

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

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## Communicative Language Teaching - A Comprehensive Approach to English Language Teaching

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### Abstract

Notwithstanding the fact that English Language has got central place in educational institutions in India today, teaching and learning English in educational institutions in the country is rather inadequate and unproductive. The existing situation is mainly due to not having significant changes in the pedagogical paradigms like English Syllabus, Teaching Methodology and Testing for long. Though the main reason for the situation includes all the said pedagogical paradigms, much depends on the ways, approaches and methods adopted to teach English. The postcolonial ELT methods are in no way beneficial for the students in the changed scenario where the majority of students are desperate to learn English only to be communicatively competent. The

history of English language teaching has seen the rise and fall of a variety of language teaching Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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approaches and linguists have been trying to develop more and more innovative methods which include - Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Situational Language Teaching etc. The latest approach which has influenced language teaching practice around the world is Communicative Approach (or Communicative Language Teaching). It is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. My paper will elaborate how this approach becomes a comprehensive approach due to its goal of teaching communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical paradigms, Communicative competence, Accuracy, Fluency, Communicative Language Teaching

## **Introduction**

English Language, the language of news, business, information, opportunity, employment, power and prestige in India, has become the synonym of all progress in the recent years. Notwithstanding the fact that today it enjoys the status of a big business in the wake of globalization, teaching and learning of it in educational institutions in our country is rather inadequate and unproductive. The situation is worse in small towns and rural areas where most of the students observe English as a terrifying subject as they register failure therein and thereof.

Today, a majority of students enter the college and receive education with the notion that they are learning, not for knowledge but for employment. Moreover, the first requirement for any kind of job is to be well versed in English. While the urban students get conducive environment both at home and at college, the rural students remain bereft of the same. The result is that they lack in even the basic functional knowledge of English. Poor souls, who otherwise are considered quite intelligent in other subjects, develop inferiority complex in English classes due

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to their inadequate knowledge and poor command over the language. Unable to use English as the students in big cities do, the students in rural areas develop an aversion and build an antagonistic attitude towards the language. This preconceived notion results into a mental block before the child ventures into learning English language. This fact brings countless problems for the child throughout his education.

Though English has got central place in Educational Institutions in India and it is learned for practical utility these days but the standard of English language in this country especially in the small towns and rural areas is deplorable. Of late, we the Indian teachers of English at the undergraduate level have become painfully aware that most students in the college easily manage to pass the examination without making much effort to either pick up the language or to learn the appreciation of literature. Most of the students attend classes because they have to complete the minimum requirement of lectures so that they can appear in the examination. The situation is worse in rural areas where most of the students are commuters and find it hazardous to carry books for they need both the hands for fighting their way into the crowded buses as well as for getting out of them through the jostling crowds. So, they attend classes without books which are supposed to be their unavoidable companions. Also, most of them have already developed the habit of cramming everything because the effort, the attitude and the methods adopted in schools which are repository of only availability to rural students, do little to help a child who finds solution only in the rote method of learning. This habit of cramming doesn't help beyond several grades when the subject matter swells and the nature of questions require the child to express himself. Therefore 'creativity' is lost somewhere. Even the capable students who can express themselves in writing do so in their native language, not in English. This is their understanding

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of only the vernacular language well that the teacher is always expected to translate each and every phrase so that at least the literary texts are somehow driven home. But there remains the important task of importing the basic function of language i.e. to communicate properly. Though there are some students who can write fairly well in English, but when it comes to speaking, they find themselves in tight corners. Just consider the frustration of such a first generation learner who has all the expectations of his elders behind him and knows that no job is waiting for him till he has a good command over the English language. Hence the students are not eager but unwilling, angry and frustrated.

Now, when we the teachers of English address ourselves to the ever passing problem of how to meet the requirement of Indian students because of their deficiency in the said language, we confront this crude fact that more than the student, it is the teacher of English who is guilty of leaving the student in a quandary. This is so because we refuse to do anything for the student. Most of us have matter of fact attitude towards teaching which allows us to perform our duty only and do nothing else. In a way, we become the carriers of degeneration in teaching as well as life in general, for expediency rather than morals, is what informs all our activities of life including teaching.

