

# **RE-CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been know as one of the most successful approaches in teaching English to speaker of other languages. With this approach students are required to engage in communication trough interaction using the target language as much as possible. In the countries where English is taught as a foreign language or as a second language, this approach has become an ideal example on how activities are reconstructed in teaching learning activity to improve students' ability in communicating in English both in spoken and written ways. Despite all of the advantages of CLT, there are still some the flaws found in he implementation of CLT in teaching learning activities. Therefore, in this paper, the writer will not only provide some critiques that are normally found in CLT but also suggesting some alternatives based on the socio cultural concepts to mitigate the shortcoming. The provided alternatives are aimed to re -conceptualize the CLT in based on the socio cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** Communicative language teaching; socio-cultural; scaffolding; Feedback

## **INTRODUCTION**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was originally found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition in the late 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 1987). According to Littlewood (2013), when firstly developed, it was widely seen as the definitive response to the shortcomings of previous approaches and the commu-

nication needs of a globalized world. Banciu and Jireghie (2012) also suggested that historically, CLT has been seen as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method and as an extension or development of the Notional-Functional Syllabus. Since then, CLT has been widely used in all over the world as an approach to teaching English as a foreign language. CLT itself is defined as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom (Richards, 2006).

According to Nunan (as cited in Banciu & Jireghie, 2012), there are five general principles or features of Communicative Language Teaching as follow:

- a. an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language,
- b. the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation,
- c. the provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning management process,
- d. an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning
- e. an attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

Similarly, Coscun (2011) mentioned some core features stated by Brown (1994):

1. Classroom goals are focused upon in all the components of communicative competence; they are not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language teaching techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Linguistic structures do not represent the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.

3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times, fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

In addition, Savignon (1983) referred CLT to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical in this approach is called communicative competence. Having communicative competence means an ability to interpret and endorse appropriate social behaviors, and it requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the target language. She also added that Communicative language teaching derives from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at the least, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research.

#### CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS OR ISSUES SURROUNDING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In countries where English is taught as foreign language, CLT seems to be an ideal and relevant approach to be used in learning activity. However, several circumstances need to be accounted for in applying this model. Koosha and Yakhabi (2013) suggested that Although the CLT approach attempts to involve learners in more authentic and interactive learning tasks that promote both comprehensible input and learners' language output, teachers still find it difficult and challenging to adopt the approach and maximize the learning; especially in EFL classrooms. It is mainly because teachers have to have a very good competence and fluency in English for they are the role models for the students. In addition, in order to make this approach successful, teachers have to make the situation in the class similar to the real communicative condition. This is quite difficult because students commonly start learning English with low intrinsic motivation and to make such situation where they can communicate actively in foreign language is something hard to achieve.

In addition, O'neil (2000) argued that CLT has some weaknesses in preparation and implementation as follow:

- a. Generative competence the ability to use underlying syntax and structure is one of the foundations of communicative competence. Without it, there is no pragmatic competence worth talking about
- b. A language syllabus is more than a list. That is why examples of speech acts cannot be the basis of a syllabus.
- c. Communicative goals are exercises in illusion rather than reality. It is not possible to specify communicative goals with any precision
- d. Good teaching requires an understanding of both "whole-class" and "pair/group-methods. Very often far more often than most CLT supporters are prepared to admit competent whole-class teaching is more efficient than pair and group work
- e. A reasonable degree of accuracy is an essential part of fluency
- f. There are essential differences between using your own language and trying to use a language you do not know well. These differences help to explain the differences in behavior of people in the foreign language classroom and in the streets outside the classroom.

From those points, it can be assumed that in realizing CLT approach, it is essential to concern on students' character, sociocultural beliefs and behavior because applying English in classroom will be difficult if the context of learning activities have no integration with the students' daily reality.

In Indonesia, CLT has not been used commonly in teaching learning process. This is due to low level of English education in some schools even though this language is included as one of the major subjects that students must learn. There are several reasons underlying the lack of the use of CLT in learning process. First of all, in some areas especially remote areas, teachers do not have good qualification in teaching English and they prefer to use native language in teaching. Another reason why the use of native language is more common is that because the students themselves feel more comfortable and easier to understand English speech if it is learned and translated into their language. Therefore, applying CLT in this kind of situation is very difficult. Next, English communication practice in the syllabus generally use for-

eign context which is not familiar with the students and that makes the less interested in following the lessons. Those are several examples of how CLT is very difficult to be implemented in Indonesian system of Education. In the next questions, the writer will also explain some critiques and suggestions on the implementation of CLT in English as foreign language teaching.

