Review

Communicative language learning as a motivating factor

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Language is seen as a system for communicative purposes and as such it involves more than just a structural organization. Indeed this view of language considers different kinds of competence which make communication really meaningful: linguistic, sociolinguistic discourse, and strategic. Linguistic competence is what we usually regard as the basis of grammatical structures; sociolinguistic competence has to do with the social context in which language is used; discourse competence refers to the relationship between the elements of language and their proper combination to convey meaningful outcomes; strategic competence relates to the ways we deal with communication appropriately. On the other hand, language learning is viewed as the result of the process of using language communicatively. The proponents of this approach believe that in order to learn a language, students should be in contact with meaningful and authentic language most of the learning time.

Key words: Communication, linguistics, competence, teaching, language.

INTRODUCTION

Concept of communication

Genuine interactional speech differs from classroom discourse in many ways. With the exception of the teacher, no one is a fluent speaker and of course the general expectation is that language classes should provide opportunities for learning and practice as well. Even so, teachers must not allow themselves to be restricted to the language of the textbooks. Students must learn to cope with utterances containing language they have not previously met.

Features of natural communication

1. Purpose.
2. Unpredictability (if this was not the case, there would be no point in our talking at all).
3. Slips and hesitations (longer utterances, especially, are liable to violate the grammar norms of written language).
4. Creativity (even children produced unmodelled language forms).
5. Spontaneously (we compose as we talk).
6. Economy (words are not wasted. We take into account what others know about a situation, avoiding redundancies)
7. Intonation and stress (through the music of language we express attitudes and feelings).
8. Comprehension checks (we look at people with whom we talk seeking for verbal / visual checks if they understand).
9. Turn taking (speakers interact, signaling when they want to take over the speech act or to surrender it. The hand over is usually non-verbal, by facial expression/gesture, sometimes by intonation).

This list may be added. It is not finished. According to the new Encyclopedia Britannica (1988), "communication" is the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols. Thus, we may add, that communication is always and necessarily meaningful.

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNICATION

What requirements must a learner meet to be considered "communicatively competent?"
The learner must attain as high a degree as possible of linguistic competence (that is, it must develop skill in manipulating the language, to the point where s/he can use it spontaneously and flexibly in order to express his intended message). The learner must distinguish between the forms, which when mastered become part of his linguistic competence, and the communicative functions that they perform, that is, the items mastered, as part of a linguistic system must also be understood as part of a communicative one. The learner must develop skills and strategies for using language to communicate meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations. The learner must become aware of the social meaning of language forms. For many learners this may not entail the ability to vary their own speech to suit different social circumstances, but rather the ability to use generally acceptable forms and avoid potentially offensive ones.

Figure 1, implies that some areas of linguistic competence are essentially irrelevant to communicative competence, but that, in general, linguistic competence is a part of a communicative one.

This modified part-whole relationship implies, in turn, that teaching comprehensively for linguistic competence will necessarily leave a large area of communicative competence untouched, whereas teaching equally comprehensively for communicative competence will necessarily cater for all but a small part of linguistic competence. If we really have communication as the major aim of our language teaching, we would be well advised to focus on communicative skills, in the knowledge that this will necessarily involve developing most areas of linguistic competence as an essential part of the product rather than focus on linguistic skills and risk failing to deal with a major part of whatever constitutes communicative competence.

COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH AS THE MAIN MOTIVATING FACTOR

The proponents of this approach believe that in order to learn a language, students should be in contact with meaningful and authentic language most of the learning time.

One of the main objectives is to help learners to become effective users of Foreign Language (FL), which implies a set of actions designed to achieve the expected outcomes. Other objectives, which seem to be more specific and derived in part from the one mentioned are:

1. To communicate in the target language with suitable fluency and accuracy;
2. To develop the four basic skills from a communicative standpoint;
3. To train the learners in the ability to express not only ideas but also judgments and needs.

The content of this approach is made up of those aspects of language that contribute to effective oral communication and interaction—resulting from negotiation between the participants. Therefore, the listening and the speaking skills are stressed from the very beginning of language learning. This does not mean that the skills of reading and writing are ignored, however. The grammar and vocabulary items are seen as means to achieve the goal of effective communication. Their selection is determined by the utility they can offer to the development of the functions, notions, and topics which constitute the backbone of the course or program. It is the need of the students which mostly determine the topics they can talk about and the functions they need to deal with. Pronunciation is deemed essential but not to the extent of considering it a must for the students to achieve native-like proficiency. What counts here is that they can make themselves understood without interrupting the activity of communication.