### **Reason**

The existing situation is mainly due to not having significant changes in the following pedagogical paradigms:

- English Syllabus
- Teaching Methodology/Training
- The Examination System/ Testing

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Though the main reason for the sad situation of ELT in our region includes all the said pedagogical paradigms, much depends on the ways, approaches and methods adopted to teach English. However much the examination system be faulty and the Syllabus not suitable to the needs of the students, the methodology while teaching is the key factor and the real power in the hands of a teacher. We see that even today, in most of the universities and colleges, the literary texts are taught in the same style as was done in the colonial times which makes the classroom monotonous. Mere listening to the teacher in the class makes the students yawn. English is still treated as a subject to be taught, not a language to be mastered. Also, the postcolonial ELT methods are in no way beneficial to the students in the changed scenario where the majority of students are desperate to learn English only to be communicatively competent.

### **Teaching Methods**

There have been various trends in the field of English Language Teaching since early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout much of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the history of language teaching saw the rise and fall of a variety of language teaching approaches and methods. It became a preoccupation of linguists during that period to develop more and more innovative methods. Each new method tried to prove that it provided more effective teaching than the preceding method. Some major trends in ELT include - Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method and Situational Language Teaching (Audiolingualism in US). Let's have a look at the principle characteristics of these major approaches in brief:

- **Grammar Translation Method:** It is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target

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language. So, Language learning is viewed as consisting of memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. the major focus being on reading and writing, this approach took sentence as the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Emphasizing on accuracy, the exponents of this approach believed in teaching grammar deductively – that is by presentation and study of grammar rules followed by practice through translation exercises. The Medium of instruction remained the student’s native language.

- **Direct Method:** Taking natural language learning as foundation, this method took the target language as medium of instruction. Correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized but grammar is taught inductively. Apart from reading and writing, speech and listening comprehension are also taught. Taking only everyday vocabulary, the new teaching points are introduced orally.
- **Situational Language Teaching (Audiolingualism in US):** Whereas ‘Situational Language Teaching’ was a major British approach to teach English as a foreign language in which language was taught by practicing basic structures in meaningful situation based activities, ‘Audiolingualism’ held that language learning is like other forms of learning. It stressed on the mechanistic aspects of language learning because it considered language as a formal, rule-governed system which could be formally organized to maximize teaching and learning efficiency. There were many similarities between the said two methods. The order in which the language skills were introduced and the focus on accuracy through drill/practice in the basic structures/sentence patterns of the target language suggested that these methods drew

from each other. Also, both methods reflected similar views about the nature of language and of language learning.

### **Syllabus Categories**

Around 1970s, some British linguists realized that there was need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures. One of such linguists, D.A. Wilkins proposed a functional or communicative definition of language in 1972 that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. It was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. Rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, Wilkins attempted to demonstrate the systems of meaning that lay behind the communicative uses of languages. He described two types of meanings:

- **Notional Categories** which included concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency etc.
- **Communicative Function Categories** which included requests, denials, offers, complaints etc.

### **Communicative Language Teaching**

It was during this period when Language teaching in many parts of the world was ready for a paradigm shift that Communicative Language Teaching came into being. Later, Wilkins' book *Notional Syllabuses* (1976) had a significant impact on the development of Communicative Language Teaching. Support from the Council of Europe and some other British linguists, the rapid application of their ideas by textbook writers along with the acceptance of these new ideas and principles by language teaching experts and curriculum development centres gave

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prominence all the world over to this approach called Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching. It was then that the scope of this approach expanded and linguists started seeing this as an approach which does mainly two things:

- Makes communicative competence the goal of language teaching
- Develops procedures for the teaching of four language skills (LSRW) that acknowledge the independence of language and communication

