

FROM ‘COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING’ TO ‘POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY’: FIFTY YEARS OF EXPLORATION

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Abstract

The term ‘communicative language teaching’ (CLT) has been with us for some 50 years now and still serves world-wide as a focus for discussion, exploration and policy-making. Beneath the superficial term, however, we may ask to what extent the concept itself has remained unchanged? In developmental terms, our understanding of CLT can be compared to the three stages of culture shock. In the first stage, we enjoyed a period of euphoria in which the language-teaching world seemed to be magically transformed and all problems seemed to be solved. This was followed by a period of questioning and doubt, driven by efforts to export the original CLT principles and practices into an ever-widening range of new contexts. The emerging challenges led to a partial rejection of CLT as an intact and unquestioned package of principles and practices. In its third period of development, which is still with us, CLT has merged with the concept of ‘postmethod language pedagogy’. In this period, the core principles of CLT remain intact, namely: we teach (a) towards appropriate forms of communication, in ways that (b) support processes of memorization and (c) stimulate as much learner-engagement as possible. However, teachers are encouraged to implement these principles creatively and in ways that suit specific situations and learners.

Keywords: language pedagogy, communicative language teaching, postmethod pedagogy

Introduction

On the global scene of language pedagogy, communicative language teaching (CLT) now has a long history. Its first theoretical and pedagogical foundations date back to the early 1970s. At that time, many in the language teaching world had begun to feel disappointed at the apparent failure of currently established methods (such as audiolingualism and situational language teaching) to achieve the universal success that had been hoped for (Littlewood, 1999). Also in the early 1970s, there were important developments in theoretical fields which led language teaching practitioners to re-think their assumptions about the goals and processes of second language learning.

In the field of linguistics, functional linguists (notably Michael Halliday) were exploring the implications of focusing on the ‘meaning potential’ of language as a necessary means to understand its structural properties. The sociolinguist Dell Hymes was also establishing the notion of ‘communicative competence’ in contrast to the narrow ‘linguistic competence’ studied by Chomsky and his followers. (See for example the extracts from the work of Halliday and Hymes in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979.) This work became a major source of inspiration for language teaching projects, notably a Council of Europe initiative to develop a new framework for syllabus design, based on communicative categories such as functions (e.g., ‘asking somebody’s name’, ‘saying what somebody’s job is’) and notions (e.g., ‘future time’, ‘quantity and degree’) (explained in Wilkins, 1976).

In language pedagogy, Widdowson (e.g. 1978) and others were exploring the implications for methodology of ‘teaching language as communication’. In the English-teaching field, a multitude of course books began to appear bearing the description ‘functional’, ‘notional’ and/or ‘communicative’, and including a large proportion of meaning-oriented activities such as pair work, role play, discussion and the use of authentic materials (Many such activities are described in Johnson and Morrow, 1981; Littlewood, 1981). In those early days, functional syllabuses and communicative course books were often seen as the definitive solution to all problems of language teaching.

At the same time, work in psycholinguistics was stimulating new thinking about the internal processes of language learning and the conditions that activate them. The natural processes and sequences that were observed in first language learning led teachers and researchers to find similar phenomena in second language learning. The idea gained influence that natural ‘acquisition’ is a more effective path to communicative competence than conscious ‘learning’. Particularly influential was Stephen Krashen’s ‘input hypothesis’, which claims that second language acquisition depends primarily on comprehensible input. Teachers should therefore concentrate not on explicit instruction but on creating conditions for natural acquisition (as in the ‘Natural Approach’ of Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The input hypothesis led later to the ‘interaction hypothesis’, which sees not only input but also output and interaction as important for learning (see, e.g., Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Gass & Mackey, 2015). All of these ideas supported the view that the key condition for second language learning is using the language for communication. The role of communication was also affirmed by advocates of ‘humanistic’ teaching such as Moskowitz (1978) and Stevick (1980), whose emphasis was on the need to engage the ‘whole person’ in meaningful communication.

The present article will review the nature and contributions of CLT by considering these five questions:

- What insights does CLT offer into the goals of language learning and teaching?
- What insights does CLT offer into the learning experiences that might take learners towards their goals?
- What insights does CLT offer into the pedagogy that can facilitate these learning experiences?

- What have been the experiences with CLT in specific contexts around the world?
- What is the legacy and current status of CLT?

In this article, the term CLT will be taken as a cover term to include also task-based language teaching [TBLT], which is a later development within the wider field.

What insights does CLT offer into the goals of language learning and teaching?

