

COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND ITS MOTIVATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Araromi Maxwell Olakunle

(Language Education)

Department of Teacher Education

University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Abstract

This study explores the communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages. It also examines the motivational implications of the approach. The perceived ineffectiveness of earlier methods of language teaching paved way for the development of communicative language teaching method. The approach lay emphasis on communication as an ultimate goal and process of second language learning and teaching. The communicative activities that engender acquisition of skills in speaking and listening are engaged in by the learners through spontaneous guidance by the teacher, and under an autonomous atmosphere. This approach makes the learner to be self-motivated and more effective in the learning of the foreign language, thus making teaching easier.

Introduction

Language is a natural gift that differentiates the humans from the lower animals. Even though the animals have their communicative process, it cannot be said to be organized as that of human. Bern (1984) is of the view that language is interaction and it operates in the confine of the society and it is interpersonal. Therefore, in the study of language, one has to look at the context and situation under which language is used, i.e. the functions of language in the social and situational context, the roles and social status of the interlocutors in the communicative acts. In summary, language is communication and it is interactional. Communicative language teaching method (CLT) emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Since learners are conscious of their learning in the communicative language class, attempt would be made to consider the motivational implications of the approach on the learners of foreign or second language.

The ineffectiveness of the previous methods of language teaching such as audio lingual and grammar translation method paved way for the development of a new method termed communicative language teaching method (CLT). It is a product of language educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with previous methods of teaching foreign languages. They felt learners of foreign language are not learning a realistic whole language. The method came into being in the 70's as a replacement of former – non productive methods. It has been used over the years in the elementary, middle, secondary and post secondary levels. It appears under numerous names such as national – functional approach, teaching for proficiency, proficiency based instruction and communicative language teaching. As earlier said, CLT is a response to the demands of the language educators who felt that older methods are not producing the desired results in inculcating communicative competence in the learner of second or foreign language. Older methods such as audio lingual methods and situational language teaching emphasize structuralism which was put under strict scrutiny by Chomsky (1957). Chomsky criticized the structural theories on the basis of the fact that they failed to bring about creativity and uniqueness which is the hallmark of language learning. In addition Richards and Rodgers (1986) opined that structuralism could not account for functional and communicative potentials of language.

Overview of Communicative Language Teaching Method

Communicative language teaching makes use of real life situation that necessitates communication. The method is designed to help learners use the target language in a variety of contexts and situation in the classroom. Language use is not limited to the classroom setting only but extends beyond the four walls of the classroom. Learners must begin to see foreign language not only as a school subject but also as a real language of communication since the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is to gain mastery of the language and acquire communicative competence in it. Communicative competence is the knowledge of both formal and socio-linguistic aspects of language with adequate proficiency to communicate. In clear terms, language should not be detached from the society because a society without a language

is not deemed to be a functional society. Learner therefore should see language as a foundation upon which a society is built.

In addition, CLT helps learners to create meaning rather than develop perfect grammatical structures. Other methods such as grammar translation method succeeded in making the learners grammatically competent but deficient in their communicative acts. According to David Human (1991), the communicative language teacher emphasizes learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. When learners are given the opportunity to interact in the target language, they see the language as a living language and they would have a totally different view about the language and its communicative ability.

In communicative language teaching method, the learners concentrate not only on the language but also on the learning process. Only few language teaching methods lend themselves to these features. Learners observe the progression of their learning in sequential order in teaching- learning situation. This will inculcate psychological balance and emotional stability in the learners.

In addition to these features, Numan (1991) observes that communicative language teaching method encourages the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation. Language is not fictitious; neither is it an unreal entity. The introduction of authentic texts into the language class paints a picture that language is a reality in the social context and an instrument of interpersonal relationship in the society. Communicative language teaching bridges the gap between classroom language learning and the language activities outside the classroom. There should be a link between language classroom and the language activities outside the classroom. Language learning in the classroom must reflect the general language activities of the learners outside the classroom setting to make learning pragmatic. Learning entails change in behaviour and in the absence of change in behaviour; it is assumed that learning has not taken place. The basic and primary aim of learning a foreign language is to be able to acquire skills to function in the society as a member of the linguistic society. If someone does not have enough skills to be fully integrated into a linguistic community, such a person may find his or her existence in that society a miserable one. Communicative language teaching method endeavours to marry the classroom activities with the learners' experiences in the society. This

singular act affords the learners viable opportunity to improve on their language experiences in the society. Learners feel frustrated when they are unable to display their communicative prowess in their day-to-day encounter with members of the linguistic community. They make efforts to search for means of improving their communicative skills through interaction with the native speakers of the target foreign language. If this ample opportunity is not feasible, the communicative approach offers the learners a rare privilege to use the foreign language to interact in a classroom situation. Communicative activities of the learners are orchestrated to reflect the real life experience in the society. The communicative approach is of significance in that it helps learners develop communicative competence in the foreign language while other methods of language learning lay emphasis on acquisition of grammatical competence through careful mastery of the language structures of the foreign language. Communicative approach aims at developing the communicative skills in the learners through bringing out meaning in the target language. Development of grammatical competence through compulsory acquisition of grammatical rules which guide the learners in forming sentences of their own will only make them grammatically competent but deficient in their ability to use the target language in a communicative process.

