

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LESSONS: A CASE STUDY OF BEGORO PRESEC

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains one of the most influential approaches to second language instruction because of its emphasis on communicative competence. (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Ellis, 1996). This study examines the use of Communicative Language Teaching techniques in English as a Second Language lessons at Begoro PRESEC. It examined the existence of information gap in lesson activities, the existence of alternative for a choice of information in lesson activities and the extent to which feedback is given in lesson activities. This research used qualitative approach, collecting data through observation and interview, and analyzing it. The findings indicate that the CLT approach to language pedagogy has dominated language instruction at the SHS level, as all the lessons sampled in this paper used techniques from this approach. It was specifically found that all the lessons had alternatives for which students had to make a choice, feedback was evident in all the lessons, and information gaps existed in all the lessons, which made these lessons gain the characteristic of CLT. It was also found that many of the teachers do not have knowledge of the theoretical basis of the techniques they use. It is therefore recommended that teachers upgrade their knowledge of approaches and techniques of teaching language through professional development workshops.

Key Words: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) information gap, alternatives for choice, feedback in pedagogical interaction.

Introduction

A look back at language education techniques reveals techniques like Audio-lingual, Grammar Translation, Suggestopedia, and Total Physical Response. These strategies are all based on a theory. Theoretically, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is likewise grounded (Larson - Freeman, 1986; Ellis, 1996). The CLT approach, which was developed in Britain, is used extensively in ESL classrooms all around the world (Ellis 1996).

Many linguists and language teachers consider CLT to be a compelling theoretical model in ELT and a practical method for teaching languages (Canale, 1983; Littlewood, 1981; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Rivers, 1987). CLT is described by Richards, et al. in the Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992) as an approach to foreign or second language instruction which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence.

Despite knowing the grammar and usage conventions, students may still have trouble speaking the language (Widdowson 1978). This led to the realization in the 1970s that effective communication necessitated that Students carry out specific tasks as well, such as promising, inviting, and denying invitations in a social setting (Wilkins 1976). In other words, communication required more than just language proficiency; it also required communicative proficiency, or understanding when and how to convey what to whom (Hymes, 1971). These findings helped the field transition from a linguistic structure-centered approach to a Communicative Approach in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Widdowson 1990).

By making communicative competence the end goal of language instruction and by recognising the connection of language and communication, communicative language teaching strives to broadly implement the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach. How the tenets are read and applied may determine how something appears in the classroom (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Some of these principles are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Adherents of CLT encourage the use of language resources that are authentic to native speakers of the target language in order to address the common issue that students cannot apply what they learn in the classroom to the outside world and to expose students to natural language in a variety of situations (Breen and Candlin, 1980: Widdowson, 1978). Of all, what comes naturally and authentically to native speakers of the target language does not necessarily do the same for classroom learners. It's crucial that these resources are utilized in a way that is practical for students (Widdowson 1998).

For example: a passage (a text) with the phrases rearranged is provided to the students. They may be familiar with this text already or it may be new to them. They are instructed to reassemble the sentences in their original order by unscrambling them. Students learn about language's cohesion and coherence features through activities of this nature. They learn how formal linguistic elements like pronouns, which make a text cohesive and a semantic proposition, which unify and make a text coherent, let sentences be joined together at the suprasentential level (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Students might also be challenged to decipher the lines of a jumbled dialog in addition to written texts. Or students can be asked to create lines to go with the photos in a picture strip story and arrange the photographs in the correct order. In CLT, games are widely used. They're fun for the pupils, and if they're made well, they help them improve their communication skills.

The activity just described is an example of using a problem-solving task as a communicative technique. Problem-solving tasks work well in CLT because they usually include the three features of communication. What's more, they can be structured so that students share information or work together to arrive at a solution. This gives students practice in negotiating meaning.

The following three characteristics appear in communication activities: There is an information gap. The speaker has a choice regarding what to say and how to say it (which form her prediction would take). The audience offered comments to the speaker. No one would respond if her prediction was unclear, she reasoned. She could assume that her prognosis was understood if she received a meaningful reaction.

