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Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

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).

Communicative Language Teaching

It is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. Learners in environments using communication to learn and practise the target language by interactions with one another and the instructor, the study of "authentic texts" (those written in the target language for purposes other than language learning), and the use of the language both in class and outside of class.

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

- 1- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- 2- Authentic Language, i.e. language as it is used in a real context, should be introduced whenever possible.
- 3- Fluency is an important dimension of communication.
- 4- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- 5- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trials and errors.
- 6- Pupils must work with language at the discourse or suprasentential (above the sentence) level. They should also learn about cohesion and coherence, i.e. those properties of language which join sentences together.
- 7- Students are given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions.
- 8- The foreign language has two functions: a vehicle for classroom communication and a means for studying the language itself.

- 9- Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Thus student's success is determined as much by their fluency as it is by their accuracy.
- 10- Interaction in communication encourages cooperative relationships among students. It gives students an opportunity to work on the negotiation of meaning.
- 11- Students are often engaged in role play or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social contexts.
- 12- Language games are important because they have certain features in common with real communicative events. The speaker also receives immediate feedback from the listener on whether or not he/she has communicated successfully.
- 13- The teacher has many major responsibilities; one of which is the establishment of situations that are likely to promote communication. And the teacher acts as an adviser during the activities, answers student's questions and monitors their performance.
- 14- The social context is important in giving meaning to the utterances of the communicative event.
- 15- The speaker has a choice of not only what to say, but also of how to say it.
- 16- Students are asked to interpret language as it is actually used by native speakers. So, they should be given enough opportunity to develop strategies.

The Goals of Teachers Who Use the Communicative Language Teaching

The goal of Communicative Language Teaching 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.

The Role of the Teacher and Learner

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. Students are, above all, communicators. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning in trying to make themselves understood and in understanding other 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.

Characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching

Brown (2001:71) advocates that learners demonstrate linguistic fluency and not just accuracy. He offers six interconnected characteristics, as follows:

1. Classroom goals should focus on all components of communicative competence: grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic;
2. Language techniques should engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes;
3. Fluency and accuracy are complimentary principles underlying communicative techniques;
4. Language should be used productively and receptively;
5. The activities are learner-centred, and the learners focus on their own learning process;
6. The teacher's role is mainly as a facilitator to guide the learners in the interaction that takes place in the classroom.

Nguyen (2010:209) points that with Communicative Language Teaching “almost everything is done with a communicative intent.” He believes that “the notion of communication is accordingly central in Communicative Language Teaching; and Communicative Language Teaching advocates learning through communication.” Communicative Language Teaching stresses more on meaning rather than structure, and students practise to communicate in the language through several types of communicative activities, such as role-plays, dialogues, games and problem-solving activities (Lindsay and Knight, 2006:54). Since of the needs for learners to practise communication, Communicative Language Teaching places importance in a wide array of activities in the classroom where the learners are given exposure to use the language in a meaningful, authentic settings. It provides ‘a repertoire of communicative activities and opportunities’ for learners to practise language skills in the classroom.

There are three characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching: (a) communicative activities; (b) the use of authentic materials; (c) small group activities by the learners. In designing the activities, they suggest that true communicative activities are bound by three features: information gap, choice and feedback. Information gap is when one person in an exchange knows something that the other person does not. Choice refers to the choice that a speaker has concerning with what he/she will say and how he/she will say it. Feedback concerns with the exchange or response that the speaker receives from the listener.

Techniques of Communicative Language Teaching

The following techniques are employed for Communicative Language Teaching inside classroom situations:

1. **Authentic Material:** Authentic language material is used in order to expose students to natural language in a variety of situations, and to enable them to transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world.

2. Scrambled Sentences: A passage (a text), which may be seen or unseen, with sentences in a scrambled manner is given to the students so as to unscramble the sentences and put them in their original order. Students might also be asked to unscramble the lines of a mixed-up dialogue or to put the pictures of a strip story in order and write lines to accompany the pictures.
3. Language Games: Language games are often used in the Communicative Language Teaching. The students find them enjoyable, and if they are properly designed, they give students valuable communicative practice.
4. Picture Strip Story: Picture strip stories used to influence students' attention, so that they focus on the material. The students feel happy and more active and enjoy studying the topic. Picture strip stories can evoke many activities. An example is the activity referred to in point (2).
5. Role-Play: In Communicative Language Teaching, role play is very important because it gives students an opportunity to practise communication in different social contexts and different social roles. Role playing exercises help students to look at the materials they are learning in a different way. The instructor persuades the students to alter their mental maps of the world instead of just filling them in. Consequently, role playing helps students to achieve better understanding of a situation by experiencing a realistic simulation.
6. Stimulation: Stimulation may play a vital role in Communicative Language Teaching to make the learner feel interested in learning new things. Questions asked by the teacher provide a useful means of stimulating students' interest. Reward can be another way for doing so.