#### RELEVANT SOCIOCULTURAL CONCEPTS OR PERSPECTIVES ASSUMED OR LACKING IN THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

CLT is for sure believed that one of the best way to be used in teaching second language. However, there are some shortcomings of the methodology if it is seen through sociocultural concepts. According to Savignon (2007) CLT does not require small group or pair work. This is according to socio cultural theory is not a very good approach for students' language and mental development because group tasks have been found helpful in many contexts as a way of providing increased opportunity and motivation for communication. Vygotsky (1978) claims that the secret of effective learning lies in the nature of the social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skills and knowledge. Here, the socio cultural theory demands that teaching language to children does depend on the teachers or more capable peer assistance. However, classroom group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts but it does not mean that the peer or group works are not implemented at all. Donato (1994) states that in an L2 classroom, collaborative work among language learners provides the same opportunity for scaffolded help as in expert-novice relationships in the everyday setting.

Another critique is that in the communicative language teaching the, only the target language is used as the mediation tool between teachers and students. When students do not understand the instruction, teacher has to repeat and use easier lexical to make students understand. However, from my own experience, I found this so frustrated because no matter how slow or how many times I repeat the instruction for the task for example, my students still do not understand and finally I give up and translate or explained the instructions in my mother tongue but feeling guilty because it had broken the rule of the communicative language teaching which has been be-

lieved as one of the most influencing method in teaching English. Students who are comfortable or used to being taught exclusively in their first language may at be uncomfortable if the teacher speaks to them in the second, expecting them not only to understand but, perhaps, to respond. Moreover, the students are only allowed to speak English in the class. This rule must be demotivated my students who has very low English proficiency due to lack English exposure and they never use English in their daily conversation. Consequently, my students refuse to take part or to participate or to engage in the teaching learning activities.

The last critique of the CLT is that the CLT focus more on the fluency and tends to ignore the accuracy. Therefore, students are asked to talk or communicate fluently and are told not to pay a lot of attention to the grammar. CLT requires teachers to focus on how students speak English with fluency and ignore the fact that students use wrong forms. In the one hand this is a good way to make students keep speaking and not worry about making mistakes. But on the other hand, without students will never be aware if they are using a correct form or not, are they grammatically correct, are they performing the meaning that they want to say. In this case, it is believed that CLT does not pay a lot of attention on the accuracy form as long as students can speak fluently that's all matters.

#### SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY ENRICHES OR ENHANCES FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEDAGOGY

From the critique above, the communicative language teaching might be completed by the use of the sociocultural concepts. The first critique about the lack of the pair or group works in the class, CLT might be improved by providing the pair or group works in some of the activities that are appropriate with the context. Within the pair and group work students can have social and collaborative aspect of learning. Ellis (2000) claims that sociocultural theory focuses on how the learner accomplishes a task and how the interaction between learners can scaffold and assist in the L2 acquisition process. Here, Ellis implies that by providing the group or pair work the students can have the chance to be scaffolded by their peers and they can use the interaction amongst themselves as a valuable chance to practice and to use the language that has been taught. Therefore, in CLT some tasks are should be imple-

mented in group or pair works. In teaching language teachers have to pay more attention on students' motivation by considering that some tasks can be too difficult for some students to perform that can lead students to be less motivated and be more stressful. But on the other hand, these tasks can be too easy to be performed by some students that can lead them to boredom and also make them less motivated. Therefore, here the group or peer study can help students to understand each other. The more capable students can help their friends about the tasks.

Teachers must realize that there is something that students can do alone but there is also something that students cannot do alone which means that there is something that students can do with the assistance. Here, Vygotsky (1978) introduced the construct of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a fundamentally new approach to the problem that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's level of development. "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 85).

