Communicative Language Teaching Activities

Dr. Namdev D. Patil

Karmaveer Hire College, Gargoti, Tal. - Bhudargad, Dist.- Kolhapur

ABSTRACT *The recent concept of the communicative language teaching (CLT) has brought a revolution of thoughts and ideas and it has, in fact, become a challenging task for linguists to understand it in the right perspective. Some linguists have tried to prove that all our past efforts of teaching language have been failures just because of our inadequate understanding or rather misunderstanding of the notion as well as the functions of language. They argue that much emphasis on structures and lexical items has not yielded desirable results. Teaching of English at present at all levels is either limited to structure or grammar or translation method. At the primary and secondary school levels, structures and vocabulary are taught through a structural syllabus and grammar-translation method. It is believed that this would help the learners construct correct English sentences with the help of the structures learnt over the years, at the higher level these structures are revised and more exposure to English is provided with the help of literary texts.*

INTRODUCTION:

In India, teaching of English is more or less content-based, not skilled-based. The four fundamental language skills namely- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, have been generally neglected. This is the reason why we find our students weak at writing, at the secondary school level, students remember by heart leave applications, stories, essays, paragraphs and get through the final examination but later on forget most of the things learnt or remembered. What is taught in the school are applications, letters to friends and family members, essays, stories which are taught through the Grammar-Translation Method and sometimes through the Structural Approach. But we know that after completing school education, a person is required to write in English social letters, applications for jobs as well as leave applications. He has to write invitations, greetings and good wishes, compliments, complaints, diary etc. Sometimes while one is in service, one has to write minutes of a meeting, appointment letters, office orders, notices, telegrams, descriptions etc.

It has been generally observed that such forms of writing are not taken care of in schools and colleges. This might be the reason why our students fail to communicate with the society they live in. writing which is an important language skill has not been given its due place. Hence, the gap between what is taught in our schools and what is required to be done with writing in society after completing education. In offices newly appointed officers frequently fail in writing notices, orders etc. the situation is so bad that our students can neither write nor reply to an invitation letter. They are not able to see the differences between the spoken and written and formal and informal forms of language. As a result, one can see the students using formal language in social letters and informal language in formal letters producing strange, funny and inappropriate expressions in writing.

Language and Communication:

The Collins Cobuild Essential Dictionary (1988)defines Language as "a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country for talking or writing, communication is the activity or the process of giving information to other people or to other living things." The American Peoples Encyclopedia (1963) defines Communication as "the sharing of thoughts, ideas of knowledge by two or more people, it includes the devices, processes and institutions by which individuals and groups exchange all kinds of information."

Communicative Ability and Competence:

In Widdowson's (1978) opinion Communicative abilities are "those skills which are defined with reference to the manner and mode in which the system is realized as use communicative abilities embrace linguistic skills but not the reverse, essentially they are ways of creating or recreating discourse in different modes, these abilities operate on everything that is communicative in the discourse as a whole." The term Communicative Competence is defined by the International Encyclopedia of Education (1985) as" the effective use of language in social contexts." T. W. Littlewood defines Communicative Competence as a degree of mastery of a very considerable range of linguistic and social skills which depends in part of the learner's sensitivity to meaning and appropriacy in language and on his ability to develop effective strategies for communicating in the second language.

Linguistic Competence: -

For years this was the only kind of competence to which language teachers gave serious attention, linguistic competence is understood as concerned with the tacit knowledge of language structure that is commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the speaker-listener can say. Conclusively one can say that linguistic competence is learning the language while communicative competence is using the language to learn.

Communication Needs:

Students can convey their ideas etc. in a better way if their communication needs are spelt out by teachers. Richterich says that Language needs are the requirements which arise from the use of language in the multitude of situations which may arise in the social lives of individuals and groups.

Accuracy in Writing:

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines accuracy as exactness, correctness. The term accurate means careful and exact, free from the error. Accuracy is the ability to perform a task without making a mistake the quality of being true or correct. Accuracy is a relative term based on a social judgment of the language by a speech community. Since accuracy refers to a focus of the user, it can refer just as much to listening and reading as to speaking and writing.

