial intelligence features that allow users to automate or personalize their blogs through prompts or by selecting from a set of pre-designed options. Of particular interest is *Wix*'s full AI blog creation feature, which can generate text, images, and layouts, potentially shaping students' writing process, design choices, and the presentation of their content.

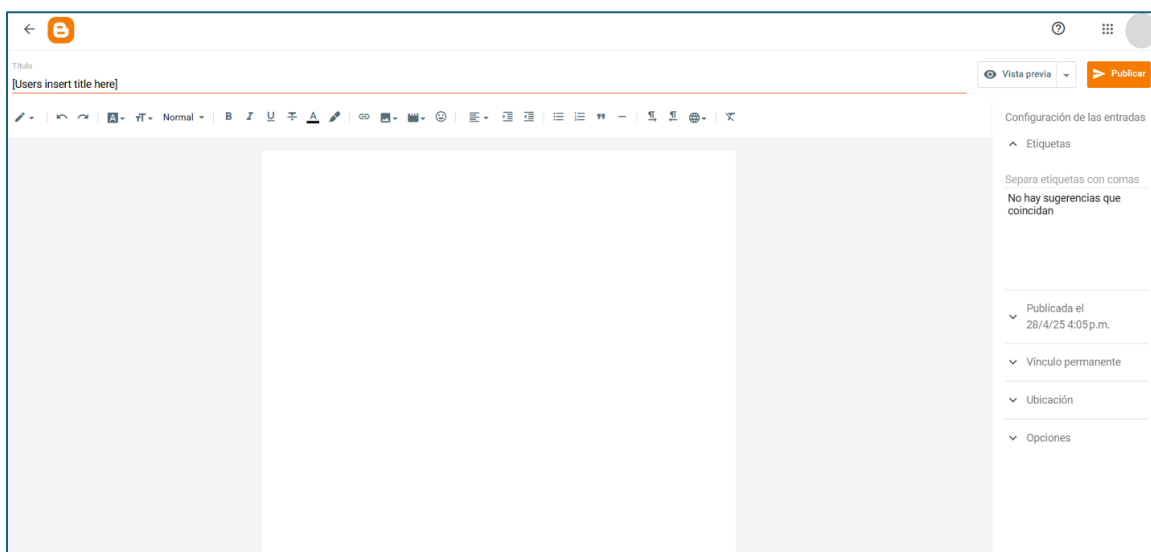


Figure 66. Blog creation start screen in Blogger

Wix's, customizable blog creation process begins with selecting the type of website one wants to create. When selecting "blog," a drop-down menu appears with different types of blogs the user can choose from (Figure 67).

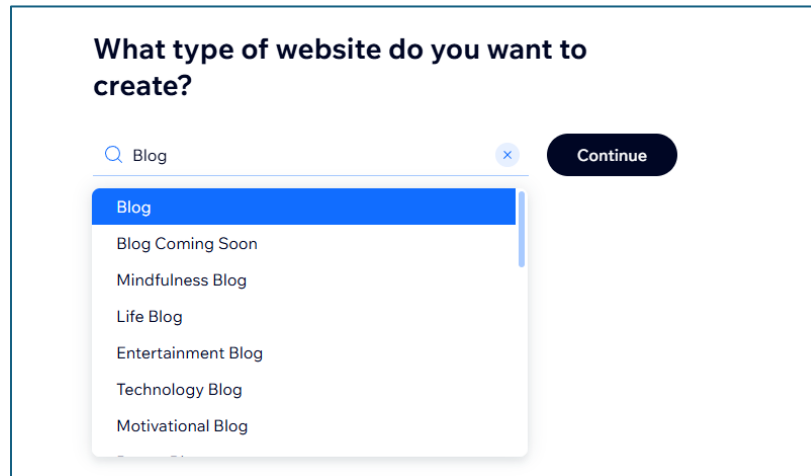


Figure 67. Example of the types of blogs offered by Wix

To test the blog creation functionalities further, I created a travel blog post. I named my website "*Mi blog de viajes*" and did not choose any of the customizable suggestions because I wanted to explore the basic functionalities of the blog. The most interesting feature of Wix in relation to this dissertation the *AI Post Creator* function. This allows users to "*Generate a full-length blog post with title and images.*"

Once this option is selected, the blog creation process is divided into three steps:

1. Topic
2. Preferences
3. Title

These affordances reflect the ongoing evolution of digital and AI-enhanced tools. They highlight the need for teachers to prepare themselves to navigate this emerging environment and equip their students with the skills needed to critically understand and evaluate these features within the context of their writing. While motivating students to experiment with and engage in AI-assisted creation is pedagogically valuable, fostering AI literacy is essential for students to recognize the importance of their own voice and authorship in the final product. Teachers must understand the possibilities and limitations of these tools to effectively guide and support learners.

