



Comunicar en la Universidad y en la vida profesional

Ricardo-María Jiménez-Yáñez

Pamplona: EUNSA, 2020. 336 pages. ISBN: 978-84-313-3458-1.

Ricardo-María Jiménez-Yáñez is an author with extensive classroom experience. In addition to his background in teaching, he has researched on oral and written expression (Jiménez-Yáñez, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016; Jiménez-Yáñez & Zárata, 2013; Jiménez-Yáñez et al., 2020). In particular, he has focused on persuasive texts and on written communication in the legal context, on which he has published a book, now in its second edition (Jiménez-Yáñez, 2016). On this occasion, he reflects on one of the most frequent complaints heard from university lecturers: the fact that undergraduates arrive from their prior studies with deficient communication skills. In most cases, this problem goes unsolved, so young people begin their professional careers without the necessary ability to express themselves correctly and efficiently. Faced with this situation, Jiménez-Yáñez proposes “to abandon the sterile complaint” (p. 15), and search for a solution instead. Although this goal is an ambitious one, the author meets it efficiently in this book.

Comunicar en la Universidad y en la vida profesional is hard to classify, as its scope spans from purely theoretical to very practical issues. This array of contents might seem arbitrary at first but, when reading the book, one realises that all the topics addressed are part of a greater aim: to help develop students’ communication skills at all levels. This implies not just knowing the grammatical rules of a language, but also understanding the underlying theory of how communication works, as well as being able to think logically and critically.

These capabilities set the basis for all good communication, which is why Jiménez-Yáñez looks into them first. After laying these foundations, he goes on to explain how to adequately write several types of texts, and sheds light on some rules of the Spanish language which frequently lead to confusion. Finally, he ends with a small but valuable section devoted to spoken communication.

The first two chapters focus, respectively, on communicative competence and the characteristics of textuality (“propiedades de los textos”). In the former, Jiménez-Yáñez draws on the classification of linguistic ability defined by Eugen Coseriu. Coseriu establishes a distinction between three levels of language, each corresponding to a certain degree of *language knowledge*, *knowledge content*, and *language valuation*. In the latter chapter, Jiménez-Yáñez identifies the characteristics of textuality with the three valuations of language, namely *congruence*, *correction* and *adequacy*. He gives a brief overview of the principles that must be followed and the mechanisms that must be used to attain these characteristics, and does so in an eminently practical way, with examples which clearly illustrate each principle.

This is followed by an exquisite collection of quotes on writing from various authors, after which Jiménez-Yáñez moves on to study some matters related to thought, which he considers relevant to writing because, as he quotes from the intellectual John Henry Newman (2014:138), “the rule is: first think and then write”. He focuses on idea generation techniques and on critical thought, considered to be especially relevant since, as stated by Breeze (2017: 38), “the importance of developing critical cultural awareness in order to build effective intercultural relationships is undisputed in today’s globalised world”.

The three ensuing chapters provide insights into elements which are essential to any well-written text: properly constructed *paragraphs*, *coherence*, and the correct use of *discourse markers*. These chapters are followed by others on how to write different types of texts (e-mails, narrations, descriptions, dialogues, expositions, enumerations and argumentations), formulated with a very practical approach. Indications are concise, practice-oriented and well-structured in lists. They are complemented by texts that serve as clear examples and by practical exercises that strengthen the theory and take the learning process to the practical sphere.

After concentrating on these textual aspects, which are common to most languages, Jiménez-Yáñez shifts his attention to Spanish, because, as he quotes from Montolío (2001: 10), “it is us who argue, but it is the language that will provide us with the guidelines that will enable us to argue, and that will enable others to understand our argumentation”. The author devotes the longest chapter in the book to spelling and grammar rules, as well as to vocabulary. Composed of brief explanations and suitable exercises, this chapter reviews some basic rules regarding punctuation and focuses mainly

on items that often lead to confusion (such as the semicolon, the gerund or homonymous words that tend to be mistakenly switched). The compilation offered is by no means exhaustive, but it deals with the main difficulties that Spanish native speakers usually encounter when writing.

The last few chapters address diverse issues: the correct and precise use of lexicon, strategies for academic writing, some recommendations on how to write more legible texts and, finally, spoken communication. The chapter devoted to speech is almost a small manual in itself: it combines a few guidelines with a set of activities that will improve the reader's communication abilities in one month, by devoting to them just a few minutes every day. On a personal note, I have tried this methodology and, apart from the fact that it is amusing, it does work.

My advice is to read the whole book first, as each section builds on the previous ones. Afterwards, when a particular chapter is required, one can find it on the table of contents and return to it.

Despite all its virtues, the work has some flaws. The content of the opening chapters and the specific terminology used in some cases can be a bit too academic for the average reader. Apart from that, the fact that one must get in touch with the author to obtain the solutions to the exercises might discourage many students, who would miss one of the book's most useful aspects, thus losing the chance to learn from their mistakes.

Nonetheless, the author practises what he preaches, so the book is overall easy to read and understand. Combined with the practical methodology and wide scope, these qualities make *Comunicar en la Universidad y en la vida profesional* a must-read for all Spanish speakers (students and professionals alike) who wish to improve their communication skills. In short, the book firmly positions itself as a reference work in the area of academic and professional discourse and fosters interest in these areas in Hispanic linguistics.

Received 30 March 2020
Accepted 02 April 2020

Reviewed by **Inés Jordán Marqués**
Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (Spain)
inesjordanm@uic.es

References

- Breeze, R. (2017). "Promoting critical cultural awareness in the international university" in R. Breeze & C. Sancho Guinda (eds), *Essential Competencies for English-medium University Teaching*, 37-49. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M. (2013). "¿Se puede enseñar a persuadir con las señales del metadiscurso?". *Journal of Language and Law* 59: 42-58.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M. (2014). "Metadiscurso y persuasión: estudio de editoriales de periódicos españoles sobre la muerte de Osama Bin Laden". *Discurso & Sociedad* 8(4): 589-622.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M. (2015). "An interview with Dr. Ruth Breeze and Dr. Florentina Taylor on foreign language teaching and learning", *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature* (BJTLLL). 8(3), August-September.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M. (2016). *Escribir bien es de justicia*, 2nd ed. Cizur Menor (Spain): Aranzadi Thomson-Reuters.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M. & B. Zárate (2013). "Estrategias de aprendizaje de expresión escrita para estudiantes de Derecho". *Revista Lenguaje y Textos* 37: 83-90.
- Jiménez-Yáñez, R.M., D. Giner & P. Franquet (2020). "Estrategias retóricas de persuasión en Blogs Jurídicos (Blawgs) y Artículos Doctrinales". *Discurso & Sociedad* 14(2).
- Montolío, E. (2001): *Conectores de la lengua escrita*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Newman, J.H. (2014). *La idea de la Universidad. II. Temas universitarios tratados en lecciones y ensayos ocasionales*. Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro.

