ORIGINAL ARTICLE

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING-AN ESSENTIAL IN PRESENT CONTEXT.

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Abstract:

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English and opportunities to learn English are provided in many different ways such as through formal instruction, travel, study abroad, as well as through the media and the internet.

INTRODUCTION:

The world wide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Employees, too, insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world.

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

The Present Scenario of Language Learning:

Our Understanding of the processes of second language learning have changed considerably in the last 30 years and communicative language teaching is partly a response to these changes in understanding. Earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence. Language learning was viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation. Good habits are formed by having students produce correct sentences and not through making mistakes. Errors were to be avoided through controlled opportunities for production (either written or spoken) . By memorizing dialogs and performing drills, the chances of making mistakes were minimized. Learning was very much seen as under the control of the teachers.

In recent years, language learning has been viewed from a very different perspective. It is seen as resulting from processes such as :

Interaction between the learner and users of the language.
Collaborative creation of meaning.
Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language.
Negotiation of meaning as the learners and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding
Learning through attending to the feed back learners get when they use the language.
Paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's

developing communicative competence.
Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things.

Why communication skills are given utmost importance:

1)Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
2)Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (ex. Knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
3)Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (ex. Narratives, reports interviews, conversations)
4)Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (ex through using different kinds of communication strategies).

What is communicative language:

Communicative language teaching sets it's goal the teaching of communicative competence. We can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of grammatical competence. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentence (ex Parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed.

Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning. It is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able tom use the language for meaningful communication.

The background to communicative language teaching:

Language teaching has seen many changes in ideas about syllabus design and methodology in the last 50 years and communicative language teaching prompted a rethinking of approaches to syllabus design and methodology. We may conveniently group trends in language teaching in the last 50 years into three phases:

Phase 1: Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)
Phase 2: Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)
Phase 3: Current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the Present)

Phase1: Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

Traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency. They were based on the belief that grammar could be learned through direct instruction and through a methodology that made much use of repetitive practice and drilling . The approach to the teaching of grammar was a deductive one: Students are presented with grammar rules and then given opportunities to practice using them, as opposed to an inductive approach in which students are given examples of sentences containing a grammar rule and asked to work out the rule for themselves. It was assumed that language learning meant building up a large repertoire of sentences and grammatical patterns and learning to produce these accurately and quickly in the appropriate situation.

Techniques that were often employed included memorization of dialogs, question- and- answer practice, substitution drills, and various forms of guided speaking and writing practice. Great attention to accurate pronunciation and accurate mastery of grammar was stressed from the very beginning stages of language learning, since it was assumed that if students made errors, these would quickly become a permanent part of the learner's speech.

Phase 2: Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s):

In the 1970s a reaction to traditional language teaching approaches began and soon spread around the world as older methods such as Audiolingualism and situational language teaching fell out of fashion.

The centrality of grammar in language teaching and learning was questioned, since it was argued that language ability involved much more than grammatical competence. While grammatical competence was needed to produce grammatically correct sentences, attention shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs, and so on. What was needed in order to use language communicatively was communicative competence.

The notion of communicative competence was developed within the discipline of linguistics (or more accurately, the sub discipline of sociolinguistics) and appealed to many within the language teaching profession, who argued that communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of language teaching. Communicative language teaching created a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement when it first appeared as a new approach to language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, and language teachers and teaching institutions all around the world soon began to rethink their teaching, syllabuses, and classroom materials.

Phase 3 : current trends in communicative language Teaching:

Since the 1990s, the communicative approach has been widely implemented, because it describes a set of very general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching, and a communicative syllabus and methodology as the way of achieving this goal, communicative language teaching has continued to evolve as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed. Current communicative language teaching theory and practice thus draws on a number of different educational paradigms and traditions. Since it draws on a number of diverse sources, there is no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching. Rather communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level , their learning goals and so on.

CURRENT PRACTICES IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING:

1)Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2)Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3)Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
4)Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5)Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6)Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
7)Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
8)The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of facilitator who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning. Rates and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
9)The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.
10)Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different roles and have different needs and motivations for language learning.

CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTIONS TO IMPLEMENT COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING:

Content refers to the information or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language rather than the language used to convey it. Content of some sort has to be the vehicle which holds the lesson or the exercise together, but in traditional approaches to language teaching, content is selected after other decisions have been made. Communication is seen as resulting from processes such as:

1)Interaction between the learner and users of the language.
2)Collaborative creation of meaning.
3)Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language.
4)Paying attention to the language one hears(the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence.

CONCLUSION:

Today communicative language teaching can be seen as describing a set of core principles about language learning and teaching, as it's inception in the 1970s, communicative language teaching has passed through a number of different phases. In the 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.

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.

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