

COMPETENCE TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE AND LANGUAGE

Seema Mukherjee
Teacher
Kolkata , India

A language teaching method is a scheme describing firstly the roles of the participants in an instructional context, and secondly, the role and form of the instructional materials. The assumption upon which such a description is based are derived from theories of what constitutes language and / or how language learning takes place. Ultimately, the method is put into practice in the classroom by teachers, who through internalizing the principles inherent in a particular method, develop their own procedures and techniques parallel to those prescribed by the method.

In describing methods, the differences between a philosophy of language teaching at the level of theory and principles, and a set of derived procedures for teaching a language, is central. In an attempt to clarify this difference, a scheme was proposed by the American applied linguist **Edward Anthony** in 1963. He identified three levels of conceptualization and organization, which he termed approach, method and technique.¹

Communicative language teaching aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the communicative Approach by making Communicative Competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication.²

Communicative Language Teaching is based on the assumption that "Communicative" classrooms provide a better environment for second language learning than classroom dominated by formal instructions, yet no studies have been undertaken by those promoting this view to demonstrate that classrooms in which learners are encouraged to use the target language for problem solving, communicative tasks, information exchange, and meaningful interaction are indeed more conducive to successful language learning than classrooms in which the teacher dominates much of the teaching time or where the primary focus of activities is on more controlled and less creative uses of language.⁵ The aim of Communicative Language Teaching is to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and to develop procedures for the teaching for the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.³

As such the goal of language teaching is to develop ‘communicative competence’ as coined by **Hymes (1972)**.

*“The competence...is integral with attitudes, values and motivation concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes towards, the inter-relation of language with the other code of communication conduct....The internalization of attitudes towards a language and its uses is particularly important...as is internalization of attitudes towards use of language itself...”*⁴

Hymes puts forward this term in contrast to **Chomsky's** theory for **Linguistic Competence**. Besides the debate between **Linguistic Competence** and **Communicative Competence**, another important contribution towards this and has been made by **Halliday** in his **Functional account of language** use.

Halliday has insisted on the centrality of meaning in communication, and the crux of good language learning to him would be to 'learn how to mean' in a Second/Foreign Language. According to him, different uses of language realize different 'intentions mentioned above.

Another theorist frequently cited for his views on the communicative nature of language is **Henry Widdowson**. In his book "**Teaching Language as Communication**" (1978), **Widdowson** presented a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. He focused on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes.

*".....it will be generally acknowledged that the ultimate aim in language learning is to acquire communicative competence, to interpret, whether this is made overt in talking or corresponding or whether it remains covert as a psychological activity underlying the ability to say, listen, write, and read. I assume that the issue is not whether this is the aim of language learning, but how this aim is to be achieved."*⁵

At the level of language theory, Communicative Language Teaching has a rich, if somewhat eclectic, theoretical base. Some of the characteristics of this communicative view of language are; Language is a system for the expression of meaning, the primary function of language is for interaction and communication, the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses and the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.⁶

The most important development in the area of language learning has been made from the field of second language acquisition research. **Krashen** (1981) and other second language acquisition theorist mainly stresses on the need to enable language learning through using language communicatively as opposed to learning the language through practicing language skills. **Krashen** describes "**a monitor model of second language (L2) performance**" in which acquisition is distinguished from 'learning'. Acquisition refers to the subconscious process of natural assimilation of language rules through using language for communication. Learning refers to the formal study of language rules and is a conscious process. **Krashen's** theory also addresses the conditions necessary for the process of acquisition to take place. He describes these in terms of the types of "input" the learner receives. Input must be comprehensible, slightly above the learner's present levels of competence, interesting or relevant, not grammatically sequenced, in sufficient quantity and experiences in low anxiety contexts. The condition, which is necessary in order to acquire a language, says **Krashen**, is meaningful interaction in the target language, in which the speakers are concerned not with the form of what they say, but rather with the message that is being conveyed. As a result, the correction of errors and the explicit teaching of rule are not conducive to language acquisition, although the interlocutors such as parents and native speakers may modify what they say in speaking to children or foreign acquirers in order to help them to understand. On the other hand, conscious language learning takes place when the focus is on the linguistic

form rather than the content of communication. And learning in this sense is greatly helped by judicious correction of errors and the explicit formulation of rules.

The works of **Johnson (1984)** and **Littlewood (1984)** depict alternative learning theory that they consider compatible with Communicative Language Teaching i.e. skill-learning model of learning. The main emphasis made by this theory is on practice as a way of developing communicative skills.

