The Emergence and the Features of the Communicative Approach in Foreign Language Teaching with a Special Reference to English Language

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Abstract

The purpose of this study tackles the emergence and features of one of foreign language (here English) teaching approaches, i.e., the communicative approach. This approach did not emerge suddenly or as a result of a specific reason. It emerged as a result of the failure of other traditional approaches or methods in foreign language teaching which emphasized on language as a linguistic system not as a means of communication, as in the case of communicative approach. So, this approach had emerged instead of these approaches, which are: the grammar — translation approach, the direct approach, the audio- lingual, i.e., the aural — oral approach, and the reading approach.

Keywords: communicative approach, emergence of the communicative approach, features of the communicative approach, English language teaching.

Received: 28/032024 Accepted: 31/03/2024

ظهور وسمات المنهج التواصلي في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية مع مرجع للغة الإنكليزية خاص

الأستاذ زينب سامي حول قسم الترجمة / كلية الآداب / جامعة البصرة المدرس المساعد نعم علي حسن دائرة البحث والتطوير / وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظهور وسمات أحد مناهج تدريس اللغة الأجنبية ومنها اللغة الإنكليزية, ألا وهو المنهج التواصلي. لم يظهر هذا المنهج فجأة أو نتيجة لسبب محدد, وإنما ظهر نتيجة لفشل المناهج أو الطرق التقليدية الأخرى لتدريس اللغة الأجنبية التي ركزت على اللغة على إنها نظامُ لغويٌ وليس وسيلة للتواصل, كما هو الحال في المنهج التواصلي. وبذا, ظهر هذا المنهج بديلا عن المناهج: المنهج النحو- ترجمي, والمنهج المباشر, والمنهج السمع- لغوي, الذي يعني المنهج السمع- شفهي, والمنهج القرائي.

كلمات مفتاحية: المنهج التواصلي, ظهور المنهج التواصلي, سمات المنهج التواصلي, تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية.

تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٤/٠٣/٣١

تاريخ الاستلام: ٢٠٢٤/٠٣/٢٨

1. Introduction:-

In simple terms, the communicative approach (henceforth CA), also called communicative language teaching (henceforth CLT) is an approach used in language teaching to enhance the interaction to achieve two objectives, i.e., the means and the entire goal of a specific item. In other words, it aims to concentrate on the importance of the actual communication for learning to be done. Many controversial studies have been stated as regards this approach. These studies lie between two opposite sides, the advantages and disadvantages attributed to it. This study will shed light on defining this approach, its emergence, its features, its classroom activities, and its advantages vs. disadvantages.

2. The Communicative Approach Defined

Newmark [1] and Azimova [2] state that CA or CLT is an approach to language teaching that concentrates on interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. In other words, in this approach, real communication and interaction is not only the objective in learning, but also the means through which it takes place[3]and[4]. Thus, it tends to concentrate on three activities, i.e., role play, pair work, and group work. And, as Byram says " it switched traditional language teaching's emphasis on grammar, and the teacher-centered classroom, to that of the active use of authentic language in learning and acquisition[5]. Brumfit[6] clarifies that such an approach is worldwide known and it has established itself in many parts of the world as a way of teaching languages, especially English. It has prevailed in English language teaching (henceforth ELT) over the past 50 years, and it is still used nowadays

3. The Emergence of the Communicative Approach: Literature Review

The emergence of this approach leads us to shed light on defining the term 'communicative'.Porter [7] states that the implication of the communicative activity focuses on content rather than form. So, such a term has been used to cover a wide variety of approaches and methodological procedures. But it cannot account for both drills on the one hand and genuinely communicative activities on the other [8]. Nowadays everything is 'communicative'. Published courses almost exclusively advertise themselves as being the latest in 'communicative methodology', as having 'communicative' as their main aim. Many convention

papers deal with the 'communicative use' of language. In addition to that , he [8] addsthat a communicative activity is characterized, for example, by saying:

Students must have a desire to communicate, and there

must be some communicative purpose to their communication.

