COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING:
HOW IS IT REALIZED IN THE CLASSROOM?

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Abstract

Communicative language teaching is aimed at enabling learners to communicate in the target language. It is a replacement of audio-lingual or grammar translation that is justified unable to make the learners to communicate in the target language. The communicative approach has dominated English language teaching worldwide. Language was no longer seen as abstract grammatical rules, but of having applications in social contexts. There is a change of role of the teacher and the students. Formerly, the teachers play a role as a model. Today, with the communicative methodology, he has new roles as facilitators and monitors. The students must take part actively in the classroom activities which are designed to make the students interact each others.

Key words: *CLT, CBI, TBI, communicative competence, fluency, accuracy, facilitator, monitor, language function, speculation, jigsaw/sequencing, ranking & rating, matching*

Background

The goal of language learning is to communicate in the target language. In 1970s, educators observed that it is mostly not reached by using traditional approach. In the traditional approach, where a language is consciously learned, attention is focused on the language in its written form and the objective is for the student to understand the structure and rules of the language through the application of intellectual and logical deductive reasoning (Krashen 1982). A key feature of this approach is the emphasis on form (accuracy) as being of greater importance than the communication (fluency). Consequently, one develops a solid understanding of grammar and linguistic form in the absence of practical usage.

The educators observed that the students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom. They noted that being able to communicate required more than mastering linguistic structures. Students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but they are unable to use the language. So, it is clear that to be able to communicate, linguistic competence is not sufficient. The competence required is called communicative competence, i.e. knowing when and how to say what to whom. Such observations contributed to a shift in the approach of language teaching, from a linguistic structure-centered approach to a communicative approach. Since then, the communicative approach has dominated English language teaching, it has firmly established itself on a worldwide.

Language was no longer seen as abstract grammatical rules, but of having applications in social contexts and as such it is not just about 'grammar' but also about functions and notions. It is a replacement of, its audio-lingual or grammar translation predecessors (Huw Jarvis and Sirin Atsilarat, 2004). Hence, the challenge that foreign language instructors face is two-fold; increasing the learner's communicative proficiency, and also teaching a new method of learning where language is "acquired" as opposed to "learned" (Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XIV, No. 8, August 2008)

Krashen (1982) makes a distinction between language learning and language acquisition. The former has long been linked to the traditional approach of language study. Conversely, language acquisition refers to the process of natural assimilation involving intuition and subconscious processes. Here, the learner is an active participant using the L2 in the production of real interactions. This approach is similar to the way children learn their native tongue, a process that produces functional skill in the spoken language without theoretical knowledge. Learners develop familiarity with the phonetic characteristics of the language as well as its structure and vocabulary. This process facilitates comprehension, the capability for creative communication and for the identification of cultural values. Much of this approach is reflected in the principles of communicative language teaching.

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

Since the 1990s the communicative approach has been widely implemented. Communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals, etc. The following principles underlie the current practices in communicative language teaching:

1. The goal of CLT is to enable students to communicate in the target language.

   To do this, students need knowledge of linguistic forms, meanings, and function. They need to know that many different forms can be used to form a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Communication is a process; knowledge of the forms of language is insufficient (Larsen, et.al., 2001: 128).

2. The role of the teacher is as a facilitator, a monitor

   Teachers have the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error-free sentences, the teacher has to develop a different view of learners' errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning. Learners now have to partici-

pate in language activities that are based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students have to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work task, rather than relying on the teacher for a model (http://www.professorjackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative-lang, August 10th 2010). The teacher and the students may face difficulties in their new roles. Formerly, the model of language teaching is "Teacher-center learning" where the students are not active in the classroom. Today, by using the communicative methodology, the model of language teaching used is "Student-center learning" where the students must be active in the classroom. Formerly language learning was viewed as habit formation: the students are drilled in order to implant the habit of the target language. Recently, language learning is viewed as processes of interaction where the classroom activities done by the students are pair work activities, role plays, group work activities, and project work. Thus, they are expected to have greater responsibility in their own learning. These changes of role make them shy and reluctant to participate in the classroom activities. Formerly, the teachers play a role as a model who must drill the students to implant new habits. They also must provide dialogs to be memorized by the students. Today, with the communicative methodology, they have new roles as facilitators and monitors. The difficulties they may have with their new roles are in enhancing the students' participation in the classroom activities.

