Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching - An Evaluation of Practice in India

M. Savitri, Ph.D. Candidate

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   129
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching - An Evaluation of Practice in India

M. Savitri, Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

This paper traces the history of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), reasons for Communicative Language Teaching in America and Europe, CLT theory and the advent of CLT in India. The reasons for CLT being popular are critically analyzed and evaluated. The implementation of CLT in India - its success and failure - is discussed. Suggestions for making CLT a success in India are discussed.

A History of CLT

The Grammar-Translation method, the Audio-Lingual approach and the Situational Language Teaching approach were the methodologies that were in vogue before CLT. These methods involved repetition and memorization of forms. During the Second World War, language was learnt with a utilitarian purpose in mind. Mere memorizing of grammar rules and studying literary texts were considered irrelevant. Ability to use the language to meet practical ends became the major goal. In other words to be successful in learning a foreign language means ability to get the meaning across while communicating. It was at this point that these methodologies gave way to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

With the appearance of CLT second language teaching faced a dramatic change in the method of teaching the language. The main reason behind this change is that the educators began to realize the goal of foreign language teaching is the communicative ability achieved by the learner.

In the 1970's in Europe there was an influx of immigrant population who had to learn English quickly to find employment. The drills of the Grammar-Translation method and the Audio-Lingual approach did not help the workers communicate with their employers. "British applied linguists began to call into question the theoretical assumption underlying the Situational Language Teaching" (Jack C.Richards, 153).

> Since the mid-1970's the scope of CLT has expanded. Both American and British proponents now see it as an approach (and not a method) that aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledges the interdependence of language and communication. (Jack C.Richards, 155).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

130

Origin of CLT

It was at this same time that Dell Hymes, an American socio-linguist counteracted Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence and performance model by coining the term 'Communicative competence'. Communicative competence in CLT is a linguistic term which refers to a learner's ability to form correct utterances in the second language and know how to use these utterances appropriately.

The CLT approach owes its origin to linguists like Dell Hymes and Michael Halliday who regarded language primarily as a way of communication (Hymes, Michael A.K.Halliday, 1973). Many researchers have helped to develop the theory and practice of CLT. To name a few, Dell Hymes (1973), Brumfit & Johnson (1979) and Little Wood (1981).

Learning by Doing

Krashen, the acquisition theorist, stresses that language learning comes about through using language communicatively. This anti-structural view of learning is usually referred to as 'learning by doing' or the 'experience approach'. He felt that Second Language Acquisition occurs subconsciously as a result of communicating in situations where the focus is on meaning. The development of the communicative ability occurs subconsciously in the learner. This subconscious process is similar to the process a child utilizes in acquiring his first language.

According to Prabhu, when individuals, whose first language is not English, focus on getting their message across then communication comes naturally.

> On the other hand, success in doing a task involves less than linguistic competence in that, strictly speaking, language needs to be comprehended only for a certain purpose (hence, to a certain degree) and an outcome needs to be formulated in language only to the extent necessary for putting its meaning-content across. (N.S. Prabhu, 69)

Communicative Language Teaching – An Overview

The communicative approach in language teaching is grounded on the theory of language as communication. Communicative Language Teaching not only considers language in terms of grammatical structures and vocabulary but also in terms of the communicative function they perform. Knowledge of the rules of grammar alone is not sufficient. The ability to use these rules appropriately to communicate meaningfully is equally, if not more, important.

Dell Hymes said "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" Dell Hymes (1973) proposed the idea of 'communicative competence,' by which he meant that competence in a language goes beyond knowing the forms (lexical, phonological or syntactic), to

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   131
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

refer to knowledge that speakers and listeners have when they communicate with the awareness of appropriateness in different social contexts.

Effective Communication in the Foreign Language

CLT is all about knowing and learning how people use a language, what they do with language forms when they want to communicate with each other. Effective communication in the foreign language is achieved by manipulating the linguistic structures.

