

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH FOR TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH IN A ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY

Minodora Otilia SIMION<sup>1</sup>

---

### ABSTRACT:

*IN THE GLOBALIZED ERA, THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING INTEREST IN LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH ALL OVER THE WORLD DUE TO CERTAIN FACTORS: THE GROWTH OF TOURISM AND TRAVEL INDUSTRIES, THE TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE MAJOR DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS, FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, FREE MOVEMENT OF THE LABOUR FORCE ACROSS EUROPE, ETC, ALL OF THESE CONTRIBUTING TO A TREMENDOUS INCREASE OF THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS THE LINGUA FRANCA AS A CONSEQUENCE, VARIOUS THEORIES, METHODS AND APPROACHES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH HAVE EMERGED AND THE TEACHERS HAVE TO CHOOSE FROM A WIDE RANGE OF OPTIONS, SOME OF THEM QUITE CONTROVERSIAL. THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) APPROACH IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR AND HAS BEEN AROUND FOR OVER 50 YEARS. THE PURPOSE OF MY STUDY-CARRIED OUT ON 200 STUDENTS FROM "CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI" UNIVERSITY OF TARGU-JIU IS TO EXAMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CLT IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES. THE INFORMATION COLLECTED CLEARLY INDICATED THAT THE STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN IMPROVE THEIR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY BY USING COMMUNICATIVE METHODS AND THESE METHODS CAN HELP THEM TO BETTER INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER AND THE TEACHER AND BUILD UP CONFIDENCE IN USING BUSINESS ENGLISH. CLT'S EFFICIENCY AND BENEFICIAL IMPACT UPON STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED AGAIN.*

---

**KEYWORDS:** BUSINESS ENGLISH, CLT APPROACH, LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

### INTRODUCTION

In the ever-changing world of globalization there is an increasing interconnection and interdependence of world economies and cultures from a political, social and technological point of view. Multilingualism is nowadays a passport to success in modern Europe and English as an international language is used in various settings, in scientific, economic, political fields or in media, continuously developing to match the technological and scientific development that our society is experiencing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu-Jiu, Romania, simionminodoraotilia@yahoo.com

There is a growing interest in many countries for improving the quality of teaching English and various theories, methods and approaches of teaching and learning English have emerged. The teachers have to choose from a wide range of options, some of them quite controversial. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is one of the most popular because of its goals to increase the students' communication competence rather than just having some knowledge about the language which was common in the past. Yet, it is not a new concept: it has been around for over 50 years and proved to be quite successful for the students' communication needs in today's world.

### **THEORY**

The communicative approach, CLT, focuses on the students' ability to communicate in the foreign language they are being taught and interact both with the teacher and with one another. Real-life situations have to be created so that the students can integrate their learning with the outside experiences they will be exposed to after graduation, at their workplaces.

The concept is not a new one: it originated in the 1960s in Noam Chomsky's theory in which he emphasized the idea of competence and performance in language learning. In the 1970s Michael Halliday and Dell Hymes laid the conceptual basis for CLT by introducing the idea of communicative competence and CLT emerged as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method.

The traditional language teaching methods such as those based on grammar translation and passive learning were gradually replaced by more active and efficient ones of communicative language teaching which required such techniques as pair-work, role plays, sharing opinions, interviews, information gaps etc.

The grammar of the target language could no longer be taught in itself, it had to be integrated into everyday communication. The focus now is not on accuracy, errors being tolerated.

All these changes brought about changes in the teacher's role and he/she became a facilitator of learning. They also brought about changes in the students' roles and they came to be now negotiators in a collaborative relationship, CLT encouraging active student participation more than any previous language teaching approach.

However, in language acquisition, accuracy should not be neglected since correct grammar and suitable vocabulary are also important. The shift from teacher-centered classroom to student-centered cooperative learning created this problem because it is obvious that students who are encouraged now to talk more than the teacher are less accurate than him/her but still the benefits of CLT are greater since fluency, comprehensibility and language production are highly increased. The learning environment itself has been changed since now the teacher has to create a friendly and motivating learning atmosphere in order to stimulate communication and not hinder it.

But we should not forget that if we simply place the students in groups or pairs and tell them to cooperate it doesn't necessarily mean that they will communicate efficiently or communicate at all.

Richards (2006) emphasized the importance of pair and group work in communicative language teaching and the importance of using authentic sources in such classes<sup>2</sup>.

Distinguishing between competence and performance Chomsky defined the former as the knowledge of the grammatical system and the latter as the use of this knowledge by the speakers to communicate. Hymes (1971) went further and introduced the concept of

---

<sup>2</sup> Richards, *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20

communicative competence. In this view this concept means that the speaker has both knowledge and the ability of using it.

