

# Implementation of Communicative Teaching Approach in College English Teaching

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**Abstract.** While paying attention to the cultivation of communicative competence, communicative teaching method neglects the importance of language form. Inspired by the research results in the field of second language acquisition and other related fields, communicative approach makes use of traditional teaching methods to improve its teaching technology. Under the guidance of communicative principles, we use some effective elements of traditional methods to solve some of its own deficiencies. The innovation provides a new perspective for the study of the relationship between tradition and innovation in English language teaching methodology.

## 1. Introduction

The communicative teaching approach (Richards and Rodgers, 1986), which emerged in the 1970s, has been regarded as a substantial reform in the field of English teaching in recent years, and has been praised for its emphasis on the cultivation of communicative competence. However, while cultivating communicative competence, communicative approach ignores the important role of grammatical knowledge in the accuracy of communicative expression. Moreover, the inaccuracy of communicative expression makes it difficult to further improve communicative competence, which seriously affects the realization of English learning objectives. Under the guidance of communicative approach theory, how to improve the accuracy of expression while cultivating communicative competence will be the direction of communicative approach.

## 2. Communicative language teaching method

The development of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics has provided a new perspective for language research and language learning, and a communicative language view has emerged based on the theories of social science and psychology.

The communicative language view is the theoretical basis of communicative teaching method. According to communicative approach, second language competence not only refers to grammatical knowledge, but also communicative language competence. This definition emphasizes the meaning and application of language and the cultivation of fluency. The focus of classroom teaching has shifted from form to function and from teachers to learners. In terms of grammar, language forms and rules are transmitted to learners indirectly through reading and listening to meaningful comprehensible input. Such indirect teaching often belittles or even replaces direct teaching. Teachers no longer teach the language and practice sentence patterns on purpose, but organize many sorts of activities to let students communicate with each other. Students work in groups to complete the communicative tasks. In terms of teaching strategies, although errors and facts need to be corrected and clarified in the transmission of communicative information in many cases, it is much more common to tolerate errors for the sake of fluency of language expression than to correct them. At the same time, in order to cultivate this fluency, teachers also encourage English thinking and forbid the use of mother tongue in communication. Traditional teaching strategies such as dictation, recitation, pattern practice and dialogue are rarely used. Role-play and problem solving activities replace teachers' explanations in class, requiring students to participate in pairs or groups.

In the communicative language learning process, communicative classroom activities, language materials and teaching strategies gradually construct a rich and beneficial process of second language learning. It is found that these methods are much more effective than grammar translation, listening and speaking or other early methods in improving students' self-confidence, oral and written fluency, and accelerating the development of preliminary language ability (Lightbown and Spada, 1993).

### **3. Challenges to communicative approach from the findings of second language acquisition research**

With the further studies of second language acquisition, linguists begin to re-examine communicative language teaching from the aspects of language input, corrective feedback of language errors and language output.

On the one hand, in terms of input, it is generally believed that in order to learn a second language well, learners must not only acquire meaningful comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), but also acquire the correct form carrier of meaning. Therefore, the language input process needs to be explained to help learners pay attention to the formal features of the language, understand the relationship between form and meaning in the context, and properly apply the knowledge in oral and written communication. However, communicative approach only pays attention to the comprehensibility of language input, but ignores the accuracy of input materials and basic contents such as vocabulary and grammar. When attention is focused on the communicative information meaning, learners' attention is first focused on the meaning and the comprehensibility of the input language, and then pay attention to the composition, sound and form of the input language.

On the other hand, learners need language output, express their own views, and modify and process the contents of poor comprehension, inappropriate and inaccurate oral and written expression (Swain, 1985, 1993). To do this, students must obtain corrective feedback about the content of the language they have used, otherwise they will not be able to improve the output language and enhance its comprehensibility and accuracy. Communicative approach thinks that it is all right as long as learners can express their own meaning. Learners rarely get corrective feedback about their vocabulary and syntactic use. As a result, errors caused by cultural differences and grammatical confusion are not only common among beginners, but also common among learners with high expressive ability.

In words, many communicative activities try to make opportunities for learners to learn second language well; however, these communicative activities, while attaching importance to the transmission of information meaning, neglect the form carrier of information and fail to meet learners' dual needs for language form and meaning. Therefore, pure communication is not enough and even harmful in the long run. How to solve these problems and get out of the dilemma of communicative language teaching is an important task for language teachers.

