

ACTIVITIES IN CLT TO ENHANCE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the best-considered approach rather than a method. Actually, it is a reaction to the earlier approaches, namely grammatical patterning, structural situationalism and rigidity of the drill /rote type methods that were related to audio bilingualism. In this computer era, language teaching has focused on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language. By and large, the emphasis is not only on the linguistic competence of the language learner but also on the development of the communicative ability of the learner. Students need to learn how to use the target language in real life situations and not in the artificial situation of the classroom where often drills and structured dialogues are taught. In this role-play activity, students are involved in more, than presentation. In this method, a kind of pair work is done in a different way. The class is divided into pairs by giving them the roles 'A' and 'B'. They are asked to sit back to back and play the roles in the given situation. Each one is given a role card. First one is given 'A' and the second one 'B'. An example of this can be found in the following conversation between A and B. This is done vice versa where 'A' plays the role of 'B' and 'B' plays the role of 'A'. CLT is one of the best methods to enhance conversational skills in English. It is not just about the language but it is about how it is used. According to CLT, language learning takes place naturally when learners are exposed to language and given opportunities to use it. CLT demands student-centered classroom management skills, such as role play, peer work, group work, seminars etc.

Keywords: Communicative Language, situationalism, linguistic competence, management skills, .etc

Introduction:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the best-considered approach rather than a method. Actually, it is a reaction to the earlier approaches, namely grammatical patterning, structural situationalism and rigidity of the drill /rote type methods that were related to audio bilingualism. It has two important guiding principles ... the first being that the language is not just patterns of grammar with vocabulary items but also involves language functions such as inviting, agreeing and disagreeing which students must learn how to perform using different language exponents. For example, a sentence like 'Do you take coffee?', can be expressed in two or three ways such as 'Would you like to have coffee?' etc. Thus CLT is not just about the language, but it is about how it is used also.

The second guiding principle of CLT is that if the learners are given enough exposure to language and opportunities for language use and if they are motivated properly, then language learning takes place naturally. Thus *"CLT has a lot in common with the acquisition view of language absorption."*¹ The focus of CLT always relies on students communicating real messages and not just using language controlled by the grammar. CLT has been recognized as a beneficial effect since it minded features that people like languages not only to know about them but also to communicate in that language. According to a critic

*"An English language classroom should have English in it, and as for as possible, there should be an English environment in the room, where English is heard and used as much of the time as possible. For that reason, it is advisable for teachers to use English as often as possible, and not to spend a long time talking in the students' Mother tongue"*²

Mr. Johnson and Johnson identified five principal characteristics of CLT... Appropriateness, Message focus, Psycholinguistic Processing, Risk Taking and Free Practice. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency is an important dimension of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error.

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching:

- A language is a tool for communication; language learning is learning to communicate
- Attempts to communicate should be encouraged from the very beginning
- People learn the best when they feel comfortable and relaxed
- Learning is more important than teaching

- Learners are individuals; they learn in different ways and have different needs
- Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language
- Language needs to be learned in context, not in isolation
- Activities that involve real communication promote learning
- Language that is meaningful to the learner promotes learning
- Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning

Typical activities in a CLT classroom include:

- Roleplay
- Seminars

Role Play:

In this computer era, language teaching has focused on the learning process rather than the teaching of the language. By and large, the emphasis is not only on the linguistic competence of the language learner but also on the development of the communicative ability of the learner. Students need to learn how to use the target language in real life situations and not in the artificial situation of the classroom where often drills and structured dialogues are taught. In this role-play activity, students are involved in more, than presentation. From this activity, we can say that it is a learner-centered activity. It provides opportunities for students to create different real-life situations to use the target language.

As far as the role of the teacher is concerned, he must first of all be convinced of what he is doing and also have clear objectives as to his role to achieve the desired goal. He is the one who sets the mood of the class. His rapport with the students is important to conduct this activity successfully. The teacher tries to make the students feel at ease and relax in the classroom at the time of interaction.

He gives clear instructions to the students to carry out their various views about the given task. As far as the role of the learner (student) is concerned, in recent years there has been a move towards the whole-person approach. The learner thus becomes the center of focus and at the center of the language learning process. This roleplay activity provides various opportunities for active student participation. It involves the student's whole personality and not merely his mental process. Effective learning takes place as the student involves himself in the task and is motivated to use the target language. The student is encouraged to discuss, evaluate and describe the activity. It is an introductory activity which helps to break the ice and develop rapport. Furthermore, these kinds of activities help to bring an atmosphere where genuine communication can take place.

