

# COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM

## COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLIKASI BAGI RUANG KELAS YANG KOMUNIKATIF

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### ABSTRACT

*A linguistically informed teacher about views of language can either adopt structuralist or functionalist approach to successfully teach language in his/her classroom. The Communicative Language Teaching is aimed at attracting second language learners to purposeful classroom activities in which learners use and reproduce language as it is practiced in real communication beyond the classroom in meaningful situations. To achieve this, a linguistically well-informed language teacher needs to focus on his role as a facilitator, an interdependent member of the classroom, a needs analyst, a counsellor, and a group activity manager. In addition, the teacher needs to remember that in communicative classroom students negotiate (for meaning) between themselves in their own ways in the classroom communications. Therefore, a linguistically well-informed teacher needs to consider what classroom activities he needs to pick up to achieve the ultimate goal of the CLT, which is the communicative competence.*

**Keywords:** *CLT, classroom communications, communicative competence*

### ABSTRAK

*Seorang guru bahasa yang benar-benar mengetahui akan pandangan-pandangan bahasa bisa mengadopsi pendekatan strukturalis ataupun fungsionalis untuk mengajarkan Bahasa di kelasnya secara efektif. Communicative Language Teaching bertujuan untuk melibatkan pembelajar bahasa kedua dalam kegiatan-kegiatan kelas yang mempunyai tujuan tertentu di mana pembelajar bahasa bisa menggunakan dan memproduksi bahasa sebagaimana bahasa tersebut digunakan dalam komunikasi sebenarnya di luar kelas pada konteks yang bermakna. Untuk meraih hal ini, seorang pengajar bahasa yang mengetahui pandangan-pandangan bahasa perlu memperhatikan perannya sebagai seorang fasilitator, anggota kelas yang interdependen, seorang analis kebutuhan, seorang pembimbing, dan seorang manajer aktifitas kelompok. Selain itu, guru juga perlu memperhatikan bahwa dalam communicative classroom siswa menegosiasikan makna antar siswa dalam innteraksi di kelas. Maka dari itu, seorang guru bahasa harus mempertimbangkan kegiatan apa yang harus ia gunakan untuk mencapai tujuan akhir dari CLT, yaitu kompetensi komunikatif.*

**Kata kunci:** *CLT, komunikasi ruang kelas, kompetensi komunikatif*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Language is defined in many different ways by various linguists. The structuralists view language as rules, and focus on ways in which linguistic entities can be combined together. Language is considered as the knowledge of grammar, consisting of syntax, inflectional morphology, and phonology, encompasses knowledge of formal rules or operations that operate on abstract linguistic categories, for example verb and noun, and phrases (Ambridge and Lieven, 2011).

In contrast, for emergentists, language is believed as a 'system of communication', 'a medium for thought', 'a vehicle for literary expression', and 'a social institution' (O'grady, 1989: 1). This definition of language agrees with that of functionalists who view language primarily in terms of its function in the context of situations, focusing on meaning conveyed in different situations. Rispoli (1991), in Ritchie and Bhatia (1999: 222), defined functionalism in linguistics as the explanation and elucidation of grammatical forms wherein semantic and pragmatic are exceptionally important constructs. Tomasello (2003) proposes that linguistic structures are linguistic symbols which are meaningful functioning as patterns which comprise meaningful linguistic symbols used in communication. This view of language is opposed to that of generativists who conceive language rules as fixed rules for combining morphemes and words not related to meaning.

While generativists view linguistic knowledge as the abstract understanding that language speakers have which make them able to produce grammatically correct sentence in a language (Chomsky, 1965), Hymes (1972)

emphasizes the importance of social and cultural knowledge that speakers need to possess, so that they are able to understand and make use of linguistic forms. Hymes postulates that language speakers not only need knowledge but also ability to put that knowledge into use in communication. This implies that language speakers or learners need to know a language and be able to put that knowledge to use in communicating with people in a variety of settings and situations. The language speakers' knowledge is then referred to as 'communicative competence' (Ibid: 1972).

Allen, (2007) proposes that only with regard to the semantic and communicative functions of language linguistic structures can be comprehended and explained because the key function of language is as a means of social communication. That is to say, in the view of functional linguists, attention should not only be paid to the formal associations in linguistic elements but to the way language is actually practised in communicative situation. Swan and Walter (1990) hold that language use must be related to real life in contexts communicative interactions with real exchange of information and opinions as much as possible.