### **4. Suggestions on the improvement of communicative approach teaching**

Some practices in traditional teaching methods, such as direct explanation and corrective feedback, have incomparable advantages over communicative teaching in learning basic language knowledge. If these two methods are applied under the guidance of the principles of communicative approach and combined with effective communicative activities, the limitations of communicative approach itself can be avoided and the learning efficiency can be greatly improved.

#### **4.1 Direct explanation and corrective feedback**

Communicative approach focuses on the development of communicative activities and ignores linguistic forms and information feedback. Direct explanation and corrective feedback in traditional teaching methods can make up for the shortcomings of communicative approach. According to language acquisition theory, direct explanation and corrective feedback improve learners' attention to

language forms and subjective consciousness of errors, and the combination of direct explanation and corrective feedback of learning effects can promote the learning of grammar.

To learn grammar well, learners must pay attention to the form corresponding to the meaning of the second language, which can only be achieved by direct explanation of grammar knowledge and corrective feedback. For example, in English, most of the affixes with verb inflections are unstressed or omitted, and many are unpronounceable and difficult to recognize. Besides, as they do not affect comprehension, they are not valued in oral and written expressions, and in some cases they are even regarded as superfluous, which needs to be emphasized through explanation. Studies have shown that the most effective presentation is one that emphasizes both communication and language form.

On the other hand, when realized he was correct, learners' response to the feedback will be higher, which will improve the sensitivity of the correct language. It was found that the most effective information was real objects and paralinguistic information. Pointing out the mistakes directly and correcting them are far more effective than simply reminding students of their mistakes (Lightbown and Spada, 1993).

Both direct explanation and corrective feedback can be used to help the second language learners acquire the language knowledge that is difficult to understand only by listening and reading without paying attention to the form and carrier of the language. By comparison, direct instruction and supportive corrective feedback are far more effective than mere communicative activities such as role-playing. Many foreign language teachers who are not native speakers are reluctant to teach social and cultural knowledge because social language knowledge is complicated and difficult to understand, which requires detailed explanation and examples, and it is far from enough to rely on communicative activities. Many people give up games and group activities in favor of direct explanation and corrective feedback under the guidance of communication principles, because communication activities like games are too simple to achieve the expected learning purpose.

The implementation of communicative activities, the teaching of language and the corrective feedback of language output all play an important role in second language learning. Some knowledge and skills need to be acquired through communicative activities, while others need to be learned through explanation and corrective feedback. They are complementary to each other.

## **4.2 Tasks and activities**

In order to better implement direct teaching and corrective feedback, some teaching activities, such as grammar decision-making and information exchange, can also be organized. These activities are similar to traditional activities, such as grammar exercise, dictation and recitation, but the reason why they are called changes to the tradition is because compared with the traditional practice, the purpose of these activities is to focus learners' attention on the grammatical features and forms related to meaning in the communicative activities. These activities are good for grammar and are much more efficient than just practice or simple communication.

For example, grammar decision-making, in this activity, the material of practice is the same as that of traditional Grammar practice, but the difference is that students are required to carry out group activities and then report to their classmates, or ask members of a group or a pair to do fillers or multiple-choice questions, such as choosing one from a set of choices, and then tell the students why they chose the item. This kind of activity is simple and easy to do, and it is well designed. As long as the traditional grammar exercises are slightly changed, good learning results can be achieved.

Another example, information exchange is commonly referred to as jig-saw tasks. This kind of activity provides a potential communication environment. A message is divided into several parts, and every student gets a part of the total information. Then each student exchange information with other students to complete the task. As the information senders and information receivers, the learners can focus on the form and meaning of the information.

In English class, there are two kinds of information exchange activities. One is to describe the activities; the other is to tell stories. In descriptive activities, learners are required to draw pictures according to the provided information, or verbally describe the information provided by pictures or other visual materials (such as maps and charts) to other students, who then draw pictures or make

other processing according to the information. In the activity of looking at pictures and telling stories, each student gets a picture and tells the information on the picture to other students, and in the end, a complete story is formed on the basis of these single information. Although the above information exchange activities have different emphasis on grammar, one thing is the same, that is, students improve the accuracy of language expression while doing a large number of input, corrective feedback and output activities.

## 5. Summary

English teaching methods are emerging one after another, and each method claims to be superior to the others. However, no one method can meet the needs of all learners. English teaching is an open field, and the research results of cognitive process and second language acquisition process can be used to guide each link and process of English teaching. Under the guidance of communicative principles, communicative method uses the direct explanation and corrective feedback of traditional methods to make up its own shortcomings, which is a good example. English teachers need to learn the relevant theories of English teaching and integrate the advantages of various methods to make English teaching activities meet the higher requirements of English learners.

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