COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH
(A Critical Analysis)
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Abstract

Communicative approach is one of the language teaching approaches used in improving learner's language skill. It is one of the alternative approaches in the language teaching and learning processes which can help create positive atmosphere in the learning of language in general and learning English in particular. Applying this approach, language teacher and learner can participate actively in various classroom activities. It can give as many opportunities as possible to language learners to interact among themselves and to express their ideas in English.

It is within the above context that this article aims at offering communicative approach to the teaching and learning of English in Indonesia.

Key Words: Communicative, Language, Teaching, Approach

Introduction

The government of Indonesia is building this nation to bring its people to a more prosperous and juster life. It still needs more time to reach this great ideal. The people of this country should learn more from outside world. One of means to learn from experience and development of other nation is, undoubtedly, English ability. In this global era, we need not only the English language experts but also technocrats who are able to speak the English language in order to get from experience and development of outside world.

As a world citizen, we cannot avoid English. As an international language, it has an important role. In the United Nations, for example, English is one of the five formal languages. Used in so wide area, English has become the part of our daily association: in

business, in diplomacy, on television, etc. That's why we should support any effort to develop it.

However, it is not an exaggeration to say that Indonesian people find some difficulties in learning English. Differences in pronunciation, spelling and grammar are the core problem of the difficulties. The system difference between bahasa Bahasa Indonesia and English arise from family difference of the both languages. Bahasa Indonesia and other archipelago languages are categorized in Austronesian language family, whereas English –like European languages in general- is of Germany-Eurasian family.

Linguists have done various attempts to solve this problem. Many methods and approaches in language teaching have developed since the outset of its history. One of them is Communication Approach.

Brief Description of the Theory

Communicative language teaching approach, well known as communicative approach, is one of the approaches that has been widely used during the final quarter of the 20th century to the time.

However, before discussing the approach further, the writer finds it important to clarify the terminology used in this writing. The crucial one is the term " approach" which is usually difficult to be distinguished from "method" and " technique". Anthony (1963) explains that:

" An approach to language teaching is something that reflects a certain model or research paradigm – a theory, and it is the broadest term among those there. A method, in the other hand, is a set of procedures, i.e. a system that spells out rather precisely how to teach a language. While technique is a classroom device or activity."

Communicative approach grew out of the work of anthropological linguists like Hymes (1972) and Firthian linguists such as Halliday (1973) who viewed language first and foremost as a system for communication with the following characteristics :

It is assumed that the goal of language teaching is that leanness can communicate in the target language. It is assumed that the content of the language course will include semantic notions and social function, not just linguistic structures. Student regularly work in group or pairs

to transfer (and, if necessary, negotiate) meaning in situations where one person has information that the other) (s) lack.

Student often engage in role-play or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social context.
Classroom materials and activities are often authentic to reflect real-life situations and demands.

Skills are integrated from the beginning; a given activity might involve reading, speaking, listening and perhaps also writing (this assumes the learners are educated and literate). The teacher's role is primarily to facilitate communication and only secondarily to correct errors. The teacher should be able to use target language fluently and appropriately.

Discussion

For the benefit of making the points of discussion clearer and well organized, the writer will present the discussion based on the characteristics of the approach as mentioned above. It is assumed that the goal of language teaching is learner ability to communicate in the target language. The definition of communication as stated by Turney et. al (1992: 34) is " sharing of messages or attitudes that produce a degree of understanding between a sender and a receiver, ………." The implication of this view as pointed out by Little wood (1982 : 17) is that " the teacher might hope to achieve communicative activity in the classroom, since this will determine his own attitude towards it and what places he gives in this overall methodology."
The contribution of the communicative activity in the classroom according to Little wood (1982: 17 – 18) are :
They provide *'whole-task practice' (= practice in the total skill).* It is done through various kinds of communication, structured in order to suit the learners' level of ability.
They improve motivation
The students' objective to be able to communicate with other in the target language will be strongly motivated if they learn in the ESL class give a significant relation to their objective of learning the language

They allow natural learning

Since many aspects of learning can take place only through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved in using the language for communication, then communicative activity (inside or outside the classroom) is an important part of the whole learning process.

They can create a context that supports learning

It provides opportunity for positive personal relationship to develop among learners and between learners and teacher. These relationships can help to 'humanize' the classroom and to create a supportive environment for the individual in his/her efforts to learn.