### 9.2.3.2 Promoting a Reflective Class Environment

It was surprising to see “my” final blog product created with (by?) Wix AI (Figure 68). This exploration led to a question: Why would students choose to create a blog when they can use an automated tool to do it for them? One possible answer, for me, is that the blog I created with Wix does not reflect who I am. From a task completion perspective, “my” blog contained the required genre-based elements: it adheres to some general narrative conventions of travel blogs by “focusing primarily on facts related to a geographic location” (Biber & Egbert, 2018, p. 80), it is written the first-person, as instructed, and it follows a conventional content distribution by alternating text and images vertically. However, compared to the actual blog I created (Appendix E), the Wix blog did not seem very engaging in terms of colors and content organization. To create a more appealing, multimodal, and interactive post, the author would need to manually personalize titles, to add other types of multimedia components, to insert hypertextual elements, and to manually modify the content distribution if they want to explore options other than intercalating text and image vertically.



Figure 68. My blog created with Wix AI

Sharing these reflections with students acknowledges that instructors are also learners in the digital environment. By modeling how to navigate the environment through collaboration, critical awareness, and reflective practice, we can highlight the importance of learners' voices, identities, and agency in L2 pedagogy.

### *9.2.3.3 Reevaluating Assessment*

As mentioned earlier, the students in my study reported a heavy reliance on writing assistance tools for grammar-based revisions. It may be difficult to believe that these behaviors can be associated with our overemphasis as teachers on linguistic form. While attention to form is still important in second language acquisition (González-Lloret, 2015; Long, 2015; Van den Branden et al., 2009), the theoretical approach adopted in this thesis advocates integrating form into real or rehearsal tasks where students could acquire language incidentally (Ellis, 2003). This approach contributes to shift the focus from learners' linguistic performance to their agency, acknowledging them as producers, editors, creators, and consumers of digital content. These considerations are particularly relevant in light of the capabilities of intelligent writing assistance in language processing and generation, which make it necessary for language educators to rethink the goals of language learning beyond linguistic mastery (Godwin-Jones, 2022).

In this sense, it is essential to include broader dimensions of writing within assessment practices. This means expanding our perceptions of evaluation criteria beyond traditional measures of linguistic mastery to embrace the richness of students' multimodal creations, their unique voices, identities, ownership, and authorship (Elola & Oskoz, 2022). Adopting this approach aligns with a pedagogical stance where language is not just a set of rules students must master, but a dynamic vehicle for self-expression, social participation, and global transformation.

## **9.3 Limitations of the Study**

Although this study was designed with the aim of diversifying the language curriculum at my institution and extending the learning experience beyond traditional classroom activities, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. These limitations are connected to three main aspects: the design of the task, its implementation, and the nature of the data collected.

First, the design of the task was shaped by contextual factors because the project was conducted within a single language course, which naturally limited the generalizability of the findings. There was also a relatively small sample size (21 blogs), which impacted the ability to capture a wider

range of learner experiences and linguistic outcomes. Additionally, a pilot study offered insights into the pedagogical design and intervention of the study in this dissertation. However, since both studies were implemented with different groups of students, it was difficult to measure and compare the insights from each study. These factors highlight the need for future research to consider larger, more diverse participant groups and to ensure continuity across pilot and main studies.

Second, the implementation of the blogging task presented several challenges. Students received limited training in the use of the digital tool, which may have affected their ability to fully exploit its potential for multimodal expression and reflective writing. Moreover, the time allotted for the blog task was relatively short, given the timeline for completing curricular activities, which may have restricted the depth of engagement with the genre. Furthermore, focusing solely on blogs excluded the possibility of comparing students' performance across other relevant genres, such as wikis, podcasts, or digital stories. With regards to the use of intelligent writing assistance, although in-class discussions and students' personal reflections were not included in the data analyzed for this dissertation, they constituted important elements of our learning environment. In the classroom, we openly discussed the implications of using writing assistance, not only for assignments, but also as part of the academic experience, such as writing emails and posting on discussion forums. I believe that students would have benefited from a more detailed and guided approach to interact with the writing tools, like the one used by Ziqi et al. (2024), in which "participants were encouraged to pose additional follow-up questions to ChatGPT based on its corrective feedback if necessary, such as (1) seeking clarifications on the feedback and suggestions, (2) requesting more examples to comprehend the feedback, and (3) engaging in arguments with ChatGPT if disagreeing with the feedback" (p. 7).

Finally, this study relied partly on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. While this approach yielded valuable insights into students' experiences and perceptions, it also introduced certain limitations. On the one hand, the questionnaire aimed to understand how and why students use writing assistance tools. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct a trial run of the questionnaire to ensure that the questions fully addressed the established objectives. On the other hand, self-reported responses may have been influenced by factors such as social desirability, acceptability, and students' perceptions of what was expected. For example, student' responses could have been influenced by the teacher's blog sample, by her views on the

use of writing tools, and/or by other issues discussed in class. Furthermore, it is possible that not all students were equally prepared to reflect critically on their learning process, which could have affected the depth and accuracy of their responses.

