

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING ON STUDENTS’ SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: *In the contemporary paradigm of foreign language education, the development of learners’ communicative competence has increasingly become a central pedagogical objective. Within this paradigm, speaking is conceptualized not merely as the mechanical production of grammatically correct utterances, but as a complex, multidimensional and socially situated form of language activity involving the integration of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, pragmatic and strategic competences. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) represents one of the most influential pedagogical approaches aimed at transforming learners’ declarative linguistic knowledge into functional communicative ability. The present article examines the pedagogical impact of Communicative Language Teaching on the development of students’ speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Particular attention is devoted to the theoretical foundations of communicative competence, the role of meaningful interaction, learner-centred instruction, task-based activities, negotiation of meaning, comprehensible input and output, corrective feedback, and the development of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, lexical competence and interactional ability. The analysis demonstrates that communicative instruction creates qualitatively different conditions for oral language development by increasing learners’ opportunities to participate in purposeful interaction and by integrating linguistic knowledge with authentic communicative functions. At the same time, the pedagogical effectiveness of CLT depends on the quality of task design, teacher mediation, classroom interaction, learners’ proficiency levels, assessment principles and the sociocultural context of instruction. The article argues that communicative language teaching should not be interpreted as a complete rejection of explicit linguistic instruction; rather, its methodological value lies in integrating form-focused learning with meaningful language use. Consequently, CLT can be regarded as a theoretically grounded and pedagogically significant framework for the systematic development of learners’ speaking competence in contemporary EFL education.*

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, EFL, speaking competence, communicative competence, oral communication, language interaction, fluency, accuracy, pragmatic competence, task-based learning, learner-centred pedagogy.*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of foreign language education in the twenty-first century is closely associated with the movement from predominantly structural and teacher-centred models of instruction toward pedagogical paradigms that conceptualize language as a means of communication, interaction, social participation and meaning construction. Within this transformation, the development of speaking competence has acquired particular significance because the ability to communicate orally constitutes one of the most visible indicators of learners’ practical command of a foreign language. Contemporary language education increasingly recognizes that knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary, although indispensable, does not in itself guarantee the learner’s ability to participate successfully in spontaneous communicative situations. Effective communication requires the simultaneous mobilization of linguistic knowledge, contextual awareness, discourse organization, pragmatic sensitivity and strategic resources.

This conceptual shift has contributed to the emergence and consolidation of Communicative Language Teaching as a major methodological orientation in foreign language pedagogy. The fundamental premise of CLT is that language is most effectively learned when learners are provided with opportunities to use it as a functional instrument for expressing intentions, exchanging information, negotiating meaning, solving problems and constructing social relationships. From this perspective, the classroom should not be regarded exclusively as a space for the transmission of linguistic knowledge. It should function as a communicative environment in which learners actively construct and negotiate meaning through interaction.

The theoretical significance of this approach is closely related to the concept of communicative competence. Hymes’ conceptualization of communicative competence challenged a purely structural understanding of language proficiency by emphasizing the speaker’s ability to use language appropriately in particular social and cultural contexts. Subsequent models developed by Canale and Swain further differentiated grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic dimensions of communicative competence. These theoretical developments established an important foundation for contemporary approaches to speaking instruction and demonstrated that language proficiency cannot be adequately measured through grammatical knowledge alone.

Within EFL contexts, this issue becomes particularly important because learners frequently have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Unlike second-language environments in which the target language may be encountered regularly in everyday social interactions, foreign-language learners often depend heavily on classroom activities for developing oral proficiency. Consequently, the pedagogical organization of classroom interaction becomes a determining factor in the formation of speaking competence.

Theoretical Foundations of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching is not a single teaching technique but a broad methodological orientation grounded in several complementary theories of language, learning and communication. Its theoretical foundation rests on the assumption that language represents both a cognitive system and a social resource. Consequently, language learning involves not only acquiring formal linguistic structures but also developing the ability to employ those structures appropriately in communicative contexts.

The concept of communicative competence occupies a central position within this theoretical framework. A communicatively competent learner must be able to construct grammatically acceptable utterances, organize discourse coherently, select language appropriate to a particular social situation and employ strategies for overcoming communicative difficulties. In oral communication, these dimensions operate simultaneously. A speaker may possess substantial grammatical knowledge but still experience difficulties in maintaining a conversation, responding appropriately to an interlocutor, interpreting pragmatic meaning or compensating for lexical limitations.

