

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN U.S. FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss communicative language teaching (CLT) as a prominent approach in language pedagogy and its implementation at one of the largest public universities in the United States, the Ohio State University, and to report on how teachers are trained to implement CLT teaching in their Slavic and East European language classes: Russian, Polish, Czech, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Hungarian. Although this study deals mainly with Foreign Language instruction, English as a Second Language specialists will also find it relevant.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching, professional training, implementation, United States

Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has achieved prominence in second and foreign language teaching, primarily in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and part of Asia. CLT emphasizes the importance of teaching language in authentic, culturally appropriate contexts and the importance of using language in a variety of realistic communicative situations. CLT is a dynamic, interactive, student-centered process focused on negotiating meanings. CLT takes into consideration students' communicative needs, their individual learning styles and paces, their levels of proficiency in the target language, and their personal interests and motivations (cf. Hendrickson (1991)).

While CLT has been widely explored and studied by many scholars, little is known about how teachers are trained in CLT and how they apply the CLT paradigm in their classrooms. In this article, I discuss the implementation of CLT at the Ohio State University (OSU), one of the largest public research universities in the United States, and report on modern languages teachers' professional preparation and training. I begin by defining CLT and sketching its theoretical background. I further briefly introduce modern language programs at the Ohio State University, and explore the teacher aspect of CLT. I next outline the training of OSU language teachers and then present some conclusions.

1. Sketching a Theoretical Base

The communicative language teaching has been one of the leading paradigms in foreign language instruction since the early 1970s. Central to communicative language teaching are theoretical perspectives on *communicative competence*, which was broadly defined by a sociolinguist Hymes in 1971 as knowledge and appropriate application of sociolinguistic rules, combined with knowledge of grammar rules. Hymes' real speaker-listener, unlike Chomsky's (1965) ideal speaker-listener, is involved in interpersonal interactions. Chomsky's ideal speaker-listener is set in a completely homogeneous speech community and "knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance (1965: 3). Chomsky's *linguistic competence* is formalistic and context free, Hymes's *communicative competence* focuses on socially-situated performances. In Hymes (1971), the notion of competence has been extended from the ability to understand and produce grammatically accurate utterances to the ability to understand, produce, and communicate utterances in contextually appropriate ways (Hymes (1971); see also Canale & Swain (1980)).

The CLT has shifted perspective from linguistic form to meaning, and from a focus on language to a focus on learner as active and creative language user (Eisenclas (2010), de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor (2005), Legutke & Thomas (1991), Canale (1983), and Savignon (1972, 1983), among others).

CLT can be viewed as an approach rather than a method, with a scope of diverse perspectives, embodying diverse goals. According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) and Eisenclas (2010), common to all the diverse voices within CLT, however, is to make communicative competence the principal and ultimate aim of foreign language teaching; and develop a variety of strategies, techniques, and procedures for the simultaneous teaching of all four language skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication and put an emphasis on meaning.

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times put on meaning, a variety of strategies, techniques, and procedures, acknowledging the interdependence of language communication, is developed to facilitate simultaneous teaching of all four language skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking).

With Hymes (1971), the concepts of *culture* (practices of everyday living), and *communication*, among other concepts, became central to language pedagogy.

Communication is both an aim and a means of language acquisition. It refers to “the ability to negotiate meaning—to successfully combine a knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules in communicative interactions” (Savignon, 1972, 1983). Savignon (1987) claims that the language acquisition process involves “the whole learner in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events”; “it engages learners not only intellectually, but physically and psychologically.” According to Lee & VanPatten (2003), language teachers can best assist students to acquire a second language by focusing on meaning while providing comprehensible input and numerous opportunities to practice communicating.

Foundational assumptions about the role of culture made by Hymes (ibid.) have been further developed by other scholars. Byram (1997), among others, assumes a direct relationship between foreign teaching and intercultural communication competence. In his view, students should not only be taught the language needed to communicate but also be confronted with “the experience of otherness”. He claims that the effectiveness of communication in the foreign language depends on students’ ability to “decentre” and understand how messages will be perceived in another cultural context. It is certainly not in a language instructor’s scope to teach all culturally-appropriate behavior, but s/he can and should take relevant opportunities to increase learners’ awareness of cultural differences and similarities, and, simultaneously, raise students’ awareness of their own cultural habits and assumptions.

