Why Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

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It has been suggested that he traditional methods of teaching language, like the structural, humanistic and natural methods that served for many years have been not really not effective because they give limited attention to teaching language for purposeful communication. The Communicative Approach was developed (Richards, 2006:2) as response to the lacuna perceived in the traditional methods of teaching. The communicative approach which is (as its name suggests) an approach and not a rigidly defined method and its development was a reaction against the mechanical pattern practice and the belief that language usage is the result of conscious learning of grammar. Communicative language teaching (CLT) emphaised the need to teach communicative competence as opposed to linguistic competence. The theoretical framework for CLT is partially based on the social interactionist theory that proposes that the learners' use of the target language is the best source for

learning the language. In other words, while the learners use the language they also get feedback and, in the process, learn the language .

CLT is a philosophical approach to the language curriculum that takes insight from Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology . CLT is a set of principle about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom (Harmer, 2007:84). CLT is attuned to the logic of post method. Post method, according to Kumaravadivelu, (2006:170), is a shift to viewing language teaching in three perspectives: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity is concerned with a particular group of teachers and learners in a particular context. Practically, as the other aspect of language pedagogy, mainly shows the teaching based on his/her "Insight or intuition" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006:170). Possibility is concerned with language teaching that provides learners with "continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006:175)

The need for enabling learners to communicate in the target language is the main focus of CLT. Teachers design Tasks reflecting real-life communicative situations are designed for learning purposes. By doing this they are in a position to use language that is not artificial or contrived, but natural real life functions such as requesting, instructing, explaining or expressing preferences are used to sensitise learners to using language appropriately in various situations. In this approach learners usually work in small groups on

communicative activities during which they get practice in deriving meaning using authentic materials such as news clippings , broadcasts, food labels , timetables , announcements and speeches.

CLT aims at developing communicative competence, which is the ability to use language for meaningful communication. Communicative competence is described as knowledge of different aspects of a language such as knowledge of using the language for various purposes and functions, knowledge of using the language according to setting and participants, knowledge of producing and understanding different texts like conversations, reports, interviews and knowledge of strategies of filling a communication gap when communication breakdown occurs.

In this regard, Hymes (1971:14) listed four sectors of communicative competence. The first is noted as the formal "possibility" of a sentence. It deals with the acceptability of a sentence because it is grammatically well formed or the rejection of the sentence because it is ungrammatical. The second sector of communicative competence deals with the "feasibility" of sentence patterns in which grammatically acceptable and meaningful combinations of words form part of the language user's competence. The "appropriates" of an utterance to the "context" is the third factor. He noted that the speaker-listener's underlying competence includes rules of appropriateness and a   sentence can be grammatically possible and feasible but inappropriate. The last sector of communicative competence is concerned with "accepted usage".

Regarding the constructs of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) gave shape to what communicative competence is composed of in terms of second language teaching. Canale and Swain (1980) and later Canale (1983) describe constructs of communicative competence as grammatical competence (also referred to as linguistic competence), discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

Components of Communicative Competence

Four areas of communicative competence are distinguished. Grammatical competence is the component of communicative competence concerned with linguistic competence of a language user that includes lexical competence, morphological competence, syntactic competence, semantic competence, and phonological competence of the language (Canale & Swain,1980:29). Discourse competence is the complement of grammatical competence. It is the ability of a learner to conjoin sentences in a meaningful pattern in a series of utterances. Grammatical competence focuses on the competence of the learner at sentence level whereas discourse competence is concerned with the competence of the learner beyond sentence level and inter sentence relationships. It is a mastery of combining grammatical forms and functions in context. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the social and cultural rules that govern language and discourse. It embraces both socio-cultural rules of use and rules of discourse which determine the ability of the language user about the social context where the language is used . It includes the roles of the speaker and the

interlocutor, the messages they exchange and the purpose of interaction. Strategic competence is concerned with verbal and nonverbal communication strategies adopted to compensate for communication breakdowns that might happen because of performance variables or because of lack of competence.

