

**TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN THE COMMUNICATIVE WAY:
SOME STRATEGIES**

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Abstract

This paper explains the way it makes the students learn English language in an interactive and creative classroom environment. While teaching English language, teaching English grammar plays a central role in every English teacher's classroom. Each English class has different grammar needs and goals and it is up to the teacher to determine these goals and provide the means with which to meet them. This paper also discusses innovative teaching strategies and the methodological transformation of grammar in the language courses. Over the last few decades, teachers and language educators have been trying all kinds of teaching methods and approaches. The communicative language teaching has gradually become a teaching idea, which has been confirmed by them. The core of this approach is to improve the students' sociolinguistic competence as well as their linguistic competence and to overcome the disadvantages of traditional English grammar teaching. In order to improve the students' ability and gain better teaching results, the two kinds of teaching approaches should not be used respectively. On the contrary, it would be better to combine Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Traditional Grammar Method (TGM) together and use them flexibly in teachers teaching work.

Key words: Teaching Methods, CLT, TGM, Approaches, Grammar, Strategies.

Introduction

Many methods and approaches like grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, functional notion methods etc. were used in teaching and learning English language. New approaches and methods proliferated throughout the twentieth century. Some achieved wide levels of acceptance and popularity at different times. From time to time various new methods and approaches replaced the older one with new tips, techniques and with extremely new prospects. In this connection, the most popular and effective approach which has already become the most popular in the West is the Communicative Approach.

The need of an all-comprising approach was considered a high priority. Some proponents see Communicative Language Teaching as an approach that aims to make communicative

competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. For others, Communicative Language Teaching means little more than an integration of grammatical and functional teaching. In this connection, Littlewoods (1981: 1) states, "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."

Communicative Language Teaching has a rich theoretical base. It has some of the characteristics of this communicative view of language like: (1) Language is a system for the expression of meaning. (2) The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication. (3) The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses. (4) The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

"Communicative Language Teaching, a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use" (Richards, 2006) gained a wide acceptance in this matter. All over the world, people started reproaching a very modern and scientific approach-Communicative Approach, without giving a second thought to the limitations of the teachers, teaching strategies, curriculum, text books, incompetent students, class size, class environment, and above all the rapid and unwise ways of implication of methodology as faulty and incomplete in solving the problems of learning and teaching English. However, the term communicative has been misunderstood since many teachers believe that students should simply articulate the language without following any rule or sentence pattern. But Richards (2006) stated, "CLT can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom" (p. 2). The language teachers' ideas about the concept can vary and they might visualize their methodologies in terms of making grammar classes more interactive and productive.

The main goal of Communicative Language Teaching is the teaching of communicative competence which refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences e.g. parts of speech, tenses, teaching methodology. It deals with certain aspects of language knowledge such as: knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions and how to vary

our use of language according to the setting and the participants, e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use languages appropriately for written as well as spoken communication, how to produce and understand different types of texts like narratives, reports, interviews, conversations and how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge through using different kinds of communication strategies.

Taking all these aspects into account, teachers can analyze and choose the best teaching activities to develop students' learning skills. This way, their input will make learners view the second language as a practical and useful tool to communicate, interact, discover and create their own ideas and goals. Based on the idea of making class activities more talkative, communicative language teaching plays a main role in course syllabus and lesson planning. Today, Communicative Language Teaching thus continues in its 'classic' form, as is seen in the huge range of course books and other teaching resources based on the principles of CLT. In addition, it has influenced many other language teaching approaches and methods that subscribe to a similar philosophy of language teaching.

Communicative language teaching: a tool to teach grammar

Many English language teachers have taught grammar classes following just prefabricated structures as groups of sentence patterns without any possible flexibility or transformation. Since 1990, the communicative approach has been widely implemented in the classes because "it describes a set of general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching. A new approach that has evolved as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed" (Richards, 2006: 23).

