Application of Communicative

Approach in College English Teaching

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Abstract

The main purpose of foreign language teaching is to communicate with language. Meanwhile, Communicative Approach is the effective way to achieve this goal. Through out more than twenty years, Communicative Approach has been confirmed and spread widely. Communicative Approach is the innovation of the foreign language teaching. Not only does it improve students' communicative competence effectively, but also carries out the quality education in foreign language teaching. This thesis will take a look at the Communicative Approach to the teaching of foreign languages. It is intended as an introduction to the Communicative Approach for the teachers and teachers-in-training who want to provide opportunities in the classroom for their students to engage in real-life communication in the target language. This thesis starts with the emergence, definition and features of Communicative Approach. It helps us understand CA continually. It also makes us aware of the obvious differences between Communicative Approach and other ways of language teaching. How to apply Communicative Approach to the teaching of foreign languages is mainly talked about. At last, three important pairs of connections in Communicative Approach are provided and the future of the Communicative Approach in foreign language teaching is described.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, Communicative Approach, Application

1. Introduction

The origins of the Communicative Language Teaching are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. In the late sixties, the current situational approach was questioned. British applied linguistics began to emphasize the fundamental dimension of language teaching at that time—the functional and communicative potential of language. Scholars like Christopher Candlin and Henry Widdowson drew on the work of British functional linguistics such as John Firth, and Halliday and American work in socio-linguistics like Dell Hymes as well as work in philosophy. They argue for focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.The impact from the European Common Market constituted another impetus for Communicative Approach. The increasing independence of European countries appealed for greater efforts to teach adults the major languages of the community. The council of Europe sponsored international conferences on language teaching. It published monographs and books about language teaching, and was active in promoting the formation of International Association of Applied Linguistics. In 1971, a group of experts began to investigate the possibility of developing language courses on a unit-credit system. At that time, Wilkins, a British linguist proposed a functional or communicative syllabus for language teaching. He attempted to demonstrate the systems of meaning that lay behind the communicative uses of language. He described two types of meanings, the notional categories and categories of communicative functions. He had his ideas published in Notional Syllabus. The work of the Council of Europe; the writings of Wilkins, Widdowson, Candlin, Chrisopher Brumfit and Keith Johnson; the rapid application of these ideas by textbook writers; and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers, and even governments gave prominence nationally and internationally to what came to be referred to as the Communicative Approach, or simply Communicative Language Teaching.

2. Communicative Approach

2.1 The definition of CA

The Communicative Approach, also called Communicative Language Teaching or Functional Approach, was the British version of the movement in the early 1960s in reaction to the structuralism and behaviorism embodied in the audio-linguistics.

Communicative Approach is a set of principles about teaching including recommendations about method and syllabus where the focus is on meaningful communication not structure, use not usage. In this approach, students are given tasks to accomplish using language instead of studying the language. The syllabus is based primarily on functional

development, not structural development. In essence, a functional syllabus replaces a structural syllabus. There is also less emphasis on error correction as fluency and communication become more important than accuracy. Authentic and meaningful language input becomes more important as well. The class becomes more student-centered as students accomplish their tasks with other students, while the teacher plays more of an observer role.

2.2 The features and principles of CA

2.2.1 Features

1) Focus on meaning.

2) Communicative competence is the desired goal.

3) Learner-centered.

4) Fluency is the primary goal.

5) Students are expected to interact with other people, either in oral practice, through pair and group work, or in their writings.

6) Dialogues, if used, center around communicative functions.

7) Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

8) Task-based.

2.2.2 Principles

1) The communicative principle: Activities that involve real communication promote learning.

2) The task principle: Activities in which language is used to carry out meaningful tasks promote learning.

