

Implementing Communicative Approach in Teaching English at School: Post-Method Era

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Abstract

The article is aimed to reveal the essence of the communicative approach, which is based on the idea that learning foreign language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. The present research states that when learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn to use the language more effectively.

Keywords: teaching English at school; method; communicative approach; communicative language teaching (CLT); Post-Method Era.

1.0. Introduction

The communicative method precisely defines objectives headed by free communication through conversation, reading, listening comprehension and writing. For those aims, the communicative method uses contemporary elements of tele-, radio communication, etc. which are natural in the world of exchanging information. Nevertheless, a book remains the main but not the only tool of language learning at school. A teacher can choose any book which corresponds to his/her purposes and defines his/her methodological approach towards language teaching. But a book should be both interesting and accessible for learners. A textbook should help learning the language, but not give interesting or boring facts about it. On the other hand, even the most attractive textbook will not give any results, if its contents (drills, exercises, rules, etc.) are separated from the communicative learning with the help of a teacher as a professional counsellor. An English language teacher must know English as well as his mother tongue. The teacher must be aware of the laws according to which language functions. The teacher must be acquainted with the last methodological points of view, but he is not to be obliged to acquire those if they do not conform to his purposes and aims. The teacher ought to know the difference between general linguistics and pedagogical linguistics in order not to convert lessons at school to linguistic seminars.

What is communication? It seems to me, communication is first of all exchanging opinions, information, notions of social, cultural, political and other aspects of everyday life. Communication always has associations with written and oral discourse. But communication includes a surprised face, a smile, a nervous movement or a smoke above the fire of Indians, as well. Communication is also advertising the color of the person's suit, flags, posters or a whistle of a boy under the window of his sweetheart. The world around us is the world of communication in various spheres. And only at language lessons the only means of communication are textbooks and the lecturing teacher. In the classroom, the teacher is the source of information. And this communication is under control rather than free. In this case, the purpose of a teacher is to transform the communication with learners to a pleasant, attractive and emotional lesson.

Real communication is always informative, unpredictable and unexpected. If the teacher is always informative, interesting and unexpected, then even before the beginning if the lesson learners will be disposed for a good lesson. But if the previous lesson is just the same as the next one, learners will be bored with it before the lesson start.

The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are to be found in the changes in the English language teaching tradition dating late 1960s. Until then, situation of Language Teaching represented the major British approach to teaching English as foreign language. In situational language teaching, language was taught by practicing basic structure in meaningful situation-based activities. But just as the linguistics theory underlying audio-lingualism was rejected in the United States in the mid-1960s, British applied linguists began to call into question the theoretical assumptions underlying Situational Language Teaching.

Common to all version of Communicative Language Teaching is a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use, and that seeks to translate this into design for an instructional system, for material, for teacher and learner roles and behaviors, and for classroom activities and technique. Let's see how this is manifested at the levels of approach, design, and syllabus.

2.0. Approach, Design, and the Syllabus

The Communicative Approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:159). Another linguistic theory of communication favored in CLT is Halliday's functional account of language use. Linguistic is concerned with the description of speech acts of texts, since only through study of language in use are all the function of language and therefore all components of meaning brought into focus.

These are some considerations to make designs in communicative approach:

Objectives. Piepho (in Richards & Rodgers, 2001:162) discusses the following levels of objectives in a communicative approach:

- a. an integrative and content level (language as a means of expressions)
- b. a linguistics and instrumental level (language as a semiotics system and an object of learning)
- c. an effective level of interpersonal relationship and conduct (language as a means of expressing values and judgments about oneself and others)
- d. a level of individual learning needs (remedial learning based on error analysis)
- f. a general education level of extra- linguistics goals (language learning within the school curriculum)

Discussion of syllabus theory and syllabus models in communicative Language teaching has been extensive. Wilkins's original notional syllabus model was soon criticized by British applied linguistics as merely replacing one kind of list (e.g., a list of grammar items) with another (a list of notions and functions). It specified products, rather than communicative processes.

3.0. Types of Learning and Teaching Activities

The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.

3.1. Learner's Role. Discussing about learner role, Breen and Candlin in Richards & Rodgers (2001:166) describe the learner's role within CLT is as negotiator between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning, emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedure and activities which the group undertakes.

3.2. Teacher's Role. According to Breen and Candlin in Richards & Rodgers (2001:167) that teacher has two main roles in CLT. First, to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and text. Second, to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. Other roles assumed for teachers are need analyst, counselor, and group process manager.

