

TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH AT THE UG LEVEL: SOME CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

Some classroom considerations in the context of teaching communicative English at the UG level in India have been the focus of this paper. The UG English syllabus has been in sum discussed in terms of its relevance in the background of the present employment market. The UG level students' English language need has been broadly kept in view while the communicative language teaching (CLT) as an instructional approach in practical terms has been analysed with major emphasis on what the teacher has to do as a facilitator or manager. Learner-centred teaching, activity-based language learning, use of authentic materials etc. have been discussed with further reference to group-work and functional English.

Keywords: CLT, UG level, authentic materials, Learner-centred teaching, Arunachal Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an approach to language teaching gathered popularity in the 1980s. With the aim to achieve "communicative competence", the emphasis is on learner interaction and communication of "real" meaning. Fluency is preferred to accuracy, the functional aspects are given priority over the structural aspects of the language, and in case of teaching materials authentic materials are given preference as reflecting real life use of English in communication. Communication is seen as both the goal and the means. The focus in the communicative approach is on teaching language through communication. The goal in the language class is to help students to learn how to communicate with a number of class activities to learn the language. The teacher in a communicative language classroom acts as a guide or facilitator and the classroom remains learner-centred for all practical purposes.

Jak C. Richards in his book *Communicative Language Teaching Today* (2006) observes that communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions

Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)

Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts

(e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)

Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies) (p.3)

The classroom communicative English teaching scene in India is full of challenges. We face the questions of syllabus. We have to step out of the literature-language opposition. We need properly designed tasks. We need a routine that grants scope for adequate exercises to ensure both exposure to and experience of English as desired to be available to our students. We long

to have technology used in appropriate contexts to enhance language presentation effects. We face the class sizes that are far in excess of the prescribed limits. Resources are a plea that we wait to answer. Means at our hands are to be utilised to their optimum. Students with dissimilar ability levels hobbled into large uncontrollable classes with no scientific grouping plans are a compulsion for the teacher to go slow to allow pace and passage to all students on the college rolls. Administration innovatively to ensure attendance on work days is still effectively to come up to make available an academic atmosphere on the campus weeding out elements and interests that hurt the English class in most definite of ways. Realisation is yet to dawn on a consensual basis as to the recognition of English as a subject of subjects – a veritable master subject in mastering which alone students could be expected to do better in their over-all studies. Medium in which education is offered is to be assessed in its strengths to support the English classroom. Methods accordingly are to be searched to fit demands of situations as on the basis of assessed supportive strengths of the mother tongues of students available in a class – in the setups today multilingualism having come to be a prevailing feature the competitive needs of all these different languages are to be satisfied in the face of human rights groups and political parties supporting equal respect to all languages and linguistic communities and government being moved to allow legitimate and fair treatment in the matter to serve the ends of social justice. With invariably almost always language being increasingly seen as a tool of empowerment, the English teaching classroom has today turned into a site for opportunities for the youth dreaming of a career at the end of the college education as much as it has become a site offering challenges to the English teacher which his fellow teachers in other subjects generally do not face. The examination needs in our traditional practices do not allow English to be tested in the communicative ways as it is expected. We have in most cases come up with new syllabus in English with a focus on communicative goals that students could achieve as a supplement to their efforts at doing English for purposes of facing life and its opportunities in the era of globalisation of the Indian economy and the changing stance of the private employers with their insistence on demonstrable communicative strengths of a

beeline of jobseekers. What uniformly fortunately for us in India has come to be a challenge is that we see the value of English as a language that guarantees employability to our students in a way today that was never there before. The teachers of English have now to make use of this uniformity of Indian reality to motivate students to perform in the English classroom so that they don't have to perish in the face of an acute crisis in the ever-shrinking job market.

Primary to our understanding of the effective methods of teaching at our UG levels is the need that English in India has come to stay and it has competed with our own vernaculars in most ways and it has emerged as a language of our daily bread. This singular special role that it plays in our lives ever increasingly shows that English and the job market are today synonymous. Education in its implied relationship with equipping students with skills that the employers demand is thus clear about the reality that English almost universally in Indian contexts has to be offered in our classrooms at all levels with every lower level linked as well as leading to greater confidence in learners to use English in all practical situations that daily life brings.