The good point of this assumption is that in the teaching-learning process in the classroom, the teacher will emphasize the learning more on the learner's ability to produce an output in English rather than on the grammatical sentences the students should be aware of in producing the language. Hence, as long as the student can send the message (=can make him/herself be understood) and understand the message given by other speaker, the students are considered to have learned 'something'.

This idea allows the learners to use both verbal and non-verbal languages to send and to receive the message in the communication as it is stated by Johnson & Johnson (1987) in Turney (1992 : 34) that "communication meaning are attached. The symbols can be either verbal or non verbal".

On the contrary, the assumption above does not strongly encourage the learners to produce the target language structurally and grammatically. In fact, it is obvious that for some forms of communication, a well-structured and grammatical language is highly required, like in writing skill and speaking in formal setting. In the cases like writing an application letter, thesis or other academic purposes, writing and/or delivering a speech or making presentation in seminar or meeting , although the meaning is still an essential thing, the well-structured language is also a demand. In applying for a job (both application letter and interview in English language) for example, the language is usually one of the most important consideration of whether an applicant is eligible for the job or not.

Another weak point is that there is also possibility that the nonverbal language can be heavily used by learners both in class and outside the class, which again does not help the learners to work

harder to produce a better language. This non verbal language indeed can help the learners a lot in sending or receiving messages in oral communication, but it will do nothing for them in the reading and writing form.

It is assumed that content of the language course will include semantic nations and social function, not just linguistic structures.

This assumption will help the students to decide what to say send her/his message, where to say certain utterance appropriately and how to say it properly. The semantic and social nation will help ESL students to understand the culture of the target language to avoid misinterpretation as suggested by Johnson & Johnson cited by Turney (1992: 34) that "a misinterpretation of the meaning of a message may well result from the lack of a shared cultural background between the message sender and the receiver".

This knowledge will enable them to communicate appropriately depending on the person, the place, the occasion and the form of the communication needed. For example, if they need help from their parents or teacher, they will say " would you help me to do this, please?" rather than "Help me to do this!. Those two sentences are grammatically correct and acceptable, but the initial one is more polite and more acceptable than the latter one.

The obstacle to provide the semantic and social notions might occur when the EL learners study the language in the non-native English country with a non-native English teacher. For instance, Indonesia students study English in Indonesia, taught by Indonesia teacher who might have not enough knowledge and experience about the culture of the language. The teachers certainly need to prepare themselves with the knowledge about the language and the culture, and it is reasonable that if the knowledge about the culture is only relied on the written references like books or magazine , still some difficulties will appear.

Students regularly work in groups or pairs to transfer (and, if necessary, negotiate) meaning in situations   where one person has information that the other (s) lack.

Students often engage in role-play dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social context.

Classroom materials and activities are often authentic to reflect real-life situations and demands

Those three point above (points c-e) give golden opportunity for ESL students to involve with other students in the class activity whether in groups or in pairs. It will encourage them to feel the atmosphere of a 'real use' of the target language.

Optimistically, though the classroom activities, the learners can build self-motivation that they learn the target language because they need it, as claimed by Fillmore (1985) quoted by McLaughlin (1987: 155): "Learners have to realize they need to learn the target language and must be motivated to do so."

Working in groups can enable the learners to experience "basic rules that appropriate for all social situations " as described by argyle et. al (1981:6-9) in Brumfit (1985: 73) that includes:

make communication possible (cf. Grice, 1975);
prevent withdrawal by other actors;
prevent aggression;
begin and end encounters

Giving a chance to practice and speak out the target language in communicating friends and   between the student and teacher especially trough a discussion on the topic of their interest and their needs in their real life is an excellent thing to arouse and maintain the students' interest and motivation in the class. It is also a reassurance to them that they are in the right place   because   the class   will significantly help them to improve   their ability in using   the language and to accomplish their purpose in learning the language. This is essential to keep them trying and practicing the language.

Unfortunately, working   in groups   or pairs can   create   a dominant to a better learners that make the 'silent' or less active learners to do most or even all the activities like pointing the active learner to perform the oral presentation.

Moreover, though the learners are the ones who perform the role play by imagining that they are in the 'real situation', still the teacher can control the   communication. This is clearly stated by Little wood (1982 : 55) that some communicative activity like simulation and role playing "……………enable the teachers to control the   interaction ………". It is important to note that the real conversation will have to be done mostly without any help   from particular person like the

teacher role in the class. Real conversation usually cannot be repeated like in the role play, and mostly cannot be predicated or planned.

