Investigación y enseñanza de lenguas: andanzas y reflexiones

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Analysing Online Tutors' Feedback: Types and Characteristics

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Abstract

This study analyses the feedback that two online tutors provided to their students in the online course entitled "Evaluative Processes in Language Teaching" within the online diploma course "Actualización en Lingüística Aplicada para Profesores de Lenguas" (alad) that the Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras (cele) at unam offers. Online feedback has been acknowledged in the literature and considered as an essential element in any online course. However, it has hardly been researched. Hence, this study contributes to a better understanding of the process of online feedback. The outcomes of the study suggest that online tutors not only organize the feedback they provide but they also use certain language functions for specific purposes.

Key words: online tutors, online feedback, genre analysis, socio-cultural discourse analysis

Introduction

The study here presented is the second of a series of three that integrate a doctoral thesis in the area of applied linguistics (Contijoch, 2009). The research work deals with the field of online learning with particular reference to the feedback that the online tutors provide to their learners. The study was carried out at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México at the Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras (cele). This second study involves the qualitative analysis of the feedback that two online tutors provided to their learners during an 11 week online course.

Context of the study

In 2000, an online Diploma course was conceived at cele. The diploma is entitled "Actualización en Lingüística Aplicada para Profesores de Lenguas" (alad, 2010). Its main objective is to offer language teachers an In Service Training (inset) option in the area of applied linguistics. It is integrated by three main components: *a)* the online component, *b)* the language teaching development component, and *c)* the action research component. Courses such as "How do I learn applied linguistics online?" "Evaluative processes in language teaching", "Reading comprehension methodology", "Language acquisition principles" "Task-based learning", "Language learning autonomy", "Digital tools", "Introduction to action research", are offered to language teachers who pursue professional development. Most of the courses are offered in Spanish. Therefore, teachers from different languages have the opportunity to update themselves.

Background and research questions

A previous exploratory study (Contijoch, 2009) revealed that online feedback is a complex process where a series of psychological and pedagogical factors take place. The study showed that motivation and affective factors are of utmost importance in the delivery of feedback. The study also showed that online tutors believe that there is a strong relationship between feedback and assessment, and that online tutors' feedback (oltf) is closely related to pedagogical aspects such as the tutor's roles, his/her methodology, and the way he/she assesses the learner. The study also

showed that some OLTS have a sociocultural perspective about learning, others a more traditional view, and some others, a constructivist one.

These outcomes opened the possibility to go into further examination about the ways in which online tutors provide feedback to their learners and verify if the beliefs exposed in the first study came into action when tutoring a course. For this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

- What are the characteristics of tutors' feedback on the course "Evaluative processes in language teaching?"
- What kinds of feedback do tutors provide in this course?
- What organizational patterns, if any are present in the OLTF provided?
- Are sociocultural views of learning present in the feedback provided?

It was decided to carry out an analysis of OLTS' feedback to the online learners (OLLS) from a sociocultural discourse analysis perspective in combination with genre analysis using a qualitative methodology. The purpose of this second study was to focus on the written messages produced by the OLT during the online course "Evaluative processes in language teaching" where OLTF was delivered. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify the characteristics and the types of feedback that online tutors provide in an online course of the nature of ALAD.

Course characteristics

It is a common practice in ALAD to have two tutors teaching one course so as to avoid large groups. In this case, each of the tutors —one male (Víctor) and one female (Pat)— was in charge of eight participants. The selection of the course to be chosen was decided upon its availability. This is to say, that at the time that this study took place, the course "Evaluative processes in language teaching" was about to commence, and the tutors had already been appointed by the course coordinator. Therefore, the researcher had no intervention in the selection of the module or of the tutors. In this module, participants need to identify an evaluation problem within their professional context and find ways to solve it as the course progresses. Participants work from the beginning of the course with their own project sharing their concerns and reflections with the rest of their colleagues. The work involves doing some bibliographic research which leads them to

integrate a final proposal which they can pilot in their particular setting and determine its usefulness and validity in solving their "evaluation" problem.