The learner uses strategies to manipulate the structures in a conversation to convey meaning effectively. The linguistic forms are given importance but the ability to use them appropriately is given more importance.

The Notion of Strategic Competence

In other words the linguistic forms are acquired and manipulated ed to communicate the meaning effectively. *The stress is on use of the language over the usage of the language*. This is what is referred as Strategic Competence by Canale and Swain (1980). Anyone who wants to be a highly confident, fluent speaker of English would do well to develop a curiosity to know the appropriate usage of language functions rather than memorize the grammar rules. This is a way of employing language at a higher level.

CLT – Goals

CLT in second language learning emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language. The CLT approach does not stress on rules of grammar or syntax. Accuracy in using the rules of grammar is given less importance when compared to the verbal fluency of the learner.

Success of CLT depends on the learner's ability to get his meaning across to the listener and also to understand the ideas of other speakers. Communication in the classroom is achieved by creating real-life situations and making the learners role- play it. Task-based activities are developed to ensure that communication takes place between the learners. Through these activities the learner gets an access to the social, cultural and pragmatic aspects of the language. If learners achieve communicative competence it means the success of CLT.

Advent of CLT in India

The Central Board of Secondary Education changed the English syllabus in the 1980's. More importance was given to the language functions rather than literature. This was on par with the Activity Based Learning introduced by the State Boards in the syllabus. Thus slowly CLT started creeping into Indian classrooms.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com									132
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

The introduction of CLT in India had a direct bearing on the language learning process and there was a change at two levels.

a) at the level of syllabus
b) at the level of methodology

That English is a global language is always recognized in India, but, when globalization processes began to dominate Indian business scene, English was seen to be an important vehicle for success. With the change in political attitudes toward the learning and use of English, there was also a significant shift in demands for better teaching of the language. The status of English underwent a change and every English language user wanted to improve his or her language performance.

There was a sudden change in the face of education, particularly with respect to English in India. All students started realizing the need for functional English. Effective communication was regarded as a symbol of social status and pride. The liberalization of the economy led to the entry of multinationals resulting in enormous job opportunities that demanded a command of English. Students started learning the language to meet practical needs, especially relating to job search. Spoken English institutes sprang up everywhere. More training centers on Communicative Language were established. The mushrooming of such institutes made the academicians take another look at the English syllabus.

At the Level of the Syllabus

With the change in the learner's needs CLT started creeping into Indian classrooms. When learners started measuring success in terms of fluency there came a situation to introduce need-based and task-based courses to suit the learner's needs. This reformed and restructured the entire language teaching system. The syllabus was designed keeping in view the needs of the learners. The learners knew why they have to learn a second language and also the practical outcome of his/her learning. It was a learner-centered syllabus based on the students' point of view. It was the rationale behind the change. The syllabus became a lot more democratic. The idea behind it is that the needs of the students must be considered before framing the syllabus. The CLT syllabus became more practical and relevant because it helps the learners become employable.

At the Level of Methodology

A new methodology was developed to teach English for communication. Various factors had to be considered.

a) LSRW skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)
b instructional materials)
c) role of the teacher

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   133
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

d) role of the learner

a) LSRW skills

As far as the language skills are concerned, the four skills are given importance while designing the syllabus of CLT. The classroom activities are designed in such a way that they help in improving all the four skills. The activities used in the CLT classroom make the learners involve in trial and error method and enhance communication by integrating different language skills.

b) Instructional materials

The instructional materials designed for the CLT classroom do the role of promoting communicative language use.

The activities based on the text book develop interest and they are relevant and fun for the learners. Activities involving real communication and activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks are performed in the class to promote Communicative Language Learning and Teaching.