Fluency:

Fluency is the quality of being fluent, someone who is fluent is able to speak smoothly and readily, someone who is fluent in a language can speak or write it easily and correctly, someone whose speech, reading or writing is fluent speaks, reads or writes easily and clearly with no hesitation or mistakes. According to Richard Leeson, fluency is the ability of the speaker to produce indefinitely many sentences conforming to the phonological, syntactical and semantic exigencies of a given natural language on the basis of a finite exposure to a finite corpus of that language.

Methods of Teaching English:

The prominent approaches and methods include the Grammar Translation Method, The Direct Method, The Structural Approach, Situational Approach, Bilingual Method, The Audio-lingual Approach, and Substitution Method and The Communicative Approach.

The Grammar Translation Method:

It is the traditional deductive method of language teaching. According to Richards and Rodgers it is a way of studying a language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. This method emphasizes accuracy.

The Direct Method:

It is known by the various names like New Method, Reform Method, Natural Method, and Oral Method. Robert Lado writes about it that the central idea of the direct method is the association of words and sentences with their meaning through demonstration, dramatization, pointing etc. in the opinion of Richards and Rodgers the direct method emphasizes the use of grammar pronunciation, vocabulary and sentences in the target language.

The Structural Approach:

The Structural Approach stresses the importance of structures which are carefully selected and graded. Structural grading consists of arranging the structural items of patterns into a suitable order. The basis of teaching is Structures and patterns of English. Situations, actions, pictures, drawings etc. are extensively used. The teacher gives choral, group and individual oral drills to reinforce the language items taught.

The Audio-lingual Approach:

The audio-lingual approach is directly based on behaviorist theory. It assumes that language learning can be broken down into a series of individual habits which can be formed by reinforcement of correct responses. This approach emphasizes the pattern drilling, repetition and the ordering of the skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Bilingual Method:

The Bilingual Method stresses the use of the mother tongue of the child and teaching the target language through the mother tongue equivalents. Mother tongue is used to explain the meaning of new words, phrases, idioms, sentences, grammatical points and rules. The linguistic habits formed are taken care of concept translation which is the core of this method.

Substitution Method:

In this method words of model sentences are substituted by other words. Drills are given through simple, compound and substitution tables. Substitution tables are extensively used.

The Situational Approach:

This approach is basically tries to teach English as the children learn their mother tongue. The teacher just introduces some new words incidentally in the classroom and offers a lot of opportunities to the learners to associate the meaning of new words with corresponding situations. A number of questions are asked by the teacher, constant repetition is stressed.

Principles of Communicative Methodology:

1 know what you are doing: According to this principle, the focus of very lesson should be performing of some operations, learning how to do something, every lesson should end with the learner being able to see clearly that he can do something which he could not do at the beginning.

2 The Whole is More than the Sum of the Parts: This principle holds the view that the ability to handle these elements in isolation is no indication of the ability to communicate. What is needed is the ability to deal with strings of sentences and ideas and in oral modes. These strings must be processed in what is called real time, what is needed is the ability to work in the context of the whole.

3 The Processes are as important as the Forms: Explaining this principle, K. Morrow writes, "a method which aims to develop the ability of students to communicate in a foreign language will aim to replicate as far as possible the processes of communication so that practice of the forms of the target language can take place within a communicative framework.

4 To Learn it do it: The cardinal tenet of learning theory is that one learns to do by doing, only practicing communicative activities can we learn communicate.

5 Mistakes are not always mistakes: According to this principle, trivial mistakes of grammar or pronunciation do not matter as long as the student gets his message across. A learner who makes mistakes because he is trying to do something he has not been told or shown how to do or which he has not mastered, is not really making a mistake at all.

Communicative Model of Teaching:

C. J. Brumfit and K. Johnson have outlined the following communicative model of teaching:

Conclusion:

Since its inception, communicative language teaching has passed through a number of different phases. In its first phase, a primary concern as the need to develop a syllabus and teaching approach that was compatible with early conceptions of communicative competence. Today, CLT can be seen as describing a set of core principles about

language learning and teaching, 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.

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