3. The most obvious characteristic of CLT is that almost everything done, is with a communicative intent

Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role plays, and problem solving tasks. Activities that are truly communicative have three features in common, i.e. information gap, choice and feedback. They should have a purpose for communicating. They should be focused on the content of what they are saying or writing rather than on a particular language form. They should use a variety of language rather than just one language structure. The teacher will not intervene to stop the activity. The activities should replicate real communication (Harmer, 2003: 85).

4. The teaching materials should be authentic

Authentic materials are useful for the students because the materials are parallel to what they will meet in the society. Authentic materials also reflect the culture of the target language. It is important because studying a target language cannot be separated from studying the culture of the speech community of the target language. By this, so the learners will be exposed to the culture concerning what are regarded taboo and not taboo to be talked, how should we talk to the interlocutors of the same age, to older interlocutors, to interlocutors we don't know well yet, etc. Thus, using authentic materials means preparing the students for the real communication that will occur in the society.

(http://www.professorjackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative-lang, August 10th 2010). The difficulties arise in using authentic materials are that it is not easy to find out materials that are suitable with the students' mastery level. Very often, the authentic materials are not comprehensible for the students. They are too difficult in terms of grammar, vocabulary, etc. In this case, the teacher needs to simplify the materials in order to be comprehensible for the students. So, simplification of the authentic materials for low-level students are necessary. The higher the level of the students the less simplification needed. In the advance level, simplification of the authentic materials is not necessary.

5. Teacher should monitor pair and group work

Monitoring the students during pair and group speaking activities is important. Circulating around the classroom creates the sense that the students are being watched. But don't just walk around; stop and observe each pair or group. Listen and provide clarification/feedback. Again, making students aware of your presence reinforces the purpose and objective of the assignment. Furthermore, ensure the activities don't go on too long by setting time limits at the activities. To wrap up, call on students to demonstrate what they have practiced to the class. This is most effective when students are informed at the outset that they will have to present their practice to their peers. Students may be motivated to concentrate on the assigned activity and put forward their best performance (Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XIV, No. 8, August 2008).

6. Combine instructor lead and Student- centered approaches

While communicative competence is often measured by the ability to engage in natural conversation, for lower level learners the notion of participating in a one hour group discussion in the L2 may be unrealistic, inappropriate and ineffective for language development. This type of lesson requires advanced vocabulary, sufficient knowledge of grammar structures and motivation to express ideas in the L2. For lower level learners, combing instructor lead and student centered approaches can be achieved by shifting from teacher presentation to pair work, group work and individual work.

7. Errors are tolerated

Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Since the activity is working on fluency, the teacher does not correct the students, but simply notes the errors, which he will return to at a later point (Larsen, et.al., 2001: 128).

Classroom Activities of CLT

In the following, an example of classroom activities of CLT is presented. This example is adapted from Larsen's *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (2001: 122-125).

1. *The teacher greets the class and distributes a handout of a sports column from a recent newspaper. He asks the students to underline the predictions the reporter has made*

   The choice of a sports column from a recent newspaper refer to the authenticity principle of CLT.

2. *Then, he asks the students to look at the first sentence of the text and asks them another way to express the meaning contained in the sentence.*

   This is to make the students aware that one function can have many different linguistic forms.

3. *The students are asked to unscramble the sentences of the newspaper article*

   In this part, the students work with language at discourse level (above the sentence) level. They learn about cohesion and coherence.

4. *The teacher announces that the students will be playing a game*

   Games are important because they have certain features in common with real communicative events. Through the games, they can negotiate meaning.

5. *The students are asked how they feel about the game*

   Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions

6. *The teacher has the students divide into groups of four. He asks each group of students to do a role play. They are to imagine that they are all employees of the same company. One of them is the others' boss. Some of the people in the company will lose their job. They must solve the problem.*

   The teacher moves from group to group to answer questions and offer any advice on what the groups can discuss. In this part, the students will practice what language forms are appropriate in dealing with one's boss. What language forms are appropriate in dealing with one's colleagues. Learning to use language forms appropriately is an important part of communicative competence.