Thus, a set of principles based on communicative language teaching can be applied according to the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, and their learning goals. This way, English language teachers can adapt their teaching strategies to the subject matter and create and apply activities in each lesson. This will awaken students' intuition and creativity when using the language. Through this application of principles, some core assumptions of the current communicative language teaching cited by Richards will be assumed:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful intrapersonal exchange.
3. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
- 4.
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as those involving language analysis and reflection (Richards, 2006, p. 23).

These assumptions help language teachers to analyze the approaches used while teaching grammar and make students internalize and use it in a natural and spontaneous way.

The Inductive Approach and Deductive Approach

It is also important to mention two approaches that can bring a light to language teaching using communicative activities: the inductive approach and the deductive approach. The inductive approach is known as a 'bottom up' approach. In other words, students discover grammar rules while doing their exercises. For example, a reading comprehension which includes a number of sentences describing what a person has done up to that period in time. After reading comprehension, the teacher will ask questions such as: How long has he done this or that? Has he ever been to Paris? And then follow with when did he go to Paris? Then, to help the students inductively understand the difference between the simple past and the present perfect, these questions could be followed with which questions spoke about a definite time in the past. Which questions asked about the person's general experience, etc?

The deductive approach is known as a 'top down' approach. This is the standard teaching approach that the teacher needs to explain rules to the students and some examples in which the rule is applied. For example, the present perfect is made up of the auxiliary verb 'have' plus the past participle of the verb. It is used to express an action which has begun in the past and continues into the present moments, etc. Here, in the first place the teacher has to facilitate students learning. However, there are certain moments when teacher needs to explain grammar

concepts to the class. Certainly, both approaches display advantages and disadvantages in their applicability in the teaching process; however, the deductive approach relates more strongly to the main objective, for teaching grammar in a communicative manner helps students, explore the given examples and deduce why certain rules are applied to those specific examples. In this constant search to innovate and make classes dynamic and inspiring, two teaching strategies will be mentioned: the communicative strategy and the explicit strategy.

Teaching Strategies: The Communicative Strategy and Explicit Strategy

There are two teaching strategies pointed out by Ulrich (1994: 4) namely “the communicative strategy and the explicit strategy”. The combination of these two strategies provides students with a clear and well-explained theoretical framework and a contextualized and natural environment to make them use the language in a native-like way. Language teachers must include communicative activities in their lesson plans such as oral presentations, individual or group projects, free written production, spontaneous speech, and the development of their own written and oral style. In this, there is no violation of the target language rules and students of a second language can implement all the theoretical aspects in their oral and written performance. In this way, learners will visualize grammar classes as an enjoyable experience that becomes the basis of a lifelong learning process.

Advantages of implementing the communicative teaching approach in the Grammar classes

The communicative teaching approach can provide the learners a better opportunity to communicate than a grammar-based approach. But there are several aspects that make the communicative approach and the traditional grammar method useful tools for students to learn the second language. Some aspects are suggested by Richards and they are:

1. Make real communication the focus of language learning.
2. Provide opportunities to experiment and try what they know.
3. Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
4. Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
5. Link the different skills, such as speaking, reading and listening, together in the real world.

6. Let students induce, or discover, grammar rules. (Richards, 2006: 13)

The language teacher will modify his teaching methodology in the classroom. Consequently, activities that demand accurate repetition, memorization of phrases, sentence patterns grammatical rules, drills and multiple choices must be substituted for activities that require learners to organise their knowledge about language to negotiate meaning, interact with their peers, plan activities that require logical thinking and defend their point of view.

