

# *Adquisición de la competencia comunicativa a través de los Trabajos de fin de grado*

## *Acquisition of communicative competence by working in the research paper*

**María Gloria García- Blay****Tomás Ernesto Micó- Escrivá**

Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera, España

Fundació Escolàpies – Escolapias Gandia, España

**Correo(s) electrónico(s):**

gloria.garcia@uchceu.es

tomasmicoescriva@escolapiasgandia.org

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**Resumen:** Durante los estudios de grado la adquisición de distintas competencias es un factor clave para el desarrollo cognitivo, conceptual, lingüístico y cultural de los alumnos. Es objetivo de este artículo analizar la relación que existe entre la competencia comunicativa y las habilidades que consiguen los alumnos a través de ella mediante la elaboración del trabajo de fin de grado. Se llega a la conclusión de que los alumnos logran una mejora de su pensamiento crítico y un aprendizaje significativo en tanto son capaces de evolucionar desde una habilidad de pensamiento de orden inferior hasta una destreza que supone un nivel cognitivo alto.

**Palabras clave:** Competencia lingüística; Habilidades comunicativas; Propiedades textuales; Aspectos paralingüísticos

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**Abstract:** During the major studies the acquisition of different competences is a key factor for the cognitive, conceptual, linguistic and cultural development of the students. The objective of this paper is to analyze the relationship between the communicative competence and the skills that the students develop when writing their thesis. The conclusion is that students achieve an improvement in their critical thinking and meaningful learning as they are able to evolve from a lower-order thinking skill to high cognitive-level skills.

**Keywords:** Linguistic competence; Communicative skills; Textual properties; Paralinguistic aspects

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## **Introduction**

The completion of the final paper or thesis (FP) as the culmination of the university studies can become an indicator to verify the achievement of the different competences that a competent graduate must possess. Among them there is the competence in linguistic communication.

Because the FP demanded at Cardenal Herrera University is composed of a writing and other part of oral presentation, the occasion is ideal for measuring whether communicative

skills have been achieved either at the level of comprehension and expression, both oral and written.

The FP becomes a tool that allows verifying the learning results that derive from the communicative skills because it has as a base the construction of an academic text which purpose should be adapted to the oratorical discourse.

To evaluate this task, it will be taken into account not only the writing capacity that the students have in terms of the textual properties of adequacy, coherence, cohesion and lexical and grammatical correction, but also the aptitude shown in all the paralinguistic aspects such as those related to proxemics and kinesthetics.

Such reason motivated the analysis of the relationship between linguistic communication competences and the skills that students show through the design process and discussion of the FP.

## **Development**

The authors of this article understand by competence in linguistic communication the ability to use the language in order to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions both through oral and written speeches, and to interact linguistically in any social context.

We differentiate the concept of linguistic competence, which refers only and exclusively to the knowledge of the grammatical rules, of the communicative competence in which the subject also demonstrates the skills possessed to use the grammatical knowledge acquired (Cenoz, 2004).

Hymens (1972), considered that to speak only of linguistic competence is insufficient, because it leaves out the context in which the communication occurs, a fundamental aspect in any interaction and without which one of the elements that compose it would be missing, which would prevent success.

Thus, we considered necessary to unite the concepts of communication and linguistics since in order to listen and to speak, both linguistic and non-linguistic skills are required if it is intended to interpret and produce oral speeches appropriate to the communicative situation.

In turn, reading and writing require searching, selecting and processing information for understanding and producing speeches with a particular intent. In the case of FP, it will depend on its typology, so that the final product has a more expository, argumentative or descriptive approach.

Therefore, it is understood here that it is necessary to encourage the critical thinking of the university students if they are to achieve and develop the skills related to the competence in linguistic communication, since the main function of this thought is review and evaluate ideas for later processing and communicating them (López, 2013), in a clear, precise and orderly manner.

In order to complement the aforementioned goal, it is important before analyzing the thinking skills that the students who write the FP should use in their elaboration, to briefly examine the dimensions in which the linguistic communication competence is structured.

Given that this is a research work based primarily on written sources, oral comprehension should be dispensed, because in rare cases students make oral speeches, even though they must demonstrate the correct management of this dimension in the defense of their FP.

