Rhetoric in teaching and e-learning in university education

Retórica docente y enseñanza online en la educación universitaria

Santiago LÓPEZ NAVIA, PhD. Associate Professor. Universidad Internacional de La Rioja *(santiagoalfonso.lopeznavia@unir.net).*

Abstract:

E-learning is a special rhetorical environment that requires teachers to use communicational skills and strategies that take advantage of its possibilities and compensate for the limitations of the virtual classroom in the interest of educational effectiveness and their ability to persuade. This study is the result of a review of literature that focusses on the characteristics of teachers' discourse and its distinctive features in online teaching environments, as well as reflection and analysis drawing on the author's experience of systematic observation of his own rhetorical practice and that of teachers from his own field in the online university sphere. The main results focus on: testing the validity of the qualitative principles of *puritas*, *perspicuitas*, *ornatus*, and *aptum* in teachers' online discourse, with particular attention to the case of *perspicuitas*; the need for special mastery of certain elements of strategic importance in verbal and non-verbal (oral and non-oral) composition; controlling certain rhetorical vices; and properly management of the time aspects of its execution and the resources that guarantee and strengthen feedback. This study considers several theses: the need to increase the *auctoritas* of online teachers in relation to their responsibility as a model of public communication in their professional practice, the advantages and disadvantages of using certain resources and supports, questions deriving from students' "criterion of presence," and the asymmetric manifestations of the relationship of communication online.

Keywords: electronic learning, virtual classrooms, classroom communication, teacher competences, rhetoric.

Revision accepted: 2021-12-29.

This is the English version of an article originally printed in Spanish in issue 282 of the **revista española de pedagogía**. For this reason, the abbreviation EV has been added to the page numbers. Please, cite this article as follows: López Navia, S. (2022). Retórica docente y enseñanza *online* en la educación universitaria | *Rhetoric in teaching and e-learning in university education. Revista Española de Pedagogía, 80* (282), 331-345. https://doi.org/10.22550/REP80-2-2022-02

https://revistadepedagogia.org/ ISSN: 0034-9461 (Impreso), 2174-0909 (Online)

Resumen:

La enseñanza *online* define un entorno retórico singular que hace necesario que el docente despliegue habilidades y estrategias comunicativas que aprovechen las posibilidades y compensen los condicionantes propios del entorno presencial-virtual en aras de la eficacia didáctica y la capacidad persuasiva. El presente trabajo es el resultado de la revisión de la bibliografía centrada en las características del discurso docente y sus peculiaridades en el entorno de enseñanza en red, así como de la reflexión y el análisis derivados de la experiencia del autor en la observación sistemática de su propia práctica retórica y la de los profesores de su mismo segmento en el ámbito universitario *online*. Los principales resultados se centran en la demostración de la vigencia de los principios cualitativos de *puritas, perspicuitas, ornatus y aptum* en el discurso docente en red, con especial atención al criterio de *perspicuitas,* así como en la necesidad de dominar especialmente ciertos elementos que cobran una importancia estratégica en su construcción verbal y no verbal (oral y no oral), controlar ciertos vicios retóricos y gestionar adecuadamente los aspectos temporales de su ejecución y los recursos que garantizan y refuerzan la retroalimentación. En el estudio se discuten diversas tesis, entre las que destacan la necesidad de abonar la *auctoritas* del docente *online* en relación con su responsabilidad como modelo comunicativo público en el ejercicio de su profesión, las ventajas y los inconvenientes del empleo de ciertos recursos y apoyos, los aspectos derivados del «criterio de presencia» de los alumnos y las manifestaciones asimétricas de la relación comunicativa propia de la enseñanza en red.

Descriptores: enseñanza *online*, clase virtual, comunicación docente, competencias del profesor, retórica.

1. The profile of the communicator teacher and its special importance in online teaching

All university teachers should, thanks to their training and the demands of their professional practice, have the necessary rhetorical competence to manage the different situations that arise in their work, especially in a global educational setting. For this reason, Valcárcel (2005) places communicative competences among the basic competences for training teachers in the process of European convergence. However, experience seems to suggest that this is not the case, and there is a need to define and improve the communicative skill of higher-education professionals, who do not always receive adequate instruction. The place and usefulness of rhetoric can be understood in this training requirement, which often suggests a shortcoming, especially the rhetoric of orality in the service of the variety of online learning situations. Good communication and clarity in teachers' explanations are two of the initial three items (eloquence is the third) that are clearly rhetorical in the *Questionnaire for the Evaluation of Online*

University Lecturers (QEOU) (Cañadas & de la Cuétara, 2018). However, it is striking that these items did not, in the first exploratory analysis, reach the minimum discrimination indices for validation in the subsequent version, despite being such important features in online and face-to-face teaching.