This implies, of course, that the students' attention will be

focused on content of what they are saying, rather than the

form. They will use a wide variety of language, and the teacher will not intervene. (By'intervene', I mean tell the students they have made mistakes in their English, correct their pronunciation,

etc.).

Speaking about the teaching and learning of a foreign language (here English), it is found that in the teaching and learning and methodology of a foreign language, it is only activities within the syllabus and methodology that can be classed communicative.

Communication is not applied to two participants in a conversation, however. It is also applied to people's letters writing and receiving and to lecturers' talks giving. It is applied novelists and radio announcers (and their readers and listeners).

It is evident that the communicative approach emerged as the result of a long process of theorization and experimentation. In other words, this approach did not emerge suddenly; nor was it based directly on one of the theories of language that appeared in this century.

As far as the Structural School of Linguistics is concerned, it is noticed that it had its heyday up to the fifties, but it is applied corollary, namely, the Audio- Lingual (henceforth AL) and Grammar —Translation methods or approaches to foreign language teaching(henceforth FLT) lasted until the late 1960s and early 1970s[2].Richards[9]adds that after its advent in the 70s, the CA branched out into different approaches and methodologiesthat aim at helping learners develop their communicative competence and is now a term that encompasses different approaches to teaching and learning, like, Project-based learning, Task-based learning, Content-based learning, and Dogma ELT. The CA influences can be divided into types,i.e., the societal

and the academic. As regards the first type, Mitchell [10] clarifies that "the rise of CLT in the 1970s and the early 1980s was partly in response to the lack of success with traditional language teaching methods and partly by the increase in demand for language learning." Then, he describes the need for foreign language learning (henceforth FLL) in Europe in general, In Europe, the advent of the European Common Market, an economic predecessor to the European Union, led to migration in Europe and an increased number of people who needed to learn a foreign language for work or personal reasons. Meanwhile, more children were given the opportunity to learn foreign languages in school, as the number of secondary schools offering languages rose worldwide as part of a general trend of curriculum-broadening and modernization, with foreign-language study no longer confined to the elite academies. And, in Britain in particular, In Britain, the introduction of comprehensive schools, Which offered foreign-language study to all children, rather than to the select few of the elite grammar schools,

greatly increased the demand for language learning.

Talking about the second type of influences of the CA, i.e., the academic, it is observed that in the in the late 19th century, the Amrican educator John Dewey wrote that learning should be based on the learner's interests and experiences. Prator [11]states that in, his book *The psychology of Meaningful Verbal Learning*, the American psychologist David Ausubel calls for a holistic approach to learners teaching through meaningful material. In his paper, *Development of a Manipulation-Communication Scale.NAFSA Studies and Papers*, written in 1965[11], the American educator Clifford Prator says in a clarion call for teachers to turn from the concentration on manipulation (drills) into communication where learners were free to select their own words. It is seen that in 1966, the sociolinguist Dell Hymes put the concept of communicative competence depending on Noam Chomsky's syntactic concept of competence, and also in 1966, the American psychologist Jerome Bruner advocates that learners build their own understanding of the world based on their experiences and previous knowledge, teachers

must present scaffolds to re-inforce this.Littlewood [12] says that the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky had influenced on Bruner in the similar concept concerning the zone of the proximal development.He, Littlewood, adds that later in the 1970s British linguist M.A.K. Halliday studied how language functions are expressed through grammar.

The CA tackles behaviourism as a theory of psychology and it sheds light on Structural Linguistics which assumes that language is a set of structural patterns, i.e., learning language as grammatical structures. This