The second critique is about the use of the mother tongue that is totally avoided in CLT. In this way, the CLT has to change the perspective of the use of the mother tongue as something useless in teaching learning activities. Therefore, when it is needed teachers sometimes can code switch from mother tongue to English and vice versa because if teachers and students does not understand each other it is for sure the study will never take place. The sociocultural theory sees a mother tongue as a valuable tool for socio-cognitive processes in language learning. In line with this, Schweers (1999, p. 6) encourages teachers to insert the native language into lessons to influence the classroom dynamic, provide a sense of security and validate the learners' experiences. From the sociocultural theory based English and language teaching the teachers and students sometimes insert the mother tongue into teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, according to Harmer (2001, p. 131), a principal cause of the mother tongue use is required by the activity, if students are linguistically incapable of activating vocabulary for a chosen task. Another reason is that translation is a natural thing to do in language learning, and code switching be-

tween languages is regarded as naturally developmental. The amount of mother tongue use by certain students may well have to do with differing learner styles and abilities.

The third critique is that CLT tends to ignore the important of accuracy in language mastery. The sociocultural theory believes the importance of meaning construction and fluency in L2 classrooms when he suggested simultaneous dual focus on form-and-accuracy together with meaning- and-fluency in L2 classroom as the best way of enhancing L2 students' level of proficiency. Here, both fluency and accuracy are two important aspects in learning target languages. Therefore, teachers have to provide the corrective feedback for students' errors. However, teachers are required to give the feedback on the right time and the right place if not, student will not willing to engage with the activities. If CLT ignores the important of accuracy and teachers bnever provide the positive feedbacks then students will never now how well their mastery. in line with this Ur (1996) mentions that in terms of skill-learning approaches the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing'. Again for sure, students not only need to be good in in terms of fluency but also they have to be good in accuracy for total target language mastery.

In short, CLT teachers now have to consider about providing feedback in term of accuracy; when and how. One of the slosuyion is provided by Ellis (2009) who states that teachers have the option of either correcting immediately an error occurs or making a note of the errors and delaying correction until later; Immediately in accuracy activities and delayed in fluency activities. Here, there is no an excuse that teachers cannot provide the accuracy feedback because of worrying that students will not be fluent in speaking but when and how to provide a feedback is the crucial. By having the awarness of the sociocultural concept that both fluency and accuracy are matters teacher can provide a better way of teaching Engslih or any other target language. The following is the illustration provided by Ellis (2009) on how to provide corrective feedback in terms of accuracy:

*S: oh my God, it is too expensive, I pay only 10 dollars*

*T: I pay? //*

*S2: okay let's go*



*T: I pay or I'LL pay? (.1.) // I will pay // I'll*

*S: I'll // I'll pay only 10 dollars.*

From the above example it is clear that teacher can find the right time and the right way to provide feedback on student' ZPD about the use of will/ll form. This kind of the feedback about accuracy has to be paid more attention of teachers teaching using communicative language learning.

In the future, with the understanding of the sociocultural theory the language teaching will become more meaningful. With the understanding that learners can gain knowledge from the language if the context is familiar and adaptable for them, it will be easier for the teachers to transfer the knowledge. Therefore, choosing appropriate context in teaching design is very important and thus teachers must consider integrating English language with students' daily communication.

Language teaching especially English as foreign language teaching is a complicated and complex subject which demands variety of approaches to be used. CLT is one but not the only approach that can be implemented in learning activities. In its application, it is very essential to consider on the real situation outside the classroom activities because effective English communicative competence can be taught if it is integrated with students' sociocultural context. For instance, in expressing gratitude or compliments, some culture has different style with another and therefore by considering this matter, teachers can provide more appropriate materials which are suitable with the students' real life.

Using effective language to communicate in socially appropriate ways that fit varied contexts is an important skill for students to have in learning a language. Therefore, learning a foreign language with a sociocultural approach is essential not only to make the students easier to comprehend a learning material because it is introduced by using their own cultural view, it is also a good way to make them able to use English in their community as part of global community.

By having the awareness about the sociocultural teachers will understand that providing model and scaffolding is vital for student language development. Without model and scaffolding students will be demotivated and will no willing to engage in the teaching and learning activities because they find that tasks are too difficult to

do. However, when the model and scaffolding are provided students somehow feel secure because they have the idea about what they have to do.

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