The Merits of Communicative Language Teaching Method in Relation to L2

N. Gurunathan, M.A., M.Phil., M. Ed.
Dr. N. Geethanjali, M.A., Ph.D.

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Abstract

This paper reviews a few teaching approaches namely Grammar Translation Method, Audio Lingual Method, Direct Method and Communicative Method and the advantages of Communicative Language Teaching Method over other methods. CLT or Communicative Language Teaching Method fosters a sub-conscious process of acquiring a second language, here English. Teacher provides plenty of comprehensible input and motivates the learners to involve in the process and acquire L2 as in the case of acquiring L1 without conscious effort.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Language Learning, Motivation, Comprehensible Input, Tasks, Language Teaching Method, Communicative Language Method.

Introduction

Good communication skills in English are a demand and a preference of the day, English being the language of international reputation and even interplanetary communication. Hence, qualitative teaching, meaningful materials and inspiring method are all important to induce learning in the learners of a target language. For any L2 language teaching, an easier method is the one that could inspire the learners to proceed further with interest. It is true that there is no 'the method' in teaching and learning a language but any method that fosters acquisition of a language is a welcome method. Acquisition happens in the L1 context where surroundings and society are favorable. Depending upon the situation, surroundings, and the nature of learners, a potential teacher can evolve a method of his own to motivate the learners to acquire the target language in the L2 context. This Paper examines a few traditional methods of teaching and how CLT or Communicative Language Teaching works better than others for our purpose.

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Language Teaching Methods

1. Grammar -Translation Method

Teaching English as L2 through grammar rules is one of the most popular English teaching methods in traditional academic settings. In this method, the teacher should be proficient both in L1 and L2 as it demands or compels translation process. To promote understanding, the teacher has to bring a solid parallel from students' native language. This method works well in a setting where L1 is the same for all the students. Memorization of rules of grammar and frequent or repetitive practice is the basis of this method. This method helps one to learn vocabulary in isolation only, but not in context. Translation involves bilingualism. Rules are given in mother tongue and then translated in the target language and so acquisition of L2 language is very minimum.

2. Audio Lingual Method

Of course, this method is the most natural way of learning a language. This method adopts learning by hearing. Students learn through agencies of socialization like family, friends, class room and society. As it is audio-based, reading and writing come later. Dialogue plays a vital role in this method. Students learn the concrete vocabulary, initially by connecting with the objects around them. Teachers do not write the words but just sound the words. Learners hear and repeat the words orally. This is how, they grasp vocabulary and basic grammar. It all happens through dialogues only. The oral English teaching method is found most suitable for younger students as it is just a spoken form in the beginning. In this method, mimicking and memorization of dialogues and repetition of drills dominate in language learning. It also stresses accuracy of language which involves conscious control of the language and so acquisition of L2 language is very minimum. Error correction may result in psychological inhibition in the learner and the very purpose of learning will be defeated.

3. Direct Method

In this method, the target language alone is used by the teacher and the taught. Use of L1 is prohibited in the learning process. Vocabulary is gained by showing and seeing concrete

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objects or visual aids first, and then only learning the abstract words and elements of the language come into the picture. Continuous and constant practice leads the students to pick up the patterns and then apply. This method works best in a setting where the students are from different vernaculars. It is an assumption that error correction promotes acquisition. The insistence (Ponniah, 2010) on the use of grammar through error correction at the early stage is a constraint for learning the language and it will cause high anxiety. Despite the fact that this method provides a lot of comprehensible input, when the teacher explains the rules in the target language, the anxiety hampers acquisition of L2.

English for Specific Purposes

For specific occupational or educational settings, we need to expose specific kinds of language and communicative skills needed for particular roles, (like that of nurse, engineer, flight attendant, pilot, biologist, and such) rather than just to concentrate on more general English. Choice based vocabulary, grammar, texts, functions and the skills needed for the professionals like doctors, nurses, engineers, restaurant staff, airline pilots are to be chosen. The language needs of the professions are decided and taught. This concept of English for specific purposes led to a rethinking of classroom teaching methodology.