## 9.4 Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several directions for future research can be outlined. Although the pedagogical use of blogs has been explored in terms of students' self-expression, individual or collaborative writing, social interaction, and autonomy, little attention has been given to the micro- and macro-textual characteristics of blogs produced by second/additional language learners. For instance, this study revealed that students transcended the conventional vertical layout of blogs (Model A) to develop an evolving hybrid model (Model E), which alternates between vertical and zigzag distributions of texts and multimedia within a single blog post. These structures may provide insight into how L2 students conceive their blogs' layout and their decisions regarding the presentation of multimodal compositions. The characteristics of these L2 blogs may differ greatly from those of L1 blogs, and it would be interesting to explore them in depth. Future studies could explore how micro- and macro-textual features in L2 learners' work demonstrate their appropriation, adaptation, or transformation of digital genres and how these decisions showcase their agency and ownership.

From a methodological point of view, conducting retrospective interviews and screen recordings would provide a deeper insight into students' reflections on the task and their use of intelligent writing assistance. These interviews would also give learners the opportunity to explain their decisions regarding the layout, structure, and discursive composition of their digital products, providing a better understanding of their meaning-making process. Also, a larger student sample size and the use of a more sophisticated text analysis tool could help obtain more reliable quantitative and qualitative data on the benefits of digital tools, the use of writing assistance, the types of discourse, and the task appropriation. Additionally, comparing rehearsal and real-world tasks with the same group of students would be valuable to observe how students use technology when preparing for real-world tasks and to determine what type of support would best help them transfer and activate the skills needed to perform effectively in authentic contexts.

Furthermore, students' technological awareness and digital skills can be enhanced by exposure to a broader range of digital genres and tools. As students learn to adapt their language and writing style to different genres, combine various semiotic modes, increase their engagement and

ownership, and explore the interconnectedness of languages and cultures online, they develop a more comprehensive understanding of technology and its affordances. An important step in this direction is to continue the work onto teacher preparation. Becoming more aware of the advances in artificial intelligence and digital tools and genres require teachers to be better prepared to guide students navigating the continuously evolving technological environments. More research is needed to understand how teachers can integrate multimodal tasks that encourage reflection, creativity, and critical awareness of technology, especially writing assistance tools and generative AI. Teacher training programs that focus on AI literacy and multimodal pedagogy would enable teachers to help students use tools effectively and engage with them ethically and responsibly. This would contribute to equipping learners with the necessary skills to participate in multimodal communication and strengthen their digital literacy.

It is important to acknowledge that some teachers may be skeptical, have no experience with the digital tools mentioned in this dissertation, or feel unprepared to integrate them into their teaching methods, and this is completely understandable. One way to approach change is to avoid viewing digital genres as a way to transfer traditional genres to online environments (Vandergriff, 2016), but as an opportunity to expand students' communicative scenarios where they can integrate a variety of skills that enable them to "participate fully in the communicative practices linked to success in today's society" (Oskoz & Elola, 2020, p. 68). In this sense, the present dissertation intends to lay the groundwork for further research, and the potential development of a teacher-training program within the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures that focuses on developing digital literacy and second/additional language learning in a way that encourages reflection and critical thinking about the use of technology for guided and autonomous learning.

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# Appendix A: Certificate of Ethics Approval

20/11/2023

**Université d'Ottawa**

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

**University of Ottawa**

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

## CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

<b>Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number</b>	S-10-22-8577
<b>Titre du projet / Project Title</b>	Spanish learner performance in new genres of writing: An analysis of texts produced in various task-based (online) contexts
<b>Type de projet / Project Type</b>	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
<b>Statut du projet / Project Status</b>	Renouvelé / Renewed
<b>Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	02/11/2022
<b>Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	01/11/2024

### Équipe de recherche / Research Team

<b>Chercheur / Researcher</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
Andrea OLIVARES BELTRAN	Département des langues et littératures modernes / Department of Modern Languages and Literatures	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Elena VALENZUELA	Département des langues et littératures modernes / Department of Modern Languages and Literatures	Superviseur / Supervisor
Marie-Josée HAMEL	Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme / Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute	Co-superviseur / Co-supervisor

**Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments**

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# Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

# University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est soumise aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Coordonnateur / COORDINATOR

Coordonnateur de l'éthique / Ethics Coordinator

Pour/For Barbara GRAVES Président(e) du/ Chair of the Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

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# Appendix B: Intermediate Spanish I Course Objectives

## OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

### ESP 2991 Intermediate Spanish I (3 units)

Review of grammar; development of oral and written comprehension and expression; reading and vocabulary. Oral and written practice.

## GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To be able to understand and express main ideas, as well as face situations of daily life autonomously in both oral and written Spanish.
- To acquire the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with particular emphasis on the latter, so that at the end of the course, the student should be able to produce brief and coherent texts on the topics listed below.
- To reach B1 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, regarding grammatical, functional, discursive, communicative, lexical and socio-pragmatic content criteria.

See documents:

- Full document: <http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/marco/>
- Short version: [http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/marco/cap\\_03\\_02.htm](http://cvc.cervantes.es/obref/marco/cap_03_02.htm)

## SPECIFIC COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students are expected to have enhanced their linguistic and pragmatic proficiency, as well as deepened their understanding of the sociocultural aspects of the Spanish-speaking world. This entails the development of their four linguistic skills: comprehension in both listening and reading, effective oral interaction, and proficient written expression (level B1 of CEFRL). By the end of this course, Students are expected to demonstrate the ability to produce cohesive written compositions and effectively analyse various types of reading materials. This skill will be a focal point of our curriculum, receiving dedicated attention throughout the course.

To reach these learning outcomes, the course content will focus on more complex vocabulary, expressions, and grammar functions of different Spanish linguistic registers (professional, academic, informal, etc.). Every session will blend the study of these theoretical components, followed by an immediate practice and interaction of students. Specific content will be indicated in Brightspace and will be divided into 6 modules; each of them contains exercises and activities such as reading texts, listening audios, watching videos, and completing grammar exercises with automatic correction.

To attain these learning outcomes, students must actively engage in every session and commit a minimum of 3 hours per week to complete virtual exercises on Brightspace during their personal time. Additionally, they are encouraged to take advantage of the Conversation groups offered by the Department as supplementary resources for enhancing their linguistic skills.

## Appendix C: Analysis and Classification Table

### Actividad 2 – Exploración de blogs

1. Browse the web freely as a group and find 5 blogs of your choice and interest (food, sports, news, travel, etc.), no matter the language they are written in. / Naviguez librement sur le web en groupe et trouvez 5 blogs de votre choix (cuisine, sports, actualités, voyages, etc.), quelle que soit la langue dans laquelle ils sont rédigés.
2. Insert each blog's URL in the table and proceed to analyze its content. / Insérez l'URL de chaque blog dans le tableau et procédez à l'analyse de son contenu.
3. Mark with an (X) the purpose(s) you all think the blogs in question have. You can mark down more than one purpose for each blog. / Marquez d'un (X) le(s) objectif(s) que vous pensez tous que les blogs en question poursuivent. Vous pouvez cocher plusieurs objectifs pour chaque blog.
4. Write in the last column other elements you observe in the blogs (i.e., images, audio, links, etc.). / Écrivez dans la dernière colonne les autres éléments que vous observez dans les blogs (images, audio, liens, etc.).

Blogs chosen by my group	Blog purpose(s)						Other
	To narrate events	To describe information	To express opinion	To use facts to persuade	To explain instructions	To express lyrically	
Blog URL							Additional elements observed

## Appendix D: Pre-Task Questionnaire

### Pre-task questionnaire - My previous knowledge

#### Part 1

*Selecciona la opción que mejor refleja tu opinión. / Select the option that best reflects your opinion. / Sélectionnez l'option qui représente le mieux votre opinion.*

*5 = Always / Toujours*

*4 = Often / Souvent*

*3 = Sometimes / Parfois*

*2 = Rarely / Rarement*

*1 = Never / Jamais*

*0 = Non applicable*

#### Part 2

*Selecciona la opción que mejor refleja tu opinión. / Select the option that best reflects your opinion. / Sélectionnez l'option qui représente le mieux votre opinion.*

*5 = Totally agree / Tout à fait d'accord*

*4 = Agree / D'accord*

*3 = Neutral / Neutre*

*2 = Disagree / Pas d'accord*

*1 = Totally disagree / Pas du tout d'accord*

*0 = Non applicable / Non applicable*

## Part 1: Aprendizaje del español

*In the context of your experience writing in Spanish, think about your habits regarding the following: / Dans le cadre de votre expérience de l'écriture en espagnole, réfléchissez à vos habitudes par rapport aux affirmations suivantes:*

1. I use traditional tools (paper dictionaries, textbooks, notebook, etc.) to revise the texts I write in Spanish. / J'utilise des outils traditionnels (dictionnaires en papier, manuels scolaires, cahier de notes, etc.) pour réviser les textes que j'écris en espagnol.
2. I use digital tools to revise texts I write in Spanish. / J'utilise des outils numériques pour réviser les textes que j'écris en espagnol.
3. Select the digital tools (if any) that you normally use to revise your Spanish texts. Select all that apply. / Sélectionnez tous les outils numériques (s'il y en a) que vous utilisez habituellement pour réviser vos textes en espagnol. Sélectionnez toutes les réponses qui s'appliquent.
  - Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or another text corrector / ou un autre correcteur de texte.
  - WordReference, RAE, SpanishDict, or another online dictionary / ou un autre dictionnaire électronique
  - ChatGPT
  - Google Bard
  - DeepL
  - Google Translate
  - LanguageTool
  - Linguee sentence checker/ vérificateur de phrases
  - Reverso
  - Other / Autre
  - None / Aucun
4. If you answered "Other", please specify. / Si vous avez répondu "Autre", veuillez préciser. (Open ended)
5. I trust the the responses, feedback or explanations I receive from the digital tools. / J'ai confiance dans les réponses, les commentaires ou les explications que je reçois des outils numériques.

