A Review on Innovative Method of Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract: This article focus the understanding of Communicative Language Teaching, compared to the traditional teaching methods, specified in language skills. It argues that communicative competence is the important dimension to explore communicative language teaching as an innovative method, which includes grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence and strategic competence. Practically, communicative curriculum design embraces five components to provide direction to both English classroom management and teaching.

Keyword: Communicative language teaching; Communicative competence; Communicative curriculum; Innovation

1 Introduction

Within the last quarter century, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been put forth around the world as the "new," or "innovative," way to teach English as a second or foreign language. Teaching materials, course descriptions, and curriculum guidelines proclaim a goal of communicative competence.

The origins of contemporary CLT can be traced to concurrent developments in both Europe and North America. In Europe, the language needs of a rapidly increasing group of immigrants and guest workers, as well as a rich British linguistic tradition including social as well as linguistic context in description of language behavior led the Council of Europe to develop a syllabus for learners based on notional-functional concepts of language use. Functions were based on assessment of learner needs and specified the end result, the goal of an instructional program. The term communicative attached itself to programs that used a functional-notional syllabus based on needs assessment, and language for specific purposes (LSP) movement was launched.

Other European developments focused on the process of communicative classroom language on the process of communicative classroom language learning. In Germany, for example, against a backdrop of social democratic concerns for individual empowerment, articulated in the writings of the contemporary philosopher Jurgen Habermas, language teaching methodologists took the lead in the development of classroom materials that encouraged learner choice. Their systematic collection of exercise types for communicatively oriented English language teaching was used in teacher in-service courses and workshops to guide curriculum change. Exercises were designed to exploit the variety of social meanings contained within particular grammatical structures. A system of "chains" encouraged teachers and learners to define their own learning path through principled selection of relevant exercises

Meanwhile, in the United States, Hymes had reacted to Chomsky's characterization of the linguistic competence of the "ideal native-speaker" and proposed the term communicative competence to represent the use of language in social context, or the observance of sociolinguistic norms of appropriates. His concern with speech communities and the integration of language, communication, and culture was not unlike that of Halliday in the British linguistic tradition. Hymes's communicative competence may be seen as the equivalent of Halliday's meaning potential. Similarly, his focus was not language learning, but language as social behavior. In subsequent interpretations of the significance of Hymes's views for learners, methodologists working in the United States tended to focus on native speaker cultural norms and the difficulty. In light of this difficulty, the appropriateness of communicative competence as an instructional goal was questioned.

This paper looks at the phenomenon of communicative language teaching, which specified into what CLT is; how and why it developed; and how CLT has been interpreted and implemented in various contexts. Keeping in mind the needs and goals of learners and the traditions of classroom teaching, this paper is discussing what some ways are for teachers to shape a more communicative approach to English language teaching (ELT) in the context of their own situation.

2 Understanding Communicative Language Teaching

Communication was understood in terms or four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, when American structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology were the prevailing influences in language teaching methods and materials. These skill categories were widely accepted and provided a ready-made framework for methods manuals, learner course materials, and teacher education programs. Speaking and writing were collectively described as active skills, reading and listening as passive skills.

Today, listeners and readers no longer are regarded as passive. They are seen as active participants in the negotiation of meaning. Schemata, expectancies, and top-down / bottom-up processing are among the terms now used to capture the necessarily complex, interactive nature of this negotiation. Yet widespread understanding of communication as negotiation has been hindered by the terms that came to replace the earlier active/passive dichotomy. The skills needed to engage in speaking and writing activities were described subsequently as productive, whereas listening and reading skills were said to be receptive. While certainly an improvement over the earlier active/passive representation, the terms "productive" and "receptive" fall short of capturing the interactive nature of communication. Lost in this productive/receptive, message sending/message receiving representation is the collaborative nature of making meaning. Furthermore, The communicative competence needed for participation includes not only grammatical competence, but pragmatic competence.
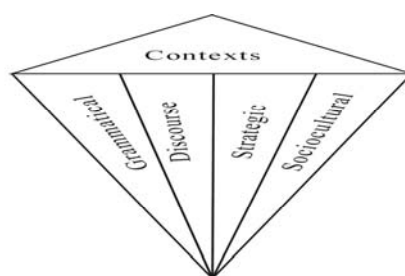
The inadequacy of a four-skill model of language use is now recognized. And the shortcomings of audio-lingual methodology are widely acknowledged. There is general acceptance of the complexity and interrelatedness of skills in both written and oral communication and of the need for learners to have the experience of communication, to participate in the negotiation of meaning. Newer, more comprehensive theories of language and language behavior have replaced those that looked to American structuralism and behaviorist psychology for support. The expanded, interactive view of language behavior they offer presents a number of challenges for teachers.

