

A REVIEW ON A TEACHING METHODOLOGY: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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***Abstract.** Communicative language teaching merupakan salah satu metode pengajaran cukup efektif bila dilaksanakan secara sesuai. Karakteristik dan prinsipnya seperti kesesuaian penggunaan bahasa target (bahasa Inggris), focus kepada pesan/ message, proses psikolinguistik, dan praktek bebas seperti halnya keahlian komunikasi, keahlian bahasa, dan kompetensi interaksi sosialisasi diulas untuk mengukur kualitas metode dan kemungkinan penggunaannya. Lebih jauh, keuntungan dan kelemahan metode inipun dievaluasi sebagai sebuah parameter untuk meminimalkan resiko penggunaan metode ini. Untuk mengatasi kelemahan-kelemahan metode ini, beberapa strategi alternative dari Tarone, Faerch, dan Nijmegen (Cook, 1993) diulas sebagai bahan pertimbangan.*

***Key words:** communicative language teaching, communicative competence, language competence, social interaction competence, language appropriateness, message focus, psycholinguistic process, free practice.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of learning a second language (L2) is understanding a message delivered by the speaker of L2 through that L2. Understanding a message means catching the meaning of what is being said. It is based on the function of the language as a means of communication. As long as the learners understand the meaning of the expression or statement of a speaker in a proper way, communication exists. Based on this assumption, communicative language teaching is developed as a method in learning a second language.

The purpose of this review is to see how to use this method effectively by analysing the characteristics and principles of communicative language teaching and evaluating the advantages and the disadvantages of communicative language teaching. Accordingly, it will be useful for teachers who concern with the most appropriate model of teaching language as a means of communication. The advantages of the method deal with how the language really functions as a means of communication. It gives learners opportunity to use the language when they are learning the L2. The disadvantages refer to the risk of avoiding the rules of grammar and structure in the process of learning L2,

and the misleading role of teacher and learners in a class practice. There are tendencies of making mistakes and errors in the language use. Language inaccuracy seems forgivable in this method. To apply this method effectively, however, there are strategies to learn so that the purpose of learning L2 appropriately will be achieved through communicative language teaching method.

A BRIEF VIEW ON COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Communicative language Teaching is a method of teaching focusing on communication or function of language rather than the structure of the language. In communicative language teaching, meaning is considered more important than grammar and structure. However, integration of meaning and form plays an essential role. This is in accordance with Larsen and Freeman idea. Larsen-Freeman (2000, pg. 121) state that “Communicative language teaching aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication.” The goal of this method is to communicate. It is based on context, meaning, and situation. This method considers situational language teaching as it is based on situation. The idea of this learning language is based on function and situation which was replacing the audiolingualism in around 1960s. Richards and Rodgers (2001, pg. 153) claim that “They saw the need to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.”

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Among the other language methodologies and approaches, communicative language teaching is an option to the learning of second language acquisition. In this method, accuracy or error is not the focus to concern with. The focus is on message. Practice to use the language goes first when they are using the L2 to communicate. However, there are more factors to consider in the communicative language teaching methodology. The attention to learn an L2 should be put on the appropriateness of the language, the fluency of the language, the flexibility of the language and the range of the language. In communicative language teaching, meaning and form are in fact essential. Message should also be sent appropriately. Richards and Rodgers (2001, pg. 155) emphasize that “Communicative Language Teaching means little more than an integration of

grammatical and functional teaching.” This idea is in accordance with Littlewood’s idea: “One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language” (Littlewood, 1981, pg.1). According to Johnson and Johnson (1998) there are five core characteristics in communicative methodology. They are appropriateness, message focus, psycholinguistic processing, risk taking, and free practice.