To sum up, the discussion on communicative competence as the goal of language teaching implies that the teaching of language as a second / foriegn should give attention to the four components of communicative competence. Teaching a single component such as grammatical elements of the language as most of the methods did will not bring about the anticipated competent users of language. That was why a number of scholars were searching for alternative methods of teaching that would satisfy the communicative needs of organised societies in a coherent and logical way . Furthermore, teaching students to think about their audience (reader of written work or receivers of an oral message) when they speak or write is compulsory to communicate a message. Besides, students should be provided with opportunities to communicate with the linguistic resources they have and teachers should encourage them to utilise communication strategies such as approximation or substitution like 'green things' to mean 'vegetables' .

The CLT approach in Teaching foreign or second language

. CLT has been viewed as an effective and widely accepted approach to language teaching in contrast to the teaching methods depending on grammatical competence . Pica (2000:5) claims that CLT is more effective than the earlier

methods in uplifting the confidence of students and their ability in speaking and writing. It is also effective in enhancing the early stages of their language development. It takes knowledge of grammar as an important tool for meaningful communication. Grammar is used as a facilitator of communication, it is not taken as an end in itself. Communicative based courses view grammar as a means for expressing and exchanging meaning. Meaningful communication can take place only when learners understand a range of complex structures of the language and have the skill to utilise them in a different context in a meaningful way .

In CLT teachers facilitate situations to involve students actively in the teaching and learning process; the teacher becomes facilitator instead of a giver. Students become active agents communicating throughout the classes rather than being passive recipients of information from the teacher. They are seen as autonomous and responsible for managing their own learning. If students want to study more independently, they must cultivate correct attitudes and approaches to learning. Students should know not only why they learn but also how to learn. Thus, teachers begin teaching by communicating the true purposes of learning. Students are encouraged to work in collaboration with others. Flexible group/team/pair interactions by way of doing purposeful activities in which they negotiate meaning and solve problems are taken to be useful techniques. The time allotted to students to engage in learning and negotiate meaning is maximised .

The integrative presentation of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing is encouraged in CLT. It is understood that a mixture of skills is used in real-life communication. For instance, it is common to see that when someone speaks, others listen and take turns to speak. It is also a regular activity to respond to written messages in writing or in speaking. CLT thus realises that there is always integration of skills and learners should be presented with activities that facilitate the integration of these skills rather than creating artificial distinctions.

Active participation in the learning activities is a prerequisite for effective language teaching based on the communicative approach. Learners must have the opportunity to use the language extensively in most lessons. Assessments in CLT are integrated with language teaching. The communicative approach promotes continuous assessment of student learning, focussing on assessing the communicative abilities of the students. Assessment is often formatively conducted when the students are involved in carrying our various language learning tasks inside or outside the classroom. A number of assessment techniques such as observation, interviews, journals, portfolios, checklists, rubrics and quizzes can be employed to evaluate learners' language development.

Over all, language teaching in CLT is viewed as a process of facilitating and monitoring students' learning. It views the language teacher as a facilitator who should monitor the student's learning processes. It requires a teacher to assume the specific roles of controller, organiser, assessor, tutor, observer,

resource person, participant, motivator, researcher, and learner (Harmer, 2001:57-63;) It considers language learning as a process resulting from interaction between the learners and other individuals and events in the learning environment. It takes learners as the main actors of the interactions, communicators of message and negotiators of meanings they make from the interactions. Learning activities are designed to engage the learners in meaningful and ongoing communication; activities that reflect the natural use of language to achieve communication, meaningful use of language and to link language use to the context of use (Gomez-Rodriguez, 2010:330).

Communicative Language Teaching in general has brought a shift in thinking about language and teaching. One of the components of the shift is that diversity among learners in the language class is taken to be inevitable and learner differences were gradually given greater attention. CLT considers learner dynamics, learning strategies and communication strategies as a way of attaining learning goals.

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