THE PROACTIVE IMPACT OF INTERACTIONS IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching has been in sharp focus as never before since globalization owing to the huge demand of personnel with good communicative skills in English. Sadly the demand has been widened as candidates with good English language skills are in short supply though the number of eligible applicants is far too many. This peculiar situation diverted the attention of the Companies, Industries and other employers towards on-campus recruitments from qualitative and standard educational institutions in the country. This has in turn signaled a new beginning in English Language Teaching from purely academic orientation to communicative oriented English Language Teaching. It is at this juncture the Communicative Language Teaching has acquired more importance and set English Language Teaching for a paradigm shift.

When, in fact, many methods and approaches including the mode of Audio-Lingual Teaching being in practice for significantly considerable time was no longer felt to reflect a methodology appropriate for the seventies and beyond CLT made its entry into English Language Teaching arena with its more humanistic approach to teaching with a premium on interactive processes of communication. CLT received the sanction and approval of applied linguists, language specialists, language teaching circles, publishers and the educational institutions for its democratic approach wherein students find freedom to interact and learn. One of the important characteristics of this communicative view of language being that the primary function of language is for interaction and communication. Interactive process in Communicative Language Teaching plays a vital role in enabling the learners become communicative competent through wide and varied interactions. The primary focus of this

Paper will be on the role of interactions in CLT and it also makes a modest attempt to study this aspect in all earnestness.

Keywords*: Globalization, communicative skills, paradigm shift, interactions*

Introduction

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Communicative Language Teaching and Interaction

Communicative Language Teaching refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in enabling the stakeholders not only acquire language skills but also use language. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.

Interaction entails a two way process. In any series of exchanges communication occurs through messages moving backward and forward between two speakers. Interaction in a group is thus multi dimensional. The turns of conversation are distributed among the members of the group. Interaction involves listening to incoming information and responding to it relevantly. The listener's response to the speaker depends upon what one thinks of the speaker and one's perception towards life and the world. The interlocutors in an exchange treat each other with respect and the tone and manner of speaking reflect all this. Interaction would thus imply mutual understanding of each other's thoughts and feelings and the principal means through which this happens is language. Spoken exchange in a group is spontaneous and multifarious. In a group each member may have something valuable to say and each member may also respond to what the other has said. The force of one's ideas result in appropriate language forms to convey them and facilitates fluency. Another principle is that knowledge is constructed collaboratively by the participants and not just received by them from one dominant speaker. Responding to others' idea is crucial to the learning process. These normal principles of human communication patterns pave way and help teachers in the language classroom to equip learners with communicative competence. Communicative competence is the ability to use language appropriately in real life situations.

Communication through Interaction

Communicative competence can certainly be accomplished in a classroom through interaction. Language development happens through interaction with others and the language inputs are processed in mind. As is seen and experienced that a child learns his/her mother tongue through interaction with his/her family members first, then people in the neighbourhood and finally in school. Now the question arises why should there be classroom interaction? One may feel that allowing interaction in large classrooms may result in disorder

and chaos. It may also be thought that allowing students to talk, takes away a lot of classroom time and the topics in the syllabus may remain incomplete. One may even think that there is no fitting way of assessing oral communication in large classes and that the time is better spent on form practice. Here it is most appropriate to note the fact that the emphasis in a learner -centered classroom is on making learners use language rather than just know about the language. While allowing students to initiate and respond to topics of discussion in the classroom, the process will facilitate and help them speak naturally and effortlessly. Language learning, thus, is actually skill learning and not context learning and facilitating and offering practice for the development of the skill will help future use of language. Another aspect of consideration in classroom interaction is that, fluency in speaking a second language is often hindered by affective factors and encouraging learners to speak in class will help them shed their inhibitions. Allowing interaction as mode of learning other than teacher talk does not mean that there is no lesson plan in the teacher's mind. It is only through the learner's interaction with the text, his peers and the teacher that the text begins to acquire meaning. As long as positive learning outcomes result, deviating from the lesson plan will not affect the learning objectives. What is important is that the language learning objectives are fulfilled where meaning making is more important because learning cannot be viewed as a product.

Process of Interaction

The process of interaction in a learner-centric classroom can be analyzed at two levels, i.e.,(i) At the level of the actual content of the lesson and (ii) At the level of practice and clarifications through interaction. Generally it is found that level (i) takes up a major portion of class time with the teacher doing most of the talking and there is very little time left for or spent on level (ii). But if at the level (ii) the teacher shares the students 'L1', and then interaction increases. Hence language development will be optimal if level (ii) and level (i) overlaps each other so that the language of social communication flows into the language of context communication and vice - versa.