Therefore, speaking competence should be understood as an integrative construct rather than a narrowly defined linguistic ability. It encompasses fluency, grammatical accuracy, lexical range, phonological intelligibility, discourse coherence, interactional competence, pragmatic appropriateness and strategic flexibility. The development of these dimensions requires instructional environments in which learners repeatedly engage in meaningful oral communication.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its Companion Volume provide further support for this multidimensional understanding. The framework conceptualizes language use as a form of social action and distinguishes oral production, oral interaction and mediation as interconnected dimensions of communicative activity. This orientation demonstrates that contemporary speaking instruction should extend beyond sentence-level accuracy toward the development of learners' capacity to participate effectively in different communicative situations.

Communicative Interaction as a Mechanism of Speaking Development

One of the principal pedagogical mechanisms underlying CLT is meaningful interaction. Oral proficiency develops through active participation in communicative events rather than through passive exposure to linguistic information alone. When learners engage in interaction, they are required to process incoming language, formulate responses, select appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures, monitor their own production and respond to the contributions of other speakers.

This process creates a dynamic relationship between comprehension and production. Learners receive linguistic input from their interlocutors while simultaneously producing output. When they encounter difficulties in expressing an intended meaning, they become aware of limitations in their existing linguistic resources. Such moments of communicative

difficulty may encourage learners to search for alternative forms, reformulate utterances, request clarification or acquire new linguistic resources.

The importance of output is particularly evident in Swain’s Output Hypothesis, according to which language production can contribute to the development of linguistic awareness by forcing learners to process language more precisely. From this perspective, speaking activities are not merely opportunities for demonstrating previously acquired knowledge. They can themselves constitute an important mechanism of language learning.

Negotiation of meaning represents another significant dimension of communicative interaction. When learners fail to understand one another, they may ask for clarification, repeat information, confirm meaning, paraphrase or modify their original utterance. These processes transform communication into a cognitively active learning experience. The learner is required to monitor not only the linguistic form of the utterance but also its communicative effectiveness.

The Role of Communicative Tasks in Speaking Development

The pedagogical effectiveness of CLT is closely connected with the design of communicative tasks. A communicative task differs from a conventional language exercise because its primary purpose is the achievement of a meaningful outcome rather than the mechanical manipulation of a predetermined grammatical form. Learners are expected to use available linguistic resources in order to accomplish a communicative objective.

Information-gap activities illustrate this principle particularly clearly. When two learners possess different pieces of information and need to exchange them to complete a task, communication becomes necessary rather than artificial. Similarly, problem-solving activities require learners to express opinions, justify decisions, compare alternatives and reach a negotiated conclusion. Such tasks create conditions for spontaneous language production and require learners to employ linguistic resources flexibly.

Role plays and simulations provide another important dimension of communicative pedagogy. By reproducing situations such as job interviews, travel consultations, academic discussions, business negotiations or service encounters, learners are exposed to contextualized language use. They must consider not only what they want to say but also how they should say it according to the social relationship, communicative purpose and situational context.

Consequently, communicative tasks contribute simultaneously to linguistic and pragmatic development. They provide learners with opportunities to practice language as it functions in real or realistically simulated communicative situations.

The Impact of CLT on Speaking Fluency

Fluency is one of the most important indicators of oral proficiency. It refers not simply to speaking rapidly but to the capacity to maintain speech with an appropriate degree of continuity, organization and communicative effectiveness. Learners who possess substantial

grammatical knowledge may nevertheless demonstrate limited fluency if they require excessive time to formulate every utterance.

Communicative Language Teaching creates conditions for the gradual development of fluency by providing repeated opportunities for spontaneous oral production. Discussions, interviews, storytelling, role plays and problem-solving tasks require learners to formulate language in real time. Repeated engagement in such activities can contribute to the development of greater automaticity and reduce excessive dependence on conscious translation.

However, fluency should not be conceptualized as the elimination of all pauses or self-corrections. Natural spoken language contains hesitation, repetition, reformulation and repair. The pedagogical objective should therefore be functional fluency: the ability to communicate ideas coherently and maintain interaction despite occasional linguistic imperfections.

This distinction is theoretically important because excessive emphasis on grammatical perfection may discourage learners from speaking. A communicative classroom should therefore establish a productive balance between fluency-oriented and accuracy-oriented activities.

Communicative Language Teaching and Linguistic Accuracy

One of the most persistent misunderstandings surrounding CLT is the assumption that communicative pedagogy necessarily minimizes grammar instruction. Such an interpretation oversimplifies the methodological principles of the approach. Effective CLT does not require the abandonment of explicit grammatical instruction. Rather, it redefines the relationship between grammatical knowledge and communicative use.