On top of that, the materials and activities that are provided to reflect   the real-life situation can also put learners into problem, because in the real life communication the flow of communication is not always the same with what has been predicted in the classroom. In Turney (1992: 34), Johnson & Johnson (1987) claimed that "communication is a process among people in which everyone constantly receives, sends, interprets and infers. There is no precise beginning and end. " In the real conversation all participants can not predict what should they say until one person say something, we need to hear something or to see other's gesture or expression before we respond them. So, all perfect conversations in the classroom will not guarantee that the learners can actually use the language in the real conversation.

Skills are integrated from the beginning; a given activity might involve reading, speaking, listening and perhaps also writing (this assumes the learners are educated and literate)

The integrated skills which are involved in the teaching-learning process that are arranged into communicative activity will help the students to develop their ability in all areas of communication. So, in the class they can improve their reading, speaking, listening and writing abilities in the target language.

Another good point is that since different skills need different activities, then it can be assumed that the learners will have to do various activities in the class. This will minimize or avoid boredom for the learners, which at the same time will arise their interest and enjoyment in the class. The only problem about the integrated skill is it is only good if the teacher can really arrange a balance proportion for all the skills. If not, then the learners would not be able to experience and practice all skills in the target language. This is especially true for the ESL classroom in Indonesia, where most ESL learners prefer to have listening and speaking practices rather than reading and writing practices.

In many cases, though the English teacher has planned a well-balanced integrated skill in the lesson plan, students still ask to do more

speaking and listening in class. The reason is, culturally, Indonesian people are an oral community, and so most communications is done orally.

More than that, listening and speaking activities give more opportunity to the learners to really, ' feel and experience' the use of the language as a means of communication compare to reading and writing activities.

Beyond those reasons, reading and writing activities are commonly found more difficult for the learners because they are required to understand and use a well formed language in which the English Grammar and structure is a demand.

The teacher's is primarily to facilitate communication and only secondarily to correct errors.
The teacher should be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately.

Communicative approach is based on student-student in which the purpose of the lesson in the class is mainly to provide activities that enable them to actively involved in the class. The teacher functions as facilitator who helps the students in the process of learning or acquiring the language. Therefore, error correction is only done if the error disturb the flow of the communication or if it can create a miscommunication.

The requirement to be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately is necessary since the teacher is a role model in the class and this ability can help teacher to again "trust' from the learners. This is especially important in the ESL classroom in Indonesia, since there is a cultural perception that "teacher should know almost everything about the subject she/he is teaching". This perception can be understood because in Indonesia most education matter is still heavily relied on the teachers and school and only few schools that suggest the parents' participation in the education. Hence, by showing a good ability in all skills in the classroom, teacher has indirectly motivated the students to learn the language.

Interestingly, Indonesia learners in general need the explicit correction because it will help them to recognize their error and mistake and also help them to do it better. There is quite 'funny

reality' in the ESL classroom about error correction in Indonesia that learners with a better ability in the target language in the class tend to make an initiative to correct her/his friend if the teacher does not comment or correct the error and mistake.

This is presumably as a result of the traditional grammar class that emphasizes the learning of English language and other foreign language more to the grammar and structure without relating it to the communication function of the language. Besides, the teacher's correction is considered as a reassurance to the learners that they have perform the language well(if the teacher does not make any correction) or that they have been given a better way to use the language (if they are corrected). Another fact is, if the teacher seems to ignore the error, the teacher can also be considered does not know the correct form.

Meanwhile, the demand for the teachers to use the target language fluently and appropriately can create a 'nightmare' for the non-native English teachers in the ESL classroom, like teacher English in Indonesia. It is especially because English is still classified into a foreign language in Indonesia, since it is rarely used in the daily communication both at school and at home. Therefore, a demand to use the target language fluently and appropriately in the classroom makes the teaching becomes more and more challenging for the ESL teachers who are in fact also can still be categorized as "learners of the target language."

Conclusion

As can be expected, every theory will have strong and weak points, it is also true for the Communicative Language Teaching approach that has been discussed above, still this approach is one of the best alternative for teaching any target language.

By knowing both the strong and the weak point of the theory, the writer believes the teacher can maximize the positive sides of the theory and do something to minimize or even eliminate the weak points

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