

Communicative Language Teaching: Recommended Approach for 'Remedial English' classes at University of Sindh, Pakistan

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Abstract: *In this paper, it is proposed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) should be adopted as a method/ approach for English language teaching at University of Sindh, Pakistan (USJP). In the beginning, English language teaching situation at USJP are given in which it is argued that our students study English language but can hardly communicate effectively. The paper further discusses literature review explaining what CLT is, how to apply CLT, misconceptions about CLT, criticism against and defence of CLT. Then, the paper presents analysis and implications of CLT application at University of Sindh. Finally, it concludes with optimism that CLT will equip our learners with communicative competence if adopted properly in USJP.*

1. ELT situation at University of Sindh

This section describes the ELT situation and need to adopt CLT at University of Sindh. English is mandatory subject for all graduates studying at University of Sindh. University of Sindh is the second oldest university of Pakistan. Approximately 12,000 students study at University of Sindh. Every year more than 6,000 students are enrolled in different disciplines for bachelor and master degree programme at University of Sindh. English is taught for two years in B.A./B.Sc programme and for one year in M.A./M.Sc programme. Hafeez (2004) describes importance of English language proficiency. He explains that knowledge of English is essential for getting good jobs, getting through examination for civil services and armed forces.

The subject title for B.A./B.sc and M.A./M.Sc is Remedial English. Remedial English as a subject was introduced in the year 2002. Before that English Compulsory was taught to all graduates. The prescribed book for English grammar was 'English Grammar and Composition' by Wren and Martin. This book was written in first half the twentieth century. This book is purely based on grammar-translation syllabus. It contains explanation of grammar rules followed by examples sentences, text for comprehension and translation, and techniques for writing

paragraphs, essays, letters etc. This book was used for many years at University of Sindh until recently.

Now this book has been replaced by two new books: 'Oxford Practice Grammar' and 'English for Undergraduates'. The adoption of these two books was a part of university policy to introduce modern language learning techniques/methods at University of Sindh. English continues to be taught at University of Sindh. However, English language teaching at University of Sindh hardly helps learners in acquiring communicative competence. The prevalence of old methods and techniques is still matter of everyday practice. Our learners study English language grammar and vocabulary items, remember them, but do not develop proper communicative skills. Sadly, only few students are quite good at writing and speaking English. This paper analyses how learners can be provided with genuine opportunity of English language learning. The paper proposes that teachers at university of Sindh adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their classes for successful language teaching/ learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of CLT

2.2.

Wikipedia Encyclopaedia defines CLT as an extension of notional-functional syllabus. CLT emphasizes using target language in different contexts and learning language functions. CLT aims at creating and comprehending meaning, rather than mastering grammatical structures. Successful language learning is measured in terms of communicative competence. Following (Nunan : 1991) are considered as essential features of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situations.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

'In the classroom CLT often takes the form of pair and group work requiring negotiation and cooperation between learners, fluency-based activities that encourage learners to develop their confidence, role-plays in which students practice and develop language functions, as well as judicious use of grammar and pronunciation focused activities.' (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia)

CLT is different from grammatical approach, which is based on the principle that language learning comprises mastering a set of rules and these rules have to be learnt

one by one in additive fashion (Nunan : 1988). In grammatical syllabus language parts are dealt with one by one until complete knowledge of language is acquired. Nunan (1988) maintains that language learning does not take place in linear-additive fashion. CLT aims at communicative competence and targets language learning as a whole as opposed to learning set of rules in linear-additive fashion. Wilkins (1972) categorized two types of meanings to negotiate sense in language learning: notional and functional. Notional approach focused on language parts such as time, location etc. while functional approach included items such as requests, denials etc. These notions and functions were considered as important ingredients of CLT. Critics argue that list of notions and functions are no different from a list of grammatical rules and lexical items (Nunan : 1988).