## B. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: A FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

From the functional view of second language learning, rather than concentrating on the algebraic linguistic system, attention would be paid more to the ways wherein second language learners try to make meaning and attain their individual communicative purposes (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Therefore, a teacher who is well-informed about this language view would

focus his language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of language rules.

Inspired by the works of British functional linguist as Firth (1957) and Halliday (1973) and of some American sociolinguists as Hymes (1972) and Labov (1972) some linguists such as Candlin (1976) and Widdowson (1972) started to develop the view that language teaching should focus on communicative proficiency. Wilkin (1972) also proposed a functional of communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. The work of these scholars initiated the emergence of the so-called Communicative Language Teaching (Richards and Rogers, 1998).

The emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach can be considered as a response against formal structural approaches such as audiolingualism which focuses almost exclusively on rules (Whong: 2013). The main reason of the development of the CLT Approach is the shift from the structure-based to meaning-based view, which regards language more than merely a structure of rules, but more as a source, which is dynamic for the meaning generation (Nunan, 1989). The CLT emerges from the theory of language as communication, and it is aimed at developing what Hymes (1972) refers to as 'communicative competence' (Richards and Rogers, 1998). Hymes' concept of communicative competence is explained as the ability a speaker needs to possess in order to be communicatively proficient in a social context. He believes that a language speaker who possesses communicative competence acquires both capability and knowledge to use language in regard to whether his/her language is structurally possible, feasible by means of available implementation, is appropriate to situation; and is actually

performed and, what it entails (Hymes, 1972: 284-286).

Littlewood (1981) explained that one of the noticeable characteristics of CLT is that it intensively focuses on functional and structural aspects of language and combines these into a more fully communicative model. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the communicative value in the CLT comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to what Chomsky (1965) coined linguistic competence, which is the formal system of language.

According to Stern (1983), linguistic competence is the language users' ability to use the rules structuring the language without being aware of them. Sociolinguistic competence is the speakers' knowledge of the social environment in which communicative interactions takes place, which Hedge (2000) calls pragmatic competence which covers the type of relationships between speakers, the information the participants share, and the purposes of the communicative interaction.

Discourse competence, which Bachman (1990) calls textual competence refers to the understanding of individual communication components concerning their interrelatedness between one and another and how meaning expressed in the text. Strategic competence relates to the way speakers manage strategies, so that they can keep the communication channel available. Along with those competences, Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson, quoted in Hedge (2000), add fluency to one of the communicative competences a speaker needs to possess. Fluency refers to language production and it is usually reserved for speaking. It is the ability to relate components of language together with

capability and without hindrance or excessive hesitation (Ibid: 2000: 54).

Further, Richards and Rogers (1986) formulate the characteristics of CLT in the context of language theory. Language is the system to convey meaning in social interaction and communication, and this is the primary function of language. The structure of language is the reflection of its functional and communicative uses, and its primary unit are not only its grammatical and structural categories, but also functional and communicative meaning features as represented in discourse.

### **C. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM**

Nunan (1989) proposes that in terms of learning, it is normally accepted that we need to differentiate between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use the rules effectively and appropriately when communicating. A teacher who is well-informed about functional view of language and adopts communicative approach to language teaching would hold the principle that the improvement of communicative language ability is the purpose of classroom learning. Therefore, a well-informed teacher would emphasis on communicative practice in the classroom.

The communicative practices in the CLT are characterized by some principles. Richards and Rogers (1986) formulate some underpinning principles in the CLT in practice. First of all, the teacher will create activities that facilitate real communication motivating students to learn. For example, the well-informed teacher can create a classroom setting in which interaction between one student and another happens. Gass & Mackey (2007) argue that

interactions will enable learners to negotiate language input. Next, the teacher will hold task principle, which implies that he will encourage learning by creating classroom activities in which language is used to conduct meaningful task (Johnson, 1984). Swain (1995) suggests that with particular task conditions learners will not merely reveal their language hypotheses, but think seriously about them and use the language as well.

The next principle the teacher should apply in communicative classroom is the meaningfulness. Learners will be encouraged if they use language that is meaningful to them. In contrast, learners will be discouraged if they merely learn language patterns that do not make meaning for them. Storch and Aldosari (2012) suggest that in the classroom setting students are on a language task which is meaning-focused and when they find a linguistic problem, they negotiate the problem to find a solution and share their linguistic information. Therefore, language learning activities should be managed in a way that enables learners to engage in language use which is meaningful and authentic. In brief, the given principles are expected to facilitate second language learning, rather than the language acquisition processes (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

### **D. MANAGING A COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM**

Based on the principles of the CLT described above, a well-informed teacher would take some considerations to create a communicative classroom. The considerations inferred from Richards and Rogers (1986) are, first of all, he would pay attention to his role as a teacher to achieve the goals in a communicative classroom, which is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the

classroom. A well-informed teacher also needs to pay attention to the role of the students. More importantly, the classroom activities created by the teacher should facilitate real communication to encourage learning.

