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The Call for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at the Undergraduate Level with Special Reference to Andhra Pradesh

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Introduction

The context of the whole teaching situation started changing around the year 2000. Socio-economic factors played a major role in this change. The liberalization of the Indian economy led to the entry of many international companies into the country. Call Centres, shopping malls, trade fairs etc., all need young personnel, fluent in English. Those desirous of immigration to the developed countries need professional help for clearing tests like TOEFL, IELTS, etc. Hence, the avenues where ELT is required in India are unlimited today.

Traditional English Classroom in India

In a typical Indian English classroom, teacher occupies the center-stage. It is he/she who reads the text mostly aloud, gives the meanings of difficult words and translates as and when he/she thinks it is necessary.

In India, students admitted to undergraduate courses come from different walks of life. At the undergraduate level, English Language Teaching continues to be largely content-based rather

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than skill-based, in spite of attempted reforms by both university and State bodies. The result is that even after attending ten or more years of English classes, students often graduate from Government colleges with no basic communicative skills in English.

Situation in Andhra Pradesh

According to the Government records provided by www.aponline.gov.in, there are approximately 272 degree colleges and 634 engineering colleges in Andhra Pradesh from where scores of students graduate annually. But a large number of the students passing out are not getting jobs because of their poor communication skills. As a result, the fresh graduates, hailing mostly from rural areas, have not been fit to be taken in for a good job, especially by the Information Technology industry. It is true that most of the students of Andhra Pradesh who manage to grab many seats in IITs, NITs and BITS become adept at using technical skills but not in communication skills. Mr. N. R. Narayana Murthy, Founder of Infosys, commented at a meeting in Hyderabad that graduates from Andhra Pradesh were good in technical skills but poor in communication skills.

Paradigmatic Change

There is a paradigmatic shift in the way English has been regarded and taught. It is now being increasingly considered as a skill and a means of communication. This has resulted in changing the traditional roles of materials, teachers and students. At the syllabus design level, the emphasis has been more on specifying and organizing the language content in a semantic way. Communicative competence has been accorded pre-eminence over structural competence.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

According to Hymes (1966), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) marks the culmination of a movement that originated as a reaction against the teacher-dominated, form-focused, traditional methods of language teaching, which often fail to equip the learners with 'communicative competence'.

Communicative Language Teaching was introduced in Britain in the 1960s as a replacement to the earlier Structural Method, called Situational Language Teaching. Many researchers have contributed to the development of theory and practice of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach like Brown, 1987; Brumfit and Johnson, 1979; Hymes, 1972; Nattinger, 1984; Nunan, 1987 and 1989; Rossner, 1988; Savignon, 1983; White, 1989; Yalden, 1983.

According to Brown (1994), "the primary goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence, to move beyond grammatical and discourse elements in communication and probe the nature of social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language."

The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises enable learners to communicate, interact and share information. Some of the important language activities of CLT like information gap, jig saw activities, role play and pair / group work etc. are presented below.

Information Gap

An important aspect of communication in CLT is the notion of information gap. This refers to the fact that in real communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess. This is the classic gap exploited by the communicative approach. Student A had some information, perhaps concerning the prices of food. Student B needs to know these prices, and so asks A questions to find the information. The information gap is ideally suited to pair and small group work and usually relies upon pre-prepared information cards. In doing so, they will acquire available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task.

Jig-saw Activities

These are also based on the information-gap principle. Typically the class is divided into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete an activity. The class must fit the pieces together to complete the whole. In doing so, they must use their language resources to communicate meaningfully and thus take part in meaningful communication practice.

Pair Work and Group Work

Most of the activities reflect an important aspect of classroom tasks in CLT, that they are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Brown (1994) proposes that communication is likely to occur in the classroom when a significant amount of pair work and group work is conducted. Through completing such activities in this way, learners will obtain several benefits:

- i) They can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group.
- ii) They will produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities.
- iii) Their motivational level is likely to increase.
- iv) They will have the chance to develop fluency (Brown, 1994).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), many other activities are used in CLT, as presented below:

- i) Task-completion activities: puzzles, games, map-reading and other kinds of classroom tasks in which the focus is on using one's language resources to complete a task.

- ii) Information gathering activities: student conducted surveys, interviews and searches in which students are required to use their linguistic resources to collect information.
- iii) Opinion-sharing activities: activities where students compare values, opinions, beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance which they might consider in choosing a date or spouse.
- iv) Information-transfer activities: these require learners to take information that is presented in one form, and represent it in a different form. For example they may read instructions on how to get from A to B, and then draw a map showing the sequence, or they may read information about a subject and then represent it as a graph.
- v) Reasoning gap-activities: these involve deriving some new information from given information through the process of inference, practical reasoning etc. For example, working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables.
- vi) Role-plays: activities in which students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

The Role of Teachers and Learners in The CLT Classroom

According to Breen and Candlin (1980), the teacher has two main roles - the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group.

The learners are no more passive recipients of the language. They are expected to participate in classroom activities that are based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students have to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They are expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning.

The Need for CLT

Teachers of English recognize that traditional pedagogy, emphasizing the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary rather than communicative competence, does not meet the requirements of English learning in an era of liberalization and globalization. Depending on the cultural, or even the physical setting, a teacher can use tasks and small group learning or a whole class format. Often a combination of the two is appropriate. Thus, to adopt CLT as a new teaching approach within a traditional education would require rethinking and adjustment of some long-held beliefs and values.

Conclusion

CLT reached both regions- India and the West- between the years 1970 – 1980 but it took around two decades to gain acceptance among learners and teachers in India. There are indeed some problems in implementing CLT in our country. Large numbers of student in a class,

unsuitable seats for pair/group work (immovable benches & small classrooms), the lack of resources (library books, cyclostyling, photocopying facilities etc), and lack of audio and video equipment are some of the reasons which hamper the implementation of CLT techniques in the English classrooms. Hence, teachers need to continually examine the situation and relate it to learner participation, autonomy, and equality in their changing context.

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