Communicative competence as measured in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, effort, and amount of communication in unrehearsed oral communicative tasks significantly surpassed that of learners who had had no such practice. Learner reactions to the test formats lent further support to the view that even beginners respond well to activities that let them focus on meaning as opposed to formal features.

CLT thus can be seen to derive from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at a minimum, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research. Its focus has been the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learner participation in communicative events. Central to CLT is the understanding of language learning as both an educational and a political issue. Language teaching is inextricably tied to language policy. Viewed from a multicultural intra-national as well as international perspective, diverse sociopolitical context mandate not only a diverse set of language learning goals, but a diverse set of teaching strategies. Program design and implementation depend on negotiation between policy makers, linguistic researchers, and teachers. And evaluation of program success requires a similar collaborative effort.

3 Four Components in Communicative Competence

The classroom model shows the hypothetical integration of four components that have been advanced as comprising communicative competence. It shows how, through contexts, learners gradually expand their communicative competence, consisting of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence.

Figure 1   Components of Communicative Competence

Although the relative importance of components depends on the overall level of communicative competence, each one is essential. Moreover, all components are interrelated. They cannot be developed or measured in isolation and one cannot go from one component to the other as one strings beads to make a necklace. Rather, an increase in one component interacts with other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence.

Grammatical competence refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological feature of a language and to make use of these features to interpret and form words and sentences. Grammatical competence is not linked to any single theory of grammar and does not include the ability to state rules of usage.

Discourse competence is concerned not with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances to form a text, a meaningful whole. Identification of isolated sounds or words contributes to interpretation of the overall meaning of the text. This is known as bottom-up processing. On the other hand, understanding of the theme or purpose of the text helps in the interpretation of isolated sounds or words. This is known as top-down processing. Both are important in communicative competence. Two other familiar concepts in talking about discourse competence are text coherence and cohesion. Text coherence is the relation of all sentences or utterances in a text to a single global proposition. The establishment of a global meaning, or topic, for a text is an integral part of both expression and interpretation and makes possible the interpretation of the individual sentences that make up the text. Local connections or structural links between individual sentences provide cohesion. Halliday and Hasan are well-known for their identification of various cohesive devices used in English, and their work has influenced teacher education materials for EFL.

Socio-cultural competence extends well beyond linguistic forms and is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use. Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction.

It is of course not feasible for learners to anticipate the sociocultural aspects for every context. Moreover, English often serves as a language of communication between speakers of different primary languages. Participants in multicultural communication are sensitive not only to the cultural meanings attached to the language itself, but also to social conventions concerning language use. These conventions influence how messages are interpreted. Cultural awareness, rather than cultural knowledge thus becomes increasingly important. Just knowing something about the culture of an English-speaking country will not suffice. What must be learned is a general empathy and openness towards other cultures. Sociocultural competence therefore includes a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning along with a willingness to suspend judgment and take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences in conventions or use.

The person who knows a language perfectly and uses it appropriately in all social interactions exists in theory only. Communicative competence is always relative. The coping strategies that we use in unfamiliar contexts, with constraints due to imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors in their application are represented as strategic competence. The effective use of coping strategies is important for communicative competence in all contexts and distinguishes highly competent communicators from those who are less so.

By definition, CLT puts the focus on the learner. Learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence. This implies global, qualitative evaluation of learner achievement as opposed to quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic features. Controversy over appropriate language testing measures persists, and many a curricular innovation has been undone by failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation.

4 Communicative Curriculum Design

It is helpful to think of a communicative curriculum as potentially made up of five components. These components may be regarded as thematic clusters of activities or experiences related to language use and usage, providing a useful way of categorizing teaching strategies that promote communicative language use. Use of the term component to categorize these activities seems particularly appropriate in that it avoids any suggestion of sequence or level. Experimentation with communicative teaching methods has shown that all five components can be profitably blended at all stages of instruction. Organization of learning activities into the following components serve not to sequence an ELT program, but rather to highlight the range of options available in curriculum planning and to suggest ways in

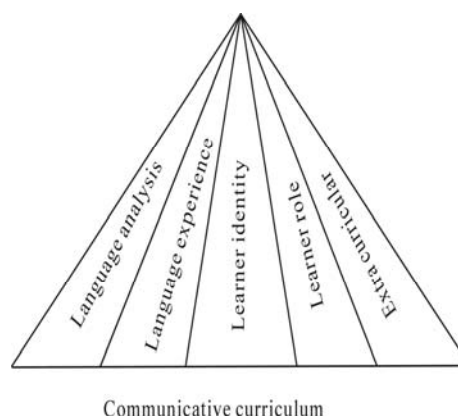which their very interrelatedness benefit the learner.

