

Analysis of the Teaching Methods between Communicative Approach and Task-based Approach

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ABSTRACT. *Communicative language teaching (CLT) was first applied as an approach to language teaching in the 1970s and it has enjoyed considerable popularity over the last thirty years. However, as the development of English language teaching research has gathered pace, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has emerged as an improvement to CLT, which is now being widely adopted by language teaching theorists and practitioners (Nunan, 2006). Recently, the debate surrounding TBLT and CTL is whether grammar syllabus should be taught in communication classrooms (Nunan, 2004, pp.9). Despite the debate and continual drive for improvement, as yet there has been no perfect approach to language teaching established. Therefore, it is important and significant to explore how to implement these approaches effectively.*

KEYWORDS: *CLT, TBLT.*

1. Introduction

This paper presents three sections: the first introducing the pros and cons of the two approaches; the second addressing the contention levelled by Littlewood (2007) and others, that there is no significant distinction between the principles of CLT and TBLT. Task-based instruction is regarded an 'extension of the CLT movement' by scholars such as Richard (2005, pp.96) who argue that the two approaches have the shared goal of achieving communication output, although they take different routes, so are not unique in themselves. Nunan (2004, pp.10) considers CLT as a concept, whereas 'task-based language teaching represents a realization ... at the levels of syllabus design and methodology'. In this circumstance, a task-based approach and communicative language teaching can be introduced together as a personal learning experience, and the differences between the methods will be pointed out in section two. 3) Some suggestions and detailed methods for tackling the problems raised in section 2 will be addresses and the reasons for their existence discussed.

2. Analysis of communicative approach

Definitions of CLT are somewhat complex but those of Ellis (2003) and Harmer (2000) are clear: CLT is radical departure from the PPP (Present-Practice-Produce) approach. Emphasis is on communicative competence, which plays a vital role in communicative language teaching lessons (Savignon, 2002). There are two main strands to CLT, the first is that teaching and learning should not only focus on form; language function should also be considered also (Harmer, 1998). The second strand of CLT presupposes that it is better to provide and motivate learners through opportunities to use the language (Harmer, 1998).

CLT emphasises the teaching and learning process relating forms to meaning, allowing learners to study the language through authentic and meaningful activities, so learning to speak the language fluently. Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue that communicative language teaching creates activities and language that is relevant to realistic situations, since it is strengthened by the use of authentic, from-life materials, replicating real communication in the classroom. For example, in order to engage learners in meaning, "functional activities" and "social interaction" (Littlewood, 1981) such as group work and information gap tasks are applied in the English teaching lessons.

As communicative activities involve different language learning aspects, learners require more than one skill to complete the communication task. In other words, when a teacher asks learners to engage in group works, they need to talk, and read to complete the task. Sometimes, the integration between the four language skills is apparent in communicative lessons. In this way, learners can sufficiently develop their language skills after finishing the communicative activities, although some trial and error arises in these activities (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, pp.172).

Schmitt (2000) claims that the communicative approach works only when the learner has enough supportive vocabulary to produce functional language use. Stern (1992) also argues that this approach emphasises communication over language learning so that it "in order to account for all varieties and aspects of language teaching we either stretch the concept of communication so much that it loses any distinctive meaning, or we accept its limitations and then find ourselves in the predicament of the "method" solution".

Stern (1992) identified a further more crucial issue, that in practice, communication in the classroom is artificial because of the absence of native speakers. In English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries, the goals and authenticity of the context do not fit the teacher's needs. All these difficulties can prevent the success of CLT and in an environment where contact time is limited this can create barriers to language acquisition.

3. Analysis of Task-based approach

Skehan (1998) highlighted other elements and perspectives related to the definition of a task, including: meaning is primary, learners are not expected to

regurgitate an artificially contextualised meaning defined by someone else, there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activity. In addition, it is generally the case in the teaching context that task completion is an assessed outcome of the task. An ideal task can contain various cognitive process and be informed by a variety of different language skills (Ellis, 2003, pp.16). There are three phrases in task-based lessons: pre-task cycle, task-cycle, and language focus (Willis, 1996).

A task-based approach is widely accepted as beneficial because it can readily involve all aspects of the four language skills (Ellis, 2003, p.10). The task work plan requires learners: i) to read or listen to the information provided in the course book and to share their ideas about the content of the text, and then to ii) speak or carry out short written tasks focused by time limits, iii) or to combine receptive and productive skills. Sometimes, a task requires that learners use dialogue or monologue to realise its outcome. These exercises and practices can help learners to apply the four skills when using the language in the classroom context. TBLT as an approach is also beneficial because it promotes the use of cognitive processes (Ellis, 2003, p.10). Learners are required to employ cognitive process: choosing, classifying, ordering, reasoning, assessing the language knowledge and transforming information from one form of representation to another in order to achieve the outcome of the task (Nunan, 2004). For this reason the task is an activity whereby a 'process of thought' is applied to understand the language (Prabhu, 1987).

Despite the evident strengths of the approach, there are some basic problems that relate to the task-based approach itself. First, there is insufficient research or evidence to conclusively prove that a task-based approach can be effective. Second, there is no rigorous evaluation element intrinsic to task-based teaching and it can be hard to assess tasks or sequence them. Third, a task-based approach may decrease the speed of acquisition as the instruction portion of the lesson content is reduced.

