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**Communicative  
Language Teaching Today**  
by Jack C. Richards

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## Introduction

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. And opportunities to learn English are provided in many different ways such as through formal instruction, travel, study abroad, as well as through the media and the internet. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Employers too insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. The demand for an appropriate teaching methodology is therefore as strong as ever.

In this booklet we will examine the methodology known as Communicative Language Teaching or CLT and explore the assumptions it is based on, its origins and evolution since it was first proposed in the 1970s, and how it has influenced approaches to language teaching today. Since its inception in the 1970s CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world. Many of the issues raised by a communicative teaching methodology are still relevant today, though teachers who are relatively new to the profession may not be familiar with them. This booklet therefore serves to review what we have learned from CLT and what its relevance is today.

## Chapter 1

# What is Communicative Language Teaching?

Perhaps the majority of language teachers today, when asked to identify the methodology they employ in their classrooms, mention “communicative” as the methodology of choice. However, when pressed to give a detailed account of what they mean by “communicative”, explanations vary widely. Does Communicative Language Teaching or CLT mean teaching conversation, an absence of grammar in a course, or an emphasis on open-ended discussion activities as the main features of a course? What do you understand by communicative language teaching?

### Task 1

Which of the statements below do you think characterize communicative language teaching?

1. People learn a language best when using it to do things rather than through studying how language works and practicing rules.
2. Grammar is no longer important in language teaching.
3. People learn a language through communicating in it.
4. Errors are not important in speaking a language.
5. CLT is only concerned with teaching speaking.
6. Classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real communication.
7. Dialogs are not used in CLT.
8. Both accuracy and fluency are goals in CLT.
9. CLT is usually described as a method of teaching.

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. Let us examine each of these issues in turn.

## The goals of language teaching

CLT sets as its goals the teaching of communicative competence. What does this term mean? Perhaps we can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of grammatical competence. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g. parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one

can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity which is understood by the term communicative competence.

Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies)

## Task 2

Consider the following sentences that are all requests for someone to open a door. Imagine that the context is normal communication between two friends. Check if you think they conform to the rules of grammatical competence (GC), communicative competence (CC), or both.

	GC	CC
Please to opens door.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want the door to be opened by you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you be so terribly kind as to open the door for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Could you open the door.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To opening the door for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you mind opening the door.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The opening of the door is what I request.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## How learners learn a language

Our understanding of the processes of second language learning has changed considerably in the last 30 years and CLT is partly a response to these changes in understanding. Earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence. Language learning was viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation. Good habits are formed by having students produce correct sentences and not through making mistakes. Errors were to be avoided through controlled opportunities for production (either written or spoken). By memorizing dialogs and performing drills the chances of making mistakes were minimized. Learning was very much seen as under the control of the teacher.

In recent years language learning has been viewed from a very different perspective.

It is seen as resulting from processes of the following kind:

- Interaction between the learner and users of the language
- Collaborative creation of meaning
- Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language
- Negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding
- Learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language
- Paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence
- Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things

## The kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning

With CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, towards the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work. These are discussed in chapter three.

### Task 3

Examine a classroom text, either a speaking text or a general English course book. Can you find examples of exercises that practice grammatical competence and those that practice communicative competence? Which kinds of activities predominate?

## The roles of teachers and learners in the classroom

The type of classroom activities proposed in CLT also implied new roles in the classroom for teachers and learners. Learners now had to participate in classroom activities that were based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students had to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They were expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning. And teachers now had to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error free sentences, the teacher had to develop a different view of learners' errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning.

### Task 4

What difficulties might students and teachers face because of changes in their roles in using a communicative methodology?

## Chapter 2

### The background to CLT

In planning a language course decisions have to be made about the content of the course, including decisions about what vocabulary and grammar to teach at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels and which skills and microskills to teach and in what sequence. Decisions about these issues belong to the field of **syllabus design** or **course design**. Decisions about how best to teach the contents of a syllabus belong to the field of **methodology**.

Language teaching has seen many changes in ideas about syllabus design and methodology in the last 50 years and CLT prompted a rethinking of approaches to syllabus design and methodology. We may conveniently group trends in language teaching in the last 50 years into three phases:

Phase 1: Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

Phase 2: Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)

Phase 3: Current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the present)

Let us first consider the transition from traditional approaches to what we can refer to as classic communicative language teaching.

Phase 1: Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

As we saw in chapter one, traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency. They were based on the belief that grammar could be learned through direct instruction and through a methodology that made much use of repetitive practice and drilling. The approach to the teaching of grammar was a deductive one: students are presented with grammar rules and then given opportunities to practice using them, as opposed to an inductive approach in which students are given examples of sentences containing a grammar rule and asked to work out the rule for themselves. It was assumed that language learning meant building up a large repertoire of sentences and grammatical patterns and learning to produce these accurately and quickly in the appropriate situation. Once a basic command of the language was established through oral drilling and controlled practice, the four skills were introduced, usually in the sequence of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Techniques that were often employed included memorization of dialogs, question and answer practice, substitution drills and various forms of guided speaking and writing practice. Great attention to accurate pronunciation and accurate mastery of grammar was stressed from the very beginning stages of language learning, since it was assumed that if students made errors these would quickly become a permanent part of the learner's speech.

## Task 5

Do you think drills or other forms of repetitive practice should play any role in language teaching?

Methodologies based on these assumptions include **Audiolingualism** (in north America) (also known as the **Aural-Oral Method**), and the **Structural-Situational Approach** in the UK (also known as **Situational Language Teaching**). Syllabuses during this period consisted of word lists and grammar lists, graded across levels.

In a typical audiolingual lesson, the following procedures would be observed:

*1. Students first hear a model dialog (either read by the teacher or on tape) containing key structures that are the focus of the lesson. They repeat each line of the dialog, individually and in chorus. The teacher pays attention to pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Correction of mistakes of pronunciation or grammar is direct and immediate. The dialog is memorized gradually, line by line. A line may be broken down into several phrases if necessary. The dialog is read aloud in chorus, one half saying one speaker's part and the other half responding. The students do not consult their book throughout this phase.*

*2. The dialog is adapted to the students' interest or situation, through changing certain key words or phrases. This is acted out by the students.*

*3. Certain key structures from the dialog are selected and used as the basis for pattern drills of different kinds. These are first practiced in chorus and then individually. Some grammatical explanation may be offered at this point, but this is kept to an absolute minimum.*

*4. The students may refer to their textbook, and follow-up reading writing, or vocabulary activities based on the dialog may be introduced.*

*5. Follow-up activities may take place in the language laboratory, where further dialog and drill work is carried out.*

*(Richards and Rodgers 2001, 64-65)*

In a typical lesson according to the situational approach, a three-phase sequence, known as the P-P-P cycle, was often employed: Presentation, Practice, Production.

**Presentation:** the new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

**Practice:** Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

**Production:** Students practice using the new structure in different contexts often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern.

The P-P-P lesson structure has been widely used in language teaching materials and continues in modified form to be used today. Many speaking or grammar-based lessons in contemporary materials for example, begin with an



introductory phase in which new teaching points are presented and illustrated in some way and where the focus is on comprehension and recognition. Examples of the new teaching point are given in different contexts. This is often followed by a second phase where the students practice using the new teaching point in a controlled context using content often provided by the teacher. The third phase is a free practice period during which students try out the teaching point in a free context and in which real or simulated communication is the focus.

