

Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT)

*An alternative starting point of for the development of language teaching methods is to view language essentially as a social practice and the goal of language teaching as engendering the learner's competence to communicate in the target language. Communication is viewed as a social interaction and therefore dynamic and influenced by the cultural context, rather than being a fixed linguistic system existing in a vacuum.

The nature of social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language is addressed beyond grammatical and discourse elements in communication. Pedagogical mean real life communication in the classroom should be explored. Learners should develop linguistic fluency not just the accuracy. Students should be equipped with tools for generating unrehearsed language performance outside the classroom. Lifelong language learning among students should be facilitated. Learners are seen as partners in a cooperative venture.

Toward the end of the 20th century, great attention was given to the communicative approach (CLT). The most obvious characteristics of CLT are that almost everything that is done 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 should be information gaps, choice, and feedback. An information gap exists when one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not know.

The speaker has the choice of what to say and how to say it. True communication is purposeful. A speaker can evaluate whether or not his purpose has been achieved based upon the information he receives from the listener. The teacher facilitates communication in the classroom. One of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities, he acts as an adviser, answering students' questions and monitoring their performance.

He might make notes of their errors to be worked on at a later time during more accuracy-based activities. At other times, he might be a co-communicator engaging in the communicative activity along with students. Students are communicators. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning in trying to make themselves understood and in understanding other—even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete.

Since the teacher's role is less dominant than in a teacher-centered method, students are seen as more responsible managers of their own learning.

The teacher may present some part of the lesson, such as when working with linguistic accuracy. At other times, he/she is the facilitator of the activities, but he does not always himself interact with the student. Student interact a great deal with one another. They do this in various configurations:

Pairs, small groups, and whole groups. Activities in CLT are often carried out by students in small groups. Small numbers of students interacting are favored in order to maximize the time allotted to each student for communicating.

*In order for these activities to be truly communicative, it was suggested, from the very beginning, students should have a desire to communicate something. They should have a purpose for communicating (e.g. to buy an airline tickets or to write a letter to a newspaper). They should focus on the content of what they are saying or writing rather than on a particular language form. They should use variety of language rather just one language structure. The teacher will not intervene to stop the activity; and the materials he/she relies on will not dictate what specific language forms the student use either.

In other words, such activities should attempt to replicate real communication. The figure below shows the “ communication continuum ” of activities ‘

Non-communicative activities

- No communicative desire
- No communicative purpose
- Form not content
- One language item only
- Teacher intervention
- Materials control

Communicative activities

- A desire to communicate
- A communicative purpose
- Content not form
- Variety of language items
- No teacher intervention
- No materials control

Not all activities in CLT occur at either extreme of the continuum, however. Some may be further towards the communicative end, whereas may be more non-communicative. The use of the authentic materials is important. It is considered desirable to give student an opportunity to develop strategies to understand language as it is actually used. Culture is everyday lifestyle of people who use the language. There are certain aspects of it that are especially important to communication.

One of the basic assumption of CLT is that by learning to communicate, students will be motivated to study a foreign language since they will feel they are learning to do something useful with the language. Also, teachers give students an opportunity to express their individuality by having them share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis. Student's security is enhanced by the man opportunities for cooperative interactions with their fellow students and teacher.

Language functions might be emphasized over forms. A variety of forms are introduced for each function. Forms are presented from similar to more complex. Students work with language at the supra sentential or discourse level. They learn about cohesion and coherence. They work on all four skills from the beginning. The oral communication takes place through negotiation between speaker and listener, whereas meaning is thought to be derived from the written word through an interaction between the reader and the writer.

Judicious use of the students' native language is permitted in CLT. But the target language should be used whenever possible not only during communicative activities, but also for explaining the activities to the students or in assigning homework. The students learn from these classroom management exchanges, too, and realize that the target language is a vehicle for communication, not an object to be studied.

