

FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTARCT: The following article discusses some functional view of communicative language teaching theories. Moreover, it emphasizes algebraic linguistic system and communicative competence theories.

KEYWORDS: CLT, communicative purposes, discourse competence.

According to the functional view of second language learning, rather than concentrating on the algebraic linguistic system, attention would be paid more to the ways where in second language learners try to make meaning and attain their individual communicative purposes (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Therefore, a teacher who is well informed about this language view would focus his language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of language rules. Inspired by the works of British functional linguist as Firth (1957) and Halliday (1973) and of some American sociolinguists as Hymes (1972) and Labov (1972) some linguists such as Candlin (1976) and Widdowson (1972) started to develop the view that language teaching should focus on communicative proficiency. Wilkin (1972) also proposed a functional of communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. The work of these scholars initiated the emergence of the so-called Communicative Language Teaching (Richards and Rogers, 1998).

The emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach can be considered as a response against formal structural approaches such as audio lingualism which focuses almost exclusively on rules (Whong: 2013). The main reason of the development of the CLT Approach is the shift from the structure based to meaning-based view, which regards language more than merely a structure of rules, but more as a source, which is dynamic for the meaning generation (Nunan, 1989). The CLT emerges from the theory of language as communication, and it is aimed at developing what Hymes (1972) refers to as “communicative competence” (Richards and Rogers, 1998). Hymes “concept of communicative competence is explained as the ability a speaker needs to possess in order to be communicatively proficient in a social context. He believes that a language speaker who possesses communicative competence acquires both capability and knowledge to use language in regard to whether his/her language is structurally possible, feasible by means of available implementation, is appropriate to situation; and is actually performed and, what it entails (Hymes, 1972: 284-286). Littlewood (1981) explained that one of the noticeable characteristics of CLT is that it intensively focuses on functional and structural aspects of language and combines these into a more fully communicative model. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the communicative value in the CLT comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to what Chomsky (1965) coined linguistic competence, which is the formal system of language. According to Stern (1983), linguistic competence is the language users’ ability to use the rules structuring the language without being aware of them. Sociolinguistic competence is the speakers’

knowledge of the social environment in which communicative interactions takes place, which Hedge (2000) calls pragmatic competence which covers the type of relationships between speakers, the information the participants share, and the purposes of the communicative interaction.

Discourse competence, which Bachman (1990) calls textual competence refers to the understanding of individual communication components concerning their interrelatedness between one and another and how meaning expressed in the text. Strategic competence relates to the way speakers manage strategies, so that they can keep the communication channel available. Along with those competences, Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson, quoted in Hedge (2000), add fluency to one of the communicative competences a speaker needs to possess. Fluency refers to language production and it is usually reserved for speaking. It is the ability to relate components of language together with capability and without hindrance or excessive hesitation (Ibid: 2000: 54). Further, Richards and Rogers (1986) formulate the characteristics of CLT in the context of language theory. Language is the system to convey meaning in social interaction and communication, and this is the primary function of language. The structure of language is the reflection of its functional and communicative uses, and its primary unit are not only its grammatical and structural categories, but also functional and communicative meaning features as represented in discourse.

Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of *communicative competence*. What does this term mean? Perhaps we can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of *grammatical competence*. Grammatical Communicative competence refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity which is understood by the term communicative competence. Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)

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