The evidence for this need is even clearer, if this is possible, at a time when circumstances and needs require teachers to demonstrate their versatility when combining face-to-face and online teaching, which is ever more widespread even beyond the circumstances deriving from such significant factors as the Covid-19 pandemic, in the midst of the inevitable clash between the archaic and the emergent that Soto Aguirre (2020) recalls, using the paradigms of identity developed by Williams (1980). It is, ultimately, a matter of online teachers accepting with renewed vigour their responsibility to be a model in the intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic elaboration of their discourse and, according to Salmerón et al. (2010), accepting the relevance and impact of the communicative aspects of their work. This attitude benefits teachers' *auctoritas*, as their credibility and influence are based on their knowledge, their exemplary status, and their communicative style, in which the qualitative principles of *puritas* (correctness), *perspicuitas* (clarity), *ornatus* (elegance), and *aptum* (appropriateness), as set out by Cicero (I a.C./2002) and Quintilian (c. 95/1999), remain decisive and will continue to be so.

We speak of *communicator* teachers, not *transmitter* teachers, and the difference is quite clear (López Navia, 2010). The communicator teacher opts for a "Socratic" communicative relationship rather than a "Demosthenic" one, in accordance with the rhetorical models of classical antiquity complemented by the now well-established contributions from the last decades of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century. Consequently, as Stubbs (1984) notes, the conversational dimension of teaching remains an exercise in social and personal relations, and Bain (2007), when defining the characteristics that support excellence in teachers, identifies the need for participatory exchange of ideas, agreeing with what Shor and Freire noted some time ago when they asserted the need to act *with* students and not *at* them (Shor and Freire, 1986) and to exercise leadership, which, as noted in the contributions by the Holmes Group, involves teachers' being able to "make their students do," on the same line as Smyth's comments when referring to "involvement in a joint search for knowledge" (Smyth, 1994, p. 244).

Online teaching clearly draws on all of these components, but it also adds others that make it possible to speak of a distinctive rhetorical space where, in line with what Adell and Sales (2000) observed, the tools and technical instruments that mediate communication between teachers and students do not increase but instead reduce the "transactional distance" between educators and students in the sense proposed by Moore (1990), in other words, the distance shaped by the role of dialogue between the educational agents and the structuring of the design of the content

delivered. We could, accordingly, claim that transactional distance is directly proportional to how structured the course is and inversely proportional to the quantity and quality of the dialogue established. Indeed, Aguaded and Cabero (2002) focus on the favourable outcome online teaching has in overcoming the unidirectionality of communication and encouraging real-time interaction, with the considerable benefit of all of this for constructing knowledge.

In line with the above, and as Salinas (2004) and Chaparro (2016) have observed, these technical elements lead to a new teacher profile, with instructors who can observe and reflect on their actions and who enable and motivate their students to learn through discovery, stimulating their intellectual development and their creative capacity, impulses that continue to demonstrate the undoubted importance of teachers' attitude of engagement in the process. Indeed, as García-Peñalvo acutely observes, it is necessary to "eliminate any relic or myth linked to viewing this educational mode as a second-class process or one requiring less commitment and effort from teachers than in an equivalent situation in a face-to-face context" (García-Peñalvo, 2020, p. 49). On the contrary, the wide variety of technologically mediated spaces in which teachers must practise requires significant effort. Otherwise, according to Osuna-Acedo et al. (2018), it would not be possible to tackle effectively the challenges of sMOOCs (Social Massive Open Online Courses) – which require a high level of interaction, are shaped by ubiquity, and lend themselves to integration in students' lived experience – or tMOOCs (Transfer Massive Open Online Courses), where full involvement of teachers is a prerequisite for approaching their transmediality, globalising impact, and condition as fertile ground for collaborative work "as a commitment to public engagement" (Osuna-Acedo et al., 2018, p. 112).

The consequences of teachers' engagement with their tasks online were very aptly summarised by Gros and Silva: "keeping communication spaces 'alive', facilitating access to content, encouraging dialogue between participants, helping them share their knowledge and building new knowledge" (Gros & Silva, 2005, p. 4). Imbernón et al. make a similar point when they mention the need to "elicit the development of competences in reasoning, planning, reflexive learning, knowledge creation, and communication" (Imbernón et al., 2011, p. 114).

2. The distinctive rhetorical features of online teaching

2.1. The special value of the maxim of *perspicuitas*

It is no surprise that Quintilian said that clarity is the first virtue of eloquence (Quintilian, c.55/1999, II, 3, 8), and the maxim of clarity (the criterion of *perspicuitas*) is especially important in the rhetoric of online teaching for very obvious reasons:

1. The attention students potentially pay in an online class is not subject to the factors of physical proximity that can be linked to the capacity for direct control teachers exercise. This could mean that

there is a greater risk of being distracted more easily by external stimuli outside the communication channel than in face-to-face teaching.

