

Development and Application of Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract

One of the main purposes of language learning is to use it into communication, therefore, the fundamental task for language teaching is to improve learner's ability in communication. Currently, communicative language teaching (CLT), which is widely applied in language teaching classroom, is accepted as a critical method to improve students' communicative competence in a sound environment. Consequently, based on some theories of this learning approach, this paper mainly focuses on the introduction of the development of CLT as well as its application in classroom.

Key Words

Communicative language teaching (CLT), communicative competence, theory

Introduction

Daily communication is the final goal to learn a foreign language, so most of the language teachers are paying more attention to students' communicative competence and they've changed the traditional way in which students will be taught deductively and attach more importance on grammatical learning, instead, many teachers adopt an inductive way to teach their students some grammar and structural rules, and regard communication between students and themselves as the most important, for they think not only will it help learners gain most, but also will enhance their ability to understand the meaning express themselves in communication. Though many researches have been focus on analyzing the application of CLT in classroom, only a few pay attention to the developing process of this teaching approach, which will be introduced in this paper by combining with its application to enlarge readers' knowledge in CLT and promote them to use it more properly in the future teaching activities.

Importance of communicative Strategy in CLT

The application of communicative strategy in language teaching is an essential part to enhance the communicative competence of learners and it is widely applied in the teaching process. This strategy is an important aspect of the strategic research as well as it has a closely relationship with other learning strategies and second language acquisition. In the educational fields, increasing number of teachers begin to choose a communicative approach in their classes to help learners make use of the language in practical situation.

Need for Study

Teaching and learning in classroom is a significant process in second language education. The developing process in communicative teaching approach is of more importance to help both teachers and learners achieve a higher competence in

communication. Both of them have to communicate well with each other to improve the teaching and learning efficiency. As a result, it is necessary for them to be more actively communicative in class. For teachers, they have to show the knowledge more clearly, while for the students, they have to understand what the teacher has told them and give some relevant response. Therefore, it is obvious to cultivate themselves in taking advantage of this teaching approach by realizing its functions and development so as to improve the learning efficiency in a communicative situation.

Background of CLT

CLT has been widely adopted in the education and particularly in the language teaching field. In class, emphasis on learners' communicative ability has attracted teachers' attention for a long time, therefore, language should be taught in a communicative environment where learners are able to make use of what they have learned into real practice and thus improve their communicative competence. The application of CLT has a long history. The origins of CLT can date back to the late 1960s when some changes can be found in the traditional British language teaching. The concept of it was put forward by Hymes and it contributed a lot to research in language teaching. Prior to that period of time, Situational Language Teaching (SLT) was the main trend in the teaching approach adopted in British when teaching English as a foreign language, and at that time the introduction of basic structures was applied in English language teaching which was a meaningful practice in situational activities. However, according to the linguistic theory, Audiolingualism was thought as the most popular teaching approach in the US whereas in Britain SLT was more popular. In the mid-1960s, some questions on the theory of SLT were arisen by British applied linguists, according to which, Chomsky (1957) had demonstrated that the standard in current theories of language structure, which were not able to account for the basic characteristic of language – the innovation and uniqueness of a single sentence. Meantime, British applied linguists stressed the functional and communicative potential of language which was regarded as another basic dimension of language and it was not clearly enough in current approaches to language teaching at that time. It proved the importance to focus on communicative proficiency in language teaching instead of the mere mastery of structures, which was considered as the final goal of CLT.

The change in educational realities in Europe brought about another impetus to apply various approaches in foreign language teaching. In the European Common Market and the Council of Europe, the need for greater efforts to teach adults the major languages came out with the increasing interdependence of European countries, and thus a local organization for cultural and educational cooperation was set up to ensure that a high priority was devoted to make use of alternative methods in language teaching.

From 1970s the theory of CLT had more widely developed, researchers in both American and British now see it as an approach rather than a method which aims to set the goal of language teaching as communicative competence and develop procedures for the four language skills in language teaching, acknowledging the close relation of language use and communication. In fact, there was not any widely

accepted single model on this approach. Some authorities or individuals believed that CLT only added functional teaching in grammatical teaching, such as Littlewood states, “One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language.” Whereas others conceded that it highlighted the importance of learners’ capability in solving problems in the learning task by using new acquired language resources. Howatt told the differences between a “strong” and a “weak” version of CLT, with the former one referring to ‘using English to learn it’ while the latter one meaning ‘learn to use English’.

The wide application of communicative approaches and the different ways to interpret and apply them can be ascribed to the fact that when practitioners with different educational traditions can identify with it, they were able to interpret it in various ways. The focus on communicative and contextual factors in language use also has been previously investigated to emphasize that language needed to be investigated in the broader sociocultural context, including participants, their behavior and beliefs, the objects of linguistic discussion, and word choice. Another frequently cited dimension of CLT also has antecedents outside the language teaching tradition, which focused on the mode of second language teaching that emphasized its learner-centered and experience-based view.

