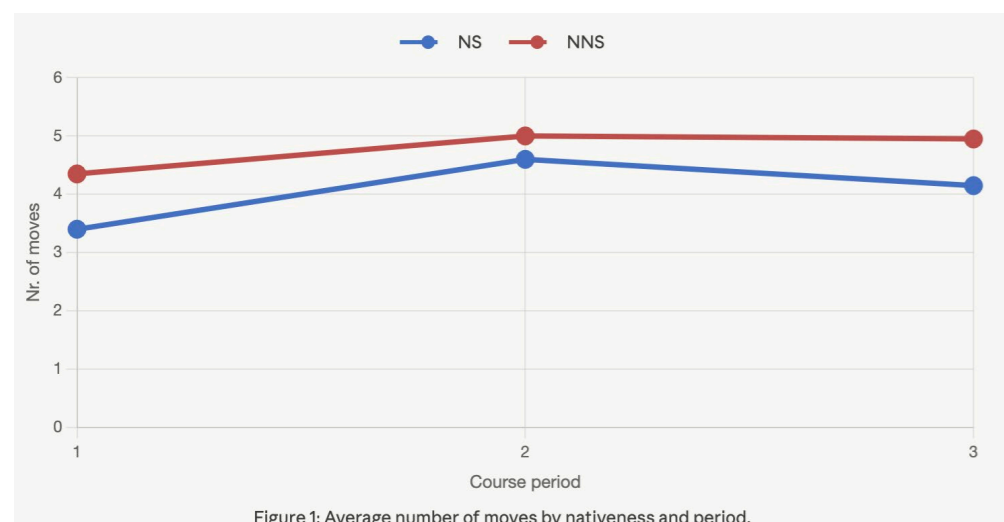


Digital genres in the making: A corpus-based analysis of student interaction in online forums

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Macro-structure of student feedback posts (Spanish sub-corpus)²

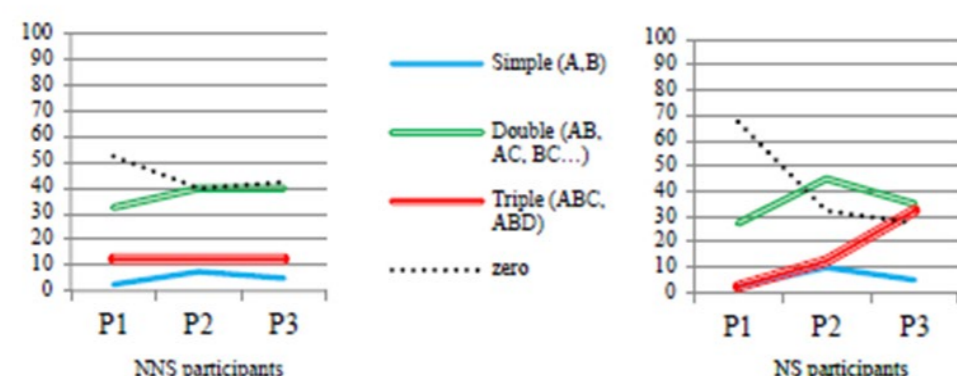
- Student posts display a **highly regular rhetorical structure**, supporting their treatment as a **stable academic genre**.
- 12 rhetorical moves** identified; only one occurs in **100% of the posts**.
 - Nucleus (N)**: containing the **feedback core**.
- Frequent optional **framing moves**:
 - Salutation (S)** (87%), **Praise (P)** (68%), **Criticism preview (58%)**, **Farewell (F)** (65%).
- Posts typically follow the pattern **S-P-C-N-F**, combining:
 - Epistolary conventions** (Salutation and Farewell).
 - Positive and negative politeness**.
- Diachronic evolution**:
 - Message **complexity increases** significantly from early to mid-term, then stabilises.



- Nativeness effects**:
 - Non-native Spanish speakers consistently use **more epistolary and politeness-oriented moves**, leading genre development over time.
- Gender differences**:
 - Minor overall, but **male students show greater fluctuation** in praise and criticism moves.

Preview and mitigation of criticism (Spanish sub-corpus)³

- Around **60% of feedback posts (Spanish corpus)** begin by announcing intent to identify issues and propose improvements.
- Four recurrent **attenuation strategies** identified:
 - Illocutionary mitigation** (e.g. *I think*, conditional forms).
 - Minimization of impact** (*a couple of details*).
 - Defocusing responsibility** (impersonals, passive voice).
 - Solidarity and shared goals** (shared concerns and goals).
- Clear **diachronic development**:
 - Frequency, intensity, and complexity of mitigation increase** over time.
 - Local Spanish students **converge towards the more mitigated style of exchange students**.