2. The fact teachers cannot make direct visual contact with every student or perform a constant visual sweep of all of the students denies them the possibility to dynamize the phatic or contact function, which regulates the principle of feedback. In other words: teachers miss real-time expressions of doubt (or confidence in comprehension), disagreement (or assent), or lack of interest (or otherwise) by their students, which they would notice if they were physically present and which they could interpret to redirect their discourse in pursuit of greater intelligibility. This does not mean that the chat function, common in virtual classrooms, cannot be a reliable instrument for registering assent or raising doubts (in fact, some students' communicative profile benefits from the sensation of distance when interacting in the lesson), but not, of course, with the degree of immediacy and efficacy that derives from visual contact.

3. It is important to keep in mind that students' concentration or the quality and intensity of the attention with which they perceive difficulties comprehending the teacher's discourse in real time can be tempered or even harmed by the certainty given by the fact that the class is being recorded so that people who cannot follow it synchronously can follow it later. All of this influences students' reactions when managing difficulties. Motivated by embarrassment or convenience, they might give in to the temptation (and hence the risk) of putting off the problem until they rewatch the recorded class instead of expressing their uncertainty in real time.

4. Teachers must take special care to ensure that the criterion of *perspicuitas* does not suffer from the variety in the use of media, concurrent use of different technological applications, and possible difficulties typical of the effective management of the multimedia setting.

Consequently, clarity in discourse is especially necessary in online teaching, both in its formulation and in its structure. Maximum intelligibility and order in the arrangement and implementation of lesson plans guarantee not only didactic efficacy but also credibility. Indeed, the connection between disorder and loss of credibility was underlined some time ago in the conversations between Gerald Miller and David Addington (in Monroe & Ehninger, 1976). On the same lines, and in a broad sense that transcends online teaching, Camacho and Sáenz (2000) note that the form of the didactic message must have appropriate levels of clarity, precision, and exactness, and Zabalza (2003) and García Nieto (2008) make it clear that the profile of the university teacher needed in the European Higher Education Area demands a comprehensible appropriately organised explanation. With regards to online education, Alvarado determines that teachers' communication skills must include "clarity, veracity, relevance, quality, appropriate quantity, and structure" (Alvarado, 2014, p. 62).

2.2. Verbal and non-verbal preparation of teachers' discourse

2.2.1. Verbal language

The qualitative principle of *puritas* should determine the proper discourse for any mode of teaching (face-to-face or online), starting from the premise inherent to the role all teachers should aspire to as models for their students. This involves structuring and execution that are subject to norms (López Navia, 1997, 1998, 2010). This approach starts with especially clear vocalisation, which will have a very favourable impact on the attention students pay to teachers and the trust they inspire[1]. Care for nuanced articulation, which is perfectly compatible with the distinctive dialectal features of Spanish, is especially necessary in e-learning as this format is more sensitive to potential disruptions from the channel than face-to-face teaching. It is also important to consider that there is a clear relationship between careless pronunciation that is peppered with confusion and the loss of teachers' credibility, as Baker (1965) showed in his pioneering studies in this area.

With regards to lexical correctness, online teaching requires a rich and varied vocabulary, something that is not in any way at odds with the maxim of *perspicuitas* and which draws upon the lexical wealth of the Spanish language, a wealth that is sometimes neglected because of the false prestige (often bordering on snobbishness) associated with frequent use of English words to express concepts that can very well be stated in Spanish[2]. Similarly, any responsible and well-prepared discourse by a teacher will require selection of the appropriate words, especially when rounding off a sequence that aims to be comprehensible, rejecting any imprecision or ambiguity and avoiding a lack of words that sometimes results from relying on students making inferences, an omission that can have especially negative consequences in online teaching. In addition, the mediation of online channels in no way justifies teachers allowing their vocabulary to stray away from formality in order to temper possible feelings of distance, and while a considered concession to informality might sometimes be acceptable, using colloquial expressions to reinforce complicity with the students, teachers should always opt for a formal register of expression.

The same could be said about the necessary observance of the norms in the morphosyntax characteristic of online teaching rhetoric. It is precisely because of this sensation of distance caused by the mediating elements of the channel that greater concentration is needed when preparing the teachers' real-time discourse, in which it is relatively easy to engage in anacoluthon, which, as we know, comprises syntactical incoherence when setting out the elements of a sequence as they do not combine properly. Anacoluthon is a very common error in spoken language, not just when the speaker fails to maintain the necessary concentration, but also when too many subordinate clauses are concatenated, losing their connection to the principal predication of which they form part. In online teaching, syntactical periods should preferably be of moderate length to avert this risk.

Only on the basis of a discourse that is subject to the norm does it make sense for teachers to make an effort to go further when expressing themselves in an especially elaborate, creative, and original style (maxim of *ornatus*) in which they employ whatever expressive resources they deem appropriate, albeit with the understanding that they will be more effective the more natural and clearer they are, so that, once again, in accordance with the maxim of *perspicuitas*, the intelligibility of the discourse is not undermined.