This method is referred to as 'learning by doing'. Here the learner is active all the time and while he or she is engaged in one or the other communication-oriented activity, quite naturally they get interested in the communication process. Experiences outside the classroom are brought into the classroom and classroom learning is used outside the class through these activity based learning. Hence such activities become really meaningful and consequently active learning that lasts for a life time takes place. These activities help the learners develop linguistic interactive competence.

c & d) Role of the teacher and the learner in CLT

In the early stages of second language learning through CLT approach, the teachers and the students need to keep in mind the goals of CLT. In CLT the teacher's pedagogic role was redefined. The roles of both the teachers and learners changed.

The teacher modifies the methods of teaching bearing in mind the context of teaching and the needs of the target learners.

The new methodology is not a substitute to the classroom teaching but it complements the qualitative lecture method.

Rules of grammar are taught in association with the functions of the language.

The role of a learner is very different from the one found in traditional classrooms. He or she is no more a passive listener. He or she is a part of the communicative activities in the classroom.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   134
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

The teacher is not only a facilitator offering the stimulus and experience that this language learning process requires, but also sometimes needs to be an independent participant in the group.

Even in the absence of the teacher any language learning environment can provide the stimuli and experience for Communicative Language Learning to take place.

Most of the need-based and task-based courses are learner-centered. Learner-centered instruction encourages students to take responsibility for their own language skill development and help them gain confidence in their ability to learn and use the language.

Teachers support students by devoting some class time to non-traditional activities, including teaching learners how to use learning strategies, how to use available tools and resources, and how to reflect on their own learning. Earlier the teachers followed the chalk-talk lecture method but in CLT the learners do most of the talking. In a CLT classroom the teacher plays the role of a coach, guide, facilitator and friend.

Practical Problems Encountered

We need to bear in mind that there are indeed several practical problems in the teaching-learning process with the implementation of CLT in India. Various problems of second language learning using CLT should be considered while discussing this issue.

a) CLT – a theory, not a methodology
b) Role of the teacher and the learner
c) Grammar
d) Infra structure
e) Heterogeneous classrooms
f) Instructional materials

a) CLT – a theory

CLT is a theory and not a methodology. Its interpretation for classroom practice can be applied in a variety of ways and so there is no uniform method of implementing it in a classroom.

Communication skills are difficult to evaluate in traditional tests. There is no common method available, at present, for testing CLT. Much work has to be done to develop exams that evaluate communication.

In real life context, the present examination system is mostly memory based and aims at getting good exam results, which need not be the outcome of knowledge. As a result the teachers tend to concentrate on exam results rather than imparting knowledge because the performance of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   135
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

teacher is measured only by exam results. Passing the exam means much more to the student's life and future.

b) Role of the teacher and the learner

When considering the tradition of learning in India, the education system started with the Gurukula System. In this system, the learners looked upon the teacher as a symbol of knowledge. They operate under the traditional understanding and practice that the teacher knows everything and that he will impart to him all the knowledge he knows.

But CLT does not advocate that the teacher should be an epitome of knowledge to practice CLT in the classroom. The teacher is a facilitator in CLT. So CLT goes against the traditional belief of learning in India. Students who are accustomed to more traditional teacher-centered instruction may resist the learner-centered model, because it expects them to be more involved in the learning process.

In the learner-centered method the teacher plays the role of a guide, providing the proper learning environment for his students to learn to use the language for communication. He or she does not 'tell' them but only sets them on the path of self-discovering or self-learning. This venture is possible only when the teacher sets a number of learning tasks for the learners instead of simply making them passively listen to whatever he or she says. Majority of the students in the Indian classroom are used to passive listening and think that the teacher is there to help him o her gather knowledge and not to give them materials and tasks for solving.

The teacher should consider the individual learner's learning process as it will help to promote learner autonomy and strategic involvement. The teacher can develop appropriate strategies only if he or she knows the individual learner's strengths, weakness and preferences of learning styles.