#### *Students' role in Communicative Language Classroom*

Breen and Candlin (1980) suggest that as the ultimate purpose of a communicative language classroom is achieving communicative competence, the learners are supposed to negotiate for meaning between themselves in their own ways. In the communicative classroom, learners' roles are as negotiators between themselves and between themselves and the learning objectives. The learners may also have monitoring role for other learners, which means they can provide feedback for their colleagues. Therefore, they are also potential teachers for other language learners. Another important role is as informant to the teacher regarding their own learning improvement. Principally, a communicative language classroom would provide the opportunity for both the teacher and the learners to be mutually dependent participants in a communicative method of teaching and learning.

Richards and Rodgers (1986) added that in a communicative language classroom the use of text is quite limited. Grammatical rules are not taught explicitly. Many language teaching scholars argue that explicit grammar instruction does not help learners to apply the rules. Green and Hecht (1992) propose that second language learners who are usually taught explicit rules of grammar are unsuccessful to apply the rules when it comes to the communicative activities. Serratrice (2012) also argue that explicit teaching does not seem to be useful in learning language. What's more, communicative classroom is not arranged in

a fixed arrangement, and this allows the students to interact more with other learners rather than with the teacher.

In communicative classroom, students' cooperation is highly expected. Students are suggested to work in pairs or small groups. Working in pairs or small groups has been proven to be very effective methods to boost students' communicative ability. Ohta's study (2001) have revealed that when learners are arranged to work in pairs small groups or pairs, they appear to use the target language more for various functions, for example asking questions, making requests, and providing feedback. Therefore, pair and group work may enable learners to improve the quantity and quality of target language practice.

#### *A well-informed teacher's role*

According to Breen and Candlin (1980: 99), a well-informed teacher should play two main roles in the communicative classroom. First, the teacher should be a facilitator of the communicative activities between all learners in the classroom as well as facilitate communicative practices between the learners and different activities and discourse. The second role is to perform as an 'interdependent' member in the language learning. Therefore, the teacher needs to be able to organise resources and also become a resource who controls procedures and activities in the classroom. Widdowson (1978) suggests that despite the use of the learner-centered method and collaborative activity in the communicative classroom, teacher should not be less authoritative. The teachers still need to organise encouraging atmosphere for learning and to observe and control activities.

Richards and Rogers (1986: 77) suggest another four roles teachers need to have: needs analyst, counsellor, and group activity manager. Regarding the teachers'

role as a needs analyst, it is very important to know the learners' language need, which can be done formally or informally. Bax (2003) suggests that before teaching teachers need to use 'context approach', in which teachers first conduct a needs analysis and then identify suitable methods of language teaching based on the students' needs. As a counsellor, the teachers are supposed to give examples of effective communication in order to maximize the engagement of speaker intention and hearer interpretation by using paraphrasing, confirmation, and feedback. The teachers' role as group process manager refers to teachers' responsibility to manage the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative processes.

#### *Activities in communicative language classroom*

A well-informed teacher goal in communicative classroom is to develop fluency in the use of language. Fluency is natural use of language that happens when a language speaker is involved in meaningful communication and keeps understandable and continuing communicative interaction even though his or her communicative competence is limited (Richards, 2006). Fluency is established through classroom activities in which students need to 'negotiate meaning', 'use communication strategies', 'correct misunderstandings', and work to avoid communication failures (Ibid, 2006: 14). Useful activities used in a communicative classroom include the following:

- **Role-play**

Role play refers to an experiential learning method in which the learners perform roles in a predetermined scenario to facilitate aimed practice and feedback to practice skills (Kiger, 2004). Hedge (2000) suggests that role play is very

suitable for communicative classroom when performed in pairs or groups because it would encourage the participation of all students. Consequently, the students will be engaged in active learning activities. Bell (2001) suggests that students' high-level engagement in active learning is much more effective than passive learning. Role play is a teaching method that has been proven to encourage active learning and allow students to gain experience they have never had before (Van Ments, 1999).

