

The Application of Communicative Language Teaching in English Classroom Activities

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Abstract: As a teaching approach aimed at improving learners' communicative competence, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been favored by many teachers. The application of CLT has eradicated the defects of traditional classroom teaching which only pay attention to the explanation of grammar structure and ignore the cultivation of practical language use ability, and changed the phenomenon of traditional teaching dumb English. However, in the specific teaching practice, there are still many problems in the application of Communicative Language Teaching. How to maximize the advantages of CLT in classroom activities, realize its purpose and then find the teaching method that truly conforms to the actual teaching situation in China is a problem worthy of teachers' deep consideration.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; Classroom Activities.

1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims at cultivating students' communicative ability by means of communicative activities between teachers and students and between students. Classroom teaching is the basic form of English learning, and the communicative interaction in class cannot be ignored. Language communicative function and emotional function objectively determine that language teaching must break through the traditional concept of language teaching, truly cultivate students' ability to use language in class, enrich students' emotions, enhance students' cross-cultural awareness, improve students' humanistic quality and ability to think and solve practical problems. However, when the application of CLT and its value are valued, many teachers find that it is not easy to apply CLT to practice, and its effect is not as perfect as people expect. This paper mainly discusses and analyzes the main problems existing in the application of CLT in classroom activities, and provides some suggestions on how CLT can play a better role in English classroom activities.

2. An Overview of Communicative Approach

Communicative Approach came into being in the early 1970s, when the European Economic Community was established, and the communication between member states in the cultural and economic fields, especially interpersonal communication, became more and more frequent, and the language barrier constituted a major obstacle in interpersonal communication. It is this social demand that gives birth to a new foreign language teaching method which starts from meeting the real needs. CLT aims to take language function as the key line and take the cultivation of language learners' ability to use language in the process of communication as its main goal. Linguists believe that communication is the combination of language function and notion, so CLT is also called notional-functional approach. It is interesting to note that "one of the main characteristics that distinguishes Communicative Approach from other pedagogies is that the understanding of communicative approach varies from

person to person. There is no authority figure representing the Communicative Approach in general, and there is no teaching mode that can be called the authoritative Communicative Approach mode (Li, 1990). A large number of scholars have defined CLT in different aspects. CLT was first proposed by Hymes (1972) and Halliday (1973), who believed that communication is the main goal of language, and improving language learners' communicative competence is the primary goal of language learning. Nunan (1991) summarized the five characteristics of communicative teaching methods: one is to learn communication through interaction; the other is to provide real corpus; the third is to pay attention to language and the learning process; the fourth is that the experience of learners is important; the fifth is to combine practical life with teaching. Liu and Zhang (2003) believe that CLT should follow three principles, that is, pay attention to the cultivation of basic language knowledge, learn language in communicative activities, and pay attention to the introduction of cultural knowledge. Lian (2008) analyzed the communicative and student-centered characteristics of communicative teaching methods, and also proposed the characteristics of individualized teaching.

In general, CLT is a teaching method in which teachers reproduce the real communication process through various means so that students can master the language in this process. The ultimate goal of teaching is to cultivate students' communicative competence.

3. Problems Existing in the Application of CLT

CLT has been highly respected since it was introduced into our country, but there are some problems in the process of localization, including objective problems such as teaching environment, which are worth reflecting on.

3.1. Do not Pay Attention to the Cultivation of Grammar Ability

Some foreign language teachers fail to understand the real meaning of communicative competence and realize that the four components of communicative competence complement each other. Instead, they set grammatical competence against

communicative competence and mistakenly believe that the root of hindering the development of students' communicative competence is grammatical competence, that is, mastering a large amount of knowledge of grammatical rules. In terms of teaching methods, they copy the rules of children's acquisition of mother tongue, exclude the direct learning of language knowledge, and neglect the inspiration and instruction to students. Without correct and standardized language forms, it is difficult to properly understand the social function of language, let alone improving students' communicative competence (Gui, 1985). Most learners begin to learn a foreign language in primary school or when they are adults, that is, their natural ability to acquire a language has disappeared. If foreign language learners want to use a foreign language appropriately, they must learn grammar rules in order to cultivate their language application ability through systematic learning. Therefore, grammar ability is the foundation of communicative ability, if there is no solid basic knowledge of language, only talking about cultivating students' communicative ability can only be empty talk.