The theoretical developments mentioned above brought to language teaching a more detailed, comprehensive account of the nature of communication and the role that language plays in it. Communication was the goal of previous ‘active’ methods such as the situational-structural approach and the audio-lingual method (for an overview of these, see Littlewood, 1999), but it was usually assumed (implicitly or explicitly) that this goal could be achieved through mastering the structures and vocabulary of the language, that is, through acquiring ‘linguistic competence’. The key concept of ‘communicative competence,’ which includes linguistic competence but goes beyond it, redefined the nature of the goal and how to achieve it. It also helped to explain why so many learners achieve poor levels of communicative ability through structure-based methods.

In a short but influential article, Widdowson (1972) drew attention to why students who have been taught English for several years frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language. He pointed out that most current methods neglect an essential fact about the nature of communication: that it depends on the ability not only to ‘compose sentences’ but also, crucially, to use these sentences to perform a variety of ‘acts of communication’. For example, when a teacher demonstrates meaning by walking to the door and saying *I am walking to the door*, then asks students to do the same with *He is walking to the door* (etc.), ‘[these sentences] are being used to perform the act of commentary in situations in which in normal circumstances no commentary would be called for’ (p. 17). Students are learning the *signification* of the sentences but not their communicative *value*. Widdowson (1978) explores further the nature and pedagogical implications of this distinction between ‘signification’ and ‘value’, which have become fundamental ideas within CLT. ‘Communicative value’ refers to the functional aspects of language and these – as well as its formal and semantic aspects – are now a central focus of language learning.

The relation between form and function is not straightforward. For example, an apparently straightforward declarative sentence such as *The door’s open* could have a range of functions. It could be an explanation (‘that’s why it’s so cold’), a reassurance (‘don’t worry, you’ll be able to get out’), a request (‘close it, please’), and many other things, depending on the situation. Conversely, the request could be expressed not only through the above sentence but also more directly through, for example, *Would you mind closing the door?* or simply *Close the door, please*. Which form is actually used, depends not only on linguistic factors but also on situational factors and conventions of social appropriacy (e.g., one is more likely to be direct with a friend than a stranger). Learners need therefore to be aware of the links between language forms and all aspects of meaning (conceptual, functional, and social) and also be able to express and interpret specific links in specific situations. Moreover, it is not enough to learn to do this

for individual utterances. Communication is an interactive process in which meanings are developed and negotiated over longer stretches of discourse. This involves developing effective ways of structuring information, creating cohesive links over longer stretches of discourse, opening and closing conversations appropriately, initiating as well as responding, expressing disagreement without producing confrontation, and so on.

An important orientational framework in discussions of the nature of communicative competence in a second language is that of Canale & Swain (1980) and Canale (1983). A convenient summary can be found in Benati & Angelovska (2016). Here I have adapted the terminology slightly and added a fifth dimension to the four proposed in Canale (1983):

- *Linguistic competence*. This includes the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, semantics and phonology that have been the traditional focus of second language learning.
- *Discourse competence*. This enables speakers to engage in continuous discourse, e.g., by linking ideas in longer written texts, maintaining longer spoken turns, participating in interaction, opening conversations and closing them.
- *Pragmatic competence*. This enables second language speakers to use their linguistic resources to convey and interpret meanings in real situations, including those where they encounter problems due to gaps in their knowledge.
- *Sociolinguistic competence*. This consists primarily of knowledge of how to use language appropriately in social situations, e.g., conveying suitable degrees of formality, directness and so on.
- *Sociocultural competence*. This includes awareness of the cultural knowledge and assumptions that affect the exchange of meanings and may lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

This expanded view of communication broadens the scope of language teaching and takes it well beyond narrower linguistic concerns.

What insights does CLT offer into the learning experiences that might take learners towards their goals?

As well as this extended notion of the goals of language teaching, CLT also works within a broader framework for designing the experiences that can facilitate learning. This framework can be usefully described in terms of the distinction between ‘analytic’ and ‘experiential’ dimensions of learning (analysed in detail by Stern, 1992).

The analytic dimension in CLT

The analytic dimension of language teaching dominated most widely-used approaches before CLT. Sometimes the learners themselves are involved in analyzing the language (e.g. in the grammar-translation approaches). In the more active, practice-oriented approaches which superseded grammar-translation in many contexts, the learners practise language items which have been isolated as discrete ‘part-skills’ by the teacher and sequenced into a teaching

syllabus. The learners practise the items until they can be produced as automatically as possible and later engage in ‘whole-task’ practice, where they integrate the separate items in order to communicate. These stages underlie the familiar ‘PPP’ (Presentation – Practice – Production) sequence described in many teachers’ handbooks. One of the main contributions of the early work in CLT was to expand this analytic dimension by adding a functional-communicative element, so that learners are more aware of the functional and social aspects of the language they are practising. For example, they may carry out a controlled pair-work activity in which they ‘make suggestions’ in various situations and later engage in a less controlled role play based on a similar situation. In this analytic dimension of learning, CLT emphasizes the need to relate forms to meanings, both for motivational reasons and to establish the form-meaning connections that are a necessary basis for communication (see for example Ur, 2012, on ways to achieve this in grammar teaching).