2. Characteristics and Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

In CLT, teachers are not traditionally regarded as knowledge givers and learners as knowledge receivers; instead, CLT reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner. The role of language instructor is de-centralizing. CLT is student-oriented: the learner’s own personal experiences and unique individual needs are important contributing elements to

classroom learning. “The role of learners as negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that “he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way” (Breen and Candlin 1980, p.110). The teacher acts as a facilitator of the active student’s learning, manager of classroom activities, observer, monitor, analyst, counselor, referee, and co-communicator.

CLT advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It is the teacher’s responsibility to create situations to promote communication while the students do most of the communicating. The centrality of culture is implicit in the target language (both small c-culture of daily life and capital C-culture). The target language is the vehicle of classroom communication. It is important for students to hear the target language in use, whether by native speakers or by their peers. Accuracy is secondary to fluency, and errors are considered a natural byproduct of communication. Authentic materials are used throughout the learning process. In addition to verbal material (written, spoken), also visual material is used. Pair activities, group activities, walk-about, eliciting a multitude of communication exchanges, role playing, games, interviews, puzzles, memory games, and other tasks – all need to be meaningfully contextualized, useful and related to students’ interests. Warm-ups, wind-ups, culturally appropriate fillers – all class time can be used efficiently. The classroom atmosphere is one that is positive, non-threatening, respectful of everyone, relaxed, and informal. Learning, ideally, should be fun. The classroom language learning tends to be linked with language activities outside the classroom.

3. Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in U.S. Academia

This empirical study/report briefly addresses some issues regarding the implementation of CLT at the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures (DSEELL) at the Ohio State University (OSU) between summer 2001 and summer 2012. Marginally (in the form of intensive summer language programs in 2006, 2010, and 2012), CLT has also been conducted at Indiana University, Bloomington, and Pittsburgh University, teaching Slovak. I have been involved in CLT at these three universities as a graduate teaching associate, lecturer, summer program instructor, assistant to the director of language programs at the

DSEELL, and supervisor of Russian Individualized Instruction track. The target languages I have taught included elementary, intermediate and advanced Czech, all levels of Russian, and elementary, intermediate and advanced Slovak. The following courses have been taught by my colleagues: all levels of Russian, elementary and intermediate Polish, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Hungarian. Apart from Bulgarian which stopped being offered in 2006, most courses have been offered by the OSU consistently in the past decade.

Slavic and East European Languages are among 30+ languages offered by the OSU – a public research university with almost 60,000 students served by about 40,000 faculty members, staff and other personnel. Other languages include those with traditionally high enrollment (Spanish, Chinese, and German), major languages spoken primarily in Europe (Dutch, Swedish, Greek, French), as well as relatively rarely taught obscure Zulu or Swahili, and even American Sign Language. However, the languages of highest significance would be those listed by the United States Department of State as the Critical Needs Languages – “languages spoken in politically volatile regions, where the US focuses large amounts of diplomatic energy”¹ – Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Turkish, and Uzbek.²

The OSU student population to which the language instruction was directed is remarkably diverse – both undergraduate and graduate students, aged 17-90, different nationalities (e.g., American, Chinese, Russian, Ukrainian, Australian, Danish, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Pakistani, Indian), minorities (African American, Native American), with various linguistic backgrounds.

The OSU language classes typically comprise 3-20 students; the small number of students reflects less commonly taught languages such as Hungarian, or a higher proficiency level

¹ <http://voices.yahoo.com/get-hired-foreign-service-world-languages-and-282670.html>

² Interestingly, the U.S. State Department has been struggling to find linguistically qualified foreign-service workers. According to *The Washington Post* (August 20, 2012), the U.S. State Department, including its national security agencies, has serious gaps in mid-level foreign-service positions (28% of overseas mid-level posts were either vacant or covered by a lower-grade employee during fiscal 2009 and 2010), all due to a lack of qualified candidates with experience and foreign-language skills. The Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security face similar difficulties (*The Washington Post*, May 22, 2012). Universities with their significant linguistic potential became popular job fair venues for the U.S. State Department, the Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security.