3.2. Formalized English Communication

It should be said that with CLT, our classroom activities have indeed become colorful and diversified, and the communication between teachers and students and between students are very close, but after careful observation, we will find that the content of communication is mostly divorced from the reality of life, only around the textbook materials, and the communication activities are only formalized. In classroom communication activities, students often can only recite the words prepared in advance, and when the content of the other party does not match their expectations or changes halfway, they can not make an immediate response, of course, let alone the correct feedback. CLT is intended to make up for the shortcomings of structural teaching method which neglects language use. But it has failed to do so. As Widdowson(1979) pointed out, language use is a creative activity that requires a set of skills or creative procedures so that language users can realize the actual value of linguistic units in context, and create, derive and negotiate meaning based on contextual information, personal knowledge and pragmatic rules. We know that there is no certain correspondence between function and form. A language function can be expressed by multiple language forms, and the same language form can also express different language functions. Because of this complex relationship, the speaker must refer to a variety of information, including his grammatical knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, the context of the utterance, and the speaker's communicative intention. It can be seen that only requiring students to memorize language functions and expression forms can not really cultivate their ability to use language creatively.

3.3. Ignoring the Cultivation of Cross-Cultural Competence

Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the content of language. Language is a complex social phenomenon, which cannot exist independently from a certain social culture. In social life, linguistic competence and pragmatic competence complement each other. Language competence is the basis of communicative competence. However, if you only have language competence without understanding cultural differences and pragmatic competence, it is difficult to successfully communicate. Therefore, it is necessary to

teach culture at the same time as language, so that foreign language learners can have the ability to communicate in a real environment in accordance with the norms of another culture and society. Thomas (1983) pointed out two kinds of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication, namely, pragmatic failure and social pragmatic failure. Inappropriate language expression and speech act hinder the realization of communicative value. In the classroom activities of CLT, teachers are not deep enough to impart students' cross-cultural knowledge. The lack of cross-cultural knowledge often leads to pragmatic failure, which affects the improvement of students' sociolinguistic ability and their adaptability in diversified communication, which is not conducive to the smooth progress of communication.

4. Suggestion

Nowadays, CLT is more and more favored and valued, how to maximize the advantages of CLT in classroom activities is a problem that many front-line teachers and applied linguists pay attention to. On the basis of synthesizing the views of various scholars, this study puts forward some suggestions on how to implement CLT more effectively:

4.1. Designing the Classroom Effectively

Large-scale class teaching and classes with large individual differences require teachers to make full preparation before class and carry out effective classroom design when using CLT. Teachers should pay attention to take all of the students' language levels and proficiency into consideration when designing classrooms. When English teachers use Communicative Approach in large classes, it is better to adopt the multi-level teaching mode for students at the same time, so as to ensure that students can better participate in teaching activities (Chu, 2019). English teachers also need to constantly enrich their teaching design. Students often avoid expressing themselves in English in class because they are afraid of making mistakes. In order to eliminate students' nervous fear of embarrassment, teachers can adopt the mode of group discussion. Detailed group task management might be a good choice. Group tasks are more diverse in every way than individual tasks, and the opportunities for discussion and communication are greatly increased by peer interaction. Students are more likely to start a conversation with people they know well, so it helps to create a relaxed and friendly environment, which effectively reduces their shyness and anxiety when speaking English. Students should interact with different classmates as much as possible. These models can both increase motivation and self-confidence, while allowing each student to learn the language while speaking it. Adopting this model in class can also give every student the opportunity to communicate and speak, which is very consistent with the Communicative Approach.

4.2. Focusing on Language Knowledge and Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is a complex knowledge system. Knowledge of language rules is the basis of cultivating other abilities and the premise of students' successful language communication. CLT emphasizes the design of various communicative situations according to students' specific learning needs, so that students can achieve their learning goals in diversified communicative activities. Littlewood (1981) proposed the division of pre-

communicative activities and communicative activities.

Pre-communicative activities include structural activities and quasi-communicative activities. On the basis of learning certain language forms, students gradually master some communication skills to establish connections between the language forms they learn and the communicative functions, non-verbal displays and social situations. This kind of activity belongs to foreign language learning and aims to lay a solid foundation of language knowledge for students, rather than requiring students to apply language rules knowledge in specific communicative situations. The purpose of quasi-communicative activities is to make students learn to associate language with its social meaning and to use language as a tool for social communication.