3) The meaningfulness principle: Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

3. Chinese foreign language education

3.1 The actuality of Chinese education

Through out the history, the traditional grammar-translation method is applied in the foreign language teaching. The foreign language learning of students is in fact a process of input of large amount of language knowledge. The necessary output is writing under the instructions about the writing styles and the common sense of style. After they finish it, the teacher just checks the grammar and spelling errors. The substance of language application is not communication but written output. Especially, the knowledge about culture background is extremely lean. In class, the teachers just explain the grammar and vocabulary in details or translate the meaning of words and sentences. Therefore, although the students can get a high mark in examination, some even have passed CET-4 or CET-6, the communicative competence is extremely poor.

4. Application of CA

4.1 Some preparations before class

4.1.1 Materials

(1) Text-based materials

A typical lesson consists of a theme, a task analysis, for thematic development a practice situation description, a stimulus presentation, comprehension questions and paraphrase exercises.

(2) Task-based material

A variety of games, roles plays, simulations, and task-based communication activities have been prepared to support Communicative Language Teaching classes.

(3) Authentic Materials

Many proponents of Communicative Language Teaching have advocated the use of "authentic" "real-life" materials in the classroom. These might include language based realia, such as signs, magazines, advertisements, and newspapers, or graphic and visual sources around which communicative activities can be built.

4.1.2 Procedures

Fincocchiaro and Brumfit once propose communicative procedures like this:

(1) Presentation of a brief dialogue preceded by a motivation and discussion of the function and situation—people, roles, setting, topic and informality of language.

(2) Oral practice of each utterance of the dialog segment.

(3) Questions and answers based on the dialog topics and situation itself.

(4) Questions and answers related to the students' personal experiences but centered around the dialog theme.

(5) Study one of the basic communicative expressions in the dialog or one of the structures which exemplify the function.

(6) Learners' discovery of generalizations or rules underlying the functional expression or structure.

(7) Oral recognition, interpretative activities.

(8) Oral production activities.

(9) Sampling of the written homework assignment, if given.

(10) Evaluation of learning (oral only).

How to sequence these things is not the most important. What really effects is the principles to follow. From the above procedures, we summarize as follows:

In a communicative lesson, the teacher should:

(1) Presentation of the topic

(2) Motivation of the students to participate in classroom activities

(3) Discussion of situations and functions

(4) Study, analysis and application of typical structures

(5) Activities related to both the topic and students' experiences

(6) Evaluation of tasks

4.2 Using pictures and games in classroom

4.2.1 Using pictures in classroom

(1) Why use pictures?
By providing a wide range of contexts, students can meet a range of situations and experience that will equip them for real life communication. Specifically, pictures

contribute to:
a. interest and motivation
b. a sense of the content of the language
(2) Five primary principles of using pictures in class
A. Easy to prepare
B. Easy to organize
C. Interesting
D. Meaningful and authentic
E. Sufficient amount of language
(3) Some examples for using pictures
Topic from pictures
a. show pictures from inside the book.

b. Ask the students to tell you as much as they can about the topic of the story.

4.2.2 Using games in classroom

(1) Why use games?

Language learning is a hard task that can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practise language skills. Games are highly motivated since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation.
(2) When to Use Games
Nowadays, games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. They can be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen.
(3) How to Choose Games
A. A game must be more than just fun.
B. A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
C. A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.

D. A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

(4) Some ways to use games:

A. Picking the apples

B. Competition

C. Climbing the ladder

D. Hunting the match picture

F. Twenty Questions

G. Word Magic

You can create all kinds of appropriate meaningful and flexible games and amusing activities and educational activities are necessary to keep the class enjoyable and create a sense of fun. However, we must be careful that the activities do not last too long or the children will become bored.

5. Three pairs of connections in CA

5.1 Teacher vs. student roles

The emphasis in Communicative Approach on the process of communication rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles from those found in more traditional second language classrooms.

Teachers' role

Instead of being the dominating authority in the classroom, the teacher in the Communicative Approach facilitates the communicative process among all the learners and between the students and the various tasks, giving guidance and advice when necessary. Furthermore, teachers act as independent participants within the learning-teaching group.