approach has been widely used in teaching foreign language for it aims at developing listening and speaking skills of reading and writing .It even still persists as the backbone of an English foreign language (henceforth EFL) syllabus and methodology in several American (and probably other) universities. The structural linguists were interested in constructing a model of what goes on outside the minds of the speakers and hearers. In this respect, Bronstein [13] advocates that being under the influence of behavioural psychology, the structural linguists used a stimulusresponse (S-R)model to describe the communicative process and wishedto confine linguistic description to observable phenomena. They also used a stimulus-response model to describe language learning, emphasizing the role of habit. Further, Slobin's [14] comment on learning language as a habit implies that it, learning language, is merely learning a set of habits which can be acquired through repetition like the learning of any other skills. However, The Structural Theory, as [15]; Bronstein [13]; Smith and Wilson [16] state, started to phase out in the sixties and was soon replaced by the Transformational Generative School of Linguistics initiated by Chomsky who came to fell that Structural Linguistics was going in the wrong direction in terms of its assumptions and methods. Structural linguists tried to describe the sound patterns and word combinations of each language as they observed them in a corpus. These linguists regarded language as a living thing not as a static corpus of forms and expressions. Consequently, as expected, the AL approach based on Structural Linguistics was gradually rejected by most of its users. So, Chomsky, destroyed behaviourism and Structural Linguistics for he insisted on innovation and creativity. He rejected the idea that people learn through repetition (like animals). In other words, he rejected the idea of repetition in learning.

Obviously, it was expected that the new TG Theory would soon lend itself to application and produce a new approach to FLT. Unfortunately, such an expectation was not unfulfilled. In

this respect, Crystal [17] claims that Chomskyhimself, in fact, was very septic about the possible direct application of his theory of grammar or of the cognitive* theory of psychology to FLT . Furthermore, there was a period of loss and confusion for everybody concerned with FLT .

It is important to know that what has been mentioned above was the state during the late sixties and early seventies in particular though there is a fact, as Thurgood [18] states, which implies that Hymes had, as early as 1966, came up with his concept of 'communicative competence' as an alternative to Chomsky's 'Linguistic competence 'which was supposed to describe one's mastery of language. Such a kind of competence, as Corder [19] states, means for [20]; and others, the person's ability to adopt the structures and the meaning of language to the requirements of the social context in which language takes place. Consequently, it includes not only the knowledge of rules (grammatical and idiomatic), but also contextual or sociolinguistic, i.e., how can a person understand the other. Candlin [21] claims that Hymes, like so many others from the British School of Linguistics before him (e.g. Firth and Malinosky) and contemporary with him (e.g. Wilkins, Halliday, Widdoson, Brumfit, etc.), realized that the two major language theories of the present century, as well as traditional grammar had dealt with only one aspect of language, namely, the internal system, or the structure of language.

Evidently, there are two points that had led the attention to be concentrated on the sociolinguistic aspects of language. The first point is represented by the newness of realizing the importance of language as a means of communication rather than simply a set of rules, and the second by the frustration felt by language teachers and methodologists at having no convincing methodology for FLT. Wilkins[22]; Corder[19] clarify that these aspects imply four main areas:

- a. Language functions
- b. Register or style
- c. Communicative (including speech) strategies
- d. Discourse analysis

It is clear, thus, that the main interest implied in applying some of the results of such studies to FLT. came in the form of English for Special Purposes (henceforth ESP). Consequently, new items like

Functional/Notional Syllabuses began to emerge. These syllabuses

seemed to be of special usefulness in teaching the language of the various branches of science, technology and medicine, since the first concentrates on what functions people adopt, and the second on the notions not on grammar kike the traditional syllabuses or approaches.

It is worth mentioning that Notional Syllabuses as Wilkins [23]states, take the desired communicative capacity as the starting point. This makes such syllabuses differ from other syllabuses like grammatical and situational. The grammatical syllabus seeks to teach the language by taking the learner progressively through the forms of the target language. The situational syllabus does so by re-creating the situations in which native speakers use the language. Consequently, the advantage of the Notional Syllabus is that it takes the communicative facts of language into account from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. In other words, Wilkins advocates that language teaching should be organized in terms of the content rather than the form of the language. In addition to that, he states that the fact implied in drawing up a Notional Syllabus is that we ask what the speakers of the language communicate through language instead of asking how they express themselves or when and where they use the language.

4. The Features of the Communicative Approach

Talking about the features of the CA, an important question emerges: in what way does this approach differ from its predecessors, or from any other approach?