Teachers' difficulties in the course of their oral interventions are often made apparent by the use of signs of a verbal nature that can reveal insecurity and limited command of the discourse. These signs do not cause problems when used in a controlled and judicious way. Indeed, they naturally form part of the phatic function of language (Jakobson, 1975), directed at keeping alive the dialogue between participants in the session. This is the case with teachers who, from time to time and without uncontrolled repetition, check on their students' attention or level of understanding[3]. This precaution is highly advisable, and online teachers must train their students, as soon as possible, to comment in the chat only if they have a doubt. Otherwise a recurrent "phatic noise" develops through the accumulation of verbal responses of assent which can, in real time, be distracting.

The case that concerns us, however, is that of pseudo-phatic signs of a verbal nature (López Navia, 1997, 2010). These consist of words, usually formulated at the end of certain sequences, with an interrogative intonation and that teachers do not in any way control[4]. They are especially common in online teaching to compensate for the lack of feedback received through the verbal-oral and non-verbal responses (both oral and non-oral) typical of face-to-face teaching, and they can become a constant expressive vice if teachers do not increase conscious control of their discourse.

2.2.2. Non-verbal language

Within the oral dimension of non-verbal language, paralinguistic elements are especially important in online teaching. In view of this, teachers who are not conscious of the importance of correct rhetorical execution should pay attention to the tone, intensity, and *tempo* of their discourse and their intonation, in accordance with the following practical guidelines:

1. Although it is not necessary to say it explicitly for obvious reasons, teachers should not force their natural tone of voice, whether it is high, low, or somewhere in between.

2. With regards to intensity, and in terms of didactic efficacy, a certain level of tension – that is to say, a moderately lively and clearly audible volume which denotes interest and dynamism while never becoming vehement – is better than a low intensity that can be associated with timidity or a lack of certainty by the teacher and so might undermine students' perception of his or her authority (in the aforementioned sense of *auctoritas*) and negatively affect their attention. As Urbina and Forteza (in Gallego, 2008) note, clarity and firmness in the voice of the teacher not

only benefit the communicative climate that is established, but they also compensate for any possible technical problems that might occur. On the other hand, it is clear that intensity must be combined appropriately in line with the conditions of amplification common in online teaching: a high-pitched tone, for example, does not benefit from excess intensity.

3. Regarding intonation, online teachers must make a special effort to formulate their sequences with the expressive nuances characteristic of the different melodic profile (declaratory, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative). Didactic efficacy and persuasiveness are lost if this seemingly basic precaution is not taken, and the risk of students momentarily switching off increases proportionately, something that is more common, as we saw above, in this form of teaching. It is very important to consider that intonation is richer and more expressive the less the speaker depends on the medium for presenting the content (PowerPoint, for example). One error that is all too common in online teaching is for teachers to base their discourse on simply reading word for word the text on the screens of the device, an attitude that is opposed to any attempt at rhetorical skill and educational utility.

4. Finally, regarding *tempo*, teachers must avoid a fast pace of exposition, as experience shows that excess speed usually results in a reduction in the sharpness of articulation: the faster the exposition, the worse the vocalisation and the more errors in articulation, with a consequent negative impact on the quality of attention and on the teacher's credibility. It goes without saying that an excessively ponderous *tempo* is just as inappropriate for maintaining tension in the educational dialogue.

Online teachers must be particularly attentive to the rhetorical vice of frequently using pseudo-phatic and para-reflexive signs (López Navia, 1997, 2010) of a non-verbal oral nature, which do not formally comprise words, but rather sounds, and which seriously deface the teachers' discourse. One very common pseudophatic sign is recurrent and uncontrolled utterance of a prolonged bilabial nasal sound (sometimes close to the vowel *-e-*)[5]. With an elongated intonation, this sound can become a para-reflexive sign whose frequent use denotes insecurity, lack of preparation in the topic, or lack of practice.

Directly related to the above, it seems clear that one thing that is truly challenging in the discourse of the teacher (and in the practice of oratory in general) is appropriately managing silence (López Navia, 2006-2007). In general, teachers, above all as a consequence of the mediating elements typical of online teaching, often give in to fear of silence, replacing the natural pauses typical of reflection with para-reflexive signs. This fear is perhaps accentuated in teachers, who often associate silences in their discourse (both in the face-to-face modality and online) with the risk that the students will interpret them as a lack of knowledge or competence. However, the most effective practice is to maintain the tension of the silence above all in two very common situations in online discourse of the teacher:

1. The necessary reflection when preparing an answer to a question a student has made in the chat function. Reflexive pauses are better than giving in to the *horror vacui* of silence with para-reflexive signs.

2. The necessary wait for a response by students either through the chat (more commonly used), or using the microphone or even video (more effective for stimulating speaking freely), as discussed below.