In a large Indian classroom there are no possible chances to understand the individuality of each and every learner. CLT considers the teacher's role as a friend. But the Indian learner is totally new to the setting. When there is no mediation between the students' and the teacher's different expectations, it results in confusion and frustration for the students.

c) Grammar – Deductive and Inductive

In the Indian traditional class room the deductive approach of teaching is followed. "This is a traditional style of teaching where the grammatical structures or rules are dictated to the students first." (Rivers and Temperley, 110). The students learn the rules and apply these only after they have been introduced to the rule. "For example, if Present Perfect is to be taught the teacher would begin the lesson by saying, "Today we are going to learn how to use the present perfect structure". Then, the rules of the present perfect structure would be outlined and the students would complete exercises, in a number of ways, to practice using the structure." (Goner, Phillips,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com 136
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

and Walters, 135) In this approach, the teacher is the center of the class and is responsible for all of the presentation and explanation of the new material.

But CLT follows the inductive method of teaching. "The inductive approach represents a more modern style of teaching where the new grammatical structures or rules are presented to the students in a real language context" (Goner, Phillips, and Walters, 135).

The students learn the use of the structure through practice of the language in context, and later realize the rules from the practical examples. In CLT Teaching of Grammar has been integrated with teaching the functions of the language.

Prescriptive rules of grammar are taught in the contexts where they arise. In this way the learner internalizes the rule rather than when the rule is taught in isolation. When the learner makes an effort to express themselves clearly they think through the rule.

> For example, if comparative form is to be taught, the teacher would begin the lesson by drawing a figure on the board and saying, "This is Jim. He is tall." Then, the teacher would draw another taller figure next to the first saying, "This is Bill. He is taller than Jim." The teacher would then provide many examples using students and items from the classroom, famous people, or anything within the normal daily life of the students, to create an understanding of the use of the structure. The students repeat after the teacher, after each of the different examples, and eventually practice the structures meaningfully in groups or pairs. (Goner, Phillips, and Walters, 135-136)

"With this approach, the teacher's role is to provide meaningful contexts to encourage demonstration of the rule, while the students evolve the rules from the examples of its use and continued practice." (Rivers and Temperley, 110).

The advantages of the inductive approach are that students can focus on the use of the language without being held back by grammatical terminology and rules that can inhibit fluency. The inductive approach also promotes increased student participation and practice of the target language in the classroom, in meaningful contexts.

The use of the inductive approach has been noted for its success in EFL/ESL classrooms world-wide, but its disadvantage is that it is sometimes difficult for Indian students who expect a more traditional style of teaching when compared to teaching to induce the language rules from context.

In a CLT classroom there is a need to design tasks to provide meaningful contexts. However, here in India, the importance of grammar is lost. The Indian classrooms have conveniently thrown grammar outside the CLT classroom. The learners, though communicate in English, are not communicating in grammatically correct English.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com 137
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

d) Infra structure

The conditions of the classrooms in Indian schools and colleges are not conducive because of the huge number of students in each classroom which make it impossible for initiating any novel method in teaching and providing individual attention to learners. Fixed desks, six students in a desk and not less than 60 in a classroom are a common sight in India. In such a situation it is always difficult to bring them to the learning situation, using CLT.

The varied social, economical and cultural backgrounds of the students who pursue higher studies make it impossible to adopt any single method to improve their skills. The learner's social and economic status is also poles apart. There is a wide gap among the students in their basic education, which prevents any teacher to adopt any uniform method. The mixed type of learners pose the problem of having to adapt to different methods of teaching and it is very difficult to make the learners shed their inhibitions.

As learning occurs inside the learner, a crucial factor in helping or hindering learning is the learner's psychological state. They should be able to express their identity and relate with the peer group. Supportive interpersonal relationships that do not create inhibitions among the learners must exist for carrying out the activities which involve pair work and collaborative-learning. Learner's individuality must be respected. A learning atmosphere which gives a sense of security and value as individuals must be created in the classroom for effective Communicative Language Learning to take place. In large classrooms this is impossible to achieve.

e) Heterogeneous classrooms

The lack of a uniform language policy in the educational system in India is a severe setback for practicing Communicative Language Teaching in India.

