

Merits and Issues of Communicative Language Teaching in the Post-method Era

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Abstract

Post-method theory is not a specific teaching method but an approach of foreign language teaching. The Post-method is beyond the level of specific methods and there is no fixed set of teaching methods. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) plays an important role in cultivating students' communicative competence. With the advent of Post-method era, English teaching in China is gradually breaking the situation of single method and exploring English classroom teaching from multiple perspectives. This study explores the merits and issues of Communicative Language Teaching in China's English teaching pedagogy from the perspective of Post-method era, and reflects on the application of Communicative Language Teaching from the perspective of Post-method era. So that Communicative Language Teaching can play a better role in English teaching pedagogy in China.

Keywords

Post-method Era; English Teaching; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Merits; Issue.

1. Introduction

The history of Communicative language teaching (CLT) dates back to the 1960s in Britain when the rejection of situational language teaching was established (Wu Yanting, 2018). Since the late 1980s, CLT has been introduced into China and learned by thousands of English teachers and researchers. It energizes the development of learners' communicative competence, and it is proved to be one of the most influential English teaching methods. The research on Communicative language teaching in China has gone through the process of introduction, application and reflection, and it is now in the deepening stage. The research on Communicative language teaching method itself has reached its peak phase in China. When Communicative language teaching method gradually withdrew from the teaching stage as an independent role and is replaced by other language teaching methods, researchers tend to focus on the application of CLT from a new perspective, and the new research trend is on the rise.

In order to have a better understanding of CLT under the post-method era, this paper initially reviews the key term post-method era, and Communicative language teaching (CLT). Then it presents some merits and issues of the application of CLT in China by attaching previous research as well as some pedagogical cases. Finally, some outlooks and pedagogical implications for adapting CLT to English teaching classrooms in the post-method era are also provided.

2. Definition of Post-method Era

In the process of the development of foreign language teaching research, various teaching methods have emerged, such as oral method, situational method, audiolingual method, etc. However, these methods can not achieve the ideal teaching effect when they are designed and implemented in English teaching pedagogy. The main reason is that English teaching is a

complicated process, and the teaching effect is interfered with many factors. Therefore, in the post-method era, teachers should choose one or more of the most appropriate teaching methods based on specific teaching situations. There is no single monolithic method, particularly one that is generated apart from the context in which it is implemented, which given rise to the notion of appropriate methodology (Halliday A, 1994).

Kumaravadivelu first combine "post-method" with foreign language teaching. He first proposes the concept of "post-method" in 1994 (B. Kumaravadivelu, 1994). At 2001, he puts forward the "post-method" as an education concept, and elaborated the "post-method" education theory in the subsequent research (B. Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

"Post-method" has the following three characteristics. Firstly, particularity. "Post-method" holds that foreign language teaching should consider the specific factors from teachers, students, environment and goals (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Secondly, practicality. The theories obtained from the teaching experience are more in line with the reality and have stronger guidance in practical teaching. Thirdly, possibility. The post-approach allows learners to bring their own life experience, cultural and political background as well as personal background knowledge to the classroom. Teachers combine the social background and language needs of learners.

3. Communicative Language Teaching

3.1. Definitions and Features

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method. It appeared at a time when British language teaching was ready for a paradigm shift. CLT appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching (Richards, 1985). Since the mid-1970s, both American and British proponents see it as an approach aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the development of the four language skills (Richards, 2000). Littlewood (Littlewood, 1981) states that "One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language." Howatt distinguishes between a "strong" and a "weak" version of Communicative Language Teaching: The weak version stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes. The strong version claims that language is acquired through communication. If the former could be described as "learning to use" English, the latter entails "using English to learn it" (Howatt, 1984).

English teaching aims at enhancing students' language ability, which is not only simple speaking and writing, but also a complete knowledge system. Language competence is closely related to the user's social and cultural background, and its basic attribute is the communicative function of language. Language learning without communicative competence will lose its social application value. The principle of CLT is learner-centered. Its teaching mode is rich and varied, which encourages classroom interaction and arouses students' enthusiasm. It not only requires students' fluent English expression ability, but also requires students' true use of language's inner meaning and usage habits. It can be seen that CLT method is a fresh application of quality education in English teaching.

