

COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING GRAMMAR IN
EFL CLASSES

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Abstract: *It looks like a serious difficulty to teach EFL for communication in a francophone nation in general and to teach its grammar for communication in particular. It seems like a good idea to teach the four skills for communication. It is worth considering, however, how educators can transform grammar instruction—which is typically viewed as a collection of rules to follow in order to construct proper sentences—into a communicative art form. In order to make standard English grammar instruction in EFL classes in Uzbekistan more dynamic and fruitful, this research seeks to illustrate the benefits of implementing the communicative approach.*

Annotatsiya: *Umuman frankofon millatida muloqot qilish uchun Ingliz tilini Xorijiy til sifatida o'rgatish va xususan muloqot uchun tilning grammatikasini o'rgatish jiddiy qiyinchilik tug'diradi. Muloqot uchun to'rtta ko'nikmani shakllantirishning o'zi yetarliddek ko'rinsada, biroq, o'qituvchilar grammatik ta'limni (ya'ni to'g'ri jummalarni qurish uchun amal qilish kerak bo'lgan qoidalar to'plami sifatida qaraladigan ta'limni) qanday qilib kommunikativ san'at shakliga aylantirishi mumkinligini ko'rib chiqishlari kerak. O'zbekistonda ingliz tili darslarida standart ingliz tili grammatikasini o'qitishni yanada dinamik va samarali qilish maqsadida ushbu tadqiqot kommunikativ yondashuvni tatbiq etishning afzalliklarini ko'rsatishga harakat qiladi.*

Key words: *communication, grammar teaching, communicative competence, traditional ethnocentric views, transversal*

Teaching EFL for communication in a francophone country in general and teaching its grammar for communication is apparently a real challenge. Teaching the four skills for communicative purpose looks like a plausible idea. But how can teachers make grammar teaching traditionally considered as a set of rules to apply to form correct sentences communicative, deserves a close attention. For this purpose, this paper aims to highlight the advantages of using the communicative approach in the traditional English grammar teaching in EFL classes in Uzbekistan so as to make it more interactive and productive. In fact, though many people, mainly some English practitioners misunderstand the term communicative language teaching (CLT), thinking that students can speak the language without bothering to follow any rules, many also believe that this approach stands the chance to provide students with necessary skills that would make them communicatively efficient.

Richards (2006) opined that “CLT can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kind of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom”. In other words, it means promoting the teaching of communicative competence which is nothing but giving students the means to use language appropriately, both receptively and productively. Richards and Rogers (2010) went further to highlight that “language learning is best served when students are interacting, completing a task, learning content or resolving real life issues as the goal of language is to develop communicative competence”. What is then the place and role of grammar in this approach that views language as an instrument for communication?

Therefore, this study has used the following research questions as sign-posts.

1. What are the challenges the teaching of grammar has been currently facing in EFL classes in Uzbekistan?

2. How far can the teaching of communicative grammar improve the teaching of EFL for learners' effective language use in real life?

This paper will try to address the issue by revising the current situation of grammar teaching in EFL classes in Uzbekistan so as to help teachers put focus on

communication related to the realistic use of language in real life situations. The main purpose is to raise trained and untrained teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching grammar within context, using communicative processes in a holistic view of EFL learning.

The international dimension of the English language has given EFL teaching a more potentially significant role that goes beyond the traditional ethnocentric views of the language. Therefore, the challenge of using this language as a tool that opens windows to the world and to many opportunities has given a new thrive to its teaching/ learning even in a country like Uzbekistan where it is used as a foreign language. In this part of the world, though some efforts have been made to make the teaching/learning of the language relevant to the needs of the country and meet up with the current challenges, many things remain to be done at the classroom level. Lack of adequate materials such as textbooks, audio-tapes, video-tapes and libraries is compounded by lack of qualified teachers, able to exercise critical judgment of innovations in language teaching. Whether in rural or urban areas, large size class impacts negatively on the quality of the teaching/learning and assessment processes. Mechanical tests for a long time have pervaded the system and usually deal with reading comprehension activities, writing and grammar tests while speaking and listening are simply ignored. In their quest to remedy this bleak situation, the educational authorities in the early nineties have adopted a learner-centered teaching methodology: the Competency-Based Approach (CBA). Let us shed some light on this new approach being implemented for some years now.

The approach bears great expectations for a whole society which, at some time, has felt the need to adapt its educational system to the global changing economic environment, characterized by high demands on the individual, on peoples and on societies. The CBA focuses on the development of practical life-skills in the learners across all the subjects taught in the school. Teaching in the new approach takes place through three main groups of competencies which are the transversal, the tran-disciplinary and the disciplinary competencies. In English for example, there are three basic disciplinary competencies to develop in learners

through the teaching/learning/evaluation processes. The main purpose is that: Learners should be able to communicate orally in English (speaking skill); Learners should be able to make their personal opinions about texts or messages they have read or listened to (reading and listening skills); Learners should be able to write texts of varied technical types and functions. (Writing skills) [DIP, 2010] The main objective of this program is to link classroom experience to the learners' socio cultural environment so as to motivate them to become true agents of change and development. It aims at responding to the needs of the country while providing generic competencies including skills, values and attitudes to all learners. This program has been putting extra burden on teachers for it requires an acute imagination and creativity difficult to face by an untrained teacher because it assigns him a new profile just as complex as diverse.