The theme of language and the learner's communication needs is a familiar one in language teaching. In recent years, applied linguistics has been revitalized by attempts to describe how language reflects its communicative uses and by demonstrations of how syllabus design and methodology can respond to the need for communicative user of language in classrooms and teaching materials by considering some central aspects of communication, this part of the chapter attempts to contribute to the general understanding of how language use reflects underlying communicative needs. Five assumptions about the nature of verbal communication will be discussed, namely, that communication is meaning-based, conventional, appropriate, interactional, and structural. These will be discussed in relation to the communicative needs of second-language learners.⁷

A communicative approach opens up a wider perspective on language. In particular, it makes us consider language not only in terms of its structure (grammar and vocabulary), but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs. In other words, it begins to look not only at language forms, but also at what people, do with these forms when they want to communicate with each other.

There are five aspects of Language teaching namely; Structural and Functional Aspects of Communication, The Meaning-Based Aspect of Communication, The Conventional Aspect of Communication, the Appropriateness aspect of Communication and The Interactional Aspect of Communication.

The structural view of language concentrates on the grammatical system, describing ways in which linguistic items can be combined. For example, it explains the operations for producing the passive 'The window has been broken' rather than the active 'somebody has broken the window', and describes the word-order rules that make us interpret 'The girl chased the boy' differently from 'The boy chased the girl'. Intuitive knowledge of these, and of a multitude of other linguistic facts and operations, makes up a native speaker's linguistic competence and enables him to produce new sentences to match the meaning that need to be expressed.

The structural view of language has not been in any way superseded by the functional view. However, it is not sufficient on its own to account for how language is used as a means of communication.

Examining basic 'survival' language needs, of a learner who has an active vocabulary of perhaps two hundred words, a minimal knowledge of the syntax of English, but who is in a situation where English is required for simple and basic communicative purposes-points out that the most immediate need is to be able to refer to a core of basic "referents" or things in the real world that is, to be able to name things, states, events, and attributes, using the words he or she knows. In addition, the learner must be able to link words together to make predications, that is, to express propositions.

The ability to use such a communicative system is crucial in the first stages of foreign-language learning. We should consequently be tolerant of grammatical "errors" from learners who are at this stage. They should not attempt active communication too soon,

however. Before the learner is ready to begin speaking a foreign language, he or she should have a vocabulary of at least two hundred words and a feel for the basic word-order rules of the target language. The learner needs to develop a feel for the system of basic word order (in English: subject-predicate sentence order, adverb and adjectival positions, negation, question formation, etc). When speaking is taught, the initial goal should be the production of comprehensible utterances through expressing basic propositional meanings and illocutionary intentions.⁸

Although much of the learner's effort in speaking a foreign language center on developing the vocabulary and syntax needed to express prepositional meanings, it is native-speaker syntax and usage that is ultimately the learner's goal. As language acquisition proceeds, the learner revises his or her ideas about how propositions are expressed in English. The learner's syntax becomes more complex as his or her knowledge of negation, the auxiliary system, questions, word order, embedding, conjoining, and so on, expands. In short, the learner begins to develop grammatical competence.

The fact that language in conventional aspects has important implications for language teaching. First, it suggests that there is reason to be skeptical of the suggestion that language cannot be taught but only acquired. Many of the conventional aspects of language are amenable to teaching. Second, applied linguistic effort is needed to gather fuller data on such forms (through discourse analysis and frequency counts, for example) with a view to obtaining useful information for teachers, textbook writers, and syllabus designers.⁹

The choice of an appropriate strategy for performing a communicative task or speech act depends on such factors as the age, sex, familiarity, and roles of the speaker and hearer, which will determine whether a speaker adopts conversational strategies implying either affiliation or dominance. In the former case, "Got a match!" may be considered an appropriate way of requesting a match, and in the latter, "I wonder if I could bother you for a match."¹⁰

Language-learning texts have only recently begun to focus on the strategies learners need to perform various types of speech acts appropriately. In these texts the emphasis is not simply on teaching functions and their exponents, but on selecting appropriate exponents in different types of communication situations. Textbooks thus need to give practice in performing particular speech acts with interlocutors of different ages, ranks, social status and practice in selecting language according to these variables.

The use of utterances that take appropriate account of the speaker's and the hearer's roles implies that conversation is often just as much a form of social encounter as it is a way of communicating meanings or ideas. This may, be described as the interactional function of conversation.

Non-native speakers who lack the ability to use small talk and to exploit the intentional aspects of communication may find many encounters awkward and may avoid talk where talk would be appropriate. For example, a foreign couple with a good command of English but lacking the ability to participate in ongoing small talk would be judged as cold, standoffish, and reserved by their American relatives.¹¹

Communication as interaction is thus aimed largely at the need of speaker and is heard to feel valued and approved of. If our conversations – teaching materials primarily emphasize transactional skills, such as how to ask directions, how to order a meal, and so forth, learners may not have the chance to acquire the interactional skills that are also an important component of communicative competence.

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