THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: ETHNOGRAPHIC AND COGNITIVE

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Abstract

In English language teaching pedagogy the three key terms i.e. Method, Approach and technique are used frequently and interchangeably. The skill of a second language teacher lies in selecting an approach, method, and a technique in view of the learner's educational, social and economical background. The skill of a teacher lies in shifting to and evolving new approaches and methods of teaching English comfortably in the Indian context. The communicative Approach in language teaching stars from a theory of language as communication. Communicative Approach makes communicative competence the goal of language teaching. It accepts the interdependence of language and communication. Communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language. The acquit ion of communicative competence in a language is an example of skill development. It involves both a cognitive and behavioural aspect. It seeks a more humanistic approach to teaching. The approach is learner- centred and experience-based view of second language teaching. Therefore, an attempt has been made to review the communicative approach which is being used commonly by the teachers of English in India.

Key words: method, approach, communicative, competence, knowledge, ability, cognitive, humanistic

In English language teaching pedagogy the three key terms i.e. Method, Approach and technique are used frequently and interchangeably. This tripartite arrangement is hierarchical in order.

The skill of a second language teacher lies in selecting an approach, method, and a technique in view of the learner's educational, social and economical background; the syllabus and the textbooks prescribed, and the goals / objectives to be achieved. He should be flexible enough too swift to multiple approaches so as to enable him / her to make learning effective.

Diane-Larsen-Freeman's remark on language teaching methodology sums up a major trend away from unity to diversity in the following words. He comments: "There is no single acceptable way to go about teaching language today."(Freeman: 1986, 86)The statement quoted above make it clear that no single approach or method is appropriate for all learning styles. A good lesson will, therefore, be one in which the teachers use a smorgasbord of activities taken from a variety of sources. By varying our techniques, we will give students of all styles the chance to shine some of the time.

The skill of a teacher lies in shifting to and evolving new approaches and methods of teaching English comfortably in the Indian context. The communicative Approach in language teaching stars from a theory of language as communication. Communicative Approach makes communicative competence the goal of language teaching. It accepts the interdependence of language and communication. Communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language. Therefore, an attempt has been made to review the communicative approach which is being used commonly by the teachers of English in India. The communicative approach to teaching of English is organized on the basis of certain communicative functions, such as apologizing, describing, inviting, promising etc. that the ESL learners need to know. This approach applied to English explaining the language in terms of the functions it performs. This approach does not ignore the role of grammar in the process of language learning, but it insists that the grammatical rules are useless unless they are applied to real-life situations.

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The Communicative approach focuses on the significance of language functions because the learner needs knowledge of both meaning and functions. It lays emphasis on functional, communicative and social interactive activities. It also lays emphasis on the semantic aspect of the language. In order to improve the ability of reading comprehension it is essential that the learner knows the semantic aspect of the language. Dr. N.S. Prabhu draws a distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence and says that there is a logical relationship between the two. Prabhu says that a language structure is best acquired when the learners' attention is on meaning, when the learner is preoccupied with understanding, working out, relating or conveying messages and copes with the language (Prabhu: 1983, 72).

This 'coping' or 'deployment' is central to the process of language learning. It is further stated that there is no syllabus in terms of structure, no pre-selection of language items for any given lesson. The basis of each lesson is a problem or a task and the conduct of the lessons consists of setting the task, demonstrating ways of tackling it and, in the process, giving some pupils a chance to attempt it, then getting all the pupils to attempt and, finally giving each pupil a rough indication of the measure of his success. The function of the task is to bring about a self-reliant effort by the learners. Tasks, according to him, consist of: interpreting a schedule, giving a set of directions, deciding which action is right and why. Attention to grammar is entirely incidental. Incorrect sentences are rectified by the teacher.

William Little wood has distributed communicative competence into pre-communicative and communicative learning activities (1981:86). In the methodology of the pre-communicative activities the teacher isolates specific elements of knowledge or skill which compose communicative activity and provides the learner with opportunities to practise them separately. The learners are thus trained in the part-skills of communication rather than practising the total skills to be acquired. This aimed at providing command of the linguistic structures, without actualising it for communicative purposes. Therefore, the learners' main purpose is to produce language which is acceptable and appropriate. Pre-communicative activities are categorised into structural activities and quasi-communicative activities, the latter take account of communicative as well as structural facts about language.

A major aspect of the ethnography of this approach is the analysis of the events in terms of their constructive components. These are: participants (speaker, hearer, sender, and receiver), setting (i.e. a psychological or cultural setting), the actual form of a message (i.e. a linguistic description of the message), topic (i.e. what is the message about), Purpose (i.e.goal, intention), key (i.e. serious, mock), channel (e.g. oral, written),code (i.e. language or variety within a language), norms of interpretation (i.e. how different norms of interaction or violation of them interpreted), genre (i.e. casual speed, poem, prayer, form, letter).

