Communicative language teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence.

The principles of communicative language teaching

- Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.

- Language teaching techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic and functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.

- Real communication is the focus of language learning.

- Authentic language should be introduced in the classroom whenever possible.

- Opportunities should be provided for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.

- There should be connectivity among the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, since they usually occur so in the real world.

- Errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of the communication skills and are therefore tolerated. Learners trying their best to use the language creatively and spontaneously are bound to make errors. Constant correction is unnecessary and even counter-productive.

- Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.

- The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study.

- Evaluation is carried out in terms of fluency and accuracy. Students who have the most control of the structures and vocabulary are not necessarily the best communicators.

- The students' native language has no role to play. The target language is used both during communicative activities and for the purpose of classroom management.

- In CLT, games, role plays, group work, pair work, etc. play an important role as they have certain feature in common to learn language effectively.

- The teacher is the facilitator of students' learning, manager of classroom activities, advisor during activities and a 'co-communicator' engaged in the communicative activity along with the students.

- Some might argue that this method can't be employed genuinely with low levels as there is no authentic communication, due to a limited vocabulary and restricted range of functions.

Communicative competence

Communicative competence, a term coined by linguist Dell Hymes in 1972, refers to a learner's ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. Communicative competence is made up of four competence areas:

1. *Linguistic competence*: it is the knowledge of the language code, i.e. its grammar and vocabulary, and also of the conventions of its written representation. The grammar component includes the knowledge of the sounds and their pronunciation (i.e. phonetics), the rules that govern sound interactions and patterns (i.e. phonology), the formation of words by means of e.g. inflection and derivation (i.e. morphology), the rules that govern the combination of words and phrases to structure sentences (i.e. syntax), and the way that meaning is conveyed through language (i.e. semantics).

2. *Sociolinguistic competence*: it is the knowledge of sociocultural rules of use, i.e. knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately. The appropriateness depends on the setting of the communication, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Moreover, being appropriate depends on knowing what the taboos of the other culture are, what politeness

indices are used in each case, how a specific attitude (authority, friendliness, courtesy, irony etc.) is expressed etc.

3. *Discourse competence*: it is the knowledge of how to produce and comprehend oral or written texts in the modes of speaking/writing and listening/reading respectively. It's knowing how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. Thus, discourse competence deals with organizing words, phrases and sentences in order to create conversations, speeches, poetry, email messages, newspaper articles etc.

4. *Strategic competence*: it is the ability to recognise and repair communication breakdowns and how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language. For instance, the speaker may not know a certain word, thus will plan to either paraphrase, or ask what that word is in the target language. During the conversation, background noise or other factors may hinder communication; thus the speaker must know how to keep the communication channel open. If the communication was unsuccessful due to external factors (such as interruptions), or due to the message being misunderstood, the speaker must know how to restore communication. These strategies may be requests for repetition, clarification, slower speech, or the usage of gestures, taking turns in conversation etc.