Because they allow students the chance to practice speaking in various social circumstances and social roles, role plays are crucial in CLT. It is possible to set up role plays in a more structured fashion (for instance, by having the teacher tell the students who they are and what to say) or in a less structured manner (for example, the teacher tells the students who they are, what the situation is, and what they are talking about, but the students determine what they will say). Of course, the latter is more in line with CLT because

it gives the pupils more options. Since students cannot foresee what the other person or individuals will say, as is the case with most types of communication, role plays constructed in this way also provide information gaps (there is a natural unpredictability). Feedback is also given to students regarding how well they have communicated.

The principles we deduced from the foregoing are that "authentic language", language as it is spoken in a real context should be introduced whenever possible. Reiterating the previous point, part of being communicatively competent is being able to discern the speaker's or writer's intents. The target language is not only the subject of study, but also a means of communication in the classroom.

Language can take on many distinct forms for the same function. A range of linguistic forms are given together because the course's emphasis is on real-world language use. The focus is on communicating as a process rather than just on mastering language forms (Littlewood, 1981). The level of language that students should practice using is discourse or suprasentential (above the sentence). They must study cohesion and coherence, two linguistic traits that bring sentences together.

Games are significant because they have characteristics with actual communicative events—the exchange has a goal. Additionally, the speaker gets quick feedback from the audience on how well they were able to communicate. They can negotiate meaning in this way. Additionally, giving students the opportunity to work in small groups maximizes their opportunity for communication practice. It is important to provide students the chance to voice their thoughts and opinions.

Errors are accepted and considered as a normal part of learning how to communicate. Since the purpose of this exercise was to improve fluency, the teacher chose not to correct the student but instead merely recorded the mistake, which he will address at a later time. Creating environments that are likely to foster communication is one of the teacher's main duties.

The development of cooperative connections among pupils is encouraged by communication. It provides an opportunity for pupils to practice negotiating meaning. The statements must have meaning in the social context of the communication event. The development of proper language usage is a crucial component of communicative competence. A speaker has a choice in communication about both what to say and how to express it.

According to Littlewood (1981); Brumfit (1984); Widdowson (1978); Johnson and Morrow (1981); Richards and Rodgers (1986); Larsen-Freeman (1986); Celce-Murcia (1991) and Johnson (1982), The ability of students to communicate in the target language is one of the stated objectives of teachers who employ communicative language teaching. Students must be familiar with the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions in order to accomplish this. They must understand that a single form can frequently carry out a number of various purposes in addition to being utilized to conduct many different functions. Given the social setting and the interlocutors' duties, they must be able to select the most suitable form from this list. Additionally, they must be able to control the process of meaning negotiation with their interlocutors. Understanding the many linguistic forms is insufficient; communication is a process.

One may argue that the instructor supports communication in the classroom when one takes into account the roles of the students and the teacher. One of his main duties in this position is to create circumstances that are likely to encourage dialogue. He serves as an advisor during the events, responding to inquiries from the kids and keeping an eye on their progress. He might make a note of their mistakes to be addressed later when performing more accurate-focused tasks. Other times, he might participate in the communicative action with pupils as a "co-communicator" (Littlewood 1981).

Students are, above all else, communicators. They actively engage in meaning negotiation even when their proficiency in the target language is weak, trying to be understood while simultaneously making an effort to understand others. Additionally, because the teacher's role is less dominating than in a teacher-centered method, students are seen as more accountable managers of their own learning. The defining feature of CLT is that communication is the primary motivation behind practically all actions. Through communicative exercises including games, role plays, and problem-solving exercises, students utilize the language a lot. According to Johnson and Morrow (1981), truly communicative activities share three characteristics: an information gap, a choice, and feedback. An information gap exists when one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not. If we both know that today is Tuesday and I ask you, 'What is today?' and you answer, 'Tuesday,' our exchange is not really communicative.

The speaker in a communication situation has a choice as to what to say and how to say it. If the activity is strictly restricted so that students can only express themselves in one way, the exchange is not communicative because the speaker has no other option. A student cannot choose her form or topic in a chain drill if she must respond to her neighbor's question in the same way that her neighbor responded to someone else's inquiry. As a result, meaningful communication is not achieved (Brown, 1994). Real communication has a goal. As a result, a speaker can assess the success of his or her message depending on the feedback she receives from the audience. A conversation is not considered to be truly communicative if the listener is not given the chance to offer this feedback to the speaker. Creating questions through a transformation drill may be beneficial, but CLT does not support it because the speaker will not receive feedback from the listener and cannot determine whether her query has been understood. Finally, it is noted that students frequently work in small groups to complete CLT exercises. To make the most of the time provided to each student for communication, it is preferable for small groups of students to interact (Harmer, 2007; Brown, 1994).