The P-P-P lesson format and the assumptions on which it is based have been strongly criticized in recent years, however. Skehan (1996, p.18), for example, comments:

The underlying theory for a P-P-P approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology.

Under the influence of CLT theory, grammar-based methodologies such as the P-P-P have given way to functional and skills-based teaching, and accuracy activities such as drill and grammar practice have been replaced by fluency activities based on interactive small-group work. This led to the emergence of a 'fluency-first' pedagogy (Brumfit 1984) in which students' grammar needs are determined on the basis of performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus. We can distinguish two phases in this development, which we will call classic communicative language teaching, and current communicative language teaching.

## Phase 2: Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)

In the 1970s, a reaction to traditional language teaching approaches began and soon spread around the world as older methods such as Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching fell out of fashion. The centrality of grammar in language teaching and learning was questioned, since it was argued that language ability involved much more than grammatical competence. While grammatical competence was needed to produce grammatically correct sentences, attention shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs and so on. What was needed in order to use language communicatively was communicative competence. This was a broader concept than that of grammatical competence, and as we saw in chapter one, included knowing what to say and how to say it appropriately based on the situation, the participants and their roles and intentions. Traditional grammatical and vocabulary syllabuses and teaching methods did not include information of this kind. It was assumed that this kind of knowledge would be picked up informally.

The notion of communicative competence was developed within the discipline of linguistics (or more accurately, the sub-discipline of sociolinguistics) and appealed to many within the language teaching profession, who argued that communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of language teaching. The next question to be solved was, what would a syllabus look like that reflected the notion of communicative competence and what implications would it have for language teaching methodology? The result was Communicative Language Teaching. CLT created a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement when it first appeared as a new approach to language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, and language teachers and teaching institutions all around the world soon began to rethink their teaching, syllabuses and classroom materials. In planning language courses within a communi-

cative approach, grammar was no longer the starting point. New approaches to language teaching were needed.

Rather than simply specifying the grammar and vocabulary learners needed to master, it was argued that a syllabus should identify the following aspects of language use in order to be able to develop the learner's communicative competence:

1. as detailed a consideration as possible of the **purposes** for which the learner wishes to acquire the target language. For example, using English for business purposes, in the hotel industry, or for travel.
2. some idea of the **setting** in which they will want to use the target language. For example in an office, on an airplane, or in a store.
3. the socially defined **role** the learners will assume in the target language, as well as the role of their interlocutors. For example as a traveler, as a salesperson talking to clients, or as a student in a school setting.
4. the **communicative events** in which the learners will participate: everyday situations, vocational or professional situations, academic situations, and so on. For example: making telephone calls, engaging in casual conversation, or taking part in a meeting.
5. the **language functions** involved in those events, or what the learner will be able to do with or through the language. For example: making introductions, giving explanations, or describing plans.
6. the **notions** or concepts involved, or what the learner will need to be able to talk about. For example: leisure, finance, history, religion.
7. the skills involved in the “knitting together” of discourse: **discourse and rhetorical skills**. For example: story telling, giving an effective business presentation.
8. the **variety** or varieties of the target language that will be needed, such as American, Australian, or British English, and the levels in the spoken and written language which the learners will need to reach:
9. the **grammatical content** that will be needed
10. the **lexical content** or vocabulary that will be needed

(van Ek and Alexander 1980)

This led to two important new directions in the 1970s and 1980s – proposals for a communicative syllabus, and the ESP movement.

## Proposals for a communicative syllabus

A traditional language syllabus usually specified the vocabulary students needed to learn and the grammatical items they should master, normally graded across levels from beginner to advanced levels. But what would a communicative syllabus look like?

Several new syllabus types were proposed by advocates of CLT. These included:

- **A skills-based syllabus:** this focuses on the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and breaks each skill down into its component microskills: For example the skill of listening might be further described in terms of the following microskills:

- Recognizing key words in conversations
- Recognizing the topic of a conversation
- Recognizing speakers' attitude towards a topic
- Recognizing time reference of an utterance
- Following speech at different rates of speed
- Identifying key information in a passage

Advocates of CLT however stressed an *integrated-skills* approach to the teaching of the skills. Since in real life the skills often occur together, they should also be linked in teaching, it was argued.

- **A functional syllabus:** this is organized according to the functions the learner should be able to carry out in English, such as expressing likes and dislikes, offering and accepting apologies, introducing someone, and giving explanations. Communicative competence is viewed as mastery of functions needed for communication across a wide range of situations. Vocabulary and grammar are then chosen according to the functions being taught. A sequence of activities similar to the P-P-P lesson cycle is then used to present and practice the function. Functional syllabuses were often used as the basis for speaking and listening courses.

## Task 6

What are some advantages and disadvantages of a skills-based syllabus and a functional syllabus?

Other syllabus types were also proposed at this time. A notional syllabus was one based around the content and notions a learner would need to express, and a task syllabus specified the tasks and activities students should carry out in the classroom. (We will examine this in more detail in chapter 5). It was soon realized, however, that a syllabus needs to identify all the relevant components of a language, and the first widely adopted communicative syllabus developed within the framework of classic CLT was termed Threshold Level (van Ek and Alexander 1980). It described the level of proficiency learners needed to attain to cross the threshold and begin real communication. The Threshold syllabus hence specifies topics, functions, notions, situations, as well as grammar and vocabulary.

## English for Specific Purposes

Advocates of CLT also recognized that many learners needed English in order to use it in specific occupational or educational settings. For them it would be more efficient to teach them the specific kinds of language and communicative skills needed for particular roles, (e.g. that of nurse, engineer, flight attendant, pilot, biologist

etc) rather than just to concentrate on more and more general English. This led to the discipline of needs analysis – the use of observation, surveys, interviews, situation analysis, and analysis of language samples collected in different settings – in order to determine the kinds of communication learners would need to master if they were in specific occupational or educational roles and the language features of particular settings. The focus of needs analysis is to determine the specific characteristics of a language when it is used for specific rather than general purposes. Such differences might include:

- Differences in vocabulary choice
- Differences in grammar
- Differences in the kinds of texts commonly occurring
- Differences in functions
- Differences in the need for particular skills

ESP courses soon began to appear addressing the language needs of university students, nurses, engineers, restaurant staff, doctors, hotel staff, airline pilots, and so on.

## Task 7

Imagine you were developing a course in English for tour guides. In order to carry out a needs analysis as part of the course preparation:

- who would you contact?
- what kinds of information would you seek to obtain from each contact group?
- how would you collect information from them?

## Implications for methodology

As well as rethinking the nature of a syllabus, the new communicative approach to teaching prompted a rethinking of classroom teaching methodology. It was argued that learners learn a language through the process of communicating in it, and that communication that is meaningful to the learner provides a better opportunity for learning than through a grammar-based approach. The overarching principles of communicative language teaching methodology at this time can be summarized as follows.

