COMMUNICATIVE METHODS AND TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING SPEAKING

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Abstract: *Since the advent of CLT, teachers and materials writers have sought to find ways of developing classroom activities that reflect the principles of a communicative methodology. This quest has continued to the present, as we shall see later in the booklet. The principles on which the first generation of CLT materials are still relevant to language teaching today, so in this chapter we will briefly review the main activity types that were one of the outcomes of CLT.*

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Accuracy Versus Fluency Activities One of the goals of CLT is to develop fluency in language use. Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns. Fluency practice can be contrasted with accuracy practice, which focuses on creating correct examples of language use. Differences between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy can be summarized as follows: Activities focusing on fluency Reflect natural use of language Focus on achieving communication Require meaningful use of language Require the use of communication strategies Produce language that may not be predictable Seek to link language use to context Activities focusing on accuracy Reflect classroom use of language Focus on the formation of correct examples of language Practice language out of context Practice small samples of language Do not require meaningful communication Control choice of language Communicative Language Teaching Today 15 Task 8 Can you give examples of fluency and accuracy activities that you use in your teaching? The following are examples of fluency activities and accuracy activities. Both make use of group work, reminding us that group work is not necessarily a fluency task (see Brumfit 1984). Fluency Tasks A group of students of mixed language ability carry out a role play in which they have to adopt specified roles and personalities provided for them on cue cards. These roles involve the drivers, witnesses, and the police at a collision between two cars. The language is entirely improvised by the students, though they are heavily constrained by the specified situation and characters. The teacher and a student act out a dialog in which a customer returns a faulty object she has purchased to a department store. The clerk asks what the problem is and promises to get a refund for the customer or to replace the item. In groups, students now try to recreate the dialog using language items of their choice. They are asked to recreate what happened preserving the meaning but not necessarily the exact language. They later act out their dialogs in front of the class. Accuracy Tasks Students are practicing dialogs. The dialogs contain examples of falling intonation in Wh-questions. The class is organized in groups of three, two students

practicing the dialog, and the third playing the role of monitor. The monitor checks that the others are using the correct intonation pattern and corrects them where necessary. The students rotate their roles between those reading the dialog and those monitoring. The teacher moves around listening to the groups and correcting their language where necessary. Students in groups of three or four complete an exercise on a grammatical item, such as choosing between the past tense and the present perfect, an item which the teacher has previously presented and practiced as a whole class activity. Together students decide which grammatical form is correct and they complete the exercise. Groups take turns reading out their answers. Teachers were recommended to use a balance of fluency activities and accuracy and to use accuracy activities to support fluency activities. Accuracy work could either come before or after fluency work. For example, based onstudents' performance on a fluency task, the teacher could assign accuracy work to deal with grammatical or pronunciation problems the teacher observed while students were carrying out the task. An issue that arises with fluency work, however, is whether it develops fluency at the expense of accuracy. In doing fluency tasks, the focus is on getting meanings across using any available communicative resources. This often involves a heavy dependence on vocabulary and communication strategies, and there is little motivation to use accurate grammar or pronunciation. Fluency work thus requires extra attention on the part of the teacher in terms of preparing students for a fluency task, or follow-up activities that provide feedback on language use. While dialogs, grammar, and pronunciation drills did not usually disappear from textbooks and classroom materials at this time, they now appeared as part of a sequence of activities that moved back and forth between accuracy activities and fluency activities. And the dynamics of classrooms also changed. Instead of a predominance of teacher-fronted teaching, teachers were encouraged to make greater use of small-group work. Pair and group activities gave learners greater opportunities to use the language and to develop fluency. Mechanical, Meaningful, and Communicative Practice Another useful distinction that some advocates of CLT proposed was the distinction between three different kinds of practice – mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. Mechanical practice refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items. Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practice the use of prepositions to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as across from, on the corner of, near, on, next to. They then have to answer questions such as "Where is the book shop? Where is the café?" etc. The practice is now meaningful because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map. Communicative practice refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example, students might have to draw a map of

their neighborhood and answer questions about the location of different places, such as the nearest bus stop, the nearest café, etc. Communicative Language Teaching Today 17 Exercise sequences in many CLT course books take students from mechanical, to meaningful, to communicative practice. The following exercise, for example, is found in Passages 2 (Richards and Sandy 1998)

Superlative   Superlative adjectives *usually appear before the noun they modify.* **The funniest** *person I know is my friend Bob.*

The most caring *individual in our school is the custodian.*

They can also occur with the noun they modify Of all the people in my family, my Aunt Ruth is **the kindest***. Of all my professors, Dr. Lopez is* **the most inspiring***.*

Superlatives are often followed by relative clauses in the present perfect.