All this, of course, takes time and involves noise and movement and personal relations and above all communication, one with another: the vital thing so often cut off in a schoolroom. In marked contrast to the discrete-point grammar focus of audio-lingual days, the past decade in language teaching has been one of growing concern with meaning. The importance of meaningful language use at all stages in the acquisition of second or foreign language communicative skills has come to be recognized by researchers and teachers around the world, and many curricular innovations have been developed in response. Published reports illustrate well, moreover, the international scope of such innovations. What has come to be known as communicative language teaching (CLT) is not an American, Canadian, or European phenomenon, but rather a universal effort that has found inspiration and direction in the interaction of initiatives, both theoretical and applied, in many different contexts.

Central to an understanding of communicative language teaching is an understanding of the term ‘communicative competence’. However, it is necessary to draw special
attention to the difference between linguistic and 'communicative competence'. Coined by a sociolinguist (Hymes, 1971) to include knowledge of sociolinguistic rules, or the appropriateness of an utterance, in addition to knowledge of grammar rules, the term has come to be used in language teaching contexts to refer to the ability to negotiate meaning, to successfully combine knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules in communicative interactions. The term applies to both oral and written communication, in academic as well as non-academic settings. The nature and development of the abilities such communication involves continue to be a focus of research and discussion.

Meanwhile, responding to learner needs and relying for guidance on research findings and experience gathered to date, language teachers and methodologists have proceeded to develop teaching strategies and techniques that put an emphasis on meaning. Perhaps, the one word that best characterizes these strategies and techniques is 'diverse'. The search for the ideal audio-lingual teaching materials has been abandoned along with the search for a universal teaching method suited to the many contexts of language learning. More than a ready-made method of teaching, language teachers today need an appreciation both of language as expressions of self and of the ways in which meanings are created and exchanged. They need to understand the language acquisition process as one that involves learners not only intellectually, but physically and psychologically. The balance of features will and should vary from one syllabus to another depending on the particular context of which it is a part. Where communicative competence is a goal, however, the most successful programs all have one feature in common: they involve the whole learner in the 'experience' of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events in an effort to summarize, as well as provide some perspective on recent developments in foreign language teaching, this article will (a) sketch the theoretical and research bases for what has come to be known as communicative language teaching and (b) outline a five-component approach to shaping a communicative syllabus. Each component includes a collection of learning activities based on principles of communicative language teaching, activities that correspond to different facets of the language acquisition process.

LINGUISTIC THEORY

Most accounts of post-1970 developments in language teaching cite the attack by Chomsky (1959) on the narrow behaviorist stimulus-response view of language and language learning espoused by Skinner. It was Chomsky who shook the Skinnerian theories of language learning, upon which the audio-lingual approach to language teaching was based- an approach with which are associated such terms as stimulus, response, drill, pattern, reinforcement, mastery, and four skills (four because listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in that order, were treated as discrete skills, almost as if they had boundaries around them and could be developed in isolation with little regard for either their complexity or their interrelatedness).

In redirecting American linguistic studies away from its preoccupation with surface structural features and toward a concern with deep semantic structures, or the way in which sentences are understood, Chomsky helped clear the way for the development of more communicative approaches to second-language teaching; but communicative language teaching is much more. Chomsky's focus is on the interpretation of sentences.

When he speaks of linguistic competence he is talking about the sentence-level grammatical competence of an ideal speaker-listener of a language. Communicative competence, on the other hand, has to do with more than sentence-level grammatical competence. It has to do with social interaction. Communicative competence has to do with real speaker-listeners who interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in many different settings.

Communication, then, is a negotiation of meaning between a speaker and a hearer, an author and a reader. This is seen in the many spontaneous interpersonal transactions in which we participate daily. It is equally true in the case of print, radio, television, and other channels of "mass" communication. A text (written or oral) takes on meaning only as it is interpreted by a reader, listener, or viewer. That interpretation depends, in turn, on the context attributed to the text by the one who interprets it. Why does it exist? To what does it refer? What does it imply? In other words, what is its function? The functional analysis of language has a long tradition in linguistic inquiry.