However, some other methods, like audio-visual method, that encourage the learners to imbibe the native-like pronunciation through pattern stress and drilling or repetition may not necessarily yield any reasonable outcome because learners cannot successfully arrive at speaking the foreign language as the native speakers. This is not to say that imperfect pronunciation should be encouraged among the learners in their learning process in the classroom situation, but the primary objective of learning foreign language is to master the language for communicative purposes and this is what communicative approach stands to address.

In addition, continuous emphasis on repetition of utterances and recorded conversations by the native speakers of language, as claimed by the advocates of audio – lingual method, as appropriate technique for improving the listening and speaking skills of the learners may not be totally embraced in the teaching of foreign language to learners. Some of the adherents of this method claimed that language is habit according to the theory of behaviorism, having the notion that

learners would imbibe the habit of communicating in the target language through imitating the utterances of the native speakers. On the other hand, Noam Chomsky claimed that language is not a habit structure and continuous emphasis on repetition does not lead to communicative competence. On the contrary, it is assumed that ordinary linguistic behaviour characteristically involves formation of new sentences, innovation and creativity in line with the structure and rules that guide the sentence structure of the language.

In clear terms, language learning should give room for flexibility and creativity without unnecessary mimicry or repetition of the utterances of the native speakers of the foreign language. Memorizing or imitating the utterances of the native speaker would constitute psychological shock to the learners when faced with communicative challenge different but slightly similar to situational context already familiar with by the learners. In this kind of situation, the learners tend to maneuver their way out of communicative problems by trying to exhibit the linguistic behaviours they are already familiar with but which may not necessarily fit into the situational context in the real life conversation.

Any approach that puts the learners in a situation where they can make spontaneous utterances in the foreign language is said to be a formidable and a linguistically viable approach to foreign language learning. Language is communication as conceived by the proponents of communicative approach and activities in the foreign language class should be geared towards inculcating communicative competence in the learners. Richards and Rodgers (1986) identified three principles with regard to the theory of language learning. They are of the opinion:

- that learning is by activities in which learners are engaged in meaningful task.
- that learning is promoted when the language used is meaningful to the learners, i.e. the learners must engage in meaningful task.
- that the activities in which the learners are engaged should not only be meaningful in themselves but should also be meaningful to the learners.

Activities in the Communicative Class

- (a) In the communicative language teaching class, the classroom activities reside around the real life situation. Well orchestrated human activities that necessitate the use of the target language are put in place by the foreign language teacher in the classroom situation. The major objectives of the activities are to put the learners in a situation where they can use language to communicate.
- (b) The real outcome or objective of the lesson is not made known to the learners; the learners are left in suspense of the topic for the day. The topic keeps on changing everyday. The learners show absolute interest in the learning of the language because they engage in meaningful conversation in the target language from day to day.
- (c) The teacher in a communicative class plays the role of a facilitator or a monitor. The students do more of the talking while the teacher sits back and listens to the students. Larsen – Freeman (1986) reiterates that in the communicative class the teacher becomes active facilitator of his students' learning. He or she talks less and listens more.
- (d) The teacher makes use of both the target language and the gestures to convey the task at hand to the learners and gets the students perform or act out a scene in the classroom situation. The teacher can make use of English language to explain some cultural elements in the conversation, the grammatical features in the conversation and the structure used.
- (e) The teacher models a conversation in the target language. He encourages the students to respond to questions asked in the target language, e.g. making a request or introducing oneself in the target language. The students respond to questions asked in the target language in a new communicative situation through the assistance of the teacher. The learners are therefore made to listen to a recorded conversation by the native speakers of the

language as a form of reinforcement to consolidate the classroom experience.

- (f) The teacher may give the learners some home assignments or instructions to listen to a conversation in the public or real life situation in their environment. The learners are expected to answer some questions in the target language and they are expected to document their experience or write a report on them in the target language. When this report is brought to the class, it gives room for a discussion on the exercise in the target language.

Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is one of the variables to be reckoned with while discussing the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language. It is a drive that determines the action of the learners in the teaching-learning situation. Takayuki (2002) opines that motivation determines the degree of efforts a learner puts into foreign or second language learning. A well motivated learner puts more efforts into learning the foreign language than an unmotivated one. The concept of motivation emanates from social psychology.

