

**CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS IN PAKISTAN: A
REFLECTION**

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ABSTRACT

Language acquisition is one of the most spectacular and intriguing aspects of human development and the changing face of underlying principles of language project that language is a source for the creation of meaning rather than a set of rules. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has its beginnings in such principium. With its widespread implementation over the years, CLT across the world has undoubtedly facilitated the process of language acquisition particularly amongst the nonnative populace, however the issue of acceptance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a Western assumption in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, the proffering of age-old Grammar-Translation method by various EFL/ESL countries' didactic systems and the general misconceptions about the approach notably act as major barriers to its effective implementation.

The aim of this paper is to review the literature and reflect upon the plausibility of the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in the context of Pakistan essentially identifying the issues that could inhibit the successful application of the approach in English Language Classes.

Key Words: CLT; methodology ; EFL/ESL ; communicative competence; discourse

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Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching, an axiomatic approach of second language teaching methodology is a highly recognized and influential perspective that comprehensively incorporates various methods and approaches for teaching L2 communicatively. Language acquisition is one of the most spectacular and intriguing aspects of human development and the changing face of underlying principles of language project that language is a source for the creation of meaning rather than a set of rules. CLT has its beginnings in such principium. Richard and Rodgers (2001) state that, “the communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication” (p.159). The CLT is a prominent model in English Language teaching (ELT) that has been accepted by numerous applied linguists and teachers as one of the most effective approaches. Since its advent in Europe in the early 1970s and the subsequent development in the English Language Teaching, CLT has developed a number of phases with researchers bringing in the approach in various contexts. Their primary objective is the inculcating and raising of communicative competence in the second language learners. However, the acceptance and implementation of CLT in many countries has been far from universal especially in the developing states of South Asia where relatively new methodologies like CLT and TBL are less popular.

The aim of this paper is to review the literature and reflect upon the plausibility of the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in the context of Pakistan essentially identifying the issues that could inhibit the successful application of the approach at the Secondary School Level in English Language Classes.

1 Review of the Literature

1.1 An Overview of CLT:

Communicative Language Teaching is a prominent revolutionary language teaching approach based on the linguistic theory of communication competence. It originated in the 1970s within Europe and United States as a result of dissatisfaction with the Grammar Translation, Audiolingualism and the Situational methods of teaching. The traditional method in language teaching classrooms comprised of students learning vocabulary and grammar rules in the target language with great deal of time spent on translating the sentences. Drilling and repetition were

inherent features of the method. The learners, however, were unable to communicate well outside the classroom as their learning was based on rote memorization rather than an actual knowledge of the L2. The CLT approach which encompasses a multitude of approaches, advocates several language learning principles and draws from several learning teaching methods was devised by the British and American applied linguists of the time as they saw the need to focus on communicative potential of language with the emphasis on the learners' needs and individual affective factors. The status of CLT was enhanced by the Council of Europe which was extremely interested in the language needs of a rapidly increasing population of immigrants (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This eventually led to the development of Wilkins (1972) functional-notional syllabus based on the needs assessments of the European language learners and the prominent seminal document on Threshold Level English by Van EK (1975). The scope of CLT further extended during the 1970s as it became recognized as the approach that was essentially concerned with the concepts of communication, negotiation and interaction in a social context. The Council of Europe, Wilkins writings along with the works of linguists like Candlin, Widdowson and Brumfit gave a boost to CLT as a functional approach that was rapidly accepted by the British language teaching specialists, the curriculum development centers and the government. Meanwhile in the US, Hymes (1971) had coined the term "communicative competence" as a reaction to Chomsky's characterization of the linguistic competence of the ideal native speaker. Hymes' views were not unlike British linguists Firth and Halliday whose focus was on the language discourse and contexts, speech acts and functions (Nunan, 1988; Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

In the CLT approach the focus is on the learner and effective communication is sought. In addition to this, the meaning is given paramount importance. According to Larsen-Freeman (1986), the most distinct characteristic of CLT is that "almost every thing that is done is done with communicative intent" (p.132). In CLT, attention is given to fluency rather than accuracy and errors in using the language are acceptable. Learners are active participants in the language learning process, use of authentic materials is encouraged and negotiation of meaning can be accomplished by involving the learners to work in groups or pairs. The American linguist, Savignon (1991) emphasizes that communicative competence is the desired result of the language teaching and the main purpose of CLT is to develop learners' communication skills and

