TEACHING FLUENCY FOR COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract
For the purpose of this study three prominent questions have been asked: the significance of an interactive-engaged approach, ICT competences and online teaching, the use of creative techniques and their influence on the students’ communicative competence. We discuss the nature of communication and its relevance to various stages of learning, emphasize the importance of integrating skills, analyze the differences and similarities in learning how to speak and write. The basic aim of foreign language teaching is to endow the students with linguistic competence, to help them adapt to the needs of society, to use the language functionally in order to achieve the expected effect. This paper will focus on several methods and strategies which makes English teaching attractive.

Keywords: communicative competence, communicative interaction in English, foreign languages, creative methods, creative students.

Introduction
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means

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and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages” or simply the “communicative approach”.

Communicative Language Teaching places great emphasis on helping students use the target language in a variety of contexts and it stresses the importance of learning language functions. Its primary focus is on helping learners create meaning rather than helping them develop perfectly grammatical structures or acquire native-like pronunciation. This means that successfully learning a foreign language is assessed in terms of how well learners have developed their communicative competence, which can loosely be defined as their ability to apply knowledge with adequate proficiency to communicate.

**Communicative Teaching**

Jeremy Harmer (1999) discusses the nature of communication and its relevance to various stages of learning. He emphasizes the importance of integrating skills, discusses the differences and similarities in learning to speak and write. The situational dialogues and pattern practice of audio-lingual classes could at best provide the learners with a number of clichés for certain situations.

Communicative teaching also relies on the understanding of the interdependence between language and communication. Unlike the structural approach of the previous generation, communicative language teaching lays stress on the functional potential of the language, emphasizing the role of language as an essential tool for ordinary interaction. In opposition to the previous generations’ insistence on form, structure and well-formedness, communicative teachers focus on meaning and interaction, with special stress on oral communication. Communicative educators also understood that they could no longer ignore the socio-cultural context of interactions, or the learners’ psychological world.

In addition, communicative textbooks no longer provide one text for a lesson, with the implicit suggestion that its content should be learned. Instead, they may offer several short texts centred around a topic (e.g. five short texts offering random pieces of information about sights in Great Britain). This kind of arrangement provides the advantage that, instead of merely learning the lesson, the student has to process and systematize the information provided by the texts; it is also closer to the way people come across
information in the real world. Furthermore, with communicative classes, the text/textbook itself has a much lesser role. As communicative teachers target productive and communicative skills, the texts may only provide a framework for subsequent activities. On the basis of the text(s) they are reading, the students are asked to create their own linguistic output in the foreign language (e.g. organize a guided tour of their home town). Obviously, the language and format of the model text will tell them what vocabulary to use and how to organize their material.

Emphasis on language functions shows that communicative teaching is competency-based (i.e. learners must show what they can do with the help of the language) and task-oriented (i.e. they are taught to perform practical tasks with the help of the language, in situations that simulate or approximate those encountered in real life). To achieve these aims, the teacher must devise classroom activities that should simulate real-world linguistic situations (e.g. the students are asked to organize a trip with the help of a guidebook).

Communicative teaching lays great emphasis on interaction, on the exchange of ideas and negotiation of meaning, like in the outside world. The traditional question-answer teacher-student exchanges are replaced by student-student conversations, offering learners the opportunity to practice the linguistic material in communicative activities, which imitate or simulate the linguistic behaviour of real-world interactants.

A communicative activity is set in a situation similar to those encountered in the real world. The situation must be close to the students' life experience, so that they can identify with it. To perform the tasks required by the activity, the learners assume certain roles, and they are made to use the language in ways typical for the situational context. This way, learning the foreign language is achieved by using the foreign language. The students learn to communicate in the target language by struggling to express their thoughts and feelings in situations close to their own background. Even literary texts can be used communicatively.

To achieve communication and student interaction, the teacher must know the students well and understand their preoccupations and needs. This way, s/he can devise activities that are challenging and motivating.

