

Teachers' Attitude to Communicative Language Teaching in Uzbekistan

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Abstract. *Growing of the status of methodology of FLT both in western countries and Uzbekistan has been seen for the last time because of a changing educational paradigm. This article focuses on a discussion of Communicative Language Teaching in the national context of Uzbekistan. This educational approach or method is widely used in all over the world. That is why this article provides a clear articulation of efficacy of some principles of the Communicative Language Teaching applied in English classes at the senior grades of the secondary schools, as well as necessity and rationality of application of the eclectic method. It also describes the research conducted with teachers of the English language who work at schools of Tashkent city in Uzbekistan. By the help of the interview we found out teachers' attitude to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), their preferences and gaps in teaching English to the achievement of B1 level of language proficiency by learners (10th -11th grades). The main inferences of this study are: 1) CLT is dominant in the FLT setting in Uzbekistan and allows to concentrating at a function, meaning and authentic material; 2) teachers need to apply eclectic approach to achieve a certain level of the language proficiency reflected in the program's requirements because of the national context specificity; 3) instructions should be designed in accordance with the principles: accuracy, fluency, approximation, appropriacy.*

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, eclectic approach, language proficiency, language performance, methods and activities, principles, pragmatic and cultural aspect, teaching material*

Introduction

Teaching and learning foreign languages (FLT) in Uzbekistan has become very important since the first days of the Independence of Uzbekistan, so since 1991 deep structural and substantial reforms in the system of foreign languages teaching (FLT) have been undertaken. Conditionally, we divide the history of development of FLT methodology since independence of Uzbekistan into two periods: 1) 1991-2012 and 2) 2013-2020.

The first period is characterized with the creation of multistage model of continuous FLT on the attempts of integrating different approaches and methods of FLT. For instance, in the syllabuses we could observe the combination of Grammar-translation method, CLT and further Cognitive-communicative and Intercultural approaches. The second period is abundant with innovations due to including primary education (1st -4th grades) into FLT system (Decree No 1875, 2013) and then extending the secondary school education with the 10th -11th grades (Decree No 5313, 2018).

Moreover, a renewal model of FLT (2013) in Uzbekistan was adapted to CEFR standard (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning. Teaching. Assessment),

which is specified with creation of new curricula, syllabuses and teaching materials under the Competence-based and action-based approaches. Since school learners must obtain: 1) 1st – 4th grades – A1 level of language proficiency; 2) 5th –9th grades – A2 of language proficiency; 3) 10th –11th grades – B1 level of language proficiency. Education at academic lyceum and college is considered as upper secondary specialized education where students must achieve B1 level of language proficiency. At that stage, the leavers of 9th grade have a choice to continue education at the senior classes (10th -11th) of schools, or at academic lyceums, or colleges. In the Uzbek educational system, a study at lyceum and college is manifested as a profile education: 1) study at academic lyceum provides intensive development of intellectual abilities, deep, differentiated and vocational-oriented education, leavers of academic lyceums can continue education at institutes or universities, or undertake a job; 2) study at vocational college provides development of professional competence, obtaining one of the professions – graduates of professional colleges get a certificate of a junior specialist (Jalolov, Makhkamova & Ashurov, 2015. p. 9-10). Teaching and learning English at college demands a study of general English and ESP or EOP, i.e. to develop both language competency and study skills which will help them to succeed in further education in the higher schools, or to land a job.

A two-level model of education in higher schools (BA and MA) in correspondence with linguistic or non-linguistic profiles of education proposes EOP and EAP learning. At the nonlinguistic higher school, undergraduates must achieve B2 level (language for development of professional skills). In turn, at the linguistic higher school (language as specialty) undergraduates must achieve C1 level of language proficiency. Post-graduate education stage (PhD applicants) aims to achieve C1+ level (EAP). Further development of language proficiency is continued at In-service training (each 3 years). Besides, FL teachers should pass examination to get CEFR certificate in State Testing Centre under the Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan. Thereby, the Uzbek model of FLT proposes life-long learning of FL in accordance with international standards.