ability in their L2. Canale and Swain (1980) identified grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence as part of the communicative competence. The grammatical competence concerns the learner's knowledge and use of lexis, syntax and structures; the sociolinguistic competence represents the learner's ability to understand the pragmatic meanings of the utterances and the use of appropriate language in different social contexts. The discourse competence is the learner's capability of combining the grammatical forms and meanings appropriately to use in discourse patterns. The discourse could be spoken or written and encompasses nonverbal actions like facial expressions. The strategic competence relates to the learner's ability to master the verbal and nonverbal communicative strategies to compensate for lack of knowledge in the other three competencies. Savignon (2007) postulates that a classroom model of communicative competence involves Canale and Swain's components of competence. She asserts that CLT is not only concerned with oral communication but applies equally to written and reading discourse and does not in any way neglect the focus on cognitive processes and the understanding of rules of syntax, discourse and social aptness. Hedge (2002) in her manifestation of communicative competence, emphasizes on fluency as an essential part of the learners' competence. For her the smooth, unhesitant production of speech is of great concern in the language discourse.

Since its inception, CLT has attracted extensive researches, versions and different models like Howatt's (1984) "strong" and "weak" versions of CLT or Bachman's "Language Competence" (see Appendix A & B, respectively) and has been influenced by studies like Krashen's theory of Output Hypothesis however; the goal of the CLT, has remained the same - preparing the learners for real world communication by building their autonomy and communicative competence.

1.2 Teachers and Students' Roles and the Activities in the CLT Classrooms:

Communicative Language Teaching as a multifaceted approach entails a cluster of techniques and a variety of language with the emphasis on communicative, student-centered activities. The divergent CLT syllabus, unlike the traditional one is designed according to the needs of the students and is therefore quite flexible. Likewise, communicative activities in a CLT classroom aim to provide the students with ample opportunities to use the language productively with authentic and meaningful communication. The PPP advocate, Littlewood (1981) distinguishes between the major activities that take place during CLT. He believes there are the "functional

communication activities” such as the problem-solving activities (e.g. completing a map) or comparing a set of pictures or shapes are different from “social interaction activities” like dialogues, role-plays, skits and debates. Often in CLT, the classroom arrangement is nonstandard, there is no formal text, the grammar rules and structures are not primary, students interact with each other under the teachers’ supervision and the use of native language to an extent is acceptable. The students learn to communicate amongst themselves, simultaneously developing their speaking, reading and writing skills with minimal of teacher’s input. Some of the typical activities in CLT classrooms are:

- i. **Role-plays:** A role-play is an activity where the students assume the roles of a certain characters. They are given a fictitious role and collaborate to create a story or accomplish a task set by the teacher. These are examples of performance activities that are often transactional - where the students interact with their peers using their linguistic skills to carry out the act.
- ii. **Information-gap activities:** These are activities where the learners do not have all the information and they need to complete a task, for this they need to communicate with each other giving way to real life communication. These activities are very beneficial for speaking and reading practice as the tasks might include jigsaw reading texts, identifying missing shapes or reconstructing missing parts of stories. Thus, the use of grammar and vocabulary is in constant play.
- iii. **Discussions, debates and dialogues:** These are one of the most common and popular activities in the CLT classrooms where the learners are provided a platform to express their opinions, compete with each other and collaborate thereby employing all their language skills.
- iv. **Games:** These are an integral part of the communicative activities where students learn while having fun. Games like spot the difference in pictures and matching the cards or words, motivate the students to learn.

In the communicative approach of foreign language teaching the classrooms are learner-centered. The learners as active participants of the process are responsible for the successful or failed communication. They are motivated to build up their communicative competence with the help of tasks that are designed by the teacher according to the students’ needs. The teacher, on the

other hand, in this learning–teaching relationship is only the facilitator of the learning process rather than a dominating authority. However, this does not mean that the teachers' role is minimized instead the teacher has to be all the more apt in order to guide and manage the students along with providing them a comfortable classroom atmosphere as well as authentic teaching materials so as to assess their learning.

Breen and Candlin (1980) contend that the teachers are there to facilitate the process of the communication in the classroom amongst the learners, the texts and activities. For them the teachers act as researchers and contribute as learners in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities (Breen & Candlin cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The teachers in CLT classrooms usually avoid breaking down the communicative process by cross correction as this may affect the students' communication skills as well as their confidence. Littlewood (1981) asserts that the role of a teacher in CLT is that of a participant, language instructor, consultant when needed as well as a coordinator and manager of activities.