The experiential dimension in CLT

The skill-learning model is now joined by a view of learning as a process of holistic development, which occurs when students use language for communication. Studies of second language learning in natural settings as well as in classrooms have shown how, through participating in communicative language use such as reading and oral interaction, learners not only consolidate their capacity to use their existing knowledge of the language but actually extend this knowledge. Studies of learners’ ‘interlanguage’ (surveyed for example in Lightbown & Spada, 2013 and Littlewood, 1984) highlight some of the internal processes by which this takes place. Table 1 (adapted from Stern, 1992) compares some of the features of the two dimensions:

Table 1

Analytic and experiential dimensions in language learning and teaching

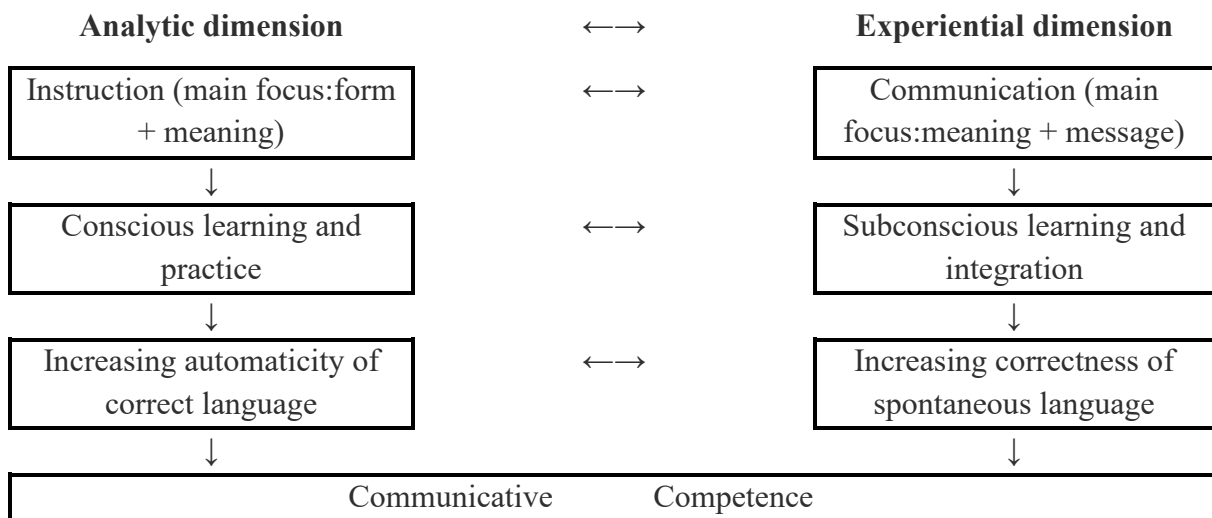
Analytic dimension	←↔→	Experiential dimension
Focus is on learning language as discrete items.	←↔→	Focus is on using language for communication.
Learning and teaching are organised around discrete language patterns and vocabulary.	←↔→	Learning and teaching are organised around communication e.g. tasks.
Language is often experienced without a context (i.e. is ‘decontextualised’).	←↔→	Language is experienced in the context of meaning and communication.
Controlled practice of language patterns is important.	←↔→	Communicative use of language is important.
Students aim to produce formally correct sentences.	←↔→	Students aim to achieve communicative outcomes.
Accuracy is very important.	←↔→	Fluency is very important.
Feedback focuses on form (e.g. through error correction).	←↔→	Feedback focuses on meaning (formal errors are less important).

Reading and writing are emphasised.	←↔→	Speaking is given at least as much time as reading and writing.
Activity tends to be teacher-centred.	←↔→	Activity tends to be student-centred.
There is a lot of whole-class teaching.	←↔→	There is a lot of pair or group work.

The complementary roles of the two dimensions in contributing to communicative competence may be represented as in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Two dimensions of learning and teaching in CLT



The two dimensions are at two ends of a continuum and most specific learning activities will have features of each, to varying degrees. For example, in what will be called ‘communicative language practice’ in the following section, learners engage in communication but with pre-taught forms. On the other hand, during ‘authentic communication’, they may sometimes focus analytically on specific forms which cause difficulties.

What insights does CLT offer into the pedagogy that can facilitate these learning experiences?