Canale and Swain(1980) developed this theory by describing communicative competence as a concept which includes four basic components: grammatical or linguistic competence(knowledge of the grammar rules), sociolinguistic competence(knowledge of how to use the language appropriately in various social contexts);discourse competence(coherent organization of ideas )and strategic competence(knowledge of how to use verbal and nonverbal communication strategies<sup>3</sup>. According to Richards and Rodgers, Communicative Language Teaching begins with a theory of language as communication and its goal is that of developing the students' communicative competence<sup>4</sup>.

CLT was defined and characterized by other authors in various ways:Littlewood-1981;Larsen-Freeman,for instance, considers that the most important feature of CLT is that "almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent"<sup>5</sup>.

Littlewood, 1981, mentions another feature of CLT: that of giving "planned emphasis on functional as well as structural features of language, combining these into a more completely communicative view"<sup>6</sup>.

Nowadays, CLT has developed towards TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching),centering upon communicative task within this larger concept, in Harmer's view CLT being "a generalized umbrella term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students' ability to communicate" in contrast to "teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist-without focusing on their use in communication"<sup>7</sup>.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at examining the attitude of the students at tertiary level of education towards communicative language teaching and its effectiveness for learners.We obtained data from 200 students of the Faculty of Economics from Constantin Brancusi University of Targu Jiu, Romania:120 students in the second year of studies and 80 students in the third year who had studied English during the first and the second semester of their first year of studies.

The data resulted from a questionnaire including 15 close questions regarding the efficiency of CLT and its impact upon the students' performance.

---

<sup>3</sup> Canale M. &Swain,1980, *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing*, Applied Linguistics, I(1), p 10, Language Culture and Curriculum, 15(2), 93-105.

<sup>4</sup> Richards and Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*(2nd ed.) (New York:Cambridge University Press,2001)

<sup>5</sup> Larsen-Freeman,Diane, *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, (Oxford University Press, 1986), 132

<sup>6</sup> Littlewood, W.T.,*Communicative language teaching:An Introduction*, (Cambridge University Press,1981), 1

<sup>7</sup> Harmer, Jeremy,*The practice of language teaching*(4th ed.) (London, Longman,2007), 70

*Table 1 Description of Students' Responses in Figures*

No	Question	Yes Answers	No Answers
1.	Do you prefer a traditional method of teaching (reading, grammar, translation)?	10	190
2.	Do you enjoy modern methods of teaching English based on communication?	184	16
3.	Are you motivated to learn English?	164	36
4.	Do you prefer specialized texts translated into English or authentic ones( newspapers, magazines, coursebooks, etc.)?	174	26
5.	Did CLT method help you to improve your speaking skills?	176	24
6.	Do you think that grammar is important to communicate efficiently?	88	112
7.	Do you like an English teacher who gives you lectures in your practical courses?	10	190
8.	Do you prefer an English teacher who allows you to speak more often?	190	10
9.	Is fluency more important for you than accuracy?	134	66
10.	Do you like pair work and group work during your English classes?	124	76
11.	Do you find the communicative teaching method entertaining?	162	38
12.	In your opinion, does the communicative teaching method develop all your skills(listening, speaking, reading and writing )?	150	50
13.	In your opinion, did CLT help you to develop personally?	158	42
14.	Do you consider that CLT helped you to cooperate with others?	17	83
15.	Did CLT increase your motivation for learning English?	170	30

*Table 2 Description of Students' Responses in Percentages*

Question No	Yes Answers	No Answers
1.	5%	95%
2.	92%	8%
3.	82%	18%
4.	87%	13%
5.	88%	12%
6.	44%	56%
7.	5%	95%
8.	95%	5%
9.	67%	33%
10.	62%	38%
11.	81%	19%
12.	75%	25%
13.	79%	21%
14.	82%	18%
15.	85%	15%

## FINDINGS

Most of the participants in the study believe that the purpose of language learning should be the ability to communicate in English and this is why English teachers should focus on communication in classroom(92%).

Due to the fact that English proficiency is a must for our students' future careers in our country or abroad, 82% of the participants answered that they are motivated to learn English. They feel that they should be given the possibility to talk more, preferring classes of practising English to lectures in English(95%).

The communicative teaching method can improve all the students' language skills(listening, speaking, reading and writing)and 75 % of the participants consider it does but from my experience the writing skills are difficult to acquire since the students are resistant to written homeworks and writing activities in the classroom are rather time-consuming.