It is clearly noticeable that the answer for such a question implies a fact that the CA came as a result of the failure of other traditional approaches or methods used in FLT. These approaches emphasized on language as a linguistic system (linguistic code), not as it is used by native speakers, i.e., the emphasis is on unapplied system or on a collection of patterns or rules. The CA, as Canale and Swain [24]advocate, is organized on the basis of communicative functions that a given learner or a group of learners needs to know, and emphasizes the ways in which particular grammatical forms may be used to express these

functions appropriately. Thus, this approach focuses on teaching language as a means of communication. Such a fact leads to the necessity on being language as supra-sentential

discourse. The following points illustrate the main differences between the CA and other approaches. These differences, by their role, led to the emergence of CA:

1. The basic difference is, as it has been stated above, almost certainly, the emphasis that this approach lays on the learning and teaching of language as a means of communication rather than only a formal linguistic system[19]. So, language is a phenomenon of the individual person which means that it is a matter of human behaviour. People speak, write, read and understand what they hear. They are not born doing so; they have to acquire these skills. Not everybody seems to develop them to the same degree. People may suffer from accidents or disease which impair their performance. Thus, language is considered as a part of human psychology, a particular sort of behaviour, the behaviour which has its principal function of communication.

In simple terms, the role of CA in language teaching is to helpthe students to acquire communicative competence. In other words, it aims at developing the learner's communicative competence rather than merely his linguistic competence. Such a kind of competence implies a fact that:

A native speaker must not only be able to produce and understand grammatically *well-formed* utterances, he must also be able to produce and understand utterances

which are *appropriate* to the context in which they are made. It is just as much a matter of 'competence' in language to be be able to produce appropriate utterances as grammatical ones [19].

Wilkins[23], Fromkin and Rodman [25] and Slobin [14] state that communicative competence, in turn, includes the following three types:

a. *Formal*, i.e., *Linguistic* Competence or the implicit structural knowledge the language user has. This type of competence comprises grammatical and idiomatic;

b. Sociocultural Competence or the knowledge enabling one to go through the routines of the day. Such a type of competence tackles two types of learning. The first is represented by the proper language used in greeting people, introducing oneself, making excuses and apologies,

asking information, etc.. In other words, it is represented by a host of functions that life requires us to perform through language. The second type is represented by learning *when* to use that sort of language; and here there may be a marked contrast between different societies;

c. *Psychological* Competence, which comprises the ability to project one's personality; and the ability to use language to achieve personal goals.

These abilities are aspects of the strategy of interaction; and they are often determined.

2. It is observed that this approach (at least its British version) is mostly interested in Syllabus Design[23] and[26]. Such a design tackles the selection and grading of items, and their ordering to be included in a particular sentence.

It is worth noting that though several advocates of the approach have been recommending techniques, such a role-playing, group-work, task-oriented activities, problem-solving, etc., to be employed in the classroom for enhancing communication, nothing like an all-round, well-defined methodology has emerged.

- 3. It is clear noticeable that it is necessary to base the Communicative Syllabus not on grammatical structures, but on language *functions*, plus the linguistic realization or realizations of each function. Consequently, and as Byrne [27] advocates, both *selection* and *grading* are functional, instead of grammatical.
- 4. Talking about language as a social phenomenon implies a fact that there is some close connection between thought and language. In language learning or teaching, however, it is the use of language as an act of communication between people that is *central*, i.e., its social function. Language or verbal behaviour is a special sort of communicative behaviour. In this respect, it is stated that A speaker behaves as he does because his audience is as it is.

