CLT in India: Issues and Suggestions

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Abstract:

In India the dominance of English is undeniable. It is the most commonly spoken and probably the most read and written language in India. It also serves to bridge the gap among Indians who come from different linguistic background. As far as the legal, financial and educational system of India is concerned the presence of English is overwhelming. It won't be incorrect to assert that English language has become inseparable from Indian minds.

But in spite of long lasting dominance of English, the language teaching and learning in India is degrading day by day. One can notice an appreciable fall in the standard of English. We often come across people who splutter and stumble when it comes to effective communication in English. Those claiming to be well-versed in English can't even differentiate between ordinary forms like 'didn't came' and 'didn't come'. In most cases people lag awfully in terms of pronunciation and usage of correct English. Thus the present paper explores the need of communicative English in India, some psychological bases for learning strategies and the advantages of communicative language teaching.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Practice Exercises, Teachers' attitude, encouraging environment

India is a democratic and multilingual nation. With a population of around one billion India is often regarded as a superb example of harmonious linguistic co-existence. The hierarchy of English language is conspicuous in official and educational domain of India. English in India is used as a miraculous key to success. It paves a path to enlightenment and caters the need of a civilized society. In India English has acquired the dominant role in terms of its usage and popularity. Fluency in English language is considered to be the status symbol in India and sometimes it even results in Hindi-

English mentality of the people. One who is fluent in English is considered to be of elite class and the others are considered to be inferior. Popularity of English language can be better guessed by the fact that even in IITs and IIMs it is introduced as the part of curriculum. Consequently people of all strata expect their child to study in English medium schools for fluency in English language. Proficiency in English is the necessity of time as it is mandatory for the survival in the competitive world.

It is however ironical that in spite of its greater influence in the society the teaching and learning of English in the educational institute in India is rather inadequate and unproductive. Even the meritorious students sometimes lack in communication skills. Majority of Indians fail to leave a good impression in terms of interactive skills. Not only this but their writings also remain to be full of infelicities and illogicalities e.g. the expression like: 'Anger is coming to me' and 'Don't eat my head' not only appear to be humorous but it also create a negative impression upon a native speaker.

Due to the inadequate knowledge of Grammar the students fail to construct even simple sentences. Their sloppy pronunciation makes them a stock of laughter among others shaking their confidence for the worst. As a result they get demoralized and it hampers their further use of language. These complicated situations pose a threat to them and they feel challenged. Current methods of teaching communicative English are no longer sustainable. In order to be competent like a native speaker the students need to be given opportunities to acquire English through practice exercises. So that they succeed in dealing with the extensive range of varieties and styles of spoken-written English and succeeds in keeping pace with the demand of an ever growing English language.

Since ages language practice has been defined, 'as intensive, imitative and isolating drilling of individual lexical and syntactic items of the target language. It's a constant process that demands patience and rigorous efforts.' It's a bit complicated procedure that includes motivational and inspirational factors. According to a recent survey, 'much emphasis should be given on the importance of motivational factors and an accompanying need to refine learner's cognitive strategies in language learning.' Here what we need to remember is that the task of the language learners continues to be to confront a range of individual lexical and syntactic items embedded and displayed within complex communication context and to master them gradually through the case of practical techniques. Once the learner masters it he can further use it in more complex tasks. In this way practice is seen as part of method and is introduced through sets of integrated exercises as a means towards curriculum objective. Learning a foreign language not only includes strong determination but it also needs practical implementation of the learned theoretical aspects in the given situation.

The term CLT (communicative language Teaching) came into existence in the 1970s as a result of dissatisfaction of some linguists with the audio-lingual and grammar translation method of foreign language instruction. Due to an increased demand for language learning CLT soon became quite popular. Thus the phrase 'Communicative English' refers to that English which helps us to communicate effectively with people using language function. According to Wikipedia,

'Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or the communicative approach is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study.'

CLT makes use of real life situation that necessitate communication. The Teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life and the students are motivated to respond to the given situation. The outcome of class exercise might vary as per the different reaction and responses of the students. It includes rich and useful vocabulary for day-to-day conversation completing the specific function of English language. Here 'Language function' refers to those specific purposes for which we use specific expressions/utterances/phrases which we speak or write. For example in order to initiate a conversation with a stranger one may use one of the given expressions:

1. 'Could you please tell me the way to Park Lane?'
2. 'Are you also waiting for the local bus to Charbagh?'

Here both the sentences might help the speaker to initiate a conversation. The first sentence reflects the speaker's cultured behavior with an indication of initiating a conversation. The second sentence also carries an urge to initiate a conversation in a submissive way. Thus both the expressions might fulfill the purpose of the speaker, depending upon the response of other person, for example, the same question can be responded in different ways-

'No.'

'Yeah! I guess you are also here for the same destination.'