However, semantic, or meaning, approaches to the study of language were disregarded by structural linguists such as Bloomfield (1933) who so strongly influenced second-language teaching in the mid-20th century. For structuralists, attempts to interpret an utterance-to put it in a context with considerations of who, when, why, etc.-lay outside the realm of theoretical linguistics proper. Thus, it was that formal analysis, that is, the analysis of the surface grammatical structure of language, that would provide the basis for the teaching and testing materials developed in the 1950s and 1960s and still in widespread use today. A concern for communicative competence, however, has brought us face-to-face with the contexts in which language is used. Once meaning is taken into account, matters of negotiation and interpretation are seen to be at the very heart of communicative syllabus. Language in use that is, language in context or setting, can no longer be ignored. The background perspective needed to understand how people talk, and what it means when they do, comes not from linguistics alone. To understand language as human behavior in the full social context in which it occurs, we must look to
perspectives provided by a broad range of disciplines; among them are philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, literary criticism, and communication theory.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH

The development of theoretical insights into the nature of language and language behavior has been accompanied in recent years by direct investigation of the language learning process itself. Yet, there was a time in the not-so-distant past, back in the 1950s and 1960s, when the answers to questions of how to improve language teaching were thought to be found in extrapolations from linguistics (or language theory) and psychology (or learning theory). It was presumed that together these disciplines would tell us about language learning and ways to improve classroom teaching. To illustrate, Brooks based his influential 1960 book, ‘Language and Language Learning’, on a stimulus-response reinforcement model of first language acquisition in which awareness and understanding of language rules were minimized.

Furthermore, he advocated the separate introduction of reading and writing activities after the introduction of listening and speaking on the grounds that this procedure paralleled that of first-language acquisition. Yet, Brooks (1966) acknowledged that his theory was “largely an act of faith; research to prove the validity of its basic principles is scanty.” Today we are much more conscious of the need to base recommendations for teaching on observation of language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. The field of both first and second language acquisition research expanded rapidly in the 1970s and, not content to look only at sentence-level grammatical structures, researchers are focusing now, in the 1980s, on the functions and features of discourse.

Discourse analysis is the analysis of connected speech or writing that extends beyond a single sentence or utterance, the study of the pragmatic functions of language. By focusing on discourse, researchers look at language behavior.

How do learners use what forms they have at their disposal to meet the functions of language? In as much as second-language learners, by definition, already communicate in a first language, there is no such thing as a true beginner in a second language. Learners are already familiar with the functions of language and have developed strategies to meet these functions in a variety of contexts, both familiar and new. By looking at language use in context, or discourse, researchers can get a better sense of the learning strategies of different learners and of the ways in which classroom environments can be managed to promote language learning.

COMMUNICATIVE SYLLABUS DESIGN

As it was noted earlier, the elaboration of new theories of language and the language learning process, along with the demands of learners and program sponsors for curricula that address real-life communicative needs, has led to many initiatives in teaching materials. Best known among these initiatives are functional approaches to syllabus design. Following the example of the Council of Europe (Van, 1975), syllabus designers have looked increasingly to language functions to provide content and sequence in teaching materials. However, the problems they face are at least twofold:

(a) Adequate descriptions of language functions and how they are realized are nonexistent;
(b) No workable guidelines have been developed as yet, for the selection and sequence of functions from among virtually unlimited possibilities.

Most important for classroom teachers to understand, no doubt, is that regardless of whether it is structurally or functionally based, a syllabus is no more than a list of features to be presented. It describes the desired outcome of a syllabus but says little about how that outcome is best attained. Simply put, communicative language teaching is not synonymous with a functional syllabus design. This is not to say that functional analysis is unimportant for materials development. To the contrary, it is a most welcome antidote to what has been a preoccupation with structure at the expense of meaning and purpose. The wisest methodologists are perhaps those who propose a combination of structural and functional approaches to syllabus design. This combination might retain a structural core to which selected functions are then related; or it might relate both functional and structural features to a core of second-language themes or experiences. In either case, the specifications of the functions introduced would presumably reflect the second-language communicative goals of the learners.

Communicative language teaching requires more, however, than attention to strategies for presenting the structures and functions of language. Above all, it requires the involvement of learners in the dynamic and interactive processes of communication. A communicative classroom allows learners to experience language as well as to analyze it. Second language acquisition research has documented the importance of communication experience in the development of communicative competence. Most effective are a combination of experiences that involve the learner in both a physical and psychological sense, as well as in an intellectual sense. That is to say that, second language experiences should involve the whole learner. They should be affective and physical as well as cognitive.

A COMMUNICATIVE PROGRAM

In an effort to represent the affective, physical, and cognitive
facets of second-language learning and to characterize the various kinds of activities that have their place in today’s communicative curricula, five components have been identified; language arts, language for a purpose, personal language use, theatre arts, and beyond the classroom. Each component represents a cluster of activities that corresponds to a different facet of the language learning process. The use of the term ‘component’ to categorize these activities or experiences seems particularly appropriate, in that it avoids any suggestion of sequence or level.

