

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND SECOND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY: THE INDIAN ESL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in India after the adoption of the policy of globalization has witnessed the emergence of English as the only viable language in the market dictated economy of the country. In the present market dictated global scenario, command over English has become the indispensable key for survival. It has become imperative on the part of individuals vying for jobs in the market to have sufficient command in English, especially in the spoken aspect of the language. However, it has been found that the traditional method adopted in English language teaching in the Indian pedagogy has not been able to ensure the desired outcome of making the learners confident users of the language. This paper examines the problems faced by the learners of English as the second language in India and also advocates the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a viable alternative for ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching in Indian pedagogy. Since successful oral and written communication generally pertains to the social, situational and professional needs, therefore, the learners should be tested in the types of communication needs they will encounter in real life. Moreover, the texts and study materials prescribed and the subsequent evaluation should all be accommodating the types of situations that one encounters in daily life. Classroom English should not be at variance with the kind of English that learners meet in the world of their regular intercourse – both in terms of the kind of situations that ask for linguistic indulgence and the kind of social variety or dialect that defines their prevailing linguistic environment. CLT can enable the learners to use the language in real-life situations and thereby develop their English communication skills and subsequently empower them to compete in the current socio-economic environment.

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INTRODUCTION:

Higher education in India after the adoption of the policy of globalization has witnessed the emergence of English as the only viable language in the market dictated economy of the country. In the present market dictated global scenario, command over English has become the indispensable key for survival. It has become imperative on the part of individuals vying for jobs in the market to have sufficient command in English, especially in the spoken aspect of the language. Lack of fluency in the language is a shortcoming that can deprive competent individuals of satisfactory engagements. How far have the methods and curricula, adopted in teaching English in colleges been able to produce individuals who are fluent speakers and writers of the language is a question that needs to be scrutinized minutely. Is our system of teaching the language at various levels of higher education effectively enabling the graduates to find satisfactory means of livelihood in this globalized world? If not, what measures need to be adopted to make the teaching-learning situation more fruitful? How far is the fear for the language, in the minds of students coming from vernacular medium schools, hampering the cause of raising their competence level in the language? If English teaching-learning situation has not been effective enough in our region, how far is the tendency of the students to somehow secure the 'pass marks' responsible? These are pertinent questions that need to be taken into consideration while dealing with English and second language pedagogy in India.

PROBLEMS FACED BY L2 LEARNERS

In L2 or Second Language learning, especially in the case of learning English in India, the learner has to work on a conceptual knowledge that is already at place. In the case of L1 or First Language learners however, the learner's knowledge of the world and knowledge of the language develop at the same time. Moreover, L1 pattern of acquisition results from exposure in a natural environment where most of the speakers use the same in their daily lives. But, L2 learning is basically carried out in the classroom and it ends with the culmination of the class for the day. Hence, classroom exposure is very much an artificial one. Moreover, in L1, the learner possesses certain specific lexical patterns from which he later tends to develop abstract categories. In the case of L2 however, the learning knowledge of abstract categories have already been acquired.

Hence, as mentioned above, we find a constant conflict between L1 and L2 rules. For example, in Assamese, there is no rule of silent consonant immediately after the ‘a’ sound in a syllable. However, in British R.P., the /r/ sound becomes silent when it succeeds the vowel sound ‘a.’ Learners also get very little scope for actual use of the English language outside the classroom situation. Therefore, when the need for using English arises in real life situation, they are found wanting.

According to Nityanandam, “In the context of ELT in India, the specific demands of constantly juggling two languages in a single mind as a psycho-linguistic study has probably not been really analyzed or understood by the teachers, nor have they looked at the resultant problem.” (2015 p. 219). In ELT in India, the factors that need to be considered include answers to questions like whether the learners possess two lexicons or one, whether the lexicon should be considered in terms of its representation or its semantics, whether a bilingual learner while learning English as L2, selectively activate his lexicon in one language or is the lexicon an integrated one where it is possible to have a parallel and nonselective activation of word forms in both the languages. Studies and research have made attempts to find answers to the following questions (Doughty and Long, 2003:106):

1. How are lexical forms in each language represented and activated during reading?
2. Are semantic representations shared across the bilinguals’ two languages?
3. On what basis are semantic and lexical representations connected for words and concepts in each language?
4. How are words spoken in the second language when a more dominant alternative always exists in the form of the first language?
5. How is the activation of lexical form and meaning controlled so that bilinguals recognize and speak words in the intended language?