In further development of language teaching Krashen (1982) discounted the importance of explicit grammar teaching. He argues that language acquisition takes place naturally in a subconscious process rather than by conscious explicit instruction. Krashen's approach is criticized on the grounds that it fails to take account of social aspect of language learning and is only based on learner's individual thinking and behaviour (Nunan : 1988).

In contrast to Krashen's approach, Nunan (1989) emphasizes the importance of class room interaction through various 'tasks'. Long and Crookes (1992) suggested an analytic syllabus following task based language teaching (TBLT). They maintained that tasks give learners opportunity to communicate and negotiate meaning using relevant target language situations. Nunan (1989) endorses the language learning through these tasks. He maintains these tasks are modelled on real life tasks that learner encounter in actual life. These ideas highlight the importance of language learning through tasks. Long (1991) gave 'interactional hypothesis'. He argues that interaction is paramount for negotiating meaning. He adds that through interaction learner identifies and corrects his mistake and interaction makes learner understand relationship between form and function.

2.2. Application of CLT

The proper application of CLT is very essential for bringing about required results. The following discussion will help understand possible problems to implement CLT.

Littlewood (2006) mentions some important reasons because of which teachers find CLT difficult to implement in the class. According to Littlewood (ibid) classroom management is one major reason because of which teachers are not able to successfully implement CLT. He says many teachers think that when students are engaged in task related activities, they fail to control the class. Avoidance of English, according to Littlewood, by students is another reason many teachers think that CLT does not work in their case. He maintains that teachers often complain that students are not motivated to use English in the classroom. Littlewood (ibid) elaborates that in many instances teachers themselves are not confident to communicate in English. Littlewood

(ibid) mentions 'minimal demands on language competence' is another difficulty faced by teachers to carry out CLT in classroom. He explains that sometimes students focus only on completion of task and engage in minimum interaction to negotiate meaning. A common occurrence in these situations is that interaction is confined to one or two students and majority does not benefit from these activities. Littlewood (ibid) enumerates another important concern which makes it difficult for teachers to implement CLT. He says many teachers find implementation of CLT incompatible with parent's expectations. He says many parents think that CLT is not examination oriented learning which is very crucial for their children's future. Littlewood (ibid) says many Chinese teachers think that CLT is in conflict with their traditional values of education. In Chinese culture 'education is conceived more as a process of knowledge accumulation than as a process of using knowledge for immediate purposes'. Littlewood (2006) informs teachers about challenges before implementing CLT in the classroom.

Littlewood (2005) suggests five-category framework for effective implementation of CLT:

- (i) At the most form-focused end of the continuum is **NON-COMMUNICATIVE LEARNING**, which includes, for example, grammar exercises, substitution drills, and pronunciation drills.
- (ii) We then move to **PRE-COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE PRACTICE**, in which the focus is still primarily on language but also oriented towards meaning. An example of this is the familiar 'question-and-answer' practice, in which the teacher asks questions to which everyone knows the answer.
- (iii) With the third category, **COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE PRACTICE**, we come to activities in which learners still work with a predictable range of language but use it to convey information. These include, for example, activities in which learners use recently taught language as a basis for information exchange or to conduct a survey amongst their classmates.
- (iv) In the fourth category, **STRUCTURED COMMUNICATION**, the main focus moves to communication of meanings, but the teacher structures the situation to ensure that learners can cope with it with their existing language resources, including perhaps what they have recently used in more form-focused work. This category includes more complex information-exchange activities or structured role-playing tasks.
- (v) Finally, at the most meaning-oriented end of the continuum, **AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION** comprises activities in which there is the strongest focus on the communication of messages and the language

forms are correspondingly unpredictable. Examples are discussion, problem-solving, content-based tasks and larger scale projects.

