

**Communicative Language
Teaching Methodology**

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Methodology is crucial in language teaching. Communicative teaching methodology, in particular, aims at achieving practical results with the learners rather than a mere knowledge about the language. "The learner is now concerned with using language, not English usages" as Scott (1981:71) points out. With a suitable methodology, the teacher will not struggle to find effective ways and techniques to carry out his task. In other words, when he knows how to deal with different functions and communicative activities, and most importantly how to cope with a variety of learners, learning can be enjoyable and successful. Scott (1981) adds that with the communicative approach, the teacher is supposed to provide the conditions (i.e. by means of practice and training for language use) for communication to take place. One cannot, however, speak of one good methodology. There have always been conflicting views as concerns the best way(s) to teach a foreign language.

Each approach puts emphasis on what it is based on. Proponents of the structural approach, for example, emphasize the teaching of grammatical structures, arguing that it is the only way that can lead learners to the mastery of a language. Communicative methodologists, on the other hand, have de-emphasized the teaching of grammar in favour of language use. However, this new trend has not developed in the same way as the various communicative (or functional) language courses. Morrow notes that:

(...) research workers and course writers have focussed their attention on the content of the language programme rather than the ways in which this content should be taught. Notional syllabuses are widely debated and discussed; communicative methodology is still largely unexplored.

(in Johnson and Morrow, 1981: 59)

There are no particular techniques of the communicative approach as it is for the moment "less well documented" as Brown and Yule (1981: 1) put it. However, such an approach requires more emphasis on certain techniques which are congruent with its objectives: language use.

For this purpose, course writers should demonstrate an awareness of some of the strategies that an instrument (i.e. methodology) of this type requires. For instance, introducing and reintroducing material (known in technical terms

as “cyclical technique”; Wilkins 1976) in realistic and real ways, making use of appropriate and creative activities relevant to the learners’ needs of everyday life.

As far as teachers are concerned, they should create opportunities for learners to develop an adventurous spirit in the use of the foreign language in trying to convey their meanings to others and to understand them. They should select and grade activities so that communication is developed early in the learners. Establishing a warm understanding with students is also of paramount importance. In fact, if students are encouraged to express themselves in simple and straightforward ways under the guidance of teachers who intervene only when the learners hesitate, then real interaction becomes possible. If, on the contrary, students are not given opportunities to try out what they have been learning, or they are stopped whenever they make a mistake, then a growing inhibition and hesitancy may lead them to lose the power of developing spontaneous speaking. In this context, “Certain features of communication output” are sketched out by Harmer as follows :

Instead of a concentration on accuracy, the focus will be on the success of the communication. The teacher’s attitude to error and mistake will therefore be completely different. If, for example, he stops students every time they make a mistake and points this out, then he will be destroying the communication that he is supposed to be encouraging .
(Harmer, 1983: 37)

Discourse is now another component of teaching methodology. Teachers, at least those who believe in communicative language teaching, no longer think of language in terms of isolated sentences. Widdowson (1978: 52) puts it this way:

Language use has to do with propositions and the acts they are used to perform. But these do not occur in isolation: they combine to form discourse.

In fact, as the aim of language teaching is now communication, linguists insist on the importance of the semantic relationships between sentences and their syntax. In other words, on the way forms are used in communication. For this reason, English teaching-learning is no longer concerned with getting skills which have no immediate utility or learned in isolation. Taking discourse into account is then essential because it is speech that it is primarily used to express social relations and personal attitudes to maintain relationships between people. Again, Widdowson (1984: 101) puts it in the following terms:

Discourse is the process whereby language users negotiate a 'reciprocity of perspectives' for the conveyance of information and intention. To do this, they draw on a knowledge of language and conventions associated with its use in social context.

On a smaller scale - the classroom – it is possible for students (with the teacher's help, having different roles, for example, as those proposed in Harmer(1983: 201): "... *assessor, organiser, prompter, participant and resource*") to treat, for instance, sentences, grammatical forms and so forth, not simply as abstract linguistic forms but as communicative stretches of connected discourse that "...cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs."(Brown and Yule, 1983: 1)

In such a way, the study of language will not be taught in a vacuum providing the student only with a dormant stock of isolated sentences. It is also the teacher's responsibility to prepare and vary for his students real communicative activities that have some relevance to their everyday life. Finally, he should make them aware that their new language is an instrument of communication just like their native language. Obviously, the teacher can be at the level of his task if he has had, among other subjects during his graduate studies, an adequate teacher training course.

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