1.3 **Misconceptions about CLT:**

CLT emerged as an ELT approach in the West and evolved as one of the most extensively adopted methodologies around the world for ESL and EFL teaching contexts. However, the transfer of this methodology by the West is perceived by many as imposing of Western teaching ideas that are completely distinct from their local cultural, social, political and educational ideologies. The views and beliefs of the people, the sociocultural environment, the needs of the learners and the educational context are all determinants in the success or failure of a methodology. A particular context might not be ready for the introduction of an innovative approach like CLT for example Ellis (1994) found that the Vietnamese teachers were too dependent on the inherent traditional grammar-translation method, had little knowledge of the target culture and were therefore, reluctant to adopt the communicative approach in their classrooms (Ellis, 1996).

The major misconceptions about the CLT arise mainly from the differences in understanding and interpretation of the underlying characteristics of the CLT among the teachers and scholars. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the approach does not clearly map out a method or use a single technique. Hence, there is an element of ambiguity. Even though, it has been agreed upon that CLT as an effective approach emphasizes on communication in the target language and

communicative competence is the desired goal while learning, the misconceptions about it continue to make it a difficult methodology to accept and implement. Thompson (1996) postulates that there are four main misconceptions about CLT; the most common being that it does not focus on explicit grammar teaching and the core of all activities is communication with not much importance to form. This is not entirely true. The communicative approach urges that grammar can be taught to the students inductively and the learners must discover as well as recognize grammar and its forms when they have understood more about the language. The second misconception mentioned by Thompson (1996) that in CLT more attention is given to oral communication seems true to an extent, however he himself clarifies that communication in the language does not occur in speech only, the written and reading discourse remain an integral part of CLT. Besides, the needs assessment of the learners may show more demand for spoken discourse. One more misconception about CLT is that in order to learn the target linguistic system the learners must communicate by working in groups or pairs. Well, they are not forbidden to work individually! The joint activities actually help them to share ideas, work collaboratively and even offer the transfer of knowledge and communicative skills between the partners; thereby giving them more confidence. Hence, this process of scaffolding makes the conversation flow. The last misconception that CLT endorses is that it expects too much from the teachers. This element is factual so it is not a misconception. Even though, Thompson thinks that teachers must reevaluate themselves and some teachers lack the motivation to bring changes in their teaching methods; the fact is that CLT does make the teachers' role much more difficult. Generally, as a non-native speaker of the target language the teacher cannot always be a very skilled and proficient expert of the language. Some people also believe that CLT teachers tolerate errors. Hedge (2000) affirms that in a communicative approach errors are "seen as reflections of learners' stage of interlanguage development" (p.15). However, in reality the errors are only over looked by the teachers so that the communication process does not get hindered and are duly dealt with later on.

The misconceptions about CLT are a cause of worry and must be addressed as they might impede the process of CLT implementation in certain contexts but these misconceptions can not overshadow the usefulness and benefits of the approach.

2 The Application Of CLT In Pakistani Secondary School Classrooms

2.1 The Context of the Study:

English as an international language, a lingua franca is highly regarded and enjoys the status of being the most widely spoken language across the world. It is also used as an official language in some of the non-English speaking countries of the world such as Pakistan. Even though Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, all official work - the government documents, military communications, financial and business contracts; is in English. This is mainly because of the fact that Pakistan had been a British colony till 1947 and the post independence era still depicts the colonial influences. Nevertheless, the acquisition of English language is of highest importance in the Pakistani society at present. Job sector, media, education, finance and technology hence, all the fields of life are ruled by the dominant English language and people who are proficient in the language are considered to be the most modern, prestigious and sought after. A person's lack of proficiency in English is the most prevalent barrier in climbing up the job and social ladder. Rahman (2002) says that the urban population of Pakistan derives a sense of empowerment by acquiring the ability to read and write in English language. He stresses that the lack of English proficiency is the biggest hindrance for people in acquiring highly paid white collar jobs and the entry in into the 'elite cadre' of the society.

The Educational system of Pakistan is divided into different levels; the primary level from grades 1 to 5; the secondary level from grades 6 to 10(matriculation); the Intermediate level of grades 11 and 12 and the University level which leads to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The affairs of all educational institutions are in the hands of Ministry Of Education which is controlled by the government. Over the last three decades, there has been a mushrooming of private English medium schools in Pakistan and very few state-owned Urdu medium schools remain in service. In Pakistan, English is taught to all school levels and although it is not taught as a mandatory subject at the university level, the medium of instruction is English through and through. Despite the fact that English is taught as a compulsory subject to the young learners, the learners are not apt or fluent in it; this is really perplexing. One of the major reasons for this may be that the teaching and learning methods in Pakistan are strictly based on the Grammar Translation Method. In addition to this, there are many other dilemmas faced by the students and the instructors that are discussed further on in the paper.