We cannot hope to explain what happens in a conversation without taking into account the characteristics and behaviour of the hearer as well as the speaker. After all, both are 'performing'linguistically.[19]

Clearly, language in this sense is a social event. Moreover, it is advocated that language as a social phenomenon, the speech, especially the social in the earlystages, is given priority; other skills to follow later, depending on the terminal objectives of the foreign language course[27]. Such skills, i.e., communicative ones comprise the following [28]:

- a. Functions, i.e., language acts or what we want to do with language,
- **b**. General notions, i.e., abstract time and space relations which are related to functions,
- c. Specific notions, i.e., items which are directly determined by the topics,
- d. Settings, i.e., where people are; when the interaction takes place and how,
- **e**. Social, sexual and psychological roles, i.e., who is to whom, what their relationship is and how they feel,
- f. Style, i.e., the way we express ourselves, to reflect our attitudes which can range between extremes ,
- g. Stress and intonation, i.e., the rise and fall of the voice while speaking,
- h. Grammar, i.e., the means we use to express ourselves (the product of the factors listed above),
- i. Vocabulary, i.e., the lexical items we need,
- j. Paralinguistic features, i.e., gestures, facial expressions and types of similar features.

Concerning to what has been stated on the features of CA, Savignon, in her book entitled *Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching: Contexts and Concerns in Teacher Education*, summarizes them in the following eight points set by Berns:

- 1. Language teaching is entirely based on the view of language as communication.
- 2. Diversity is considered a part of language development and use in second language learners and users as in the case with the first language users.
 - 3. As regards the learner's competence, it is considered in relative terms, not in absolute ones.
 - 4. A number of language varieties are recognized as a renewed model for learning and teaching.
- 5. Culture plays an important role in shaping the speaker's communicative competence of his/her first language, and then, in the subsequent languages.
 - 6. There is no prescription for a single methodology or a fixed group of techniques.
- 7. It is seen that there is a relationship between the ideational ,interpersonal and textual functions of the language use and the development of the learner's competence in each.
- 8. It is essential that learners use language for different purposes in all types of learning. Having stated the features of the CA, it is important to state the classroom activities concerning this approach.

5. The Communicative Approach Classroom Activities

To shed light on the nature of communication and communicative activities in the classroom, let us have a look on the following two figures set by Harmer[8]:

Fig. 1: The Nature of Communication

- A Communicative purpose
- A Desire to communicate
- Focus on content
- Variety of language
- No teacher intervention

Fig. 2: Communicative Activities

Classroom activities of the CA have been dealt more by many linguists. Let us gather what Mitchell [10], Richards [9] and Brandl [29] classify in the following items:

- 1. **Role-play**, which is an oral activity usually done in pairs. Its main aim is to develop student's communicative abilities in a certain setting.
- 2. **Interviews**; an interview is an oral activity done ,also, in pairs. Its main aim is to develop student's interpersonal skills in the TL.
- 3. **Group work**, which is a collaborative activity. Its main purpose is to reinforcecommunication in the TL, in a larger group setting.
- 4. **Information gap**, which is a collaborative activity. Its main purpose is for students to effectively get information that was previously unknown to them in the TL.
- 5. **Opinion sharing**, which is a content- based activity. Its main aim is to engage student's conversational skills, while talking about something they care about.

6. Scavenger hunt, which is a mingling activity that stimulate open interaction between students.

Thus, it is clear that since the teacher does not constitute the center of the instruction anymore, the activities attributed to this approach usually concern with student-student interaction, and, increase learners opportunities to speak.

The above activities display clearly how the CA has been extremely influential in language teaching. However, many linguists advocate that this approach imply many disadvantages. Let us shed light on these disadvantages.

6. The Disadvantages of the Communicative Approach

As it is mentioned above, CA has many advantages in foreign language teaching, especially English; however, it implies certain disadvantages. So, although it has been extremely influential in language teaching, and the linguists and scholars stated previously (like Hymes, Chomsky, Wilkins) and others like (Van Ek and Alexander, and the Council of Europe) contributed to the rise of this largely used approach, they felt, as Spada [30]declares, that the students were not learning the language in the right way via this approach. Further, they did not learn the whole and realistic language. Their learning is limited in the classroom and they did not know how to communicate outside the classroom as regards everyday situations that require the use of the appropriate social language. In other words, and as Spada advocates, they depended on the structures of the language instead of its functions and notions, which in turn, made them unable to communicate in the culture of the language studied. Anotherdisadvantage lies in that it is difficult for the teacher to check the skills of the students especially that of the conversation, when he is alone in front of a large number of students. So, the teacher must correct, for example, the mistakes he/she encounterswhile he/she is teaching them a course of conversation; how can he correct all mistakes committed by them. In addition to that, the tasks done in the classroom depends on "how motivating or boring the lesson will be"[5]. This, in turn, requires that the teacher must completely do his best to make the best tasks in presenting the required skills of his/her lesson to achieve motivating and avoid boring.