Teachers' role of transformation: an educational shift

The language teacher assumes a responsibility for determining and responding to learner language needs. Language teachers should visualize the shift towards communicative language teaching as an open door to implement new teaching strategies. This way, they will have the opportunity to develop their creativity and interest in topics to be developed in the class. Those activities will have grammar as their focal point. Jacobs and Farrell identify key components of this shift. They are:

1. Focusing greater attention on the role of learners is receiving from their environment. Thus, the centre of attention shifts from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centred instruction.
2. Focusing greater attention on social nature of learning rather than on students as separate individuals. Focusing greater attention on diversity among learners and viewing these differences not as impediments to learning but as resources to be recognized, catered to and appreciated. This shift is known as the study of individual differences.
3. Along with this emphasis on context comes the idea of connecting the school with the outside world as a means of promoting holistic learning.
4. A whole-to-part orientation instead of a part-to-whole approach. This involves such approaches as beginning with meaningful, whole text, e.g. the choice of words and the text's organizational structure.
5. An emphasis on the importance of meaning rather than drills and other forms of rote learning.
6. A view of learning as a life-long process rather than something done to prepare students for examination (Jacobs and Farrell, 2003, p. 1).

Teachers implement various strategies to develop oral and written activities to promote interaction among students through these components. The communicative teaching forces language teachers to integrate the curriculum, grammar is not seen as a stand-alone subject but will be linked to other subjects in the curriculum. These changes in approach must not be based on just a single model of communicative language teaching. They can also be supplemented by the traditional grammar method. Combining them together and using them flexibly in teaching work can provide different responses to the questions teachers have about the effective and practical teaching of grammar.

Communicative Teaching Strategies

To make grammar classes active, vivid and creative is a constant challenge for most grammar teachers. This is not an easy task since it requires language teachers to develop and implement catchy activities to provoke students' enthusiasm and interest. However, there are some helpful and enjoyable activities that can make English language teachers' classes more fun and task oriented:

1. The teacher will choose a topic in which specific noun phrases and verb phrases must be used. He will provide the list of noun phrases and verb phrases he wants the students to use. The student will use that information and will write a story of three or four paragraphs. In this way, they will focus on meaning and organization.
2. Teacher and students can ask and answer questions about any topic whatever they like. The teacher will implement communicative drills that will encourage students to connect form, meaning, and use several grammatical structures to enable the speaker's message to be understood by the listener. They will develop the ability to use language to convey ideas and information and to encounter the grammar rule in a variety of contexts.
3. The teacher will ask students to sit down in a circle and asks them to choose an appealing topic and talk about it. When the topic is chosen, the teacher chooses a verb tense and begins the story by providing a statement to be developed orally by the students. Then, the first student will continue by adding some sentences. Each student adds something until finally the last participant gives the concluding sentence to end the story. The idea is to keep the same verb tense throughout the story and see how students

insert new information and vocabulary, and use simple or complex verbal phrases. Thus, they become story-tellers.

4. The teacher engages students in a short discussion which relates the content of a grammar structure to picture sequences of learners' own lives. Learners are encouraged to bring their background knowledge to the discussion. The teacher focuses on the use of referential questions in order to review grammar forms with the students, while genuine communication, content-based topic nominations, students' interactions and the negotiation of meaning by students and teacher are used.
5. The teacher matches grammatical patterns to particular communicative meanings, and the learners choose the right pattern to express ideas and feelings about a particular topic. This will help them to use grammar to express different communicative meanings, thus to see the connection between form and function.

Conclusion:

Communicative Language Teaching and Traditional Grammar Teaching can become perfect complements rather than separate issue. Teaching grammar requires more than making students memorize lists of words, noun phrases, verbal phrases, prepositions, articles and other grammatical structures. It urges the implementation of effective and useful teaching methodologies to guide, help, and induce students to visualize grammar as an efficient tool for transmitting their ideas in a clear and precise way. Grammar can be the vehicle to encourage a student's social integration into foreign cultures and peer interactions. Language teachers must see grammar teaching strategies as a way to develop techniques to teach the grammar subjects by implementing communicative activities in the classroom. Teachers must understand that students learn in different ways and have different strengths and abilities. This diversity in methodology and written and oral activities allows learners to develop their own learning strategies and self confidence toward English language.

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