When CLT was first introduced, it was similar to the methods that preceded it in the sense that it was delivered to teachers across the world as a ‘package’ of principles and techniques which they should implement but not question. After years of experience, as Hiep (2007) notes, teachers in many parts of the world came to reject CLT as a ‘fixed package’ but still accept ‘the spirit of CLT’, which emphasizes that learning happens best ‘when classroom practices are made real and meaningful to learners’ and that this learning should make learners ‘able to use the language effectively for their communicative needs’. In other words, learning needs to fulfil two all-important criteria:

- it should be engage learners as deeply and personally as possible
- it should be oriented towards the goal of communicative competence.

Learning should engage learners as deeply and personally as possible

Four strands of engagement are sometimes distinguished in classroom learning (see Philp & Duchesne, 2016):

- cognitive engagement, e.g. sustained attention, mental effort, self-regulation;
- behavioural engagement, e.g. time on task, participation;
- emotional engagement, e.g. motivated involvement;
- social engagement, e.g. when learners listen and provide feedback to one another.

These strands are closely intertwined in practice (e.g. increased social engagement supports the other three strands) and teachers have a wide range of pedagogical strategies at their disposal for implementing them, for example by increasing the elements of:

- personalization and authenticity: designing activities which are related to students' own selves and interests;
- emotional and intellectual safety: creating an environment where students feel free to take risks;
- challenge: offering students an acceptable degree of challenge;
- autonomy: letting students feel they have choices and independence;
- novelty and variety: introducing elements of the unusual or unexpected;
- relatedness: furthering a sense of cooperation and social connection between students.

The above factors involve personal feelings and students will respond to them differently. However, teachers can make efforts to influence them for specific groups of students through the ways that they select, design or adapt texts and activities.

Learning should be oriented towards the goal of communicative competence.

This second condition does not mean that every activity in the classroom should engage learners in real communication (as was often assumed in the early years of CLT) but that the role and value of each activity is evaluated according to how it *contributes* to learners' ability to engage in real communication (i.e. their communicative competence). Some activities may involve actual communication (or 'whole task practice' as discussed earlier) but some may focus on separate aspects of communication, such as structures, vocabulary or pronunciation (the 'part-skills' of communication). An important temptation to avoid is that we sometimes attach so much attention to the part-skills that practice in actual communication is neglected.

Over the years, as teachers have searched for a single 'right method', they have devised a wide range of techniques for teaching specific objectives and skills. With CLT, they have also gained a lot of experience in designing activities which involve communication. How can we best incorporate these various kinds of activity into a single methodology for teaching English? Here we will look at one framework which has proved useful to many teachers. The framework

is based on the distinction made earlier between ‘analytic’ and ‘experiential’ learning activities. Activities are ranged along a continuum, so the borderline between different types of activity is not clearly defined. Also, individual learners, even within the same class, may experience the same activity in different ways.

Figure 2

The ‘communicative continuum’ as a basis for CLT pedagogy

Analytic Learning		←	→	Experiential Learning	
1	2	3	4	5	
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication	
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, inductive ‘discovery’ and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. describing visuals or situational language practice (‘questions and answers’)	Practising pre-taught language but in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information gap activities or ‘personalised’ questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language but with some degree of unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion	
Focus on form		←	→	Focus on meaning	

The framework is structured around five main categories of activity. They form a continuum and there is not strict division between them. Indeed, the same activity may be interpreted differently by differently by different learners, even within the same class.

1. At the extreme left of the diagram, *non-communicative learning* involves the strongest focus on form. It includes, for example, grammar exercises, substitution drills and pronunciation drills.
2. As we move to the right into column 2, *pre-communicative language practice* still focuses primarily on formal features but is also oriented towards meaning. An example of this is the familiar ‘question-and-answer’ practice, in which the teacher asks questions (e.g. about a text, picture or situation) to which everyone knows the answer,

e.g. ‘Who is sitting next to John?’ and so on. Students are not communicating new information but they have to pay attention to the meaning of the words.

3. With communicative language practice in column 3, we come to activities in which learners still work with a predictable range of language but use it to convey information. These include, for example, information-gap activities in which learners share information to complete a table, compare two pictures to discover differences, questionnaire activities in which learners gather information from classmates, or map-based activities which require learners to follow a route or find a location.
4. In structured communication, the main focus moves to the communication of meanings but the teacher has carefully structured the situation to ensure that the learners can cope with it with their existing resources, including perhaps what they have recently used in more form-focussed work. This category includes more complex information-exchange activities or structured role-playing tasks. The example below is designed by Ur (2012). It develops students’ ability to use the future tense but in other respects the language that emerges is not predictable:

The World Tomorrow

Students are asked to write down a list of changes they expect to see in the world by a date 50 years in the future. For example:

We will have a working day of four hours.
Every home will have a video telephone.
People will live to be 100 years old or more.

They may be told to write as many ideas as possible in the time given or they may be asked to write ideas for a particular topic-area (e.g. education, sport, fashion, technology, etc.).

