



جامعة تكريت

كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

المرحلة الثالثة

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Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

You may have noticed that the goal of most of the methods we have looked at so far is for students to learn to communicate in the target language. In the 1970s, though, educators began to question if they were going about meeting the goal in the right way. Some observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom. Others noted that being able to communicate required more than mastering linguistic structure, due to the fact that language was fundamentally social (Halliday 1973). Within a social context, language users needed to perform certain functions, such as promising, inviting, and declining invitations (Wilkins 1976). Students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but be unable to use the language (Widdowson 1978).

Principles 1 The teacher distributes a handout that has a copy of a sports column from a recent newspaper. Whenever possible, authentic language —language as it is used in a real context —should be introduced. 2 The teacher tells the students to underline the reporter's predictions and to say which ones they think the reporter feels most certain of and which he feels least certain of. Being able to figure out the speaker's or writer's intentions is part of being communicatively competent. 3 The teacher gives the students the directions for the activity in the target language. The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study. 4 The students try to state the reporter's predictions in different words. One function can have many different linguistic forms. Since the focus of the course is on real language use, a variety of linguistic forms are presented together. The emphasis is on the process of communication rather than just mastery of language forms. 5 The students unscramble the sentences of the newspaper article. Students should work with language at the

discourse or suprasentential (above the sentence) level. They must learn about cohesion and coherence, those properties of language which bind the sentences together. 6 The students play a language game. Games are important because they have certain features in common with real communicative events—there is a purpose to the exchange. Also, the speaker receives immediate feedback from the listener on whether or not she has successfully communicated. Having students work in small groups maximizes the amount of communicative practice they receive. 7 The students are asked how they feel about the reporter's predictions. Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. 8 A student makes an error. The teacher and other students ignore it. Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Since this activity was working on fluency, the teacher did not correct the student, but simply noted the error, which he will return to at a later point. 9 The teacher gives each group of students a strip story and a task to perform. One of the teacher's major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. 10 The students work with a partner or partners to predict what the next picture in the strip story will look like. Communicative interaction encourages cooperative relationships among students. It gives students an opportunity to work on negotiating meaning.

Reviewing the Principles The answers to our 10 questions will help us come to a better understanding of Communicative Language Teaching. In some answers new information has been provided to clarify certain concepts. 1 What are the goals of teachers who use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)? The goal is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form, given the

social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Communication is a process; knowledge of the forms of language is insufficient. 2 What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students? The teacher facilitates communication in the classroom. In this role, one of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities he acts as an advisor, answering students' questions and monitoring their performance. He might make a note of their errors to be worked on at a later time during more accuracy-based activities. At other times he might be a 'co-communicator' engaging in the communicative activity along with students (Littlewood 1981). Students are, above all, communicators. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning—in trying to make themselves understood—even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete. Also, since the teacher's role is less dominant than in a teacher-centered method, students are seen as more responsible for their own learning. 3 What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process? The most obvious characteristic of CLT is that almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent. Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks (see discussion of these in the review of the techniques). Activities that are truly communicative, according to Morrow (Johnson and Morrow 1981), have three features in common: information gap, choice, and feedback. An information gap exists when one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not. If we both know today is Tuesday, and I ask you, 'What is today?' and you answer, 'Tuesday,' our exchange is not really communicative. My question is called a display question, a question teachers use to ask students to display what they know, but it is not a question that asks you to give me information that I do not know. In communication, the speaker has a choice of what she will say and how she will say it. If the exercise is tightly controlled, so

that students can only say something in one way, the speaker has no choice and the exchange, therefore, is not communicative. In a chain drill, for example, if a student must reply to her neighbor's question in the same way as her neighbor replied to someone else's question, then she has no choice of form and content, and real communication does not occur. True communication is purposeful. A speaker can thus evaluate whether or not her purpose has been achieved based upon the information she receives from her listener. If the listener does not have an opportunity to provide the speaker with such feedback, then the exchange is not really communicative. Forming questions through a transformation drill may be a worthwhile activity, but it is not in keeping with CLT since a speaker will receive no response from a listener. She is thus unable to assess whether her question has been understood or not. Another characteristic of CLT is the use of authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used. Finally, we noted that activities in CLT are often carried out by students in small groups. Small numbers of students interacting are favored in order to maximize the time allotted to each student for communicating. While there is no explicit theory of learning connected with CLT, the implicit assumption seems to be that students will learn to communicate by practicing functional and socially appropriate language. 4 What is the nature of student-teacher interaction? What is the nature of student-student interaction? The teacher may present some part of the lesson. At other times, he is the facilitator of the activities, but he does not always himself interact with the students. Sometimes he is a co-communicator, but more often he establishes situations that prompt communication between and among the students. Students interact a great deal with one another. They do this in various configurations: pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group

Reviewing the Techniques There may be aspects of CLT that you find appealing. This review has been provided in the event you wish to try to use any of the techniques or materials associated with CLT.

- **Authentic Materials** To overcome the typical problem that students cannot transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world, and to expose students to natural language in a variety of situations, adherents of CLT advocate the use of authentic language materials.¹ In this lesson we see that the teacher uses a newspaper article. He also assigns the students homework, requiring that they learn about two political candidates who are running for election. Of course, the class that we observed was at the high-intermediate level of proficiency. For students with lower proficiency in the target language, it may not be possible to use authentic language materials such as these. Simpler authentic materials (for example, the use of a weather forecast when working on predictions), or at least ones that are realistic, are most desirable. It is not so important that the materials be genuine as it is that they be used authentically, with a communicative intent. Another possibility for the use of authentic materials with a lower-level class is to use items of realia that do not contain a lot of language, but about which a lot of discussion could be generated. Menus in the target language are an example; timetables are another.
- **Scrambled Sentences** The students are given a passage (a text) in which the sentences are in a scrambled order. This may be a passage they have worked with or one they have not seen before. They are told to unscramble the sentences so that the sentences are restored to their original order. This type of exercise teaches students about the cohesion and coherence properties of language. They learn how sentences are bound together at the suprasentential level through formal linguistic devices such as pronouns, which make a text cohesive, and semantic propositions, which unify a text and make it coherent. In addition to written passages, students might also be asked to unscramble the lines of a mixed-up dialogue. Or they might be asked to put the pictures of a picture strip story in order and write lines to accompany the pictures.