

Pedagogy and Curriculum Innovations

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First Semester
Lecture 13:
Communicative Language Teaching

- **Reviewing Principles**



What are the goals of teachers who use 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.



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.

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.



What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

The most obvious characteristic of CLT is that almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent. Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks (see discussion of these in the review of the techniques).

Activities that are truly communicative have three features in common: **information gap**, **choice**, and **feedback**. An information gap exists when one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not. If we all know today is Thursday, and I ask you, 'What is today?' and you answer, 'Thursday,' our exchange is not really communicative. My question is called a display question, a question teachers use to ask students to display what they know, but it is not a question that asks you to give me information that I do not know.

Another characteristic of CLT is the use of authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used.

Finally, activities in CLT are often carried out by students in small groups.



What is the nature of student-teacher and 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.



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.



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. 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, he must also use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situation in order to convey his intended meaning appropriately. 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.

What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?



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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 suprasentential level. They learn about cohesion and coherence.

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.



What is the role of the students' native language?



Judicious (rational) 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.



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.



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.