Although officially English is a second language in Pakistan, it is not used very commonly by the people in everyday life; most learners do not have the access of the language outside the classroom. With the new millennium English became the most important language for communication. The educationists in Pakistan too, are trying to improve the educational system and things are changing albeit at a slow pace. With regards to English language teaching, CLT is an emerging teaching approach that is being used in Pakistan but only in certain private institutions and at the tertiary level. CLT as one of the most recent developments in ESL teaching methodology has yet to gain ground in the context of Pakistan.

2.2 **Issues In The Secondary Schools Context:**

For any new step or approach to be introduced in a particular context, the issues pertaining to it must be taken into consideration. In this case the problems are many and similar to those existing in the other countries of the developing world. One of the potent issues is that the learning-teaching methods in the secondary schools are typically traditional with the focus on the GTM. The instruction is teacher-centered, little attention is paid to communicative competence whilst the learners are not encouraged to think critically and analyze. They are at the receiving end whereas the teacher is the final authority. Chowdhury (2003) claims that a Pakistani teacher is the “authoritarian purveyor of knowledge” who is not to be questioned. In these classrooms, the lessons which are presented in a blend of L1 and L2 are quite often of 40-50 minutes in which the learners are required to memorize words, basic syntactical structures and although teachers do explain the workings of grammar in the text, the practice of the language at the end of a lesson is very short. It does not actually provide the learners with opportunities to listen to or speak in English thus, not giving them any chance of developing communicative skills in the L2. Furthermore, the grammar-translation syllabus offers no flexibility and does not include any sort of topics that involve creative thinking and writing. Mostly the subjects are taught and learnt from commercial text books, both foreign and locally developed, in a way that does not raise any interest in the concepts. There is no focus on building language awareness and the learning is more geared towards the passing of final examinations at the end of an academic year. There is an immense pressure on the students to succeed in the tests and exams for which students resort to rote memorization and cramming. The examinations do not comprise of any listening, reading

or speaking tests and are entirely based on testing written skills. The questions are based on comprehension passages, essay/letter writing, correction of grammar in sentences and the production of exact meanings for given words. The students depend too much on the material provided by the teachers and reproduce it in exams in order to score good grade; the utter shame is that they get good marks in doing so. This 'wash back' effect of exams, however, does not promote language learning (Jilani, 2009). The assessment system in Pakistan is obsolete and inept in assessing students' competence in the subject or else their linguistic potential.

Another problem in the English language learning faced by the pupils is the dearth of competent teachers. The teachers as non-native speakers of the language just pass on the learning they themselves had acquired within the GTM to their students. The teachers are instructed to follow the syllabus and are generally more interested in getting an overall good class result as it affects their chances of promotion or pay rise. They, unfortunately, do not have adequate knowledge of English and the lack of proper training intensifies the problem. The large class sizes also cause problems. Shamim (1996) implies that large classes are impractical for pair and group activity:

“(...) the learners in most school classes in Pakistan seem to work better when the source of control is external and imposed rather than internal and voluntary. Thus, it becomes very difficult for the teachers to use group work effectively in these large classes” (Shamim, 1996 cited in Brown, 2000:2).

In addition to these issues, the economic constraints, lack of resources and the redundant government policies all seem to degenerate the process of language learning.

2.3 The Implementation and Recommendations:

In Pakistan where English language acquisition has become imperative, there is a dire need to introduce a comprehensive methodology like CLT and despite so many barriers to it, the application of CLT is still attainable. The masses in Pakistan are gradually moving towards change; a change for the betterment of the society. The educationists are looking for reforms and changes in policy while undoubtedly; the teachers are trying to bring changes to the language learning process especially in the secondary school classrooms. The Pakistani English language teachers and learners are much more open to accepting ideas from the West without any cultural

inhibitions, unlike other Asian nations like the Vietnamese. Ellis affirms that in order to implement CLT in Asia the approach “needs to be both culturally attuned and culturally accepted” (Ellis, 1996 p.213). The acceptance of CLT would not face much opposition in this aspect but certainly it is not an easy task to execute it. It cannot just replace the outmoded Grammar Translation Method with a flick - the learners, the teachers, the institutions and the policy makers must work together to pave way for this interactive approach. The shift has to be unhurried and as a new beginning there must be a combination of both the GTM and CLT in the classrooms. A weak version of CLT would be more appropriate and practical in the Pakistani context. There are certainly going to be issues in the initial stages for both teachers and learners as the communicative approach is very different.