Central to the development of the curricula and syllabuses within two periods was understanding that education reform in the field of FLT means that deep and consequential changes are needed to rethink the components of communicative competence and to have a tinker at procedures of mastering communicative competence to achieve a certain level of language proficiency. The Uzbek model of communicative competence includes itself three components as linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components (State Educational Standard, 2013). All components of this model are significant because it is impossible being communicative competent without their mastering.

Thus, curricula change has been a major issue in education since independence (1991) because of articulation of variety of materials and methods of teaching. The renewal curriculum (2013) aims to wide implementation of CLT and its variants as Interactive methods, Problem-solving method, Task-based learning, Project methods, game methods and others (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Richards, 2006; Brown, 2007; Kasumi, 2015; Thornbury, 2017).

While there are numerous studies examining the effectiveness of different approaches and methods in FLT setting on various outcomes variables, little researches are evaluable on the effect of CLT in the national context of Uzbekistan. Being dominant the CLT in FLT setting, it would be useful to analyse its efficacy in the achievement of language proficiency on the example of senior grades of the secondary schools.

Objectives of this study are

- to analyse CLT applied via certain principles and instructions;
- to define advantages and disadvantages of CLT and current materials for achievement of B1 level of language proficiency in accordance with the requirements given in the State Educational Standard (2013);
- to identify successful methods, techniques, activities used by teachers for the development of communicative competence of learners (10th –11th grades).

Literature review

The key principles of CLT: challenges and decision-making

In all over the world, the practice of FLT under the CLT justifies the efficacy of CLT making teaching and learning process more active and oriented to communication or interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Yilmaz, 2017). According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), CLT is an approach with the help of which we can explain the nature of language and language learning, where language teaching is organized in terms of functional meaning and communicative using of language. Not without remuneration Wilkins (1978) appeals to two types of meaning referred to notional category and communicative functions category, because language is only a means of communication and fulfills nominative, communicative and cumulative functions. According to Thornbury, CLT «focuses less on what learners know about the language than what they can do with it» (2017. p.68). That's why CLT is characterized by Brown as: 1) teaching focus on more mastering language skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing not restricted to linguistic competence; 2) instructions are directed to involving learners into authentic, pragmatic use of language for achievement of communicative goal; 3) fluency and accuracy are complementary principles under the choice of communicative techniques; 4) communicative classrooms propose language use, productively and receptively, in unprepared context (Brown, 2007. p. 241). The CLT allows to organize an active interaction at English classes, so the process of assimilation of language means (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar materials) should be submitted under the practice of functional aspect (Sierra, 1995; Richards 2006; Cenoz, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Moreover it is necessary to stress here the importance of teaching non-verbal and paralinguistic means within CLT, because they are manifested with form, meaning and function (See: Celce-Murcia, 2007. p.49). At that level, accuracy and usability, as well as knowledge about non-verbal means are significant for the achievement of a certain level of communicative competence.

At times under CLT the fluency is more important than accuracy (Brown, 2007. p. 241). In so doing one of the characteristics of CLT is «Language created through trial and error» (Sierra, 1995. p.122.), but fluency can not without accuracy (Chambers, 1997. p. 540). That's why in the local context of FLT the teachers evaluate accuracy of learners' language performance under the principle of approximation. Firstly, this principle was used concerning teaching and assessing pronunciation subskills, but nowadays it is applicable to all language subskills and skills¹.

This special instructional principle means acquiring approximate (relative) language system for language performance on the target language because of the essential differences in the Uzbek and English language systems and existence of unnatural environment of teaching English. As a result, we face an interlanguage phenomenon which should be analysed within

¹ Note: In the local methodology we designate: 1) pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar subskills; 2) listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Jalolov, Makhkamova & Ashurov, 2015).