Figure 2　Elements of Communicative Curriculum

Language analysis is the first component, which includes many of the exercises used in mother tongue programs to focus attention on formal accuracy. In ELT, Language Analysis focuses on forms of English, including syntax, morphology, and phonology. Spelling test, translation, dictation, and rote memorization are important. There are many Language Analysis games that learners of all ages enjoy for the variety and group interaction they provide. So long as they are not overused and are not promoted as the solution to all manner of language learning problems, these games can be a welcome addition to teacher's repertoire.

In contrast with language analysis, language experience is the use of English for real and immediate communicative goals. Not all learners are learning English for the same reasons. Attention to the specific communicative needs of the learners is important in the selection and sequencing of materials. Regardless of how distant or unspecific the communicative needs of the learners may be, every program with a goal of communicative competence should give attention to opportunities for meaningful English use, opportunities to focus on meaning rather than on form. Learners who are accustomed to being taught exclusively in their mother tongue may at first be uncomfortable if the teacher speaks to them in English, expecting them not only to understand but, perhaps, to respond. When this happens, teachers need to take special care to help learners realize that they are not expected to understand every word, any more than they are expected to express themselves in native-like English. Making an effort to get the gist and using strategies to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning are important to the development of communicative competence.

The third component in a communicative curriculum relates to the learner's emerging identity in English. In planning for CLT, teachers should remember that not everyone is comfortable in the same position. Within classroom communities, as within society at large, there are leaders and there are those who prefer to be followers. Both are essential to the success of group activities. The wider the variety of communicative or meaning-based activities, the greater the chance is for involving all learners. Respect for learners is essential as they use English for self-expression. Although language arts activities provide an appropriate context for attention to formal accuracy, most teachers know this and intuitively focus on meaning rather than on form as learners express their personal feelings or experiences. It requires more than simply restraint in attention to formal "errors" that do not interfere with meaning. It includes recognition that so-called "native-like" performance may not in fact, even be a goal for learners.

Learner role is the fourth component of a communicative curriculum, which implies that "life is a stage", on this stage we play many roles, roles for which we improvise scripts from the models we observe around us. All are roles that include certain expected ways of behaving and using language.

Extracurricular is the fifth and final component of a communicative curriculum. Regardless of the variety of communicative activities in the EFL classroom, their purpose remains to prepare learners to use English in the world beyond. The classroom is but a rehearsal. Development of the beyond the classroom component in a communicative curriculum begins with discovery of learner interests and needs and of opportunities to not only respond to but, more importantly, to develop those interests and needs through English language use beyond the classroom itself. In an EFL setting, opportunities to use English outside the classroom abound. Systematic "field experiences" may successfully become the core

of the course, which then could become a workshop in which learners can compare notes, seek clarification, and expand the range of domains in which they learn to function in English.

Discussions of CLT not infrequently lead to questions of grammatical or formal accuracy. The perceived displacement of attention to morph syntactic features in learner expression in favor of a focus on meaning has lead in some cases to the impression that grammar is not important, or that proponents of CLT favor learner self-expression without regard to form. While involvement in communicative events is seen as central to language development, this involvement necessarily requires attention to form. The nature of the contribution to language development of both form-focused and meaning-focused classroom activity remains a question in ongoing research.

Communicative competence obviously does not mean the wholesale rejection of familiar materials. There is nothing to prevent communicatively-based materials from being subjected to grammar-translation treatment, just as there may be nothing to prevent a teacher with only an old grammar-translation book at his or her disposal from teaching communicatively. What matters is the teacher's conception of what learning a language is and how it happens. As an innovative method, CLT holds the basic principle, which is an orientation towards collective participation in a process of use and discovery achieved by cooperation between individual learners as well as between learners and teachers.

5 Conclusion

Disappointment with the traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods for their inability to prepare learners for the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning, along with enthusiasm for an array of alternative methods increasingly labeled communicative, has resulted in no small amount of uncertainty as to what are and are not essential features of CLT. Thus, this summary description would be incomplete with out brief mention of what CLT is not.

CLT is not exclusively concerned with face-to-face oral communication. The principles of CLT apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers engaged in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning: the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context. CLT does not require small-group or pair work; group tasks have been found helpful in many contexts as a way of providing increased opportunity and motivation for communication. However, classroom group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts. Finally, CLT does not exclude a focus on meta-linguistic awareness or knowledge of rules, of syntax, discourse, and social appropriateness.

The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication in order to allow them to develop their communicative competence. Terms sometimes used to refer to features of CLT include process oriented, task-based, and inductive, or discovery oriented. In as much as strict adherence to a given text is not likely to be true to its processes and goals, CLT cannot e found in any one textbook or set of curricular materials. In keeping with the notion of context of situation, CLT is properly seen as a approach or theory of intercultural communicative competence to be used in developing materials and methods appropriate to given context of learning. Contexts change. A world of carriages and petticoats evolves into one of genomes and cyberspace. No less than the means and norms of communication they are designed to reflect, communicative teaching methods designed to enhance the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning will continue to be explored and adapted.

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