The course consists of four units; the first two focus on evaluation within the foreign language teaching field and the differences between process and product oriented evaluations, helping participants to identify a problem, to be aware of their teaching context, and to be able to set evaluation objectives. The last two units guide the online learner step by step in organizing the proposal. As part of the online diploma they must use the course site and its correspondent tools which include, e-mail, the discussion room, the gallery, and the OLLs' personal electronic note-pad and personal electronic notebook. The pedagogical tasks include the reading of different articles (posted on the site with links to specialized references) and case studies, making summaries, tables and grids, designing evaluation activities, describing their institutional and teaching context, and discussing their ideas, opinions and proposals with the other OLLs. The Diploma web site is at http://alad.cele.unam.mx and the module's unit page looks like figure 1.

Figure 1
Initial web page of the course "Evaluative processes in language teaching"

In figure 1 the main web page of the course is displayed. At the top of the page, there are six different options the learner can access: tutors, units, personal electronic file, tools, discussion room, personal electronic notebook and log out. At the centre of the page the name of the module is displayed (*Evaluation processes in language teaching*), and on the left side, access to the different units is shown. In the following section the way feedback is expected to be delivered by tutors in this course is explained.

olts' Feedback in the module "Evaluation processes in language teaching"

olts provide feedback in the written form asynchronously, although a chat or video session is also proposed. olls receive feedback from the beginning of the course as tasks develop. olts provide basically two kinds of feedback: individual and group feedback. When tasks require learners to prepare a specific table, produce a summary or design an activity for their personal context individual feedback is provided through their electronic notebooks or their personal e-mail, and only the learner can see this feedback. When tasks involve providing personal opinions or comments about a specific subject, group feedback is provided and it can be posted in the discussion forum or through the group e-mail list. Peer feedback is also promoted to enhance discussion and critical thinking. There are times when olls act as moderators leading and monitoring the discussions. This study will deal only with the olts' group feedback leaving individual feedback for a future publication.

Group feedback

The olts' group feedback was delivered in a group-based way by each tutor via the discussion room and via e-mail. Table 1 shows a summary of the feedback messages delivered during the course.

Table 1

Feedback messages delivered in "Evaluative processes in language teaching"

OLTS	PAT	VÍCTOR	TOTAL
Group feedback messages	28	18	46
Individual feedback messages	200	177	377
Total # of feedback messages	226	197	423

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ALAD'S SOCIAL-CONSTRUCTIVIST TEACHING VIEWS AND OLTF

According to their authors, ALAD's teaching philosophies are based on a social-constructivist perspective. Within constructivists views, the concept of scaffolding (which has been closely related to Vygotsky's concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development*) (Vygotsky, 1978) plays an important role, particularly in an online environment, since the OLT acts as a learning support for the participant and has to interact with him/her in order to help him/her reach the course objectives. Scaffolding is a term that was defined by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) as the control that a knowledgeable or better skilled person exercises upon certain issues that are beyond the learner's capability in order to help him/her understand them and be able to achieve his/her learning goals. This expert not only encourages the learner to complete the activity/task but provides sufficient support so that he/she is able to reflect and become more critical. In an interesting review of the construct of scaffolding, Puntambekar and Hübscher (2005) mention that the most important characteristics of scaffolding such as ongoing diagnosis (learner's level of understanding), calibrated support (graded level of assistance), and fading (the moment that the learner takes control of his/her learning) have been neglected, and for this reason, there has been a lack of emphasis on the whole process of scaffolding, particularly in the new online classroom environments.

In a quite similar but not equal view of Vygotsky's ZPD, Mercer (2000) suggests that for a teacher to teach and for a learner to learn, both of them must use "talk and joint activity to create a shared communicative space, an "intermental development zone" (IZD) on their contextual foundations

of their common knowledge and aims" (Mercer, 2000: 141). What Mercer means by the concept of the IZD is that both teacher and learner participate in a continuous learning event in which joint activity takes place and where both are equally responsible for the outcomes. Thus, one would expect that within a sociocultural perspective the OLF that the tutor provides to the OLL should include elements of guided assistance that would help the OLL to achieve significant progress resulting in a product of a joint effort.

Sociocultural discourse analysis

One of the salient features of the sociocultural theory is that it contributes to understand how knowledge is constructed and co-constructed in the classroom by means of the various interactions that take place. In this study, a sociocultural perspective to discourse analysis was chosen as a method to understand how the OLT provides feedback. According to Paltridge (2006), one of the perspectives that discourse can take is discourse viewed as "social construction of reality", as it sees texts as "communicative units which are embedded in social and cultural practices" (Paltridge, 2006: 9). Paltridge acknowledges that discourse is shaped by the medium where it takes place, shaping also the potential for that medium.