THE APPROPRIATENESS OF L2 IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In the process of learning a second language, learners use the L2 to communicate. In this case, they need to know the situation they are in. They are expected to try to use the L2 in any situation and setting. The competence to communicate will be seen as they can use the language formally or informally and as they can communicate in any setting, for example in apologizing, asking direction, joking, ordering food, explaining their feelings, and so on. Their competence in using the L2 as a means of communication also depends on how they can master the function of language for communication in such a range of situations and settings. Mastery of grammar and vocabulary will depend on the situation and setting as well. This communicative competence then should be close to the competency of using the language in social interaction (Hymes, 1972). Moreover, MAK Halliday emphasizes that appropriateness should be differentiated from performance (Halliday, 1978, pg. 38). Further, Larsen-Freeman point out that communicative competence is not equal with language competence. “Being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, pg. 121). Thus, being a communicative speaker, someone has to master language competence, communicative competence, and social interaction competence. The language competence deals with the accuracy or performance of the language. It deals with the mastery of structure and form. The communicative competence deals with the function of the language; while social interaction competence concerns with how people could interact with other people in using the language.

THE MESSAGE FOCUS IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

When I communicate with someone, I will express what I mean through my words. I convey what I mean, I convey what I think or what I feel. I am actually trying to send a message to someone I am talking to. When s/he can understand what I have expressed through my words, communication exists. Dealing with communicative language teaching method, therefore, authentic and meaningful aspects should be the goal of classroom activities (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, pg. 172). The materials given in the class should be based on authentic texts. The best example is the materials concerning with content based materials and task based materials; for instance English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials. Learners are given authentic materials dealing with authentic sources such as newspaper articles or magazine articles dealing with the ESP courses. The tasks will concern with guiding discussion on the authentic topics from the articles. In line with this idea, the following concept is an alternative viewed by Saraceni:

“...a significant role is also played by non- authentic tasks with authentic texts, for example, tasks which aim at drawing the learners’ attention to certain linguistic features of the input through language awareness activities based on texts taken from authentic sources” (Saraceni, 2003, pg. 77)

THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PROCESSES IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Cognitive aspect and fluency play an important role in the communicative language teaching. The mastery of language system, including grammar, vocabulary selection, and social convention is very important. Fluency will be supported if the mastery of language system is achieved.

“The relationship between communicative ability and language acquisition can be seen as two ways – the more language learners acquire, the more communicatively effective they become, while the more effective they are as communicators, the more opportunities for language acquisition they will be able to obtain for themselves.” (Ellis, 2003, pg. 85).

However, there must be a sharp distinction between fluency and accuracy. Fluency is relating to natural language use based on meaningful interaction. It is understandable and unbreakable. Unfortunately, in this approach language competence is sometimes

neglected and accuracy only concerns with correct language use. It does not concern with meaningful communication. It concerns with examples of correct language form which is sometimes out of context. It is grammatically correct, but it does not make sense. This idea is in accordance with Richards' idea about accuracy versus fluency (Richards, n.d, pg. 14).

FREE PRACTICE IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In a free practice, learners of a second language will be adapted to the use of the 4 language skills. They will use these skills all at once. They speak, listen, read, and write in the L2. They automatically use the L2 as a holistic system. The four skills will not be able to be separated or used singly. When they are asking a direction for example, they will ask someone that direction (practice of speaking). By the time the answer is given, they do a practice of listening. They will also read the map to know the location of the street they are looking for (practice of reading). And it is possible for them to write the location of the street in their note to clarify the exact location of the address or the street they are looking for (practice of writing). There is spontaneous practice of the integrated 4 skills of language. In short, there is a holistic practice of using L2 in the communicative language teaching. There should be consideration on how learners are able to develop their competence and capacities to unite the specification of the language related to function and purposes. This is in accordance with Brumfit's idea:

“We cannot therefore base our teaching on precise identification of the *product* of teaching, but we can concentrate on enabling learners to use the language tokens presented in their language work for purposes which they will develop themselves” (Brumfit, 1984, pg. 112).