Evaluation is accomplished for both accuracy and fluency. The student who has the most control of the structures and vocabulary is not always the best communicator. Evaluation could be done informally for students' performance by the teacher in his role as an adviser or co-communicator, by using integrative tests. Errors of form are tolerated during fluency-based activities and are seen as natural outcomes of the development of communication skills. Students can have limited linguistic knowledge and still be successful communicators. The teacher may note the errors during fluency activities and return to them later with an accuracy-based activity.

*Theory of Language

CLT starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of a language is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as “communicative competence”. Chomsky focuses on the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentence in a language. Hymes believes that the linguistic theory needed to be seen as part of more general theory incorporating communication and culture. His theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community.

Hymes's theory offers a much more comprehensive view than Chomsky's view of competence which deals primarily with abstract grammatical knowledge.

Another theory of communication favored in CLT is Halliday's functional account of language use. He elaborated a powerful theory of the function of language, which complements Hymes's view of communicative competence. He described seven basic functions of a language: instrumental, regularity, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative, and representational.

Widdowson (1978), another theorist of CLT, presented a view of relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. He focused on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes.

A more pedagogically influential analysis of communicative competence is formed in Canale and Swain (1980) in which four dimensions of communicative competence are identified:

Grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

CLT has rich theoretical basis which may be called eclectic. Some of the characteristics of this communicative view of language as follows:

1- Language is a system for expression of meaning.

2- The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.

3- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative values.

4- The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

CLT, therefore, with its different standards of what to teach (utterances as well as sentence, functions as well as grammar) and how to teach it (meaning-focused communicative tasks as well more traditional study techniques), has become a generalized “umbrella” term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students’ ability to communicate.

*Theory of Learning

Little has been written about CLT learning theory view. But elements of an underlying learning theory can be discerned in some CLT practices. These elements are:

- 1- Communication principle: activities that involve communication promote learning.
- 2- Task principles: activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful task promote learning.
- 3- Meaningful to learner to support the learning process.

Savignon (1983) believes that theories of second language acquisition is a source for the learning theory of CLT, and he consider the role of linguistic, social, cognitive, and individual variables in language acquisition. Krashen and other Second Language Acquisition theories typically stress that language learning comes about through using language communicatively, rather than through practicing language skills. Johanson (1984) and Littlewood (1984) consider a skill-learning model of learning as an alternative learning theory for the CLT. According to this theory, the acquisition of the communicative competence in a language is an example of skills development. This involves both a cognitive and behavioral aspect, and emphasized on practice as a way of developing communicative skills.

* Teaching Techniques and Materials in CLT

1- Authentic materials: It means using language materials authentic to native speakers of the target language, by providing a variety of situations.

2- Scrambled sentence: The student is given a passage in which the sentences are in scrambled order, and they are told to scramble it, so that the sentences are restored to their original order.

3- Language games: Games are used frequently in CLT and they are found enjoyable for students.

4- picture strip story: It is used with many activities. It could be done by showing one picture and ask the students predict what the second picture would look like.

5- Role play: This technique gives students an opportunity to practice communication in different social contexts and in different social roles.

6- Jigsaw: Students listen to different taped materials and then communicate their content to others in the class.

7- Functional communication activities: They include such tasks as learners comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences, completing map, following directions, solving problems from shared clues, etc.

8- Social interaction activities: They include conversation and discussion session, dialogues and role plays, simulations, improvisations, and debates.

*Teaching Procedures of CLT

Finocchairo and Brumfit (1980: 107-108) offer the following lesson outline for teaching function in CLT:

- 1- Presentation of a brief-dialogue or several mini-dialogues, preceded by a motivation, and discussion of the function and situation.
- 2- Oral practice of each utterances of the dialogue segment to be presented but preceded by a model.
- 3- Questions and answers based on the dialogue topic and situation itself.
- 4- Questions and answers related to the student's personal experiences but centered around the dialogue theme.

5- Study one of basic communicative expressions in the dialogue or one of the structures which exemplify the function.

6- Learner discovery of generalization or rules underlying the functional expression or structure.

7- Oral recognition, interpretive activities.