Genre analysis

Genre analysis has been an area of interest and research for a long time. The outcomes of the vast research on genre have enriched different areas of knowledge from the business world to the academic one. According to Bhatia (2002), one of the objectives of genre analysis is to understand and to represent the reality of the world of texts. In this sense genres can be also seen as ways of interaction between speakers and/or readers and writers and the social relations that flow among them. Fairclough (2003) recognizes that nowadays social practices have become more complex due to the advent of new technologies, particularly the information technologies such as the Internet. In the case of this study, the community of practice under study is integrated by a group of OLTS and OLLS who meet in an online course. One of the consequences of this social situation is that participants interact with each other bringing with them formats from other sources (printed material, electronic and digital material, etc.), and producing other genres.

Methodology

For Mercer (2004) sociocultural discourse analysis is different from linguistic discourse analysis as the focus of sociocultural discourse analysis is "the content, function and the way in which shared understandings are developed in social context, over time" (Mercer, 2004: 203). The focus of linguistic discourse analysis is the formal aspects of the language such as grammar and lexical issues. Sociocultural theory applied to the educational field contributes to the understanding of how the learning process develops in the classroom. In the case of this study the analysis of the way the OLT delivers feedback may provide insights about how this process develops at different moments in an online course. In this article the analysis focuses on group feedback. The data collected for this study are based on the postings placed by OLTs and OLLs during the "Evaluation processes in language teaching" course. The postings selected, analysed and interpreted are those related to the group feedback delivered by the two OLTs who taught this course.

In this study, it was decided to analyse the online messages using a combination of genre analysis and the methodological proposal by Mercer, which is within the sociocultural perspective. As Mercer (2004) points out, sociocultural methodology is used to refer to the analysis of talk in a social context. The usual way to exemplify the analysis is to select extracts of transcribed talk. In this case, a corpus of texts from the feedback that the tutors sent to different participants in the course "Evaluative processes in language teaching" constitutes the data for the study. In this case, I focused on the identification of the generic structure of the feedback messages and on the language functions that appeared at the different moves or stages.

Data

Extracts from tutors' feedback from the discussion room and participants' personal electronic files were collected and analysed. The course discussion room shows the topic, the type of activity and the number of postings and threads of the different discussions along the four units. The following figure shows how the discussion room appears on the screen.

Figure 2
"Evaluation processes in language teaching" module: Discussion room page

Analysis of data

OLTS sent a total of 46 group feedback messages. The female tutor, Pat, sent 28 messages, and the male tutor, Víctor, sent 18 messages. This represents 10.8% of the total of feedback messages which means that OLTS provided individual feedback most of the time (89.2%). The two OLTS provided group feedback for different purposes, informing, motivating, guiding, saving time, directing, providing input, anticipating possible problems, and providing positive feedback. Group feedback involved a generic structure that consisted of three major moves: opening, feedback and closing. From this pattern, sub-structures (greeting, introduction to feedback, pre-closing) were identified. Also a functional pattern which includes the realization of the generic structure was identified. This functional pattern is essential since it reflects the realization of the language functions produced by the olt when providing feedback in specific contexts and situations.

Samples of postings were taken at different points of the course (Units 1, 2, 3 and 4). It should be noted that group feedback was not always delivered by the OLTS at the same time after each one of the activities. Each OLT decided when and how to send feedback at different moments in the course. Therefore, the messages represent examples where OLTS sent group feed-

back to their groups at these specific points and for these specific activities. Figure 3 shows the activities that were analysed, their purpose, the type of task involved, the time frame in the module when the task took place and the number of postings and threads that the activity produced.

