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A Handbook to the Communicative Approach (CA)

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1.0 A BRIEF LOOK AT COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH THEORY

1.1 DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS

In the modern global economy, English is a minimum requirement for getting a majority of jobs. As a result, more students than ever are learning English as a second language.

Over the past century, several approaches to improve and accelerate student comprehension of English have been designed, tested, and implemented. Previously, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) dominated in applied linguistics until the second half of the 20th century. This approach derives from former common languages such as Latin and Ancient Greek, which are taught by translating word-by-word.



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Growing concerns about the practical relevance gave rise to the Audio-Lingual-Method (ALM) which reduced grammatical content and focused on important patterns through drills and audio-visual materials. This method was implemented to assist soldiers during and after World War II who required proficiency in listening and speaking in a

foreign language during their service. Later, the Communicative Approach (CA) ¹ emerged as a new strategy for practical language learning. The following section will go into depth about the history, theory, and application of the CA (Integration of Grammar Translation Method with Communicative Approach: A Research Synthesis; Shawana Fazal Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Majoka Dr. Mustanir Ahmad)

As one teaching methodology tends to influence the next, origins of the CA may not be clearly established. A commonly accepted history of the CA is that it is the product of educators and linguists who grew dissatisfied with previous approaches. They believed that students were not taught enough practical language skills. Students were not learning how to utilize modern, social language, gestures, or expressions. They learned without immersing themselves into the culture they studied. Interest in and development of communicative style teaching bloomed in the 1970s; authentic language use and classroom exchanges where students engaged in authentic dialogues with one another became quite popular.

To understand better how the CA improves foreign language learning, it is worth discussing the traits of students who excel in learning a new language. The first serious discussions and analyses of those emerged during the 1980s with papers written by Morrow and Taylor. Although many modifications have been made since then, most papers written on this subject emphasize the importance of communicating in the target language. Good students seek situations to practice what they learned and ask questions to widen their vocabulary.

CLT reinforces these behaviours by focusing on communication in the classroom in the foreign language so that students may incorporate their personal experiences. The emphasis switched from mechanical practice of language patterns to activities engaging the student in a more meaningful and authentic use.

The CA places great emphases on helping students use the language in a variety of contexts as well as on learning the language's grammar. CLT is not designed to be a highly structured method. Rather, it is a broad assembly of ideas from a range of

¹or Communicative language teaching (CLT), which aims on communicating effectively in real life situations

sources which have come to be accepted as “good practice” by many contemporary language trainers. In the classroom environment, the CA often takes the form of pair and group work. Negotiation and co-operation between learners is common and encouraged. Additionally, the language taught is used as the normal medium for classroom management and instruction which reinforces naturalistic language acquisition. The CA is thus dictated directly by the students' needs and interests.

However, Wan Yee Sam (1990), showed that activities such as drama used in CA for TESL could further boost student interaction. She argues that role-plays help in contextualizing vocabulary as well as improving fluency. Although it may be embarrassing for some students to engage in an imaginary situation, she points out that researchers such as Moredacai have shown as early as 1985 a correlation between drama activities and students happiness. This should not be used in isolation but rather understood to be an unconventional addition of conventional CA.

Learners focus on creating meaning rather than developing perfectly grammatical structures or acquire native-like pronunciation. This means that teachers assess competency in a foreign language by how well the learners have developed their communicative ability. CLT makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The language trainer sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life.

Unlike the audio-lingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the CA can leave students in suspense since the outcome of a class exercise will depend on their reactions and responses. The students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

Margie S. Berns writes that “language is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society.”(1984: 5). Furthermore, she considers it important not to be restricted to textbooks. With a little creativity, a textbook can be manipulated into an aid for communicative exercises with additional elements.

In general, therefore, it seems that the Communicative Approach covers a broad spectrum of teaching opportunities and is not to be defined that easily. However, Sam (1990) considers the framework set by Morrow in 1981 to be dominant and we are inclined to agree.

These principles are as follows:

1. Know what you are doing

Students learn elements that are relevant to them. Thus, an engineer would have a different curriculum than a historian

2. The whole is more than the sum of its parts

As has been mentioned before, contextualizing helps students to use what they have learned in real-life situations and gives meaning to their studies

3. The processes are as important as the forms

This refers to the process of communication: You encounter an information gap, choose to close it by asking a question and receive feedback by a given response

4. To learn it, do it

This implies by far the biggest change in a classroom situation since the dominant speaking role switches from the teacher to the students in activities such as playing a drama, setting up a podcast, broadcasting a video etc.

