

Communicative Language Teaching: A New Perspective

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Abstract

Since the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), many textbooks have been written to incorporate communicative activities, authentic materials and personalized contexts. However, where the teaching and learning of grammar is concerned, most textbooks do not reflect CLT principles. As demonstrated in this paper, grammar activities in some Indian textbooks retain the structural method of teaching grammar. This paper suggests some methods so that grammar activities can be made more communicative by retaining some practices of the structural syllabus. Communicative Language Teaching is one of the highly focused aspects in contemporary English language teaching. Points of reference: Methodology of Teaching, Classroom Activities in communicative Language Teaching, Theorizing from Practice, Application of Theory and Developing Principles and a Teaching Philosophy. The Introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) materialized in the West in the 1960s and has extended to the Eastern countries over the last 2 decades. Since then, CLT principles have formed the foundation of English language syllabi in our Indian curriculum brought out by Indian association of English language Teachers, the switch from the structural to communicative approach only started in the 1990s. Before CLT was introduced, the structural syllabus was the mainstream approach in India.

Key Words: CLT, ELT, grammar

Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction:

Communicative Language Teaching is a set of principles about the goals of language teaching. The foremost aim of this methodology of teaching is to develop the Communicative Competence as against the grammatical competence. As said by Noam Chomsky an American Linguist, who in his theory of Competence and theory of Generative Grammar has said that language learning is a natural process and it is acquired and language has a property of productivity or fresh and new sentences could be generated. Henceforth, among

students the Communicative Competence should be developed by providing autonomy to the learners.

Teaching is an art, perhaps the greatest of all arts. As said by a Nobel laureate John Steinbeck, who meant that teachers have to perfect their art of teaching. Today, there is an ever-growing and increasing need for good communication skills in English and it has created a huge demand for not just English learners but English teaching around the world. Accuracy and Fluency in English is a pre-requisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's competitive world. The demand

for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever.

English Language Teaching professionals have to focus on the following aspects:

Disciplinary knowledge, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Skill, Professional Knowledge and professional Development and should also try to develop a model of teaching from the personal teaching experience .Knowledge drawn from language teaching and language learning, acquired through experience helps in developing principles and a teaching philosophy .

Now let us try to understand what is this Communicative Language Teaching and why is this methodology of teaching English Language so very important . As we know that a lot of research was conducted in the field of English Language Teaching in the past to find an appropriate Teaching Methodology or a means and process to achieve a target end. And even know a lot of research is been conducted in this area of Teaching Methodology, coming up with new approaches and innovative tools of teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching does not look at language as a set of linguistic items ,to store in the memory or on the form of a language but on the meaning and functional aspect of it This is because as I have already told that language is acquired and learnt rather than learnt consciously. There is virtually no teaching but felicitating the learners and enriching their experience of learning, no teaching because, there is no prescribed text book. The Texts discussed are Notional and the emphasis is on the

functional part. Therefore the aim is to involve the learner in the learning process, so that language develops automatically, naturally and more spontaneously.

It is based on the notion of the learners as communicators, naturally endowed with the ability to learn languages. It seeks to provide learners with the target language system. It is assumed that learners will have to prepare to use the target language (orally and in written form) in many predictable and unpredictable acts of communication which arise both in classroom interaction and in real-world situations, whether concurrent with language training or subsequent to it.

After CLT was implemented, many English textbooks were designed attempting to accommodate the expectations of the communicative syllabus. Where grammar teaching is concerned, CLT focuses on “communicative proficiency rather than mere mastery of structures” (Richards and Rogers, 1986:64). However, how well communicative proficiency can replace the structural approach is a question that many ELT practitioners are interested in. Considering the influence of the structural practice which is deep-rooted in the Asian culture, it will be a debatable issue as to how CLT comes into play in the Asian classrooms. In the following sections, the components of the structural and communicative approaches are first outlined. In order to find out whether CLT principles are incorporated into grammar exercises in textbooks, this paper then analyses several grammar activities .Finally, five activities based on CLT are recommended.

Structural and Communicative Syllabi: The structural view of language sees grammatical structures as the underlying units of the language system. These units of language are structurally rule-governed. The audio-lingual syllabus² is also derived from the structural view this syllabus comprises activities that focus on correct pronunciation, spelling convention and grammatical forms. Drills are also used in the audio-lingual classroom because repetition and memorization are believed to be important. However, the CLT syllabus has redefined the teaching of grammar, teachers' and students' roles, use of materials and teaching learning.

Methodology:

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) describe the CLT syllabus as follows: 1. a. meaning (function) is emphasized b. Contextualization is important c. Language learning is learning to communicate d. Language is created through repeated trials and errors e. Fluency is primary whereas accuracy is secondary.

² Also referred as 'Audio lingual Method.' Some also refer to the 'Communicative Syllabus' as the 'Communicative Approach' (Richards and Rogers, 1986). This paper terms both as 'syllabi' because it is the course outlines that are referred to in this paper.