With regards to the non-oral dimension of non-verbal language and its performative importance, it is necessary to start from the fact that the computer is in principle an unavoidable proxemic barrier that online teachers must compensate for so that the students perceive the weight of their presence in the absence of a direct contact in the sense that Marín et al. note (2013) when listing the drawbacks of this teaching modality. Indeed, the terminology used at the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja refers to "virtual face-to-face classes" to emphasise the fact that the teacher is giving a class in real time (which might also be viewed at a later time) and constantly redirecting it on the basis of interventions by the students. In the inherently dialogic act of online communication between teacher and learner, the former must display a special interest to neutralise or at least temper the physical distance from the latter with the certainty that students' motivation is directly related to the transmission of emotions (Alvarado, 2014).

So, given that the online teachers normally speak while seated at their desks in front of the computer, in principle eschewing the pleasant and effective possibilities of peripatetic communication, it is vital that they maintain the necessary formality in their posture and the use of certain gestures and movements that are indeed expressive, but perhaps more limited than those used when speaking while standing, a posture that allows a greater kinesic range. Without forgetting the need to adopt an upright and respectful posture, moderate forward movements that reflect the intention (or the effect) of the teacher drawing close to the students with complicity are sometimes very advisable. Trusting in the expressiveness of hand movements is also of the greatest importance. These should preferably be free, and teachers should try not to raise their hands above shoulder height to attenuate potential displays of vehemence. Teachers who are starting out in online teaching, given the desirability of keeping their hands in view, can adopt a starting point for gestures that permits kinesic progression. This involves intertwining their hands without ceasing to move them. Starting from this position, it is easier to free one or both hands in gestures that are sometimes symmetrical and sometimes parallel, and are highly suited to regulating the pace of the discourse. Ultimately, according to Vázquez (2001), it is a matter of properly controlling adaptive gestures, which reveal the speaker's nerves, and of correctly using illustrator gestures, which have a descriptive intention.

Obviously, online teachers will avoid folding their arms in front of the screen as this posture accentuates distance and sometimes displays insecurity and even a

certain degree of hostility. In any case, according to Urbina and Forteza (in Gallego, 2008), the kinesic display of online teachers must tend towards smooth movements in the interests of image quality.

As they cannot do the visual sweep that is a customary part of non-verbal communication in face-to-face teaching, online teachers must direct their gaze at the camera, without looking above it or below the level their eyes occupy in the on-screen image while seeking in students' individual perception of the teacher the virtue teachers manifest when, as Bain (2007) states, they are truly dedicated to excellence in their work and consequently seek to attract each and every one of their students, whatever the place they occupy. Nonetheless, as Feenberg very appositely observes, we have to accept the phatic, sociodynamic, and affective limitations of online teaching in this sense, compared with the face-to-face modality, which makes it possible to "catch the teacher's eye and exchange a fleeting glance in which boredom or attention are tacitly expressed" (Feenberg, 2004, p. 126). Teachers can also use head movements to emphasise and expressively give nuances to the discourse and will adopt facial gestures of receptivity and interest when students reply to their questions or ask ones themselves. According to Castellà et al (2007), these elements are all fundamental for encouraging student participation.

2.3. Some comments on time management and basic auxiliary elements

Just as the rhetoric typical of online teaching has distinctive paralinguistic, kinesic, and proxemic factors, the chronemic aspects that shape teachers' discourse are also important, given that the appropriate use of time is a clear display of rigour, skill, command of the topic being covered, and courtesy to the students. The mediation represented by the technical elements in the educational dialogue between the agents who participate in the process requires precautions to avoid connectivity problems and the subsequent loss of time that these cause. Experience shows that the sense of punctuality that should decide the boundaries of an online teaching session is usually apparent at the moment of connection, but not always at the moment of disconnection, as though the breadth of the virtual space that teacher and students share justifies the laxity with which the ends of classes are sometimes administered.

To end, we should also mention the supports and distractions typical of online teaching. Just as students follow the class from their personal space, online teachers deliver classes in a setting of security and confidence provided by the familiar and recognisable objects and elements of their surroundings. However, it is important to ensure that the guarantees of that physical comfort zone are not shaped, and much less disturbed, by nearby items that might become distractions.

With regards to supports, one of the most effective for maintaining constant interaction with students is the chat function, and teachers should pay constant attention to it in order to monitor in real time the expressions of feedback by the students: their spontaneous comments, the doubts they express, and their

answers to any questions raised. The importance of what we could very well call the "criterion of presence" of the students requires teachers to show very clearly that they are paying attention to these manifestations, making periodic interventions and addressing students who participate by name so that they are expressly aware that they are the object of special interest at that moment, a requirement whose importance Urbina and Forteza (in Gallego, 2008) identify as one of those that benefit didactic communication online.