5. Mistakes are not always mistakes

This means that the gravity of a mistake depends on the level of the student. For instance, a supposed to be fluent speaker should not make the same grammar mistakes as a novice

Thus, in sum, the principal features of the Communicative Approach include:

- 1 The approach focuses on the language as a medium of communication recognizes that all communication has a social purpose – the learner has something to say or find out.
- 2 Communication encompasses a whole spectrum of functions (e.g. seeking information, apologizing, expressing likes and dislikes, etc.) and notions (e.g. apologizing for being late or asking where the nearest post office is) at differing levels in the Common Reference Level scale.
- 3 New syllabuses are based on a communicative method which offers the language learner some communicative ability from an early stage.



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1.2 THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE CA

- Ongoing communicative interaction increases the learners' overt participation.
- The emphasis on creative role-play and simulation all produce spontaneity and improvisation – rather than repetition and drills. The learners not only hear the teacher, but obtain personal contact with language, by practicing sounds, permutating sentence patterns, and getting the chance to make mistakes and to learn from them. ⁶
- The Communicative Approach is not just limited to oral skills. Using elements encountered in variety of ways (e.g. reading, summarizing, translating, discussing, debating) makes language more fluid and participants' manipulation of the language becomes more fluent.
- Because of the increased responsibility to participate, students may find they gain confidence in using the target language. Students thus become more responsible for their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).
- The Communicative Approach places great emphasis on listening, which implies an active student will try to understand others. This is arguably one of the hardest tasks to achieve because participants are more accustomed to listening to the language trainer than to their peers. The language trainer sets up the exercise; but, because the students' performance is the goal, the language trainer must step back and observe, sometimes acting as referee. In other words, more STT (student talking time) and less TTT (teacher talking time).
- The classroom during a communicative activity is far from quiet. The students do most of the speaking, and frequently the scene of a classroom during a communicative exercise becomes a hive of activity with students leaving their seats and assuming roles in order to complete a task.
- The CA addresses another area which constantly challenges the language trainer - the mixed-ability class. When the lesson progresses to a free speaking

activity, students can contribute according to their ability and confidence. So there is a challenge for the more capable students, while those with an average ability still feel their effort is valid.²

1.3 THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CA

- Most trainers are enthusiastic about the opportunities which the CA offers. However, some also indicated they felt constrained by the system under which they operated especially those teaching in settings which are exam-focused. In addition, they queried the relevance of the CA to their situation, where many of the students have never used English outside the classroom.
- Some might argue that this method cannot be genuinely employed with low levels as there is no authentic communication, due to a limited vocabulary and restricted range of functions.
- Another problem is how to correct students' mistakes in pronunciation, grammar and so on. Many students are too concerned about their mistakes in pronunciation and grammar when speaking English. However, a well-trained and experienced language trainer plays an important role in the Communicative Approach. When students engage in activities such as "paired practice", "group work" or "role-playing", a good language trainer knows how and when to move around, offer help, and record students' mistakes for discussion after the activities are over.
- Introducing the CA to students who have previously studied a foreign language in traditional fashion may generate uneasiness and resistance towards a new approach (Deckert, 1987).

²(Denkci-Akkas, 2016)

1.4 CONCLUSION AND RECENT INSIGHTS

Considering the findings above, it is clear that the CA should be implemented or at least considered in teaching English as a second language. To date various methods have been developed to increase using CA but there is still abundant room for further research. For instance, Denkci-Akkas (2016) emphasizes cultural barriers that might play a role. Upon examining TESL for 9th graders in Turkey, he discovered that students were more satisfied with traditional and teacher-centered approaches.³ Although students and teachers alike may find this approach to be of benefit, tight schedules focusing and curricula focused on grammar exercises prohibit further usage. Additionally, even university entrance exams appear to be still using multiple choice tests so that learners may see the benefit of CA in real-life interaction but not in academic advancement. These findings are further supported by a recent study done in Indonesia. Evidently, students who were subject to the CA developed better social and communicative skills, but they did not perform better on the exam.⁴ Researchers took this as an indication that the approach does not have the desired academic merit and should not be further pursued. However, one could perceivably hypothesize that it is difficult to judge a new approach on an exam that is based on traditional teaching so that the learning environment should change as well as the methodology. Interestingly, recent data suggests that a mixture of grammar and communicative based approaches seems to be beneficial if it is promoted by a correct framework.

