

FACTORS CAUSING DIFFICULTIES IN PRACTICING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang pengajaran bahasa yang komunikatif (Communicative Language Teaching). Banyak pendapat menganggap pendekatan ini sebagai jawaban atas masalah yang berkaitan dengan kemampuan komunikasi pelajar. Bagaimanapun, pengajaran komunikatif bahasa merupakan masalah bagi guru mata kuliah speaking yang bukan berlatar belakang bahasa Inggris. Mereka berpendapat bahwa konsep tidak bisa didapat serta tidak ada kejelasan bagaimana menjalankannya. Di samping itu tantangan untuk dihadapi ketika kemampuan bahasa yang dikuasai rendah. Artikel ini membahas faktor- faktor yang menyebabkan Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) sulit diaplikasikan.

kata kunci: communicative language teaching (CLT)

INTRODUCTION

Communicative language teaching is a cluster of broadly based principles about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching (Brown, 2000). It comprises ideas which emphasize on learners' language competence, not a procedure to apply in the classroom. That is why Brown argued that it is best considered as an approach rather than a method.

In 1970s, the concept communicative language teaching was first introduced as a response to the requirement for new approaches to language teaching. Its emergence was affected by dissatisfaction with the structuralism and situational methods as well as caused by changes in the field of linguistics which moved away from a focus on grammar to a rationale of how language is communicated in different situation (Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001). Larsen-freeman (2000, p 121) explained that the goal of communicative language teaching is to enhance learners' ability to communicate in the target language. More specifically, besides understanding the rules of the language, learners need to be able to use the language within a social context. This includes learners' ability to choose the language features appropriately by considering what to speak (an invitation, an apology, or bargaining), to whom they speak, and

in what situation (formal or informal, in wedding or funeral). Hence, communicative is not simply learners' speaking ability but how to use the language appropriately in various situations.

Communicative language teaching has captured language teaching practitioners' interest for more than two decades. A great number of conference papers, books, and articles support communication language teaching (Mangubhai, et. al, 2000; Sato and Kleinsassre, 1999). In addition, it has been succeeded in the context of language acquisition theory which then brings to the assumptions that communicative language teaching has significant impact on language learning outcome (Beale, 2003). A research which was conducted by Hammond (1988), for example, showed that students who were taught using language teaching methodology which emphasizes communication activities performed better in their communication skills as well as gained higher score in "the traditional discrete point exams" (p. 411) which expected them to manipulate grammatical structure. Therefore, many believe that communicative language teaching is the most effective approach to promote learners' communicative competence as well as learners' understanding about grammatical structure of the target language.

Why is Communicative Language Teaching Difficult to Implement?

Despite its popularity, communicative language teaching has not been successfully implemented by language teachers in many part of the world. According to Beale (2003, p.12), a quite limited use of its principles were implemented in lesson structure, lesson content and syllabus design. Further, a survey and observation on 14 Greek teachers conducted by Karavas-Doukas (1996, as cited in Sato and Kassesenger, 2001, p. 497) showed that although most of language teachers agreed towards principles of communicative language teaching, their classroom activities did not correspond to the principles.

Additionally, there are some arguments warn that to certain extent communication language teaching can be problematic. Nunan, (1999, p. 156) recognized that the principles of communicative language teaching is not suitable for non-Western contexts. For example, student-student interaction is not typical of the culture in most classrooms in Hong Kong. Furthermore, Richard and Rodger (1986, as cited in Sze, 1992) doubted the communicative language teaching for primary schools. They pointed out that communicative approach may be appropriate for any levels of English learners in the first language context but not for young learners in foreign language context.

This essay, therefore, attempts to uncover the factors which possibly cause difficulties in implementing the principles of communicative language teaching. There are at least four factors which influences teachers' unwillingness to practice the principles of communicative language teaching. First, teachers' understanding toward the concept of communicative language teaching is limited. Second, communicative language teaching requires teachers' extra efforts. Third, there is lack support from other school elements. And the fifth is other factors such as teachers' experience in learning and teaching language.