In any case, to adjust for the asymmetry of the communicative relationship in the virtual classroom (oral in the case of the teacher and written in the case of the students) and in pursuit of effective educational communication, it is of the greatest strategic importance for the teacher to encourage students to participate through the microphone and, if students agree to it, in front of the camera. All of this, is clearly to be done while respecting the people's understandable sense of embarrassment, especially when using the camera, because the "criterion of presence" we mentioned above is also resolved in another form of potential asymmetry that relates to the form of physical perception of the agents. The heteroperception of teachers is public: they are present before their students, all of whom can see the teacher, and this shapes their communicative performance, from clothing to non-verbal non-oral language. Students' preferred self-perception is private, even though it has a public projection through their interventions, but displaying their own images projected into heteroperception – horizontal (student/student) or vertical (teacher/student) – can represent a greater intrusion into their privacy than sharing their voices.

None of the above, of course, has a negative effect on the efficacy of merely written interaction in the chat function that is typical of the synchronous communicative relationship and as a complement to the virtual face-to-face classes through asynchronous chats or formal communication by email. As Feenberg notes, "the practice of writing imposes discipline and helps to focus thoughts. Teachers learn to understand students' ideas at a deeper level when they communicate with them electronically" (Feenberg, 2004, p. 119). Similarly, as Chaparro (2016) observes, teachers' written communication skills also are also favourably affected by this form of interchange between educational agents, which should be intense and continuous (Area & Adell, 2009), and interaction and dialogue between students increases, with positive effects on the construction of knowledge (Gros & Silva, 2005), especially from the conscience of diversity typical of the group–class universe, which justifies the versatility and adaptation of teachers' discourse in accordance with the maxim of *aptum*. The greatest of care must be taken in this interchange, using both synchronous and asynchronous resources, although in this case "teachers should set maximum response times so that students can receive the necessary feedback without it preventing the teacher from pursuing the learning objectives" (García-Peñalvo, 2020, p. 50).

3. Conclusions

The communicative skills of university teachers must be improved given the particular features of e-learning. This is a rhetorical setting that needs communicator professionals whose participation in a common interactive process of knowledge construction helps to advance it by surmounting the conventions typical of mere transfer of specialised knowledge.

Online teachers' execution of discourse makes it especially necessary to strengthen observance of the classical maxim of *perspicuitas* (clarity) to compensate for one of these distinctive features: the risk of students becoming distracted by external stimuli. Reinforcement of natural limits in feedback and dissuading students from putting off their possible doubts is equally necessary. The qualitative principle of *perspicuitas* is expressed through the formulation of teachers' discourse with the maximum intelligibility and in accordance with a solid and coherent structure.

The elaboration and formal execution of teachers' discourse must also respect the maxim of *puritas* (correctness), which requires care for nuanced articulation, the necessary lexical correctness, preferably using a formal register, and structuring sequences to avoid common errors such as anacoluthon in teachers' discourse, in general and particularly online. Only by complying with the criterion of *puritas* does an original and creative elaboration of the discourse (*ornatus*) make real sense.

In the execution of their discourse, online teachers must take particular care with pseudophatic oral signs (verbal and non-verbal) and effectively administer paralinguistic elements (tone, intensity, *tempo*, and intonation) to support their didactic efficacy and their persuasive capacity, upholding their credibility (characteristic of *auctoritas*) and inspiring higher quality attention by students. Appropriate management of silence will avert reliance on rhetorical vices such as para-reflexive signs, which reduce the trust teachers inspire in their receptors.

Another distinctive feature of online teaching is the natural proxemic barrier created by the computer. This should inspire teachers to neutralise the feeling of distance by reinforcing the necessary performative dynamism in which, notwithstanding the necessary postural formality, expressive hand movements, visual projection that reaches each student through the camera in the absence of a visual sweep that takes in the group, and the use of facial expressions that denote the receptivity and interest of the teacher are all essential. Other enhancements also contribute to the efficacy of teachers' online discourse. These include balanced time management, neutralising distractions, and above all constant encouragement of feedback based on the certainty of the students' "criterion of presence" and its implications in didactics with a dialogic basis that can temper the two common forms of asymmetry that characterise the communicative relationship in online teaching: the contrast between the teachers' orality and the students' preferred writing in the chat function, and the public character with which students perceive the teacher compared with the un-

derstandable shelter of a certain degree of privacy that is characteristic of them.

Conscious implementation of the strategies we propose would make it easier to improve the communicative skills that any university teacher should display when facing their different receptors and in the different situations that arise in their practice (maxim of *aptum*), among which online teaching opens a path with ever clearer force. The rest, as Quintilian, with his great lucidity, said, lies in "hard work and assiduity of study, by a variety of exercises and repeated trial, the highest prudence and unfailing quickness of judgement" (Quintilian, c. 95/1999, II, 13, 15-17). Something that ultimately is in no way foreign to the professional commitment inherent to the practice of teaching.