In any kind of activity like this in language teaching, problems are bound to arise. However, these are not insurmountable.

Advantages of Using Role-Play:

For this play to be successful, 100% participation from the students should take place. The activity requires a great deal of mental activity as each student tries to express himself to show his understanding and to relate what is being said with his own opinion. Thus opportunities to generate language use arise. This is one of the main concerns of language teaching. Learning is active and not passive when role-play is used. By and large, the situation in the activity is often related to real life. The students will see the relevance and they may be more motivated to participate and use the target language.

Disadvantages of Using Role-Play:

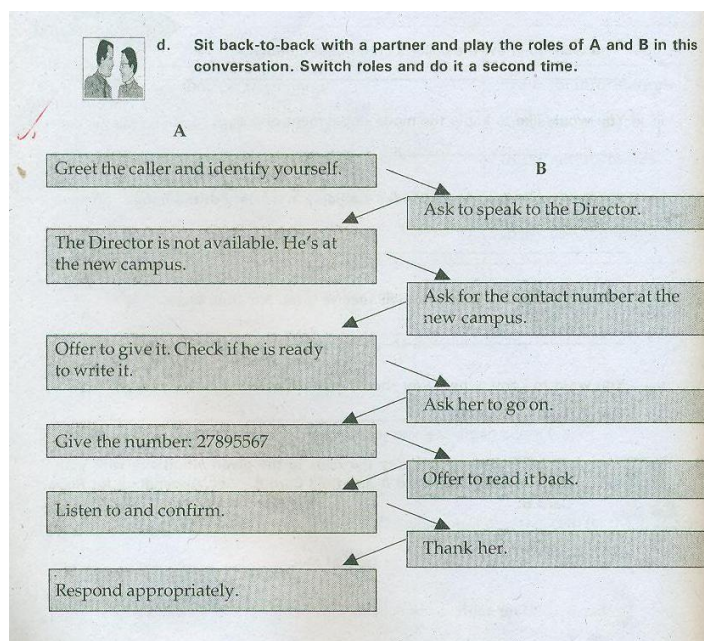
Some students will have fixed ideas as to what a good class teacher is. They expect a rigid, fixed procedure in his teaching.

The teacher has to adopt the following effective eliciting techniques:

- a. Remain silent when it is obvious a learner is still thinking.
- b. If a learner cannot answer, ask another learner.
- c. Effective questions: Does anyone know....? Can anyone tell me? Do you know.....?. Tell me.....
- d. Use encouraging language, e.g.. well done! Great work!
- e. If a learner is halfway to an answer, encourage him/her further by giving some prompts.
- f. If a learner is almost right, tell him/her not quite, smile and encourage him/her further.
- g. Use intonation to indicate which part of a sentence is correct or incorrect.
- h. Write a half-right answer on the board and encourage learners to correct it.
- i. Don't immediately give the answer.
- j. If a learner is wrong, gently ask another learner to answer.
- k. If a learner is wrong, ask him/her to try to correct himself/herself.
- l. Reject learner's wrong responses in a tactful way.

Clear instructions must be given to the students, while they are being divided into pairs, to carry out their tasks. And at the same time, the students' abilities and personalities can be considered. The duration of the activity can be fixed by the teacher but flexibility will be there. In this method, a kind of pair work is done in a different way. The class is divided into pairs by giving them the roles 'A' and 'B'. They are asked to sit back to back and play the roles in the given situation. Each one is given a role card. First one is given 'A' and the second one 'B'. An example of this can be found in the following conversation between A and B. This is done vice versa where 'A' plays the role of 'B' and 'B' plays the role of 'A'.

A model of this example can be seen in the following Role – Model.



The Role-Play can thus say to be a useful tool in teaching oral communication as illustrated by the activity discussed above. In terms of generating the use of language, this activity can manage to do it quite well. Although all the language which is used may not be accurate, it may be fluent with better preparation in implementing the activity. The Role-Play can indeed be a valuable tool for language teaching. To conclude according to Penny Ur, this is useful particularly in teaching conversational skills. The teacher may alternately make one of the pairs of students demonstrate the activity in the class. The members in each pair should reverse their roles and do the activity a second time so that each member gets a chance to play two different roles.

