

**Ўзбекистон Республикаси Олий ва Ўрта Махсус
таълим Вазирлиги**



Тошкент Молия Институтини

“Суғурта иши” факультетини

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Communicative Language Teaching

This paper aims at emphasizing the significance of communicative language strategy in foreign language learning and teaching. It summarizes the background of communicative language teaching strategies, defines the concept of a language teaching strategy. Whether CLT should be considered an approach or a methodology is a more abstract debate and here I would like to deal with its more practical aspects. In fact, it is those very elements, and the name itself, which have been used to challenge the future relevance of CLT.

Firstly, the label implies a focus on communication and some might argue that this method can't be employed genuinely with low levels as there is no authentic communication, due to a limited vocabulary and restricted range of functions. Not so many years have passed since the introduction of the Communicative Language teaching approach in Uzbekistan; however, despite curriculum reform and passage of time, many remain skeptical of the effectiveness of communicative methodology in the Uzbek English language classroom.

According to Jack C. Richards, “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.” Communicative language competences involve linguistic competence (knowledge, skills and abilities of acquiring pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar (phonetics, lexis, grammar)), socio-linguistic competence (ability to use and interpret language forms with situational appropriateness (formal vs. non-formal in terms of communicative context: who is communicating with whom, about what, where, on what topic and for what purpose)) in the four communicative skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) according to the four domains of language use (personal, public, academic and occupational) and pragmatic competence (ability to receive and produce coherent and fluent discourse with reference to differences in register, genre and type of text, focus on appropriate functional use of linguistic resources

while communicating (implying language functions and speech acts as required by certain scenarios of international exchanges)). Ability to learn consists of ability to self-evaluate one's professional development and integrate the newly-acquired knowledge and skills into the formerly built context of learning, ability to critically reflect on the achievements and outcome of activity, and ability to initiate and adequately interpret the situation of learning. Strategic competence involves ability and skill of planning, execution, evaluation and repair of communication, application of compensation strategies.

In the process of teaching the teacher displays the above mentioned competences and performs certain roles. Harmer (2001, 57) distinguishes eight roles of the teacher, i.e. controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and observer. The teacher can perform any role depending on the teaching situation, students' needs, learning style, and type of intelligence. An appropriate approach in teaching English can be used with respect to the above discussed factors.

The Communicative approach or the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes the importance of language functions rather than focuses on grammar and vocabulary. The main principle of CLT is to train students to use language forms appropriately in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes (Harmer, 2001, 84). The top ten principles of CLT are communicative interaction, meaningful practice, active involvement, positive reinforcement, choice of suitable materials, changes of pace and activity, making the teaching process enjoyable, teaching English in English, realization that mistakes are natural and that even beginners *can* understand when taught in the target language.

Activities in CLT involve students in real and realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language is less important than successful achievement of the communicative purpose. Therefore, such activities as role-play and simulation are very popular in CLT. All activities in CLT have to be constructed in such a way that students should have a desire to communicate something. According to Harmer (2001, 85), in CLT students should have a purpose for

communication (e.g. to write a letter of complaint, to make reservation of a table at the restaurant, etc.), they should be focused on the content of what they are saying and writing rather than on a particular language form. They should use a variety of language rather than just one language structure. In short, all such activities should attempt to replicate real communication. The key principles of effective CLT that teachers have to take into consideration are as follows: be aware of students' needs, develop learner independence, be a facilitator rather than a controller, motivate your students by verbal encouragement (praising, good mark, awards, body language), use variety of activities, and encourage students' active involvement.

The Communicative Language Teaching, having an aim to improve students' ability to communicate, has been criticized for having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students in accuracy in the pursuit of fluency (Harmer, 2001, 86). Despite the criticism, the Communicative approach has left a deep mark on teaching and learning of a foreign language and has been extensively used in classrooms all over the world.

This act of improvement and change in students' learning of English language in a multilingual context showed that an action research had a potential to bring desired change and improvement in students in any context of the classroom. Many researchers noted that classrooms are social environments (Hall, 2011) and ELTs are active participants in the creation of classroom realities, how teachers talk and how teachers talk to learners is key element in organizing and facilitating learning. Communicative abilities cannot be simply categorized as speaking, listening, reading, or writing skills, as it was done in a traditional four skills approach. For example, when two people talk to each other, the process normally involves speaking and listening skills as well as active communicative strategies such as asking for clarification and adjusting language to make each other understood. The endeavor to teach languages in a way that encompasses all skills, based on an interactive view of language behavior, has posed many challenges on how to go about integrating the four skills effectively in a daily and long-term

curriculum. The teaching of proficiency and communicative-based skills raises the question not only about content but also about the choice of learning tasks or best teaching practices. CLT does not promote one standardized method or curriculum, but is eclectic in its approach. Being eclectic means it promotes the best or most effective techniques or methodologies.

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method. Thus although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the levels of design and procedure there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit. It could be that one version among the various proposals for syllabus models, exercise types, and classroom activities may gain wider approval in the future, giving Communicative Language Teaching a status similar to other teaching methods. On the other hand, divergent interpretations might lead to homogeneous subgroups.

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. Teachers should identify and draw awareness to concrete short term goals which can be more readily observed and evaluated by students. Many students may be unaware of their progress, strengths and weaknesses. If students are familiar with the structure and criteria essential for effective communication, they will be better able to direct the learning strategies to the desired goal.