Notes

1 To give two examples of habitual errors in Spanish, excessive relaxation of pronunciation of post-tonic syllables is very common, especially in the last syllable of words that have the stress on the antepenultimate syllable, and teachers often yield to the temptation to elide the *-d-* between vowels in past participles ending in *-ado* (although not in the case of participles ending in *-ido*).

2 Such is the case, among many other possible examples, of "schedule" in place of *programa*, "timing" in place of *horario*, and "input" in place of *señal*.

3 With questions such as "*¿entendéis?*" ("do you understand?"), "*¿me explico?*" ("am I being clear?") and "*¿alguien tiene alguna duda*?" ("does anyone have any doubts?")

4 "*¿Verdad?*" ("right?"), "*¿entendido?*" ("understood?"), "*¿visto?*" ("do you see?"), and, very frequently, "*¿vale?*" ("okay?").

5 We could transcribe these approximately as [¿mmm?] or [eeeh].

References

Adell, J., & Sales, A. (2000). Enseñanza *online*. Elementos para la definición del rol del profesor [Online teaching. Elements for the definition of the teacher's role]. In J. Cabero, M. Cebrián, A. M. Duarte, F. Martínez, I. Aguaded, J. Barroso, J. M. Fernández-Batanero, & J. A. Morales-Lozano (Coords.), *Nuevas tecnologías en la formación flexible y a distancia* (pp. 351-372). Universidad de Sevilla.

Aguaded, J. I., & Cabero, C. (2002). *Educar en red. Internet como recurso para la educación [Educate online. Internet as a resource for education].* Aljibe.

Alvarado, M. A. (2014). Retroalimentación en educación en línea: una estrategia para la construcción del conocimiento [Feedback in online education: a strategy for knowledge building]. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia, 17* (2), 59-73.

Area, M., & Adell, J. (2009). E-Learning: Enseñar y aprender en espacios virtuales [E-Learning: Teaching and learning in virtual spaces]. In J. de Pablos (Coord.), *Tecnología Educativa. La formación del profesorado en la era de Internet* (pp. 391-424). Aljibe.

Bain, K. (2007). *Lo que hacen los mejores profesores universitarios [What the best university professors do].* Publicacions de la Universitat de València.

Baker, E. (1965). The Inmediate Effects of Perceived Speaker Disorganization on Speaker Credibility and Audience Attitude Change in Persuasive Speaking. *Western Speech, 29*, 148-161.

Camacho, S., & Sáenz, Ó. (2000). *Técnicas de formación eficaz para profesores y formadores [Effective training techniques for teachers and trainers].* Marfil.

Cañadas, I., & de la Cuétara, I. (2018). Estudio psicométrico y validación de un cuestionario para la evaluación del profesorado universitario de enseñanza a distancia [Psychometric study and validation of a questionnaire for the evaluation of online university lecturers]. *Revista de Estudios e Investigación en Psicología y Educación, 5* (2), 102-112. https://doi.org/10.17979/reipe.2018.5.2.3701

Castellà, J. M., Comelles, S., Cros, A., & Vilà, M. (2007). *Entender(se) en clase. Las estrategias comunicativas de los docentes bien valorados [Understanding each other in class. The communicative strategies of highly rated teachers].* Graó.

Chaparro, P. (2016). La enseñanza *online* en los estudios universitarios [Online teaching in university studies]. *Actualidad Jurídica Iberoamericana, 4 bis*, 9-26.

Cicerón, M. T. (I a. C./2002). *Sobre el orador [About the speaker].* Gredos.

Feenberg, A. (2004). La enseñanza *online* y las opciones de la modernidad [E-learning and the choices of modernity]. *Pensamiento Digital, 4*, 115-133.

Gallego, M. J. (2008). Comunicación didáctica del docente universitario en entornos presenciales y virtuales [Didactic communication of university teachers in face-to-face and virtual environments]. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación, 46* (1), 1-16.

García Nieto, N. (2008). La función tutorial de la Universidad en el actual contexto de la Educación Superior [Tutoring at University in the current context of Higher Education]. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 22* (1), 21-48.

García-Peñalvo, F. J. (2020). Modelo de referencia para la enseñanza no presencial en universidades presenciales [Reference model for virtual education at face-to-face universities]. *Campus Virtuales, 9* (1), 41-56.

Gros, B., & Silva, J. E. (2005). La formación del profesorado como docente en los espacios virtuales de aprendizaje [Teacher training as a teacher in virtual learning spaces]. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación, 36* (1), 1-13.

Holmes Group (1990). *Tomorrow's Schools: Principles for the Design of Professional Development Schools.* The Holmes Group.

Imbernón, F., Silva, P., & Guzmán, C. (2011). Competencias en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje virtual y semipresencial [Teaching Skills in Virtual and Blended Learning Environments]. *Comunicar, 18* (36), 107-114.

