**Didactics LMD3 Prof. Semmoud.A**

**Lecture 5**

**Communicative Language Teaching (The Communicative Approach)**

As the language theories underlying the [Audiolingual method](https://www.myenglishpages.com/blog/the-audiolingual-approach/) and the [Sitiuational Language Teaching](https://www.myenglishpages.com/blog/situational-language-teaching-oral-approach/) method were questioned by prominent linguists like Chomsky (1957) during the 1960s, a new trend of language teaching paved its way into classrooms. **Communicative Language Teaching** (CLT), which is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages, emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “Communicative Approach”. Historically, CLT has been seen as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), and as an extension or development of the Notional-Functional Syllabus. Task-based language learning, a more recent refinement of CLT, has gained considerably in popularity.

**A shift towards communicative proficiency**

The increasing interdependency between the European countries necessitated a need for a greater effort to teach adults the principal languages of the continent. New goals were set in language teaching profession:

* The paramount importance of communication aspects of language.
* The increasing interest in meaningful learning.
* The growing centrality of the learner in teaching processes.
* The subordinate importance of structural teaching of language.

**Notional / functional dimension of language**

Applied linguists  and philosophers addressed another fundamental dimension of language: the functional and communicative potential of language.  The speech act theory showed that we do something when we speak a language. We use language ( cf Halliday 1975)

* to get things,
* to control behavior,
* to create interaction with others,
* to express personal feelings,
* to learn,
* to create a world of imagination,
* to communicate information.

Besides applied linguists emphasized  a teaching of language based on communicative proficiency rather than mastery of structures. instead of describing the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, they (Van Ek & Alexander, 1975; Wilkins, 1976) attempted to show the systems of meaning underlying the communicative use of language. They described two kinds of meanings.

* Notional categories: concepts such as time, sequence; quantity, location, frequency.
* Functional categories: requests offers, complaints, invitation …

In other words, a “notion” is a particular context in which people communicate. A “function” is a specific purpose for a speaker in a given context. For example, the “notion,” of *shopping* requires numerous language “functions,” such as *asking about prices or features of a product* and *bargaining.*

**One language competence or numerous competences*?***

For Chomsky the focus of linguistics was to describe the *linguistic competence* that enables speakers to produce grammatically correct sentences. Dell Hymes held, however,  that such a view of linguistic theory was sterile and that it failed to picture all the aspects of language. He advocated the need of a theory that incorporate *communication competence*. It must be a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community.

Later Canale and Swaine (1980) described four dimensions of communicative competence.

* Grammatical competence: refers to what Chomsky calls linguistic competence.
* Sociolinguistic competence: refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place (role relationships, shared beliefs and information between participants …)
* Discourse competence: refers to the interpretation of individual messsage elements in terms of their interconnectedness and how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text.
* Strategic competence: refers to the coping strategies that participants use to initiate terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication

**Learning theory**

According to the the communicative approach, in order for learning to take place, emphasis must be put on the importance of these variables:

* Communication: activities that involve real communication promote learning.
* Tasks: activities in which language is used to carry out meaningful tasks supports the learning process.
* Meaning: language that is meaningful and authentic to the learner boosts learning.

**Acquiring or learning?**

Stephen Krashen later advocated in his language learning theory that there should be a distinction between *learning* and *acquiring*. He sees acquisition as the basic process involved in developing language proficiency and distinguishes this process from learning. Acquisition is an unconscious process that involves the naturalistic development of language proficiency while learning is the conscious internalization of the rules of language. It results in explicit knowledge about the forms of language and the ability to verbalize this knowledge. Learning according to Krashen can not lead to acquisition.

**Syllabus**

Communicative language teaching syllabus organizes the teaching according to the notional and functional categories of language rather than according to its structures.It concentrates on the following:

* Interactions: using  language to communicate,
* Tasks: using language to  perform meaningful tasks
* Learner: putting the learner’s interests, needs in the forefront.

**Merits of CLT**

There are many advantages in teaching according to the communicative approach:

* CLT is a holistic approach. It doesn’t focus only on the traditional structural syllabus. It takes into consideration communicative dimension of language.
* CLT provides vitality and motivation within the classroom.
* CLT is a learner centered approach. It capitalizes on the interests and needs of the learner.
* In a world where communication of information and information technology have broken new considerable ground, CLT can play an important role in education.

**Criticism**

* Notional syllabus was criticized as merely replacing one kind of list, namely a list of grammatical structures, with another list of notions and functions.
* The various categories of language functions are overlapping and not systematically graded like the structures of the language.
* The communicative approach focuses on the use of language in everyday situations, or the functional aspects of language, and less on the formal structures. There must be a certain balance between the two.It gives priority to meanings and rules of use rather than to grammar and rules of structure.  Such concentration on language behavior may result in negative consequences in the sense that important structures and rules would be left out.
* The approach relies extensively on the functional-notational syllabus which places heavy demands on the learners.
* A major principle underlying this approach is its emphasis on learners’ needs and interests. This implies that every teacher should modify the syllabus to fit the needs of the learners.
* The requirements are difficult. Not all classrooms can allow for group work activities and for teaching aids and materials.

In spite of its critics, CLT has gained widespread acceptance in the world of language study. CLT can succeed, as long as teachers don’t completely reject the need for the structure provided by grammar. Teachers must strive for moderation and shouldn’t neglect the merits of other methods. CLT, in the hands of a balanced teacher, can bring new life and joy to the classroom. Its vitality makes it an important contributor to language learning approaches.

Read more on the Communicative Approach.

* Check Richards & Rogers’ book: [Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching (Cambridge Language Teaching Library)](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1107675960/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1107675960&linkCode=as2&tag=myenglishpa0e-20&linkId=572PER6TYWUOC5XS)http://ir-na.amazon-adsystem.com/e/ir?t=myenglishpa0e-20&l=as2&o=1&a=1107675960
* Brown’s book: [Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (6th Edition)](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0133041948/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0133041948&linkCode=as2&tag=myenglishpa0e-20&linkId=YDZZPMCDFEIDFCYU)http://ir-na.amazon-adsystem.com/e/ir?t=myenglishpa0e-20&l=as2&o=1&a=0133041948

**References**

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Richards, Jack C. and Theodore S. Rodgers (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Other sources: [Wikipedia – CLT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communicative_language_teaching)