A Progress in English Language Teaching Approach: CLT to Context Approach

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Abstract

Change never changes. The history of English Language Teaching keeps changing its colour as it is built upon many positive and negative outcomes. The purpose of teaching English aims at making the learners use the language so the usage of the language by the learners has been being assessed and new methodologies have been introduced and implemented. Even though the CLT was considered a better approach during the 80s, the contemporary Linguist criticizes the outcome of the approach. Hence in this study, the author focuses on the different stages and factual errors in CLT that lead to the Context Approach. This article also argues the advantages of the Context Approach and concludes with the radical changes in the approach.

Keywords: CLT, Context Approach, Target Language, English Language Teaching (ELT), Communicative Competence.

1. Introduction

Noam Chomsky the renowned linguist came out with the ideology of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1960s. Target Language (TL) competence and performance in the learning process were given importance in the CLT. Even though Chomsky introduced the approach, the conceptual formation was set by the famous linguists Michael Halliday and Dell Hymes in the 1970s. The importance of grammar which is used to express the functions of language and the wider communicative competence in TL are studied by Michael Halliday and Dell Hymes respectively. Littlewood (1981) argues that compared to Chomsky's narrower linguistic competence Halliday's is wider. The primary language teaching methods were loosening in language teaching as it was depending on memorization and repetition. The development of CLT made the worn-out situational language teaching vanish. The linguists trusted more on the interaction among the learners of TL rather than just imitating. The hoary approaches did not provide the real-time situational based usage of the TL.

The critics like Swan (1985) reported the practical and theoretical difficulties in adopting CLT in the classrooms as a theoretical understanding of the linguists are completely different from the practical understanding of a language teacher. According to Swan, the theories of the linguists will confuse the teachers and learners in applying the CLT techniques. Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers (2014) criticizes that Chomsky's structural theories of language fail in real-time communication. Moreover, the primitive approaches were ineffective even in classrooms. The linguists started finding the methods for developing the learners' communicative skills and functional competence rather than mastering the syntax and lexical functions of the TL.

This article aims at discussing the shortcomings of CLT even though it served the purpose during the 80s while comparing with the previous methods and approaches such as Grammar-Translation and Direct method. Though the CLT has certain shortfalls the remark it made was really appreciable. But as it ignored the main characteristics of language teaching it was made to change the paradigm into a Context Approach.

2. Literary Review

In the year 1972, the concept of communicative competence was introduced by Dell Hymes. According to him, the phenomenon of language is bound with society and culture. He argued that real-time socio-environmental research should be carried out rather than focusing on structures. Further, he said there are "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." The objective of foreign language teaching is not only to instruct the students with a set of grammatical rules but to make them ease in their communicative competence

in real life. Target culture and the real atmosphere of the TL should be given importance while teaching the TL. He stresses that the communicative function and teaching content is important in foreign language teaching.

Canale and Swain (1980) classified the Communicative Competence into four aspects, Grammatical Competence, Social Competence, Discourse Competence, and Strategic Competence. Widdowson's (1978) four elements of effective communication also states the same. Grammatical Competence denotes the usage of vocabulary, morphology, grammar, pronunciation, etc. In Social Competence, they argue that the culture of TL, environment of the language being used and the custom of the target language are to be focused while teaching. Discourse Competence meant that the form of the TL with the meaning of the TL should be combined and made the learners use the TL in any socio-linguistic environment. Discourse Competence mainly focuses on the formal usage of the TL. Strategic Competence focuses on the different skills apart from language adopted by the learners to improve their communicative competence in the TL. Altogether Dell Hymes, Widdowson, Canale and Swain's concepts paved the way to CLT.

It is Richards and Rodgers' (1986), who first made their criticism strong against CLT that it is learners' oriented. They included the terms such as drill, pattern, and laboratory which made awareness on the importance of grammar patterns and techniques. They argued that earlier to CLT the patterns were more concerned about the drill and pattern-based drills that made the learners aware of grammatical techniques and structures. According to them in CLT "drilling may occur, but peripherally". Bachman (1990) facilitated a survey in Communicative Competence and he divided the competence into a broad title of "organizational Competence". He included Grammatical and Discourse Competence and Pragmatic Competence which leads to "Illocutionary Competence" that is related to the TL speakers' ability in applying communication strategies in TL.