The reasons for choosing the communicative learning approaches through cooperation are various, one is the research study supporting the use of it to increase student achievement, as well as such other outcomes as improved relations within groups, acceptance of academically handicapped classmates, and developed self-esteem; another reason is the increasingly growing realization that students need to learn to think, to solve problems and to integrate and apply knowledge and skills, and cooperative learning is an excellent means to meet the needs; the third one is that cooperative learning can help make diversity a resource rather than a problem; further, another critical reason to apply it is that it has wonderful benefits for relationships between students of different ethnic backgrounds and between mainstreamed special education students and their classmates. (Slavin, 1995, p.2-3).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of language

A theory of using language as communication is the origin of the communicative approach in language teaching which means the target of language teaching is to develop what referred to as “communicative competence.” Hymes (1972) used this term to compare with a communicative view of language and Chomsky’s theory of competence. It is suggested that speaker and listener learned in an ideal environment where they acquired knowledge in a completely homogeneous speech community and they knew the language well without being affected by “any grammatically irrelevant conditions, such as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors which are either random or characteristic in applying their knowledge of the language in practical situation” (Chomsky, 1965). He focused on the linguistic theory that was to find the abstract abilities speakers have which enable them to make sentences with correct grammar. Whereas Hymes held that this view on linguistic

theory was so sterile that linguistic theory had to be seen as part of a more general theory comprising cultural communication.

Communicative competence has its own background, that is to say, communication always occurs in a certain occasion. And a qualified communicator should choose a proper language to express himself according to the variation of the occasion, which requires that the learners should focus on cultivating their strategic competence in the learning process, get to know and master the communicative strategies, which are useful to improve their communicative competence. M. Canale & M Swain considers that the communicative competence of language includes the four following aspects: (1) grammatical competence, it is the capacity of grammar and vocabulary. (2) sociolinguistic competence, including the capacity based on social cultural knowledge. (3) discourse competence, which is the ability to speak language. (4) strategic competence, the ability to apply language in communication

Theory of Learning

Learning is one of the most significant activities which humans engage in. It is the fundamental part of the educational process, in spite of the fact that most of what people learn does not occur in class. For a long period, researchers have sought to know the nature of learning on how it occurs, and how one learner can influence the learning of another one through similar teaching and learning efforts. Various theories of learning have been investigated, most of which differ for a variety of reasons. A theory is simply a combination of different elements or variables gathering together in an effort to explain what a theory is about. Theories based on scientific evidence are generally considered more valid than those based on personal opinion or individual experience. Therefore, it is wise to be cautious in any cases when contrasting the appropriateness of different theories.

There is a variety of different theories of how people learn and it is useful to consider how to apply them to help students learn a new language as well as how the teachers teach in educational programs. It is interesting that a particular way of learning is not what others always adopt, which means the learning methods are rarely identical in various language learners.

In some CLT practices, factors of an underlying learning theory can be recognized. One factor refers to the communication principle which can be described as activities including the notion that real communication improves learning. A second factor is based on the task principle: Activities designed to use language for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning. A third one is about the meaningfulness principle, suggesting that Language that is meaningful to the learner facilitates the learning process.

Application of CLT

With the development of educational practice, this learning approach is being used by teachers as a fundamental way of organizing classrooms for instruction, and most of the English language teachers are not exception. In the language teaching classroom, all the language teachers might be aware of that the objective of learning language is to apply it into communication. So only understanding the grammatical usage and meaning is not useful enough, learners have to know the relevant functional

meaning and also know how to manage it in real communication. The former researcher William Littlewood (2000) has summarized four study fields of skill to be recognized in foreign language teaching which improves a person's communicative competence.

- 1) A high level linguistic competence must be achieved by the learner.
- 2) The learner must tell the differences between the two forms of his linguistic competence which he has to mastered, and the communicative functions that they perform.
- 3) In terms of learning strategies, the learners must develop their skills to apply them in real practice so as to focus on using language to express meanings effectively in concrete situations.
- 4) "The learner must be conscious of the social meaning in language forms" (Littlewood, 76-84).

In communicative learning class, students will share information on certain topics through cooperation, by doing so, they have to think more about different opinions aroused by individual and it is necessary to think critically to determine what are right and what are wrong. During this process, thinking more will develop their understanding of certain questions and thus improve their ability in expressing themselves by using the new language.

Apart from the above competence, it will also occur to us that communication in target language among all learners exerts positive effect in helping learners improve their learning achievements Cognitive Competence. According to what we've mentioned above, the teachers have to organize their courses in order to cultivate the four skills of the language learners (Littlewood, 76-84).

1) Linguistic Competence

Based on the socially structured interaction on a certain topic, they will get a proper way of using target language without paying attention to the grammatical correction consciously that will only be an obstacle on communicating in target language.

2) Social Communicative Competence

Students have to communicate with each other when sharing information, although their conversation may only focus on given topics, it is a kind of social interaction, and their communicative competence may be enhanced in the process of this socially structured exchange of information.