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It 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 classroom. These principles are:

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities
- Fluency is an important dimension of communication
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error

Since its inception, CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world and obviously it is due to its goal of teaching communicative competence. Communicative competence is different from grammatical competence in which the knowledge of a language is attained by producing sentences of that language and the knowledge attained is of the building blocks of sentences (i.e., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses and sentence patterns etc.) and formation of sentences. But, while grammatical competence is an

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important dimension of language learning it is clearly not at all that is involved in learning a language. It is because one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful in using the language for meaningful communication. CLT solves this purpose. It makes a learner communicatively competent by:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes/functions
- Knowing how to change the language according to formal and informal atmosphere
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts i.e., narratives, reports, interviews and conversations etc.
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (through using different types of communication strategies)

### **Tasks/Activities**

For the above purpose, a variety of activities/tasks are carried out in a CLT classroom. Some of them are given below:

- Role Play
- Interviews
- Information gap
- Games
- Language exchange
- Surveys
- Pair work
- Learning by teaching

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According to some experts, Communicative Language Teaching means a little more than an integration of grammatical and functional teaching while for some others, it means using procedures where learners work in pairs or groups employing available language resources in problem solving tasks. Since there is neither a single text (or authority on this approach) nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative, CLT becomes different from the other approaches of language teaching.

### **CLT in India**

In spite of developments in English Language Teaching and popularity of CLT in many countries as a comprehensive approach, there are many states in India where English language is still facing a very precarious situation. These include mainly the north Indian states. Overall scenario of teaching English in these states is dismal as the graduates passing out from the colleges and universities here are unemployable. No need to say that the sole reason for such a large number of unemployables is lack of communicative competency in the students. So, it is the need of the hour to change the existing syllabuses and reframe the new ones by following CLT approach. It will definitely bring about a positive change in the Indian scenario of small towns where the young ones have inferiority complex just because of their being incompetent in communicative skills.

### **CLT Advantage**

As said above, there are few universities which have changed their syllabuses and follow the latest teaching techniques. Many teachers who have taught and observed the development of students in both – earlier ‘literature focused curriculum’ and the current curriculum ‘focusing on

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communicative competence' feel that the CLT approach for teaching English has certainly an edge over the earlier approaches . This is because of the following factors:

- Students stay engaged throughout the class because there are lots of activities which keep them busy
- The interest level of the students is much more than their interest level in the old syllabus because the topics chosen are related to their day to day problems
- The confidence of the learners automatically increases very fast because of each individual's participation
- Hesitation goes away
- Exam fear also goes away due to the lesser number of texts
- The rote learning goes backstage because of lots of exercises related to texts
- The learners develop their own sense of answering when many things are discussed with them beyond the text
- Inclusion of soft-skills in the curriculum designed on CLT approach prepares the learners for the job market

Due to the integrated skills approach in a syllabus designed on CLT pattern, all the four skills essential for a language are covered. Whereas reading/writing skills are covered in the usual classes, Language Labs cover the listening and speaking skills. The difference in students between the two stages i.e. pre and post Language Labs becomes obvious after a certain period. It clearly indicates that the Language labs give a tremendous ignition to the desire of a learner to speak English. The learner's accent, pronunciation, stress, tone etc are controlled and modified according to the standard pattern.

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## Accuracy/Fluency

Developing fluency is also one of the goals of Communicative Language Teaching. 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 is developed by creating classroom activities in which the students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and work to avoid communication breakdowns. Fluency practice can be contrasted with accuracy practice:

<b>Activities focusing on fluency</b>	<b>Activities focusing on accuracy</b>
Reflect natural use of language	Reflect classroom use of language
Focus on achieving communication	Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
Require meaningful use of language	Practice language out of context
Require the use of communication strategies	Practice small samples of language
Seek to link language use to context	Choice of language is controlled

## Responsibility

The need for good communication skills has always been there, but Good communication skills have become crucial in the information age we live in. For this, the teachers must make the learners realize the importance of communication skills (in English) in today's world. With the

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number of foreign investors flocking to India and the growth of outsourcing, English has come to play a key role in professional relationships between foreign and Indian companies. With the onslaught of IT and ITES companies, English has become the language of employability and good command over it is considered a unique qualification. So, now, more than ever it becomes the moral duty of the teachers of English not only to create and sustain motivation levels of the college students, but also adopt new innovative methods while teaching, to make the learners communicatively competent.