- **Information gap**

Hedge (2000) defines information gap as an activity where learners are missing information they need in order to accomplish a task and are required to communicate to each other to find the information, and this activity involves information decoding or encoding from or into language. The rationale behind this activity is the fact that in real interaction, people generally need to communicate to get information they do not have (Richards, 2006). This activity is aimed at providing more opportunity for learners to experience authentic communication by practicing language beyond forms, and apply their linguistic and communicative ability to gain information. Thus, the learners will recall their existing linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, use their communication strategies and meaning negotiation ability to complete a task.

Some empirical studies have shown that the use of information gap in L2 teaching is very effective. Doughty and Pica (1985, 1986) investigate adult students and teachers from six intermediate L2 English classroom to

compare the effectiveness of a task with optional and required information exchange across teacher-directed, small-group, and pair interactional patterns. The result shows that it is evident that activities which require an information exchange for the task completion generate more modified interaction than those in which information exchange was optional. This happens because the task with required information exchange encouraged students to have more comprehension and confirmation check, clarification requests, and repetitions.

- Games

Games have been widely applied in teaching, and there have been a large number of games used in CLT: spelling bees, crossword puzzles, limericks, Scrabble, riddles, Diplomacy, Guggenheim, tongue twisters, anagrams, Password, word squares, one-ups-man-ship, spoonerisms, rebuses, stinky-pinkies, twenty questions, and debates to name a few (Palmer and Rodgers, 1983: 2). The nature of games in language teaching is to make the learners concentrate on the activity they are dealing with and use the language as a means to achieve the goal instead of as a goal itself (Terrell, 1982).

Palmer and Rodgers (1983: 3), in the study to review the use of games in language teaching, they use gaming characteristics proposed by Rodgers (1981). First, gaming should be competitive. For example, there is a competition between participants, (e.g. board-race), against time (e.g. race heats), against their own best performance (e.g. hammer throw), against a particular goal (e.g. matching). Second, gaming should use a predetermined rule, and all participants

need to know and understand the rules which may include the procedure of the game, acceptability and non-acceptability, and grading. Third, the objective of the game should be clear, which means that there some clear goals for gaming which are understood and agreed upon by the participants. Next, gaming must have an ending point at which the game is supposed to be ended, whether the objective of the game is achieved or not. Last but not least, the game is expected to make the participants engaged and challenged.

A study on the effectiveness of games in language classroom was conducted by Palmer (1981). The subjects were 54 first-year students of Thai college. They were randomly divided to control and experimental groups. The control group was instructed with the university's conventional method. The result shows that no differences were found in terms of cognitive learning. However, the experimental group consider that the experimental programme was really enjoyable, and it was evident that they unconsciously reached more of the teaching objectives compared to the control group. Therefore, it can be inferred that a well-informed teacher use of games in communicative language learning is very essential considering the effectiveness of games in promoting the unconscious acquisition of learning aims and positive feelings toward instruction. Consequently, a well-informed teacher would minimise the use of traditional teaching methods with a lot of negative evidence which is believed to hinder unconscious learning.

- Pair-work or group work

A well-informed teacher would create as much interactions as possible

between participants in the language classroom, and this can be done by assigning individuals into pair or small group works. Storch (2002) investigated the nature of pair work interaction in an adult ESL classroom. The result shows that pair interaction can help boost the learning opportunities for language learners as all individual is involved in the social interaction. Block (1996) suggests that a language classroom is supposed to be a social event in which communications between individuals have some advantages and consequently result in various academic outcomes.

Regarding the best way to pair students, Long & Porter (1985) suggest that pairing of mixed proficiency can benefit both high and low proficiency learners since more negotiations in the target language occur. However, Leiser's study (2004) suggests that although low proficiency students can benefit from being paired with their high proficiency counterparts, high proficiency learners would benefit more from the activity when they are paired with high proficiency students.

There are more activities that can be applied in CLT classroom, such as: jigsaw, information-gathering, opinion-sharing, information-transfer, reasoning gap, interview activities, etc.

## E. CONCLUSION

A well-informed teacher about functionalist view of language can adopt CLT approach to effectively teach language in his classroom. The CLT is aimed at engaging L2 learners in purposeful activities in which learners practice and reflect language as it is used in real communication outside the classroom in meaningful contexts. To achieve this, a well-informed teacher needs to pay attention to his role as a

facilitator, an interdependent member of the classroom, a needs analyst, a counsellor, and a group activity manager. In addition, the teacher needs to bear in mind that in communicative classroom students negotiate (for meaning) between themselves in their own ways in the classroom interactions. Therefore, a well-informed teacher needs to consider what classroom activities he needs to pick up to achieve the ultimate goal of the CLT, the communicative competence.

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