1. Teachers' understanding toward the concept of communicative language teaching is limited.

The concept of communicative language teaching has not been understood well by language teaching practitioners. Despite their agreement that communicative language teaching is the most effective approach, there are number of misconceptions about what the concept involves (Thompson, 1996, as cited in Razmjoo and Riazi, 2006). Responding to the problem above, many literatures tried to sum up the principles of communicative language teaching and collect other literature's ideas about the concept in order to enable readers to grasp what exactly the concept is (see Brown, (2000) and Mangubhai et al, (2000),). Still, teachers' understanding about the concept of communicative language teaching remains shallow. Savignon, (2002 cited in Razmjoo and Riazi, 2006) notified teachers misunderstanding towards communicative language teaching concept and practice remain exist.

Misconceptions among language teaching practitioners affect teachers' readiness to implement communicative language teaching. Alexio (2003) found that the implementation of communicative language teaching in Brazil is difficult since teachers failed to recognize their own misconceptions about the principles. Likewise, when non-English speaking teachers in Japan were asked about the definition of communicative language teaching, they replied that the communicative language teaching in broad term was not fully articulated so that they did not implement the concept into their teaching practice accordingly (Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999).

Additionally, communicative language teaching is easy to say than done. This is regarding to the thought that communicative language teaching is merely a cluster of approaches rather than methodology (Nunan, 1988; Richard and Rogers 1986, as cited in Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999). This brings to a consequence that compels language teachers to

design their own lesson plan and develop the curriculum (Hendrickson, 1991). On the contrary, teachers need a clear directions how to organize communicative classroom. They find communicative language teaching is difficult to implement in the classroom since teacher the trainings in communicative language teaching they attended were concentrated on theoretical aspects rather than providing guidelines on how to apply communicative language teaching theory in the classroom (Alexio, 2003). Hence, teachers' requirement on the teaching methodology for the classroom activities indicates that teachers are more willingly to be a recipient of a fixed teaching method than creating their own teaching methods.

2. Communicative language teaching requires teachers' extra efforts.

Communicative language teaching is somehow demanding. One of its characteristic which familiarizes students to encounter unrehearsed situation discouraged is challenging for non native speaking teachers (Brown, 2000). This makes sense because such an unrehearsed situation forces teachers to be able to utter various expressions to respond unpredictable situation. Whereas, producing spontaneous utterances in the target language is difficult for non native teachers. Despite the suggestion for using technology devices, it is costly and requires efforts. Teachers in remote areas hardly access electronic materials. Moreover, it is very difficult for them to find an authentic material which is suitable for particular teaching objective. Therefore, Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) reported that teachers appear to be reluctant to prepare their communicative classroom because of authentic materials preparations.

Additionally, it is time-consuming to evoke students' motivation. Communicative language teaching is demanding as it requires teachers to be a facilitator of language acquisition process whose responsibility is to stimulate students' motivation to speak (Hendrickson, 1991). Nunan (1999, 231) concluded that students' reluctance to speak was considered as language teachers' biggest challenge. Burns and Joyce (1997, as cited in Nunan, 1999) identify three factors that caused a reluctance which include cultural factors, psychological and affective factors. He summarized some of the practical steps to overcome the problem related with students' motivation to speak (p.235). However, evoking students' motivation is more complicated that we expect. Macintyre *et. al.* (1998) argued that learners' willingness to communicate fluctuates over time and across situation and, learners' authentic communication in second language classroom is the result of a complex system which includes stable influences and situation-specific influences. The stable influences comprise learners' personality, communicative competence, and self confidence whereas situation-

specific influences consists of learners' desire to communicate with specific person, state communicative self confidence.

Moreover, the level of learners' language competence is problematic for language teachers especially when they encountered mixed-ability classroom. Students have language learning background so that their communicative ability differs to other. The differences become a problem when teachers put students into groups to promote students' interaction. Web (1980, as cited in Richards, 1990, p.13) found that middle ability students experience a loss of achievement while the low ability child produces gains in achievement. So that teachers might fail to reach the potential of their students.