For a communicative activity, the teacher creates a situation; sets a purpose for the interaction; organizes the students (pairs or groups) and assigns...
their roles; s/he sets the activity in motion, then stands back to allow the students to use their imagination to expand the context. The teacher encourages the students to be creative and communicate freely, to negotiate meaning and thus solve problems. The classroom atmosphere is positive, relaxed and supportive, aiming to reduce the students’ anxiety. This way, the learners are taught to use the language as social individuals, and they gradually arrive at language autonomy.

The teacher may of course be involved in the activity as a participant, and will also be watching and listening very carefully in order to be able to conduct feedback. As the teachers go around the class while students do their reading activities in order to observe their performance, listen to them, and give advice when needed, we can call them monitors. As they work directly on a one-to-one basis with the students, the teachers become partners in communication, so they are co-communicators. Also, they should judge the students’ performance by helping them to see if they have completed their tasks successfully, finding out how well they have done, and providing feedback. So, they are evaluators.

Often students work with materials which force the use of certain language, or at least restrict the students’ choice of what to say and how to say it. But by restricting the students’ options, the materials are enying the language variety characteristic which we have said is important for genuine communication.

The Story Telling Method

The Story Workshop method, its activities and formats used by teachers with reasonable training, integrates reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking and incorporates the three major ways of learning in every phase - the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic. These “ways of learning” are not so distinct, but interpenetrate in all of the Story Workshop activities. The methodology is designed to be flexible, enabling the teacher to engage the diversity of students.

It proved to be a successful English immersion class, with large advances in fluency and sense as well as a marked development of fiction writing skills.

The Story Workshop approach provides means of effective “classroom management” integrated with its activities. “The Story Workshop approach is one of the best examples of a high-quality curriculum and instructional
method that fully integrates four critical areas in literacy: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.” (Egan, 1986, p.18)

Writers frequently identify their childhood dramatic play as crucial to their development of storytelling in writing. This can be true for nearly all students in our classes. Writing is done finally alone-alone looking at the page with the sense of audience that the writer develops in the social situation of the classroom and is developing imaginatively through the word games and oral tellings up to the writing. There are important connections made in the physical act of using pen or pencil on a pad of paper. The students seek imagery and metaphor to do in writing what they did with gestural expression in the oral tellings. Bill Gates himself said that he used a yellow legal pad and pen or pencil for his note taking on any subject under discussion. He said that it would take quite a while before they could duplicate on the computer screen what is accomplished with the complexity of a pad of paper and pen or pencil and presumably that physical sense of connection of pencil and paper to the speaking voice. With what we have accomplished on the pad of paper, then we can go to the computer and begin to type and use it for further development.

In every stage of a Story Workshop class, students are coached for seeing-in-the-mind, voice awareness, and audience awareness - that is, the integration of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. Students read stories and essays aloud and silently, tell, use gestures to illustrate their perceptions, write, and read aloud from their own work in the presence of the audience of their peers and their teacher. Students in Story Workshop classes dramatically improve reading, writing, speaking, listening, and problem-solving skills. “Reading became easier, more enjoyable, and writing was given a voice with power” (Egan, 1986, p.23).

Story Workshop programs engage thinking (seeing-in-the-mind, imagination), voice, sense of audience, and sense of form and purpose in immediate word games, oral telling, coached oral reading by teacher and students, and in-class and out-of-class writing activities. All activities are coached and guided by the Story Workshop teacher, sitting or standing before the semi-circle of students.

Students use stories and basic writing forms to practice and build the fundamentals that make learning to write easier, engaging, and more effective. They orally tell and write stories, play word games, and read vivid
published pieces. This combination of activities builds the integrated sense of audience, imagery, voice, communication, and creative problem-solving every person needs to write well.

Their in-class writings, and the writings finished as outside assignments, are also selected to be read aloud for the enjoyment and learning of the group. Sense of audience is crucial to the students’ skills advancement. The ability to reach the immediate audience and make them listen, laugh, get serious, and recall effective passages bring about not only skills advancement, but self-respect for individual students and social cohesion of ethnic groups.

In the students’ eagerness, expressed across the range of ethnic groups, we see some of the most thrilling results of guiding students to develop their own voices and sense of audience in writing.