The communicative teaching method is considered to be entertaining by 81% of the participants and 95% of them prefer a method based on communication over a method of teaching based on reading, grammar, translation etc.

Not surprisingly, grammar is the Cinderella of language teaching, only 44% of the participants considering that it is important for communication and 67% believe that fluency is more important than accuracy when communicating..

However, CLT teachers are painfully aware of the fact that poor grammar can hinder efficient communication and it should not be ignored , no matter how much the students seem to dislike it. It should be taught in communicative meaningful situations based on authentic Business English contexts.

However, most of the participants(87%) prefer authentic materials(magazines, articles, coursebooks) and do not agree to the idea of having specialized texts translated into English by non-native speakers of the language and in this case, the teacher should carefully monitor their activity and ensure equal participation to classes.It is also his task to make the activities more challenging and enjoyable for the students.

Surprisingly, only 65% of the students enjoyed pair work and group work and this may be due to the fact that they had not been exposed to this method before and their perception was possibly affected by their previous experiences of learning English. Another reason for their dissatisfaction is that those students who are more proficient tend to monopolize the group or pair work activities.

Yet, 82% admitted that CLT helped them to cooperate with others which means that their initial resistance to pair work and group work probably changed during the course, despite their initial reluctance.

Most of the participants declared that CLT contributed to the development of their speaking skills(88%), 79% considered that CLT also helped them to develop personally and 85% had an overall positive attitude towards CLT, considering that it increased their motivation for learning English. Real-life situations generate communication and the students' desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics leads to increasing their motivation to learn English<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Banciu, Viorica, Jireghie, Angela, *Communicative Language Teaching*,The Public Administration and Social Policies Review, IV Year, No(8), June 2012

#### Discussion:

The findings in this study provide information that can be applied to many students at tertiary level about their perceptions regarding communicative language teaching in English classes, revealing the following:

1. The traditional methods used by some of the students' previous teachers may have affected their perception of language teaching but they seem to enjoy the modern ones more.
2. Grammar is necessary for teaching Business English but if practised in excess, it does not encourage communication;
3. CLT should include both speaking and writing;
4. CLT supports the notion of engaging students in communication,
5. There are more advantages in teaching English communicatively than disadvantages to it.

But we must not forget that there are still certain challenges facing CLT teachers:

difficulty with classroom management, especially with larger groups, students' poor language proficiency which may lead to using their mother tongue especially for pair work activities, the rather common view that the teacher has to transmit knowledge and not facilitate learning or autonomy, poor funding, lack of time to prepare authentic materials, time-consuming activities, the teachers' perception of CLT- affected by their own language learning experiences, teachers' heavy workload and, last but not least, their own deficiency in spoken English and lack of training in CLT (especially for teachers' belonging to older generations)

The question now is not whether to adopt CLT or not but to adapt it so that it should be suitable for the specific context where English is taught..

#### **LIMITATIONS**

One limitation of the study refers to the relatively small number of participants and further studies may be done on larger groups in the future, in order to demonstrate the feasibility of the CLT approach from the students' perspective. Another limitation may be the subjective character of the students' responses which may affect the quality of the study itself. It would be interesting to develop further studies both on larger numbers of students and on Business English teachers from Romania to give their perspectives and attitudes to teaching CLT at tertiary level.

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The questionnaire, designed for the students, was created in accordance with the objective of the study and the information contained in the theoretical framework and included closed ended questions about CLT methodology and its efficiency in teaching English. The data in the questionnaire were analysed in figures, percentages, interpretation and discussion. Based on the findings resulting from research, we drew the conclusions and recommendations.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of CLT in Business English classes. The information collected clearly indicated that the students believe that they can improve their language proficiency by using communicative methods and these methods can help them to better interact with one another and the teacher and build up confidence in using Business English.

### REFERENCES:

1. **Richards**, *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006,p20
2. **Canale M. &Swain**,1980, *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing*, Applied Linguistics, I(1), p 10, Language Culture and Curriculum, 15(2), 93-105.
3. **Richards and Rodgers**, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*(2nd ed.)New York:Cambridge University Press,2001
4. **Larsen-Freeman,Diane**, *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press, 1986, p 132
5. Littlewood, W.T.,*Communicative language teaching:An Introduction*, Cambridge University Press,1981,p1
6. Harmer, Jeremy,*The practice of language teaching*(4th ed.)London, Longman,2007, p 70
7. **Banciu, Viorica, Jireghie, Angela**, *Communicative Language Teaching*,The Public Administration and Social Policies Review, IV Year, No(8), June 2012