restructuring and developmental continuums (Corder, 1978; Moeller & Catalano, 2015). Stage by stage learners' language performance will be approximating to the norms of native speakers. Taken into consideration the interlanguage, the teacher may ignore learners' language errors if they don't break and impede understanding of a message (Jalolov, Makhkamova & Ashurov, 2015. p. 141). For example, we often observe some pronunciation errors (incorrect voicing of sounds [θ] and [ð] and specific accent of the Uzbek learners), as well as grammar errors (e.g. using preposition *in* instead of *at*, or missing of article before nouns in an utterance because of the discrepancies in the English and Uzbek systems) which don't lead to misunderstanding. In the aspect of fluency, local teachers should be tolerant to the slow speech of bilingual learners. Without doubt, we can not evaluate positively a language performance if learners have a lot of errors in their speech (Riggenbach, 1991), especially, touching upon pragmatic errors. But if learners' errors don't impede to understanding any produced discourse that language performance is considered as quite satisfactory. Moreover, the principle of approximation gives a possibility to a teacher to conduct teaching and assessment processes more rationally: to create a positive atmosphere in the class, to raise the activity of the learners, and to eliminate learners' fears of doing mistakes in the non-natural conditions taken place in Uzbekistan.

Pragmatic aspect of FLT

A growing body of researches aligning with understanding the importance of functional aspect in the framework of CLT (Wilkins, 1978; Sierra, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2001) deduce to choose certain instructional strategies. Building on the functional theory, for instance, learning is regarded as an intentional, goal-directed, meaningful and situational or cultural process through active engagement into social interactions (Sierra, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 2007; Cenoz, 2007; Brown, 2007; Cohen, 2010; Hinkel, 2014; Makhkamova, 2019). That is why «there has been a call for reconceptualization of theoretical underpinnings related to the use of the target language for language instruction» (Moeller & Catalano, 2015. p. 330). It is known, that language use is related to the development of pragmatic competence as one of the components of the communicative competence including the ability to produce and comprehend utterances or speech acts appropriately to the social norms and rules (Ishihara, 2010; Cohen, 2010; Celce-Murcia et. al., 1995; Cenoz, 2007; Hinkel, 2014; Borer, 2018). Under the impact of pragmatics, the term instructional pragmatics has been appeared as development and utilization of the most advantageous teaching methods for improving learners' pragmatic competence (Borer, 2018. p.4). That's why, pragmatic competence or actional competence, in view of Cenoz (2007. p. 125), consists of discourse and functional competences.

Concerning teaching priority of focus on meaning, context and authentic language (Richards, 2006; Brown, 2007) and pragmatic use of language for the achievement of a communicative goal, we need to point out here the importance of the appropriacy principle for instructions. This principle is going alongside with accuracy, which also has implications for error correction (Sierra, 1995. p.125).

Pragmatic errors usually concern 1) inadequacy of using language items in accordance with context, intention and subject of conversation as well as infringement of logic sequence; 2) changing the meaning because of incorrect pronunciation or incorrect construction of a message on syntactic and intonation levels; 3) not following to a certain register and breaching of norms and convention of communicative behaviour (interrupting, redundant emotionality, touching, not keeping the distance, eye-contact, etc.). In general, pragmatic errors break down interaction or social relationships; the communicative aim will not be achieved due to inappropriate using

language items and structures, as well as inappropriate communicative behaviour that lead to rudeness or bad manners. According to Brown & Yule, the language may be formally correct, but inappropriate to the norms of the native language that can provoke no positive reaction (1983. p. 21-22). Thus, the didactic value of appropriacy is evident and it should be applied in the process of the development of pragmatic competence (discourse and functional) in a close relationship with cultural competence (Hinkel, 2014. p. 399) via pragmatolinguistic and intercultural/cross-cultural approaches, or within intercultural pragmatics (Cenoz, 2007; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Thus, for successful assimilation of language means and rules of communicative behaviour to have a sense to «...cultural norms and patterns of the people who speak the language» (Brown, 2007. p.194) we should exceed the limits of CLT instruction and integrate it with pragmatically- or culturally-oriented approaches. The pragmatic aspect of language teaching focus on active engagement in social interaction, teaching discourse and genres production through using appropriate communication strategies (Makhkamova, 2019). While teaching cultural, or pragmatic attributes learners realize cultural specificity of language use and communicative behaviour of the native speakers. It is desired here to emphasize pragmatic fluency in the context of FLT (House, 1996), which can be achieved within interlanguage pragmatics implemented via culture-oriented methods.