The dimension of written comprehension encompasses all those skills and knowledge that serve to rebuild the meaning of any written text a pupil confronts. It is assumed that throughout the studies of the major the students have been faced with texts of different typology, not only in the subjects related to the linguistic field in which it has been treated theoretically, but also in the other subjects where they are required to put into practice these linguistic knowledge acquired in a totally multidisciplinary and transversal way.

With regard to oral expression, it must be taken into account that the analysis maintains its focus on the production of oral speeches adapted to different communicative situations which, in the case of this research, must be related to the academic field.

Thirdly, reference is made to the dimension of the written expression. This is mainly related to the production of written texts that maintain the textual properties of coherence, lexical and grammatical cohesion, and adequacy, as well as the grammatical and formal correction that is presupposed to any university student. Therefore, students must be able to write according to established models and in an absolutely accurate way.

Finally, it is necessary to mention the oral interaction that remains linked, in particular, to the norms of social communication, that is, which respects the rules of the proxemics and kinesthetics, because it is necessary to bear in mind that a correct gesture can benefit and enrich discursive coherence (Ussa, 2013).

All these dimensions favor the possibility of offering to the students different opportunities to develop their learning through competences, so that this is a significant issue (Benali, 2015), and as so it is addressed in the process of tutoring the FP.

During the development of the FP, an attempt is being made to promote sufficient autonomy from the beginning. Two drafts are required, in the first it is valued the student capacity for searching and selecting information, whereas in the second the tutor evaluates the student aptitude for the synthesis of contents and the coherent drafting of his ideas.

It should be based on the concept of effective thinking as "the competent and strategic application of thinking skills and productive habits of mind that allow us to carry out thoughtful acts of intellect, such as making decisions, arguing and other analytical, creative or critical actions" (Swartz et al., 2013) to demonstrate the achievement of the linguistic communication competence in the FP required for graduating from the university level.

Since the research work carried out by the students is used in four dimensions, as explained previously (remember that oral comprehension is practically non-existent due to the sources used in its design), each one is linked to the three thinking skills used by Robert Swartz in his research.

The dimension of written comprehension is directly related to the first skill: "clarify and understand." Whatever the typology chosen from FP, it is necessary to develop a broad conceptual framework suitable for each type of work. Students must therefore work with written sources and look for relevant information. They must develop two fundamental skills for the treatment and selection of information:

1-the analysis of ideas: the student has to compare the information of different speeches, classify it, and know how to relate each of the secondary ideas with the main or establish the correct sequence that follows the subject progression of the text.

2-the analysis of the arguments: the student needs to find each of the arguments whether they appear explicitly or if their existence is implicit.

The aim is to identify the global meaning of a text, and to select the information that will allow them to recognize the purpose of the discourse: to argue, to describe, to inform, to narrate, etc.

They should be related to the third skill: "critical thinking", i.e. at this stage of research it is necessary for students to develop the ability to evaluate ideas through an analysis of the basic information they have used for the design of their paper. In addition, they must be able, either through hints (implicit in the text) or deductions, to infer causal relationships between different ideas, to generalize patterns or to establish different similar postures. In short, critically interpret any written text.

Once the two previous skills have been worked out within the scope of the written comprehension, one can start with the evaluation of the second task: "creative thinking", a part of the dimension of the written expression. Both the main objective of this task and that of the postulates by Swartz are aimed to enabling the student to elaborate an original discourse.

It is necessary to generate possibilities of writing through the organization of multiple ideas which they have found throughout the process of comprehension, that favor the originality and the elaboration in the exposition of the new ideas. On the other hand, it is important to use analogies in the discussion of the paper, since here it is necessary to demonstrate the capacity to reflect about the similarities and differences between the dissimilar criteria of each author studied.

Obviously, there must be pre-planning of the process as well as a correct use of the expressive means. To this end, it is interesting to mention the rules of Cicero's oratory (2004) concerning the parts of a discourse:

1. *Exordium*, which could be assimilated to the justification of the subject. Writers should try to attract the reader's attention and keep their curiosity on the subject.
2. *Narratio*, that is, the introduction of the paper. Here it is mandatory to explain clearly and briefly what the line of work is going to be and what the proposed objectives are.