Obviously, the role of the EFL teacher is more than ever daunting in this era of CBA. These multiple demands on him/her require adequate training in many areas including updated pedagogical issues in language teaching/learning. However, it is clearly demonstrated in this field, that no program can be effective if capacities are not built in teachers to promote new ways of performing their professional roles. Hence, the necessity of finding new ways of teaching grammar so as to promote communication to meet the current requirement. Some training sessions mentored by the researcher have started introducing this approach on her courses so as to create in teachers the awareness that new ways should be found to teach grammar in context. Many researchers and language educators have highlighted the issue by providing various views that need scrutiny.

The role of grammar in language teaching has always constituted a very important and debated issue mainly in foreign language context. Traditionally, grammar was considered as prescriptive, that is by telling people what rules they should know and how they should speak and write and this includes many aspects of linguistic knowledge. But the teaching of grammar for the past decades has undergone a substantial change in people's traditional attitudes and approaches. Today, more and more teachers as Celce-Murcia (1991, p. 460) have begun to pay

attention to the spoken English and discourse structure, making out between language use and language usage. As for Lock (1997, p.267) he identified some of the dichotomies that arise whenever dealing with grammar teaching, which are forms versus function, forms versus meaning, fluency versus accuracy, meaning-based instruction versus form-based instruction, and the one that denies grammar teaching, that is communication versus grammar. From these dichotomies, Newby (2003) managed to sort things out by presenting three general ways of approaching grammar throughout ELT history: traditional grammar teaching, communicative language teaching and post-communicative approaches. Let's highlight each of these approaches.

Traditional Grammar Teaching According to Doughty and Williams (1998), traditional grammar focuses on the learning of technical vocabulary for nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives; learners are taught grammatical rules to master sentence patterns. It means at classroom level that, a teacher explicitly presents to students a grammar rule followed by a practice exercise to apply the rule. The chance of drawing an incorrect form of the language is then minimized. Ellis (1995) and Larsen-Freeman (1991) discovered that this type of language learning, despite its facilitative effects stands less chance of impacting on language acquisition whereas for Ulrich (1994) the teaching of grammar should include three components: language structure, meaning and use. In fact, an important characteristic of traditional language teaching is that not much or even no emphasis is put on learners' communicative needs in real life situations but rather on their classroom immediate needs or just to satisfy exams demand. In Uzbekistan, the classroom teaching has unfortunately been more exam-oriented than catering for students meaningful practice. As a result, learners often have difficulty using what they have learned beyond the classroom setting. It is for this reason that Skehan (1996) is of the view that though mechanical practice may be of little help to effective grammar use, precise focus on a particular form can benefit students. However, it seems wise not to radically discard the traditional methodology but to

combine it with the new communicative teaching methodology for all they can offer the CBA in a roundabout way.

The CLT which appeared in the eighties has changed the world of foreign language teaching and has gone beyond linguistic theories. Richards (2006, p.23) contends that “It describes a set of general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching. A new approach that has evolved as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed.” Lopez & Agullo (2013) argued that the main objective of CLT is to teach communicative competence, which includes the knowledge of the construction blocks of sentences (e.g. parts of speech, tenses), a teaching methodology which refers to some aspects of language such as making use of language for various purposes and functions, varying them in taking account of the setting and the audience for instance, differentiating between formal and informal, written and spoken discourse etc. Many researchers shed light on the issue of CLT and offered various enlightening views. In highlighting the key principles of CLT, Brown (2001) presents the following six characteristics.

Classroom goals refer to all the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic) of communicative competence.

Language techniques aim at involving learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language that leads to meaningful purposes.

There are two complementary principles that underlie communicative techniques: fluency and accuracy alternatively used by students, depending on the meaning of the communication.

Language in a CLT class is used productively and receptively, and in impromptu speeches in real life situations.

Students are the main actors in the building of their knowledge as opportunities and strategies are given to them to understand their learning styles and use them appropriately.

Teachers are no longer considered as the fountain or the only source of knowledge but have to play the role of facilitator and guide by encouraging students

to be responsible for their own learning through authentic interaction. These key principles are consistent with the (CBA), a socio-constructivism approach centered on the learner and which focuses on acquiring life-coping skills while developing the language to perform the skills. However, a “weak” and a “strong” version of CLT are classified by Ellis (2003). For him, the weak version considers that identified communicative competence components can be taught by providing learners with opportunities in skills integration programs, the main goal is learning the language for communicative purposes in and outside the classroom. A contrastive view reveals a strong version of CLT.

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