Another major setback is that a shift to group work implies an increasing responsibility of students to correct their mistakes accordingly. Being in an environment where neither teachers are native speakers, nor resources authentic could easily lead to deeply ingrained malpractices that will be hard to cure later on. Somewhat surprisingly, even the children examined by Denkci-Akkas in 2016 considered this to be a major concern and saw the role of a student rather in paying attention to the teacher.

Overall, it can be said that these arguments are more than counterbalanced by the greater variation in teaching and learning offered by increased communicative

³ (Denkci-Akkas, 2016)

⁴ (Wiyono, 2017)

possibilities using the communicative approach, fostering an inquisitive and participative approach on the part of the learner. The result is a useful practical application of language, as opposed to passive reception and understanding. This garners well for learners for better future competence and skill in use of the language.



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2.0 SUGGESTED STEP IN INTRODUCING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

This step concentrates on locating the most appropriate materials and the use of CLT in the local learning language environment as in Catalyst Module 1.B.

2.1 FINDING THE RIGHT MATERIALS AND USING TECHNOLOGY IN CA LANGUAGE TEACHING



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PUBLISHED MATERIALS

We are all aware of standard published materials consisting of the various course book packages, supplementary materials, job-specific materials, reference books, self-access materials, skills training materials, CD and DVD materials, simulation games, Applications, Podcasts, online videos, etc. In the list of sources at the end of this document, you can find recent and older literature as well as internet links to get more information about the CA. Also as a teacher you can find several work books to go along with your course, such as *The Principled Communicative Approach. Seven criteria for success* by Jane Arnold, Zoltán Dörnyei and Chaz Pugliese (2012).

FRAMEWORK MATERIALS

Framework materials are those materials for different purposes such as analyzing, describing contrast and similarity, describing change, describing cause and effect, describing sequences, etc. Those can be any videos, interviews, articles or other media that show or talk about a communication situation and thus give the opportunity to analyze and interpret them.

AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

The Communicative Approach deliberately seeks to use authentic resources that students find interesting and motivating. In a foreign language classroom, authentic texts serve as a partial substitute for a community of native speakers. Newspapers, magazine articles, poems, manuals, recipes, DVDs, videos, news bulletins, and discussion programs may all be exploited in a variety of ways.

These can assist in the development and enhancement of speaking skills by allowing students to practice extracting information, develop listening skills, improve comprehension, and extend vocabulary.

2.2 NEW TRENDS INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY - BLENDED LEARNING, ONLINE TEACHING ETC.

Blended learning combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology. Recent technologies that may be used include software applications, online portals (e.g. for web conferences), podcasts, interactive videos, and interactive whiteboards. It also includes the use of computers, tablets, mobile phones as a means of communication (e.g. instant messaging and e-mail), and a number of environments which enable language trainers to enrich their courses, such as VLEs (virtual learning environments).

The term blended learning has been used for a long time in the business world. There, it refers to a situation where an employee can continue working full time while simultaneously taking a training course online. Many companies are attracted by the potential of blended learning as a way of saving costs. Employees do not need to take time out of work to attend a seminar and they can work on their course in their own time wherever they choose. Companies around the world have moved parts of their in-house training onto e-learning platforms, and use sophisticated tools such as learning-management systems to organize the course content. The structure of the course may include web-based training modules, video conference programs, paper-based manuals, or any other useful tools.

For many, blended learning is merely the logical extension of what we do already. The technique has been criticized for compromising too many of the traditional fundamentals of language learning. A blended-learning course running without a principled approach may be seen as an "eclectic" blending together of course components and can end up as a chaotic mixture. There may be little or no relation between the in-person and the online components of a course. In a worst-case scenario, learners may suffer the "worst of both worlds".

Those not enjoying the online component are forced to participate in web-based communication and those happier communicating online must attend classes. On the other hand, if done well, blended learning can exploit the best of both worlds. Carefully chosen online materials can enhance the classroom component of the course and learners

have the opportunity to work at their own pace and follow their own interests. Thus, the outside world can be brought into the classroom to improve motivation and generate interest.

In comparison to the mid-2000s, when the main media to use technology in teaching were CD-ROMs and DVD videos, easy access to the internet and the normalization of mobile computing allows for a vastly broader field of opportunities today.