Figure 3
Activities analysed in the course "Evaluation processes in language teaching"

ACTIVITY	Example 1 Unit 1. Activity 1.1. "Evaluation scenarios"
PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY	To reflect upon their personal experience in relation to the way they evaluate their students.
TYPE OF TASK	OLLS were presented with four scenarios that served as models for them to participate in the discussion room.
TIME FRAME IN THE MODULE	Week 1
NUMBER OF POSTINGS AND THREADS	103 postings, 16 threads

ACTIVITY	Example 2 Unit 1 Activity 1.3. "How do you evaluate your students' oral production?"
PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY	To describe their own criteria for evaluating their students' language performance. To explain the characteristics of formal and informal evaluation.
TYPE OF TASK	OLLS were asked to watch excerpts of a DVD that showed teachers describing their personal criteria for evaluating their students. Then, they participated in the discussion room.
TIME FRAME IN THE MODULE	Week 2
NUMBER OF POSTINGS AND THREADS	71 postings, 16 threads

Activity	Example 3 Unit 2. Activity 2.3. "Describing your evaluation problem"
Purpose of the activity	To describe an evaluation problem taking into consideration the individual teaching context of the participant and whether he/she considers evaluation by product or by process.
Type of task	OLLs were presented with four descriptions of different evaluation problems. Then, they did the task and presented it in the discussion room.
Time frame in the module	Week 4
Number of postings and threads	83 postings, 18 threads

Activity	Example 4 Unit 3. Activities 3.1. and 3.2. "Defining your educational and evaluation contexts"
Purpose of the activity	To write a reflection about the relationship between the evaluation problem described in activity 2.3. and the program. To write a description of their teaching context and their evaluation context.
Type of task	OLLs were given some guidelines in relation to the content of a program and how it relates to the institutional context. Then, they participated in the discussion room.
Time frame in the module	Week 7
Number of postings and threads	100 postings, 20 threads

| Activity	Example 5 Unit 4. Activity 4.1. "What type of activities can you propose in order to reach your objectives?"
Purpose of the activity	To describe the participants' evaluation activities.
Type of task	OLLs were asked to check two examples of final proposals prepared by other teachers in order to help them with their own one.
Time frame in the module	Week 10
Number of postings and threads	No postings nor threads

OUTCOMES OF THE STUDY

THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURES OF GROUP FEEDBACK

The analysis suggests that genre analysis in combination with the socio-cultural approach to discourse analysis resulted an adequate methodology to understand the development of feedback messages in the virtual classroom since specific generic structures and sequences were identified. Also, as Mercer (2004) points out focusing on the language functions helps the researcher to look at the cognitive activities that are developed through dialogue. The generic and functional structures show that OLTS do organize their messages according to a coherent main pattern (opening, body of feedback, and closing). In order to summarize the organizational and functional structures identified in group feedback messages, the following figure shows its main features.

As it can be seen in figure 4, the generic structure of group feedback messages is integrated by five stages. These include: opening, introduction to feedback, body of feedback, pre-closing, and closing. All openings include a greeting to the whole group. All of them address OLLS in an informal way. Two greetings contained the @ symbol (Hi @ll). This was interpreted in the analysis as the "virtual greeting" which could be understood as an acknowledgement on the part of the OLT that he and the OLLS are participating in a virtual environment. In any case, one would think that the greeting is considered part of the basic rules of netiquette. However, Crystal (2001) mentions that in asynchronous groups where the aim is to get information to all its members it is not common to have greetings apart from the standard ones like: "Hi all", Hello everyone", "Dear all", as was the case of the greetings in the messages presented. This idea is also confirmed by Murray (2000), who suggests that openings and closings are quite optional. However, in this case greetings were always present in the opening stage. The introductions to feedback can be considered direct, that is, their content is very specific, brief, and fulfill the OLTS' objective of informing. OLTS use this stage to express their thanks to OLLS for various reasons such as: thanking for offering contributions, posing questions or for moderating a discussion. OLTS also employ this stage to state the purpose of feedback or to wish the group well. Basically, all introductions to feedback are short, written in a friendly tone, and act as a preamble for the body of feedback. They act as a positive start

especially those that contain an encouraging statement: "I think that in general, you did it very well and you have understood..." (Pat) or "I read with interest your descriptions in the discussion room. I even made copies so as to follow your projects in more detail" (Víctor), as they set a good atmosphere in the virtual classroom. There is no literature related to this stage in feedback messages but a brief introduction to feedback such as was found in this analysis may be due to the non-linear nature of the interaction. This is to say, communication is not synchronous and therefore an OLL may not read the message immediately so, the introduction to the feedback may have the intention to provide a sense of closeness between the sender and the receiver and prepare the learner for the positive or negative information that follows (particularly if it is of a negative nature). However, at times, OLTS did not include any introductory statement and started the message directly in the body of it, where the OLTS address the subject matter in a very direct way. The lack of the introductory stage in these messages does not make a drastic gap between the greeting and the subsequent information. This means that the introduction to feedback is not an obligatory stage (see figure 4).

