

Literature Review of Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract

Communicative language teaching is crucial in the development of foreign language teaching methods. And it plays an important role in English teaching in China. This study discusses its definition and historical development, analyzes the factors that influences the development of communicative approach and give some advices on how to promote the use of communicative approach.

Keywords

Communicative Approach; English Teaching; Foreign Language Teaching Methods.

1. Definition

According to communicative approach, language is a system for the expression of meaning and the primary function of language is for interaction and communication. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

Richards and Rodgers suggested there are three principles in communicative language teaching, namely communication principle, task principle and meaningfulness principle. Communication principle means that activities that involve real communication promote learning. Task principle refers to that activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning. Meaningfulness principle means that language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

One possible solution to bridge the gap between classroom language teaching and real life language use is the adoption of communicative language teaching. The goal of CLT is to develop students' communicative competence, which includes both the knowledge about the language and the knowledge about how to use the language appropriately in communicative situations.

2. Historical Development

Communicative language teaching emerged in the early 1970s in the UK and entered a flourishing period in the mid-1980s, but criticism questioning never stopped (Baohui Shi, 1997).

In the middle and 1980s, scholars' curiosity and research interest in communicative pedagogy gradually decreased and people gradually accepted this teaching method. Communicative language teaching began to embark on the track of development in China. In addition, at that time, China ushered in a new teaching program in colleges and universities. With the combination of textbooks and communicative language teaching, the development of communicative language teaching in China's foreign language teaching has been vigorously promoted.

Since the 1990s, with the progress and development of the society, the communication between countries have been strengthened. Communicative language teaching has entered a prosperous stage after long-term practice and development. More and more school paid attention to the introduction of communicative language teaching. In this period, the level and scale of the theoretical research on communicative language has improved.

3. Research at Home and Abroad

Communicative language teaching was born in the 20th century in England. In his theory of syntax(1957), Chomsky pointed out that the popular structuralism at that time could not fully explain the basic characteristics of language. Hymes(1972) pointed out that communicative competence is influenced by different factors such as grammatical structure and society. According to Hymes' theory, language competence is a kind of social competence for communication.

In the 1970s, traditional teaching methods were criticized and many new foreign language teaching methods formed. Communicative language teaching also emerged at that time. D. Wilkins emphasized the limitation of traditional teaching methods and provided a detail explanation of ideas. According to the theory put forward by Grice in 1975, in order to make communication be smooth, both person in communication should exchange their roles and each person should have the opportunity to participate in the input and output of information. Based on the analysis of language, the Communicative Language Teaching Method published by Widdotson(1978), summarizes the principles and experience of communication in teaching. In the same year, John Mundy published the Communicative Syllabus Design. After that, communicative language teaching developed rapidly and gradually improved.

Since 1980s, communicative language teaching has gradually become mature. In 1980, M. Canale and M. Schain proposed four competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. LittleWood(1981) pointed out that communicative language teaching has become an international foreign language teaching approach. In 1981, Johnson and Morrow co-edited *Communication in the Classroom*, which clearly expounded the principles and practices of communicative approach and provided teachers with specific guidance. In the following ten years, Candlin(1993), Nunan(1989), Long(1989), Bachman(1990), Crooks(1993), Willis(1996), Skehan(1998) and many other researchers have greatly improved the theory of communicative language teaching.

Communicative language teaching was mainly introduced into China in the late 1970s. During this period, many advanced teaching theories came one after another, including communicative language teaching. In 1979, Li Xiaoju published *Communicative English for Chinese Learners (CE-CL)*. It is recognized as the successful combination of communicative approach and the reality in our country. In the late 1980s, communicative language teaching developed further. Zeng Kengan(1987) emphasized that the teaching syllabus should focus on the situation of learning, absorb the advantages and eliminate disadvantages and communicative language teaching became one of the major foreign language teaching approaches in China. In the 1990s, the application of communicative approach had a lot of remarkable achievements. Li Xiaoju(1997) made a deeper study on the forms of communicative competence. This is the first time for researchers to systematically explain the relationship between communicative approach and traditional teaching methods and it also shows that China has basically accepted communicative language teaching.

4. Problems in Developing Communicative Language Teaching

4.1. The Number of Students is Large

There are about 40-60 students in a class in China. It's hard to make sure every students have the opportunity to communicate. Firstly, students have less chance to speak English in class. Secondly, it is difficult for teachers to control the atmosphere of class and the degree of cooperation between teachers and students will be greatly reduced. Thirdly, one-to-one communication between teachers and students cannot be realized and the classroom

interaction cannot be further enhanced.[1]So in Chinese classes, it's hard to use communicative approach to improve students' foreign language learning ability.

4.2. Cultural Differences

The cultural environment in which Chinese students grow up and the way of education they receive are quite different from those in English-speaking countries. In China, students are rarely answer teachers' questions positively unless teachers asks them to answer the question. Influenced by traditional education of Chinese civilization, Chinese students are used to respecting teachers and they dare not speak freely or question teachers. So there is a long way to go in cultivating students' courage to express.

4.3. The Impact of Examination

The reason why students learn English is mostly that they need to pass College Entre Examination. When they came into senior high school, teachers emphasized the importance of vocabulary, reading listening and writing. Students focused on doing exercises and they are unwilling to participate in activities because they think it's a way of wasting time. They just want to make their grades be higher. Guided by the requirements of examination, it is difficult for teachers and students to use communicative language teaching.

5. Promote the Development of Communicative Language Teaching

With the continuous development of economy, China is gradually on the track of international development, and foreign language communicative competence is becoming more and more important, which is extremely beneficial to the development of communicative teaching method. How to make full use of communicative language teaching to cultivate students' communicative competence so that students can use foreign language proficiently and fluently, is an important issue for foreign language education and teaching workers in China.[2]

5.1. Strengthen the Training of Teachers

Training for teachers can be divided into two kinds, including training for in-service teachers and training for prospective teachers.

In-service English teachers are leaders in English classroom and they play an important role in communicative language teaching. In order to use communicative language teaching, we should train teachers to make them realize why we need to use this method and how to teach guided by communicative approach.

Also, students major in English teaching should have a good command of communicative language teaching to prepare for their future teaching. In our normal university courses, we should corporate more knowledge about communicative language teaching so that students can be familiar with communicative language teaching in advance and then they can use this teaching method in future career.

5.2. Combine Communicative Language Teaching with Other Teaching Methods

There is no perfect teaching method and any teaching method should adapt to specific teaching condition. Communicative language teaching needs continuous innovation and reform in practice to adapt to the progress and development of the society and our country's education. However, the current researches about communicative language teaching are mostly at the theoretical level. We should try our best to put communicative language teaching into practice so that we can find a more effective way to use communicative language teaching and make our students be interested in learning foreign language.

6. Conclusion

All in all, communicative language teaching is an effective way to teach foreign language. However, there are many problems in using it, so we should try our best to improve teachers' ability and make them have a deeper understanding of communicative approach. At the same time, the use of communicative approach should adapt to the development of society and the reality in our country.

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