- Gender effects run counter to stereotypes**:
 - By the end of the course, **male students mitigate more** and show greater stylistic adaptation.

Forum interactivity: Student citation practices⁴

- Overall **low interactivity**:
 - Only **55% of posts contain references** to classmates' contributions.
 - Many discussions resemble a **sequence of monologues** rather than genuine dialogue.
- Earlier posts** get more cited:
 - More than **80% of citations target the first 15 messages** in a thread.

Target message number	Number of references	% of total
First 15	349	82.5%
16-30	63	14.9%
31-45	9	2.1%
Later than 45	2	0.5%

- Agreement prevails over disagreement**:
 - Acknowledgement and agreement** account for over **90% of all references**.
 - Open disagreement is extremely rare** (~4%) and never intensified.

Alignment Type	Frequency	% of total	Cumulative %
Acknowledgement	462	57.0%	57.0%
Agreement	282	34.8%	91.9%
Disagreement	32	4.0%	95.8%
Mixed	34	4.2%	100.0%

- A **small group** of students becomes **increasingly engaged over time**.
- Exchange students** cite less, post later, are cited less often → **peripheral participation**.

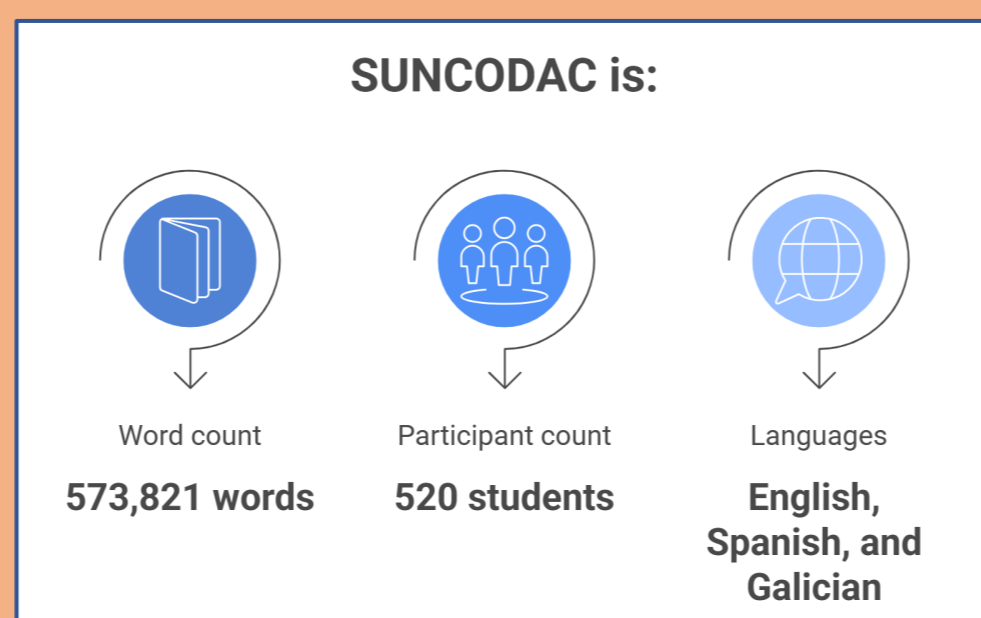
Concession and politeness ("but"-concessives)⁵

- Analysis of **165 "but"-concessives** shows a highly regular polite argumentative pattern:
 - Proposition A**: praise or agreement.
 - Proposition B**: mitigated criticism or suggestion.

Proposition A (Conceding move)	Proposition B (Denial of expectations move)
(2) You have done a great job with your translation	but I would like to make some changes ...
Positive sentiment/agreement/evaluation	Mitigated imposition (improved translation)

- Concessives strongly co-occur with**:
 - First-person reference** (~88%)
 - Positive evaluation** (~64%)
 - Hedges** (~52%)
- Functional distribution**:
 - Positive words and second-person reference** cluster in **Proposition A**.
 - Hedges** are significantly overrepresented in **Proposition B**.
- Diachronic effect**:
 - Decrease in hedging and praise over time**, suggesting growing confidence and genre stabilization.
- Gender differences**:
 - Women** use more **hedges and pronouns**, **men** more explicit **positive and negative evaluation**.