In addition to that Ridge (1992) accepted the arguments that CLT facilitates the learners to achieve communicative competence but she questioned their competency of making full and adequate use of language as no importance is given to grammar teaching. She also argued that there was no standard definition of CLT compared to the earlier approaches. Few more critics of CLT also added that CLT facilitated the learners to reproduce the utterances that are grammatically wrong as the approach did not make proper emphasis on grammar teaching.

Bax (2003) made his criticism directly on the CLT saying that the context of TL's implementation is missing when a teacher would follow CLT. He further asserted that from the perspective of modernism the learners and teachers were forced to use the techniques of CLT without knowing that they were failing to teach the TL successfully. The paradigm has been changed as Bax has made his perception clear that the CLT make a negative effect on the learners' TL competency as the teachers themselves are not aware of what they must teach. The importance of the Context Approach is stressed by him.

3.Aims of the Study

It has been the trending research topic of the linguists to find out the opt approach to teach English to the Foreign language learners as the language is the lingua franca of all the aspects of life all over the globe. Since the development of CLT, it has been being made to believe that the approach is the best as it aims to facilitate the learners to achieve the Communicative Competency in the TL. In this study, an attempt is made to analyze the pits and falls of the CLT and the reasons for the emergence of the Context Approach.

3.1. Learning and Teaching in CLT – Overview

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach, used in language teaching that highlights the interaction among the learners in the TL. The primary goal of the approach is to make the learners attain the Communicative Competency in the TL. The approach believes that the process of language learning is not only inside but outside the classroom too. Grammatical structure and rules are not taken into consideration in the process of learning TL. Grammatical Competence is no more considered. Teachers are considered as a guide by side so they are looked as a facilitator rather than as a teacher.

The CLT facilitators believed the classroom activities than grammar drills or other activities. According to Mitchell (1988), the CLT is based on six activities like roleplay, interviews, group works, information gap, opinion sharing, and scavenger hunt. Role-play is to develop the learners' communicative competence in the TL and it is an oral-based activity. The learners felt ease as the activity is done in pairs. The facilitator has to be careful about whether the students are making sentences rather than utterances as most of the students make only utterances as the activity depends on how far the partner can understand the conversation.

Claus (2007) argues that the interview activity in CLT is to develop the learners' interpersonal skills. The activity is done in pairs. The facilitator can monitor the activity as the activity is between two. The activity is highly structured and the facilitator can monitor the learner's grammar and choice of diction in context. This

activity is meant for the beginners as higher-level learners can make conversation easily. The next activity is group work which is a collective activity. This activity focuses on a single information. The learners have to share the opportunity with the other group members equally.

According to Jack (2006), the information gap is a collaborative activity, in which the learners are forced to obtain unknown information as much possible. The facilitator has to design the activity according to the need of the learners. The learner can learn unknown information in the TL. Sharing and exchanging the information makes the learner communicate effectively in the TL. He also discusses the opinion sharing activity which is content-based. In this activity, the learners are given a sensitive topic and asked to discuss it. The facilitator has to respect the learners' opinion so even the timid learners participate effectively.

The scavenger hunt is another activity that can be used as an icebreaking among the large classroom setup. Claus (2007) argues that this activity has to properly monitor by the facilitator as there is no structure. Unlike other activities in this activity, the learners get an opportunity to talk with everyone in the classroom. The students feel more confident and comfortable because making the conversation is easier as they collect only the basic information about themselves.

3.2. CLT – Constructivism

CLT, according to H.K.Xiong & D.L.Xiong (2004) is based on the learners' autonomous learning that is based on constructivism. The constructivism focuses on the teachers' role to be the supporters of the learners in constructing the learners' knowledge in the TL. In this, the learners are acquiring the knowledge, not passively like the previous approaches but actively. The learners are considered as the constructors of their own linguistic knowledge based on their own exposure in the TL. In the autonomous learning process, as the learners, initiative and active participation are required, the learning is considered as a 'process', not as an 'outcome'.