Methodology

A number of studies found advantages of using CLT (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards, 2006; Thamarana, 2015; Kasumi, 2015; Kapurani, 2016; Yilmaz, 2017; Song, 2019 and many others), but some of scholars discussed traditional methods which are valuable in integration with CLT (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Yilmaz, 2017; Song, 2019). But this problem has not been discussed in the local methodology of FLT, so the goal of this research is to reveal teachers' attitude to using CLT in the national context of Uzbekistan and an efficacy of application of the discussed above principles in the English classes. For this purpose, we have conducted an interview with 21 teachers who work at the senior classes of the secondary school (No 293 and 291 schools in Tashkent). Then, the English language teachers who work at the 10th –11th grades in an academic year 2018–2019 were the subjects of investigation. The main method of the research within this study is an interview in a form that both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

The topical points of this study were formulated around the following questions:

1. Do you follow only CLT instruction in the English classrooms? What methods within CLT do you usually use?
2. Do you use switching strategy in the classrooms?
3. What kind of methods, techniques or exercises do you usually use for practicing language skills as
 - pronunciation?
 - grammar?
 - vocabulary?
4. What communicative activities do you use for teaching
 - receptive skills?
 - productive skills?
5. What methods or techniques do you use for development of interactional competence and in teaching cultural-marked items or patterns?

Data processing of the interview in accordance with those questions showed the following findings:

1. The teachers confirmed that they tried to conduct English lessons under the CLT and use its variety of methods as Interactive methods, Problem-solving method, Project methods, Game methods. 61% of teachers criticized the CLT because sometimes they had to explain some grammar structures and other linguistic phenomena to the Uzbek audience. So they couldn't follow only CLT to achieve good results in the learners' language performance. They stressed that they had to combine a few methods or techniques in teaching language subskills and skills. Such implication has been advocated by a lot of researchers (Kumar, 2013; Yilmaz, 2017). Moreover, it was claimed that constant development of methodology of FLT has justified the invalidity of the assumption about application of one approach or method (Stern, 1983. p. 477) because of existing the postmethod period (Kumaravadelu, 2001; Brown, 2002). It has been proved that after implementation of any approach or method its efficacy, relevance and potential is undergone to critical analysis by practitioners. The society has been developing time to time, the novel social and educational trends have been appearing that is a challenge of changing goals and content of education and application of rational approach in compliance with the goal and results of education (Cf. Prabu, 1990). In other words, when instructors make an attempt to improve the quality of FLT, they pick up the successful elements of methods and techniques to combine them in dependence on the objectives of teaching.

2. 63% of teachers claimed that sometimes they had to use switching strategy to explain some difficult structures or compare cultural features of some phenomena (in the mother tongue). A lot of empirical studies have shed light on the fact that mother tongue is considered as a useful resource or «stepping stone to support effective performance in the target foreign language» (Moeller & Catalano, 2015. p.330). This idea found supporting in some research (Song, 2019). Although CTL is not against judicious use of L1 sometimes it is accepted (Sierra, 1995. p.122).

3. For the improvement of pronunciation and rhythmic-intonation subskills, 47% of teachers used listening activities, but if there were errors which brought to changing meaning of the words, they had to conduct phonetic drills. In contrary, 53% of teachers didn't give consideration to the quality of pronunciation and prosodic features of speech. Discovering the meaning (semantization) of words was usually organized via direct method, but if the words were abstract and difficult for explanation in English, 53 % of teachers resorted to the help of indirect method as translation or interpretation. Grammar rules are not suggested within CLT at the senior classes, so the errors were met in a lot of learners' speech. On the basis of that fact, 66% of teachers had to explain some grammar rules inductively. The types of activities which were more popular among teachers for the development of vocabulary and grammar subskills: Complete the sentence/columns, Fill in the gaps/blanks, Match the words, Rearrange the words in the sentence (Jumbled sentence).