A number of OSU graduates who complete their language training indeed apply for positions in the state service (e.g., language analyst, translator, interpreter).

language. The big number indicates a more commonly taught language, e.g., Spanish, French, or Chinese.

This study has evolved from self-observation, peer-observations, and observations of graduate teaching associates³ whom I supervised, and from the documentation related to those observations, from training materials, and student evaluations.

It should be noted that there is slight fluctuation between CLT theory, teachers' understandings of CLT and their personal implementations of CLT. In addition to diversity arising from teachers' practical application of CLT in OSU language classes, each OSU language program (e.g., Slavic and East European, Germanic, East Asian) as a coordinated unit is different, too. Nevertheless, the CLT components of the teachers' practical theories and language program theories are largely consistent with principles commonly listed in scholarly texts about CLT. The main goal of language teachers' use of a CLT is to have students being able to engage in meaningful conversations in the target language. Cultural and social contextualization of language is necessary; it contributes to shaping students' attitudes and influencing their behavior. The choice, organizing, and processing of topics, tasks, and activities should be meaningful, related to students' interests, and serving practical purposes.

Based on my longitudinal observations, success and efficiency of CLT in OSU classrooms primarily depend on the following factors: the university's endorsement and support; ability to provide quality training for their language teachers; availability of teaching resources; student factors (students' cooperation, students' needs), and – most importantly – teachers' knowledge and skills acquired through professional training, resourcefulness and creativity, determination, persistence, and willingness to risk and leave their comfort zone in the name of trying the new teaching method. The professional training of language GTAs and lecturers, which is a key component of successful implementation of CLT at OSU is discussed in the following section.

With respect to teaching resources, an observable drawback of CLT is the lack of quality instructional materials for some languages, e.g., Czech, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian. For Russian,

³ In the North American educational system, a graduate teaching associate (GTA) is a graduate student, in the European context, a post-graduate student, Masters or Ph.D., typically an aspiring academic who is hired as a temporary employee by a university-type educational institution in order to provide teaching and teaching-related services to an undergraduate student population.

Boyle (1994) points out that pedagogical scholarship seems to be split into two diametrically different camps: one building upon traditional grammar-translation tradition, and one advocating practical instruction while downplaying grammatical accuracy and mastery of structures. In practice this “instructional schizophrenia” (Boyle, *ibid.*) is often reflected by an existing grammar-based textbook which needs to be generously supplemented by additional communication-oriented materials.

4. Foreign Language Graduate Teaching Associate Training

In the recent decade, the OSU teachers of foreign languages have been encouraged to implement CLT to help develop students’ language abilities appropriately in context. The OSU provides systematic preparation of newly hired language GTAs and lecturers in the form of a Combined Foreign Language Graduate Teaching Associate training course. The “801” course⁴ is a multi-component course consisting of a pre-service 2-week intensive workshop, a quarter-length seminar conducted in the respective departments, and a continual peer review and constructive cooperation and supervision by a language program coordinator during the instructor’s teaching assignment. The whole process is a complex and multifaceted learning experience in which GTAs have a double role – both as students/trainees and instructors. The training has been developed and conducted by the OSU Foreign Language Center and modern language departments. The course is a pre-requisite for employment with the OSU as a GTA. GTAs and lecturers are learning how to teach, and are oriented in three major instructional areas: classroom management, student involvement, and instructional strategies. Both the workshop and the quarter-long course are taught by full-time professional trainers, such as professors or experienced teachers, to inspire and motivate GTAs as well as educate them. It is recommended that a variety of staff be involved in the training process so that GTAs know they have the support of institutional faculty as they teach. The course goals include:

- Becoming familiar with the basic structures of the OSU, its programs, resources, and general student population,
- Becoming familiar with basic theoretical foundations of the teaching-learning process as well as practical issues surrounding it,

⁴ With the recent transition from the quarter system to the semester system the number has changed to 7801 (College Teaching of Foreign Languages).