THIS POSTER PRESENTS selected findings from a long-term research project on student discussion forums as **collaborative learning tools in higher education**. Based on the analysis of **SUNCODAC**,¹ a corpus of asynchronous forum interactions, the project explores how students **construct feedback, manage interpersonal relations, and negotiate expertise** in digital academic environments. The findings contribute to our understanding of **academic digital genres** and pragmatic competence, while also **informing pedagogical approaches** that promote more effective and interactive forum participation.



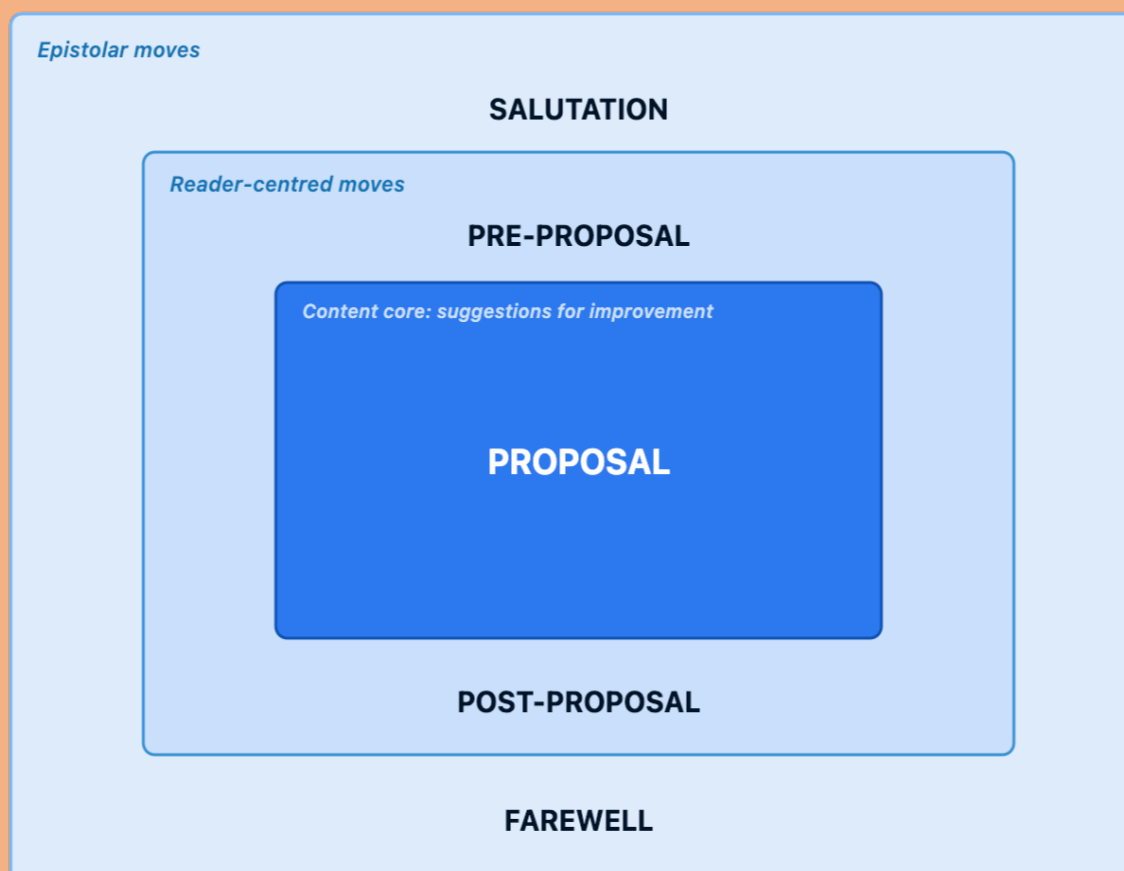
Highlights:

- Student forums function as structured academic genres**, with recognisable conventions that shape how students write and interact.
- Peer feedback is organised around a compulsory core proposal**, systematically framed by interpersonal moves.
- Criticism and advice are interactionally buffered**, with mitigation and concession playing a central role.
- Students mainly respond to the first posts they read**, creating parallel responses rather than cumulative discussion.
- Expertise and academic identity are interactionally constructed**, emerging through participation rather than being pre-given.
- Participation differs across groups**: exchange students occupy more peripheral positions, while gender patterns challenge expectations.