Jakobson, R. (1975). *Ensayos de lingüística general [Essays on general linguistics].* Seix Barral.

López Navia, S. (1997). Principales deficiencias en el uso oral del lenguaje en las situaciones expositivas [Main deficiencies in the oral use of language in expository situations]. *Anuario de la Universidad Internacional SEK, 3*, 229-235.

López Navia, S. (1998). La retórica de la docencia y la retórica en la docencia [The rhetoric of teaching and rhetoric in teaching]. In T. Albadalejo, J. A. Caballero, & E. del Río (*Coords.*), *Quintiliano. Historia y actualidad de la retórica* (pp. 1381-1396). Ediciones del Instituto de Estudios Riojanos.

López Navia, S. (2006-2007). El silencio y los silencios en la ejecución del discurso: algunas consideraciones prácticas [Silence and silences in speech performance: some practical considerations]. *Anuario de la Universidad Internacional SEK, 11*, 39-44.

López Navia, S. (2010). *Diseño de tareas para la superación de las principales dificultades del alumnado universitario en la construcción y la ejecución del discurso expositivo [Design of tasks to overcome the main difficulties of university students in the construction and execution of expository discourse].* Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.

Marín, V., Reche, E., & Maldonado, G. A. (2013). Ventajas e inconvenientes de la formación *online* [Advantages and disadvantages of online training]. *Revista Digital de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria, 7* (1), 33-43.

Monroe, A. H., & Ehninger, D. (1976). *La comunicación oral. El arte del discurso y del informe [Oral communication. The art of discourse and reporting].* Editorial Hispano Europea.

Moore, M. G. (1990). Recent contributions to the theory of distance education. *Open Learning, 5* (3), 10-15.

Osuna-Acedo, S., Marta-Lazo, C., & Frau-Meigs, D. (2018). De sMOOC a tMOOC, el aprendizaje hacia la transferencia profesional: el proyecto europeo ECO. *Comunicar, 55* (26), 105-114.

Quintiliano de Calahorra (c.95/1999). *Obra completa [Complete Works].* Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca.

Salinas, J. (2004). Cambios metodológicos con las TIC. Estrategias didácticas y entornos virtuales de enseñanza-aprendizaje [Methodological changes with ICT. Didactic strategies and virtual teaching-learning environments]. *Bordón. Revista de Pedagogía, 56* (3-4), 469-481.

Salmerón, H., Rodríguez, S., & Gutiérrez, C. (2010). Metodologías que optimizan la comunicación en entornos de aprendizaje virtual [Methodologies to Improve Communication in Virtual Learning Environments]. *Comunicar, 34* (17), 163-171.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1986). *Medo e ousadia. O cotidiano do profesor [Fear and daring. The teacher's everyday life].* Paz e Terra.

Smyth, J. (1994). Una concepción pedagógica y educativa del liderazgo escolar [A pedagogical and educational understanding of school leadership]. In J. M. Escudero & M. T. González (*Eds.*), *Profesores y escuela. ¿Hacia una reconversión de los centros y la función docente?* (pp. 221-250). Ediciones Pedagógicas.

Soto-Aguirre, T. (2020). Clases *online* o la necesidad de adaptación a una nueva forma de establecer el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje [Online classes or the need to adapt to a new way of establishing the teaching-learning process]. *Revista Saberes Educativos, 5*, 9-21.

Stubbs, M. (1984). *Lenguaje y escuela: análisis sociolingüístico de la enseñanza [Language and school: sociolinguistic analysis of education].* Cincel.

Valcárcel, M. (2005). La preparación del profesorado universitario para la convergencia europea en educación superior [The preparation of university teaching staff for European convergence in higher education]. *Educatio Siglo xxi, 23,* 209-213.

Vázquez, G. (*Coord.*). (2001). *El discurso académico oral. Guía didáctica para la comprensión auditiva y visual de las clases magistrales [Oral academic discourse. Didactic guide for the auditory and visual comprehension of lectures.].* Edinumen.

Zabalza, M. A. (2003). *Competencias docentes del profesorado universitario. Calidad y desarrollo profesional [Teaching competences of university teaching staff. Quality and professional development].* Narcea.

Author biography

Santiago López Navia has an undergraduate degree and a doctorate in Philology and a doctorate in Philosophy and Educational Sciences. He is an Associate Professor at the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, where he is the Vice-dean for research in the Faculty of Education and is the Academic Director of the University Masters in Rhetoric and Oratory. He holds the Felipe Segovia Martínez Chair in Humanistic Studies at the Universidad SEK (Santiago de Chile) and is an advisory member of the Board of Trinity College Group of Spain. One of his main research interests is rhetoric, with special attention on the organisation and execution of expository discourse typical of formal situations, especially in the academic field, and its application in teaching and in defining the rhetorical profile of the communicator teacher compared to the transmitter teacher.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5074-0208