Communicative language teaching has been problematic in terms of assessment and evaluations. Beale (2003) argued that for teaching to be accountable, assessment and monitoring are required and the most suitable way to assess learners' communicative competence is the use of qualitative assessment, not quantitative one. This is because language is perceived as a dynamic process rather than a static product. However, Beale regretted what Savignon (1991) believed about the qualitative assessment of written and oral expression. She claimed that to do this kind of assessment is time consuming and complicated.

Savignon's comment above appears to be true. This can be illustrated by qualitative assessment of the International English Language Test System (IELTS) in which the assessors need not only conducting face to face interaction but also recording examinee's every single word. This needs approximately fifteen minutes for each examinee. Although this seems to be an extreme example, we can imagine how we could assess written and oral expression of hundred of our students.

3. There is lack support from other

As communicative language teaching enhance learners' communication competence, it requires not only teachers' adequate language proficiency (Liddicoat, 2004), but also their understanding about various aspects of meaningful communication. This involves four components such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale, 1983, as cited in Beale (2003); Savignon, 1985, p. 130). Grammatical competence involves one's capability in producing a structured utterance. Meanwhile, Sociolinguistic competence requires learners' understanding on the social context where language is used. Discourse competence needs one's understanding how

to combine utterances to form a meaningful text, and strategic competence demands the users' abilities in producing effective communication. For that reason, non native speaking teachers who do not have background knowledge about the culture of target language will find communicative language teaching difficult to apply.

The aforementioned competence above can only be achieved by promoting lifelong language learning among teachers. This can be in the form of professional development trainings and further education. However, many teachers have not received any training in communicative language teaching. A survey of 100 Japanese high school language teachers showed that the majority of them received no training in communicative language teaching (77 percent) (Lamie, 1998, as cited in Kelly et. al., 2003). They just copied the way their teachers taught them in high schools, so that, grammatical translation method is introduced. The similar situation is encountered by English teachers in Brazil (Alexio, 2003).

Other factors make communicative language teaching difficult to practice is the lack of supports from others. The way teachers arrange their classroom and the method they choose for language learning activities depend on the conditions that are out of their control (Manggubhai et. al. 2002, p 16). These conditions include how well the language classroom equipped, the way learners are grouped, school's policy on student management and the attitudes of school community toward language teaching and learning. Therefore, since teaching facilities like classroom, multimedia, and laboratory available for language teaching activities vary in every single school, teachers encounter different level of difficulty in implementing communicative language teaching.

The class size restrains teachers to implement communicative classroom. The problems encountered by teachers in large classes include the difficulties in controlling, assessing, as well as organizing classroom interaction (Coleman, as cited in Jimakorn & Singhashiri, 2006). Some literatures list the disadvantages of large classes for language teaching. Manggubhai et. al. (2002) argued that the large class leads to students' undisciplined behavior and ineffectiveness. Similarly, Todd (2006) found that large class which is commonly encountered by language teachers in the third world countries like Thailand and Nigeria, leads teachers apply methods which enable them to control their students, more specifically, drillings and using their mother tongue very often. In addition, teachers' changing role from controller to facilitator becomes impossible since large classes instigates the distance between teacher and learners (Holliday, 1996, p.90).

Classroom layout is also problematic for teachers to implement communicative language teaching. Language teachers need to prepare classrooms which are suitable for various multilevel class groupings but there is a consideration that organizing the classroom and taking it back to its original setting is wasteful (Mangubhai et. al.,2002, p.14). Likewise, most classrooms in Indonesia, for example, are conventionally designed where students sitting in rows and teacher stands at front of the class. As there are other subjects taught in the same classroom, teachers hesitate to arrange the benches and chairs in certain ways to enhance interactive classroom.