THE RISK IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

When learners learn a language through using it to communicate, the authentic and real situation is experienced by the learners. There is a challenge to struggle and try to use the language in a natural way. Consequently, for learning a second language is a process, making mistakes and errors happen as a risk of learning. In a conversation with a native speaker for example, communicative language teaching may lead to a very broad conversation. They really use the language function as a means of

communication. They depend on how they can understand what the native speaker says, and how they can convey their message in the L2. In this example, language accuracy is often neglected. They do trial and error in using the L2. There is no correction on the form of language. Grammatical mistakes and poor structures are uncontrolled. This idea meets Richards and Rodgers's (2001, pg. 172) idea that "Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error." Since it seems that there are excuses for accuracy in this method, the role of the teacher as a controller and a flexible facilitator is essential. If the teacher is not well trained and does not master the skills of teaching communicatively, the purpose of the method will fail. To encounter the risk, strategies should be proposed.

THE STRATEGY TO COMPENSATE THE RISK (WEAKNESS) OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

There are some strategies to compensate the weakness of communicative language teaching. These strategies are proposed by Tarone, Faerch and Kasper, and the Nijmegen Project. Tarone introduced social strategy which is based on three main strategies, namely paraphrase, transfer, and avoidance. Faerch and Kasper applied psychological strategies which covers avoidance strategies and achievement strategies. The Nijmegen project worked on compensatory strategies which emphasize the communication strategies on description to prediction, and explanation (Cook, 1993, pgs. 120-131). These strategies are essential to put a strong foundation to an ideal communication, therefore, they should be considered as important strategies to introduce in communicative language teaching. Applying these strategies to communicative language teaching, learners are expected to be able to creatively correct, refine and initiate the L2 in their communication. In short, it will minimize the mistakes and errors occurring during the process of communication.

REVIEW ON ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

The review on the advantages and the disadvantages of the communicative language teaching is very useful for evaluating the power and the quality of the method. Both have been implied in the preceding discussions. However, it is quite significant to remeasure them explicitly, so that we can apply the communicative language teaching

method appropriately and effectively. This is the way to consider the possibility of using this method wisely.

The Advantages of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching method has a strong power to propose to creative teachers. This method offers good principles and characteristics in teaching second language. There are options to consider the quality of this method. The appropriateness of the method offers the learners many ways to use the language practically. It gives learners opportunity to use the language in a formal way or in an informal way. It also gives the learners chance to use the language in any situation and setting. In this method of teaching, learners are given the possibility to convey what they want to say or express, or think flexibly. They send their message flexibly in the communication practice. The psycholinguistic process of the method brings the learners to the awareness of using the language fluently, so the need to master the language based on the cognitive capacity should suffice. Positively, the free practice of the method leads the learners to a wide opportunity to develop the language competence as well as the communicative competence themselves.

The Disadvantages of Communicative Language Teaching

To employ the method, the disadvantages should also be taken into account as a good reminder to encounter the risk. If the teacher fails to guide the class, control to the use of language can be very loose. Correction on grammatical mistakes and errors, vocabulary misused, and inappropriate use of language can be very vague. Teacher should sympathetically correct the language use in such a good manner so that the learners do not feel demotivated. Teacher's misleading therefore can even demotivate the learners more. In this case, the role of the teacher in the class is very important. This is in line with Littlewood's idea (1981, pg. 19) that "There will also be activities, of course, in which the teacher can take part as a 'co-communicator'." Teacher should be a flexible person with holistic competence. Teacher should be very well prepared and trained to master not only the language, but also to master communication and social interaction. The other disadvantages could concern with the competence of the learners. A class with different levels of learners' capability will be even harder to manage. Poor motivation of the learners will become an obstacle of the class. If most of the students

are poorly motivated, communication will run hard. This is based on what we experienced in class practice. Psychological pressure such as feeling shy to talk or to discuss a task given by the teacher in the class will weaken the communicative language teaching process.

CONCLUSION

To apply communicative language teaching as an effective method, we need to review the characteristics and the principles of the method as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the method. There are some points to underline that in communicative language teaching, we should not only consider the communicative competence, but we also need to integrate the communicative competence with language competence, as well as with social interaction competence. We need to rethink that communicative language teaching method can be applied in class effectively if the risk of the method can be encountered through the strategies of communication.

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