Clement, Dornyei and Noel (1994) divided motivation into three levels: language, learner and the learning situation levels respectively. The three levels proposed by Clement et al (1994) meet the three basic constituents of second language learning, i.e. the target language, learner and the language environment. Motivation as one of the variables that determine learners' achievement in second language learning could be divided into two major parts: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation denotes learning a foreign language in order to gain an entry into the target language culture and linguistic community. The learner who learns a foreign language under this orientation seeks to be identified with the native speaker of the language and their culture and successfully integrate him or herself into the language environment where the foreign language is used as a medium of communication.

Instrumental motivation on the other hand connotes learning a foreign language for utilitarian purpose (getting international jobs, or appointment, high grades and travelling abroad, etc).

Elis (1986) is of the view that it is not always easy to differentiate between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation while considering the motivational orientation of each foreign language learner. Another argument put forth by the researcher is whether the two levels of motivation, i.e. instrumental and integrative motivation, cover the full spectrum of learners' motivation because he believes that a learner or a group of learners may have purposes or reasons for learning a foreign language that is outside the scope of the two orientations. Therefore, there is urgent need to dig further into the concept of motivation to know its nature and features.

Motivational Implications

Communicative approach gives a lot of room for learners' motivation in the foreign language learning situation because of the level of involvement of the learners in the learning process. Larsen Freeman (1986) opines that the learners gain confidence in using the target language because of increased responsibility to participate in the class activities in the communicative class. It is quite interesting to note that the level of autonomy enjoyed by the learners in the communicative class gives them enough confidence to exhibit their potentials. The communicative class is far from being quiet. The students do much of the talking and they are at liberty to leave their seats to complete a given task while the teacher only serves as facilitator or coordinator of the classroom activities.

Clement, Donyei and Noels (1994) concluded in their study that good classroom atmosphere promotes students involvement and activity while moderating anxiety promotes self – confidence. They believed that learners bring into the classroom the self – confidence and anxiety in relation with the extra-curricular experiences with the language and these will have bearing on their classroom behaviour achievement and anxiety.

In the communicative class the learners are very active, and being active in class means having the notion that one can use the language outside the classroom. Communicative approach gives room for the learners to exercise their liberty in the classroom situation unlike in the conventional method where the teacher is an enigma upon which the learners rely for imparting knowledge. It should be

noted that autonomous learners become more highly motivated and that autonomy leads to better and more effective work. It increases motivation and consequently increases learning effectiveness. According to Knowles (1995), there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn better than people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners).

Wang and Peverly (1986) also supported the view of the earlier researchers. They concluded that independent or autonomous learners are those who have the capacity for being active and independent in the learning process. They can identify goals, formulate their own learning strategies and monitor their own learning. Dickenson (1987) summarized the advantages of autonomy in learning in some few lines. The researcher is of the view that:

- Since learners set their agenda, learning would be more focused and more purposeful and more effective both shortly and on the long run.
- Since the learners take responsibility for learning, the barrier between learning and living usually found in the traditional teacher in the educational structure will not exist.
- In the absence of barrier between learning and living, the learners would take advantage of their autonomous status and transfer it to their activities as active participants or members of the larger society. By so doing, they become useful members of the society.

In summary, communicative exercises where learners are made to report their experiences offhand motivate them because topics of interest to the learners are treated at an appropriate time. Therefore, since communicative approach accords the learner the privilege to be independent and follow the learning process, they tend to be self-motivated and engage in learning activities without a push from teacher, parents, peers and so on.

Conclusion

This paper discussed extensively communicative approach to second language learning. The conceptualization and characteristics of the communicative approach as a contemporary approach to second

language learning are exhaustively discussed. Communicative approach is said to lay particular emphasis on communication as an ultimate goal and process of second language learning. Communicative activities that engender acquisition of skills in speaking and listening are engaged in by the learners through spontaneous guidance by the teacher and under an autonomous atmosphere. The autonomous status of the learners makes them to be self-motivated and more effective in the learning of the foreign language.

References

- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures* The Hague, Mouton.
- Clement, R., Dornyei, Z and Noel, K.A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language learning*, 44(3), 417 – 448.
- David Nunan (1991). *Language teaching methodology. A textbook for teachers*, Prentice Hall.
- Dickenson, L. (1995). Autonomy and motivation: A literature review system 23, 165 – 174.
- Ely, C.M. (1986). Language learning motivation: A descriptive and causal analysis. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70, 28 – 35.
- Knowles, M.S. (1995) *Self directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. Chicago: Association Press.
- Larsen Freeman, D. (1986). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J.C. and Rodgers, T.S. (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching, a description and analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takayuki, N (2002). Critical literature review on motivation. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*. Volume 1 number 3. Ibaraki University of Japan.
- Wang & Peverly (1986). The Self-Instructive process in classroom learning contexts' *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. 11:370.404