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同学们，学得懂吗？

By Cheung Wai, Astrid

The application of communicative language teaching in Chinese societies

Under the influence of globalization, countries all over the world are going to have a closer connection among each other. Having the ability to communicate with people in / from other countries may lead to more opportunities in commerce and industry, thus learning foreign languages is becoming more and more important. As a developing country, China is no exception.

China is a country with a long history. Throughout the past thousands of years, China has developed its educational theories mainly based on Confucian notions. However, foreign language teaching was not needed at that time; traditional theories in education may not be well applied in the teaching of languages. Besides, western scholars have developed a lot of theories and approaches in LT, China has

directly imported those theories and approaches.

Western theories like audio-lingual method or situational language teaching have a great influence on Chinese societies once they were imported. However, whether western approaches are suitable for Chinese learners needs to be explored. The skill of using foreign languages (in the case of Chinese societies, usually known as English) is found more and more important. Therefore, language teachers are urged to seek a more suitable approach.

Since Communicative Language Teaching has been a prevailing trend in western countries (Yalden, 1987), it has made its way east and influenced LT in Chinese

societies. What both educators and learners concern most is its suitability and effectiveness when applied to a new environment. Therefore, this project is going to analyze CLT's application in Chinese societies.

The Issues

CLT has been proved to be a popular approach in language teaching. However when it is applied to Chinese societies, problems may emerge due to both internal and external reasons. Firstly, grammar teaching in CLT is neglected, which may cause the learner's failure in using the target language (Savignon, 1991). Secondly, to our disappointment, CLT and other western approaches were proved to be unsuccessful in LT when applied to Chinese societies. It can easily be noted that when Beijing is going to hold the Olympics Game in 2008, the government has made a great effort to improve the general English level of the citizens, even though English has been incorporated in the curriculum of primary and secondary school years before. In this project, I will focus the analysis on what alterations should be made in CLT as it is the prevailing trend.

CLT is a popular teaching approach in which the goal is to develop learners' communicative competence. In Hymes's view, a person who acquires communicative competence should have the knowledge and ability for language use with respect to :

1. whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (Hymes, 1972:281 quoted in Richards & Rodgers, 1986)¹

Using this approach, teachers may become less dominant in the classroom. The teacher is a facilitator of students' learning. At this point of view, the teacher has many roles to fulfill such as a classroom manager, an advisor and a co-communicator (Littlewood, 1981). Therefore, learners are the real communicators who should contribute as much as they gains, and thereby learn in an independent way (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Learners are given an opportunity to express their ideas and opinions in

interactive activities that are communicative. The activities have the following three features: information gap, choice and feedback (Johnson and Morrow, 1981. cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1986)². In communication, an information gap exists when a speaker knows something that other speakers do not. Then, they have the choice of what to say and how to say it. In addition, the exchange of information should be purposeful, which means the utterances of the speaker should provide feedback on what the listener is awaiting. As learners have the chance to express the ideas, they are more motivated to learn because they can integrate the foreign language with their own personality, so they feel more emotionally secure with it (Littlewood, 1981). In the light of the language used in the interactive activity, learners often carry it out in small groups using the target language. Native language of learners can also be used judiciously (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983).

Another characteristic of CLT is the use of authentic materials, that is, the language used by native speakers, which may enable learners to understand the target language and foreign cultures, thus gaining the linguistic competence and communicative competence in the learning process.

While grammar is viewed as an important element in LT, in CLT, it is not explicitly taught. Knowledge of grammar is learnt throughout the learning process in the form of communicative activities (Savignon, 1991).

As a developing country, China is developing rapidly. There are lots of opportunities in commerce, finance and industries and western developed countries are going east in the hope of getting more business opportunities to boost the economy of their countries. Communication between Chinese people and westerners is to be found more easily and frequently. Hence, a greater demand in an effective language teaching method is noticed.

Scholars have begun questioning the appropriateness of using western language teaching approaches in China. In order to get the optimal result in LT, they analyze the characteristics of Chinese learners and the situation, because they are prerequisite to designing an optimal method in LT.

In *Teaching English literacy using Chinese strategies*, Sampson (1990) points out three characteristics of Chinese learners :

1. The Chinese conceive of literacy not simply as a set of skills or techniques, but as a way of changing the self.

Analysis of the CLT



Using western *koans* carrying ideas about ways of behaving and moral values would meet the needs of Chinese because *koans*, which are like fables, will provide room for reflection.