Another school facility which is critical for communicative language teaching is technology. Some schools have technological devices to assist communicative language teaching while other schools are poorly equipped. This can be illustrated by the experience of my colleagues. Their school does not have proper technology device like what Brown (2000) mentioned. There was only one tape recorder available in this school, but they could not use it because they did not have cassettes to play. Further, they could not stream any radio station which announces in English in their area.

School community's attitude towards language learning influences teachers' unwillingness to apply communicative language teaching in their classroom (Manggubhai et al, 2000). In many cases parents and stakeholders call for teachers to prepare students to pass the national examination. As a consequence, teachers still use the 'old fashioned methods' of the Grammar Translation Methods and Audiolingualism (Liu, 2005, Benson & Shudo, 2000). Moreover, this also leads pragmatic orientation among language teachers so that they only focus on the materials to be examined. In many language classroom activities in Indonesia, for example, students are introduced with variety of examination sheets to customize students to strategies or hints to answer the national exam. This is caused by the government's policy which recognizes schools based on what their students achieve in national examination. The better the students' performance in examination, the more the community recognize the school. So that, for schools prestige, headmasters force teachers to make their pupils do their best in national examination whatever it takes.

4. Non native speaking teachers' language competence

Since communicative language teaching requires a 'native-like' communicative competence, non-native speaking language teachers encounter problems in communicative classroom. In discussing about Non native speaking language teachers, Cullen (2001, as cited

in Lliurda) stated that a teacher who does not have requisite language skills will lack of self confidence in the classroom, and this adversely affects to their performance in the language classroom. A research conducted by Benke and Medgyes (2005) showed that non native English teachers in Hungarian have a good deal with grammar difficulties and well prepared in teaching grammar but they switch very often to their mother tongue, their English pronunciation is bad and the language they use is outdated. Another example is a survey of 216 native and non native teachers from 10 different countries which showed that eighty percent of non native language teachers encountered language difficulties especially in vocabulary and fluency (Revers and Medgyes, 1994 cited in Lliurda, 2005). And, seventy percent of them realized that their language problems lead to ineffective teaching.

Teachers' resistance to change habit might be another reason why teachers are reluctant to implement communicative language teaching principles. They feel teaching a rule of language is easier than what so called communicative one because this enable them to deliver similar activity for every classroom. Further, teachers have been already familiar with the old paradigm methods since they are taught with the grammar translation methods and audiolingualism. Teachers tend to teach like how they were taught (Morgan, n.d.) so that they prefer to model of their previous teachers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Communicative language teaching was emerged as the result of dissatisfaction towards the old paradigm language teaching which emphasizes on grammar and language accuracy. Many agree that this is considered as the best approach to meet learners' communicative competence since learning language is learning about how to use the language appropriately in certain context. However, the implementation of the principles is somehow difficult, especially for non native language teachers. The complicatedness of the implementation can be from the concept itself which is so broad that it leads to misconceptions among non native language teachers. Also, teachers seem to require a "ready made" teaching method than a collection of principles. Non native language teachers' competence in communicative skills leads to ineffective language teaching. They tend to be less confident and use their mother tongue very often. Hence, the old fashion methods are introduced.

Teachers are reluctant to implement the principles because communicative language teaching requires variety of competence such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Additionally, there is a consideration that communicative language teaching has problem in assessment and examination since learners' communicative competence is difficult to assess and examine.

The lack support from school community exacerbates the condition above. This includes school policy in managing students (class size and classroom settings) and community's perspective toward language learning. English teachers in developing countries find difficulties to manage the large class as well as they have many classes to teach. In addition, since school's priority is to make the students pass the exam, teachers merely prepare a strategies and hints for students to pass the national examination.

The problems above are certainly not an excuse for not implementing communicative language teaching principles. This is just a reflection to recognize about common problems encountered by non native language teachers. The above problems can be solved by giving more supports for teachers to develop their professionalism. This can be in the form of thorough teachers' trainings in communicative language teaching. The trainings must not only introduce the theories and principles of communicative language teaching but also give variety of communicative classroom activities for teachers to develop.

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