- make real communication the focus of language learning
- provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know
- be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence
- provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency

- link the different skills such as speaking, reading and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world
- let students induce or discover grammar rules

In applying these principles in the classroom, new classroom techniques and activities were needed, and as we saw above, new roles for teachers and learners in the classroom. Instead of making use of activities that demanded accurate repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns, activities that required learners to negotiate meaning and to interact meaningfully were required. These activities form the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Classroom activities in Communicative Language Teaching

Since the advent of CLT, teachers and materials' writers have sought to find ways of developing classroom activities that reflected the principles of a communicative methodology. This quest has continued up to the present day, as we shall see later in the booklet. The principles on which the first generation of CLT materials are still relevant to language teaching today, so in this chapter we will briefly review the main activity types that were one of the outcomes of CLT.

### 3.1. Accuracy versus fluency activities

One of the goals of CLT is to develop fluency in language use. Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and work to avoid communication breakdowns.

Fluency practice can be contrasted with accuracy practice, which focuses on creating 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
- Choice of language is controlled

## Task 8

Can you give examples of fluency and accuracy activities that you use in your teaching?

The following are examples of fluency activities and accuracy activities. Both make use of group work, reminding us that group work is not necessarily a fluency task (See Brumfit 1984).

### Fluency tasks

A group of students of mixed language ability carry out a role play in which they have to adopt specified roles and personalities provided for them on cue cards. These roles involve the drivers, witnesses, and the police at a collision between two cars. The language is entirely improvised by the students, though they are heavily constrained by the specified situation and characters.

The teacher and a student act out a dialog in which a customer returns a faulty object she has purchased to a department store. The clerk asks what the problem is and promises to get a refund for the customer or to replace the item. In groups students now try to recreate the dialog using language items of their choice. They are asked to recreate what happened preserving the meaning but not necessarily the exact language. They later act out their dialogs in front of the class.

### Accuracy tasks

Students are practicing dialogs. The dialogs contain examples of falling intonation in Wh-questions. The class is organized in groups of three, two students practicing the dialog, and the third playing the role of monitor. The monitor checks that the others are using the correct intonation pattern and correct them where necessary. The students rotate their roles between those reading the dialog and those monitoring. The teacher moves around listening to the groups and correcting their language where necessary.

Students in groups of three or four complete an exercise on a grammatical item, such as choosing between the past tense and the present perfect, an item which the teacher has previously presented and practiced as a whole class activity. Together students decide which grammatical form is correct and they complete the exercise. Groups take turns reading out their answers.

Teachers were recommended to use a balance of fluency activities and accuracy and to use accuracy activities to support fluency activities. Accuracy work could either come before or after fluency work. For example, based on students' performance on a fluency task, the teacher could assign accuracy work to deal with grammatical or pronunciation problems the teacher observed while students were carrying out the task. An issue that arises with fluency work, however, is whether fluency work develops fluency at the expense of accuracy. In doing fluency tasks, the focus is on getting meanings across using any available communicative resources. This often involves a heavy dependence on vocabulary and communication strategies and there is little motivation to use 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.

### 3.2. Mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice

Another useful distinction that some advocates of CLT proposed was the distinction between three different kinds of practice – mechanical, meaningful, and communicative.

***Mechanical practice*** refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding 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 neighborhood and answer questions about the location of different places in their neighborhood, 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 following exercise, for example, is found in ***Passages 2*** (Richards and Sandy 1998).



## **Superlative adjectives**

Superlative adjectives usually appear before the noun they modify.

**The funniest** person I know is my friend Bob.

**The most caring** individual in our school is the custodian.

They can also occur with the noun they modify

Of all the people in my family, my Aunt Ruth is **the kindest**.

Of all my professors, Dr. Lopez is **the most inspiring**.

Superlatives are often followed by relative clauses in the present perfect.

My cousin Anita is **the most generous** person **I've ever met**.

**The closest** friend **I've ever had** is someone I met in elementary school.

**A** Complete these sentences with your own information, and add more details.

Then compare with a partner.

1. One of the most inspiring people I've ever known is ...

*One of the most inspiring people I've ever known is my math teacher. She encourages students to think rather than just memorize formulas and rules.*

2. The most successful individual I know is ...

3. Of all the people I know .... is the least self-centered.

4. The youngest person who I consider to be a hero is ...

5. The most moving speaker I have ever heard is ...

6. The most important role model I've ever had is ...

7. Of all the friends I've ever had .... is the most understanding.

8. One of the bravest things I've ever done is ...

**B** Use the superlative form of these adjectives to describe people you know. Write at least five sentences.

*brave honest interesting smart generous inspiring kind witty*

**C** Group work

Discuss the sentences you wrote in Exercises A and B. Ask each other follow-up questions.

A. My next-door neighbor is the bravest person I've ever met.

B. What did your neighbor do, exactly?

A. She's a firefighter, and once she saved a child from a burning building ...

If students read and practice aloud the sentences in the grammar box, this constitutes mechanical practice. Exercises A and B can be regarded as meaningful practice since students now complete the sentences with their own information. Exercise C is an example of communicative practice since it is an open-ended discussion activity.

## Task 9

Examine the activities in one unit of a course book. Can you find examples of activities that provide mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice? What type of activities predominate?

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

Pre-communicative activities	Communicative activities
Structural activities	Functional communication activities
Quasi-communicative activities	Social interaction activities

Functional communication activities require students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem (see below). 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.

### 3.3. 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 go beyond practice of language forms for their own sake and use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to obtain information. In so doing they will draw available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task. The following exercises make use of the information-gap principle:

Students are divided into A-B pairs. The teacher has copied two sets of pictures. One set (for A students) contains a picture of a group of people. The other set (for B students) contains a similar picture but it contains a number of slight differences from the A-picture. Students must sit back to back and ask questions to try to find out how many differences there are between the two pictures.

Students practice a role-play in pairs. One student is given the information she/he needs to play the part of a clerk in the railway station information booth and has information on train departures, prices etc. The other needs to obtain information on departure times, prices etc. They role play the interaction without looking at each other's cue cards.

### 3.4. Jig-saw activities

These are also based on the information-gap principle. Typically the class is divided into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete an activity. The class must fit the pieces together to complete the whole. In so doing they must use their language resources to communicate meaningfully and so take part in meaningful communication practice.

The following are examples of jigsaw activities.

The teacher plays a recording in which three people with different points of view discuss their opinions on a

topic of interest. The teacher prepares three different listening tasks, one focusing on each of the three speaker's points of view. Students are divided into three groups and each group listens and takes notes on one of the three speaker's opinions. Students are then rearranged into groups containing a student from groups A, B and C. They now role-play the discussion using the information they obtained.

The teacher takes a narrative and divides it into twenty sections (or as many sections as there are students in the class). Each student gets one section of the story. Students must then move around the class, and by listening to each section read aloud, decide where in the story their section belongs. Eventually the students have to put the entire story together in the correct sequence.

## Other activity types in CLT

Many other activity types have been used in CLT, among which are the following:

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

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

**opinion-sharing activities:** activities where students compare values, opinions, beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance which 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 work 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:

- they can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group
- they will produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities
- their motivational level is likely to increase
- they will have the chance to develop fluency

Teaching and classroom materials today consequently make use of a wide variety of small group activities.