Seminars:

There are seminars where many scholars gather at a university or college and discuss various topics related to a subject. There are national and international seminars. A national seminar is one where research scholars or teachers of a particular nation join together and discuss the most relevant and advanced developments in a particular subject. In international seminar researchers and teachers from all over the world gather at a particular higher educational institution and share their views on a selected topic from a common platform.

As far as the classroom interaction is concerned, a seminar is confined to a classroom. The teacher plays an important role as the teacher has to give clear instructions regarding the rules of the seminar such as presentation skills, time management, and answering the questions

from the peer participants so that there will be no confusion when a student presents a topic in the conduct of classroom seminars. In the classroom seminar, each is given a topic to prepare well and express his/her ideas from the dais to his classmates. Here the teacher is a silent spectator. A student is given a minimum of ten to fifteen minutes to present his/her views or ideas on the topic. As soon as this is over, the teacher asks other students to ask questions or clarify their doubts regarding the topic presented by a student. Sometimes the teacher also shares his views on a topic and suggests weaknesses and strengths of the student who has presented the paper. Likewise, every student is given an opportunity to participate in the classroom seminars. Sometimes some diffident students who are diffident are forced to participate in the seminar or discussions so that they will become confident gradually.

Advantages of the Classroom Seminars:

- ❖ The classroom seminars make students confident and face the fellow students boldly when they ask questions or doubts regarding the presentation.
- ❖ They enthuse students to come forward on their own and actively prepare and participate, thereby, preparing themselves for national or international seminars.
- ❖ They also make the diffident students, 'though forced', gradually become confident.

Problems:

- In large classrooms, it becomes difficult for the teacher to conduct the seminars due to time constraint. So, it is not possible for the teacher to allow maximum time of at least 15 minutes to each student to present the paper.
- It is also difficult for the teacher to force the dull and diffident students to participate actively in the seminars.
- Most of the teachers do not find time to conduct the classroom seminars as their concentration is always on the completion of the syllabus.

Disadvantages:

Classroom seminars, in fact, have more advantages than disadvantages. It is but natural to have some disadvantages.

- All teachers and all students may not be equally interested to take part in classroom seminars.
- There are chances for absenteeism of the students as they are afraid to face the audience.
- There may be a chance for dull students to get frightened and more diffident.

In conclusion, some findings and suggestions are expressed as follows:

Problems of Teaching English:

As everybody knows, no activity in man's life is problem free. The teaching of English is no exception. The problems may be enumerated as follows:

- Strictly speaking, there is no urge for learning English. As there is a chance to get promoted up to X class automatically, students do not learn the subjects taught in English, besides the English language.
- Usually, classes are overcrowded and there is no scope for adequate teacher and student interaction, to enhance students' conversational skills in English.
- By and large, only some teachers are trained to teach English either at school or college level. Besides, their competence in using the English language is inadequate for systematic teaching.
- Most of the teachers feel or believe that students in rural areas, and especially those from poor families, cannot be taught many subjects including English because they are the first generation learners'. They have almost no exposure to English at the elementary level.

Problems of Learning English

- While learning English language, learners face a number of problems, such as :
- Difference between the structures of their mother tongue (L_1) and those of the target language, English (L_2).

Differences in some sounds of the two languages.

- Lack of exposure, that is, students listen to English only for about 40 or 50 minutes each day and rest of the time - in college and outside – they listen to, speak, read and write in their mother tongue.
- Moreover, any language, including English is too complex to be learned purely by imitation and repetition. A conscious effort, on the part of the learner, is highly essential.

How to get over these problems

If the teacher of English wants to teach English successfully, he/she should.....

- acquire a good knowledge of the differences in sounds, words and sentence structures between L_1 and L_2 .
- ensure that students grasp the areas of differences and partial overlap from L_1 to L_2 or L_2 to L_1 by spending more time on these aspects.
- enlist participation and cooperation of students in language learning activities.
- ensure that oral presentation is followed by oral practice; and that adequate oral work precedes any writing.
- teach all the language items before a passage for reading is taken up.
- listen to the radio or T.V. programmes broadcast every day to improve professional competence in teaching English.

Conclusion:

CLT is one of the best methods to enhance conversational skills in English. It is not just about the language but it is about how it is used. According to CLT, language learning takes place naturally when learners are exposed to language and given opportunities to use it. CLT demands student-centered classroom management skills, such as role play, peer work, group work, seminars etc. Both the teacher and the taught are equally important to enhance conversational skills of students both inside and outside the classroom. CLT adds to enhance the abilities of learners of English to communicate well in English.

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