One of the concerns that is certain to arise is as Maley (1986) says that CLT “does not offer the teacher the security of the textbook” (p.90) and this sometimes unnerves the teacher as well as the students. The Pakistani language instructors and students are heavily dependent on the textbooks but this is a habit they really need to abandon. Moreover, at present there are no CLT books available that would be appropriate for the Pakistani context. The teachers must select and use authentic materials in the class and should introduce the practice of using multiple textbooks, newspapers and online materials that the learners could refer to. The teachers can encourage communicative tasks such as debates and discussions on a proposed topic and it may take learners quite a while to adapt to the active learning but the learning method would alter. The teachers must capitalize on such authentic classroom discourse and then form a flexible learner-centered curriculum. However, to execute all such approaches the teacher must be skilled and proficient in English and for this there must be emphasis on professional teacher training. The institutions must take necessary steps to ensure that the teachers get acquainted with latest studies in the area and attain the most modern skills and educational techniques so as to impart the best of knowledge to their learners. The teachers themselves must reflect upon and reevaluate their own teaching methods critically along with adopting a positive attitude towards the L2 teaching. For most teachers, a large class size poses the biggest problem in the language teaching as it bars them from catering to individual needs of the learners; however, they can turn this into an advantage in the CLT classroom. The more the number of students the more chances for them to interact and have meaningful communication; the students can be encouraged to work in pairs

if not in large groups or they could be divided into teams with a representative for each team. For a more communicative approach, teachers must focus more on students' English fluency and their compatibility of using the language in everyday life with a little less strictly enforced discipline in the classes. On the other hand, the learners will have to stop depending on the teachers spoon feeding them by taking responsibility for their own learning.

The assessment system in the secondary schools must be modified. Jilani (2009) talks in her paper about the negative wash back effect of the exams on the secondary schools students in Pakistan and says, "this examination system has mushroomed privately run exam preparation centers (popularly called 'coaching centers') and English language learning centers" from which the students hardly benefit (p.7). The government and private schools' administrations must take steps to change the examinations systems with the government's support. The administrative bodies in the schools should aim to be more flexible, helping the teachers to upgrade the learning process. By and large, the framework of the language teaching methodology in the secondary schools needs a complete makeover and the induction of an effective CLT approach.

3 Conclusion

Over the years, Communicative Language Teaching has seen a burgeoning of changes and a plethora of criticisms but the fact of the matter is that the underlying principles of the approach remain steadfast which still makes it a very favorable, viable and adoptable approach. In the context of Pakistan's secondary English language classrooms, CLT is likely to face initial disapproval from many; learners, parents as well as some teachers and scholars but it is high time that the change be brought about. This preliminary study can perhaps act as a catalyst for Pakistan's language learning professionals, compelling them to work on developing a strategy for the introduction of CLT in the secondary schools.

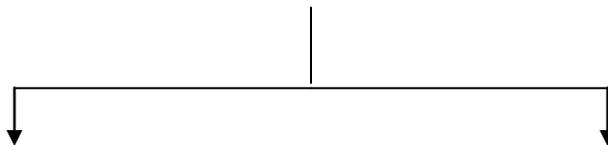
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APPENDIX A

HOWATT'S WEAK AND STRONG VERSIONS OF CLT



Weak Version

- Based on assumptions that the components of communicative competence can be identified and systematically taught.
- It proposes that the students should be taught how to realize specific general notions such as ‘duration’ and possibility in addition to language functions such as ‘inviting’ and ‘apologizing’.
- An interventionist and analytic approach (White, 1998).
- No radical departures from earlier methods.
- Howatt describes it as “learning to use English”.

Strong Version

- Language is acquired through communication.
- Non-interventionist and holistic approach (White, 1998).
- Learners do not first acquire language as a structural system in communication but rather actually discover the system itself in the process of learning how to communicate.
- Encompasses activities that stimulate target performance which consequently helps to develop language ability.
- Howatt describes it as “using English to learn it”.

Howatt (1984) cited by Ellis, 2003 p.28; Richards & Rodgers, 2001 p.155.