## Task 10

What are some advantages and limitations of pair and group work in the language classroom?

## The push for authenticity

Since the language classroom is intended as a preparation for survival in the real world and since real communication is a defining characteristic of CLT, an issue which soon emerged was the relationship between classroom activities and real life. 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 Silbertstein (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.

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. However since the advent of CLT textbooks and other teaching materials have taken on a much more “authentic” look, reading passages are designed to look like magazine articles (if they are not in fact adapted from magazine articles) and textbooks are designed to similar standard of production as real world sources such as popular magazines.

## Task 11

How useful do you think authentic materials are in the classroom? What difficulties arise in using authentic materials?

## Chapter 4

# Current trends in communicative language teaching

Since the 1990s the communicative approach has been widely implemented. Because it describes a set of very general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching, and a communicative syllabus and methodology as the way of achieving this goal, communicative language teaching has continued to evolve as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed. Current communicative language teaching theory and practice thus draws on a number of different educational paradigms and traditions. And since it draws on a number of diverse sources, there is no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching. Rather, communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals and so on. The following core assumptions or variants of them underlie current practices in communicative language teaching.

## Ten core assumptions of current communicative language teaching

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Although errors are a normal product of learning the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing

## Task 12

What are the implications of the principles above for teaching in your teaching context?

Current approaches to methodology draw on earlier traditions in communicative language teaching and continue to make reference to some extent to traditional approaches. Thus classroom activities typically have some of the following characteristics:

- They seek to develop students' communicative competence through linking grammatical development to the ability to communicate. Hence grammar is not taught in isolation but often arises out of a communicative task, thus creating a need for specific items of grammar. Students might carry out a task and then reflect on some of the linguistic characteristics of their performance.
- They create the need for communication, interaction, and negotiation of meaning through the use of activities such as problem solving, information sharing, and role play.
- They provide opportunities for both inductive as well as deductive learning of grammar.
- They make use of content that connects to students' lives and interests
- They allow students to personalize learning by applying what they have learned to their own lives.
- Classroom materials typically make use of authentic texts to create interest and to provide valid models of language

Approaches to language teaching today seek to capture the rich view of language and language learning assumed by a communicative view of language. Jacobs and Farrell (2003) see the shift towards CLT as marking a paradigm shift in our thinking about teachers, learning, and teaching. They identify key components of this shift as follows:

1. Focusing greater attention on the role of learners rather than the external stimuli learners are receiving from their environment. Thus, the center of attention shifts from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction.
2. Focusing greater attention on the learning process rather than the products that learners produce. This shift is known as move from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction.
3. Focusing greater attention on the social nature of learning rather than on students as separate, decontextualized individuals.
4. Focusing greater attention on diversity among learners and viewing these difference not as impediments to learning but as resources to be recognized, catered to and appreciated. This shift is known as the study of individual differences.
5. In research and theory-building, focusing greater attention on the views of those internal to the classroom rather than solely valuing the views of those who come from outside to study classrooms, investigate and evaluate what goes on there, and engage in theorizing about it. This shift is associated with such innovations as qualitative research, which highlights the subjective and affective, the participants' insider views and the uniqueness of each context.
6. Along with this emphasis on context comes the idea of connecting the school with the world beyond as means of promoting holistic learning.

7. Helping students to understand the purpose of learning and develop their own purpose.
8. A Whole-to-part orientation instead of a part-to-whole approach. This involves such approaches as beginning with meaningful whole text and then helping students understand the various features that enable texts to function, e.g. the choice of words and the text's organizational structure.
9. An emphasis on the importance of meaning rather than drills and other forms of rote learning.
10. A view of learning as a life-long process rather than something done to prepare students for an exam.

Jacobs and Farrell suggest that the CLT paradigm shift outlined above has led to eight major changes in approaches to language teaching. These changes are:

1. **Learner autonomy:** giving learners greater choice over their own learning, both in terms of the content of learning as well as processes they might employ. The use of small groups is one example of this, as well as the use of self-assessment.
2. **The social nature of learning:** learning is not an individual private activity but a social one that depends upon interaction with others. The movement known as co-operative learning reflects this viewpoint.
3. **Curricular integration:** the connection between different strands of the curriculum is emphasized, so that English is not seen as a stand-alone subject but is linked to other subjects in the curriculum. Text-based learning (see below) reflects this approach, and seeks to develop fluency in text types that can be used across the curriculum. Project work in language teaching also requires students to explore issues outside of the language classroom.
4. **Focus on meaning:** meaning is viewed as the driving force of learning. Content-based teaching reflects this view and seeks to make the exploration of meaning through content the core of language learning activities (see chapter 5).
5. **Diversity:** learners learn in different ways and have different strengths. Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than try to force students into a single mould. In language teaching this has led to an emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies.
6. **Thinking skills:** language should serve as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, also known as critical and creative thinking. In language teaching this means that students do not learn language for its own sake but in order to develop and apply their thinking skills in situations that go beyond the language classroom.
7. **Alternative assessment:** new forms of assessment are needed to replace traditional multiple-choice and other items that test lower-order skills. Multiple forms of assessment (e.g. observation, interviews, journals, portfolios) can be used to build up a comprehensive picture of what students can do in a second language.
8. **Teachers as co-learners:** the teacher is viewed as a facilitator who is constantly trying out different alternatives, i.e. learning through doing. In language teaching this has led to an interest in action research and other forms of classroom investigation

These changes in thinking have not led to the development of a single model of CLT that can be applied in all settings. Rather, a number of different language teaching approaches have emerged which reflect different response to the issues identified above. While there is no single syllabus model that has been universally accepted,

a language syllabus today needs to include systematic coverage of the many different components of communicative competence, including language skills, content, grammar, vocabulary, and functions.

Different syllabus types within a communicative orientation to language teaching employ different routes to developing communicative competence. We will now examine some of the different approaches that are currently in use around the world and which can be viewed as falling within the general framework of communicative language teaching.

### Task 13

How have the 8 changes discussed by Farrell and Jacobs influenced language teaching practices in your school or district?



## Chapter 5

# Process-based CLT approaches – content based instruction and task-based instruction

In this chapter we will examine two current methodologies that can be described as extensions of the CLT movement but which take different routes to achieve the goals of communicative language teaching – to develop learners' communicative competence. We refer to them as process-based methodologies since they share as a common starting point a focus on creating classroom processes that are believed to best facilitate language learning. These methodologies are content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based instruction (TBI).

### 5.1. Content-based instruction

We noted above that contemporary views of language learning argue that it is seen as resulting from processes such as the following:

- Interaction between the learner and users of the language
- Collaborative creation of meaning
- Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language
- Negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding
- Learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language
- Paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence
- Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things

But how can these processes best be created in the classroom? Advocates of CBI believe that the best way to do so is by using content as the driving force of classroom activities and to link all the different dimensions of communicative competence, including grammatical competence, to content. Krahnke (1987:65) defines CBI as:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teaching the language itself separately from the content being taught.

#### Task 14

How important is content in a language lesson? What kinds of content do you think are of greatest interest to your learners?