Experimentation with communicative teaching methods has shown that all five components can be profitably blended at all stages of instruction. This blending is not only desirable, it is inevitable in as much as the components overlap. No language syllabus, any more than the language proficiency it promotes, should ever be thought of as neatly divisible into separate tasks. The organization of learning activities into the following components is intended not to sequence a program but rather to highlight the range of options available in syllabus planning and to suggest ways in which their very interrelatedness can be maximized for the learner.

Fantasy and play-acting are a natural and important part of growing up. Make-believe and the familiar “you be, I’ll be” improvisations which children are so fond of are routes to self-discovery and growth. They allow young learners to experiment, to try things out-like hats and wigs, moods and postures, gestures and words. As occasions for language use, role playing and the many related activities that constitute theatre arts, are likewise a natural component of second-language learning. They allow learners to experiment with the roles they play or will play in real life. Smith (1984), a professionally trained actor and a teacher of English as a second language, stresses that when teachers do role playing, dialogue work, improvisation, scene study, or play production in language classes, they need first to set up the situation. They cannot just ask the learners to stand up and act. Teachers must prepare learners by providing them with the tools they need to act, that is, to observe, relate, experiment, and create in a second language. The theatre arts component of a second-language syllabus includes the following activities:

1. Ensemble: Building activities involving listening, observation, movement and games;
2. Pantomime: The use of gestures and facial expression to convey meaning;
3. Simulations: A more open-ended form of unscripted role-playing;
4. Scripted role-playing: That is, the use of a prepared script to interpret characters in a dialogue, skit, or play.

All the theatre and other communication activities that have been described work best when they are well integrated into the syllabus. As noted in the quotation at the beginning of this article (Ashton-Warner, 1963), communication “takes time and involves noise and movement and personal relations.” For the second-language classroom this implies not disorder but the carefully planned use of time and space to maximize the incentive for productive interaction. Many efforts to include theatre arts, games, and other interaction activities fail because teachers have not fully anticipated the possible outcomes; for example, not enough time, too much noise, confusion about procedure, too slow a pace to sustain learner (and teacher) interest. A class cannot just “play a game.” Nor should simulations, role playing, and other opportunities for interaction be saved for parties, rainy days, or the last few minutes of the class period. To be effective, communicative activities must constitute an integral part of the classroom program.

**Outside the classroom**

Regardless of the variety of communicative activities in the classroom, their purpose remains to prepare learners for the second-language world beyond, a world on which learners will depend for the development and maintenance of their communicative competence once classes are over. The classroom is but a rehearsal. The strength of a foreign or second-language syllabus depends ultimately on the extent to which it reaches out to the world around it. When learners live within or adjacent to a second-language community, systematic interaction with that culture should be an integral part of the syllabus. The interaction may take many forms, depending on learner interests and level of proficiency. For example, learners may bring in grocery or other ads from local newspapers to decide where certain products may be had at the best prices. They may be sent on shopping expeditions in teams of two or three to price and otherwise inquire about a major purchase - a used car, a watch, a camera - and report back to the class. Weekly calendared community events can be compiled as a regular activity.

In the more likely situation where a second language community is not close enough for daily or weekly contact, a special field trip sometimes can be arranged. This requires a good deal of preparation and can involve the community as well as students in planning and fund raising. Many secondary schools have found that such efforts make an important contribution to support for foreign language study and now maintain field trips and exchange programs of various kinds as an integral part of their programs.

As often as possible, representatives of the culture(s) where the second language is used should be invited to visit the classroom. They should be allowed to interact with learners in either their native or second language, as appropriate, in discussions of contrastive culture as well as on specific language projects. Teachers need not be
concerned that the native speaker’s language is “too advanced” for their students.

In fact, by allowing them to try out their Spanish, French, etc., in a communicative situation they are providing learners with the opportunity to develop the strategies they need to interact with and learn from native speakers. It is much better for them if this valuable interaction is made an integral part of their classroom activities. Magazines, newspapers, radio, and even television in some communities offer often underutilized means of establishing contact with a distant second-language world. Pen pals are an old-time favorite, and if international phone rates continue to decrease, phone pals may one day become a reasonable alternative. Learners may correspond as individuals or as a class, perhaps teamed up or “twinned” with a group of students of the same age in a second-language community. A class newspaper is one way to exchange information on topics of interest in the school or community. The preparation of a newspaper can involve everyone in some capacity as reporters (sports, food, fashion, etc.), feature writers, crossword puzzle and other word-game experts, cartoonists, layout artists, and copy editors. Items may be in either the learners’ native or second language, or both.