Brian Cambourne in “Oral and Written Relationships: A Reading Perspective” identifies and sums up much of the research in three necessary experiences: (1) reading the spoken language that one is most familiar with, that is, one’s own speech which has been written down; (2) hearing the written language of books, that other more mature users of the written mode have produced; and (3) reading the written language that other more mature users of the written mode have produced.

**Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling has educational potential, in particular in terms of language acquisition. In Taiwan, most students do not have the opportunity to improve their oral performance in English due to the tradition pedagogy focusing in reading and writing. This study adopted the qualitative approach to investigate an English class with digital storytelling. The results showed that four types of issues: technology, communication, instruction and motivation, could influence applying digital storytelling into course design. The practical strategies can be advised for improvement, including technology selection, objective clarification, instructional development, reinforcement incentives.

Applying multimedia in education has become a big trend in this digitalization time. As a creative and flexible recording tool, diversity and variety of multimedia can contribute users to present their own thoughts and ideas. The increasing audio-visual files on the Internet just echo this phenomenon (Heise, 1986). Digital storytelling is a kind of multimedia application, which
just draws attention from education. Digital storytelling, which integrates photographs, text, images, animation and sounds through information communication technology for human interaction, can positively influence learning motivation and teaching effectiveness (Meadows, 2003, p.20.) Especially in terms of representing life experiences, this approach with media can easily help audience realizing, experiencing and memorizing (Bull & Kajder, 2004). According to literature review, three educational functions of story narration include: improve language learning, form thinking framework, organizing cues in content (Malin, 2010, p. 2). It just indicates the importance of applying digital storytelling for improving language learning.

Digital storytelling can function as an alternative for enhancing students’ English oral performance. In order to achieve this purpose, identifying the effective strategies is critical for course design. This study focuses on how to distinguish the practical solutions and how to effectively implement them. The research questions are listed as following:

Storytelling is a critical way to exchange or deliver knowledge in human society. Before written words were invented, human history and experiences were preserved by oral narration. Nowadays, information communication technology influences human interaction and social structure. Therefore, the way of storytelling becomes more complicated. In addition to text, more elements, such as photographs, images, sounds and animation, are integrated by computer, so the presentation can be more interactive and innovative.

Unlike the traditional way of storytelling, the digital approach has diverse formats which can even effectively work out in multicultural situations. The non-linear way can enhance audience’s understanding and interests in the scenarios. According to the viewpoint of Meadows, digital storytelling is a kind of art and technology which creatively integrates media with computer software for delivering narration. It cannot only provide more flexible ways of recording and presenting information, which breaks the limitations of time and space, but also create a more interactive platform for sharing and exchanging experiences. In terms of its practical application, digital media can motivate users to explore, organize, and analyze information, so their problem-solving ability or life experience can be expanded. In addition, digital storytelling can develop users’ collaborative mindset as well as technology literacy and global views. That is why digital storytelling becomes an alternative for education (Mclellan, 2006).
Using story narrating for education is nothing new. Egan (1986, p.5) indicates that teaching is a kind of story narrating in a sense. Teachers implement their oral communication ability to systematically present materials and actively introduce content to students. Some researchers even claim that it is human nature to interact via story narration, which makes each other easily understand complicated social values (Lambert, 2002). In the process of storytelling, human can reassemble or rebuild their experiences and represent the stories received with others based on their interpretation. This process is beneficial for mutual understanding and respect. In the time of globalization, it is very valuable and meaningful.

Conclusion

In order to have deeper interpretation, more studies should be conducted. For example, this study only focuses on the teachers’ insight. The student or administrator side can provide different views, which can expand our understanding. In addition, difference cases can be compared to explore the relevant issues. Case comparison can illustrate the influence and impacts of various approaches. These are what future studies can keep exploring.

In the age of information, teachers must relinquish their traditional, central, authoritative place in the classroom, and they must cease to be the source of information: the teacher’s new role is that of go between the student and the learning process. The communicative teacher is a needs analyst, an organizer and a manager of the classroom activities and, occasionally, an error corrector.

REFERENCES