Content refers to the information or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language rather than the language used to convey it. Of course any language lesson involves content, whether it be a grammar lesson, a reading lesson or any other kind of lesson. Content of some sort has to be the vehicle which holds the lesson or

the exercise together, but in traditional approaches to language teaching content is selected after other decisions have been made. In other words grammar, texts, skills, functions etc are the starting point in planning the lesson or the course book and after these decisions have been made, content is selected. For example a lesson may be planned around the present perfect tense. Once this decision has been made, decisions about the context or content for practicing the form will be decided. Content based teaching starts from a different starting point. Decisions about content are made first, and other kinds of decisions concerning grammar, skills, functions etc, are made later.

CBI is based on the following assumptions about language learning:

- People learn a language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself
- CBI better reflects learners' needs for learning a second language
- Content provides a coherent framework that can be used to link and develop all of the language skills

CBI can be used as the framework for a unit of work, as the guiding principle for an entire course, as a course that prepares students for mainstreaming, as the rationale for the use of English as medium to teaching some school subjects in an EFL setting, as the framework for commercial EFL/ESL materials.

***As the framework for a unit of work:*** CBI need not necessarily be the framework for an entire curriculum but can be used in conjunction with any type of curriculum. For example in a business communication course a teacher may prepare a unit of work on the theme of sales and marketing. The teacher, in conjunction with a sales and marketing specialist, first identifies key topics and issues in the area of sales and marketing to provide the framework for the course. A variety of lessons are then developed focusing on reading, oral presentation skills, group discussion, grammar, and report writing, all of which are developed out of the themes and topics which form the basis of the course.

***As the guiding principle for an entire course:*** many university students in an EFL context are required to take one or two semesters of English in their first year at university. Typically a mainstream multi-skilled course book is chosen as the basis for such a course and the courses covers the topics that occur in the book. Any topics that occur are simply incidental to practicing the four skills etc of the coursebook. Such courses, however, are sometimes organized around content. In one European university, for example, the first year English course consist of a sequence of modules spread over the academic year. The topics covered are:

1. drugs
2. religious persuasion.
3. advertising
4. AIDS
5. immigration
6. native Americans
7. modern architecture
8. microchip technology
9. ecology
10. alternative energy
11. nuclear energy
12. Dracula in novels and films
13. professional ethics

The topics are chosen so that they provide a framework around which language skills, vocabulary, and grammar can be developed in parallel.

## As a course that prepares students for mainstreaming:

Many courses for immigrant children in English-speaking countries are organized around a CBI framework. For example non-English background children in schools in Australia and New Zealand are usually offered an intensive language course to prepare them to follow the regular school curriculum with other children. Such a course might be organized around a CBI approach. An example of this approach is described by Wu (1996) in a program prepared for ESL students in an Australian high school. Topics from a range of mainstream subjects were chosen as the basis for the course and to provide a transition to mainstream classes. Topics were chosen primarily to cater to the widest variety of students' needs and interests. Linguistic appropriateness was another factor taken into account. Topics that fulfilled these criteria include multiculturalism, the nuclear age, sports, the Green movement, street kids, and teenage smoking.

## As the rationale for the use of English as medium to teaching some school subjects:

A logical extension of the CBI philosophy is to teach some school subjects entirely in English. For example, in Malaysia, where the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia (i.e. Malay), a decision was recently taken to use English as the medium of instruction for math and science in primary school and also for some courses at university. When the entire school curriculum is taught through a foreign language this is sometimes known as immersion education, an approach that has been used for many years in part of English speaking Canada. Parents from English-speaking families in some parts of Canada can thus opt to send their children to schools where French is the medium of instruction. This approach seeks to produce children who are bilingual in French and English, since they acquire English both at home and in the community.

## As the framework for commercial EFL/ESL materials

The series Cambridge English For Schools (Littlejohn and Hicks 1996), is the first EFL series in which content from across the curriculum provides the framework for the course. My own conversation course Springboard (Richards 1998) is also a content based course with themes and topics serving as the framework. The topical syllabus was chosen through surveys of the interests of Asian college students.

### Task 15

What problems does CBI pose for teachers? What are some advantages and limitations of this approach in your opinion?

## Issues in implementing a CBI approach

CBI raises a number of issues. A central issue is the extent to which focusing on content provides a sufficient basis for the development of the language skills. It has been pointed out, for example, that when English is used as the basis for teaching school subjects, learners often bi-pass grammatical accuracy since their primary concern

is mastery of content rather than development of accurate language use. This has been a common complaint in places like Hong Kong, where English has traditionally been the main medium for teaching school subjects in many schools. Another issue concerns whether language teachers have the necessary subject-matter expertise to teach specialized content areas such as marketing, medicine, ecology etc and the inevitable “dumbing down” of content in such cases. Lastly a key issue is that of assessment. Will learners be assessed according to content knowledge, language use, or both?

## 5.2. Task-based instruction

Task-Based instruction or TBI (also known as task-based teaching) is another methodology that can be regarded as developing from a focus on classroom processes. In the case of TBI the claim is that language learning will result from creating the right kinds of interactional processes in the classroom, and the best way to create these is to use specially designed instructional tasks. Rather than employ a conventional syllabus, particularly a grammar-based one, advocates of TBI argue that grammar and other dimensions of communicative competence can be developed as a by-product of engaging learners in interactive tasks. Of course most teachers make use of different kinds of tasks as part of their regular teaching. TBI however makes strong claims for the use of tasks and sees them as the primary unit to be used both in planning teaching (i.e. in developing a syllabus) and also in classroom teaching. But what exactly is a task? And what is not a task?

The notion of task is a somewhat fuzzy one, though various attempts have been made to define it. Some of the key characteristics of a task are:

- It is something that learners do or carry out using their existing language resources
- It has an outcome which is not simply linked to learning language, though language acquisition may occur as the learner carries out the task
- It involves a focus on meaning
- In the case of tasks involving two or more learners it calls upon the learners use of communication strategies and interactional skills

### Task 16

Do you make use of classroom activities that can be described as tasks in the sense described above? What do you think are the characteristics of a good task?

Many of the activities proposed in the early days of CLT can be described as tasks according to the definition above, i.e. information gap and information sharing activities that we find in many course books and ELT materials. From the point of view of TBI two kinds of tasks can usefully be distinguished:

**Pedagogical tasks** are specially designed classroom tasks that are intended to require the use of specific intreractional strategies and may also require the use of specific types of language (skills, grammar, vocabulary). A task in which two learners have to try to find the number of differences between two similar pictures is an example

of a pedagogical task. The task itself is not something one would normally encounter in the real world. However the interactional processes it requires provides useful input to language development.

**Real-world tasks** are tasks that reflect real-world uses of language and which might be considered a rehearsal for real world tasks. A role-play in which students practice a job interview would be a task of this kind.

Willis (1996) proposes six types of tasks as the basis for TBI:

1. **Listing tasks.** For example students might have to make up a list of things they would pack if they were going on a beach vacation.
2. **Sorting and ordering.** Students work in pairs and make up a list of the most important characteristics of an ideal vacation.
3. **Comparing.** Students compare ads for two different supermarkets.
4. **Problem-solving.** Students read a letter to an advice columnist and suggest a solution to the writer's problems.
5. **Sharing personal experience.** Students discuss their reactions to an ethical or moral dilemma.
6. **Creative tasks.** Students prepare plans for redecorating a house.