3) Psychological Development

Just as we have mentioned, communicative language learning emphasizes cooperation rather than competition, students will get help from their partners, so they are highly encouraged to voice their opinions about the topics. A higher motivation and self-confidence will be achieved, and they can also lower their anxiety.

Moreover, in language teaching process, a more significant task for the teacher is to choose the content in order to achieve the learning objective we've talked about. The methods they adopt may concern how a communicative view in teaching language can help the teacher make the course content in linguistic field more relative to learners' needs and how a communicative view of language can provide the teacher with alternative ways of organizing this content into teaching units. In order to

organize an effective course to satisfy the learners' needs and improve their communicative ability, the teacher should consider thoroughly in the following process

- 1) **Choosing course-content:** the content of a course applying communicative approach to impart new knowledge needs not involve abandoning selection and sequencing with the use of structural standard, because mastery of the structural system is still the fundamental requirement for using language to express one's own meanings in communication. However, more are required in a communicative approach that encourages us not to get stuck in structures and take other aspects of communication into account. Therefore, structure of the language is the basic content to be mastered by learners, but nothing is more important than the actual use of communicative view in the learning process. Only in this way can it help us to relate the content more closely with the practical used in communication.
- 2) **Organizing course-content:** There are several kinds of organization for the teachers to adopt in their lesson plans. All that relate to the functional-structural organization, functional organization, notional organization, topic-based organization and some other alternatives have been adopted in forming a course. From them we can realize that the structural patterns are the basic knowledge for the learners to acquire, after that, learners should focus on going through to a form of organization that directly reflects the potential communicative practices in learning a foreign language.
- 3) **Check-lists for predicting communicative needs:** We've talked about that teachers should choose a method that can satisfy the learners' needs in communication. The published check-list can make their task easier, which has been proved by the Europe's "Threshold level". And the lists provide a tentative description of the general learner's communicative needs and of the language needed for satisfying them

In the language education process, it is the teachers' responsibility to facilitate the students to attain the different knowledge both in and out of the classroom, and we may know that teacher is not only in the position as a guider, especially when they adopt the communicative approach. one of the features that it occurs through processes inside the learner is the most obvious about the development of communicative competence. Kinds of stimulus can be offered by the teacher who may experience that these learning processes seem to require, but has no direct control over them and they do not need to correct students' errors when they apply the new knowledge. The teacher is still important in the classroom adopting communicative approach, because several roles are assumed for them. The first one is to facilitate the learning process between all participants in a communicative environment in the classroom. The second role is to involve in the class by acting as an independent participant within the communication group. A third role for the teacher is the researcher and learner, for they have much to contribute to provide actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities as well as some appropriate knowledge and skills. Besides these, they should also act as needs analyst,

counselor and group process manager.

When talking about the learners' role in communicative language teaching, the emphasis is on the processes of communicating process, not on mastery of language forms, which leads to new roles for learners different from those spotted in a more traditional second language classroom where reciting new structures and vocabulary is emphasized. Therefore, the implication for the learner is that he should contribute in the communicative practices as much as he gains in this leaning environment, and thereby learn in an interdependent way to get further improvement.

Implication for Students' learning in the Future

When the communicative approach has been chosen, the teacher may be conscious of using communicative approach in the class to enhance the learners' competence so as to achieve the goal of language learning. To improve learners' communicative strategic competence, we should focus on the following aspects. For one thing, the teacher should ask their students to enlarge their vocabulary that can help them make use of L2-based strategy and get familiar with how to change another to explain something when it is necessary. It will not only benefit their strategic competence but improve their language proficiency directly. For the other thing, students ought to make a good use of cooperative learning strategy and stalling strategy in order to go on well with the interaction. Both of the two points encourage the learners to build their self-confidence, which is an important part of improving the communicative competence. In class, many students may be afraid of making mistakes, so they often adopt a passive attitude, however, the communicative approach needs students' active participation, which requires the teacher to make good use of the communicative approach to cultivate their students' strategic competence and actively participate in communication in language teaching process.

Conclusion

Focus on communication is of more importance than only stress on the grammatical structures in language learning process. In order to improve learners' leaning achievement through practice, communicative context is to be provided to help them apply what they have learned in to real situation. Interaction between learners and teachers is encouraged in class and after class. Delivery of meaning is more significant than focus on language itself. Besides, communication among different learners is also encouraged to get more opportunities to improve their skills in oral practice. Language is applied in practice to communicate with others and thus helps to improve its accuracy. Based on its developing process, we can see it as suitable to the language education development, for teachers should try to avoid the traditional teacher-centered way to restrict the form of class activities, instead, they can offer freer platform for the students to learn knowledge from each other and consider what they have learned collaboratively. Therefore, group work and peer work are better ways in promoting the cooperation among classmates to improve their learning achievement. As a consequence, in order to achieve a higher fulfillment, many language teachers have adopted this approach in teaching class to cultivate students' ability in communication as well as understanding the knowledge they have to acquire. In the future, teachers may pay more attention to improve the

application of this approach to emphasize the importance of communication when teaching a foreign language.

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