Given the nature of the interactions between the teacher and the students, it is evident that the teacher may deliver a portion of the lesson, such as when discussing linguistic accuracy. While he occasionally engages in direct interaction with the pupils, he is sometimes the activity facilitator. He occasionally engages in co-communication, but more frequently he creates circumstances that encourage interaction among the pupils (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Students engage in a lot of interpersonal interaction. They perform this in a variety of groups, including pairs, triads, small groups, and the entire group. In light of the students' emotions, it is clear that one of the fundamental tenets of CLT is that students will be more motivated to study a foreign language if they can communicate because they will feel like they are learning to do something meaningful with the language. Teachers also provide kids a chance to exhibit their uniqueness by often asking them to share their thoughts and opinions. The numerous opportunities for cooperative exchanges between students and the teacher also contribute to student security.

Given the way that language and culture are perceived, it seems clear that communication is the primary purpose of language, and that linguistic competence—the understanding of forms and their meanings—is merely a subset of communicative competence. The understanding of the purposes for which language is employed is another part of communicative competence. As this work has demonstrated, different forms can be employed to carry out a single function (Larsen-Freeman 1986). It is possible to forecast something by using phrases like "It may rain" or "Perhaps it will rain." On the other hand, the language can serve a range of purposes in the same form. For instance, the word "may" can be used to express prediction or permission.

Learning requires understanding of forms, meanings, and functions. However, in order to effectively communicate their intended meaning, writers must also employ this information and take the

social context into account. While a speaker can ask for permission using the word "may" (as in "May I take a piece of fruit? "), he or she is more likely to use the word "can" if they regard the listener to be more of a social equal or the setting to be informal. Culture is the way that language users live their daily lives. Certain components of it, including the use of nonverbal behavior, which might get more focus in CLT, are particularly crucial to communication. It's possible to prioritize language functions over forms. There are times when a functional syllabus is employed, but not always. For each function, a number of forms are introduced (Thompson 1996:10). At first, just the simpler forms would be taught, but as students gain proficiency in the target language, the functions are once again introduced and students learn the more sophisticated forms. So, for instance, beginning pupils could practice saying "Would you" and "Could you" as they learn to ask for things. Highly skilled students may learn the phrase "I wonder whether you would mind."

Students begin by working on all four skills (Celce-Murcia 1991). The idea that meaning is derived from the written word through an interaction between the reader and the writer is similar to the idea that spoken communication occurs through negotiation between speaker and listener. The reader attempts to grasp the writer's goals and the writer writes with the reader's perspective in mind, even though the writer is not present to receive immediate feedback from the reader. Therefore, meaning is not just contained in the text but rather develops through negotiation between the author and reader (Celce-Murcia 1991). Given the importance of the pupils' native language, it can be observed that CLT allows for the sparing use of such language (Brumfit, 1984). The target language should, however, be used wherever possible not only for communicative activities but also to explain the activities to the students or to assign homework (Larsen Freeman 1986). The students gain knowledge from these discussions on classroom management and understand that the target language is a tool for communication, not just something to be studied.

When evaluating students, teachers take into account both their correctness and their fluency (Brown 1994). The best communicator is not usually the kid who has the most control over the grammar and language. A teacher, in his capacity as a co-communicator or advisor, may formally assess the performance of his students). A teacher will probably employ an integrative test with a genuine communicative purpose for a more formal evaluation (Savignon, 2001). For instance, a teacher might ask pupils to compose a letter to a friend in order to evaluate their writing abilities. CLT is believed to be the result of a multidisciplinary approach that at the very least incorporates linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research (Savignon, 2001). In light of all these complexities, it is well acknowledged that CLT supporters consider it an approach rather than a strategy (Richards and Rodgers 1986; Savignon 1997; Brown 1994). It is also assumed that CLT has a place in second language pedagogy which this paper seeks to look at.

1.1 Limitations of the Study

This study has the following as its limitations:

only one school was studied and only four lessons were observed. only Form Two classes were included; as a result, the study may not represent all SHS English teaching practices;

Another limitation of the study was that because the teachers know that they were being observed for the purpose of research, they tried to put up the best in the classroom. This means that the data from the observation might be better than what is the ideal classroom.