## Task 17

Can you give other examples of each of the six types of tasks above?

There are many other taxonomies of tasks based on particular features of tasks, such as whether they are one way, two way, simple, or complex. Many classroom activities do not share the characteristics of tasks as illustrated above and are therefore not tasks and are not recommended teaching activities in TBI. These include drills, cloze activities, controlled writing activities etc and many of the traditional techniques that are familiar to many teachers.

How does TBI in practice differ from more traditional teaching approaches? Recall our earlier discussion above of the principles of a P-P-P lesson or teaching format.

**Presentation:** the new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it

**Practice:** Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises

**Production:** Students practice using the new structure in different contexts often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern.

Advocates of TBI reject this model on the basis that a) it doesn't work and b) it doesn't reflect current understanding of second language acquisition. They claim that students do not develop fluency or progress in their

grammatical development through a PPP methodology. They also argue that second language learning research has shown that language learning results from meaningful interaction using the language and not from controlled practice. With TBI the focus shifts to using tasks to create interaction and then building language awareness and language development around task performance. How does this work in practice?

Willis proposes the following sequence of activities:

### **Pretask activities**

#### ***Introduction to topic and task***

- T helps Ss to understand the theme and objectives of the task, for example, brainstorming ideas with the class, using pictures, mime or personal experience to introduce the topic.
- Ss may do a pre-task, for example, topic-based odd-word-out games. T may highlight useful words and phrases, but would not pre-teach new structures.
- Ss can be given preparation time to think about how to do the task.
- Ss can hear a recording of a parallel task being done (so long as this does not give away the solution to the problem).
- If the task is based on a text, Ss read a part of it.

### **The task cycle**

#### ***Task***

- The task is done by Ss (in pairs or groups) and gives Ss a chance to use whatever language they already have to express themselves and say whatever they want to say. This may be in response to reading a text or hearing a recording.
- T walks around and monitors, encouraging in a supportive way everyone's attempt at communication in the target language.
- T helps Ss to formulate what they want to say, but will not intervene to correct errors of form.
- The emphasis is on spontaneous, exploratory talk and confidence building, within the privacy of the small group.
- Success in achieving the goals of the tasks helps Ss' motivation.

#### ***Planning***

- Planning prepares for the next stage where Ss are asked to report briefly to the whole class how they did the task and what the outcome was.
- Ss draft and rehearse what they want to say or write.
- T goes round to advise students on language, suggesting phrases and helping Ss to polish and correct their language.

- If the reports are in writing, T can encourage peer editing and use of dictionaries.
- The emphasis is on clarity, organization, and accuracy, as appropriate for a public presentation.
- Individual students often take this chance to ask questions about specific language items.

### ***Report***

- T asks some pairs to report briefly to the whole class so everyone can compare findings, or begin a survey. (N.B: There must be a purpose for others to listen). Sometimes only one or two groups report in full; others comment and add extra points. The class may take notes.
- T chairs, comments on the content of their reports, rephrases perhaps, but gives no overt public correction.

### **The language focus**

#### ***Analysis***

- T sets some language-focussed tasks, based on the texts student read or on the transcripts of they recordings they heard. Examples include the following.
  - Find words and phrases related top the topic or text.
  - Read the transcript, find words ending in “s” and say what the s means.
  - Find all the words in the simple past form. Say which refer to past time and which do not.
  - Underline and classify the questions in the transcript.
- T starts Ss off, then students continue, often in pairs.
- T goes round to help; Ss can ask individual questions.
- In plenary, then reviews the analysis, possibly writing relevant language up on the board in list form: Ss may make notes.

#### ***Practice***

- T conducts practice activities as needed, based on the language analysis work already on the board, or using examples from the text or transcript.

Practice activities can include:

Choral repetition of the phrases identified and classified

Memory challenge games based on partially erased examples or using

lists already on blackboard for progressive deletion

Sentence completion (set by one team for another)

Matching the past-tense verbs (jumbled) with the subject or objects they had in the text

Dictionary reference with words from text or transcript

## Task 18

How practical do you think Willis's proposal is? What issues does it raise for teachers?

TBI can in theory be applied in a number of different ways in language teaching:

**As the sole framework for course planning and delivery:** this appears to be the strategy proposed by Willis. Such an approach was used in a program described by Prabhu, (1987) in which a grammar based curriculum was replaced by a task based one in a state school system, albeit only for a short period.

**As one component of a course:** a task strand can also serve as one component of a course, where it would seek to develop general communication skills. This is the approach described by Beglar and Hunt (2002) - a 12 week course for second year Japanese university students. The task strand was based on a survey. Students designed a survey form then collected data, analyzed it and presented the results. In this case "task" is being used in ways others would use the term "project". At the same time students were also involved in classroom work related to a direct approach to teaching speaking skills, receiving explicit instruction in some of the specific strategies and microskills required for conversation.

**As a technique:** teachers who find the procedures outlined by Willis unrealistic and unmanageable over a long period could still use task-work from time to time as one technique from their teaching repertoire.

## Issues in implementing a task-based approach

Many issues arise in implementing a task based approach. To begin with, there is little evidence that it works any more effectively than the P-P-P approach it seeks to replace. Criteria for selecting and sequencing tasks are also problematic, as is the problem of language accuracy. Task-work may well serve to develop fluency at the expense of accuracy, as with some of the other activities suggested within a CLT framework. Content issues are also of secondary importance in TBI, making it of little relevance to those concerned with CBI or mainstreaming. The fact that TBI addresses classroom processes rather than learning outcomes is also an issue. In courses that have specific instructional outcomes to attain (e.g. examination targets) and where specific language needs have to be addressed rather than the general communication skills targeted in task work, TBI may seem too vague as a methodology to be widely adopted.



## Chapter 6

# Product-based CLT approaches – text-based instruction and competency-based instruction

In this chapter we will examine two approaches which focus more on the outcomes or products of learning as the starting point in course design than on classroom processes. They start by identifying the kinds of uses of language the learner is expected to be able to master at the end of a given period of instruction. Teaching strategies are then selected to help achieve these goals.

## 6.1. Text-based instruction

Text-based instruction, also known as a genre-based approach sees communicative competence as involving the mastery of different types of texts. Text here is used in a special sense to refer to structured sequences of language that are used in specific contexts in specific ways. For example in the course of a day a speaker of English may use spoken English in many different ways including the following:

- Casual conversational exchange with a friend
- Conversational exchange with a stranger in a lift
- Telephone call to arrange an appointment at a hair salon
- An account to friends of an unusual experience
- Discussion of a personal problem with a friend to seek advice

Each of these uses of language can be regarded as a text in that it exists as a unified whole with a beginning, middle, and end, it conforms to norms of organization and content, and it draws on appropriate grammar and vocabulary. Communicative competence thus involves being able to use different kinds of spoken and written texts in the specific contexts of their use. This view of language owes much to the work of the linguist Michael Halliday. According to Feez and Joyce (1998) TBI is thus based on an approach to teaching language which involves:

- Teaching explicitly about the structures and grammatical features of spoken and written texts
- Linking spoken and written texts to the cultural context of their use
- Designing units of work which focus on developing skills in relation to whole texts
- Providing students with guided practice as they develop language skills for meaningful communication through whole texts.

