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Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of grammar in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and bridges the gap between the two elements, namely, Grammar and Communication. Grammar plays a prominent role in learning a new language. Language does not develop without grammar.

What is Grammar?

Linguists define grammar as a set of components: phonetics (the production and perception of sounds), phonology (how sounds are combined), morphology (the study of forms, or how

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elements are combined to create words), syntax (how words are strung together into sentences), and semantics or meaning.

Role of Grammar

Many teachers think that grammar is a set of rules without which a language cannot be taught or learnt. There is a belief among the people that CLT does not include grammar. But Spada argues that the thought that “Communicative Language Teaching means an exclusive focus on meaning is a myth or a misconception” (Spada 2007). The role of grammar in CLT is based on two types. They are the Shallow-end Approach and the Deep-end Approach. The Shallow-end Approach to CLT is based on the thought that it is first necessary to learn the grammatical rules and then apply them in the communicative situation. The Deep-end Approach is based on the belief that grammar is acquired unconsciously during the performance on the Communicative situations, so it would be useless to teach grammar previously and explicitly (Thornbury 1999).

Objectives of CLT

- The focus is on meanings and functions of the language.
- More importance is on the learner and his learning.
- The role of the teacher is a facilitator.
- Students are instructed to involve in the learning process through tasks, problem- solving, participation and interaction.
- All the four skills, LSRW are equally treated.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) focus on communication related to realistic use of language in context, student-centered teaching and learner autonomy. Communicative language teaching has brought a renewed emphasis on the role that semantics plays in the definition of language. Communicative language teaching is fundamentally concerned with 'making meaning' in the language, whether by interpreting someone else's message, expressing one's own, or negotiating when meaning is unclear.

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The origin of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was from late 1960s. *Howatt* distinguishes between a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ version of Communicative Language Teaching. “The weak version stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes. The strong version of communicative teaching advances the claim that language is acquired through communication. If the former could be described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter entails ‘using English to learn it’ (Howatt 1984).

Activities / Tasks used in the classroom

The following classroom activities enhance the learners to learn without any fear or inhibition in the classroom; Eavesdropping, Role Play, Interviews, Information gap, Games, Surveys, Pair-work, Learning by teaching, Problem Solving etc.

(i) Eavesdropping

This is aimed at advanced students. The students are instructed to listen to a conversation somewhere in a public place and be prepared to answer, in the target language, some general questions about what was heard by them. For example, the following general questions may be asked.

1. Who was talking?
2. How old were they?
3. Where were they when you eavesdropped?
4. What were they talking about?
5. What did they say?
6. Did they become aware that you were listening to them?

This activity helps the students to listen in a real-world situation and they have to report the information they overheard. This motivates the students to select the topic of their choice.

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(ii) Role Play

Students are asked to play the role, they select from the lots. For example, if a student picks a rolled sheet from the lot box and finds the word, Scientist, he/she has to play the role. Here, the student comes out with his own ideas and never bothers about the grammatical errors.

(iii) Interviews

A model interview is to be conducted by the teacher in the classroom. Then the students one by one have to attend the interview. They have to answer the questions asked by the interviewer. The students are instructed to bring a file with their Bio-data when they attend the interview. This helps the students to face the interview in future without fear or inhibition. Moreover, this helps the students to learn the do's and don'ts of the interview.

(iv) Information Gap

In this task, students are asked to complete the task by filling the missing information or to solve a problem. They communicate with their classmates to fill in the gaps. For example, spot-the-difference activity is used in the information gap.



Another activity is in which one student is given a picture, and he must describe it to another student who has to create a drawing from the description. Further examples are students sharing information among them to complete a class timetable, and an activity where students must share information about their families and then draw each other's family trees.

(v) Games

Speaking Games

The topic such as 'Village Life Vs Town Life' can be given in the class. The learners those who select the village life should stand in a line. The learners those who select the town life should stand in a separate line opposite to the previous group. Now, each and every learner has to substantiate his/her stand for choosing the topic. This helps the learners to come out with their views/points in an unconscious way, so that they least bothered about the mistakes they commit while presenting their views. Here, language learning takes place in a natural way without any fear or inhibition among the learners. Psychologically, the learners feel comfortable to discuss a common topic.

Reading Games

Story Completion

Two stories are written on cards and the each story is cut into sentences. The class is divided into two groups. Each group is given a set of cards with sentences and the group has to arrange the cards to create the story. The group, which does it first, wins.

Advantages of CLT

- ❖ Provides a more holistic view of language and language learning.
- ❖ Gives students opportunities to practice using the language and to see its relevance outside the classroom.
- ❖ Stimulates critical and creative thinking.
- ❖ Focuses on active learning (instead of passive listening) as well as teaching.
- ❖ Effective Communication is sought.

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- ❖ Language is created by the individual by trial and error method.

Conclusion

To conclude, most of the language teaching in India is done on the basis of traditional grammar books and pedagogical grammar books like *Wren and Martin's*, *Thomson and Martinet's*, *Nesfield's*, etc. These books are based on the written rules of Latin Grammar. The learners find it very difficult to relate the use of rules in the discourse they carry out in real life situations. The Communicative teaching places with more emphasis on the learner's contribution through independent learning.

If the above said activities are well organized with care and interest, these would surely help the learners, especially the young ones to acquire a lot of language skills, because while playing a game learners have opportunities to learn without stress and anxiety, which is also good for learning. If the active learning takes place in an ESL classroom, the achievements would be high and sure.

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