7. *The class is almost over. The teacher uses the last few minutes to give homework. The students are asked to listen to a debate on the radio or watch it on television*

   Students should be given opportunities to listen to language as it is used in authentic communication.

Content-based and task-based Instruction (CBI and TBI)

Richards states that CBI and TBI are the extensions of CLT movement but which take different routes to achieve the goals of CLT to achieve learners' communicative competence

(http://www.professorjackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative-lang, August 10th 2010). Richards further explains that language learning is seen as resulting from processes such as the following:

1. Interaction between the learner and users of the language
2. Collaborative creation of meaning
3. Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language
4. Negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding
5. Learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language
6. Paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence
7. Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things

Advocates of CBI believe that these processes can be created in the classroom by using content as the driving force of classroom activities and to link all the different dimensions of communicative competence, including grammatical competence, to content.

Shin suggests several considerations when selecting an appropriate theme or content. The content should:

1. be motivating, interesting, and relevant to the learners (and teacher)
2. connect to real-life situations, including content from across the curriculum for school age children
3. appeal to and/or develop various learning styles and intelligences
4. provide a context for meaningful, authentic discourse and interaction
5. facilitate the development of appropriate, useful and real-world language functions and communication modes
6. connect to the target culture(s), wherever possible.

(English Teaching Forum, number 2, 2007)

The most important aspects of choosing an appropriate content are that it be interesting and meaningful to students and that it have potential for real-life application.

Task-based instruction is regarded as developing from a focus on classroom processes. TBI claims that language learning will result from creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially designed instructional tasks. A variety of games, role plays, simulations, and task-based communication activities should be prepared to support communicative language teaching classes (Richards, 1992: 80).

Oliver states that in the development and successful execution of tasks, we should consider the following points:

1. Learner Needs – based on our experience, our needs analysis (provided by our learners) and our overall lesson objective(s). Although we may have a large group, consider also

learners who stand out, in terms of being particularly strong and particularly weak communicators.

2. Input – we select tasks according to learners' general level, interest and /or major and overall needs. What skills should we focus on? We may focus on English for General Purposes, English for Special Purposes, etc.

3. Task Type – we need to develop a task from our input that we feel will address the learner needs. Modifications need to be made for e.g. individual learner roles

4. Goal/Purpose – This must be clear in our minds, and in the minds of the learner. The teacher needs to be careful in his/her instructions before conducting the task onto the learners. Time constraints, organization of material, justification of choices should be considered.

5. Task Link – This is probably the most difficult consideration. The task does not exist in isolation and functions as a component in the overall lesson objective(s). What precedes this task? What follows? Why?

6. Learner Organization and Roles – What are the groupings? Who is the 'leader'? Who are the 'followers'? If a learner has weak listening skills, we might consider their role as note taker/observer/reporter. (The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 2010)

Some examples of tasks are *Speculation , Jigsaw/sequencing , Ranking & rating , Matching*, which can be modified according to level and goals. In Speculation, learners predict the nature/topic of a text, e.g. The teacher (physically) cuts three sentences from a text (the choice is important). Learners are shown these one at a time. The learners speculate on what the text is about.

In Matching, Learners pair together words, items, objects, pictures etc. which have something in common, e.g. Students match a selection of pictures with the appropriate texts (e.g. newspaper photographs and their captions), Students match texts that have something in common with each other (e.g. news headlines and the related story).

Jigsaw means reassembling in order. For example: The teacher cuts the text into paragraphs and learners read each separately. Learners share information to put the whole text together.

Ranking and Rating mean prioritizing or categorizing. For example: Learners individually rank a number of short news story headlines in terms of their importance and then ask questions to ascertain the others' results. With more advanced groups, the teacher should encourage more justification on the part of the learners.

Conclusion

Communicative language teaching is held based on the principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals, etc. The classroom activities are designed based on the CLT principles. Content-based instruction and task-based instruction are the extensions of CLT movement but which take different routes to achieve the goals of CLT to achieve learners' communicative competence. In choosing the content, the tasks to be implemented in the classroom, teachers should consider the appropriateness with the students.

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