As said above, it is the duty of a teacher to adopt the best method or technique while teaching English, but the teacher will be helpless in a situation where the authorities/central bodies that control the institutions do not help him/her. It is because the syllabuses based on CLT pattern are generally Task Based and Learner Centered. The tasks or activities carried out in the classrooms require some infrastructure different from the usual old styled classrooms. For example, the usual desks/benches in colleges are heavy and become a hindrance if groups or pairs are to be formed for discussions etc. For that purpose, light weight separate chairs are required. Also, since the students do not rely on the teacher for a model but be comfortable with listening to their peers in group or pair work tasks, the classrooms tend to become noisy which may disturb the adjacent classes. So, not only the infrastructure but an entire separate wing for the language classes is needed. In addition, shorter class sizes, treating English as an important subject like other subjects and supporting the innovative teachers can help to improve the scenario of bad communication skills. For these and other such things the support of the governing authorities becomes essential.

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But again, in spite of the above said factors about the governing bodies, the teacher cannot run away from his/her responsibility. The teacher has to develop a different view of learners' errors and of his/her own role in facilitating language learning. It becomes his/her utmost duty to devote maximum time to the activities to be carried out and give every chance for the learners to speak. In the task based syllabuses, the selected texts are contemporary, relevant to the socio-cultural needs of the students and are usually kept smaller in length and lesser in number. This is done so as to devote maximum number of teaching hours to the activities to enhance the learners' communicative competence. So, only such teachers, who are trained and believe in the positive result of these kinds of activities, can do justice while following CLT approach.

### **Efforts in India**

In the recent past, some efforts have definitely been made in India to improve the teaching of English. With the inception of 'Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)' in late 1960s, English teaching has been affected positively showing some hopeful signs of modifications and modernization. These signs include introduction of CLT curriculum by Central Board of School Education in all its affiliated schools, introduction of 'English for Specific Purposes (ESP)' in some Indian schools, infusion of technology with the teaching of English in the form of Language Labs, availability of the native English Language to the Indian people with the widespread availability of cable Television in India, realization of English as the most preferred language of the global information highway by the new generation with the rise

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of computer expertise and internet and reframing of the curriculum by some universities on CLT pattern. But there still remain many problems and there are few universities which follow the CLT pattern.

### **Need to adopt CLT Approach**

The need for good communication should be realized by one and all. Also, fluency in English being a pre-requisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world, the demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever. Obviously, when communicative competence is the essential requirement in the global scenario today, CLT becomes the best approach to be followed.

Communicative Language Teaching has been widely implemented since 1990s. The wide acceptance of the Communicative Approach and the relatively varied way in which it is interpreted and applied can be attributed to the fact that practitioners from different educational traditions can identify with it and consequently interpret it in different ways. And since it draws on a number of diverse sources, there is no single or agreed upon set of principles that characterizes current CLT. CLT today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals and so on. Today, Communicative Language Teaching continues in its classic form around the world as seen in the huge range of course books and other teaching resources that cite CLT as the source of their methodology. In addition it has influenced many other language teaching approaches that subscribe to a similar philosophy of language teaching.

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It seems that Communicative Language Teaching will continue to be the major general language teaching methodology in the coming years as its principles are supported by the English language teaching profession and by ELT/TESOL specialists and applied linguists. The comprehensiveness of this approach makes Communicative Language Teaching different in scope and status from all the other approaches in the teaching of English and hence its success so far.

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