

Language Acquisition Forum through Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract

Communication is essentially personal, the expression of personal needs, feelings, experiences and knowledge, in situations that are never quite the same. Language is the most important tool of communication. The ever growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. The world- wide demand for English has created demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials. Learners set themselves demanding goals. The demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever. Perhaps the majority of language teachers today identify “Communicative” as the methodology of choice. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the class room. Our understanding of the processes of second language learning has changed considerably in the last 30 years and CLT is partly a response to these changes in understanding. In this paper we will examine the methodology known as CLT, its trends and classroom activities to language teaching today.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has enormous intuitive appeal. A great deal of CLT is based on essentially a view of second language (L2) acquisition. CLT sets as its goals the teaching of communicative competence. Perhaps we can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of grammatical competence. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g. parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus

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of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning; it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity which is understood by the term *communicative competence*.

Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants(e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts(e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge(e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies)

Language Learning Process through CLT

Language Learning was viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation. In recent years language learning has been viewed from a very different perspective. It is seen as resulting from processes of the following kind:

- Interaction between the learner and the users of the language
- Collaborative creation of meaning
- Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language
- Negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding

- Learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language
- Paying attention to the language one hears(the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence
- Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things.

Classroom Activities in CLT

Since the advent of CLT, teachers and materials' writers have sought to find ways of developing classroom activities that reflected the principles of a communicative methodology. The main activity types that were one of the outcomes of CLT are:

- Accuracy versus fluency activities
- Mechanical, meaningful and communicative practice
- Information-gap activities
- Jig-saw activities

➤ **Accuracy versus fluency activities**

One of the goals of CLT is to develop fluency in language use. Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency practice can be contrasted with accuracy practice, which focuses on creating correct examples of language use. Difference between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy can be summarized as follows:

Activities focusing on fluency

- Reflect natural use of language
- Focus on achieving communication
- Require meaningful use of language
- Require the use of communication strategies
- Produce language that may not be predictable

- Seek to link language use of context

Activities focusing on accuracy

- Reflect classroom use of language
- Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- Practice language out of context
- Practice small samples of language
- Do not require meaningful communication
- Choice of language is controlled

➤ **Mechanical, Meaningful and Communicative Practice**

Mechanical practice refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items.

Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practice the use of prepositions to describe to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as across from, on the corner of, near to, next to. They then have to answer questions such as “Where is the book shop? Where is the café?”etc. The practice is now meaningful because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map.

Communicative practice refers to the activities where practice in using language within a real communication context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example students might have to draw a map of their neighborhood and answer questions about the location of different places in their neighborhood, such as the nearest bus stop, the nearest café, etc.

➤ **Information-gap Activities**

An important aspect of communication in CLT is the notion of information gap. This refers to the fact that in real communication people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess. This is known as an information-gap. More authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students go beyond practice of language forms for their own sake and use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to obtain information.

➤ **Jig-Saw Activities**

These are also based on the information-gap principle. Typically the class is divided into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete an activity. The class must fit the pieces together to complete the whole. In doing so they must use their language resources to communicate meaningfully and so take part in meaningful communication practice.

Current Trends in Communicative Language Teaching

Since the 1990's the communicative approach has been widely implemented. Because it describe the set of very general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching. Current communicative language teaching theory and practice thus draws on a number of different educational paradigms and traditions.

The following core assumption or variance of them underlies current practices in CLT:

- Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication
- Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange.
- Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging.

- Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities
- Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
- Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
- Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
- Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies
- The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
- The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Conclusion

Communicative Language Teaching sources of influence will doubtless continue to shape other approaches to language teaching in the future. However, CLT depends ultimately on the extent to which major stakeholders in the language teaching enterprise feel that is successful in achieving the goals set for language teaching programs in their contexts.

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