However, it is easily discernable that solutions to these pertinent questions have not yet been scientifically arrived at which has made it difficult to make classroom ELT in India effective enough.

CLT AS A VIABLE OPTION FOR ESL TEACHING IN INDIAN PEDAGOGY

In order to make CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) a viable option for teaching English as L2, one needs to have a concrete idea about CLT. CLT 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 (Jack C. Richards 2006). Let us examine each of these issues in turn. As has been stated in the beginning, one of the major purposes of Tertiary level of language teaching is to ensure that at the end of the college education learners should ideally find themselves in gainful employment with prospective employers, either in the government sector or in the private and corporate world. In this era of globalization, English has emerged as the language with the scope of ensuring meaningful employment opportunities. This very importance of English has increased the role of classroom teaching of English manifold. Success in acquiring the communication skills in English has become the much cherished dream of the learners. What then the real nature of this success must be like? To be sure, the success here is the acquisition of command in both oral and written communication in English. Since successful oral and written communication generally pertains to the social, situational and professional needs, therefore, the learners should be tested in the types of communication needs they will encounter in real life. Moreover, the texts and study materials prescribed and the subsequent evaluation should all be accommodating the types of situations that one encounters in daily life. Classroom English should not be at variance with the kind of English that learners meet in the world of their regular intercourse – both in terms of the kind of situations that ask for linguistic indulgence and the kind of social variety or dialect that defines their prevailing linguistic environment. Among the educated Indians, we find that English is predominantly used in varied areas of communication, be it social, pedagogical, cultural or even political. As has already been stated, the most vital element in increasing the fluency in English is

the practice of using the language even outside the classroom under various social contexts. In real life situations, the learners can effectively improve their English if they use the same as much as possible. What needs to be appreciated here is that exposure aspect so vital to nurturing a spoken English performance is better and most naturally arranged for in this framework of motivated self participation in peer and group work programmes that are mostly informally generated and contents there develop more spontaneously with actual actors in social scenes contributing voluntarily to progressively enrich and guide to a desired logical conclusion the thematic subtleties of the matter involved. What further interests us is that the themes are in a way auto-manifesting and immersed in the life of the events as they emerge apparently sui generis in itself is naturally exciting, exhilarating and empowering as an experience from the learners' point of view. Hence, at the Tertiary level, while teaching English as the second language, there should be greater flexibility in course contents, teaching methods and evaluation. For this we need to consider greater autonomy in not only selecting the text but also in choosing the tasks to be assigned. Moreover, there should be autonomy in the material adapted keeping in mind the test modes opted for examination and also in the final evaluation of the various tasks and activities with or without the help of relevant technology. The type of learner autonomy adopted is vital in ensuring the emergence of a very efficient language user who can communicate in English without any type of inhibitions. This proficiency in English is vital for the learners since the prospective employers are always on the lookout for proficiency in English while considering the employability of an individual. The recruiting bodies that evaluate job applicants on the basis of their performances in the recruiting tests are actually the market players whose job it is to also identify the universities and institutes that have an evaluation system that is as good as the academic standards that they claim to have achieved. The graduates facing the interview board therefore will be assessed on their sincerity in pursuing their education and to what extent will they be able to contribute towards the concerned firm in real terms and actual work environments. An increasingly globalized world has thrown up newer and newer challenges towards the learners. "The ESL teaching in our present complex and competitive job market must have a complete understanding of the emerging challenges that an increasingly globalised world has come to engender. The classroom teacher has to realize the toughening climate of expectations that our degree distributing academic world faces