Communicative activities can be divided into functional communicative activities and social communicative activities. According to Wang Qiang (2006), the difference between these two sub-stages is that the former is communicative, while the latter is more contextual. According to Littlewood (1981), the distinction between the two subcategories depends on the degree of importance to social and functional significance. The focus of the first type is to let students use the resources obtained in a specific situation to express and achieve a certain function as much as possible. Functional communicative activities are evaluated by whether they successfully transmit and process information. The second type of communicative activities should not only express a certain function, but also train students to consider its social communicative significance when using language. Such activities generally take place outside the classroom in a physical environment, but activities in the classroom can also serve as a starting point. Because the classroom itself is not only a specific social interaction environment, but also the language structure and behavioral rules learned in a certain social interaction environment can be transferred to other scenes. Teachers can carry out role play according to the teaching purpose and teaching content, and cultivate the ability of learning and using the language. Classroom teaching lays the foundation for real communicative activities. In classroom activities, we mainly cultivate students' language ability, which is the foundation of communicative ability. Through classroom teaching, the transition from language ability to pre-communicative activities is realized, and the transition from pre-communicative activities to real communicative activities is prepared.

4.3. Creating Classroom Communicative Environment

As a communication tool, foreign language can be better mastered by students through language communication activities and interesting classroom teaching activities. At present, English teaching at home and abroad generally attaches importance to the creation of classroom communication environment, so that students can have more opportunities to use their language knowledge and gradually cultivate students' communicative ability in classroom activities. Classroom communication activities should be varied, including not only oral, but also written. In recent years, foreign language teaching experts and teachers at home and abroad have created many effective forms of classroom communication activities. For example, language communication games, thematic classroom discussions, imitating situations and playing roles, exchanging letters, making up stories and so on. These classroom communicative

activities are not only suitable for the elementary stage, some of them are also suitable for the middle and advanced stage. In order to make classroom communication close to real communication, teachers can create information gap. Communication is usually carried out when the listener or reader does not know in advance the information conveyed by the words of the speaker or writer. In other words, if the speaker knows what the listener does not, there is an information gap between them. Generally speaking, if there is no such information gap, there is no real communication. For example, in order to practice a certain sentence pattern in the classroom in the past, the dialogue between teachers and students who know why and ask questions is not real communication without information gaps.

In order to encourage students to have real communication in classroom teaching, teachers should strive to create information gaps for students. However, traditional English textbooks seldom provide information gaps, and teachers seldom consciously create information gaps for students. Creating information gap in current classroom teaching is a problem worthy of attention, and there are many ways to do it. For example, let two students talk, the teacher can write the requirements in advance on the cue card, the prompt only tells the student the function of the language, does not tell the specific language, let the student rely on their own to complete.

4.4. Creating Real Language Communication Situations

Teaching contextualization is the invisible path of communicative teaching method. To solve the problem of "formality" in the communication activities mentioned above, the best way is to design real language communication situations, so that students can gradually master English knowledge in life situations, flexibly use English knowledge to communicate, and improve students' communicative ability. The latest revised version of English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools emphasizes the topic context, covering "man and self, man and society, man and nature, involving human society and natural science fields" and providing topics and context for discipline education. Therefore, in English teaching, teachers need to design effective English communication scenarios according to the actual teaching content, so as to create a relaxed and active classroom teaching atmosphere for students, enhance students' interest and confidence in speaking English, and subtly improve students' communication level. Therefore, the teacher can design the situation in the teaching, suppose that one day you go to the mall to buy clothes, the salesman sees you will say what? And how would you ask? What conversations will be involved? In this kind of situational teaching, students will take the initiative to recall their own shopping process and use the knowledge of this lesson to have a shopping conversation. Or directly use multimedia to show the real shopping situation, let students write dialogue content according to the shopping situation. Thus, it can be seen that the real language communication situation can make the application of communicative teaching method practical, so that students can master English vocabulary and key sentence patterns smoothly, expand the scope of students' knowledge in the dialogue, and improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching.

5. Conclusion

Communicative Approach has brought revolutionary changes to our English teaching and has made great contributions to the progress of English teaching. However, as Zhang (2006) pointed out, the implementation of Communicative Approach should be based on specific foreign language teaching situation, rather than blindly believing in it. Therefore, teachers should combine the teaching situation in our country and flexibly use CLT in English classroom teaching according to the actual situation of each stage instead of concentrating on simple communicative activities. In English teaching, it is not wise to stick to a certain teaching method. Because there is no fixed way of teaching. Teachers should further improve the English teaching effect according to the situation, and form an English teaching method that conforms to the current practice of foreign language teaching.

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