

Communicative Language Teaching

AS DISCUSSED EARLIER, modern applied linguistics has focused on a speaker's "communicative competency." In other words, it looks at how well the speaker can use the language to communicate in various situations. A growing body of research shows the way learners gradually improve their abilities by attempting to use the target language to successfully communicate. As they gain practice in making successful communications in the target language, their ability to do this in future gets better and better, slowly approaching the skill of a native speaker (Moss, 2005).

The linguistic concept of *communicative competence* has been mirrored by a change of emphasis in language teaching (see Moss, 2005 for more information). For this reason, modern language teaching approaches, such as the *Communicative Approach*, have focused on improving the learner's ability to communicate in the target language.

According to Galloway (1993):

The communicative approach could be said to be the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audiolingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction. They felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied.

In order to do this, the activities that learners perform in the classroom have been changed to more resemble activities that the students will actually be called on to perform in their daily lives. Therefore, the use of "communicative activities" has become increasingly prominent.

Communicative activities try to get students to talk in ways that approximate the way they will actually have to use the language outside of the classroom (Galloway, 1993). Many of these activities depend on one student having information that the second student doesn't have. The first student has to get the information from the second student by using English, to the best of his or her ability (Moss, 2005). The process by which the students work together to communicate that information is where language is learned, or more specifically, *acquired*. It is the role of the teacher to set up and manage the activity, but the students actually help one another to learn. "The teacher's role is primarily to facilitate communication and only

secondarily to correct errors" (Celce-Murcia, 1991, p. 8).

There are several features that make an activity communicative, including *meaningful communication*, *information gap*, *choice* and *feedback*. *Meaningful communication* means that there is an actual purpose for the learners to communicate in the target language, *information gap* means that one learner has a piece of information that the other one doesn't. *Choice* means that the learner has a choice of how to communicate, and *feedback* means that the learner receives some response as to whether or not he/she has successfully communicated.

For example, two learners might have copies of maps, each with different locations on the map labeled. By giving each other directions, the learners find the names of the unlabeled buildings on their own map (without looking at each other's maps). Once they have labeled the unlabeled buildings, the learners are allowed to look at each other's maps to see if they have marked them correctly. In this example, the meaningful communication is giving street directions; the information gap is that the learners each know the names of different buildings on the map. The learners can use any means that they have available to communicate with each other, and when they see each other's maps, they will know if they have successfully communicated (See appendix C). The features of this communicative example are present to a greater or lesser degree in every communicative activity.

Some other common types of communicative activities include:

- * Conversation grids
- * Questionnaires
- * Games
- * Information gap activities
- * Problem-solving activities
- * Discussion
- * Role-plays

(See Moss, November, 2005)

Setting up a successful communicative activity requires a great deal of planning and preparation on the part of the instructor. First, and most importantly, the teacher must make sure that the learners already have the appropriate vocabulary with which to complete the activity. These activities often break down because the learners don't have the required language. Then, the teacher must make sure that the learners don't look at each other's information,

because if that happens, meaningful communication will no longer be taking place (Moss, 2005).

It is often a problem that some learners don't see this type of activity as a learning activity, since they tend to resemble games. This may run counter to the learner's expectations of what learning and teaching are like. However, as the teacher, you should make some effort to convince the learners of the usefulness of communicative learning, as these types of activities can be some of the most powerful language learning tools.

FURTHER READING

Online

Galloway, Ann. (1993). *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction and Sample Activities*. ERIC Digest. ERIC Digest ED357642. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. Available from: <http://www.ericdigests.org/1993/sample.htm>

Arlington Education and Employment Program (2003). *REEP Adult ESL Curriculum: ESL Techniques*. Available from: <http://www.apsva.us/15401081182015517/lib/15401081182015517/reepcurriculum/esltechniques.html>

Moss, D. "Teaching for Communicative Competence: Interaction in the ESOL Classroom" in Focus on Basics, Volume 7, Issue C, March 2005. Available from: <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=739>

Moss, D. "Interactive Classroom Activities" in Focus on Basics, Volume 8, Issue A, November 2005. Available from: <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=739>

Sharon McKay and Kirsten Schaetzel. (2008). *Facilitating Adult Learner Interactions to Build Listening and Speaking Skills*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Available from: http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pd_resources/learnerinteractions.html

Print

Celce-Murcia, M. "Language Teaching Approaches: An Overview". In Celce-Murcia, M. ed. (1991). *Teaching English as a Second of Foreign Language*, 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Larsen-Feeman, Diane. (2000). *Techniques and Principals in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Activities

ESL speaking activities: communicative activities for oral fluency <http://www.eslgo.com/resources/sa.html>

Games & Activities for the ESL/EFL Classroom — A Project of The Internet TESL Journal: <http://iteslj.org/c/games.html>

REEP ESL Curriculum for Adults: ESL Techniques <http://www.apsva.us/15401081182015517/lib/15401081182015517/reepcurriculum/esltechniques.html>