We will assume that you have decided to incorporate technology into a language course for a pedagogical reason, and by doing so you are adding value to the teaching. A blended-learning course is potentially greater than the sum of its parts, and positive learning outcomes are most apparent when clear roles are assigned to the language trainer and to the technology. With today's technology, it is easy to have an online backup for all important information of your course. With web-portals we have access to simple and user-friendly platforms, that do not require any downloads and make information accessible and shareable for all members of your course.

APPLICATIONS

In 2020, the most frequently used tools to practice foreign languages online are mobile phone applications, such as Duolingo, Babbel, Andy or Drops. The students can practice anywhere with these apps, often even offline. Duolingo and Babbel offer a broad range of exercises; conversation, grammar, or listening comprehension can all be practiced. There are explanation sections for every chapter and new vocabulary words are sorted by topic. Andy and Drops focus mainly on expanding vocabulary and using the words in simple sentences. With mobile phone apps, the language learning can easily become part of a daily practice routine.

Whilst the applications are not able to detect cheating or to properly correct wrong pronunciation, they therefore provide the advantage of accessibility. Instead of carrying books or work journals with them, students only need their mobile device and can practice at any time. High scores or in built animations are there to increase the motivation of the learner. Also most applications allow the users to learn multiple languages at the same time, that way they can fulfill customized needs such as changing the priority to a different language or spontaneously start a new one with less effort than starting or stopping an actual in person language course.

VIDEO CONFERENCES

The entire class can be now F2F and online at the same time thanks to video conferencing (e.g. Skype, Zoom, or BigBlueButton). These options make it possible to have participants around the world all in one class and to involve native speakers as trainers or guest speakers. Even today, having classes online might still feel unusual for a lot of students or teachers. If you are planning to hold a lesson or maybe even your whole course online, you should calculate time for everyone to get familiar with the new work format. Most web conference services have a well working system where every participant gets to turn their microphones and web cameras on and off individually. Some might feel more comfortable without turning their cameras on in the beginning. Also, if attendees should not have a camera at all they may still use the conference service. However, to get the group into a smooth work flow and to achieve the most authentic class experience we would recommend a working camera for every participant.

To avoid sound problems or echoing, we furthermore recommend the usage of headphones, ideally combined with a microphone. If only few or one student / trainer is speaking for a certain amount of time, the others may mute their microphones in the meantime to avoid disturbances.

Several online conference services provide the option of so called break out rooms. If you are working with a larger group, you may decide to break up the class into smaller teams for project works, presentations, or any other occasion that does not have to be discussed with the entire group. Furthermore there is an optional chat that can be used to comment without interrupting a currently speaking person, to share notes, or as a back-up communication option, in case of microphone failure.

PODCASTS

Recent evidence suggests that students learn subjects best if they are personally relevant for them and genuinely interesting. Due to advances in multimedia technology, today's generation of students grew up as digital natives. Omnipresent social media as well as huge floods of information. However, given proper filtering students may use this opportunity to access authentic sources that are relevant to them. Podcasts are a widely accessible audio format may be downloaded or streamed with almost any internet connected device. The variety of podcasts allows listeners to explore topics that interests them personally. This provides an opportunity for language students to learn about familiar and new topics in the language of their choice. For example, podcasts produced by the British Council serve the sole purpose of teaching English. However, more advanced students may find news sources such as The Daily or comedy like The Joe Budden Podcast with Rory & Mal more appealing. Furthermore, many podcast hosts publish transcripts which may be used as a tool by students to prepare in advance or reinforce the language by reading along.

Artyushina et al. (2011) from the Russian State Technological University used podcasts successfully in combinations with WebQuests⁵ to teach English as a second language. They highlight that students were provided with an environment where they were motivated to study more on their own. In support of this claim, they stress that students could work at home or in class, with the possibility to pause or rewind as they saw fit, thus greatly enhancing educational mobility. However, students should ensure that they use podcasts that are appropriate for their level. Podcasts that rely heavily on local regional or cultural influences may be overwhelming for beginner students and provide more stress than benefit. More research on the association between authentic learning and podcasts needs to be undertaken to provide a greater assistance to students.



Applications in use-PVPi76-O1uCA-unsplash

⁵Webquests are tasks (quests) that are to be solved using information that is available on the internet.

We highly recommend consulting

Pete Sharma's and Barney Barrett's *Blended Learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom*

from Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2007

or

Jennifer Hofmann's *What works in talent development: blended learning*

from Association for Talent Development Publisher, 2018

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