2.0. The purpose, objectives and research questions of the study



The purpose of this paper is to examine how CLT principles are reflected in English language lessons at Begoro PRESEC, focusing specifically on information gap, learner choice, and feedback

As a result of the above purpose, this research has the following as objective to guide the research in the conduct of this work:

1. To assess the existence of information gap in lesson activities
2. To examine the existence of alternative for choice of information in lesson activities
3. To examine the extent to which feedback is given in lesson activities

As a result of the above objectives, this research has the following as research questions to guide the research in the conduct of this work:

1. What is the information gap in lesson activities?
2. What is alternative for choice of information in lesson activities?
3. What is the *extent to which* feedback is given in lesson activities?

Research Methodology

This research used qualitative approach by obtaining data through observation and interview, and analyzing this data. Conclusion is drawn from the analysis based on the relevance of each data and not necessarily counting and drawing conclusion from the numbers. The research design that was used is case study which is a strategy that involves an empirical investigation of a particular issue in the actual context which presents the perspective of the sampled participants involved in the phenomena (Robson, 1993)

The participants who form the population of the study are students of Begoro Senior High School in the eastern region of Ghana. The school has a population of two thousand six hundred and eighty students. The researchers selected form two students which has a population of eight hundred and sixteen students. The researcher chose the form because it is the classes that one of the researchers is currently teaching, also it is the classes that are preparing to sit for the west African examination council exams (WASSCE) in the near future

For this study to be successful, the researchers selected four teachers out the five teachers teaching the form and observed a lesson each. One of the researchers who was teaching the form was left out to eliminate bias. The selection was based on purposive sampling as well.

4.0 Result and Discussion

4.1. the Description of the Lessons and the Interview of Teachers

One-hour lessons of all the four English language teachers was observed. The first two lessons were reading comprehension lessons. In the first lesson, the teacher introduced the lesson by asking the students questions on the pictures on the page. This was linked the title of the passage and the class predicted what they think is the situation in the passage. In the second lesson, the teacher introduced the lesson by asking questions on the title and the students discussed what they know about such situations in real life.

After, this, both teachers asked the students to skim the passages to get general ideas about the passages. They then had short discussions on the passages to confirm or refute what they had predicted. The students were then asked to do detailed reading after which they were asked to answer the comprehension question on the passage.

After which the teacher of the first lesson guided the students to do peer marking. The teacher of the second however, collected the exercises for marking later. They all discussed the answers with the students. In doing that, they gave opportunity to the students to express themselves about the issues raised in the text.

The third lesson was a grammar lesson on sentences. The teacher took the students through the types of sentences based on structure and at each section of the lesson, students were asked to give example where they sometimes have the freedom to choose what their sentence will be about.

The fourth lesson was a literature lesson on the drama book (The Son of Umbele). The teacher chose some of the students to read the text. The teacher then, paused the reading at vantage points and asked questions on the issues raised in the text. The students were encouraged to make meaning of what was being read and communicate same to the class as the teacher guided them.

After the lesson all the teachers were asked the following interview questions and they gave the subsequent answers in the respective excerpts:

What teaching approach or method did you use and why did you use it?

Have you heard of CLT approach and how is it seen in your lesson?

Teacher 1: I used question and answer method. I used this method because I think it is the best for Reading and Comprehension lessons. we were taught CLT in the university but I have forgotten the details.

Teacher 2: I used question and answer method because that is what I prefer. I have heard of it in school but I cannot remember the detail formation.

Teacher 3: I used lecture method. I used this method because it is convenient for teaching grammar. I do not remember anything about CLT although I have heard it before.

Teacher 4: I used discussion method. I used this method because I think it is the best for Literature lessons. I remember that the CLT approach encourages discussion and focuses on communication but I have forgotten the various components

4.2. The Analysis of the Lessons

4.2.1. The Existence of Information Gap in Lesson Activities

Information gap existed in all the lessons that were observed for this paper. In the first and second lesson, the students were asked to discuss the picture and the topic of the passage where information gap existed. This is because there was information which the students were not aware but the teacher was aware. After they read and answered the questions on the passages, the classes had an opened discussion on the text where various issues about the topic were discussed, and in this too there were so many instances of gaps in information that interlocutors were holding and these made the lessons gain the characteristics of CLT.