An example of a feedback post in SUNCODAC

Hello everyone!
First of all, I think you have done a good translation. However, I would like to add a couple of things:
- I think that in "la persona que" the word "persona" could be replaced by "quien me había disparado" because it is understood that it was a person. Moreover, I opted to connect these two sentences in a whole unit "Quien me había disparado seguramente volvería para comprobar que estaba muerto, por lo que decidí buscar un sitio en el que esconderme y esperar". I consider this is a better option in order to make the sentences follow with naturally, since in Spanish long sentences are more habitual than in English.
- Apart from that, I don not find the term "gatear" so much appropriate in this context; I consider that "arrastrarse" or "reptar" fix well because there are expressions related to the military field. Besides, the narrator mentions he had attended to a spy training.
- To finish, maybe it is not required to mention twice in the paragraph the word "esperar", because you have just said it one time.
Best regards,
17DVM.

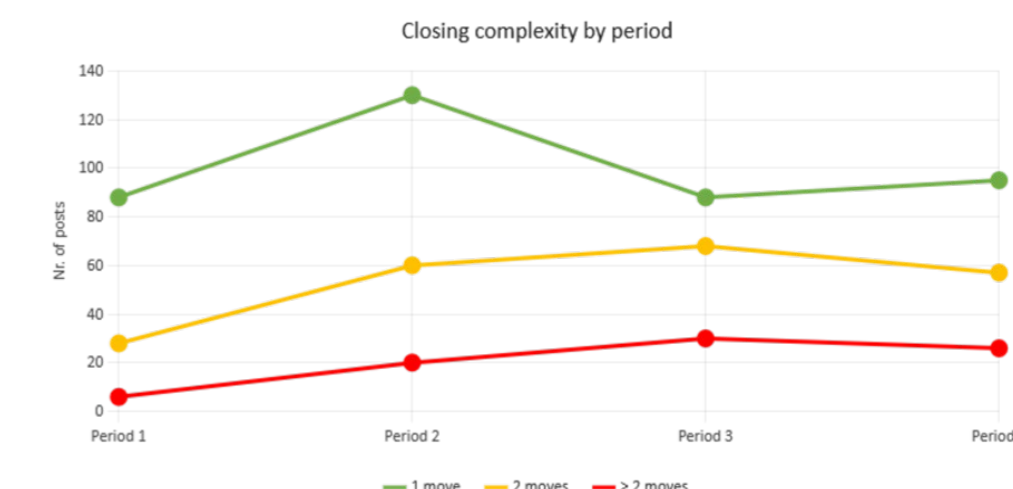
SUNCODAC feedback post structure



¹ Cal Varela, M., & Fernández Polo, F. J. (2020). SUNCODAC: A corpus of online forums in higher education. *Nexus-AEDEAN*, 20(2), 44–52.
² Fernández Polo, F. J., & Cal Varela, M. (2018). A structural analysis of student online forum discussions. In F. J. Díaz Pérez & M. A. Moreno Moreno (Eds.), *Languages at the Crossroads: Languages, Accreditation and Context of Use* (pp. 189–200). Universidad de Jaén.
³ Cal Varela, M., & Fernández Polo, F. J. (2019). Preparing the ground for critical feedback in online discussions: A look at mitigation strategies. In J. Longhi & C. Marinica (Eds.), *CMC Corpora through the Prism of Digital Humanities* (pp. 15-34). L'Harmattan.
⁴ Cal Varela, M., & Fernández Polo, F. J. (2022). Referring to other participants in asynchronous online discussions: Citation patterns in a higher education context. *Psychology of Language and Communication*, 26(1), 353–374. <https://doi.org/10.2478/plc-2022-17>
⁵ Doval-Suárez, S., & González-Álvarez, E. (2025). You have done a great job, but I would make some changes: Concession and politeness in asynchronous online discussion forums. *Research in Corpus Linguistics*, 13(1), 113–138. <https://doi.org/10.32714/ricl.13.01.06>
⁶ Fernández Polo, F. J. (2021). See you on class, man!: Closing formulae in ELF students' forums. Paper presented at the 12th International Conference on Corpus Linguistics (CILC 2021), University of Murcia, Spain.
⁷ Fernández Polo, F. J. (2025). Peer advice in academic forums: Pragmatic strategies and interlanguage features in translation discussions. Paper presented at the 42nd International AESLA Conference, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.
⁸ Fernández Polo, F. J. (2023). Balancing expert and peer-student identities in online discussion forums. In L. Cotgrove, L. Hezberg, H. Lungen, & I. Pisetta (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on CMC and Social Media Corpora for the Humanities (CMC-Corpora 2023)*, 14–15 September 2023, University of Mannheim, Germany (pp. 78–82). Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache. <https://doi.org/10.14618/1z5k-pb25>

