

English Department

Method of Teaching English

Third stage

Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching

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Introduction

You may have noticed that the goal of most of the methods we have looked at so far is for students to learn to communicate in the target language. In the 1970s, though, educators began to question if they were going about meeting the goal in the right way. Some observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom. Others noted that being able to communicate required more than mastering linguistic structure, due to the fact that language was fundamentally social (Halliday, 1973). Within a social context, language users needed to perform certain functions, such as promising, inviting, and declining

invitations (Wilkins 1976). Students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but be unable to use the language (Widdowson 1978). In short, being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence (Hymes 1971)—knowing when and how to say what to whom. Such observations contributed to a shift in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s from a linguistic structure-centered approach to a Communicative Approach (Widdowson 1990; Savignon 1997).



Based on the teacher experience, the following are the main principles that this method based upon:

As we have seen before, there are important principles underlying the behavior we have observed. Let us now investigate these by compiling our two lists: our observations and the underlying principles. **Observations and Principles 1** The teacher distributes a handout that has a copy of a sports column from a recent newspaper.

Whenever possible, **authentic language** as it is used in a real context should be introduced.

2 The teacher tells the students to underline the reporter's predictions and to say which ones, they think the reporter feels most certain of and which he feels least certain of.

-Being able to figure out the speaker's or writer's intentions is part of being communicatively competent.

3 The teacher gives the students the directions for the activity in the target language.

-The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study.

4 The students try to state the reporter's predictions in different words. -One function can have many different linguistic forms. Since the focus of the course is on real language use; a variety of linguistic forms are presented together. The emphasis is on the process of communication rather than just mastery of language forms.

5 The students unscramble the sentences of the newspaper article.

-Students should work with language at the discourse or suprasentential (above the sentence) level. They must learn about **cohesion** and **coherence**, those properties of language which bind the sentences together.

6 The students play a language game.

-Games are important because they have certain features in common with real communicative events—there is a purpose to the exchange. Also, the speaker receives immediate feedback from the listener on whether or not she has

successfully communicated. Having students work in small groups maximizes the amount of communicative practice they receive.

7 The students are asked how they feel about the reporter' s predictions. -Students should be given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions.

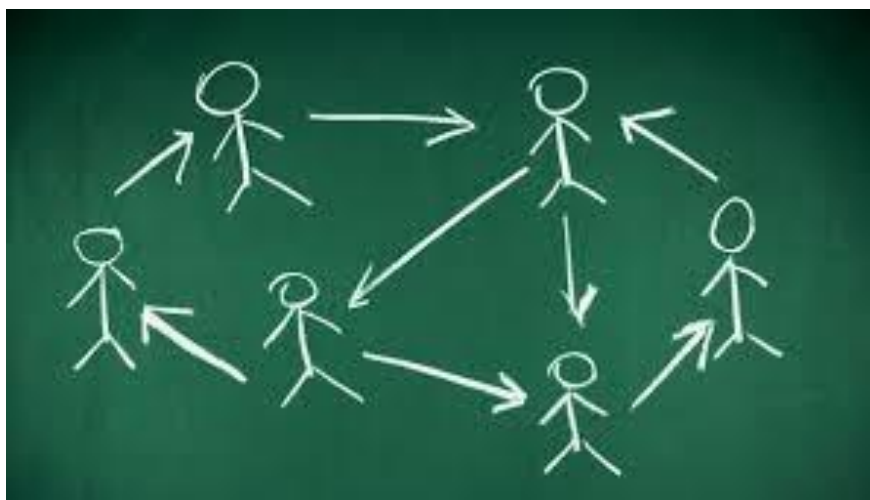
8 A student makes an error. The teacher and other students ignore it. -Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Since this activity was working on fluency, the teacher did not correct the student, but simply noted the error, which he will return to at a later point.

9 The teacher gives each group of students a strip story and a task to perform. One of the teacher' s major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication.

10 The students work with a partner or partners to predict what the next picture in the strip story will look like.

-Communicative interaction encourages cooperative relationships among students.

It gives students an opportunity to work on negotiating meaning.



Dear students

The following ten questions cover all what is important in this method. Please read and memorize them all.

1 What are the goals of teachers who use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

The goal is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form, given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors. Communication is a process; knowledge of the forms of language is insufficient.

2 What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students?

The teacher facilitates communication in the classroom. In this role, one of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. During the activities he acts as an advisor, answering students' questions and monitoring their performance. He might make a note of their errors to be worked on at a later time during more accuracy-based activities. At other times he might be a 'co-communicator' engaging in the communicative activity along with students (Littlewood 1981).