Figure 4
Organizational and functional structure of OLTS' group feedback
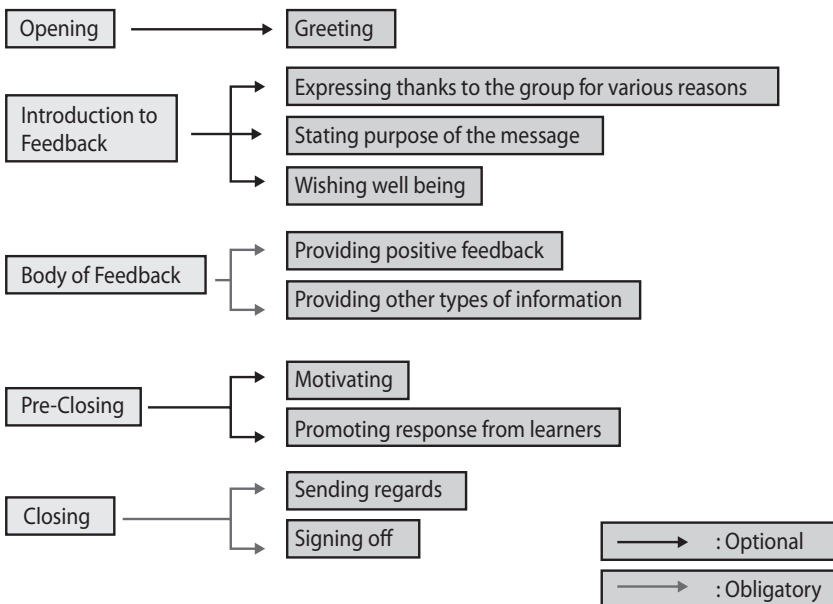
The OLTS use language functions basically to do two things: providing positive feedback, and providing other types of information to the learners. It can be said that positive feedback was axiomatic and it was delivered by making positive comments about OLLS' work as these examples show: "I think you did it very well and you have understood" (Pat) or "Congratulations to all of you, the feedback that you provided to your peers is very good, some of you made very pertinent questions that caused you to re-define what you had previously mentioned..." (Víctor).

In this respect the way OLTS delivered positive feedback has to do with the behaviourist perspective of feedback which is concerned with the reinforcement of correct answers (Kulhavy & Stock, 1989; Mory, 1992). This aspect is also related to the motivational side of feedback (Dörnyei, 2001). The three language functions mostly used by OLTS were: suggesting/recommending, informing, and instructing. They have a direct relationship with the different purposes of the feedback messages. OLTS use the suggesting function to indicate to OLLS what to do. For example: "I'd recommend that if some of you feel that there's something that it's not clear in relation to the way you evaluate i.e. the way you assign a grade, do read the others in the group so as to clarify..." (Pat).

In a similar tone, in the following example she says: "I think that if you have a little bit of time to see the final proposals of past courses, you'll see how other teachers defined their problems..." (Pat).

Here, the OLT is not directly instructing but promoting the idea of learning from others. This is also a way of providing OLLS with extra resources that may help them to build their project. OLTS provided information in the body of feedback by telling OLLS about the development of their activities. For example, Pat informs the group that she received their activities: "This message is to let you know that I have received all your activities...", and Víctor informs the group what actions need to be consider next: "From this moment onwards, you'll have to start thinking, organizing and formulating your final project".

OLTS inform learners when they gave specific and direct commands to the group as in the case of Víctor when he wants OLLS to identify their evaluation problem: "Identify an evaluation problem that you really like, feel very inclined to solve or you haven't been able to solve before", or when Pat wants the group to check an activity: "Have a look at activity 4.2. It's for Friday".

Overall, it can be said that the use of these three functions may be due to the efforts of the OLTS to guide, provide information, and re-direct OLLS

towards the achievement of the activity at hand. This means that OLTs are not only aware of the support OLLs need but also that the course objectives are present and need to be reached. In terms of politeness, the way the OLTs made requests and instruct the OLLs do not threaten the OLLs negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Other functions like clarifying, giving advice, questioning, anticipating, and exemplifying are used in less extent but are also present in the body of feedback.