Allen Widdow son points out: 'utterances can take on an enormously wide range of meanings in different contexts" (1975:53-54).Sociolinguistic competence refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place. It includes role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose for their interaction.

He further adds that the learner must be aware of the social meanings of the language forms in different types of social contexts which he may have to face in his life. The classroom teaching should preserve the communicative character of the language and it should enable the learner to face the real-life situations. Keith Morrow is also of the same opinion. He writes: "any use of language will take place in a Context, and the language forms which are appropriate will vary in accordance with context" (1986a:150).

Experts in the field of CLT observe that creating and interpreting everyday situations in the language class should be the important strategies of teaching English as a second language. This is evident from what Littlewood has to say: "Foreign language learners need opportunities to develop the skills; by being exposed to situations... the learners need to acquire not only reportoire of linguistic items, but reportoire of strategies for using them in concrete situations" (1981:4)

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Littlewood further writes elaborately on the significance of meaning or semantic options, as language is essentially a system of meaning potential i.e. it consists of sets of semantic options available to the language users that relate what the user can do in terms of social behaviour, what the user can say in terms of grammar. Littlewood writes: "Students must also learn to relate language to the social meaning that it carries and to use it as a vehicle for social interaction. To this end, it is necessary to increase their sense of performing in a meaningful social context, rather than simply responding to promote with the necessary linguistic form and the necessary links between form and meaning" (1981:12).

There is a difference between a 'strong' and 'weak' version of this approach as: "There is in a sense, a 'strong' and 'weak' version of the communicative approach. The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes. It characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching. The 'strong' version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language. It stimulates the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it". Summarising the main characteristics of the communicative approach Richards and Rodgers asserts:

"i) Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

ii) The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.

iii) The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural Features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse" (1986 b: 69).The cognitive aspect involves the internalisation of plans for creating appropriate behaviour. The behavioural aspect occurs mainly through practice in converting plans into performance. It encourages an emphasis on practice as a way of developing communicative skills.

An important aspect of communicative approach which has attracted attention of the applied linguists is the syllabus model. Wilkins's notional- syllabus was one of the very first syllabus models, which specified the semantic- grammatical categories and the categories of communicative function that learners need to express. But it was soon criticized by linguists as merely replacing functions. According to Richards and Rodgers "it specified products

rather than communicative processes"(1986b:72).

It is considered that task-specification and task-organisation as the appropriate criteria for communicative syllabus as: 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 types of tasks to be attempted in the classroom and suggests an order of complexity for tasks of the same kind. The roles of the learner and the teacher as visualised in CLT are different from those found in the traditional second language classrooms. It is described that 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 interdependent way.

The teacher has two main roles: the first is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and various activities and texts. The second is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; first, as an organiser of resources and as a resource himself, second as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. A third role for

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the teacher is that of a researcher and learner with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities.

Thus, it is the co-operative approach to learning in CLT. Students interact primarily with each other rather than with the teacher. Thus, the CLT teacher's primary role is to organize the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities. The teaching materials are also designed to promote communicative language use. Richards and Rodgers consider three kinds of instructional materials currently used in CLT and label these as: 'text-based, task-based, and realia'.There is an argument against the belief that the traditional structure-based courses neglect the teaching of functions, notions and skills. It is quite false to represent older courses as concentrating throughout on form at the expense of meaning, or as failing to teach people to do things with language.

However, Swan concedes that we have, by and large, gained more than we have lost from the communicative approach in that it has helped us to analyse and teach the language of interaction. We can benefit from the innovative language teaching methodologies only if "we can keep our heads, recognize dogma for what it is, and try out the new techniques without giving up useful older methods simply because they have been proved wrong"(1985:87)

Richards and Rodgers catalogue some of the important questions which are raised by the applied linguists and pedagogues alike regarding the communicative approach as: "i) can the communicative approach be applied at all levels in a language programme? ii) is communicative approach equally suited to ESL and EFL situations? iii) does communicative approach require grammar-based syllabuses to be abandoned or merely revised?"(1986:81) Teachers are encouraged to develop learning materials on the basis of the particular needs appeared in the class.

To conclude, the communicative approach takes into account all the four basic linguistic skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing and also the conversational skill where the social context of utterances play the significant role. It is considered the best approach. It refers to a diverse set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning. It can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures. Learners learn a language through using it to communicate. It is authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of class room activities. Fluency is an important dimension of communication. The approach has influenced other language teaching approaches that subscribe to a similar philosophy of language teaching. The approach is learner- centred and experience-based view of second language teaching. It advocated the use of authentic and real life materials in the class room.

Language learning is a complex process that it is impossible to offer a single solution to all our problems. Perhaps the best method is the one which works, and this varies from context to context. Any method which creates conditions for learning to take place is good. It should enable the learner to acquire the strategies of Learning rather than merely equipping him with knowledge. What is important for the teacher, therefore, is to find out what approach and what method will enable him to realize a particular objective under a set of particular circumstances.

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