Closing sequences: Doing relational work⁶

- Closings serve a **repair function**:
 - Mitigating face-threatening** advice and critique.
 - Restoring interpersonal balance** before departure.
- Hybrid written-spoken register**:
 - High preference for **formal or semi-formal expressions** (*Regards*).
 - Limited use of emoticons and typographic play** → academic awareness.
- Recurrent closing moves**:
 - Closure markers (*that's all*).
 - Leave-taking (*regards*).
 - Gratitude (*thanks*).
 - Signature.
- Time effect**:
 - Closings grow **more complex over time**.
 - Fatigue effect**: Slight simplification at the end.

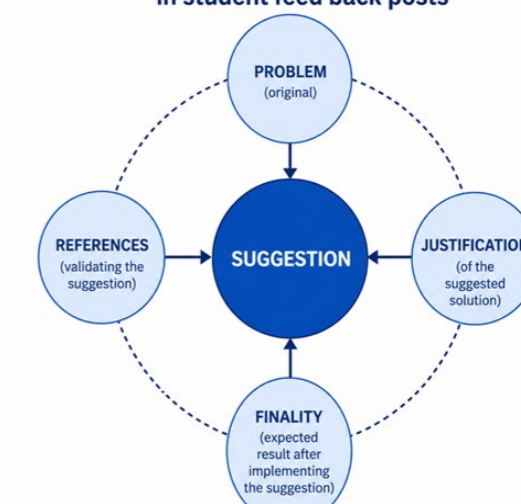


- Gender effects**:
 - Male students behave non-stereotypically**:
 - Use more **negative politeness** (self-downgrading).
 - Female students:
 - Show preference for **positive politeness** and emotive language.
- Local vs. exchange students**:
 - Exchange students: Avoid naming peers → **peripheral positioning**.
- ELF features**:
 - Non-standard** but intelligible forms (*thank you a lot*).
 - Formality** used as a strategy of pragmatic safety.

Giving advice: Mitigating face-threat⁷

- Student **feedback functions as peer advice**, with the **moderator's draft** acting as an **advice-seeking move**.

Characteristic advising move structure in student feedback posts



- Advice is overwhelmingly **indirect and mitigated**:
 - Direct **imperatives** are **extremely rare**.
 - Indirect directive strategies are favoured:
 - Participant shift** ("I did / I would do X").
 - Referring to others' opinions** ("Others say that X should be done").
 - Inclusive we** ("we should do X").
 - Impersonal and passive constructions** ("X should be done").
- Advice is generally vague**:
 - ~2/3 of advice sequences **do not explicitly define the original problem or justify the proposed improvement** → reduced credibility.
- ELF-related features**:
 - General **language simplification**: a few basic formulae are constantly repeated.
 - ELT materials bias**: overuse of *should*.
- Diachronic trend**:
 - Increasing use of external references, signalling **growing awareness of credibility building**.

Constructing credibility: Balancing expert and student identities⁸

- Focus on **three prestige-prominent students** identified through network analysis (Gephi).



- High **visibility** correlates with a successful **balance between two identities**:
 - Expert advisor** (knowledgeable, authoritative).
 - Peer student** (approachable, supportive).
- Expertise-building (warranting) strategies**:
 - Use of **specialised terminology**.
 - Citation of **authoritative sources**.
 - Formal **academic style** and structured argumentation.
 - Displays of **encyclopaedic knowledge**.
- Mitigating strategies** to avoid imposition:
 - Strong preference for **non-directive advice**.
 - Extensive use of **hedges, disclaimers, humour, humility**.
 - Framing advice as **personal narrative or experience**.
- 3 different successful participatory styles**:
 - Informal & relational**.
 - Rigorous & academic**.
 - Authoritative but selectively softened**.