3.2. What is New About CLT

The communication process between people in society is actually a kind of language communication behavior. It is by virtue of communicative ability that effective intercourse and communication can be achieved. Communicative teaching emphasizes the functions and meaning of language and aims at cultivating students' communicative competence. Compared with the traditional teaching method, Communicative Language Teaching method changes the

traditional teacher-centered teaching into student-centered learning, attaches importance to stimulate the enthusiasm and initiative of students. Besides, Communicative Language Teaching method creates a large number of situations for students to use language and promotes foreign language acquisition. Finally, Communicative Language Teaching method creates a harmonious classroom learning atmosphere for students and develops their communicative competence(Wesely & Neubauer,2021).

In the Post-method era, there emerges various language teaching approaches such as linguistics, applied linguistics, language education technology. Although Communicative Language Teaching method will gradually be replaced by "other variants", people do not completely deny or abandon it(Al-Kadi,2020). However, language teachers and researchers will explore the application of Communicative Language Teaching method suitable for China from a new perspective. The "post-method" foreign language teaching theory is not the rejection of Communicative Language Teaching method, but the development, extension and transcendence of various methods.

4. Merits of CLT

Since 1980s, the communicative approach was introduced into China. More and more relevant domestic studies and practices emerged. Some scholars even referred CLT as one of the top five foreign language teaching methods in China. Until now, CLT still has a certain degree of adaptability in China.

4.1. In Line with the Trend of Globalization

With the rapid development of the Internet, and the concept of "global village" deeply rooted in people's minds. the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability has become an indispensable objective of English teaching. In CLT English teaching pedagogy, students can cultivate their communicative ability and deepen their cognition of cross-cultural communication. In addition, in order to fully express their thoughts and feelings, students need to obtain the cultural knowledge of other English-speaking countries. Hence, students can not only develop interests in English learning, but also obtain a more comprehensive development. Therefore, the application of CLT in English teaching classroom is in line with the trend of globalization.

4.2. Solid Theoretical Foundation

Halliday proposes seven functions of language: the instructional function, the regulatory function, the interactional function, the personal function, the heuristic function, the imaginative function and the informative function(Halliday, 1970). These functions of language can only be performed by communicating. Therefore, the theory of Communicative Language Teaching comes from the essence of language. Language is a system used for expression, and its most basic function is interaction and communication. Therefore, the CLT method has a solid theoretical foundation.

4.3. The Nature of English Curriculum

Although CLT method was first proposed by the West and later introduced into China. In fact, The Ministry of Education of China has long paid attention to the cultivation of communicative competence in English teaching, which is reflected in the National English Curriculum Standards.

According to National English Curriculum Standards of 2017, English curriculum has both humanistic and instrumental functions. In terms of instrumental function, English Curriculum helps students integrate the language knowledge they have learned and develop the capacity of using language skills and communicating in English appropriately(Ministry of

Education,2018). Such ability can only be cultivated by using language and communication. In addition, from the humanistic dimension of English curriculum, it requires teachers to improve students' intercultural communication ability by combining the teaching of cultural knowledge with students' life.

In the stage of compulsory education, the National English Curriculum Standards of 2022 also stipulates the overall objective of English curriculum. English curriculum of compulsory education needs to require students to form preliminary comprehensive language ability. It refers to the comprehensive application of these four key competence, language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability(Ministry of Education,2022). Such comprehensive application must be developed by communicating. Therefore, the CLT method is consistent with the nature of English curriculum.

5. Problems and Difficulties of Applying CLT in China

Communicative Language Teaching has its specific requirements in application. Some Chinese teaching pedagogy can not fully meet the conditions of applying the CLT method, so there are certain difficulties and problems in the application process.

5.1. Different Learning Style

Most Learners' learning styles are not consistent with the learning styles supporting by CLT. Communicative Language Teaching method advocates more interaction between teachers and students, and attaches importance to students' independence and individual differences. In traditional Chinese teaching pedagogy, students are in a passive state in class. Some learners feel uncomfortable to the CLT, they are not willing to communicate in the English classroom. Due to the differences in the culture of learning style, the application of Communicative Language Teaching method in Foreign language classroom in China will inevitably have some difficulties. For example, teachers will feel hard to encourage learners to engage in class. The teaching objectives are difficult to obtain.

5.2. Number of Students

The number of students affects the teaching effect. As one of the main factors of classroom environment, class size affects the teaching effect to a certain extent. A study in Japan shows that class sizes in primary and secondary schools should not exceed 20. Compared with classes with more than 20 students, students in classes with less than 20 students have more opportunities to interact with the teacher and their learning ability is relatively strong (Wang Yingbin,2002). However, there are usually more than 30 students in one class in our country. And this fact will definitely influence the possibility of each students' opportunity to express their ideas.