8- Oral production activities (guided to free communication activities).

9- Copying of the dialogues or mini-dialogues or models if they are not in the class text.

10- Sampling of the written homework assignment.

11- Evaluation of learning (oral only).

Johanson and Johanson (1998) identify five core characteristics that underlie current applications of communicative methodology:

1-Appropriateness: language use reflects the situation of its using and must be appropriate to that situation depending on the setting, the roles of the participants, and the purpose of the communication. Thus, learners may need to be able to use formal as well as informal style of speaking.

2- Message focus: learners need to be able to create and understand messages that are real meanings.

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 tasking: learners are encouraged to make guesses and learn from their errors.

5- Free practice: CLT encourages the use of “holistic practice” involving the simultaneous use of a variety of subskills, rather than practicing individual skills one piece at a time.

* A comparison of ALM and CLT

| No. | ALM | CLT |
|-----|---|---|
| 1 | Attend to structure and form more than meaning. | Meaning is paramount |
| 2 | Demands memorization of structure-based dialogues | Dialogues, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized. |
| 3 | Language items are not necessarily contextualized | Contextualization is basic premise |
| 4 | Language learning is learning structures, sounds , or words | Language learning is learning to communicate |
| 5 | Drilling is a central technique | Drilling may occur, but peripherally |
| 6 | Native-speaker- like pronunciation is sought | Comprehensible pronunciation is sought |

| NO. | ALM | CLT |
|-----|--|--|
| 7 | Grammatical explanation is avoided. | Any device that helps the learners is accepted-varying according to their age, interest etc. |
| 8 | Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises. | Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning. |
| 9 | The use of the student's native language is forbidden. | Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible. |
| 10 | Translation is forbidden at early levels. | Translation may be used when students need or benefit from it. |
| 11 | Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered. | Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired. |
| 12 | The target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system. | The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate. |
| 13 | Linguistic competence is the desired goal. | Communicative competence is the desired goal (i.e., the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately). |

| NO | ALM | CLT |
|----|--|---|
| 14 | Varieties of language are recognizes but not emphasized. | Linguistic variations is central concept in material and mythology. |
| 15 | The sequence of units is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity. | Sequences is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning that maintain interest. |
| 16 | The teacher controls the learners and prevents them from doing anything that conflict with the theory. | Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language. |
| 17 | “ Language is habit “ so errors must be prevented at all costs. | Language is created by individual often through trail and error. |
| 18 | Accuracy, in terms of formal correctness, is a primary goal. | Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context. |

| NO. | ALM | CLT |
|-----|--|--|
| 19 | Students are expected to interact with the language system embodied in machines or controlled materials. | Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings. |
| 20 | The teacher is expected to specify the language that students are to use. | The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use. |
| 21 | Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the structure of the language. | Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language. |

Closely related to CLT a number of methods and teaching techniques have appeared including learner-centered instruction, cooperative and collaborative learning, interactive learning, whole language education, content-based instruction, and task-based instruction.

*CLT and Needs Analysis:

The CLT teacher assumes a responsibility for determining and responding to learner's language needs. This may be done informally and personally through one-to-one sessions with students, in which the teacher talks through such issues as the student's perception of his or her learning style, learning assets, and learning goals. It may be done formally through administering needs assessment instrument. Such formal assessments contain items that attempt to determine an individual's motivation for studying the language. On the basis of such needs assessments, teachers are expected to plan group and individual instructions that responds to the learners' needs.

*Demerits of CLT

- 1- CLT has come under attack from teachers for being prejudiced in favor of native-speaker teachers by demanding a relatively uncontrolled range of language use on the part of the student, and thus expecting the teacher to be able to respond to any and every language problem which may come up.
- 2- In promoting a methodology which is based around group and pair-work, with teacher intervention kept to a minimum during an activity, CLT may also offend against educational traditions.
- 3- CLT has sometimes been seen as having eroded explicit teaching of grammar with a consequence among students in accuracy in the pursuit of fluency.

*THANK YOU