Now the first expression shows the unwillingness of the speaker to continue with the conversation as it reflects a brief and neutral reply showing the negative mood of the speaker. On the contrary the second expression shows the willingness of other speaker to continue with the conversation. Thus CLT is most often defined as a list of general principles or features. One of the most recognized of these lists is David Nunan's (1991) five features of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

CLT is usually characterized as a broad approach to teaching rather than as teaching method with a clearly defined set of classroom practices. There are a number of expressions for a specific function and to choose the appropriate expression as per the requirement of the situation the learner needs to have proper training as this can only be cultivated through hard practice. Basically practice demands the learner's

willingness to involve him actively in communication on the basis of a set of exercises or a sequence of tasks. This willingness can be termed as the learners' motivation or readiness to communicate.

As per the various researches and experimentation it is proved that 'the most stable and most highly co-related prerequisites for the variable of language performance is that of the attitude taken by the learner to the subject, the country and the people who speak the language being learned and the language itself.' The attitude of the speaker also depends upon the variables of content that is relevance and accessibility and the teaching style, for example, a learner will develop a positive attitude if the teacher is co-operative and he is provided with an amicable and encouraging environment involving social learning and planning. It will motivate him to actively participate in any task developing his confidence in his ability to learn.

The learning environment should be student-centered, celebrating the progress of the students. The students should feel free to commit mistakes while learning. The focus should be on a democratic classroom where students learn through fun activities for mutual progress. The teacher should be supportive. While ignoring the mistakes of the students the teacher should motivate them to get involved in the classroom activities. It is very important to provide students with an active, exploratory and co-operative environment because the prerequisites for dynamic and successful learning is not only a systematic typology of exercises and tasks but also a pedagogy which focuses on attitudes to language learning and teaching procedures which link content and teaching style. So in order to prepare the learners for real life situations its essential to consider the learner's level of competence and to should select the task accordingly so that it helps in increasing their motivation and boosting their confidence. Brown & Yule suggested the following four factors which could determine the difficulty level of task:

- Speaker: no. of speakers, speed of speech, accent.
- Listener: eavesdropper or participant, required level of response, individual interest in the topic.
- Content: grammar, vocabulary, information structure, assumed background knowledge.
- Support: physical objects, visual aids (including video), and printed texts.

                                                                            (Anderson and Lynch, 1988:94)

Once the difficulty level of task is decided it is important to analyze the learner's mindset i.e. to see if they are interested in a particular activity or not and even their varied reactions to a given task and so on as they might be biased or preoccupied with certain thoughts that might hamper their productivity.

While talking about the learners' mindset we must not forget about the teachers' attitude as it is of equal importance. The success of a learner depends upon his teacher and the teaching strategies. Many times negative attitude of the teacher results in students' failure as they feel ignored and de-motivated and as a result involve themselves in other activities rather than focusing on the content as Valette says:

"An important component in students' success is the teacher's mental set. If one teacher expects all of his students to master the French sounds system, they usually

do, where as if another teacher is convinced the more students will never get it, his students usually do not."

Thus in spite of its didactic organization or the legitimacy of their content the practice exercises alone cannot lead a student towards success. These exercises simply engender a special kind of relationship between the teachers and the learners. The key factor always remains to be the teachers' attitude towards students. The importance of teacher and learners roles in an understanding of language teaching, and in an understanding of learning content through materials and tasks, has recently been highlighted in several important studies. According to Wright (1990),

'An understanding of roles also mediates between theory and practice, because it focuses on the people most intimately involved in the translating of theory into practice and who are able to test and modify theory through practice, and who are in the enviable position of being able to derive theory from practice – teachers (that is, you!). Investigating roles of teachers and learners thus has both theoretical and, most importantly, personal relevance, (for all of us!)'.

The students who are praised, motivated and encouraged regularly perform better in comparison to the students who are ignored and de-motivated in the classroom. Scolding a student for not using language effectively is not a remedy to the problem rather it hampers the progress of the student. So the teachers should avoid any sort of negativity in communicative language teaching.

The extent to which any teacher can look after every individual learner in this way has its own organizational constraints but an adequate and substantial procedure would be for a set of repeated exercises to be recycled in short drill sequence until every learner had achieved the learning objective and had mastered the skill. The teacher should consider the nature, the content and the purpose of an exercise before using it for communicative tasks, like simulative text analysis or text comparison. Any form of practice requires as a major objective that the learner perceives the following aspects of the practice in cognitive terms: the formal aspect of lexis and grammar its meaning and interpretation, the social or communicative relevance of the stylistic variation offered, the link to be made to social rituals and conventions of discourse, and not least, the value of the practice itself to the particular communicative task in hand.

In spite of its criticism CLT remains to be an effective mode of teaching English in India. CLT is certainly godsend for both learners and teachers provided the teacher remains cautious while selecting and implementing any content in the classroom as the wrong content might mar the entire purpose of teaching. Moreover the students need to free themselves from any sort of prejudices to master the language. They should be wholeheartedly ready to explore the unknown territories of the mystical world of English language. Their mutual cooperation and coordination will result in building the confidence of the learner and they will be inspired to adopt a more constructive approach coupled with fluency in English language which surely remains to be one of the most cherished dreams of majority of Indians.

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