## **Part 2: Experiencia con blogs**

*Now, think about your knowledge of blogs. / Réfléchissez maintenant à votre connaissance des blogs.*

1. I know what a blog is. / Je sais ce qu'est un blog.
2. I know some blogging platforms. / Je connais quelques plateformes de blogs.
3. I know the characteristics/features of a blog. / Je connais les caractéristiques d'un blog.
4. I read blogs in my first language (mother tongue). / Je lis des blogs dans ma première langue (langue maternelle).
5. I read blogs in Spanish. / Je lis des blogs en espagnol.
6. I write blogs in my first language (mother tongue). / J'écris des blogs dans ma première langue (langue maternelle).
7. I feel prepared to write a blog in Spanish. / Je me sens prêt à écrire un blog en espagnol.

# Appendix E: The Teacher's Travel Blog

De viaje con la profe Andrea :)

## Mi blog de viajes 2023

noviembre 30, 2023

## De viaje por Colombia

Por: Andrea Olivares-Beltrán

### Villa de Leyva

Villa de Leyva es un pequeño pueblo ubicado en el departamento de Boyacá, en Colombia. Este pueblo tiene casi 17.000 habitantes y fue fundado en 1572. Villa de Leyva queda a 40 kilómetros de Tunja, la capital del departamento.



Imagen tomada de [https://grancolombiatours.com/es/st\\_tourtour-de-un-dia-a-villa-de-leyva/](https://grancolombiatours.com/es/st_tourtour-de-un-dia-a-villa-de-leyva/)

#### Mi viaje a Villa de Leyva

Visité Villa de Leyva con mi familia en diciembre del 2019. Viajamos en carro durante más de 3 horas para llegar a nuestro destino. Yo nunca duermo en el carro porque me gusta mirar el paisaje: las montañas, los ríos, la gente, etc.



*El hospedaje donde dormimos con mi familia. Foto tomada por mí.*

Estuvimos 3 días en Villa de Leyva. Mi familia y yo comimos platos típicos de la región, tomamos muchas fotos y caminamos por la plaza central. Personalmente, recomiendo probar el café y hacer actividades al aire libre.

Mi lugar favorito fue la zona natural de Los Pozos Azules. En la época precolombina, muchas comunidades indígenas como Los Cheva, Los Ura y los Ogamora vivían en esta zona.

Fuimos allí con mis tíos, mi prima, mis padres, mi hermano y mi perrita. Estuvimos allí durante 4 horas aproximadamente. La entrada es gratuita y el lugar tiene parqueadero privado.



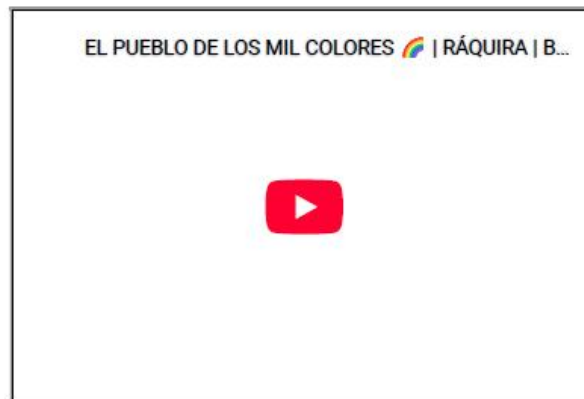
Foto tomada por mí en Los Pozos Azules. Estoy con Kira, mi perrita.

Después visitamos Ráquira, que está aproximadamente a 60 kilómetros de Tunja.

## Ráquira

Ráquira es otro pueblo que visitamos con mi familia. Es un pueblito muy pintoresco y es considerado patrimonio nacional.

Decidí compartir este video porque se pueden observar lugares muy bonitos e interesantes.



Puedes obtener más información sobre Boyacá y sus destinos turísticos [aquí](#).

También puedes explorar otros lugares turísticos de Colombia en este [sitio web](#).

### Referencias

Colombia travel: <https://colombia.travel/es>

Gran Colombia Tours: <https://grancolombiatours.com/es/>

Sistema de Información Turística de Boyacá: <https://situr.boyaca.gov.co/>



 Escribir comentario

 Con tecnología de Blogger

# Appendix F: Post-Task Questionnaire

## Post-task questionnaire - Mi blog de viajes en español

Selecciona la opción que mejor refleja tu opinión. / Select the option that best reflects your opinion. / Sélectionnez l'option qui représente le mieux votre opinion.