In the first part of his published article "A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach[31] 1, Swanshows other disadvantages behind this approach. So, he tackles its theoretical and practical problems. He says that this approach is not always a compatible domain since it has a great difference between the theoretical understandings(by linguists) and the practical understandings(by language teachers). Furthermore, he adds, there is the usefulness of: citing a small amount of data, a large amount of confusing items, assuming the knowledge that is not language-specific to be language-specific.

In the second part of the article [31] 2,he advocates that the above theoretical elements lead to the confusion in the application of the CA techniques. Such confusion can be clearly recognized in the classroom settings. The fact that is implied in these techniques is the priority of function of the language over its structure. This , in turn, leaves learners with crucial gaps in their knowledge concerning the formal issues of their target language. Besides, these techniques make the languages that the student might already know are not used in instructional techniques. Another disadvantage of the CA implies that " many researchers associate the use of CLT techniques with modernity, and so, the lack of CLT techniques is the lack of modernism."[32]. Accordingly, teachers, according to those researchers or school system that fail to use CLT techniques are outdated and suggest that their students learn the target language in spite of the absence of CLT techniques, as if CLT, he says, " were the only way to learn a language, and everyone who fails to implement its techniques is ignorant and cannot teach the target language."

Having stated the most distinctive disadvantages of the CA, it is time to conclude the study with the fundamental points of this approach mentioned in the above sections. These points are stated in the following section.

Conclusions

In the light of what has been mentioned in this study, the researchers have arrived at the following conclusions:

1.It is clearly noticeable that the structural approach or method in foreign language which depends on audio-lingual method, was refuted by Chomsky for he rejected the idea of repetition in learning or teaching language on which the structural approach is based. Chomsky's theory

insists on innovation and creativity in language learning. So, this theory, the failure of other traditional approaches or methods-which focus on a teacher-central process, i.e., the learner is passive-and the emergence of other theories like speech-act theory led to the emergence of CA in FLT. So, according to the features mentioned above, it seems that this approach enables the learners of a foreign language to use it in a real or an actual way by showing them up situations taken from daily life similar to those lived by native speakers. It depends on the learner 's communicative competence rather than only his linguistic competence.

2. In spite of the mentioned advantages of the CA, it, as many linguists and scholars advocate, has many disadvantages. So, the students are not learning the language in the right way and did not learn the whole realistic language. The learning is limited in the classroom and they did not know to communicate outside the classroom. In addition to that, the large number of the students in front of the teacher makes him /her feel difficulty in checking ,then, correcting the mistakes they commit while learning. Besides, there is a great difference between the theoretical understandings, by the linguists, and the practical understandings, by the language teachers; and the usefulness of citing a small amount of data, a large amount of confusing items considering the knowledge that is not language-specific to be language-specific. This, in turn, leads to the confusion in the application of CA techniques. Finally, many researchers relate the use of the CA techniques to modernity, and then, the lack of such approach techniques is the lack of modernism.

Note:

(*). The termcognitiveor cognitivefunction of communication is to express our perception, imaginings and beliefs about states of affairs. In addition to that, when talking about this item, as regards animals and human-beings, it is observed that animal signaling systems, whether intentional or not, do not have a cognitive function. Similarly, human communicative behaviour, both linguistic and non-linguistic, may have an attitudinal function, but only linguistic behaviour has a cognitive function. We may communicate fear, good will or pleasure linguistically and non-linguistically, but we cannot assert that something is dangerous or pleasant except linguistically[19].

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