Nunan (1987) points out that classroom-based research shows that activities conducted in the name communication are rather pseudo-communicative. Nunan (ibid) provides transcript of a communicative classroom, it clearly indicates that students are hardly engaged in independent interaction. Students are repeating what teacher wants them to say. Nunan (ibid) believes that proper application of CLT can ensure successful teaching/learning opportunities. He suggests, keeping reasons for pseudo-communication in mind, teacher should use 'referential questions' (whose answer teacher does not know) instead of just 'display questions' which more often induce repetition. Nunan (ibid) also suggest that stimulating students' schematic knowledge (knowledge which students have already got) can be a good way of engaging them in successful communication.

2.3. Misconceptions about CLT

Thompson (1996) argues that despite CLT being most widely used approach in ELT, many teachers still have certain misconceptions about CLT. He says following are the common misconceptions about CLT:

- (i) CLT means no teaching of grammar
- (ii) CLT means teaching speaking only
- (iii) CLT means pair work, which means role play
- (iv) CLT means expecting too much from teacher

Thompson (1996) writes one basic misconception is that CLT means no explicit teaching of grammar. He refers to Krashen (1988) that language acquisition can not take place just by remembering rules of grammar, but language learning takes place unconsciously by exposure to it. Thomson (ibid) suggests without reverting to traditional way of grammar teaching, an appropriate time of class should be given to grammar teaching. He suggests a 'retrospective way' to grammar teaching. He says learners first be exposed to a simple understandable language context, it helps learner understand function and meaning of that language context. Once the context is understandable, grammatical forms are introduced afterwards. Thompson makes it clear CLT does not mean exclusion of grammar teaching completely.

Thompson (ibid) says it is widely held misconception that CLT means teaching speaking only. He explains that communication between two people is not only oral but written as well. He elaborates that CLT focuses on all language skills. He even suggest that a communicative class should not only increase student talking time (STT) from teacher talking time (TTT), but communicative class should embrace the concept of student communicating time, in which student can enjoy reading text silently or even engrossed in quite thinking. Thompson (ibid)

argues that CLT does not necessarily mean use of pair work for language teaching. He says CLT envisages learner having control over his learning. While use of 'pair work is physical signal of some degree of control and choice passing to learners.' Thompson does not underscore the efficacy of pair work. He explains that students can use pair work 'to do a grammatical exercise, solve a problem, analyse the new language structures in a text, and prepare a questionnaire for other students.' He suggests that instead of pair work allowing students to practice a language point at the same time can also be very useful. He maintains that CLT does not mean pair work has to be invariably used.

Thompson (ibid) concedes that it is not completely untrue that CLT demands a great deal from teacher. In a communicative class teacher need to have better communicative and management skills. Thompson raises here an often repeated charge that CLT is designed for native speaker teachers, and for non-native teachers it is not quite difficult to conduct communicative activities and manage the class at the same time. Thompson argues that teachers need to improve their teaching skills and accept challenges. He maintains that successful implementation of CLT is a challenge for all alike

2.4. Criticism against CLT

In recent times perhaps the strongest criticism against CLT comes from Bax (2003).

Bax argues that CLT has always overlooked one important aspect of language teaching: the context in which it takes place. Bax (ibid) points out that many CLT practicing teacher hold this view that any one not using CLT is 'backward'. He elaborates that these teachers believe that CLT is the 'complete solution to language learning and no other method is good. He calls this 'CLT attitude'. Bax (ibid) argues that CLT relies heavily on methodology and consequently ignores 'context' in which language takes place. Bax (ibid) explains that in 'Context Approach' method is significant but it is only one of the factors for successful language teaching. Bax (ibid) says in 'Context Approach' students' attitude and cultural expectation have to be taken in account. Bax (ibid) laments that 'CLT attitude' is also widespread in material production. It is believed that course books and methodology books are universally good without considering the context in which they are used. Bax (ibid) acknowledges that his insistence on context is not something novel to language teaching. He maintains that good teachers do not only rely on methodology but think about students' individual and cultural context in mind.