5 = *Always / Toujours*

4 = *Often / Souvent*

3 = *Sometimes / Parfois*

2 = *Rarely / Rarement*

1 = *Never / Jamais*

0 = *Non applicable*

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### Part 1: The task

Reflect upon the task with blogs we conducted in class and select the option(s) that best reflect(s) your opinion. / Réfléchissez à la tâche avec les blogs que nous avons menée en classe et sélectionnez la ou les option(s) qui reflète(nt) le mieux votre opinion.

1. I felt prepared to complete the blog task. / Je me suis senti prêt à accomplir la tâche du blog.
2. I am more familiar with the blog genre (characteristics/features) now. / Je connais mieux le genre (les caractéristiques) du blog maintenant.
3. I learned something useful with this task. / J'ai appris quelque chose d'utile grâce à cette tâche.
4. I am more interested in reading blogs now than before taking this class. / Je suis plus intéressé par la lecture des blogs maintenant qu'avant de suivre ce cours.
5. I am more interested in writing blogs now than before taking this class. / Je suis plus intéressé par la rédaction de blogs maintenant qu'avant de suivre ce cours.

## Part 2: El proceso de escritura

*Now, think about the blog writing process. / Maintenant, réfléchissez au processus de rédaction d'un blog.*

1. Select the digital tools you used when writing your travel blog (if you used any). / Sélectionnez les outils numériques que vous avez utilisés pour rédiger votre blog de voyage (si vous en avez utilisé).
  - Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or another text corrector / ou un autre correcteur de texte.
  - WordReference, RAE, SpanishDict, or another online dictionary / ou un autre dictionnaire électronique
  - ChatGPT
  - DeepL
  - Google Translate
  - LanguageTool
  - Linguee sentence checker/ vérificateur de phrases
  - Reverso
  - Other / Autre
  - I did not use digital tools for completing this task / Je n'ai pas utilisé d'outils numériques pour accomplir cette tâche
2. If you answered "Other", please specify. / Si vous avez répondu "Autre", veuillez préciser. (*Open ended*)
3. When in the writing process did you use digital tools? Select all that apply. / À quel moment du processus d'écriture avez-vous utilisé des outils numériques ? Sélectionnez toutes les réponses qui s'appliquent.
  - Before start writing / Avant de commencer à écrire
  - While writing my blog / Pendant que j'écris mon blog
  - After writing my blog / Après avoir écrit mon blog
  - I did not use digital tools for completing this task / Je n'ai pas utilisé d'outils numériques pour accomplir cette tâche

4. For what purpose did you use digital tools? Select all that apply. / Dans quel but avez-vous utilisé des outils numériques ? Sélectionnez toutes les réponses qui s'appliquent.
- For revising word spelling. / Pour réviser l'orthographe des mots.
  - For revising verb conjugations. / Pour réviser la conjugaison verbale.
  - For revising text structure. / Pour réviser la structure du texte.
  - For looking up words. / Pour rechercher des mots.
  - For verifying the meaning of Spanish words. / Pour vérifier le sens des mots en espagnol.
  - For translating text (sentences, paragraphs, etc.). / Pour la traduction du texte (phrases, paragraphes, etc.).
  - For obtaining content ideas. / Pour la recherche d'idées de contenu.
  - For producing text (sentences, paragraphs, etc.). / Pour produire du texte (phrases, paragraphes, etc.).
  - Other. / Autre.
  - I did not use digital tools for completing this task / Je n'ai pas utilisé d'outils numériques pour accomplir cette tâche
5. If you answered "Other", please specify. / Si vous avez répondu "Autre", veuillez préciser. (*Open ended*)
6. I understood the responses, feedback or explanations I received from the digital tools. / J'ai compris les réponses, les commentaires ou les explications que j'ai reçus des outils numériques.
7. I feel the digital tools I used help to improve my text. / Je pense que les outils numériques que j'ai utilisés m'ont aidé à améliorer mon texte.
8. I feel the use of digital tools helped me learn Spanish. / Je pense que l'utilisation d'outils numériques peut m'ont aidé à apprendre l'espagnol.

### **Part 3**

*Please share something you learned with this task. / Veuillez partager ce que vous avez appris dans le cadre de cette tâche. (Open ended)*

## Appendix G: Email Invitation to Participate in Study

### Invitation to participate

The following email was sent to all students who completed the intermediate level of Spanish I, section B (ESP2991[B]) during the Fall 2023 at the University of Ottawa. This invitation was sent in January 2024 using Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) to protect privacy and no personal or identifiable information was revealed in any way.