In the analysis no negative feedback is explicitly stated by the OLTs but there are specific judgements where Pat, for example, states that the work is not completely accurate. For example, comments such as: "You've touched most of the issues related to formal and informal evaluation with certain accuracy", or: "In general, I see that you have more or less located the problems you face in relation to teaching and evaluating", show that Pat is not completely satisfied with the outcomes shown by OLLs but the comments are generalised as the OLT does not point out concrete issues.

In study 1 when OLTs were asked about the areas they tend to focus on when providing feedback, they mentioned that they check if the task is complete (n = 3), if the learner relates theory and practice (n = 4), if the learner understands the content of the readings (n = 3), if the learner is able to make himself/herself understood (n = 2). The content of the feedback messages analysed reveals that yes OLTs focus on aspects such as if the task is complete (as they provide positive feedback), if the learner has understood the content of the readings, but also they concentrate more on guiding the learner towards the achievement of objectives by suggesting, advising, instructing, informing, clarifying, anticipating, and exemplifying. Therefore the aim of most of the messages is to help, to guide, to provide input, to re-direct OLLs, and not to judge incorrect answers. It may be the case that, OLTs consider that explicit negative feedback is not considered appropriate when delivering group feedback. This issue requires further research. Two types of functions were identified in the pre-closing stage: one involved encouraging and the other was where the OLTs left the possibility for the OLLs to respond. There were encouraging phrases such as: "I am very happy to see that you have started with so much motivation and excitement, Keep on like this" (Pat), and even one that added a humoristic phrase like: "You're doing great, do continue like this and don't feel overwhelmed. As they say here "These are not enchiladas" (Pat).

For Dörnyei (2001) as in the data here a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere is an essential motivational condition that should prevail in the classroom. The closing stage does not have any particular fea-

tures as most closings included the standard regards, or goodbyes or just the name of the OLT after the pre-closing statement. This stage was always present.

The organizational and functional structures of OLTF can be clearly identified in the OLTS' postings. They reflect coherent messages and their structure follows the organization of a letter (opening, body, and closing) rather than more open-ended oral discourse. At times the OLTS omitted the introduction to feedback or pre-closing stages. This lack of optional stages did not affect the meaning or the intention of the messages. This last statement confirms what Fairclough (2003) mentions about the variability of a genre structure. In the following section the OLTF characteristics and types of OLTF will be discussed.

In general, the examples analysed and compared in the study, show that OLTS provide positive feedback, inform, suggest and provide information to the learners. In this sense, the type of feedback is formative as it aims to modify the OLLS' thinking (Puccinin, 2003); and it is also constructive as it helps the OLL to organize his/her thoughts.

Two of the features of scaffolding appear systematically in the postings. These are ongoing diagnosis and calibrated support (Puntambekar & Hübscher, 2005).

In the messages the OLTS are authentic, respectful supportive and emphatic which according to Brinko (1993) are important features of good feedback. In addition, these may not only be features of good feedback but characteristics of the OLT's personality as mentioned by OLTS in a previous study. By providing group feedback the OLT saves time as it was evident in the messages analysed. For example, Víctor informs learners about the reason why he is sending group feedback by saying: "I started providing personal feedback but I think that I can't go on because activity 1.4. is ready, and so I prefer to send you a mail with some of the issues I noticed and that I consider relevant in this case".

In a previous study (Contijoch, 2009), the OLTS also pointed to the relationship between feedback and assessment. This relationship can be clearly seen again in the analysis of the data in this study as OLTS

make judgements about the OLLs' work by evaluating their participations and most postings contain a judgemental element. The data reveal that as Ur (1996) indicates it is not possible to provide a judgement about something being right or wrong without evaluating it. On more than one occasion the two OLTs make reference to the benefits of peer feedback. This seems an interesting point since OLTs realise that when providing group feedback OLLs gain knowledge. These extracts show how OLTs confer a certain degree of value in this activity: "This procedure of giving comments and feedback to each other is an integral part of your learning. These exchanges help us to see that "two heads are better than one" (Pat); or "It seems to me that the most important thing was the feedback that you provided to each other. Thanks to it, some of you realized that you hadn't considered the magnitude that the task of evaluation implies" (Víctor).