The ideas are then read out and discussed. Those that most of the class agree with may be written up on the board.

Variations:

In groups, students try to sort their predictions into ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ ones.

Later, students may choose predictions that appeal to them and use them as the topic for a short essay.

5. Finally, at the extreme right of the continuum, *authentic communication* comprises activities in which there is the strongest focus on the communication of messages and in which the language needed is unpredictable, such as using language for discussion, problem-solving and content-based tasks. These activities may develop into larger scale projects and contribute to students’ personal and interpersonal development. Here is an example from Ribé & Vidal (1993):

Designing an alternative world

1 Students and teachers brainstorm aspects of the environment they like and those they would like to see improved. These may include changes to the geographical setting, nature, animal-life, housing, society, family, leisure activities, politics, etc.

2 Students are put into groups according to common interests. The groups identify the language and information they need. The students carry out individual and group research on the selected topics. The students discuss aspects of this ‘Alternative reality’ and then report back. They decide on the different ways (stories, recordings, games, etc.) to link all the research and present the final product.

3 Students present the topic and evaluate the activity.

Observational classroom studies (e.g. Deng & Carless, 2009) suggest that many teachers use predominantly activities from columns 1 and 2. Those teachers who are eager to extend their repertoire in CLT may use the framework as a ‘map’ of the landscape and gradually include more of the activities in column 3 (where they are still controlled by the teacher) and then move into columns 4 and 5 (where there is greater independence, creativity and autonomy). As they gain experience (or with more advanced learners), they may increase the proportion of activities that involve structured and authentic communication. But they will usually continue to use activities from columns 1 – 3, either to prepare learners for ‘communicative tasks’ or to remedy gaps that have emerged.

Task-based and task-supported language learning

A lot of current discussion within the field of CLT focuses on ‘task-based language teaching’ (TBLT) or ‘task-supported language teaching’ (TSLT). There is a lot of debate about the precise definition of a ‘task’ but in essence it is a learning activity in which learners use *their own language* (not simply regurgitating textbook language), in a recognizable *context of communication* (which is related to the ‘real world’), for a *communicative purpose* (which goes beyond practising language for its own sake), in order to *achieve an outcome* (which is the measure of success). Here is a simple task intended for elementary level students:

My best friend

Students work in groups of four or five. Each student prepares a short description of his or her best friend. Through question and answer, students find out what each other’s best friend looks like and whether there are any similarities between them. They then listen to the teacher describing two or three of his or her friends. They complete a table with key characteristics and, from a display of photographs, identify which persons the teacher has described.

In the continuum presented in Figure 2, tasks would be classified as ‘authentic communication’ or ‘structured communication’, depending on the degree of free expression of meanings involved. They connect the learners with the world outside the classroom and motivate them

to participate. They also connect the learners with the specific elements of language that they need in order to communicate, not only in the specific task but also in other situations. These may include communicative functions such as ‘describing appearance’, vocabulary items such as ‘eyes’ and ‘glasses’, and grammatical structures such as ‘possessive adjectives’. These specific elements are often called ‘objectives’.

In the pure (or ‘strong’) version of (TBLT), a learning sequence might begin when students are asked to perform a task with language they already know and with the use of communication strategies (e.g. paraphrase) to fill any gaps. As they communicate, they become aware of gaps in their knowledge and see the need for new language. The teacher later helps them to learn this language through more controlled practice activities. This may lead to the students performing the task again or performing a task which is different but requires similar language and skills.

In *task-supported* language teaching (TSLT), the sequence is different. As in pure TBLT, the teacher first designs the task. But then he or she analyses in advance the language that students might need – but have not yet learnt – in order to carry it out. After the learners have practised this language, they carry out the task itself. The task thus helps the students to integrate the new language into their communicative competence and also to link it to real communication. TSLT is similar to the familiar ‘PPP’ approach (Presentation, Practice, and then Production) in which the final ‘production’ stage is realized through ‘tasks’ as defined above.

In general, the strong version of *task-based* language teaching has proven most successful with intermediate and advanced learners, who have sufficient language to attempt the tasks with some degree of success even without pre-teaching. In most elementary and secondary school contexts, it is *task-supported* language teaching that has proven more accessible to teachers and learners. TBLT remains a possibility, however, as demonstrated by the study of Nguyen, Newton & Crabbe (2015), who found that many learners in an (elite) Vietnamese secondary school preferred to carry out tasks without pre-teaching, because they felt that pre-teaching hindered their ability to create their own ideas.

Teachers do not need to make a categorical choice between TBLT and TSLT. They can use the two approaches alternately, or experiment with different degrees of pre-task preparation, and seek the most suitable balance for themselves, their students and their specific context.

What have been the experiences with CLT in specific contexts around the world?