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**Subject:** *Invitation to participate on a research study*

*(French version follows)*

*Dear student,*

*This is an invitation to voluntarily participate in a research study conducted by PhD candidate [REDACTED] under the supervision of [REDACTED]*

*The purpose of the study is to analyze Spanish language students' perceptions and performance in various writing task conditions, and to use specific linguistic and paralinguistic indicators in their written products to provide recommendations for task design and instruction.*

*Your participation will consist of donating your previous ESP2991[B] – Fall 2023 course written work to the project. If you decide to participate, the main researcher will download your written assignments from Brightspace and store them anonymously on a password-protected computer. Your decision to contribute or not to this study will have no effect on your course grade since final grades have already been officially submitted, and the semester is over. Your choice to participate will not have any impact on the relationship with the course instructor either.*

*Please read the attached consent to find more information about the study, confidentiality, privacy, conservation of data and risks of participation.*

*Should you decide to voluntarily participate in this study by donating your work, please reply to this email stating "Yes, I want to participate". If you do not wish to participate, please ignore this communication.*

*We appreciate your time,*

[REDACTED]  
*PhD. Candidate,  
Dep. of Modern Languages and Literatures,  
Faculty of Arts,*  
[REDACTED]

*Objet : Invitation à participer à une étude de recherche*

*Cher étudiant,*

*Ceci est une invitation à participer volontairement à une étude de recherche menée par le doctorant [redacted] sous la supervision de [redacted]*

*L'objectif de cette étude est d'analyser les perceptions et les performances des étudiants en langue espagnole dans diverses conditions d'écriture, et d'utiliser des indicateurs linguistiques et paralinguistiques spécifiques dans leurs produits écrits afin de fournir des recommandations pour la conception des tâches et l'enseignement.*

*Votre participation consistera à faire don au projet de vos travaux écrits du cours précédent ESP2991[B]-Automne 2023. Si vous décidez de participer, le chercheur principal téléchargera vos travaux écrits de Brightspace et les stockera de manière anonyme sur un ordinateur protégé par un mot de passe. Votre décision de contribuer ou non à cette étude n'aura aucun effet sur votre note de cours puisque les notes finales ont déjà été officiellement soumises et que le semestre est terminé. Votre choix de participer n'aura pas non plus d'impact sur la relation avec l'instructeur du cours.*

*Veillez lire le consentement ci-joint pour obtenir plus d'informations sur l'étude, la confidentialité, le respect de la vie privée, la conservation des données et les risques de la participation.*

*Si vous décidez de participer volontairement à cette étude en faisant don de votre travail, veuillez répondre à ce courriel en indiquant « Oui, je veux participer ». Si vous ne souhaitez pas participer, veuillez ignorer cette communication.*

*Nous vous remercions de votre temps,*

[redacted]  
*Candidate au doctorat,  
Dép. des Langues et Littératures Modernes  
Faculté des Arts,*  
[redacted]

# Appendix H: Informed Consent Form

## Informed consent

**Title of the study:** Spanish learner performance in new genres of writing: An analysis of texts produced in various task-based (online) contexts

[REDACTED]  
PhD. Candidate,  
Dep. of Modern Languages and Literatures,  
Faculty of Arts,  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Supervisor,  
Dep. of Modern Languages and Literatures,  
Faculty of Arts,  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Co-supervisor,  
Official Languages and Bilingualism  
Institute,  
Faculty of Arts,  
[REDACTED]

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by [REDACTED] as part of her Doctoral Thesis. This study is supervised by [REDACTED]

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is 1) to analyze Spanish language students' perceptions and performance on various writing task conditions, and 2) to use specific (para)linguistic indicators in their written products to provide recommendations for task design and for second language instruction.

**Participation:** My participation will consist of donating my previous ESP2991 course work, which were completed during the intermediate Spanish course I took in the Fall 2023. Should I consent to participate, the main researcher will download my activities and assignments from Brightspace and store them anonymously on a password-protected computer.

My decision to contribute to this study will have no effect on my grade since final grades for the course have already been officially submitted.

**Risks:** Since my participation in this study entails that I voluntarily donate writing assignments and course work I completed during my ESP2991 Fall 2023 course, the main researcher does not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. I have the option to refuse to participate, and if I decide to participate, I am assured my information will be secured, my identity will not be compromised in any way, and my work will be anonymized.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will contribute to a better understanding of the use of language tools when completing writing tasks, and to examine the diverse linguistic and paralinguistic features expected in digital writing genres. Additionally, results can be used to make recommendations for teachers to provide optimal conditions for Spanish language learning.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** I have received assurance from the main researcher that the

information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the data will be used only for analyzing linguistic features in Spanish, and that my identity will be protected with complete anonymity.

**Conservation of Data:** The data collected (course work) will be kept in a secure manner in a password-protected folder in a password-protected computer only accessible to the principal investigator. There will be a digital copy of data stored on a portable hard drive that will be safeguarded at the main researcher's home in a locked desk. There will not be hard (paper) copies of data or research documents.

