Emergence and Theoretical Underpinnings of CLT

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Abstract: Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is 'communicative competence' a term introduced into discussions of language use and second or foreign language learning in the early 1970s. This paper looks at emergence of communicative language teaching and the phenomenon of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the current scenario. The goal of the paper is to show how CLT has been emerged, interpreted and implemented in various contexts and to present the role of the teacher in the class, syllabus and more importantly learner's role in the class where the class is in use. Also, the paper discusses ways for teachers to shape a more communicative approach to ELT in the context of their own situation keeping in mind the needs and goals of learners and the traditions of classroom teaching, which is the first step in the development of a teaching program that involves learners as active participants in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning. Although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the level of design and procedure, there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most other methods permit.

Keywords: Theory of Language, Communicative Approach, Paradigm Shift, Learner's Role, Communicative Competence.

INTRODUCTION

After all life is communication and communication is life. So when the traditional methods of British language teaching like situational language teaching started sliding downwards in the late 1960s, it became crystal clear that the situational approach had run its course.

In situational language teaching, language was taught by practicing basic structures in meaningful situation activities. But just as the linguistic theory underlying Audiolingualism was rejected in the United States in the mid-1960s, British applied linguists began to call into question in the assumptions underlying situational language teaching.

The linguists could well judge that there was no future in continuing to pursue the chimera of predicting language on the basis of situational events. What emerged as a preferred alternative was a closer study of the language itself and returns to the traditional concept that utterances carried meaning in themselves and expressed the meanings of the speakers and writers who created them.

This was partly a response to the sorts of criticism the prominent American linguist Noam Chomsky had leveled at structure linguistic theory in his new classical book 'Syntactic Structures' (1975). Chomsky has demonstrated that the current standard structural theories of language were capable of accounting for the fundamental characteristics of language, the creativity and the uniqueness of individual sentences.

British applied linguists emphasized another fundamental dimension of language that was inadequately addressed in current approaches to language teaching at that time the functional and communication potential of language. They saw the need to focus in language teaching on communication proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.

With the increasing interdependence of European Countries came the need for greater efforts to teach adults English- the prominent international link language. The British linguist W. A. Wilkins proposed a functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing syllabuses for language teaching[4]. Wilkins's contribution 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 meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language.

Wilkins described two types of meanings:

A. National Categories and
B. Categories of Communicative function. His book 'National syllabuses' (1976) had a tremendous impact on the development of communicative language teaching.

Later the council of Europe incorporated his communicative analysis in a set of specifications for a first-level communicative language syllabus and these threshold level specifications left an indelible imprint on the design of communicative language programme and textbooks in Europe. The work of the council of Europe, the writings of Wilkins, Widoson, Candid, Christopher Brumfit, Keith Johnson [3] and other British applied linguists on the theoretical basis for a communicative or functional approach to language teaching; the rapid application of these ideas by text-book writers and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centre and even the government gave prominence nationally and internationally to what came to be referred to as a communicative approach or simply communicative language teaching.

The terms national-functional approach and functional approach are also sometimes used. Although the movement began as a largely British innovation now both British and American proponents see it as an approach and not a method that aims to make communicative competence. The goal of language teaching and developed procedures for the teaching of four language skills [LSRW] that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.

APPROACH

The communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. According to Hymes [1] the goal of language teaching is to develop 'communicative competence'. Hymes coined this term in order to contrast a communicative view of language and Chomsky's theory of competence. For Chomsky, the focus of linguistics theory was to characterize the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentence in a language. Hymes held that such a theory of linguistics was sterile, that linguistics theory needed to be seen as part of more general theory incorporating communication and culture. Hymes' theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate completely in a speech community.

At the level of language theory communicative language teaching has a rich base if somewhat eclectic.

Some of the characteristics of communicative view of language are as follows:

A. Language is a system for the expression of meanings.
B. The primary function of a language is for interaction and communication.
C. The structure of a language reflects its functional and communicative use.
D. The primary units of a language are not merely its grammatical and structure features but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

THEORY OF LEARNING

In contrast to the amount that has been written in communicative language teaching, literature about communicative dimensions of language little has been written about learning theory. Activities that involve real communication promote leaning. A second principal activity in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promotes learning. A third element is the meaningfulness language that is meaningful to the learner supports learning process.

SYLLABUS

The only form of syllabus which is compatible with and can support communicational teaching seems to be a purely procedural one- which lists in more or less detail, the type of tasks to be attempted in the class room and suggest an order of complexity for tasks of same kind.

LEARNER'S ROLE

The emphasis in CLT on the processes of communication rather than mastery of language forms. Breen and Candlin describe the learner's role within CLT in the following terms:

The role of the learner as negotiator- between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning- emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependence way[2].

TEACHER ROLE

The teacher has two main roles- the first is to facilitate communication between all participants and between these participants and various activities. Other roles assumed for teachers are needs analyst counselor and group process manager.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN USE

The communicative approach of language teaching has been widely in practice since 1990s. As it describes a set of very general principles grounded in

the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second language teaching, and a communicative syllabus and methodology as the way of achieving this goal, communicative language teaching has continued to evolve as our understanding of the process of second language learning has developed. Thus, current communicative language teaching theory and practice draws on a number of different educational paradigms and traditions. These include second language acquisition research, collaborative learning, competency based learning and content based instruction. And since it draws on a number of diverse sources, there is no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching rather refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending upon the context of teaching, the age of learners, their levels, their learning and so on.

MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS
Some of the assumptions of communicative language teaching are as follows:
- Learning is facilitated only when learners are engaged in the meaningful communication and interaction, and meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging.
- 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 production 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.
- The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.
- 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.

CONCLUSION
CLT is best considered as an approach rather than a method. Thus, although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the level of design and procedure, there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most other methods permit. CLT appeared at the time when British language teaching was ready for a paradigm shift. Situational language teaching was no longer felt to reflect a methodology appropriate for the seventies and beyond. CLT appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching- One in which the interactive processes of communication received priority. The rapid adoption and implementation of communicative approach also resulted from the fact that it quickly assumed the status of orthodoxy in British language teaching circles.

Now that the initial wave of enthusiasm has passed, however some claims of CLT are being looked at more critically. The adoption of a communicative approach raises important issues for teacher training, material developments, testing and evaluation-questions that have been raised include whether a communicative approach can be applied at all levels in a language programme, whether it is equally suited to ESL and EFL situations, whether it requires existing grammar-based syllabuses to be abandoned or merely revised. How such an approach can be evaluated, how suitable it is for non –native teachers and how it can be adopted in situations where students must continue to take grammar-based tests. Indubitably, these kinds of questions will require attention if the communicative movement in language teaching continues to gain momentum in the future. Today CLT continues in its classic form 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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