CLT had its origin in Western countries, often with small classes in favorable teaching conditions. In other contexts it has met challenges of implementation, especially in primary and secondary schools with large classes and limited resources. For example, Jeon (2009) describes the ‘drastic change’ that Korean teachers were expected to implement when CLT was introduced. It involved:

- emphasizing communicative competence rather than only linguistic competence;
- moving from teacher-fronted to learner-centred classes;

- changing the teacher's role from lecturer to facilitator;
- working with textbooks which focus on communicative situations rather than language based on sentence examples:
- setting the unit of analysis at the discourse level rather than the sentence level.

In China, according to Wang (2007), teachers were suddenly expected to:

- develop new practical skills for classroom teaching;
- change how they evaluate students;
- develop the ability to adapt textbooks;
- use modern technology;
- improve their own language proficiency;
- change their conception of their own role from being a transmitter of knowledge to being a multi-role educator;
- change their conception of language learning from one based on knowledge-acquisition to one based on the holistic development of competence.

Butler (2011) classifies these challenges neatly as conceptual constraints (e.g., conflicts with local values and misconceptions regarding CLT/TBLT), classroom-level constraints (e.g., various student and teacher-related factors, classroom management practices, and resource availability), and societal-institutional level constraints (e.g., curricula and examination systems). Similar factors are highlighted by Lai, 2015 and Littlewood, 2007.

As Butler's classification suggests, in addition to challenges of practical implementation, there has often been confusion at the conceptual level. Some of this confusion was inherent from the outset. CLT's roots in functional accounts of language leads teachers to give importance to the functions of language but otherwise lets them continue to organize teaching within the familiar 'Presentation – Practice – Production' framework. On the other hand, CLT's roots in psycholinguistics and learning theory leads them to a new, unfamiliar framework in which communication is not only the goal of learning but also the main means by which learning takes places. These are sometimes called the 'weak version' and the 'strong version' of CLT respectively.

In many cases the challenges and uncertainties described above have caused teachers to reject official CLT policies. For example, Hu (2004, p. 43) found in his survey that 'the intensive top-down promotion of CLT notwithstanding, pedagogical practices in many Chinese classrooms have not changed fundamentally.' In South Korea, Shim & Baik (2004, p. 246) state that many teachers 'write up reports that comply with government recommendations while continuing to practise examination-oriented classroom instruction.' But many teachers have responded to the introduction of CLT in more creative ways by adapting the ideas of CLT to suit their own practice. In Hong Kong, for example, Carless (2004) observed that many teachers reinterpret the use of communicative tasks as 'contextualised practice' rather than activities in which learners negotiate meaning independently of the teacher. Rao (1996) observes how some teachers in China reconcile the traditional approach and CLT by accepting

CLT as a reference framework but placing traditional Chinese elements next to it in an equal relationship. Zheng & Adamson (2003) show how a secondary school teacher of English in China ‘reconciles his pedagogy with the innovative methodology in a context constrained by examination requirements and the pressure of time’ (p. 323) by ‘expanding his repertoire rather than rejecting previous approaches’ (p. 335). He maintains many traditional elements, such as his own role as a knowledge transmitter, the provision of grammatical explanations, and the use of memorization techniques and pattern drills. However, he integrates new ideas into his pedagogy by including more interaction and more creative responses from the students in his classes, ‘usually in the context provided by the textbook, but sometimes in contexts derived from the students’ personal experience’ (p. 331).

Conclusion: CLT in the context of ‘postmethod language pedagogy’

In its early days CLT was widely regarded as a new and unquestionable orthodoxy. As Morrow & Johnson (1983) put it with reference to a seminal conference that they organized in 1978, in those days ‘functional syllabuses [on which early CLT courses were based] seemed to offer an automatic solution to all the problems of language teaching’ (p. 4). As a package of ideas and techniques, CLT was exported around the world with the support of the ELT industry (textbooks, advisors, training courses, native-speaker teachers, and so on). Bax (2003) writes of the ‘CLT attitude’ that accompanied this endeavour: ‘assume and insist that CLT is the whole and complete solution to language learning; assume that no other method could be any good; ignore people’s own views of who they are and what they want; neglect and ignore all aspects of the local context as being irrelevant’ (p. 280).

The interpretations and responses described in the previous section illustrate how, as the examples in Duff (2014) also show, the term ‘CLT’ is used to describe a wide range of practices and principles. This echoes the view of Richards (2006) that CLT is ‘a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals’ (p. 22) but does not correspond to any single set of practices. Dörnyei (2013) uses the term ‘principled communicative approach’ to characterize CLT as most teachers now seek to implement it. CLT thus merges increasingly with current ideas which argue in favour of a ‘postmethod pedagogy’, which rejects traditional notions that there are fixed ‘set methods’ (see for example Kumaravadivelu 1994, 2003, 2006).