In communicative English teaching our utmost emphasis thus has to be on how best we provide for use of English in our syllabus to bring in the equivalence between what society and life demand and what classrooms offer through teacher-initiated work on and use of materials that develop on such realistic syllabus. It remains to be seen that what we test is what we teach; what we teach is what the syllabus prescribes. Besides the syllabus question, we have to carefully consider the pragmatic role the classroom teacher has to play to make the best use of his resources and to fully exploit the opportunities that a given classroom offers in terms of what ready abilities the students bring to the classroom after their having been in their schools for twelve clear years. The point is the UG level teacher in his classroom faces learners who are not entirely new to English as a language of their complex daily life. The added virtue is that we are here dealing with a mature audience and co-workers who are clearly motivated about why they must give their best to the class as they are asked to participate in various language exercises in most of which

they will surely be facing a situation that they very much face in their market places, offices, with strangers and even with friends. The classroom assigning roles to be played out is interesting in that students both do and shed fear and become thereby confident as they use English when the rest get inspired while thoroughly enjoying the scene and while suggesting interim improvements when the teacher points out a problem or as a natural reaction and response students witnessing a performance in a scene promptly come out extending a correction or an improvisation. Students interact a great deal with one another, in pairs and small groups.

Because communicative English teaching asks for development of the students' personality in ways that make them shed fear, hesitation, inhibitions and become interested and active contributors in fit response to situations in demand, teachers need to create that personality that sees in English the opportunity that its efficient use brings and that uses it to all the promised ends of power, prestige and pragmatic gains that social situations both offer and withhold. From a patient and watchful audience to an active and effective performer in English language use situations the transformation-working journey may be a matter of time, but given determination and perseverance and readiness to cooperate in classrooms as English is being offered with groups of students playing out bits of roles assigned to them when the teacher is overseeing and managing the whole scene, there needs be no doubt that job-market worthy efficient users of English will be produced in the classrooms. Whatever is the mode – spoken or written, efficiency will show up itself when in actual times tests are taken in formal or informal set-ups.

A look at the kind of syllabus Rajiv Gandhi University of Arunachal Pradesh has offered for UG English at compulsory and elective categories says that communicative focus is well read into the structures of the same. Arunachal Pradesh with English as its official language has through its English medium of education at all levels, its effective teacher training programmes for teachers up to secondary level ensured coming of such crops of students to the UG level of college education that job aspirants among them see well the crisis that stares them in face with both opportunities and problems on the

employment front and give their best to the communicative classrooms to get the maximum from there to benefit them and to brave the world of challenges to their pragmatic best as a result of such conscious participation in their pursuit of the English language learning.

This paper in a way presents status as well as discusses a vision which deals with the need today to go pronouncedly and aggressively communicative while teaching English to UG students as they embark on careers full of promise and equally resonant with high magnitude challenges particularly at a time when computers and communication technology have come up in a big way. We need to appreciate that the complexity of the practical employment market and increasingly globalised national economy have together to influence our considerations in our own classrooms on how our students need to face the future squarely by being thoroughly equipped in definite powerful ways of using English language intelligently for purposes that clearly help them to be retained in the job. We need reveal that English in our mature handling has turned into a very enviable strength with us and we are able to explore the opportunities that the world today offers at the local and the global levels. It is a matter of abilities that effectively people use English in the best suited contexts or conditions. We have to have the student and his/her needs in mind as we go communicative, take him/her by hand to problem-spots of living in this world, put words into his/her mouth and make him/her mouth them the way others will best understand him/her and offer the place and position that so assuredly may be his/her rightful due. At heart of the communicative exercise let us always see the teacher whose personal contribution has always to be critically acknowledged as singularly indispensable because as the manager, initiator and well-meaning collaborator in the transformational project of the student's potentiality courtesy language learning, it is he/she at their alert best and committed best that can make results salutary in visible and verifiable terms. Does not all hype of globalisation mean an insistence on results – verifiable as useful for all practical purposes? Human individuals turn into virtual commodities to be sold with a price-tag in the labour market under multi-national recruiters. Years of consciously planned and consistent efforts in form of national exercise at education

make the English-knowing job-seeking youth grab employment opportunities. Communicative English teaching has to concentrate on such job-earning project for the students. Between the communicator and the recipient, it is the recipient that has to see and accept the meanings in line as intended and conveyed by the speaker. It is interesting that the listener as the ultimate responsible creator of the meaning in a communicative context has to prevail as English teaching goes communicative and the learner put at the centre while learning is visibly being assessed and certified all the time as successful. All educational exercises in a communicative language teaching context have certainly to be free, frank, fearless, and more importantly properly communication-bound. It has to be kept in mind that communicative competence is the goal of language teaching and procedures for the teaching of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) are to be emphasised. English teaching in UG classrooms in the communicative approach in Arunachal Pradesh and elsewhere in India promises to practically empower the students at a stage in their career and life when their need to perform all important communication assignments efficiently is the highest.

References

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