- Becoming familiar with common techniques, strategies, technology, materials, and other instructional support,
- Learning how to develop and enhance organizational, managerial, planning and people skills,
- Becoming aware of adult student individual learning styles and differences,
- Learning how to develop curricular and extra-curricular materials, how to develop and implement monitoring and assessment systems and feedback,
- Acquiring skills of effective course and lesson planning (presentation-practice-application-assessment), both in a classroom and in the Individualized Instruction module,
- Learning how to negotiate and provide cultural experiences in the classroom,
- Learning how to cooperate and effectively and constructively function and work in a team of instructors,
- Learning how to manage one's professional development.

The workshop is typically divided into two sessions – the morning sessions with instructors' micro-teachings, presentations, and discussion forums are designed for all new university language GTAs and lecturers, while the more language-specific afternoon sessions take place in individual modern language departments. Orientations to the OSU Office of Disability Services, the Committee for Academic misconduct, multimedia labs, Individualized Instruction division, etc., are also part of the workshop.

Conclusion

This article has discussed theoretical principles of CLT and supplied information about modern languages teachers' training at the Ohio State University. A solid foundation in teaching foreign languages via CLT is acquired through the college teaching workshop, a quarter-long methodology coursework, and continuous regular formal conferring with language program coordinators and fellow teachers. While multiple concerns need to be addressed in follow-up studies, this sketch of CLT in practice is relevant for anyone who desires an insight into a validated model of language teaching.

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Communication is much more than language skills! To improve communication skills in a foreign language, shift the focus of teaching from the language itself to actually doing things in that language. Four language and communication skills. There are four language and communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking as a communicative activity requires all four processes. However, much oral practice in the classroom merely requires the repetition of prefabricated phrases that does not entail the first two cognitive processes. This is not enough to improve your communication skills in a foreign language. It's fun to do things in a foreign language. The Communicative Language Teaching appeared during the 1970s due to a shift in language learning views. British linguists, dissatisfied with the audio-lingual and grammar-translation method of second language education, proposed a new approach based on the need for communicative proficiency within a social context rather than mere mastery of particular vocabulary and grammatical structures. Accredited CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) course. You learn about CLT and how to create and deliver successful English lessons within multilingual and multicultural environments on the EBC Trinity CertTESOL course. You get taught the CLT approach from week 1. With this style of teaching, practice Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, CLT implementation, CLT in EFL contexts. v. Table of contents. significant effect on how language is learned and taught. Since its inception in the 1970s, CLT has been discussed extensively in the ELT literature and its basic principles have been adopted and applied in language classrooms all around the world. This approach, generally recognized as a new method to language teaching, is developed in response to the realization. Language Teaching in the United Kingdom and Audiolingualism in the United States, which devoted full attention to the mastery of grammatical structures or lexical items, but failed to prepare learners for real communication outside the classroom (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei This article states different methods, emphasizing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Furthermore, we studied the way; students learn a foreign language and also its impact on a class motivation. In our research initially it is studied literature regarding the Method of Communication and its advantages compared to other methods as part of behavior, cognitive or human theories. Moreover, it was conducted a research by observing some of the schools in urban and rural areas, to see how this method is implemented in our schools. At the same time conducting a research that included in itself Free English language training materials for trainers and teachers with sections on Cambridge Delta, TKT and CELTA. You may also find it called Communicative Language Learning or CLL and even Communicative Language Teaching and Learning (CLTL). The roots of CLT. The roots of CLT run deeper than many realise. By the 19th century, many approaches to teaching language centred around its communicative functions, not just its grammar, so, for example, François Gouin (1831-1896) developed a teaching methodology based on sequentially logical descriptions of everyday routines and others, too, were experimenting with what today would be seen as communicative approaches.