Carless (2004) found that some learners finished tasks producing only the modest linguistic output necessary to complete them and Lee (2005:199) noted that many learners do not try to exploit their full language resources but produce language at the minimum level of explicitness demanded by the task. In this circumstance, this approach may prevent learners from successfully acquiring the language.

To sum up, based on the evidence presented here; the difference between TBLT and CLT is that they take different routes to achieve the goal of communicative competence, and frame tasks differently. CLT engages students in the function of language use, whilst TBLT focuses on improve the comprehension based competence of language use. However, the approaches have many more similarities than differences. Although CLT has fallen from favour, TBLT, exists as a development of the communicative approach, covering shortcomings in both theory and practice, creating a diverse environment for communication and interaction.

4. A personal reflection on the experience of language learning

The popularity of both TBLT and CLT is derived from the advantages of each; in particular they have been proven to be an effective way for adult learners to study English (Carless, 2004). To be more specific, since adult learners have a strong motivation to learn English, they may easier to understand the instructions and complete the effective communication element that is required for the learning process. These two approaches include many interesting activities which can lead to an adaptation of the traditional (teacher-centered lessons) method of teaching and learning. For example, when I learned Shakespeare at university, our teacher would guide us in pair work and discuss questions about Shakespeare in the pre-task cycle. In pair work, I could talk about relevant films and books which I had read before, such as *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*. This process led me to predict what would be taught next and so gave me confidence in my learning in this subject.

TBLT and CLT offer learners the opportunity to use authentic language (Willis, 1996, pp.40). In other words, the task-cycle help learners to accomplish the communication in real world (Willis, 1996, pp.40). For example, when carrying out this method out teacher asked us to watch a film and answer questions about a short movie. Communicating in groups or in discussion activities also formed part of the 'task-cycle' in order to improve our listening and critical thinking skills. The teacher also required us to participate in a role-play activity to create a deep impression on the character of the people in the story. These kinds of special learning strategies facilitate the use of knowledge and new language for future communication.

TBLT and CLT provide a new style for teaching and learning grammar and vocabulary. The last phase is language focus, allowing us a closer study of some of the specific features that naturally occur as a result of the language used during the task-cycle (Willis, 1996, pp.40). Some grammar and vocabulary knowledge would be embedded in the tasks, and would motivate learners to study in the 'language focus' section. For instance, teachers would ask us to think about how 'would' is used and the effect of this high frequency word. We might work alone or in pairs before focusing on sentences and phrases to show the different meanings and uses of 'would'.

It was apparent as a learner that this process can help teachers to evaluate students' outcomes (Nunan, 2006); either through homework or the achievement of outcomes.

When I was in the secondary and high school, communication based activities were not very popular in Chinese lessons. Although a task-based approach was referenced in the content of text books, our teachers often threw this approach aside teaching grammar and vocabulary knowledge directly in the class. It is difficult to use TBLT and CLT in the elementary and secondary school system in China.

Initially, it is hard to manage young students to doing a task cycle in 45 minutes. Carless (2002) also points out that implementing communicative language teaching is difficult. Specifically, a task-based approach requires students to do many activities in a time-limited session to achieve a given outcome. If more than 60

students participate in these activities, the teacher does not have enough time to check whether everyone is negotiating meaning during the activities. For example, in secondary school, we had more than 50 students in each class. When engaged in communication activities the whole class was very noisy. It would be very hard to control each group and get a satisfactory result in this setting.

Secondly, teachers cannot prevent the students using Chinese during discussions, and this is a situation encountered in TBLT and CLT lessons (Carless and Gordon, 1997). For instance, also in secondary school, a teacher gave us a 5 minute talk about interesting topics, such as how to be healthy. When teacher said: "Begin!", we were very happy that we could chat with our partners. Maybe in the beginning, I would think strictly and use English during the conversation, but after 2 minutes or so I find it frustrating because I am repeating the same words and phrases as a result of my deficiency in English competence. Therefore, I would then use Chinese to speak about other things unrelated to the activity. For this reason our teacher avoided communication tasks in class.

In my opinion, a task-based approach and communicative language teaching is an interesting teaching methods which provides many appealing micro-task activities throughout the whole teaching process. This has created a big opportunity for all the students to interact with each other and share their ideas about themselves. However, this is also a big challenge for people like me, as I need to concentrate on recycling tasks for all lessons. Sometimes, if the teacher designs task activities without interesting materials, I lose my interest as the grammar element is not interesting to me. Therefore, in the future, I will consider much more the topic and content of communicative lessons I teach in order to form a virtuous circle of language teaching and learning.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, although CLT has lost its edge to some degree, TBLT provide teachers and learners opportunities to communicate in second language lessons. Despite the weaknesses identified as implicit in CLT and TBLT, especially in the Chinese EFL context, the approaches do provide teachers and learners with a creative style to employ for teaching and learning the language. The bottom line is that a teacher should base their plans on the theory, be creative and be aware of disadvantages when designing and implementing the two approaches. It is necessary to keep exploring for answers to the problems teachers experience, meanwhile learners should have a positive attitude and be prompted to cooperate with their teachers to achieve optimum language acquisition.

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