The third lesson gave the students chance to give sentences from various fields which the follow up discussions provided a lot of gaps for information. Similarly, the fourth lesson provided information gap than all the lessons. The students were asked questions based on the content of the book they read which reflect real life situations. As a result, they were given chance to say what they know about such situations. In this, the teacher and the rest of the class do not know the exact thing one will say at a particular time. This is a clear demonstration of the information gap which is one of the characteristics of CLT lessons.

The advantage this information gap gives the students is that they are able to participate in a communicative activity where they can anticipate what their interlocutor will be saying and have a range of answers to use to react to them. Through this process, they acquire skills that can help them become communicatively competent which is the goal of the communicative approach.

4.2.2. The existence of alternative for choice of information in lesson activities

All the lessons observed had alternatives for which students had to make choice. In the comprehension lessons on “*The Nightmare*”, there was alternative for students to talk about various kinds of scary dreams. Meanwhile, the picture under the page shows a boy who is struggling to protect himself from falling from a broken bridge which also gave the opportunity for varied interpretation before the passage was read. After the reading and the exercise, the passage was discussed where students gave their varied views on the text. They were asked to give their own suggestions of what they would have done if they were they character in the dream. This also gave opportunity for alternative choices.

The literature lesson gave alternative for choice when the various issues were discussed. The students had chance to relate what was happening in the text to their real life which they did. It should be noted that there was a general thing like welcoming a visitor to your home and having a domestic conflict which every body knows was fix in the text. But how that was related to each students’ experience was different and created the alternative for choice. The students’ ability to choose the appropriate response in the context helps to build their communicative competence which is the goal of CLT.

4.2.3. The feedback in lesson activities

Feedback runs through the lessons. In the comprehension lessons, the teachers asked questions on the picture and the title. These questions demanded that students provided answers which were oral feedbacks. After the reading, they were asked to answer questions that follow. The answers to these questions were also written feedback. The exercise that the teacher marked was also feedback to students.

In the grammar lesson, the students were asked a lot of oral questions on their understanding of types of sentences based on structure. They were also asked to give example of all the types and these were oral feedback. They were also asked to do exercise on the types of sentences in writing which is written feedback. The exercise that the teacher marked was also feedback to students.

The literature lesson also contains a lot of feedback. The teacher stops the reading at vantage points and ask questions for the students to answer which facilitate their understanding of the text.

The advantage with the feedback is that, it creates the chance for exchanges between interlocutors which is a mark of communication. In this, the students were learning how to get involved in a communication using the target language. By this, they acquire the skills necessary to be communicative competence which is the goal of communicative language teaching.

Conclusion.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of CLT is asking teachers to look closely at what is involved in communication and tailor their lessons to meet it. It is obvious that, CLT has dominated the field of language pedagogy today. It is also true that many teachers use the communicative approach and are not aware of them. CLT approach to language pedagogy has dominated language instruction at the SHS level as a result of its relevance as the four lessons sampled in this paper, used techniques from the approach.

It was concluded that SHS language classrooms employ communicative language instruction. Additionally, all of the classes that were observed had information gaps, which contributed to the lessons’ acquisition of CLT traits. Students benefit from this knowledge gap by being able to engage in a

communication activity where they can predict what their interlocutor will say and have a variety of responses to utilize in response. By doing this, students are developing the abilities that will enable them to communicate effectively, which is the aim of the communicative language teaching method.

All the lessons observed had alternatives for which students had to make choice. The students had chance to relate what was happening in the text to their real life which they did. The students' ability to choose the appropriate response or alternative in the context helped to build their communicative competence which is the goal of CLT.

It was also concluded that Feedback was evident throughout the lessons. Students were asked questions to provide either oral or written feedback. The advantage with the feedback is that, it creates the chance for exchanges between interlocutors which is a mark of communication. In this, the students are learning how to get involved in a communication using the target language. By this, they acquire the skills necessary to be communicative competent which is the goal of communicative language teaching.

It was found from the interview data that many of the teachers do not have knowledge of the theoretical basis of the techniques they use. It is therefore recommended that teachers upgrade their knowledge of approaches and techniques of teaching language through professional development workshops on CLT principles, classroom-based teacher reflection, peer observation among English teachers, training on designing genuine information-gap tasks, support for balancing examination preparation with communicative activities and integration of feedback strategies that promote negotiation of meaning.

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