The ‘CLT attitude’ described by Bax corresponds to early conceptions of globalization and modernization as unidirectional processes in which ideas and forms are transmitted from centre to periphery and, in the words of the social anthropologist Hannerz (1992), ‘when the centre speaks, the periphery listens, and mostly does not talk back’ (p. 219). Gradually, this unidirectional conception has been overtaken by one in which ‘inflowing cultural forms and meanings [meet] existing local forms and meanings’ and the resulting ‘creative mixture of “global” elements with local meanings and cultural forms’ leads to innovation and diversity (Schuerkens, 2004, p. 19 and p. 23). Schuerkens characterizes this as a ‘cosmopolitan conversation of humankind’ (p. 15) in which all participants have a voice. As we continue to move further through the era of globalization, perhaps the most valuable contribution of CLT is to act not as a specific set of practices and ideas but as a transnational ‘ideoscape’ (Apparudai,

1996; Holton, 2005), that is, as an *ideational landscape* which provides a location for deepening and extending our ‘cosmopolitan conversation’ about second language pedagogy.

To give meaningful direction to this conversation, Littlewood & Wang (2022) suggest structuring it around three major principles which are fundamental to all second language learning:

- Learning comes from engagement. (It is only through engagement that individuals connect with learning opportunities)
- Language must be memorized (Otherwise new material will not be available for use beyond the immediate situation of learning)
- Language learning must serve the requirements of communication. (For most people, that is the main source of their motivation.)

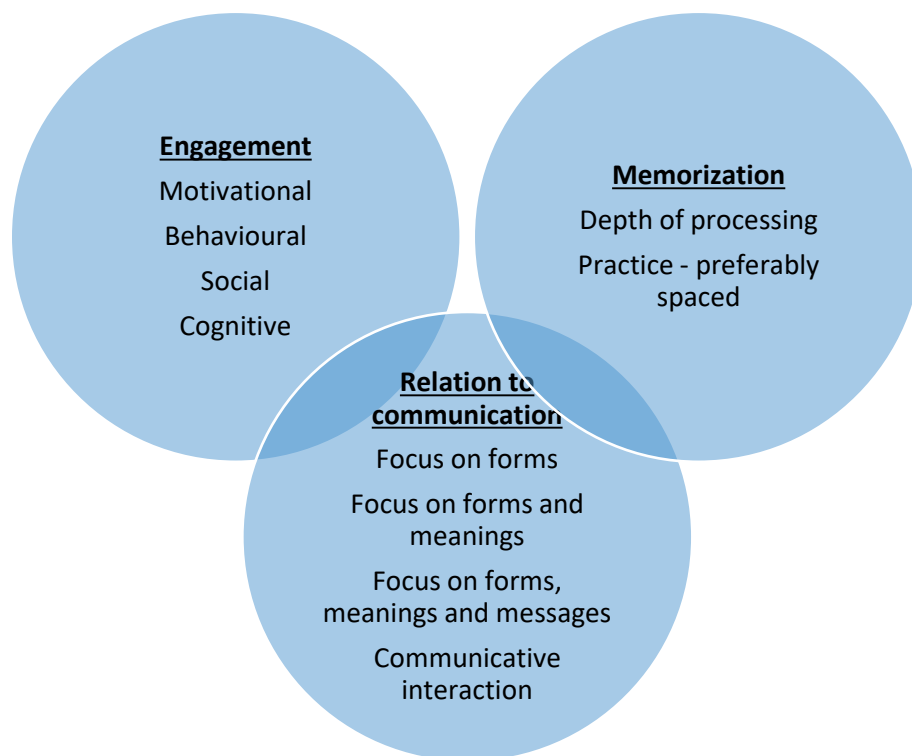
These three major principles govern every moment of our teaching: we constantly need to consider (a) the extent and nature of our students’ engagement, (b) the measures we and they can take to strengthen memorization, and (c) the relationship of classroom activities to the goal of using language for communication. Each principle is simple enough to guide our practice on a moment-by moment basis but also sufficiently generative to stimulate creativity and innovation.

Within each of these major principles, Littlewood & Wang propose between two and four ‘dimensions’, which focus on strategies for implementation. Teachers endeavor to choose specific strategies which are sensitive to the specific context in which they teach. The decisions which they take along these dimensions are thus the essential link between the theoretical principles and classroom practice.