However, this does not mean that once a teaching activity is in progress, the teacher should become a passive observer. It is still the teacher's obligation to develop the students' potential through external direction. Although the teacher may be nondirective in general, it is still the teacher's responsibility to recognize the distinctive qualities in the students and to help the students develop those qualities.

In contemporary English teaching, the teacher's function should become less dominant than before, but no less important. For example, his/her role as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group is closely related to the objective of his/her role as communicative activator. These roles include a set of secondary roles for the teacher: first, as an organizer of resources and as a resource; and second, as a guide and manager of activities. A third role for the teacher is that of a researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge, abilities, and actual experience in the nature of learning (Breen and Candlin 1980).

One of the important components of communicative competence is the ability to select a linguistic form that is appropriate for a specific situation (Hymes 1981). Language has been redefined as an integral part of the culture with which it is connected today. There is plenty of evidence that a good command of English grammar, vocabulary, and syntax does not necessarily add up to a good mastery of English. There is a set of social conventions governing language form and behavior within a communicative group.

Students' role

Because in Communicative Approach the students' performance is the goal, students need much practice. So students should be centered. The teacher must step back and observe, sometimes acting as a referee or monitor. A classroom during a communicative activity is far from quiet, however. The students do most of the speaking, and frequently the scene of a classroom during a communicative exercise is active, with students leaving their seats to complete a task. Because of the increased responsibility to participate, students may find they gain confidence in using the target language in general. Students are more responsible managers of their own learning.

5.2 Accuracy vs. fluency

There is no denying the fact that both accuracy and fluency are essential in language learning. However, in English teaching dominated by the grammar-translation method, accuracy is emphasized more than fluency.

Modern society is in need of people who not only read English well but also speak it fluently. As for beginners, they must have a solid foundation in English, which is primarily, though not solely, built on accuracy. It is believed that once bad language habits are formed, they are difficult to break. Moreover, for the students who are learning English in a non- English-speaking country, there is little chance for them to learn an acceptable form of English outside the classroom. So, in order to achieve accuracy, students need rigorous language training in their classes.

However, accuracy does not mean 100% error-free, an impossible achievement. But during the controlled and semi-controlled language practice periods for beginners, a high degree of accuracy should be required. Not only are the students encouraged to make as few errors as possible, but they are expected to manipulate the language system as spontaneously and flexibly as possible.

Of course, fluency in language learning goes far beyond that. Soon after the students have mastered the language forms, they ought to be given intensive fluency practice. Then, as control is withdrawn, students can use the language more freely. At this stage, errors should be tolerated, and the teacher should emphasize that error making is not at all disgraceful but a natural and common practice. Teachers assess the students' performances at the end of each fluency practice so that the students are aware of their weaknesses and become more and more conscious of their errors. In this way, accuracy and fluency are practiced almost simultaneously. Accuracy and fluency are not mutually exclusive, but are interdependent.

5.3 Linguistic competence vs. communicative competence

The relation between linguistic competence and communicative competence is also important. At the fundamental stage, linguistic competence is the spontaneous, flexible, and correct manipulation of the language system. Communicative competence involves principles of appropriateness and a readiness on the part of the learner to use relevant strategies in coping with certain language situations. Linguistic competence, then, is the basis of communicative competence. Without linguistic competence, there is no communicative competence. But communicative competence does not automatically result from linguistic competence. Forms of classroom activities such as role playing, simulations and real-life interactions should be used to provide as much practice as possible for students to develop communicative competence while practicing linguistic competence.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Communicative Approach is an innovation of foreign language teaching, aiming at improving students' communicative competence. It also helps to carry out quality education in foreign language teaching.

Meanwhile, with the rapid development of EFL teaching in non-English-speaking countries, English teachers have become more aware that the exclusive use of either the Communicative Approach or Grammar-Translation method does not suit all English teaching situations. Teachers have also discovered that no single teaching method deals with everything that concerns the form, the use and the content of the target language.

So we can't throw away the traditional teaching method completely. To make Communicative Approach work well in China, we must reconcile it with the traditional Grammar-Translation method that is still popularly used in China.

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