Students are, above all, communicators. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning—in trying to make themselves understood—even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete.

Also, since the teacher's role is less dominant than in a teacher-centered method, students are seen as more responsible for their own learning.

3 What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

1. **Communicative Intent:** CLT emphasizes using language for communication rather than just rote memorization. Activities like games, role-plays, and problemsolving tasks are common to promote language use.
2. **Features of Communicative Activities:** Morrow identified three common features of communicative activities: an information gap, choice, and feedback. True communication occurs when there's a gap in knowledge between participants, allowing for choice in expression, and feedback on understanding.
3. **Purposeful Communication:** CLT emphasizes purposeful communication where speakers have the freedom to choose what to say and how to say it. Feedback from listeners allows speakers to assess whether their purpose has been achieved.

4. ****Use of Authentic Materials and Group Work:**** CLT encourages the use of authentic materials to expose students to real-life language usage. Activities often involve small group interactions to maximize communication opportunities for each student.

4 What is the nature of student–teacher interaction? What is the nature of student–student interaction?

The teacher may present some part of the lesson. At other times, he is the facilitator of the activities, but he does not always himself interact with the students.

Sometimes he is a co-communicator, but more often he establishes situations that prompt communication between and among the students.

Students interact a great deal with one another. They do this in various configurations: pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group.

5 How are the feelings of the students dealt with?

One of the basic assumptions of CLT is that by learning to communicate students will be more motivated to study another language since they will feel they are learning to do something useful. Also, teachers give students an opportunity to express their individuality by having them share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis. Finally, student security is enhanced by the many opportunities for cooperative interactions with their fellow students and the teacher.

6 How is the language viewed? How is culture viewed?

Language is for communication. Linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and their meanings, is only one part of communicative competence. Another aspect

of communicative competence is knowledge of the functions that language is used for. As we have seen in this lesson, a variety of forms can be used to accomplish a single function. A speaker can make a prediction by saying, for example, 'It may rain,' or 'Perhaps it will rain.' Conversely, the same form of the language can be used for a variety of functions. 'May,' for instance, can be used to make a prediction or to give permission ('You may leave now.').

Thus, the learner needs knowledge of forms and meanings and functions. However, to be communicatively competent, she must also use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situation in order to convey her intended meaning appropriately (Canale and Swain 1980). A speaker can seek permission using 'may'

('May I have a piece of fruit?'); however, if the speaker perceives his listener as being more of a social equal or the situation as being informal, he would more likely use 'can' to seek permission ('Can I have a piece of fruit?').

Culture is the everyday lifestyle of people who use the language. There are certain aspects of it that are especially important to communication—the use of nonverbal behavior, for example, which might receive greater attention in CLT. 7 What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized? Language functions might be emphasized over forms. Typically, although not always, a functional syllabus is used. A variety of forms are introduced for each function. Only the simpler forms would be presented at first, but as students get more proficient in the target language, the functions are reintroduced and more complex forms are learned. Thus, for example, in learning to make requests, beginning

students might practice ‘Would you ...?’ and ‘Could you ...?’ Highly proficient students might learn ‘I wonder if you would mind ...’

Students work with language at the discourse or supralingual level. They learn about cohesion and coherence. For example, in our lesson the students recognized that the second sentence of the scrambled order was the last sentence of the original sports column because of its introductory adverbial phrase, ‘In the final analysis...’ This adverbial phrase is a cohesive device that binds and orders this sentence to the other sentences. The students also recognized the lack of coherence between the first two sentences of the scrambled order, which did not appear connected in any meaningful way.

Students work on all four skills from the beginning. Just as oral communication is seen to take place through negotiation between speaker and listener, so too is meaning thought to be derived from the written word through an interaction between the reader and the writer. The writer is not present to receive immediate feedback from the reader, of course, but the reader tries to understand the writer’s intentions and the writer writes with the reader’s perspective in mind. Meaning does not, therefore, reside exclusively in the text, but rather arises through negotiation between the reader and writer.

8 What is the role of the students’ native language?

Judicious use of the students’ native language is permitted in CLT. However, whenever possible, the target language should be used not only during communicative activities, but also for explaining the activities to the students or in assigning homework. The students learn from these classroom management

exchanges, too, and realize that the target language is a vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied.

9 How is evaluation accomplished?

A teacher evaluates not only his students' accuracy, but also their fluency. The student who has the most control of the structures and vocabulary is not always the best communicator.