Bax (2003) lays down the strategy for successful implementation 'Context Approach':

'The first priority is the learning context, and the first step is to identify key aspects of that context before deciding what and how to teach in any given class. This will include an understanding of individual students and their learning needs, wants, styles, and strategies-I treat these as key aspects of the context-as well as the coursebook, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, national culture, and so on, as far as possible at the time of teaching.'

2.5. Defence of CLT

Harmer (2003) contends that methodology is 'fundamental' in language learning and not the context as suggested by Bax (2003). Harmer (2003) argues that methodology used by teacher rests actually upon his beliefs and understanding, without which a teacher 'becomes client-satisfier only'. Harmer (ibid) says consigning method to secondary position is to question what a teacher believes in and does as a teacher. Harmer claims that there is nothing wrong with the methodology but how it is applied and modified to suit the particular needs of students. Harmer does not question the importance context, but to him methodology is essential to language teaching. Harmer does not advocate blind pursuance of method and endorses the integration of method with context. Harmer (2003) says:

'I believe, on the contrary, that is the teacher's knowledge, experience, and training (together with their personality, interpersonal skills and interest in the students) that he or she brings in triumph to the classroom. What the students bring are their hopes and fears, and their pre-conceptions and sociocultural reality. Somewhere, in discussion between them, methodology and context, as equals, should meet in the way that is most appropriate for all concerned.'

Many researchers share Harmer's views that language teaching must adopt a pedagogy that encompasses cultural context without scraping methodology altogether. Widdowson (1994) advocates a 'pedagogy of appropriate' rather than 'pedagogy of authentic'. In continuation of Widdowson's views (1994), Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) point out that pedagogy of authentic seeks to impose native-speaker style to different contexts, whereas appropriate pedagogy adapts native-speaker style to cater for both global and local expectations. Freeman (1996) rightly suggests that methodologies follow values and may not suit all cultural contexts. He explains in language we do not deal with entire culture but with 'individuals within a culture'. Freeman (ibid) believes a method can be adapted to suit a particular context.

Thompson (1996) acknowledges that CLT is surely not the absolute remedy and change in language teaching is already underway. He advises that we need to build upon what we have got. Any change in language teaching will emerge out of CLT. Holliday (1994) writes : 'The communicative approach has been a development from previous methodologies; and further improvement can only be achieved by further development, not by going back.' Liao (2004) shares his views about implementation of CLT in China. He believes that introduction of CLT has provided Chinese teachers knowledge about latest teaching methodologies; otherwise they would have reverted to teaching just grammar rules and vocabulary. Yoon (2004) writes about the implementation of CLT in South Korea. He maintains that CLT is the most successful method ESL/EFL contexts.

Analysis and Implications of CLT application at University of Sindh

It is explained that English language teaching at University of Sindh needs to do more to ensure that learners acquire communicative competence. English language teaching classes are conducted by dedicated teachers. Despite that genuine learning has yet to be achieved. One major reason is many teachers are not familiar with modern teaching methodologies. And perhaps many teachers are not trained to conduct CLT. Liao (2004) acknowledges that introduction of CLT in China keeps teachers informed about latest developments in ELT. Introduction of CLT at University of Sindh will familiarize teachers with new innovation in ELT. The introduction of CLT should be coupled with teachers training: all teachers should be informed about the aims and objectives of CLT. All teachers need to know what are the essential tools and techniques of CLT, and how to implement them in the class. Hafeez (2004) suggests that communicative syllabus fits the requirements of Pakistani learners and should be adopted for ELT.