The characteristics of Chinese may impose even more difficulties in adopting western teaching approaches. However, with the effort dedicated by linguists and teachers, an optimal approach that suits the needs of Chinese learners will soon come into existence.

Analysis of the CLT

The application of CLT in Chinese societies has both advantages and disadvantages. Fluency is the primary goal in CLT while accuracy is often considered as an unimportant aspect in LT. As Horwitz *et al.* (1986) point out, "any performance in the second/foreign language (L2) is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic." Wu (1991) also suggests that "when students are called upon to respond, they may prefer to hesitate and give short answers." To some extent, it does reveal that learners are afraid of making mistakes. When they are being criticized about their mistakes, they lose their confidence. Worse is that their low self-esteem may affect their language learning. Since errors are tolerated in CLT, learners can develop a higher level of self-esteem. With enough practice in language classroom, learners can gain their proficiency gradually. In the case of Chinese societies, language learners are usually specialists who are going to study abroad in foreign countries (Huang, 1987). They may be asked to pass stringent tests requiring grammatical accuracy. If learners are taught in CLT, they can also be lack of accuracy in utilizing the language while gaining the fluency, thus results in poor performance when they take the test. Therefore, while making an approach suitable for

2. Language teaching in China has always highlighted the teaching of meaning before the teaching of skills.

3. Chinese scholars believe that knowledge is gained through specific mental experiences that a teacher sets up. These experiences are simultaneously cognitive and affective and are intended to change the learner's cognitions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Burnaby and Sun (1989) also reveal that traditional Chinese educational strategies are inclined toward memorization, discussion and grammar-translation. Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) indicate two perspectives of language learners in China (here, mainly focus on the learning in English) :

1. Chinese concern for the preservation of its own cultural integrity in spite of the interests in communicating with the West;

2. English is seen as an international language of communication without necessary cultural ties to any one nation.

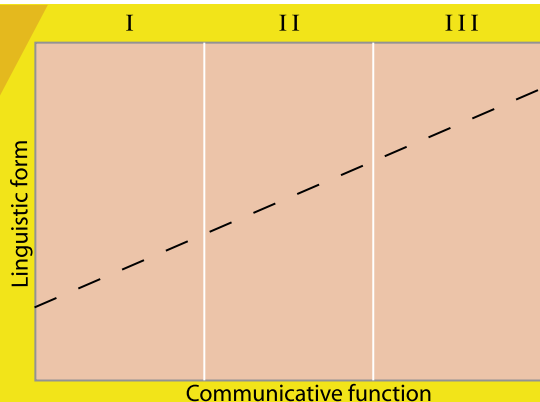


Figure 1 An example of the proportional approach to course design (Yalden, 1983).

Chinese learners, to link present language study to future use is of great value (Ellis, 1981) because learners' needs are taken into consideration. In terms of LT in Chinese societies, learners may feel more secured while they are asked to take stringent tests if grammar is taught. So accuracy should be viewed as an equally important aspect as fluency is. Errors should be corrected in a way that language learners appeal to instead of ignoring them.

Though scholars keep arguing about whether grammar should be taught explicitly in language classrooms, grammar teaching and communicative function should not be in sharp contrast but complementary. To be more productive, language teachers can include both of them into the classroom by making suitable proportional arrangement (See Figure 1). Grammar and pronunciation should be taught to learners at the elementary level, with little work in the language functions and in discourse skills introduced. While learners are gaining more and more fundamental knowledge in grammar and pronunciation, the teaching of linguistic form can be reduced whereas the teaching of communicative function can be increased (Yalden, 1987).

Learners have few opportunities to apply their knowledge in the target language in the EFL

setting of the community. Canale and Swain (1980) say that "a communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's communication needs." Of course, it has much to do with the individual, but the external pressure to use the language is essential to the process of language learning. Therefore, we can infer that learners in Chinese societies who are taught in CLT may not be able to establish their language proficiency of the target language due to the few opportunities to use the language.