A teacher can evaluate his students' performance informally in his role as advisor or co-communicator. For more formal evaluation, a teacher is likely to use an integrative test which has a real communicative function. In order to assess students' writing skill, for instance, a teacher might ask them to write a letter to a friend.

10 How does the teacher respond to student errors?

Errors of form are tolerated during fluency-based activities and are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Students can have limited linguistic knowledge and still be successful communicators. The teacher may note the errors during fluency activities and return to them later with an accuracy-based activity.



The following techniques are the main techniques that used in this method. Please read them carefully.

- **Authentic Materials**

To overcome the typical problem that students cannot transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world, and to expose students to natural language in a variety of situations, adherents of CLT advocate the use of authentic language materials.¹ In this lesson we see that the teacher uses a newspaper article. He also assigns the students homework, requiring that they learn about two political candidates who are running for election.

Of course, the class that we observed was at the high-intermediate level of proficiency. For students with lower proficiency in the target language, it may not be possible to use authentic language materials such as these. Simpler authentic materials (for example, the use of a weather forecast when working on predictions), or at least ones that are realistic, are most desirable. It is not so important that the materials be genuine as it is that they be used authentically, with a communicative intent. Another possibility for the use of authentic materials with a lower-level class is to use items of realia that do not contain a lot of language, but about which a lot of discussion could be generated. Menus in the target language are an example; timetables are another.

- **Scrambled Sentences**

The students are given a passage (a text) in which the sentences are in a scrambled order. This may be a passage they have worked with or one they have not seen before. They are told to unscramble the sentences so that the sentences are restored to their original order. This type of exercise teaches students about the cohesion and coherence properties of language. They learn how sentences are bound together at the suprasentential level through formal linguistic devices such as pronouns, which make a text cohesive, and semantic propositions, which unify a text and make it coherent. In addition to written passages, students might also be asked to unscramble the lines of a mixed-up dialogue. Or they might be asked to put the pictures of a picture strip story in order and write lines to accompany the pictures.

• **Language Games**

Games are used frequently in CLT. The students find them enjoyable, and if they are properly designed, they give students valuable communicative practice. Games that are truly communicative, according to Morrow (ibid. 1981), have the three features of communication: information gap, choice, and feedback. These three features were manifest in the card game we observed in the following way: An information gap existed because the speaker did not know what her classmate was going to do the following weekend. The speaker had a choice as to what she would predict (which sport) and how she would predict it (which form her prediction would take). The speaker received feedback from the members of her group. If her prediction was incomprehensible, then none of the members of her group would respond. If she got a meaningful response, she could presume her prediction was understood.

• **Picture Strip Story**

Many activities can be done with picture strip stories. We suggested one in our discussion of scrambled sentences. In the activity we observed, one student in a small group was given a strip story. She showed the first picture of the story to the other members of her group and asked them to predict what the second picture would look like. An information gap existed—the students in the groups did not know what the picture contained. They had a choice as to what their prediction would be and how they would word it. They received feedback, not on the form but on the content of the prediction, by being able to view the picture and compare it

with their prediction. The activity just described is an example of using a problemsolving task as a communicative technique. Problem-solving tasks work well in CLT because they usually include the three features of communication. What is more, they can be structured so that students share information or work together to arrive at a solution. This gives students practice in negotiating meaning.

• **Role-play**

We already encountered the use of role-plays as a technique when we looked at Desuggestopedia. Role-plays are very important in CLT because they give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles. Role-plays can be set up so that they are very structured (for example, the teacher tells the students who they are and what they should say) or in a less structured way (for example, the teacher tells the students who they are, what the situation is, and what they are talking about, but the students determine what they will say). The latter is more in keeping with CLT, of course, because it gives the students more of a choice. Notice that role-plays structured like this also provide information gaps since students cannot be sure (as with most forms of communication) what the other person or people will say (there is a natural unpredictability). Students also receive feedback on whether or not they have communicated effectively.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest contribution of CLT is asking teachers to look closely at what is involved in communication. If teachers intend students to use the target language, then they must truly understand more than grammar rules and target language vocabulary.

Is achieving communicative competence a goal for which you should prepare your students? Would you adopt a functional syllabus? Should a variety of language forms be presented at one time? Are there times when you would emphasize fluency over accuracy? Do these or any other principles of CLT make sense to you? Would you ever use language games, problem-solving tasks, or role-plays? Should all your activities include the three features of communication? Should authentic language be used? Are there any other techniques or materials of CLT that you would find useful?