3.3. The Role of Instructional Materials. A wide variety of materials have been used to support communicative approaches to language teaching. Practitioners of Communicative Language teaching view materials as a way of influencing of quality of classroom interaction and language use. Richards & Rodgers consider three kinds of materials currently used in CLT, they are: text-based materials, task-based materials, and realia.

4.0. Procedure

Because communicative principles can be applied to the teaching of any skill, at any level, and because of the wide variety of classroom activities and exercise types discussed in the literature on communicative Language Teaching, description of typical classroom procedures used in a lesson based on CLT principles is no feasible. Finocchiaro and Brumfit offer a lesson outline for teaching the function "making a suggestion" for the learner in the beginning level of secondary school program that suggests that CLT procedures are evolutionary rather than revolutionary:

1. Presentation of a brief dialog or several mini-dialogs
2. Oral practice of each utterance of the dialog segment to be presented that day
3. Question and answer based on the dialog topic.
4. Question and answer related to the learner's personal experience
5. Study one of the basic communicative expression in dialog.
6. Learner discovery of generalizations or rules underlying the functional expression
7. Oral recognition, interpretative activities
8. Oral production activities-proceeding from guided to freer communication activities
9. Copying of the dialog or modules if they are not in the class text

10. Sampling of the written homework assignment
11. Evaluation of learning.

5.0. Characteristics of Communicative Methodology

According to Johnson & Johnson in Richards & Rodgers, (2001:173) there are five core characteristics that underlie current applications of communicative methodology. They are:

1. Appropriateness: Language used reflects the situations of its used and must be appropriate to that situation depending on the setting, the roles of participants, and purpose of the communication.
2. Message focus: Learners need to be able to create and understand messages, that is, real meanings. Hence the focus on information sharing and information transfer in CLT activities.
3. Psycholinguistic processing: CLT activities seek to engage learners in the use of cognitive and other processes that are important factors in second language acquisition.
4. Risk taking: Learners are encouraged to make guesses and learn from their errors. By going beyond what they have been taught, they are encouraged to employ a variety of communication strategies.
5. Free practice: CLT encourages the use of “holistic practice” involving the simultaneous use of a variety of sub-skills, rather than practicing individual skills one piece at a time.

6.0. Challenges to the Use of CLT at School

Perhaps the most serious challenge to the spread of CLT comes from teacher outside of the Inner Circle who questions the appropriateness of the approach for their particular teaching context at particular school. One of the earliest studies which provide evidence of the challenge is a survey of Chinese school teachers undertaken by Burnaby and Sun (in McKay, 2006:113). The Chinese teachers in the study believed that whereas CLT would be appropriate for Chinese school learners who intended to go to English speaking countries, an emphasis on reading and translation would best meet the need of many English language school learners in China.

Meanwhile, Li (in McKay, 2006:113) interviews Korean secondary school teachers on the difficulties involved in implementing CLT demonstrates similar problems. Li's study revealed three sources of difficulty in using CLT. The first comes from the educational system itself in which large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding, and lack of support for teacher education undermines the implementation of this approach. Second, the learners' low English proficiency, lack of motivation for developing communicative competence, and resistance to class participation makes it difficult to use CLT. Finally, the school teachers believe that their own inadequacies contribute to the problem. They feel that their deficiency in spoken English and sociolinguistic competence, along with their lack of relevant training and limited time to develop materials, add their difficulties.

7.0. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using CLT at School

7.1. Advantages

Communicative teaching emphasis on “task-oriented, learner-centered” language teaching practice, asked to show the life of the actual needs of the English language to simulate a variety of life contexts, emotional, and to provide learners with comprehensive use of English language, for communication of opportunities, its focus is not only a language in the form, grammatical accuracy, more emphasis on the appropriateness of language use, feasibility, communication skills, as well as training learners in communicative activities in the strain and problem-solving ability. Specifically, the communicative approach of teaching foreign languages at school has the following three advantages:

(1) The interaction between learners and teachers. Communicative teaching is becoming increasingly clear feature is the change in the way as the internship, learners develop the subject, initiative and become increasingly important. Teacher-learner relationship is an interactive, harmonious relationship, rather than the traditional education, the kind of master-servant relationship.

(2) To impart the basic knowledge and ability to skillfully combine the development. Traditional classroom teaching of English in the main body of the expense of home study, only emphasized the teachers on the knowledge of the systematic and integrity, which is a teacher-centered, knowledge-centered from the medieval “scholastic” teaching methods inherited One consequence of the neglect of learner ability. The communicative teaching emphasizes the learner's cognitive ability and operational capabilities, which allow the learners themselves to think about and express their views, thus trained in real life the ability to use language to communicate.