Bax (2003) speaks of context being more important and relegating method to second position. We have to take into account this consideration before introducing CLT at University of Sindh. Does CLT suit our context? Harmer (2003) is pertinent here. He argues that a method is what teacher believes in. Widdowson (1998) advocates the pedagogy of appropriate. Teachers at University of Sindh need to know about all these ideas. They need to keep their context in mind before implementing CLT. It will be fruitful that CLT is followed as pedagogy of appropriate. We can learn from the experience of other countries. Liao (2004) describes how CLT has been successful in China. Liao (2004) argues that to develop a methodology which suits a particular context is not possible in China where teachers are not completely free in their choice and not properly trained. Liao's argument is relevant to Pakistani situation as well. Many teachers are not familiar with teaching methodologies, how can they design their own methods. We need to believe in ourselves (Harmer: 2003). We can make CLT work in our context.

The implementation of CLT can cause certain problems (Littlewood: 2006). Teachers need to be cautious of the common difficulties they face in implementing CLT in the class. Teachers may be less motivated to implement CLT if they have certain misconceptions (Thompson: 1996). Teachers should dispel all doubts before implementing CLT in the class. We ought to make our teachers ready to encounter any possible problems in the implementation of CLT. Gupta (2004) shares her experience of CLT in India. She contends that CLT does not suit teaching context in India. She counts reasons for failure of CLT in India:

- i) It was implemented without planning and in a hurry.
- ii) Most teachers did not know how to implement CLT.
- iii) Exposure of students to English was limited to classroom only.
- iv) Examination system was not ready to change.

It is quite obvious that reasons which Gupta (2004) have given hardly raise doubts about the efficacy of CLT as a teaching methods. Problem does not lie with the method but how it is implemented. CLT is working in many parts of the world; it can work in Pakistan too, provided it is implemented in right earnest. We can learn from the Indian experience (Gupta: 2004). Teachers at University Sindh should be fully trained to adopt CLT. All aspects of the implementation must be discussed and resolved. Students and teachers be provided will all possible facilities to carry out CLT in a conducive environment. One major hurdle, in the implementation in CLT, is the number of students in the class. Approximately 80 to 100 students are present in a Remedial English at University of Sindh. This surely is well beyond ideal number for a communicative class. But this problem can be overcome by inducting more teachers (Liao: 2004).

CLT is the suitable approach for ELT at University of Sindh. Hafeez (2004) counts the benefits of communicative syllabus for Pakistani students:

- i) Acquisition of four language skills
- ii) Use of target language in class will help learners outside classroom
- iii) Learning language forms and functions through activities develop better understanding of language
- iv) Learner is free in learning, role of teacher is that of a guide and facilitator
- v) Language learning based on the genuine need of learners

Hafeez (2004) quite appropriately describes the benefits of communicative syllabus for Pakistani students. We agree with him that our learners need to be communicatively competent to compete in the global market. The introduction of CLT at University of Sindh will bring multiple benefits for teachers and learners alike.

3. Conclusion

This paper advocates the adoption of CLT for ELT at University of Sindh when doubts are raised (Bax: 2003) whether CLT is really an effective approach. In this paper we have given definition of CLT, how CLT is implemented in the class, misconceptions about CLT, and criticism and defence of CLT. In this paper, the authors have referred to various ideas from different researchers in the field of English language teaching. The goals and objectives of CLT suit ELT situation in Pakistan. It has been mentioned that a huge number of young learners study at University of Sindh. English is taught to all bachelor and master students. This has been observed that despite teaching, learning does not occur among the learners. At the end of English language course, students know about English, but they can not communicate in English. Lack of proficiency in English deprives our graduates from prospective jobs. English language teaching at University of Sindh is a huge exercise, but it has yet to deliver. This paper has discussed different aspects of CLT. These aspects will help in proper implementation of CLT at University

of Sindh. CLT may not be an absolute method (Thompson: 1996) but it can work if implemented keeping learners need and local context in mind. The paper has discussed implementation of CLT in China, India, South Korea. Learning from these experiences, and following the essential techniques of CLT, we can make a difference. CLT at University of Sindh will equip our learners with genuine communicative competence. CLT is working in other parts of the world; it can work in our case too. We need to have this belief (Harmer, 2003).

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