on its scrutiny by an employment-granting demanding labour-purchasing super certifying body like the corporate, industry, mega firms and multinationals, and in turn asks for a matching responsive dynamism in the classroom itself mostly to conform to a daily auditable skills consolidation and assessment charter” (Jack.C.Richards 2006). There is the utmost need to ensure full and effective use of the ESL teaching time in the class rooms in order to enable the learners to achieve the maximum. English language in India has to vie for exposure and use time slots with the other national regional languages as mediums of instruction. Hence due teaching time is something that the English language is always deprived of in a regular college routine. Therefore, there is difficulty in proper development of skills on the part of the learners. As has been stated in the beginning, most of the learners tend to treat English as another subject to be ‘cleared’ in the examination for promotion into the next stage. This attitude has hampered the development of efficiency in English to the desired level among the college learners. Moreover, since English is a foreign tongue, sufficient time should be allotted for its teaching in colleges. Extra time has to be devoted to teach and learn various skills and sub-skills that need to be developed in an inter-related manner and may be regarded as urgent during a programmed learning. Additionally, it may be recognized that English, because it is a different tongue, requires more time over which specific skills need be selectively and exclusively taught, tested and upgraded as per fresh evaluation of any new and essential need - identified new areas in terms of skills and sub-skills inter-related development of which may be deemed urgent at any point during a programmed learning. What needs to be emphasized is that always examples of successes of training courses of specified durations in matters of foreign language teaching to significantly high-motivation adult learners are cited to say in what poorer and dismal ways ESL teaching is conceived, planned, co-ordinated, conducted and completed. Though enough truth is to be appreciated in matters of organization and conduct of such courses and also the verifiable and visible success in the behavioural changes and confidence at a definite sense of achievement marked in the learners, the difference in the profile of these foreign language aspirants with cool, goal-bound determined adults and the college students of the adolescent years of fun, flamboyancy and extravagance is some very convincing matter without realizing the crucial and critical role of which it may be faulty to plan ESL teaching programmes – at all levels in general and college education level in particular. This very paper is

specifically interested to suggest that the characteristic differences in the make-up of both the learning groups need be duly recognized while making comparative evaluative comments on the success and failure of teaching/training programmes. Though foreign language short term courses in design and mode and method of delivery could by valid reasons be recommended models, infrastructural adjustments and administrative-academic co-ordination and restructuring may have to be imminently worked out for effective college level ESL teaching programmes. It is other than in these very practical ways that significant changes in our average college students' performances can hardly be dreamt of. This very practical consideration of how things are running in ESL teaching establishments in third world countries like India and why things despite best of attempts at teaching changes in objectives, priorities, methods and planning are reluctant to improve for the better is that the deserved status of English as something more than just any other subject is not granted in our regular and formal college education.

ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE ASSIGNED IN THE CLASSROOMS DURING CLT

CLT when applied to teaching ESL in India can be more effective if classroom activities that can ensure learners' involvement and participation can be incorporated. Some of these activities include:

Accuracy versus Fluency Activities

Fluency development in language use is one of the goals of CLT (Jack C. Richards 2006). A person is said to have achieved fluency in a language when he or she can use the language in a natural manner and can be engaged in meaningful and intelligible conversations for a long time despite lacking proper communicative competence. Fluency can be developed by creating such classroom activities wherein the learners must deal with meanings, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and also can make efforts to avoid breakdowns in communication. Accuracy Practice on the other hand focuses simply on the creation of correct examples of language use. Differences between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy can be summarized as follows:

Activities focusing on fluency

- Reflect natural use of language
- Focus on achieving communication
- Require meaningful use of language
- Require the use of communication strategies
- Produce language that may not be predictable
- Seek to link language use to context

Activities focusing on accuracy

- Reflect classroom use of language
- Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- Practice language out of context
- Practice small samples of language
- Do not require meaningful communication
- Control choice of language

Teachers can use a balance of fluency activities and accuracy and can use accuracy activities to support fluency activities. Accuracy work could either come before or after fluency work. For example, taking into account a learner's performance on a fluency task, the teacher can assign the learner grammatical or other task which the teacher believes will be able to help the learner in overcoming his or her shortcoming. One of the problems that can arise out of fluency task is whether fluency is being achieved at the expense of accuracy. While carrying out fluency task, the learner can concentrate so much on getting meanings across through any available communicative resources that the learner tends to depend overtly on vocabulary and communication strategies. As a result, the learner doesn't feel too inclined towards using accurate grammar or pronunciation.

Fluency work thus requires extra attention on the part of the teacher in terms of preparing students for a fluency task, or follow-up activities that provide feedback on language use. While dialogs, grammar, and pronunciation drills did not usually disappear from textbooks and classroom materials at this time, they now appeared as part of a sequence of activities that moved back and forth between accuracy activities and fluency activities. And the dynamics of classrooms also changed. Instead of a predominance of teacher-fronted teaching, teachers were encouraged to make greater use of small-group work. Pair and group activities gave learners greater opportunities to use the language and to develop fluency.

MECHANICAL, MEANINGFUL, AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE

Another set of activities comprise of mechanical, meaningful and communicative practices. They are discussed below:

Mechanical practice is that type of practice activity which is controlled and which the learners can carry out quite well without even having any knowledge or understanding of the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items.

Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practice the use of prepositions to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as ‘across from’, ‘on the corner of’, ‘near’, ‘on’, ‘next to’. They then have to answer questions such as “Where is the book shop? Where is the café?” etc. The practice is now ‘meaningful’ because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map.

Communicative practice refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example, students might have to draw a map of their neighbourhood and answer questions about the location of different places, such as the nearest bus

stop, the nearest café, etc. Exercise sequences in many CLT course books take students from mechanical, to meaningful, to communicative practice.

The distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities is similar to that given by Littlewood (1981), who groups activities into two kinds:

<i>Pre-communicative activities</i>	<i>Communicative activities</i>
Structural activities	Functional communication activities
Quasi-communicative activities	Social interactional activities

Functional communication activities require students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem. Social interactional activities require the learner to pay attention to the context and the roles of the people involved, and to attend to such things as formal versus informal language.

INFORMATION-GAP ACTIVITIES

An important aspect of communication in CLT is the notion of information gap. This refers to the fact that in real communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess. This is known as an information gap. More authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to ensure that information is obtained. While doing so, they will inevitably chalk out available vocabulary, grammar and communication strategies in order to complete a task.

Jigsaw activities

Jigsaw activities are also based primarily on the information-gap principle. In a jigsaw activity, the classroom is divided into groups and each group has a part of the information which can ensure the completion of the activity. The groups must fit together the information to complete the activity. In doing so, they have to communicate with each other and hence have to participate in meaningful communication practice.

OTHER ACTIVITY TYPES IN CLT

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Many other activity types have been used in CLT, including the following:

Task-completion activities: puzzles, games, map-reading, and other kinds of classroom tasks in which the focus is on using one's language resources to complete a task.

Information-gathering activities: student-conducted surveys, interviews, and searches in which students are required to use their linguistic resources to collect information.

Opinion-sharing activities: activities in which students compare values, opinions, or beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance that they might consider in choosing a date or spouse.

Information-transfer activities: These require learners to take information that is presented in one form, and represent it in a different form. For example, they may read instructions on how to get from A to B, and then draw a map showing the sequence, or they may read information about a subject and then represent it as a graph.

Reasoning-gap activities: These involve deriving some new information from given information through the process of inference, practical reasoning, etc. For example, working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables.

Role plays: activities in which students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

EMPHASIS ON PAIR AND GROUP WORK

Most of the activities discussed above reflect an important aspect of classroom tasks in CLT, namely that they are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Through completing activities in this way, it is argued, learners will obtain several benefits: A. They can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group. B. They will produce a greater amount of language than they would in teacher-fronted activities. C. Their motivational level is likely to increase. D. They will have the chance to develop fluency.

Teaching and classroom materials today need to make use of a wide variety of small-group activities.

NEED FOR THE RELATION BETWEEN CLASSROOM ACTIVITY AND REAL LIFE

The main motive of a language classroom is the preparation for survival in the real world. Real communication, on the other hand, is the predominating characteristic of CLT. Hence, the need for relation between classroom activity and real life has arisen. Some argued that classroom activities should as far as possible mirror the real world and use real world or “authentic” sources as the basis for classroom learning. Clarke and Silberstein (1977, 51) thus argued: Classroom activities should parallel the “real world” as closely as possible. Since language is a tool of communication, methods and materials should concentrate on the message and not the medium. The purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life. Arguments in favor of the use of authentic materials include:

They provide cultural information about the target language.

They provide exposure to real language.

They relate more closely to learners’ needs.

They support a more creative approach to teaching.

Others (e.g., Widdowson 1987) argued that it is not important if classroom materials themselves are derived from authentic texts and other forms of input, as long as the learning processes they facilitated were authentic. Critics of the case for authentic materials point out that:

Created materials can also be motivating for learners.

Created materials may be superior to authentic materials because they are generally built around a graded syllabus.

Authentic materials often contain difficult and irrelevant language.

Using authentic materials is a burden for teachers.

A factor that cannot be denied is that after the advent of CLT, the authenticity of the textbooks and other related teaching materials have increased manifold.

CONCLUSION

While dealing with English and second language pedagogy under the Indian context, the factor that has been accepted and gradually implemented both at the secondary and tertiary levels of pedagogy is that the best method of SLT in India is the CLT method. However, the various types of activities including classroom activities need to be made more compact so that they can be implemented quite effectively in the classrooms. As has been stated earlier, the global economic scenario has made it indispensable to relate classroom activity with real life situations. While teaching English as a second language in India, CLT with its various learners' practice based course modules is the best viable option.

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