Putting all together

How is it all put together? Is there an optimum combination of language arts, personal language use, language for a purpose, theatre arts, and beyond the classroom? These questions must be answered by individual language teachers and administrators based on the goals they have set for their learners and their programs. Central, of course, to a discussion of the optimum balance of activities in an instructional program is an understanding of communication and thus, of communicative language use. The problem at present is that some of the activities being introduced as communicative are not communicative at all but structure drills in disguise. Grammar often remains the hidden agenda. The preceding elaboration of five components has been intended to sort out the analytical activities associated with sentence-level grammatical form (language arts) and to give greater attention to the experiences (language for a purpose, personal language use, theatre arts, beyond the classroom) that promote the development of communicative competence. The proper balance of analytical and experiential activities in the classroom will depend on the age of the learners as well as on the learning context and program resources.

However, a clear understanding of the nature of each kind of activity may be the first step in the elaboration of a communicative syllabus. Such a syllabus can go a long way toward defining not only ‘what’ foreign language programs should teach but, more importantly, ‘how’ they should teach it. One of the main objectives of syllabus is to help learners to become effective users of FL, which implies a set of actions designed to achieve the expected outcomes. Other objectives, which seem to be more specific and derived in part from the one just, mentioned are:

1. To communicate in the target language with suitable fluency and accuracy;
2. To develop the four basic skills from a communicative standpoint;
3. To train the learners in the ability to express not only ideas but also judgments and needs.

The content if this approach is made up of those aspects of language that contributes to effective oral communication and interaction – resulting from negotiation between the participants. Therefore, the listening and the speaking skills are stressed from the very beginning of language learning. This does not mean that the skills of reading and writing are ignored, however. The grammar and vocabulary items are seen as means to achieve the goal of effective communication. Their selection is determined by the utility they can offer to the development of the functions, notions, and topics which constitute the backbone of the course or program. It is the need of the students which mostly determine the topics they can talk about and the functions they need to deal with.

Pronunciation is deemed essential but not to the extent of considering it a must for the SS to achieve native-like proficiency. What counts here is that they can make themselves understood without interrupting the communication activity. Speaking of communicative activities we must not forget, according to Littlewood, that the balance of focus between language forms and meanings is of course a matter of degree, nor will it depend on how the teacher presents the activity and whether the learner expects his performance to be evaluated according to its communicative effectiveness, grammatical accuracy or both. Communicative activities make the following contributions to language learning:

1. They provide “whole-task” practice.
2. They improve motivation: The students’ ultimate objective is to take part in communication with others. Their motivation to learn is more likely to be sustained if they can see how their classroom learning is related to this objective and helps them to achieve it with increasing success. Most learners’ conception of language is as a means of communication rather than as a structural system. Their learning is more likely to make sense to them if it can build on this conception rather than contradict it.
3. They allow natural learning: It is likely that many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved in using the language for communication.
4. They can create a context which supports learning communicative activity and provides opportunities for positive environment in the classroom that supports the individual in his efforts to learn.

Littlewood proposes to distinguish between two main categories:

1) Functional communication activities: These imply activities emphasizing the functional aspect of communication; for instance, solving a problem with whatever language the learners have at their disposal. That is, they are not required to attempt to choose language which is appropriate to any particular situation. It may not even matter whatever the Language is grammatically correct. The main purpose of the activity is that students should use the language they know for getting meanings across as effectively as possible. Success is measured primarily according to whether they cope with the communicative demands of the immediate situation.

2) Social interaction activities: They are those activities which emphasize social as well as functional aspects of communication. Students must still aim to convey meanings effectively, but must also pay greater attention to the social context in which the interaction takes place. Success is now measured also in terms of the acceptability of the forms used.

It goes without saying that the teacher must match the linguistic demands of the activity as closely as possible with the linguistic capabilities of his learners, he also has to aim for maximum economy in his Students’ learning. It makes sense, in that it bears a direct resemblance as much as possible to the situations where they will later need to use their communicative skills. Learners are more likely to feel involved on situations where they can see relevance of what they are doing and learning.

**CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that learners can be motivated to learn almost any language irrespective of the social attitudes to this language or its community, the technical equipment or the complete absence of the latter, provided that the talented and skillful teacher is conducting his lessons involving genuine communication. This study makes no claim at being the first to see this striking fact, but the very consciousness of its possibility inspires new strength.

The method, to FLT, to our mind, occupies the central position since it influences not only the learners’ academic progress (both in terms of linguistic and communicative competence), but also the moral aspect of education. Thus, the use of communicative approach implies the fidelity to humanian values. On the whole, this study helped us to realize that in FLT, there cannot possibly be minor factors, everything is important, since one thing ensues the other. It is impossible to solve the problems of motivation neglecting other indispensable aspects of teaching.

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