According to this view learners in different contexts have to master the use of the text types occurring most frequently in specific contexts. These contexts might include: studying in an English medium university, studying in an English medium primary or secondary school, working in a restaurant, working in an office, working in a store, socializing with neighbors in a housing complex.

### Task 19

What kinds of texts do your students encounter? What kind of texts do they need to learn to use?

## Contents of a text-based syllabus

As its name implies, the core units of planning in TBI are text types. These are identified through needs analysis and through the analysis of language as it is used in different settings. (Text based teaching thus has much in common with an ESP approach to language teaching, discussed above). However the syllabus also usually specifies other components of texts, such as grammar, vocabulary, topics and functions, hence it is a type of mixed syllabus, one which integrates reading, writing and oral communication and which teaches grammar through the mastery of texts rather than in isolation.

The following text-types are included in the Certificates in Spoken and Written English, which are widely taught language qualifications in Australia.

<b>Exchanges</b>	Simple exchanges relating to information and goods and services
	Complex or problematic exchanges
	Casual conversation
<b>Forms</b>	Simple formatted texts
	Complex formatted texts
<b>Procedures</b>	Instructions
	Procedures
	Protocols
<b>Information texts</b>	Descriptions
	Explanations
	Reports
	Directives
	Texts which combine one or more of these text types
<b>Story texts</b>	Recounts
	Narratives
<b>Persuasive texts</b>	Opinion texts
	Expositions
	Discussions

A text-based approach has been adopted in Singapore and forms the framework for the 2002 syllabus for primary and secondary schools. In the Singapore context the text types that are identified can be understood as

forming the communicative building blocks Singapore children need in order to perform in an English-medium school setting. The text types in the syllabus are:

Procedures	e.g. procedures used in carrying out a task
Explanations	e.g. explaining how and why things happen
Expositions	e.g. reviews, arguments, debates
Factual recounts	e.g. magazine articles
Personal recounts	e.g. anecdotes, diary/journal entries, biographies, autobiographies
Information reports	e.g. fact sheets
Narratives	e.g. stories, fables
Conversations and Short functional texts	e.g. dialogs, formal/informal letters, postcards, e-mail, notices

## Task 20

How many of the text types above are relevant to your learners needs?

The Singapore syllabus also identifies the grammatical items that are needed in order to master different text types. For example the following items are identified in relation to the text types of narratives and personal recounts at Secondary 2 level:

Adjectives, adjectival phrases and clauses

Adverbs and adverbials

Connectors to do with time and sequence

Direct and indirect speech

Nouns, noun phrases and clauses

Prepositions and prepositional phrases

Pronouns

Tenses to express past time

Verbs and verb phrases

# Implementing a text-based approach

Feez and Joyce (1998, 28-31) give the following description of how a text-based approach is implemented:

## **Phase1. Building the context**

In this stage students:

- Are introduced to the social context of an authentic model of the text-type being studied
- Explore features of the general cultural context in which the text-type is used and the social purposes the text-type achieves
- Explore the immediate context of situation by investigating the register of a model text which has been selected on the basis of the course objectives and learner need
- An exploration of register involves:

Building knowledge of the topic of the model text and knowledge of the social activity in which the text is used, e.g. job seeking

Understanding the roles and relationships of the people using the text and how these are established and maintained, e.g. the relationship between a job seeker and a prospective employer

Understanding the channel of communication being used, e.g. using the telephone, speaking face-to-face with members of an interview panel

### **Context building activities include:**

- Presenting the context through pictures, audiovisual materials, realia, excursions, field-trips, guest speakers etc
- Establishing the social purpose through discussions or surveys etc
- Cross cultural activities such as comparing differences in the use of the text in two cultures
- Comparing the model text with other texts of the same or a contrasting type e.g. comparing a job interview with a complex spoken exchange involving close friends, a work colleague or a stranger in a service encounter.

## ***Phase 2 Modelling and deconstructing the text***

In this stage students:

- Investigate the structural pattern and language features of the model
- Compare the model with other examples of the same text-type

Feez and Joyce (1998) comment that “modeling and deconstruction are undertaken at both the whole text, clause and expression levels. It is at this stage that many traditional ESL language teaching activities come into their own”.

### ***Phase 3 Joint construction of the text***

In this stage:

- Students begin to contribute to the construction of whole examples of the text-type
- The teacher gradually reduces the contribution to text construction, as the students move closer to being able to control text-type independently

Joint construction activities include:

- Teacher questioning, discussing and editing whole class construction, then scribing onto board or OHT
- Skeleton texts
- Jigsaw and information gap activities
- Small group construction of texts
- Dictogloss
- Self-assessment and peer assessment activities

### ***Phase 4 Independent construction of the text***

In this stage:

- Students work independently with the text
- Learner performances are used for achievement assessment

Independent construction activities include:

- Listening tasks, e.g. comprehension activities in response to live or recorded material such as performing a task, sequencing pictures, numbering, ticking or underlining material on a worksheet, answering questions
- Listening and speaking tasks, e.g. role plays, simulated or authentic dialogs
- Speaking tasks e.g. spoken presentation to class, community organization, workplace
- Reading tasks e.g. comprehension activities in response to written material such as performing a task, sequencing pictures, numbering, ticking or underlining material on a worksheet, answering questions
- Writing tasks which demand that students draft and present whole texts

### *Phase 5 Linking to related texts*

In this stage students investigate how what they have learnt in this teaching/learning cycle can be related to:

- Other texts in the same or similar context
- Future or past cycles of teaching and learning

Activities which link the text-type to related texts include:

- Comparing the use of the text-type across different fields
- Researching other text-types used in the same field
- Role-playing what happens if the same text-type is used by people with different roles and relationships
- Comparing spoken and written modes of the same text-type
- Researching how a key language feature used in this text-type is used in other text-types

### Task 21

What challenges does the methodology discussed above pose for teachers?

## Problems with implementing a text-based approach

As can be seen from the above summary, a text-based approach focuses on the products of learning rather than the processes involved. Critics have pointed out that an emphasis on individual creativity and personal expression is missing from the TBI model which is heavily wedded to a methodology based on the study of model texts and the creation of texts based on models. Likewise critics point out that there is a danger that the approach becomes repetitive and boring over time since the five phase cycle described above is applied to the teaching of all four skills.

## 6.2 Competency-based instruction

Competency-based instruction is an approach to the planning and delivery of courses that has been in widespread use since the 1970s. The application of its principles to language teaching is called Competency-Based Language Teaching an approach that has been widely used as the basis for the design of work-related and survival-oriented language teaching programs for adults. It seeks to teach students the basic skills they need in order to prepare them for situations they commonly encounter in everyday life. Recently competency-based frameworks have become adopted in many countries, particularly for vocational and technical education. They are also increasingly being adopted in national language curriculum, as has happened recently in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

## Task 22

What specific skills or competencies does a language teacher need to possess in order to be a good teacher? Think of things that are specific to language teaching and not qualities such as good classroom management -skills that are true of a teacher of any subject.