The principles and related dimensions are represented in Figure 3:

Figure 3

Principles and dimensions in classroom language teaching



Conclusion

As we continue to move further through the era of globalization, perhaps the most valuable contribution of CLT is to act not as a specific set of practices and ideas but as a transnational ‘ideoscape’ (Apparudai, 1996; Holton, 2005), that is, as an *ideational landscape* which provides a location for deepening and extending the ‘cosmopolitan conversation’ about second language pedagogy. Every teacher will have his or her own views, based on experience, about what topics should have priority in this conversation. Here are just three:

We should examine systematically the optimal combinations of analytic and experiential strategies.

Many of the most significant strategic decisions that classroom teachers have to make concern the complementary functions of analytic and experiential strategies. This issue is at the heart of the distinction between the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ versions of CLT discussed above (the latter affirming that analytic learning is not necessary) and is also central to considering the respective roles of accuracy-based and fluency-based activities. More recently, much research has addressed the role that form-focused instruction plays in facilitating language learning and the kinds of form-focussed instruction that are of most benefit in particular circumstances. The ‘communicative continuum’ mentioned above proposes a methodological framework for moving between analytic (non-communicative and pre-communicative) activities to experiential activities (structured and authentic communication).

The optimal balance between different kinds of activity from the analytic – experiential continuum remains very much an area for individual intuition and experimentation. It is also an area in which research can seek to propose new possibilities and investigate their likely effects on learning.

We should explore ways to deepen and personalize the content of L2 communication in the classroom.

Much of the language use that occurs in the communication-oriented language classroom does not, as a teacher interviewed by Gong & Holliday (2013) puts it, ‘touch the hearts of the students’. Gong & Holliday report on how students in a remote village in rural China were asked to talk about their weekend activities through examples such as ‘go to see a movie, go to an art museum, or go to piano lessons in a coaching school’. None of these opportunities existed in their lives and, not surprisingly, the students had nothing to talk about.

Hanauer (2012) writes eloquently of the need to put the ‘living, thinking, experiencing and feeling person at the centre of the language learning process’ and ‘make language learning a personally contextualized, meaningful activity for the learner’ (p. 106). The exploration of more strategies for doing this is a key task for the future of CLT. Hanauer himself proposes procedures for incorporating poetry writing. Kim (2013) uses literature-based instruction to connect language learning with the real-life experiences of the learners. Gong & Holliday (2013) emphasize the need to base tasks on content which is relevant to learners’ lives and interests and which will help them become ‘multicultural citizens’ who can communicate about their own and other cultures and express their own views. Other proposals include linking language development to other subject content, developing project work, and using drama techniques. The ‘three generations of tasks’ described by Ribé & Vidal (1993) offer a possible framework for deepening task engagement: the first ‘generation’ focuses only on communicative development, the second on communicative and cognitive development, and the third adds the dimension of global personality development. Engagement may also be encouraged through collaborative learning techniques which increase learners’ responsibility for contributing to group interaction (McCafferty, Jacobs & DaSilva Iddings, 2006). Zhang & Head (2010) report on a project in which a teacher was able to increase students’ sense of personal engagement by including them in joint decision-making about the topics and activities in their course. In the context of more controlled language use, there is a range of techniques for personalizing practice by relating it to students’ own identity (Griffiths & Keohane, 2000). All of these proposals provide a basis for further widening the options at teachers’ disposal.

We should continue to explore the role of the learners’ mother tongue in the language classroom

A practical issue that engages teachers’ decision-making in the classroom almost constantly is the role (if any) that they should accord to the students’ mother tongue (see for example Littlewood & Yu, 2011 and Hall & Cook, 2012 for discussions of the issues). The ‘monolingual principle’ - that only the target language should be used - has been enshrined in many of the

methodological proposals that have influenced language teaching over the last century and in many countries it is official policy to use the mother tongue only as a last resort.

The monolingual principle is now questioned on a number of grounds. Few people would disagree that, since the classroom is the only source of input for many students, the overriding aim should be to establish the target language as the main medium of communication. To achieve this aim, however, they also acknowledge that the mother tongue can be a major resource. At the affective level it can provide psychological reassurance. In terms of teaching strategies, it opens up a wide range of options at all stages. At the presentation stage, for example, it can convey meaning efficiently and enable students to progress more quickly to the stages of internalization and active use. At the practice stage, it can provide effective stimuli for students to use and expand their full foreign language competence. At the production stage, it can help to create contexts where the foreign language has a meaningful role, e.g. as students brainstorm ideas for a story in the security of their mother tongue and later write it in the foreign language. In ways such as these, the mother tongue can serve as a natural bridge between the two languages, offer a sense of ownership over learning, and help satisfy the need to personalize communication. There must be a clear policy for its use, however, to ensure that it does not take on a dominant role.

This is only a small sample of areas where research is needed. Indeed, within the broad ‘postmethod’ definition of CLT that has now emerged, one may say that there is no distinction between research into CLT and all other research that sets out to further an engaging, communication-oriented approach to language teaching.

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