Communicative competence is the aim of any foreign language teaching and learning. Modern concept in language teaching and learning is that one can gain Communicative Competence through Communicative Language Teaching. The principles of communicative language teaching methodology include co-operative work through peers and groups, fluency acquisition, and communicative competence.

Grammatical Competence vs Communicative Competence

Grammatical Competence is the knowledge of Grammar to study the formation of   a sentence and produce sentences consciously keeping the Grammar rules in mind. Accuracy is the base of it, but fluency is not immediate. Richards points out that one can master the rules of a language but may not be successful in using the language for meaningful communication. It applies very well in classroom situation, but it may not help very much in the beyond classroom

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situation. Language learning was treated as 'the process of mechanical habit formation.' Memory, exactitude and drills are the major components of Grammatical Competence. Producing grammatically correct sentences is the essence of the Grammatical Competence.

Communicative Competence on the other hand fosters the knowledge of using the language for different purposes and modifying the language for a particular context. It includes the application of a relevant communication strategy to understand, use and produce different types of texts, for different communicative purposes, such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs, and so on. It means possessing or gaining the knowledge of what to say, when to say and how to say something appropriate, based on the situation. Purposeful interaction, negotiation of meaning as per the context, rectification through feedback, and multiple ways of saying a particular idea and above all motivation and encouragement are the major components of Communicative competence. Task-based activities through pair work and group work are the essence of Communicative Competence.

Co-operative work vs Individualistic work

A learner is more comfortable when he learns in the company of his own age-group rather than learning from the instructions of the teacher. They listen, share and contribute mutually without any inhibition and this makes learning easier, faster and permanent. It sharpens the traits of application and innovation leading to producing and using the language according to the context. Teacher becomes the motivator, facilitator and monitor, but not a dictator or fault finder. Once the learners are motivated, the results are outpouring as the involvement is near 100 percent. Errors in communication disappear in the process of learning and this type of learning is known as self-learning or automatic learning which is otherwise called acquisition of language. Teachers provide the tasks and the learners discuss, decide, and produce the language activity. The feedback from the co-learners and the teacher encourage them to venture more and more.

CLT

Richards (2006) beautifully sums up the core assumptions involved in Communicative

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Language Teaching in the following passages:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how the language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. 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.
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

A Good Teacher

A good teacher is an ever-learning student. He should be a motivator, facilitator and monitor but not a dictator or fault finder. He scaffolds in teaching, provides stimulus, autonomy, guides and promotes interaction among students in the class room. He prepares teaching and learning materials on the basis of students' needs. He asks questions and clarifies doubts. He promotes pair work and group work. He declares the task, gives them time to think and gears them to work in pairs and groups and in short keeps the learners in comfort zone.

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A Good Student

A good student is one who is inquisitive, receptive and interactive. He is committed to learning and sharing in learning. He receives and returns. He begins to use or produce language. Any language learning starts from listening and then it moves onto imitation of words and integration of sentences. He gets the exposure from families (not so much support from rural or back ward families in India), school, society and media.

Conclusion

There is no 'the only method' in Language learning and teaching. A method that fosters Communicative Competence in the learners can be called the best one. Sub-conscious learning, low-anxiety learning and peer group- learning is what is known as Acquisition. The method that fosters this type of acquisition enjoys a lead over other methods. As to date, it is proved that CLT promotes Communicative Competence. However, an integrated-skills approach would be a classical one forever.

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N. Gurunathan
Lecturer (SG)/ Ph.D. Scholar
Seshasayee Institute of Technology
Tiruchirappalli
Tamilnadu
India
ngsiteng@gmail.com

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Dr. N. Geethanjali, M.A., Ph.D.
Associate Professor / P.G. & Research Department of English
Periyar E.V.R. College
Tiruchirappalli-23
Tamilnadu
India

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