What characterizes a competency-based approach is the focus on the outcomes of learning as the driving force of teaching and the curriculum. Auerbach (1986) identifies eight features involved in the implementation of CBI programs in language teaching:

1. A focus on successful functioning in society. The goal is to enable students to become autonomous individuals capable of coping with the demands of the world.
2. A focus on life skills. Rather than teaching language in isolation, CBLT teaches language as a function of communication about concrete tasks. Students are taught just those language forms/skills required by the situations in which they will function. These forms are normally determined by needs analysis.
3. Task or performance-oriented instruction. What counts is what students can do as a result of instruction. The emphasis is on overt behaviors rather than on knowledge or the ability to talk about language and skills.
4. Modularized instruction. Language learning is broken down into meaningful chunks. Objectives are broken into narrowly focused sub-objectives so that both teachers and students can get a clear sense of progress.
5. Outcomes are made explicit. Outcomes are public knowledge, known and agreed upon by both learner and teacher. They are specified in terms of behavioral objectives so that students know what behaviors are expected of them.
6. Continuous and ongoing assessment. Students are pre-tested to determine what skills they lack and post-tested after instruction on that skill. If they do not achieve the desired level of mastery, they continue to work on the objective and are retested.
7. Demonstrated mastery of performance objectives. Rather than the traditional paper-and-pencil tests, assessment is based on the ability to demonstrate pre-specified behaviors.
8. Individualized, student-centered instruction. In content, level, and pace, objectives are defined in terms of individual needs; prior learning and achievement are taken into account in developing

curricula. Instruction is not time-based; students progress at their own rates and concentrate on just those areas in which they lack competence.

There are two things to note about competency-based instruction. First, it seeks to build more accountability into education by describing what a course of instruction seeks to accomplish. Secondly it shifts attention away from methodology or classroom processes, to learning outcomes. In a sense one can say that with this approach it doesn't matter what methodology is employed as long as it delivers the learning outcomes.

## Task 23

What are some advantages of a competency-based approach? In what situations would it be useful? When might it not work so well?

## Implementing a competency-based approach

As we saw above, CBI is often used in programs that focus on learners with very specific language needs. In such cases, rather than seeking to teach general English, the focus is on the specific language skills need to function in a specific context. This is similar then to an ESP approach. The starting point in course planning is therefore an identification of the tasks the learner will need to carry out within a specific setting (e.g. such as in the role of factory worker, restaurant employee, or nurse) and the language demands of those tasks. The competencies needed for successful task performance are then identified and used as the basis for course planning. For example part of a specification of competencies for a job training course includes the following:

### The student will be able to:

- Identify different kinds of jobs using simple help-wanted ads
- Describe personal work experience and skills
- Demonstrate ability to fill out a simple job application with assistance
- Produce required forms of identification for employment
- Identify social security, income tax deductions and tax forms
- Demonstrate understanding of employment expectations, rules, regulations and safety
- Demonstrate understanding of basic instruction and ask for clarification on the job
- Demonstrate appropriate treatment of co-workers (politeness and respect)

Materials' writers would then have to plan language lesson around these competencies.



## Task 24

Describe some of the competencies a learner would need to master in order to work effectively as a waitperson in a restaurant.

### Problems with implementing a competency-based approach

Critics of CBLT have argued that this approach looks easier and neater than it is. They point out that analyzing situations into tasks and underlying competencies is not always feasible or possible, and that often little more than intuition is involved. They also suggest that this is a reductionist approach. Language learning is reduced to a set of lists and such things as thinking skills are ignored.

## Conclusions

Since its inception in the 1970s, communicative language teaching has passed through a number of different phases. In its first phase, a primary concern was the need to develop a syllabus and teaching approach that was compatible with early conceptions of communicative competence. This led to proposals for the organization of syllabuses in terms of functions and notions rather than grammatical structures. Later the focus shifted to procedures for identifying learners' communicative needs and this resulted in proposals to make needs analysis an essential component of communicative methodology. At the same time methodologists focused on the kinds of classroom activities that could be used to implement a communicative approach, such as group work, task work, and information-gap activities.

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.

Some focus centrally on the input to the learning process. Thus content-based teaching stresses that the content or subject matter of teaching drives the whole language learning process. Some teaching proposals focus more directly on instructional processes. Task-based instruction for example, advocates the use of specially designed instructional tasks as the basis of learning. Others such as competency-based instruction and text-based teaching focus on the outcomes of learning and use outcomes or products as the starting point in planning teaching. Today CLT continues in its classic form as seen in the huge range of course books and other teaching resources that cite CLT as the source of their methodology. In addition, it has influenced many other language teaching approaches that subscribe to a similar philosophy of language teaching.

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## **about**

### professor Jack C. Richards

Born in New Zealand, Dr. Richards obtained a Master of Arts degree with first class honours in English from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1966. He obtained his Ph.D in Applied Linguistics from Laval University (a French-Language University) in Quebec City, Canada in 1972.

He has worked in many parts of the world, including New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States. After completing his PhD, he taught in Indonesia and was then appointed specialist in applied linguistics at the Regional Language Centre Singapore, under the auspices of the New Zealand Government. Later he was Senior Lecturer in English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, before being appointed Full professor in the Department of English as a Second Language at the University of Hawaii in 1981. In 1989 he returned to Hong Kong to set up a new department of English at the City University of Hong Kong, where he was head of the department of English and also chair professor. In 1996 he returned to his home country for two years to set up an MA program at the University of Auckland. In 1999 Dr. Richards retired from full-time university teaching and administration and since then has taught for part of each year at the Regional Language Centre, (RELC), in Singapore, while making his primary residence in Sydney Australia. At RELC where he is adjunct professor, Dr. Richards teaches language classes and on the MA in Applied Linguistics, as well as the RELC Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics. Professor Richards is also an adjunct professor at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, and gives guest lectures at Macquarie when he is in Australia.

Dr. Richards is a frequent speaker at conferences and workshops for language teachers, and visits some 12 countries every year. He is also a long term consultant to the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman.

He has written over 60 articles and 20 books. Many of his books and articles are classics in the field of second language teaching and have been translated into many different languages,

including Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Arabic. Among his well known professional books are *Error Analysis*, (1974), *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* (1996, with Charles Lockhart), *Beyond Training* (1998), *The Language Teaching Matrix* (1990), *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* (2001), *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (second edition 2001, with Ted Rodgers), *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (3rd edition 2002, with Richard Schmidt).

His classroom textbooks are also widely used and have helped millions of students around the world learn English. These include *Springboard*, *New Person to Person*, *Tactics for Listening*, *Passages*, and the best-selling series *New Interchange*.

Professor Richards has for many years made himself available as a speaker at many professional conferences without a fee, and supported scholarship programs in different parts of the world. In recognition of this the Presidents of De La Salle University, Manila and of Philippine Normal University, Manila, presented Professor Richards with a citation in 2001 which states:

*“Generous in sharing his expertise with junior members of the profession, unstinting in his efforts to promote excellent language teaching in all parts of the world, indefatigable in showing the applications of theory to teaching practice in the classroom, Dr. Richards is a fine example of what English language education and applied linguistics can accomplish.”*