

Application of Communicative Method in EFL Listening and Speaking Class

LIU Chenlu^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Foreign Studies, Nantong University, Nantong, China.
*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The main purpose of EFL listening and speaking teaching is to improve the English learners' listening and speaking ability. By analyzing the communicative method of teaching (CMT) and the influence upon English teachers, this paper explores to apply CMT to listening and speaking teaching by presenting a sample plan in order to shed light on EFL listening and speaking teaching in China.

Key words: Communicative method; EFL listening and speaking; EFL teachers

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INTRODUCTION

With the globalization, English plays an increasingly important role in the interpersonal communication in China. As a result, college students are required to develop their listening and speaking abilities in order to communicate effectively in real situations. However, traditional listening and speaking class focused on exam-oriented practice of listening and speaking based on outdated materials, ignoring the use of language in a social-cultural context as well as the interaction between students and teachers. Therefore, students failed to know how language are used and in what situation they are appropriate. Although CMT (communicative method of teaching) was introduced into China in the 1990s, it hasn't

been applied into English listening and speaking classes yet. Few teachers manage to organize their class activities based on this method to make the class more interesting, effective as well as informative. Therefore, this paper aims to apply CMT to listening and speaking teaching by giving a sample plan in order to shed light on English listening and speaking teaching.

1. THE PRESENT CONDITION OF ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING CLASS

In China, as a good English learner, he or she is supposed to master four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, listening class was set for English majors. Different listening materials were exposed to the students. And in almost one and half hours for each class, students were just listening and answering questions based on the materials. What the teachers' responsibility is just playing the tape again and again and checking the answers. Thus, the traditional listening class was quite dull and the students were tired of this and what they have learned, to some extent, were some listening skills, and they might be good at doing multiply choices. However, in real daily conversations, they might not communicate with the foreign friends well.

In recent years, English listening class is replaced by listening and speaking class in some universities. Besides listening, students can speak in class. From this point of view, it is quite good for students, because it's an effective way to check what they have heard and can also practice their oral English. But the students are still complaining for this kind of class is different from pure oral English class. What they are asked to speak is related to the listening materials such as the main idea of the material or retelling the story. Without doubt, retelling and summarizing are practical ways to learn English and

students are required to have these abilities. However, too much retelling and summarizing are unnecessary. And the author observed that nowadays the listening materials are out of date, and some of them couldn't even happen in real situations. Therefore, how to combine listening and speaking well and how to improve the students' ability to communicate in real situations is problems that we meet and it's a challenge for the teachers of English listening and speaking class.

2. WHAT IS COMMUNICATIVE METHOD OF TEACHING (CMT)

2.1 The Essence of English Teaching and Learning Is Communication

The essence of English teaching and learning is communication. Teaching and learning is the embodiment of communication between the teacher and students. It is a bilateral activity, the result of which is not decided by a single side but by mutual efforts. So in a sense, Teaching is in communication. Focusing on communication, teaching is an activity through which the students acquire linguistic knowledge and form communicative competence. Teaching is by communication.

Language acquisition is a dynamic process of the acquirement of the learner's linguistic and communicative competence. Dynamic process of language learning depends, to large extent, on the involvement of the learners who are thinking beings, emotional beings and communicators instead of knowledge receptacles.

Introduced into the field of teaching as a second language, the CMT is a most influential approach in the modern world. It was introduced into China in the 1990s and CMT Classes have already been well accepted in China so far. The new edition of SEFC (Senior English for China) lays greater emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, integrating focus on form with content-based and/or task-based language learning, and on an enhancement of the learners' experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

2.2 Definition of CMT

CMT (CMT) came into being in the 1970's in the West. According to Sanders (1987), it refers to any approach to language teaching which emphasizes the meaning and use, rather than the form of language and which aims at developing the learner's communicative competence in foreign language teaching and learning. According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence consists of four aspects: possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and performance. Possibility refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences while feasibility means the ability to produce sentences which can be understood. Appropriateness comes to the ability to use

correct forms of language in a specific socio-cultural context. And performance refers to the fact that the utterance is completed." In Hymes' view, the aim of language learning is to help the learners acquire the ability to perform naturally, that is, the learners acquire knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical but also as appropriate.

2.3 Three Characteristics of CMT

Firstly, compared with the traditional grammar-based teaching approaches, CMT studies language from the perspective of socio-culture. In this perspective, language is used for different purposes or functions. Language teaching is far more than the teaching of grammar but rather to inform the learners how to apply "the rules" into practice or to develop the learners' ability to use the language to communicate idiomatically.

Secondly, CMT deals with language from a socio semiotic perspective. Halliday's systemic- functional linguistics (1978) sees language as an instrument used to perform various functions in social interaction. In Halliday's eyes, Language learning is a process of learning how to express one's ideas in an appropriate and effective manner.

Thirdly, CMT emphasizes on the use of language in a socio-cultural context. CMT claims discourse to be the fundamental linguistic unit used for communication. Discourse here refers to any piece of language used to achieve a communication goal in a certain language situation. The emphasis on language at the discourse level means that in language teaching the students are taught and required to practice using patterns of communication, the ways of interaction in a conversation and the strategies used in writing and understanding authentic written discourse in the target language.

Traditional teaching approaches emphasized on the forms of sentences as its major purpose for teaching, however, the theory of communicative method of teaching pays much more attention to the context.

From above, we can conclude that teachers should do more than merely provide learners with language materials. Teachers must demonstrate how language items are used, and in what situation they are appropriate. They must show learners that a choice of words is possible, and they should teach them, in short, the use of language as well as its use. CMT is a most scientific and efficient way to do communication.