O'Malley & Chaot (1990) argue that the success of the autonomous learning process is based on the teachers' efficiency in scheduling and the way they made the learners use the strategies. They further add that "the cognitive strategies enabling learners to deal with and develop the input language knowledge, and the metacognitive strategies used for monitoring, adjusting or self-management". They also accepted that implementation of autonomous learning with proper strategies alone does not fetch the competency but it is the learners' determination to learn for their life.

3.3. The disadvantages of CLT

The CLT approach was even though praised by most of the linguists, it has its own limitations that made the linguists lookout for another alternative. Linguists like Swan (1985) clearly criticizes the practical implications of the CLT in a classroom. According to him, there was confusion in the application of the techniques in a real-time classroom. The approach focuses only on 'function' and does not give importance to the 'structure'. Here, function means the usage of language knowledge of the learner in TL and structure means the grammatical system of the TL. He worries that the learners can suffer by leaving the grammatical system that will make 'serious gaps' in acquiring the knowledge of the TL.

According to Dan Lu & Julie (2013), there are few limitations to the application of CLT. The factors like 'neglect of errors, emphasis on global meaning, big classroom size, and unreal peer communication' makes the CLT unsuccessful. CLT paid insufficient attention to the context in which teaching-learning takes place. The CLT often has the socio-cultural difficulty as the learners are not aware of the society and culture of the TL. While CLT focuses more on the fluency, no attention is given for the accuracy. The learners are left with their own error findings and error deduction using their own cognitive understandings of the TL which results in the learners producing incoherent and grammatically errored sentences.

The major disadvantage of the CLT is that the students are allowed to commit mistakes and the teachers are facing difficulty in correcting the mistakes in between the activities, especially if the class is big. The learners are not given a chance to correct their mistakes. According to Swan, the learners can convey their communicative functions in their language but they face difficulty to execute the same in the TL as they lack vocabulary.

3.4. Alternative Paradigm – Context Approach

Jacobs and Farrell (2001) comment that "When a paradigm shift takes place, we see things from a different perspective as we focus on different aspects of the phenomena." The paradigm shift has been first proposed by Bax (2003), argues that CLT is facing a negative effect as the teachers and learners are not aware of the

priorities in language teaching. Hence the learners' attention is drawn away from the real context of teaching and learning.

According to Bax (2003), language teachers must use the Context Approach to achieve the communicative competence of the learners. The teachers before starting their classes have to make an analysis and choose the suitable approach according to the learners' ability in the TL. As the approach is an eclectic approach in nature the teachers should be aware of contextual analysis. Richards and Rogers (2001) call this as a method not as an approach as 'design' and 'procedure' are not available. It is in the hands of teachers to create the learning context according to the learners' need that has to be analyzed by the teacher.

The CLT includes assumptions about "correct" teaching methods, materials and learning styles whereas the Context Approach includes teaching methods, materials and learning styles stem from and specific to local and national contexts of the TL. Bax further states that the teacher should consider the individual learners' learning styles, strategies. The classroom culture such as classmates' ability, group motivation, and school environment and local and national culture also plays a vital role in language teaching. Different stages are required to carry out the language teaching like improving the teacher's awareness in language context, planning the lesson, evaluating and reflecting the learnt context.

4.Conclusion

In the era of looking at English learning as global language learning, not as second or foreign language learning as called earlier, the paradigm shift has been being discussed to make the learners attain the communicative competency in the TL. The evolving argument has begun with Bax's view on paradigm shift towards the context. The language like English is being spoken widely by the non-native speakers the experiences of the native in particular context will make the learners deliver the TL perfectly.

"Education is a very complex process, relating closely to linguistics, sociology, psychology, and so on. Teachers need to know and study individual differences among language learners, and discover sensibly the difficulties and problems in their different leaning phases, and then design new teaching methods to solve these problems" (Qu, 2004). Good teachers always give importance to the context. When the context of teaching is perfect the learners' ability to achieve the communicative competency is high. But the earlier approaches including CLT place the context not as primary.

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