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IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A COMPULSORY ENGLISH CLASS

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching has emerged as a promising teaching method in the present ELT context. It emphasizes meaningful interaction among learners. This paper is divided in two parts. In section one a brief review of *Communicative Language Teaching* is presented. In section two sample activities to apply *Communicative Language Teaching* in Compulsory English classes are presented.

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Introduction

In today's times the need to develop communicative competence among learners is as urgent as never before. Traditional methodologies and assessment patterns have proved inadequate in bringing the desired results. The teaching-learning situation has become exam oriented. Though the students achieve success in the exams, yet their performance in real context is not satisfactory. Many students have a significantly low motivation level towards learning English. A number of companies visit colleges to recruit students under the campus recruitment drive, but few students are able to communicate in English effectively in front of the interviewers. It means that students are unable to use the acquired language resources in target language situations. Thus practice of interaction and communication in target language are very necessary to train students in English effectively. The teaching learning methods hence should be revised in order to make them benefit the student community.

Communicative Language Teaching seems to be a promising method to meet the above referred goals. It emphasizes interaction and meaningful communication among learners. A skilled teacher can effectively use this method to develop the communicative competence of students. Generally for a compulsory English class a central syllabus is prescribed. It is followed in all the affiliated institutes of the University. Students have to study a Compulsory English text book in each year of the degree course. It contains some lessons, poems, grammar items and writing skills tasks.

Any such text book can suffice to employ the communicative teaching method in the class. A teacher can select a certain lesson or a poem as a starting point. Meaning based and interactional activities can be framed around that lesson or poem to encourage negotiation of meaning and interaction among learners. Pair work or group work activities too can be given to students for this.

This paper is divided in two sections. In the first section the development of *communicative*

language teaching as explained by Jack Richards in his book **Communicative Language Teaching Today** is presented. In section two a sample lesson from a Compulsory English text book is selected. The *Communicative Language Teaching* approach is then exemplified by framing interactive activities around the selected lesson.

Section 1

Before the entry of *Communicative Language Teaching* the ELT scene was dominated by a variety of approaches like the grammar translation method, direct method, aural-oral method etc. With advent of communicative language teaching, came a shift in the way language was being taught. In the traditional approaches the focus was on the acquisition of grammatical competence by the learners. As part of the teaching, activities like substitution drills, repetitive practice, memorization of dialogue and similar activities were common practice. The errors of the learners were viewed in a negative light.

The CLT approach which emerged later differs sharply from these approaches. Jack Richards explains it as:

“Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom (pg. 2)”.

Under CLT the learning focus shifted to functional teaching of language items. The ‘purpose’ of the learning activity became important. Errors were viewed in a positive manner. Grammar was not taught explicitly. Opportunities were to be created so as students discovered grammar rules rather than teaching them explicitly. The new syllabi which emerged under the umbrella of CLT were skill based syllabus, functional syllabus, notional syllabus etc. There are two phases in the development of the communicative language teaching. They are the classic phase and the current phase. The current communicative language teaching phase starts from 1990s onwards. A few of the assumptions of CLT as

given by Richards (2006, pg.22-23) are summarised below-

- Interaction and meaningful communication foster second language learning.
- Good learning tasks will give students chances to negotiate meaning. They will attempt to increase their language and observe and participate in the tasks.
- Content should be meaningful and engaging.
- Teacher should work as a facilitator.
- Learning happens more effectively through sharing and collaboration

Richards further explains two methodologies which can be called as the extension of CLT. They are the process based methodologies and product based methodologies. The process based methodologies are called so because they focus on the classroom processes to bring about language learning. In them there is *content based instruction* and *task-based instruction*. In *content based instruction* i.e CBI the decisions about content are made first. They are followed by decisions about grammar, skills, functions etc. In *task-based instruction* learning occurs through specially designed instructional tasks. They foster interaction among learners. Grammar and communicative competence develop through these tasks.

The product based approaches concentrate on the product of the learning process. So they are called as product based approaches. Like process based approach the product based approach too has two kinds. They are text based instruction and competency based instruction. In text-based instruction the emphasis is on mastery of different kinds of texts. While the competency based instruction aims to equip learners with skills they may require in everyday life.

Section II

The text book is the most easily available teaching material for the teacher. It contains the prescribed units along with comprehension exercises. A creative teacher can use it to teach a variety of language items to the students. The

teacher should analyze individual units of the textbook for the scope they provide to teach specific topics. It will help teacher plan the objectives of the lesson and proper activities can then be framed for successful learning. For the purpose of this paper a lesson from the SYBA Compulsory English text book *Panorama* is analyzed here. The relevant activities which can be framed are presented below. Activities are framed so as to promote meaningful interaction among learners.

The selected lesson from the text book *Panorama* is a short story 'The Homecoming' by Rabindranath Tagore. It is the story of a boy Phatik. In his village Phatik is a mischievous lad. He constantly quarrels with his brother Makhan. His uncle Bishamber visits their house. He takes Phatik with him to Calcutta for studies. However, due to the poor treatment by his aunty, Phatik feels homesick and misses his mother. He is struck by fever. He tries to escape to his village but is brought back by the police. Finally in the end he is reunited with his mother. It is a very touching and emotional story. Following activities can be framed based on this lesson:

Activity 1: In the beginning of the lesson a childhood prank of Phatik is narrated. Taking this as a cue the teacher can divide students in small groups. Then students can be asked to narrate any of their childhood pranks to the group in English. In this kind of narration students will get practice in narration of past events, specially the past tense form of the verb. The teacher may give a personal example to the students, so that they understand the kind of language used for this.

Activity 2: In the story there is a scene when Phatik is sitting on the river bank and his uncle Bishamber lands on the bank. He enquires about the residence of the Chakravortis. A role play activity can be framed in this situation. One student can play the role of Bishamber while the other student will play the role of Phatik. The students can discuss in their groups and improvise upon the dialogue. In this activity students will get opportunity to practice seeking information in a realistic situation. They will also get practice in speaking skills.

Activity 3: Students can be asked to read the story and identify words expressing human emotions. There are few such words in the story like puzzled, unconcerned, frightened, distressed etc. Teacher may ask students to make their own sentences using these words. Here students will get practice in vocabulary building and sentence forming using given words.

Activity 4: An information gap activity can be created. One of the students in the pair will ask questions on the short story. The second student will try to answer the question. Students will then discuss the correct answer for the question.

In all these activities the teacher should act only as a facilitator of the communicative activities among the learners. Teacher should encourage students to participate in the communicative interaction. In this process there is a possibility that students may commit some errors. The errors should be handled sympathetically.

Conclusion:

Communicative Language Teaching can be fruitfully applied in our Compulsory English classes. A creative teacher can suit the traditional contents for communicative activities. Meaningful interaction in target language will boost students' confidence. Even grammar and vocabulary can be taught through such tasks.

References

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