Grammar is treated as a resource that enables learners to express meanings accurately and appropriately. Consequently, grammatical forms can be introduced, explained and practiced within meaningful communicative contexts. For example, rather than limiting instruction on a particular tense to written transformation exercises, learners may use the target structure to discuss personal experiences, describe completed activities or exchange information.

This integration of form and meaning allows learners to understand not only how a grammatical structure is constructed but also why, when and for what communicative purpose it is used. Such contextualization contributes to the transformation of declarative knowledge into procedural and functional competence.

Therefore, the relationship between CLT and grammar should be understood as complementary rather than oppositional. Explicit instruction can provide the linguistic foundation, while communicative practice creates opportunities for learners to activate and proceduralize that knowledge.

Learner-Centredness and Speaking Development

A fundamental characteristic of CLT is the movement toward learner-centred pedagogy. In traditional teacher-fronted classrooms, the teacher may control a substantial proportion of

classroom discourse, while learners primarily listen, reproduce predetermined answers or complete individual exercises. Although such activities may have pedagogical value, they can restrict opportunities for authentic oral interaction.

Learner-centred communicative instruction redistributes classroom participation by positioning students as active participants in the learning process. Pair work, group discussion, collaborative problem solving and project-based communication increase the amount of time during which learners actively use the target language.

However, learner-centredness should not be interpreted as the teacher’s withdrawal from the instructional process. On the contrary, successful communicative pedagogy requires sophisticated teacher intervention. The teacher must select appropriate tasks, establish communicative objectives, scaffold difficult activities, monitor interaction, provide feedback and evaluate learner progress.

The teacher consequently assumes the role of pedagogical facilitator, interactional organizer, observer, feedback provider and learning designer. This transformation requires substantial methodological competence and an understanding of both linguistic and pedagogical principles.

The Role of Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback represents an important but complex dimension of communicative speaking instruction. If teachers interrupt learners after every grammatical or pronunciation error, communication may become fragmented and learners may develop reluctance to participate. Conversely, the complete absence of corrective feedback may allow persistent errors to become stabilized.

A balanced approach therefore requires sensitivity to the instructional purpose of the activity. During fluency-oriented communication, teachers may record recurring errors and address them after the activity. During accuracy-oriented activities, more immediate intervention may be appropriate.

Different feedback strategies, including clarification requests, elicitation, recasts, repetition, metalinguistic prompts and self-correction, can be employed depending on the nature of the error and the proficiency level of the learner.

The pedagogical objective is not to eliminate every error immediately but to develop learners’ ability to monitor and progressively improve their own language production.

The Affective Dimension of Speaking Development

Speaking performance is influenced by cognitive and affective factors. Learners may possess sufficient linguistic knowledge but remain reluctant to speak because of fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited willingness to communicate or negative previous classroom experiences.

Communicative pedagogy can contribute to a more supportive learning environment by reducing the psychological pressure associated with individual performance. Pair and group

activities provide learners with opportunities to experiment with language in relatively low-risk contexts before participating in whole-class communication.

A supportive classroom environment does not mean the elimination of academic expectations. Rather, it involves creating conditions in which errors are understood as a natural component of language development while learners are simultaneously encouraged to improve the accuracy and sophistication of their communication.

The affective dimension is particularly relevant in EFL contexts where students may have limited opportunities to use English outside formal educational settings. Classroom interaction can therefore serve not only linguistic but also motivational and confidence-building functions.

Communicative Competence and Contemporary Assessment

The principles of CLT also require reconsideration of how speaking proficiency is assessed. If the objective of instruction is communicative competence, assessment should not be restricted to grammatical accuracy. A comprehensive evaluation of speaking should consider the learner's ability to maintain interaction, organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, produce intelligible speech, demonstrate grammatical control and employ communication strategies.

This multidimensional perspective is consistent with CEFR-oriented assessment, which distinguishes different aspects of oral production and interaction. Such an approach enables teachers to identify specific strengths and weaknesses rather than reducing speaking proficiency to a single numerical measure.

Furthermore, formative assessment can be particularly valuable within communicative pedagogy. Rather than evaluating learners exclusively at the end of an instructional unit, teachers can continuously observe oral performance, provide targeted feedback and modify subsequent instruction according to identified needs.

In this sense, assessment becomes an integral component of learning rather than merely an instrument for measuring its final outcome.