The highest impact of this can be had when the teacher makes it a point to move freely during the two levels so that the learners are also able to do so. It is only when content and communication interact that learning can be effective. In many cases it is observed and found that the teacher is good at level (i) and makes the students also proficient at this level. In

other words, academic language content develops mainly with the help of the textbook in the literary mode, while the spoken language that is required to internalize the learning and to communicate it to others does not happen. This is exactly what is expected in workplace communication and that is why the need to strengthen stakeholders at level (ii). A student should be able to explain and clarify context in simpler terms using everyday language and this can be achieved through interaction.

As it is very clear that learning a language requires classroom interaction, then an obvious doubt crops up in one's mind as to the role of a teacher. When learning is made to happen through interaction it is obvious that student involvement in interaction increases and it also means that teacher talks less. It is in no way mean that learning is reduced as is thought in some circles. In this context, it is observed that organized forms of interaction can be arranged through pair work and group work activities. In such activities the teacher stands outside the learning circle or participates as an equal. Here the teacher's role is to arrange the setting for interaction, to provide task inputs, monitor student interaction, give clarifications when students seek them, offer suggestions when a group does not know how to proceed, collect feedback on the learning achieved and consolidate learning at the end of the session. Thus a teacher has a huge responsibility even in an interactive classroom session and moreover, learners' confidence that they are not merely receivers of information but can contribute to knowledge making will encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning and initiate discussion in the classroom. This will lead them to being autonomous individuals later at the workplace with the ability to take initiative, engage in collaborative team work and assume leadership roles in their respective working environments.

Interaction and Language Acquisition

In a classroom all the teaching is done through language irrespective of the subject as it is the medium of communication between the teacher and the learners but in a language classroom both the content of teaching and the medium are the same. It is exactly for this reason that there is a difference between analyzing interaction in other subject classrooms and in the second language classroom. In the first case, what acquires importance is the impact of interaction on the learning of the subject whereas in the second case it is assessed to understand what kinds of activities involving interaction will promote language acquisition.

Here both the object of learning and the medium of learning is interaction itself. Learners need to learn to interact and they learn this by interacting.

Many methods and techniques are there through which interaction could be promoted in the classroom. The best one is supposed to be the instructional mode. Instruction in an institutional set-up can take several forms. One of them is task - based instruction. As it happens naturally in content based instruction mode with stress on the content, so is in a language classroom with a task - based approach it is naturally planned to provide learners with a natural context for language use. As learners work to complete a task, they have ample opportunity to interact. Such interaction is thought to facilitate language acquisition as learners have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning. By so doing, they have to check to see if they have comprehended correctly and, at times, they have to seek clarification. By interacting with others, they get to listen to language which may be beyond their present ability, but which may be assimilated into their knowledge for use at a later time. In this context the apt comments of Candlin and Murphy hold good, "The central purpose we are concerned with is language learning and tasks present this in the form of problem solving negotiation between knowledge that the learners hold and new knowledge ability acquired."

Manifold Functions of the Teacher

Many relevant activities can be planned in advance and conducted by the teacher in a language classroom to provide ample scope for enhancing communication skills of the students. The teacher while designing the activities should bear in mind to create a purpose for facilitating talking among the students. Students can be given some tasks and speaking is the way to complete them. For instance, the students could be shown two similar pictures with some differences and asked to find out the differences between the two pictures. Here the focus is on completing the task successfully and students use language unconsciously and automatically to complete the task. In an interactive language classroom the teacher has multiple roles to don such as activity-designer, facilitator, moderator and task-master.

There are many Task -based approaches that could be implemented accordingly in a language classroom to promote interaction.

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Conclusion

Task-based activities such as Information Gap, Opinion Gap, Reasoning Gap approaches, Chain Story etc., are very useful and productive in involving the stakeholders in interactive sessions. Thus learning through tasks and activities demands a great deal of interaction. It is found that this sort of interaction in classroom facilitates the cognitive learning processes, develops autonomy in learners and makes interaction in real - life purposes easier that finally enhances communicative competence among the students and hence Communicative Language Teaching puts a premium on interactive process for language acquisition.

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