There is a large difference between the two sets of people entering colleges after their schooling. One is a set of students who were taught in the English medium schools right from their kindergarten and the other set who took their education through their vernacular.

70% of the students who get admitted to the Indian Universities hail from the rural populace. They are not taught English properly because of the poor infrastructure facilities. Most of the rural and government schools are not fully equipped with libraries, laboratories and good classrooms. Sometimes they are even without teachers. This poor learning environment becomes a handicap for the learners of English.

While the former has an exposure to English for fourteen years and hence somewhat fluent in the language, the latter has learnt the language for ten years and that too as a second language.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com 138
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

These factors implicitly or explicitly influence the later stage when they enter the college for higher studies, when they need to learn the language for survival. The teacher who practices CLT in the Indian classroom has to bring out a balance by integrating the students from English medium and other non-English medium students.

f) Instructional materials

We must recognize that regular classroom teaching is inadequate to meet the customer needs. The whole concept of 'facilitating' in a CLT classroom is misunderstood in India. The teachers give tasks in the CLT classroom without giving appropriate 'input'. Input gives learners the material they need to develop their ability to use the language on their own. The input should match the individual learner's current comprehension level.

The teachers should give the learner the material they are familiar with. The teacher should provide a scaffold for climbing, that is, he or she should build on existing knowledge as they increase the language proficiency. The learning process and learning materials should be chosen keeping this in mind. When the learner can manage on his own the scaffold could be removed.

The learner should be taught to depend more on themselves and less on the teacher. The activities in the classroom should stimulate communication outside the classroom.

Here lies the success of CLT. To achieve the goal of CLT the English teachers in India need to be given sufficient training to update their teaching methodologies. But they are still following the conventional lecture method at all levels of teaching.

Conclusion

CLT is thought of as a methodology to teach English. But its introduction in India has revealed several difficulties. Many problems started creeping up. The success of CLT means giving a sense to the learner that they can really use the language.

As the paper analyses, CLT's success depends on many extraneous factors. All the factors discussed above cannot be cited as an excuse when it comes to success in life and career of the learner. Considering the importance of English in today's context, at least at the tertiary level we need to create conducive learning environment, where English is learnt to achieve certain specific ends. Due to the above discussed factors teacher-centered method dominates the Indian educational scenario. This teacher dominated information transfer mode of teaching must give way to learner-centered learning, for Communicative Language Teaching to establish itself firmly in India and be a success.

References

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   139
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India

Brumfit, C.J. & Johnson, K. The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 1979.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics* 1, 1-47. 1980.

Goner, Phillips, and Walters. *Teaching Practice Handbook: Structures: Grammar and Function*. Heinemann, 1995.

Halliday, M. A. K. *Explorations in the functions of language*. Edward Arnold, London, 1973.

Howatt, A.P.R. *A History of English Language Teaching*. OUP, Oxford, 1984.

Hymes, Dell. "On Communicative Competence," in *Sociolinguistics*, edited by J. B. Pride and J. Homes. Penguin, Harmondsworth. 1973.

Krashen, S. *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman, New York, 1985.

Littlewood, William. *Communicative Language Teaching – An Introduction*. CUP, Cambridge, 1981.

Prabhu, N. S. *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford University Press, 1987.

Richards, J. & Rodgers, S. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. CLT Library, Cambridge, 1986.

Rivers, Wilga M., Temperley, Mary S. A *Practical Guide to the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Oxford University Press, 1978.

M. Savitri
Department of English
SRM Valliammai Engineering College
S.R.M. Nagar
Kattankulathur - 603 203
Kancheepuram District
Tamil Nadu, India.
savirajesh2003@yahoo.com.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   140
9 : 10 October 2009
M. Savitri, Ph.D.
Teaching English as a Second Language Using Communicative Language Teaching –
An Evaluation of Practice in India