Language learners are usually too shy to speak. Their unwillingness stems from their lack of confidence (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). When learners are asked to speak, their silence may cause the impatience and anger of teachers, which may make learners to be even more reluctant to speak, thus a vicious cycle is formed. Language learning should be enjoyable and games are enjoyable (Dorry, 1966), the use of games has been incorporated in CLT. Though the use of games can encourage learners to speak, it doesn't indicate that it works well in language classrooms. A lot of factors should still be considered, such as student disaffection (Cruickshank & Telfer, 1980). Chinese language learners are used to traditional way in teaching, they may find themselves uncomfortable or got lost when being asked to take part in the games. Adult learners may even see games in language classrooms as awkward and childish. Traditional relationship between Chinese teachers and students makes it difficult for them to take part in simulated interactions (Ting, 1987). However, the use of games in LT is not to be denied. Omaggio (1982) points out that "if teachers view classroom games as potentially beneficial language learning activities, analyze their usefulness for attaining specific course objective, and fit them judiciously into their lesson plans, students will find the experience both enjoyable and useful as their language skills develop."



Authentic materials are required in CLT. The use of authentic materials enables learners to have the opportunity to understand the language used by native speakers

(Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Within the ESL settings in English-speaking countries, authentic materials are available everywhere; however, for the case of Chinese societies, the materials are not easily obtained in the EFL settings. If a lot of effort has to be spent on finding the suitable materials but the effect in language classrooms is unknown, it is not cost-effective. And elementary learners, faced with authentic material that is not carefully chosen, may find it so difficult thus hinder their progress in language learning (Swan, 1985). An important thing is that learners have the enthusiasm to learn. However, when they are confronted with materials that are extremely difficult, they may lose their eagerness towards learning the language. Therefore, language teachers should pay close attention when choosing suitable authentic materials for learners at different levels. Another important aspect is that language learning cannot be done without actual application in real life, authentic materials are usually about lives in western countries, in this case, learners have to spend enormous time understanding foreign cultures besides the linguistic contexts, it is very time-consuming.

Some of the communicative language teachers in Chinese societies are nonnative speakers of the target language, they may not be familiar with a large number of authentic materials, and this may cause difficulties in their teaching profession. Another challenge for them is that because of the dynamic atmosphere of the lessons, questions are asked spontaneously by learners, teachers may worry that they are not able to answer without preparation (Swan, 1985). As all the activities are carried out in target language, at lower levels, it may serve as a barrier for teachers and learners to communicate, thus adding to the difficulties. While teachers are facing a great pressure, they will not be able to perform their task well. Heavy workload and difficulties found in their job may lead to teachers' resentment towards their profession.



still find many drawbacks in their language teaching programs in schools.

The density of population is usually high in Chinese societies. Therefore, classes are usually large and the room for activities is limited. In the implementation of interactive activities, difficulties are found. The relationship between learners and teachers is usually built on a give-receive basis; atmosphere in language classrooms is usually serious rather than relaxing. Large classes, learners' perception towards activities like problem-solving tasks and role-plays will contribute to the inappropriateness of the existing approach. Moreover, the target language is used as the classroom language, it may cause the loss of interests in the language when they cannot understand. In fact, Terrell (1977) states that "the students should be allowed to respond in either the target language, their native language, or a mixture of the two." Hence, the place of the native language should never be ignored. All of these make it more difficult to implement CLT in Chinese societies effectively.

On the other hand, CLT does have its positive characteristics. It helps to establish rapport among learners

Conclusion

Conclusion

In fact, CLT is a two-edged sword. The important thing is that we will consider the suitability of the approach in certain circumstances. In the case of Chinese societies, we are not able to have the opportunities to apply what has been learned in the EFL setting. Though in Chinese societies like Hong Kong and Macao will provide language learners with more chances to use the target language, scholars will

and teachers. Learners can cooperate well with teachers or among each other when doing interactive activities if they appeal to it. Even when language learners in Chinese societies do not react well towards interactive activities, those activities can also be used for a change occasionally and judiciously.

Above all, no matter what approach we are going to apply, we must be clear about the needs in specific environment and society. There are numerous approaches in LT, every one has its own strengths and weaknesses. How to synthesize different approaches is becoming a hot issue. Take Chinese societies as an example, some language learners are those who are going to study abroad and have to pass tests like TOEFL and GRE. Educators or teachers in Chinese societies should consider the need in grammatical knowledge of learners. When we see that authentic materials are important because they can enable learners to know more about foreign cultures, we should also keep in mind that knowing how to express the culture of one's self is equally important. Besides learning about daily conversations, understanding others and making others to understand us are also important in terms of attaining real communication. In conclusion, while applying CLT in different societies, considering the needs of learners, the tradition and cultures of specific environment can be more productive.

(Cheung Wai, Astrid, *Master Student in English Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Macau*)

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