4. In attitude to this point, 100 % of teachers usually did activities given in the coursebook (English. Pupil's book 10, 11. 2017). We classify these activities into two groups as following:

1) Communicative tasks in reading and speaking (taken from the coursebook for 10th –11th grade as example):

10-th grade: 1) Ex.4 (p.63) Group work. Read the following pupil's problems with time management and find out the best solution for them. Try to use vocabulary from exercise 3; 2) Ex. 7 (p.116). Complete Madina's CV using the text; 3) Ex. 9 (c.117) According to the sample, complete the information about yourself.

11-th grade: 1) Ex.2 (p.95) Pair work. Make up dialogues for the given situations; 2) Ex.6 (p.165) Work in pairs. Fill the table for your future career by using the information of the passage; 3) Ex.8 (p.33) Read the text. Find the cause and effects of the problem.

In correspondence with the teachers' view (65%), writing has been still of little attention and activities are not aimed at real developing writing skills. For example, teachers need to use additional exercises for the development of free-writing skills. Taking into consideration 10th – 11th grade learners' cognitive characteristics and wide using of the Internet communication, learners should have a fluent writing performance. Writing is more important in this stage, because by writing learners improve their interlanguage and «... foster communication; develop thinking skills; make logical and persuasive arguments...» (Klimova, 2014. p. 90).

2) Reflective tasks:

10-th grade: 1) Ex. 3 (p.63) with your partner decide, whether they are positive or negative; 2) Ex. 5 (p.92) Do the following statements reflect the claims in the text below?

11-th grade: 1) Ex.5 (p.12) How much do you know about inventors and inventions? Who invented what? 2) Ex.5 (p.20)Why did children perform better results than older children?; 3) Ex. (p.117) Answer the questions.

The presented examples of activities give evidence that teachers use CLT and its variants at the English classes, but only 27% of teachers used ICT and inquiry-based technologies.

In spite of the positive facts, there were also some gaps in the practice of ELT, in particular:

1) Teaching writing was conducted on the basis of product-based and communicative approaches. 48% of teachers couldn't explain where was top-down or bottom-up approaches in teaching receptive and productive skills. Besides, in the process of listening the teacher should apply a strategy-based approach where learners will have an opportunity «to explore using their listening strategies in different context and for a variety of reasons; and enable learners to interact with the task and not simply listen and respond...» (Flowerdew & Miller, 2013. p. 16).

2) All teachers stressed that they used various types of interaction (pair and group work) and interactive methods. However, 71% didn't have any imagination about functional or interactional competence, as well as about communication strategies carried out via teaching speech acts (See: Makhkamova, 2019. p. 70, 78). At the same time, the teachers, in accordance with the coursebook material, introduced some phrases (speech acts) but they didn't practice them in the real-life situations. In the lesson "My future plans. Lesson 1.B. Looking back... moving on..." the phrases for giving advice are presented but there is not any relationship with other tasks for practice. Teaching communication strategies is important for successful organization of production stage. Not without reason, Morley (1991) pointed out a functional intelligibility, functional communicability, self-confidence, speech-monitoring abilities and speech-modification strategies which can be related to a communicative competence and goals of teaching. However, these strategies have been still out of vision of the local teachers.

5. According to 73% of responses, the teachers used material for the development of intercultural competence. At the same time, communicative rules and cultural semantics of

linguistic items were not the object of assimilation, because teachers didn't use analysis, comparison, contrast, commentary of cultural items and patterns.

Discussion

Interpretation and discussion of results gained from interview as data collection instrument are presented in this part. It was mentioned that this study investigated teachers' attitude to the CLT and materials constructed under this approach.

The findings of this data collection, undoubtedly, has reaffirmed again the efficacy of CLT. Besides, the teachers have decided which methods and activities more strongly support the development of all components of communicative competence. It is conceivable that program's material is effective but it demands using also traditional methods and techniques for the development of communicative competence on B1 level. None of the instructions guarantee that one of the methods can give a desirable result. So, there was not consensus between teachers about CLT's efficacy in the development of language subskills and pragmatic competence. Especially, there was a disagreement concerning necessity of special teaching 1) grammar rules and correction of pronunciation subskills via drills; 2) cultural material through analytical, or inquiry-based instructions. Most part of the EL teachers (59%) considered that typical language and pragmatic errors were the result of influence on the CLT, because there was not enough application of the accuracy and appropriacy principles. But it is necessary to stress that overcorrection downgrades the natural process of language acquisition and even using an eclectic method (Fallah & Nazari, 2019), especially, while working on fluency.