2.4 The Influence of CMT Upon English Teachers

For an English teacher, A CMT class should be a process of motivating, activating and triggering learners' internal learning mechanisms. In order to create a good linguistic and communicative atmosphere in a CMT class, the word "teacher" has a larger connotation than it does in a traditional sense.

The teacher should be, to some extent, a psychologist. He/she should keep keen awareness of learners' quality and

need. According to the introduction to the textbook “*Look Ahead*”, a teacher should be aware of the following factors.

a) Learners are intelligent individuals who are already proficient in at least one language.

b) Learners want to know what they are learning and why. They also need this information in order to become more independent as they progress.

c) Learners need to develop at the same time knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, functional language and communicative skills. Attention to the systems of the language is crucial.

d) Topics should be interesting, varied and relevant to students’ lives.

e) Learners need to be provided with every possible opportunity to use new language in contexts which are meaningful to them.

f) Learners want and need to be able to measure their own progress.

g) Learners need resources to help them to continue learning outside the classroom.

The teacher of English in a CMT class is a demonstrator or performer of new language. The initial step of the acquisition of a second language is to acquire linguistic competence. In a traditional English class, the teacher’s job is teaching while the students are just passive listeners. And what they are listening to is often something unfamiliar to them. It is hard for them to sustain interest in the target language learning.

He is a coordinator in activities. The distance between the teacher and students becomes narrower.

In a word, the teacher in a CMT class acts as a facilitator of teaching and learning process. Only when the teacher has realized the role transformation can he do well in a CMT class.

3. APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IN ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING CLASS

As a teacher of English listening and speaking class, which is quite different from other CMT classes, bearing this method and principles in mind, he or she first should find suitable listening materials, which are practical, up-to-dated, and related to real situations. After listening, students are required to answer some questions and summarize the main idea or retell the story which is done in traditional listening and speaking class. However, this is not the ending. The most important thing is that teachers should point out some useful expressions and sentence structures for students to practice, and should also introduce some related phrases or structures that are often used in natural conversations. In this way, students can learn more and practice more. They are interested in imitating and creating dialogues. That’s the purpose of our English listening and speaking class.

Here is a sample teaching plan for students of pre-intermediate level in School of Foreign Studies, Nantong University. We use episode one: 46 Linden Street of Family Album U.S.A as our listening material. Since we have the VCD, the students can watch it as well as listen to it which will arise their interest and help them understand the episode better.

4. SAMPLE TEACHING PLAN

4.1 Objective

a) Understand the episode well and can retell it in their own words.

b) Understand the meaning of some new words and phrases in this episode.

c) Learn to use some sentence structures and make dialogues.

4.2 Procedures

a) Play the VCD of episode one and after watching, answer some questions.

ACT1 a) Why did Richard want to take a picture of the lady and her little child?

b) Where is Alexandra from and when did she come to New York?

c) What is Richard’s book?

d) Introduce the Stewart family.

ACT2 a) Describe what happened in the boutique.

b) What did Marilyn do when she heard that Richard lost his bag of film on the ferry?

ACT3 a) How many flavors of ice cream?

b) Who brought Richard’s bag of film back?

b) Play it again and pause to explain some words and expressions if necessary.

e.g. In this episode, Richard mentions the word terrific.

The students may not understand this word. So the teacher can ask the students to guess the meaning and then point out that it means good, and then introduce some other words that mean good to them, for example, fabulous, splendid and so on.

c) Point out the difficulty in this episode: How to greet and introduce. The teacher can ask the students to list the greeting and introduction sentences occurred in this episode by playing the VCD again. And then introduce some other useful sentence structures.

e.g. Introduction

(a) How to approach the person you are meeting?
How to respond?

It’s Mr.Brown, isn’t it?

Yes, that’s right, and you must be Mr.Smith.

Excuse me, are you Mrs. Jones?

(b) How to introduce yourself?

I’m Lu Xin. I’m an interpreter from the China International Travel Service.

(c) How to respond and reply to an introduction

I’m very pleased to meet you.

So glad to meet you.

I've been looking forward to meeting you.

Welcome to Shanghai.

(d) How to respond to an introduction when you are introduced for the first time?

How do you do? (formal, shake hands)

Hello. (informal, may or may not shake hands)

(e) How to introduce someone who is with you?

May I introduce my brother Jack? (formal)

And this is one of my colleagues Mr. Wang. (informal)

d) Practice. Ask the students to form a group of four to five and make dialogues according to the situations.

(a) You are in your university one day with a classmate. You have heard that an American exchange student Bob is arriving that day, and by chance you meet him in the corridor. Approach him , introduce yourself and your classmate. (informal)

(b) Introduce a foreign student Tom to your parents. This student is from Britain and is studying at your university: And you are looking after him. You take the student to your hometown to meet your parents. (Informal)

(c) You go to the main railway station with the Deputy Dean of your college, to meet an Australian teacher, Jane Greenwood, who is traveling around China and who will give some talks at your university. Approach her, introduce the Vice Chairman to this teacher. (formal)

(d) You have been asked by your university to go to the airport to meet Professor Smith, a famous British author. You go to the airport with one of your classmate because she knows the airport very well and also speaks very good English. Approach him, introduce yourself and your classmate to the professor.

CONCLUSION

English listening and speaking class is not only listening or speaking. They should be combined well, and should be useful for the students. Communicative method is a way to be applied in the class which can help students communicate effectively in real situations. However, there are some other ways that can be applied in the class like genre — based teaching approach, situational method and so on. Teachers can adopt any one of them or combine some ways together if necessary in order to make the class more lively and beneficial. And the teachers themselves should prepare the class and organize the class well. It involves a lot of requirements for the teachers. Thus they should make great efforts to upgrade themselves in both their professional skills and language proficiency so as to meet the demand of teaching English listening and speaking class.

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