(3) Greatly enhanced the learner's interest. Communicative teaching learners to participate in, sometimes accompanied by scenes or simulated scenarios, so that learners closer to life, the learners became the main character, naturally they were interested in the English language, to learn English as a pleasure.

7.2. Disadvantages

(1) Although it can be successfully argued that the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach does enable learners to interact, it is possible that the activities undertaken in the classroom may be perceived by learners as being too abstract. Despite teachers' best efforts, classroom activities are not actually real-life, and it can be difficult to reproduce truly authentic language use and to facilitate genuine interaction.

(2) It may also be a difficult method to use in very large classes, where it may be easier to monitor and guide learners by adopting a more didactic approach.

(3) Learners with low levels of proficiency in the target language may find it difficult to participate in oral communicative activities and, if the exams used by an institution are grammar based, communicative fluency may not be appropriate.

(4) It is also worth considering that CLT may not be appropriate in EFL classrooms where English is rarely heard or used outside of the classroom – where all the situations in which English is used in the classroom are 'pretend' and are therefore difficult to place in any authentic context.

(5) Some people believe that with CLT there is a danger of focusing too much on oral skills at the expense of reading and writing skills, and that there may be too much focus on meaning at the expense of form. It is felt that there is not enough emphasis on the correction of pronunciation and grammar errors.

(6) Li (2001) also cites the difficulties faced by school teachers and EFL learners in Korea when attempting to introduce a communicative approach. Difficulties reported included: learners' lack of motivation for developing communicative competence, low English proficiency, and resistance to class participation, teachers' misconceptions and lack of training in CLT combined with deficiencies in sociolinguistic competence and little time for developing materials for communicative classes and large classes. Other difficulties cited included grammar based examinations, insufficient funding and lack of support.

8.0. The Post-Method Era

Good teaching is regarded as correct use of the method and its prescribed principles and techniques. Roles of teachers and learners, as well as the type of activities and teaching techniques to be used in the classroom are generally prescribed. Richards & Rodgers (2001:244) stated that: "From the survey of approaches and methods, we have seen that the history of language teaching in the last one hundred years has been characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching second or foreign language. The commonest solution to the "language teaching problem" was seen to lie in the adoption of a new teaching approach or methods. One result of this trend was the era of so called designer or brand-name methods, that is, packaged solutions that can be described and marketed for use anywhere in the world. Thus, the Direct Methods was enthusiastically embraced in the early part of the twentieth century as an improvement over Grammar Translation. In the 1950s the Audiolingual Methods began to fade in the 1970s, particularly in the United States, a variety of methods emerged to fill the vacuum created by the discrediting of Audiolingualism, such as the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia. While these had declined substantially by the 1990s, new "breakthrough" continue to be announced from time to time, such as Task-Based Instruction, Neurolinguistic Programming, and Multiple Intelligences, and these attract varying level of support. Mainstream language teaching on both sides of the Atlantic, however, opted, for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the recommended basis for language teaching methodology in the 1980s and it continues to be considered the most plausible basis for language teaching today, although CLT is today understood to mean little more than a set of vary general principles that can be applied and interpreted in a variety of ways".

In addition, a method refers to a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning. It contains detailed specifications of content, roles of teachers and learners, and teaching procedures and techniques. Methods are learned through training. The teacher's role is to follow the method and apply it precisely according to the rules. The following are examples of methods:

- a. Audiolingulism
- b. Counseling-Learning
- c. Situational Language Teaching
- d. The Silent Way
- e. Suggestopedia

f. Total Physical Response

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001:247) some methods are unlikely to be widely adopted because they are difficult to understand and use, lack clear practical application, require special training, and necessitate major changes in teachers' practices and beliefs.

Yet the notion of methods came under criticism in the 1990s for other reasons, and a number of limitations implicit in the notion of all purpose methods were raised. By the end of the twentieth century, mainstream language teaching no longer regarded methods as the key factor in accounting for success or failure in language teaching. Some spoke of the death of methods and approaches and the term "post-methods era" was sometimes used. In other words, in this era, teacher and teacher trainees don't discuss or focus about certain methods anymore.

9.0. Conclusion

Today, communities are increasingly facing rapid and profound changes and tensions that affect the social, economic, and political aspects of life. The role of education has also become questionable in the millennial era, or, as it is called in methodology – the Post-Method Era. As a matter of fact, 21st century school education requires a gradual shift in curriculum construction focusing on the transferable competencies that learners need to develop in instructional settings. In today's knowledge-based, types of skills and competencies that school learners need to gain are different from those in the past. Emphasizing the communicative competence is one of the most influential developments in language education at school. The implementation of communicative activities in foreign language school classroom prepares learners to use English in the world beyond based on their own needs, interests and opportunities.

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