In addition to these features, CLT also emphasizes learner-centeredness and the use of original materials. Howatt (1984) divided CLT into strong and weak versions. The strong version is in support of communicative features whereas the weak version suggests the integration of

structural practice into the communicative elements. This paper is of the view that both structural and communicative elements have a role to play in EFL and ESL especially in the Asian setting. This is due to two main reasons: First, the norms and practices of the structural syllabus have been embedded in the Asian cultures for decades. For instance, in a survey carried out by Maley (1986:104) on the Chinese of Mainland China, it was found that the Chinese view the teacher as the "textbook" or the guru that "has the knowledge." Therefore, to learn is to convert knowledge in the textbooks to memory.

Second, communicative proficiency will become easier to achieve only when one has grasped the necessary knowledge of language (such as grammar). For societies whose first (and second) language is not English, there is still a need for structural practices so that the foundation of linguistic knowledge can be built up before further communicative tasks are given.

Yalden (1987:94) suggests the proportional approach in course designing. In this design, students learn more form than meaning at an early stage and as time increases (and as students' language proficiency improves), the intervention of communicative functions increases. At this later stage, the emphasis on form can be gradually reduced in order to examine whether the textbooks comply with either the structural or the communicative syllabus. This is of much significance because grammar is the hardest component to teach with CLT approach.

English language syllabus is outlined by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) of India. The attempt to incorporate

communicative language teaching can be seen in the aims of the Form Four English Language Syllabus which emphasizes daily communicative needs and occupational needs: To equip them [students] with the skills and knowledge of the English language to communicate in certain everyday activities and certain job situations, and also to provide points of take-off for various post-secondary school needs.

However, when grammar is presented in textbooks, it usually does not reflect the aim of the communicative syllabus. An analysis shows that most of the grammar activities still feature the traditional pattern rather than conforming to the principles of the communicative syllabus. Even though some parts of the textbooks attempt to integrate the communicative elements, most exercises are mainly structural with the inclusion of grammar-rule explanation.

Communicative activities have to be selectively incorporated for better results. This makes the context of the reading task communicative. In addition, there is also speaking practice placed as pre-reading activity in which students have to work in groups to come up with a book list. Nevertheless, where grammar is concerned, the context.

Therefore, one can see that the Form Five textbook is still rule-based and the expectation for linguistic awareness is higher. This helps students relate the use of language to their immediate surroundings. A successful communicative activity helps to generate the target language unconsciously but at the same time makes students enjoy what they are doing

The communicative part comes in through the use of real life contexts (such as the life of Paul Newman and life in Harvard University). However, the grammar exercises are largely structure-based. In other words, the implementation of CLT has only impacted the 'contextualization' of content but not the teaching of grammar.

II. Natural Contexts: The context used in a communicative task plays a crucial role. Meaning (or use) materializes with the help of authentic contexts because contexts not only bring out the speakers' roles but also the time and place in which a communication takes place one has in mind a reference point of time and place. As evidenced in our evaluation of textbooks, contextualization is seldom present in the grammar activities, making reproduction of sentence patterns difficult. Therefore, natural contexts are helpful because there is a clear indication of place and referent time.

III. Balancing Skills: When the communicative syllabus is concerned, continuity and balance in teaching the four skills are emphasized. Chang (2000) highlighted the importance of communicative skills such as "initiating, sustaining, closing a conversation" to enhance communicative competence among Chinese students. However, Chang's suggestions tend to overlook the importance of reading and writing. For instance, reading comprises 'real life skills such as reading for gist, reading for information' (Grant, 1994:79) as well as skimming and scanning. Writing includes all kinds of genres as well as creative thinking skills that should be balanced with (the overly emphasized) speaking skills. An activity that balances

between form and meaning is the Information Gap activity. In this activity, one student has the information that the other lacks. Thus, students have to exchange information (through oral practice) in order to complete a table, map, or paragraph. The Information Gap activity can also be varied to form exchanges between speakers in situations such as: a) asking for directions from a map and information from a table or chart; b) asking for a third person's well being; and c) interviewing a famous person. The Information Gap activity practices listening and speaking, reading and writing at the same time, i.e., students skim and scan (reading skills) for missing information, exchange information (listening and speaking) and jot down the missing information (writing) and use thinking skills in the process.

IV. Personalization Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) mention that a language curriculum is written based on generalizations regarding learning and usage. Similarly, textbooks are designed with a 'generalized audience' in mind. In order to address specific students' needs and interests, adaptation and personalization of textbooks is necessary

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(Cunnings worth, 1995). If a communicative style is suitable for a particular class, a communicative activity should be designed and vice versa.

V. Adjustment of Teacher Role Even though CLT proposes that teachers to step back and "make space for the learners" (Spaventa, 1980, as cited by Little wood, 1992:98), the lessening of teacher control may be difficult. For the Taiwanese and Malaysian settings, a variable Control-and Warmth approach (Borich and Tombari, 1993:302) may be adopted, i.e. some classes may employ a High-Control-Low-Warmth stance, whereas others may adopt a Low Control-High-Warmth stance. The total withdrawal of teacher control may discourage introverted students from participating in class, while too much control may stifle participation or creativity altogether.

Conclusion: This paper has suggested a number of communicative tasks to supplement the structural activities in the textbooks. Nevertheless, the methods discussed herein will only be effective when teachers are ready to incorporate CLT principles into their lessons.

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