Under the view of post-communicative approach to FLT in Uzbekistan, we can say, first, teachers had to apply the main principles of CLT with incorporating principles of some traditional methods. Secondly, the CLT should not overestimated, because many teachers critically analysed CLT (61%), especially, touching upon the senior classes at the secondary schools, academic lyceum and colleges where students should achieve B1 level of language proficiency. The teachers (69%) claimed to focus not only on fluency and accuracy, but on authentic discourse perception and production, that was proved in the research by Klimova (2014) too. In the attempt to master communicative competence encouraged within CLT led to less accuracy in using language and cultural material. So, in English classes teachers needed to integrate four language skills and kept the balance between skill-getting and skill-using activities, as well as a balance of individual and pair and group work to achieve the mentioned level of language proficiency by learners at the senior classes of the secondary school (Cf.: Hinkel, 2006). The efficacy of CLT can be fully due to the implementation of principles of functional, or discourse, and intercultural approaches for the development of pragmatic competence (Cenoz, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2007; Brown, 2007; Hinkel, 2014) under the angle of the appropriacy principle. For example, the model of interactional competence, suggested by Celce-Murcia, consists of the actional, conversational and nonverbal/paralinguistic competences (2007. p. 48) that can be developed via discourse or pragmatic approach. The principle of appropriacy seems to really support the development of practical skills, but its effect may become lively apparent in practice of communication strategies.

A challenge connected with this study was effectiveness of ELT process depended of application not only of methods within CLT but also traditional or other best methods. So, when comparing different methods, there was also a question whether the implementation of eclectic method is useful. A choice of the methods and techniques by a teacher in the local FLT setting

depends on the situation or types of interaction, goal of a certain lesson and complicity of the materials and cognitive abilities of learners.

Conclusion

In the senior classes of the secondary school, learning of the English language is provided by the material designed mainly on the base of CLT. However, this study's aim is to prove teachers' attitude to the CLT. For that purpose, we conducted the interview with the EL teachers around the mentioned questions. Along with the interview we measured the degree of teachers' satisfaction with CLT. The results make an important contribution to empirical base for methodology of FLT at the senior classes of the secondary schools and decision making for the EL teachers about efficacy of using different principles in practice of ELT.

Among local teachers there are ongoing debates about the effectiveness of CLT at senior classes of the secondary school that is sometimes considered as insufficient. The major criticism from teachers' view was about the teaching material presented in the current coursebooks of the English language for 10th –11th grades, that demanded of creating additional materials for successful achievement the mentioned level of language performance. Another fact was related to 1) non-natural environment in FLT, and 2) specificity of cultural aspect of teaching and communication in application of CLT. So, the EL teachers had to resort to different methods including traditional ones.

On the other side, CLT had many advantages both for teachers and learners: 1) an opportunity to apply context-based teaching, authentic material and various types of interaction; 2) a possibility to realize and practice the language use in different types of discourse. These advantages are grounded with focusing on function, meaning and authentic material, that has been proved by the results of some studies (Kasumi, 2015; Kapurani, 2016; Song, 2019).

The findings of the research ground the necessity of the implementation of eclectic method, where principles of traditional methods and CLT are integrated. This idea was supported also by a number of researchers (Prabhu, 1990; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Kumar, 2013). Due to traditional methods language material is assimilated solidly, in particular, using a comparative method «...focusing mainly on the differences» (Thornbury, 2017. p. 50), teaching grammar rules and using drills, and other practice exercises included even translation are reasonable in Uzbekistan national context because of existence of bilingualism and multilingualism problem related to interlanguage and intercultural interferences.

Successful mastering of communicative competence on B1 level can be achieved in the case of

- not ignoring traditional and other methods;
- concentrating at the functional and cultural aspects while ELT, i.e. development of pragmatic competence;
- integrating the main principles of CLT and other successful methods.

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