3. *Argumentatio* or theoretical framework, which would refer to the ideas, explanations or hypotheses developed by the different authors and analyzed by the students, it would correspond to the main part of the paper or discussion.

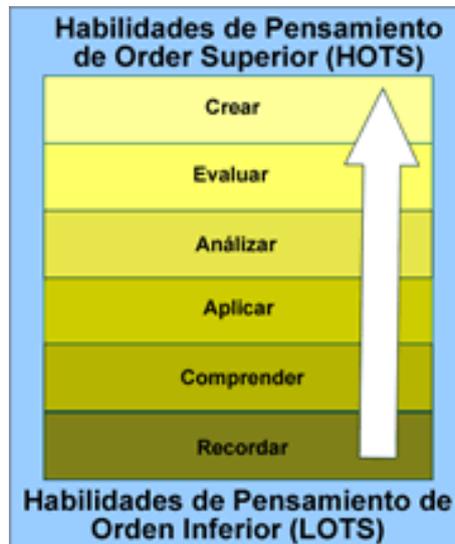
4. *Peroratio*, understood as the conclusions reached after the entire previous process of analysis.

Finally, referring to the oral expression, it is necessary to start from the point that the students have carried out a bibliographical search and have structured all the material following the steps previously mentioned, therefore, the planning process is already done. Correct oral expression must be put into practice at this time, using appropriate control strategies and respecting social communication standards. It is the hardest part for students because non-verbal communication is an aspect that is treated in the classroom; however, at least once in each grade course, students have exhibited in which the importance of contextualizing oral discourse has been worked, such as: demonstrating their ability to adapt to the auditorium, knowing how to choose the correct greeting and farewell formulas, demonstrate their role as enunciator, plan how to develop the topic and capture attention, use audiovisual media and, of course, the use of gestural elements.

With regard to proxemics, the social zone will have to be worked to create a certain degree of comfort in the issuer, as well as to emphasize the importance of eye contact and a position of the body without indicators of relaxation or contraction, since this would indicate distraction or boredom (Ussa, 2013). In addition to these paralinguistic elements, it is important to demonstrate the ability of utterance by means of a proper tone of voice and a discursive rhythm. Clarity is essential in the articulation of sounds and in the expression of ideas, the appropriate intonation that will distinguish the different types of sentences or attitude and predisposition that is shown while talking with interest and without showing too much sharpness or more cheerfulness than socially established in a formal context such as the discussion and presentation of a FP.

Directly related to all of the above, it should be mentioned that after the whole process, students have to prove able to move from lower thought order ideas to a high cognitive domain (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001), because they have been part of the functions of

moving from more simple thinking to reach the most complex thinking process, as it is shown in the following image:



**Image 1:** Bloom's Taxonomy

**Source:** Churches <http://www.eduteka.org/TaxonomiaBloomDigital.php>

In the first phase, it is about collecting material after a bibliographical search; therefore, cognitive demand in this step would be virtually null.

Then the second stage, understanding, would begin the significant learning of the students since, from different types of texts, they should be able to interpret the papers read, and to make a summary.

In the implementation phase, students must demonstrate the capacity they have acquired to use the material in new situations, that is, they will be able to relate and organize each of the ideas with which they have worked.

The analysis would consist of a comparison or categorization of arguments that students can use for the subsequent writing of their text.

Judgments based on different criteria depending on each typology of FP will allow them to evaluate and validate all the information they have had access to.

Finally, they will reach the level of higher-order thinking in the creation phase. Now, after having overcome the previous stages, they will be able to gather and reorganize each of the elements they have resorted to elaborate a coherent text with a certain discursive function

proving to have acquired the communicative competence that was mandatory from the beginning of the task.

## **Conclusions**

The design and writing of the FP can become a tool to acquire the linguistic communication competence since it treats all the dimensions that this article mentions, both from the point of view of the written comprehension, and by expressing both oral and written academic speeches. In addition, it allows working with thinking skills that favor the achievement of different abilities aimed at understanding, judging and elaborating a paper, which are indispensable in the aforementioned processes of writing. Finally, it must be taken into account that students must prove able to create a product that demonstrate how they have advanced in their knowledge, starting by evaluating the skills of a low cognitive demand to achieving skills that require a high cognitive level.

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