All data will be permanently deleted 5-years after the results of the study have been published.

**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate in this study and if I choose not to do so, I will not suffer any negative consequences now or in the future. Should I decide to participate, I am informed I will not be able to withdraw because data gathered will have been anonymized, and the researcher will be unable to retrace my individual dataset.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the main researcher or their supervisors. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email ([ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)) or telephone (613-562-5387).

It is recommended that I save a copy of this consent form for my records.

**Acceptance:** By replying "*Yes, I want to participate*" to the invitation email, I am consenting to participate in this research study.

## Consentement éclairé

**Titre de l'étude :** Spanish learner performance in new genres of writing: An analysis of texts produced in various task-based (online) contexts

[REDACTED]  
Candidate au doctorat,  
Dép. des Langues et Littératures Modernes  
Faculté des Arts,  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Superviseur,  
Dép. des Langues et Littératures Modernes,  
Faculté des Arts,  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Co-superviseur,  
Institut des Lang. Officielles et du  
Bilinguisme,  
Faculté des Arts,  
[REDACTED]

**Invitation à participer :** Je suis invité(e) à participer à l'étude de recherche susmentionnée menée par [REDACTED] dans le cadre de sa thèse de doctorat. Cette étude est supervisée par [REDACTED]

**Objectif de l'étude :** L'objectif de cette étude est 1) d'analyser les perceptions et les performances des étudiants en langue espagnole dans diverses conditions d'écriture, et 2) d'utiliser des indicateurs (para)linguistiques spécifiques dans leurs produits écrits pour fournir des recommandations pour la conception des tâches et pour l'enseignement d'une seconde langue.

**Participation :** Ma participation consistera à faire don de mes précédents travaux du cours ESP2991, qui ont été réalisés pendant le cours d'espagnol intermédiaire que j'ai suivi à l'automne 2023. Si je consens à participer, le chercheur principal téléchargera mes activités et mes devoirs de Brightspace et les stockera de manière anonyme sur un ordinateur protégé par un mot de passe.

Ma décision de contribuer à cette étude n'aura aucun effet sur ma note puisque les notes finales du cours ont déjà été officiellement soumises.

**Risques :** Étant donné que ma participation à cette étude implique que je donne volontairement des travaux de cours que j'ai réalisés dans le cadre de mon cours ESP2991 d'Automne 2023. Le chercheur principal ne prévoit pas de risques autres que ceux qui surviendraient dans la vie de tous les jours. J'ai la possibilité de refuser de participer, et si je décide de participer, je suis assuré que mes informations seront sécurisées, que mon identité ne sera pas compromise de quelque manière que ce soit, et que mon travail sera rendu anonyme.

**Avantages :** Ma participation à cette étude contribuera à une meilleure compréhension de l'utilisation des outils linguistiques lors de la réalisation de tâches d'écriture et à examiner les diverses caractéristiques linguistiques et paralinguistiques attendues dans les genres numériques. En outre, les résultats peuvent être utilisés pour formuler des recommandations pour des enseignants afin de créer des conditions optimales pour l'apprentissage de l'espagnol.

**Confidentialité et vie privée :** J'ai reçu l'assurance du chercheur principal que les informations

que je partage resteront strictement confidentielles. Je comprends que les données ne seront utilisées que pour l'analyse des caractéristiques linguistiques de l'espagnol, et que mon identité sera protégée par un anonymat complet.

**Conservation des données :** Les données recueillies (devoirs et travaux écrits) seront conservées de manière sécurisée dans un dossier protégé par un mot de passe dans un ordinateur protégé par un mot de passe uniquement accessible au chercheur principal. Il y aura une copie numérique des données stockées sur un disque dur portable qui sera sauvegardé au domicile du chercheur principal dans un bureau fermé à clé. Il n'y aura pas de copies papier des données ou des documents de recherche.

Toutes les données seront définitivement supprimées 5 ans après la publication des résultats de l'étude.

**Participation volontaire :** Je n'ai aucune obligation de participer à cette étude et si je choisis de ne pas le faire, je ne subirai aucune conséquence négative, ni maintenant ni à l'avenir. Si je décide de participer, je suis informé(e) que je ne pourrai pas me retirer car les données recueillies auront été rendues anonymes, et le chercheur ne pourra pas retracer mon ensemble de données individuelles.

Si j'ai des questions concernant l'étude, je peux contacter le chercheur principal ou ses superviseurs. Si j'ai des questions concernant la conduite éthique de cette étude, je peux contacter le Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche par courriel ([ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca)) ou par téléphone (613-562-5387).

Il m'est recommandé de conserver une copie de ce formulaire de consentement pour mes dossiers.

**Acceptation :** En déclarant « *Oui, je veux participer* » en réponse au courriel d'invitation, je consens à participer à cette étude de recherche.