Therefore, peer feedback seems to be conceived as enriching and promoting a joint cognitive activity in the same way that according to Mercer (2000) it helps to co-construct knowledge. In the messages analysed, it is possible to identify two approaches for guiding the learner: the first can be called *constructivist* and a second one *directive*. The constructivist approach can be defined as the way the OLT questions the OLL and promotes in-depth thinking and reflection. The directive approach is the one that is controlled by the OLT and is prescriptive.

The presence of motivational and encouraging messages is not overwhelming but is clearly present. Phrases like: "Let me tell you that you're doing fine,.. you did it very well and you have understood", I'm very happy to see that you have started with so much motivation and excitement..." (Pat), or "Congratulations to all of you" (Víctor), help to convey a good atmosphere in the virtual classroom and some of them contain an evaluative element which tells the OLLs about their general progress. This last comment coincides with what Pintrich and Schunk (1996) in Dörnyei (2001: 27) call "goal orientation theory of motivation" in which positive comments like these help the learner to complete the task/course successfully. The use of these phrases also confirms that OLTs are aware of the importance of motivational aspects and the possibility that they may stimulate OLLs' intrinsic motivation.

The reference to texts within other texts is constantly present. As mentioned in the interpretation of example 1 from Víctor this intertextuality is understood by both groups of participants (OLTS and OLLS) because they are aware of the context, the content and the continuity of topics in the course. Therefore in instances such as: "Sara, Pat and Yola's commentaries helped us to focus exactly on the problem" (Pat) or: The assignment that you're developing is a…" (Víctor), it can be perceived that in the first example the trace of past texts is there, and in the second example, the presence of a present text which is being developed is mentioned and in both cases, both olls and OLTS know exactly the content of these texts. Most of the intertextual examples in the feedback postings can be recognized as what Fairclough (1992) calls "manifest intertextuality" where "specific texts are overtly drawn upon within a text" (p. 85). It should be noted that in order to analyse the role of intertextuality in these messages a combination of micro and macro analysis of the discursive practices of OLTS and OLLS would be required. There is certainly an opportunity for further research in the area. The concept of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1992) is also present in the OLTS messages. It may even appear more interesting than the analysis of intertextuality, to study the reasons why the OLT takes the OLLS' voices to say something and with what purpose.

THE OLTS' GROUP FEEDBACK WHEEL

As a way to conclude this paper, I will introduce "The OLTS' group feedback wheel" which provides energy and force to the learning process as it is shown in figure 5.

The "The group feedback wheel" can be explained as follows. Once the OLTS start the course, they *a)* begin observing and monitoring everything that takes place in the discussion forum and in the electronic notebooks of the OLLS. Next, *b)* they make judgements about the outcomes that little by little are produced (ongoing diagnosis). Then, the OLTS may *c)* talk to each other and then plan and grade the necessary and adequate support and decide about the moment to *d)* deliver feedback to the group (calibrated support). Once feedback is given, *e)* the OLTS fade away leaving the OLLS to work, reflect and continue making headway in the course. Then, the olts re-enter the wheel by observing and monitoring the next task.

Figure 5
The OLTS' group feedback wheel

Online Environment
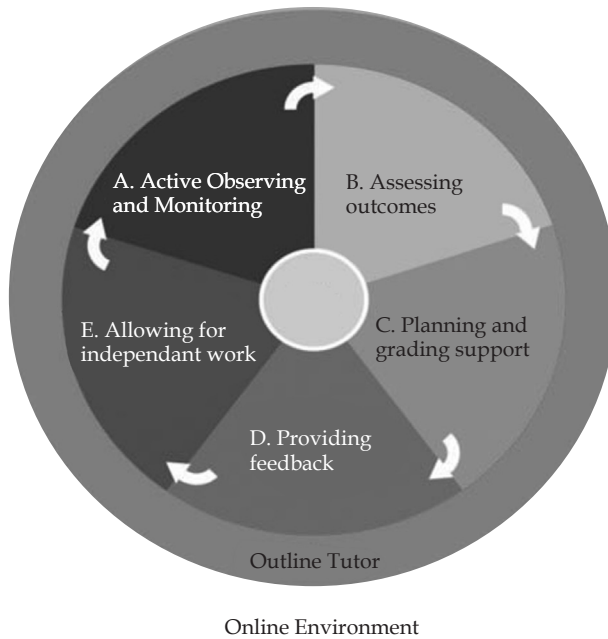
Thus, more research on the discursive practices of other OLTs when delivering group feedback is needed in order to obtain more data, and be able to compare their performance.

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