My cousin Anita is **the most generous** *person* **I've ever met***.*

The closest *friend* **I've ever had** *is someone I met in elementary school.* **A** *Complete these sentences with your own information, and add more details. Then compare with a partner.*

I.   *One of* **the most inspiring people I've ever known** *is …*

II.   *One of the most inspiring people I've ever known is my math teacher. She encourages students to think rather than just memorize formulas and rules.*

2. The most successful individual I know is …

3. Of all the people I know …. is the least self-centered.

4. The youngest person who I consider to be a hero is …

5. The most moving speaker I have ever heard is …

6. The most important role model I've ever had is …

7. Of all the friends I've ever had …. is the most understanding.

8. One of the bravest things I've eve done is …

B *Use the superlative form of these adjectives to describe people you know. Write at least five sentences. brave honest interesting smart generous inspiring kind witty*

C *Group work Discuss the sentences your wrote in Exercises A and B. Ask each other follow-up questions.*

A. *My next-door neighbor is the bravest person I've ever met.*

B. *What did your neighbor do, exactly?*

A. *She's a firefighter, and once she saved a child from a burning building*

If students read and practice aloud the sentences in the grammar box, this constitutes mechanical practice. Exercises A and B can be regarded as meaningful practice since students now complete the sentences with their own information. Exercise C is an example of communicative practice since it is an open-ended discussion activity .Examine the activities in one unit of a course book. Can you find examples of activities that provide mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice? What type of activities predominate? The distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities is similar to that given by Littlewood (1981),

who groups activities into two kinds: **Pre-communicative activities** Communicative activities Structural activities Functional communication activities Quasi-communicative activities Social interactional activities Functional communication activities require students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem (see below). Social interactional activities require the learner to pay attention to the context and the roles of the people involved, and to attend to such things as formal versus informal language.

Information-Gap Activities 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 known as an information gap. More authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students go beyond practice of language forms for their own sake and use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to obtain information. In so doing, they will draw available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task. The following exercises make use of the information-gap principle: Students are divided into A-B pairs. The teacher has copied two sets of pictures. One set (for A students) contains a picture of a group of people. The other set (for B students) contains a similar picture but it contains a number of slight differences from the A-picture. Students must sit back to back and ask questions to try to find out how many differences there are between the two pictures. Students practice a role play in pairs. One student is given the information she/he needs to play the part of a clerk in the railway station information booth and has information on train departures, prices, etc. The other needs to obtain information on departure times, prices, etc. They role-play the interaction without looking at each other's cue cards.

Jigsaw 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 so doing, they must use their language resources to communicate meaningfully and so take part in meaningful communication practice. The following are examples of jigsaw activities: The teacher plays a recording in which three people with different points of view discuss their opinions on a topic of interest. The teacher prepares three different listening tasks, one focusing on each of the three speaker's points of view. Students are divided into three groups and each group listens and takes notes on one of the three speaker's opinions. Students are then rearranged into groups containing a student from groups A, B, and C. They now role-play the discussion using the information they obtained. The teacher takes a narrative and divides it into twenty sections (or as many sections as there are students in the class). Each student gets one section of the story. Students must then move around the class, and by listening to each section read aloud, decide where in the story their section belongs. Eventually the students have to put the entire story together in the correct sequence.

Other Activity Types in CLT Many other activity types have been used in CLT, including the following: 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.

Information-gathering activities: student-conducted surveys, interviews, and searches in which students are required to use their linguistic resources to collect information.

Opinion-sharing activities: activities in which students compare values, opinions, or beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance that they might consider in choosing a date or spouse. **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.

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. Communicative Language Teaching Today

Role plays: activities in which students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

Emphasis on Pair and Group Work

Most of the activities discussed above reflect an important aspect of classroom tasks in CLT, namely that they are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Through completing activities in this way, it is argued, learners will obtain several benefits:

• They can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group.

• They will produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities.

• Their motivational level is likely to increase.

• They will have the chance to develop fluency. Teaching and classroom materials today consequently make use of a wide variety of small-group activities.

What are some advantages and limitations of pair and group work in the language classroom?

In conclusion. Since its inception in the 1970s, communicative language teaching has passed through a number of different phases. In its first phase, a primary concern was the need to develop a syllabus and teaching approach that was compatible with early conceptions of communicative competence. This led to proposals for the organization of syllabuses in terms of functions and notions rather than grammatical structures. Later the focus shifted to procedures for identifying learners' communicative needs and this resulted in proposals to make needs analysis an essential component of communicative methodology. At the same time, methodologists focused on the kinds of classroom activities that could be used to implement a communicative approach, such as group work, task work, and information-gap activities. Today CLT can be seen as describing a set of core principles about language learning and teaching, as summarized above, assumptions which can be applied in different ways and which address different aspects of the processes of

teaching and learning. Some focus centrally on the input to the learning process. Thus content-based teaching stresses that the content or subject matter of teaching drives the whole language learning process. Some teaching proposals focus more directly on instructional processes. Task-based instruction for example, advocates the use of specially designed instructional tasks as the basis of learning. Others, such as competency-based instruction and text-based teaching, focus on the outcomes of learning and use outcomes or products as the starting point in planning teaching. Today CLT continues in its classic form as seen in the huge range of course books and other teaching resources that cite CLT as the source of their methodology. In addition, it has influenced many other language teaching approaches that subscribe to a similar philosophy of language teaching.

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