Pedagogical Challenges and Contextual Limitations

Despite its theoretical and methodological significance, Communicative Language Teaching cannot be regarded as a universal formula that produces identical outcomes in every educational environment. Its implementation is influenced by class size, curriculum requirements, examination systems, teacher preparation, available instructional resources, learner expectations and institutional culture.

Large classes may create difficulties in monitoring individual speaking performance. Limited lesson time may constrain the implementation of extended communicative tasks. In examination-oriented contexts, teachers may experience pressure to prioritize grammar, reading and written test preparation. Differences in learner proficiency may also create unequal participation, with more confident students dominating interaction while less proficient learners remain relatively passive.

These challenges demonstrate that CLT should be implemented flexibly and contextually. Communicative methodology should be adapted to the specific educational conditions rather than applied as a rigid set of techniques.

Moreover, successful communicative teaching requires alignment between curriculum, classroom instruction and assessment. If examinations primarily evaluate grammatical knowledge through decontextualized written tasks, teachers and learners may have limited incentives to prioritize oral communication. Consequently, the development of speaking competence requires not only classroom-level methodological innovation but also broader curricular and assessment coherence.

DISCUSSION

The pedagogical relationship between Communicative Language Teaching and speaking development can be interpreted through the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, social and affective mechanisms. At the linguistic level, communicative activities provide opportunities for learners to activate vocabulary, grammatical structures and phonological knowledge. At the cognitive level, spontaneous communication requires real-time processing, planning, monitoring and reformulation. At the interactional level, learners negotiate meaning, respond to interlocutors and manage conversational turns. At the affective level, sustained participation can contribute to confidence and willingness to communicate.

The principal methodological significance of CLT therefore lies not simply in increasing the quantity of student talk but in transforming the qualitative nature of classroom language use. The crucial distinction is between language produced merely to demonstrate knowledge of a particular structure and language produced to accomplish a meaningful communicative purpose.

Nevertheless, communicative practice should be systematically structured. Uncontrolled conversation does not automatically constitute effective language learning. Tasks should correspond to learners' proficiency levels, contain clearly defined communicative objectives and provide appropriate linguistic support. Teachers should also monitor participation and ensure that communicative opportunities are distributed equitably.

From this perspective, the most productive interpretation of CLT is not as an alternative to all previous pedagogical practices but as an integrative framework. Explicit instruction, controlled practice, communicative tasks, interaction, feedback and reflective assessment can be organized within a coherent instructional sequence.

Such an integrated model allows learners first to acquire and understand linguistic resources, subsequently to practice them in controlled conditions, and finally to employ them flexibly in increasingly complex communicative situations. This progression supports the transformation of linguistic knowledge into functional speaking competence.

CONCLUSION

Communicative Language Teaching occupies a significant position within contemporary EFL pedagogy because it conceptualizes language learning as an active process

of communication, interaction and meaning construction. Its contribution to speaking development is particularly important because it provides learners with systematic opportunities to transform linguistic knowledge into practical communicative performance.

The analysis demonstrates that communicative instruction can create pedagogically valuable conditions for the development of fluency, linguistic accuracy, lexical flexibility, pronunciation, discourse organization, interactional competence, pragmatic awareness and strategic communication. The central mechanism underlying these developments is meaningful interaction, through which learners receive input, produce output, negotiate meaning, notice linguistic limitations and progressively expand their communicative resources.

At the same time, the effectiveness of CLT cannot be separated from the quality of its implementation. Communicative activities require careful pedagogical design, appropriate teacher mediation, differentiated support, constructive feedback and assessment practices consistent with communicative objectives. The implementation of CLT also needs to take into account contextual factors such as class size, learner proficiency, curriculum, examination requirements and institutional conditions.

Accordingly, Communicative Language Teaching should be conceptualized not as the complete rejection of grammar-based or teacher-guided instruction, but as a comprehensive pedagogical orientation that integrates linguistic form, meaning and communicative function. Its ultimate educational value lies in enabling learners to move from knowing the language system toward being able to use that system purposefully, appropriately and effectively in interaction.

In the contemporary EFL classroom, therefore, the development of speaking competence requires a pedagogical environment in which learners are not merely recipients of linguistic information but active participants in communicative processes. When communicative tasks, explicit language instruction, interactional practice, feedback and reflective assessment are systematically integrated, foreign language education can more effectively address the complex linguistic and communicative demands placed upon learners in academic, professional and intercultural contexts.

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