5.3. Exam-oriented Education System

The exam-oriented education system restricts the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching method. Under the initiative of the curriculum reform of basic education, the quality of English teaching in our country has been significantly improved, but the pressure of examination has always dominated the English classroom in primary and secondary schools. In addition, the examination of students' communicative competence is difficult to be carried out in the examination, which virtually restricts the application of CLT.

5.4. Lack of English-speaking Environment

The acquisition of foreign language ability is different from the acquisition of mother tongue. In terms of objective conditions, it is mainly manifested in four aspects. Firstly, the acquisition of mother tongue depends on a natural congenital condition, which is difficult for Chinese students to have in foreign language learning. Secondly, the acquisition of native language

competence is synchronized with the development of mind, while foreign language learning cannot have such a condition of "language - mind" isomorphism. Thirdly, the acquisition of mother tongue is synchronized with the physiological development of infants' brain and central nervous system, while foreign language learning does not have such conditions. Finally, the learning of mother tongue starts from oral English and is acquired in a long period of personality building, while it is impossible for foreign language learning to acquire language competence only through communication (Han Cingying,1999). From the above characteristics, the mechanism and process of foreign language learning are fundamentally different from that of the acquisition of mother tongue .

5.5. Design of Syllabus

There are difficulties in the design of teaching activities. Communicative teaching approach advocates to cultivate learners' communicative competence based on their actual needs(Farrell, 2019). CLT requires teachers to create real communicative activities for students. How to change "quasi-communication" into "real communication" for students is a great challenge for the application of CLT.

6. The Implication of the Application of CLT in the Post-method Era

The era of "post-method" is not the era of no teaching method. In fact, "post-method" is not the choice of a method, but the selection of methods, which requires teachers to choose the most appropriate teaching method based on the specific teaching situation. Under the post-method era, the application of CLT must bare the following aspects.

6.1. Update the Teaching Belief and Change the Role of Teachers

The reason why Communicative Language Teaching method has great influence at home and abroad is not only because of its theoretical viewpoints, but also because it can absorb new theoretical research results. Therefore, teachers should constantly strengthen professional learning, update teaching belief, improve theoretical level and teaching capacity, so as to explore suitable teaching strategies. "Post-method" emphasizes the openness and diversity of teaching methods. In the classroom, teaching methods are not immutable. Teachers should select, explore, reform and even innovate teaching methods according to specific situations and students' needs.

CLT mode first requires that the roles of teachers and students in class should be changed from teacher-centered to student-centered. In 2017, GUANGDONG University of Foreign Studies conducted a survey and research on 103 students who have participated in CLT classes for more than one year. From the perspective of students, teachers' role in CLT classes can be understood into four categories: cognitive category, affective category, managerial category and negative category (Huang Q,2017). According to the data inferred from this research report, the latter three roles play a more critical role in forming a truly meaningful CLT class (Huang Q,2017). Thus, CLT classroom has put forward more diversified requirements for teachers' roles.

6.2. Attach Importance to Classroom Situations and Emphasize Learner-Centeredness

The teaching concept of "post-method" emphasizes the specific situation of foreign language teaching and believes that teaching should be carried out according to the specific environment of teaching. Stephen Bax attaches great importance to the specific situation of foreign language teaching. He believes that foreign language teaching should first consider the specific situation and then the teaching method, while the communicative approach does not pay enough attention to the specific situation (Stephen Bax,2003). The scale and impact of communicative

pedagogy are not found on a global scale. It's a small deal, but the situation varies from place to place. English teaching in China should get rid of the shackles of "method-centered theory", and turn to the selection of teaching methods and means based on students' learning characteristics and needs, learning content and teaching environment.

In a learner-centered system, learning content should be determined through consultation and negotiation with learners, in which the main consideration is learners' communication needs. The key of curriculum design is to make teachers pay more attention to the purpose of language use. The following points should be paid attention to when designing a learner-centered communicative course: a. The current language competence of learners; B. The level of language learners need to develop; C. The environment of the target language; D. Topics and how learners can develop these topics; E. Language forms learners may use. All of the above are goals that learners strive to achieve. Taking learners' goals as the starting point, it will help students improve their communicative skills more efficiently and stimulate their enthusiasm for class. Students are even more enthusiastic when they learn that all the content is organized based on their real needs.

6.3. Combine Different Teaching Methods

With the social progress and the continuous innovation of science and technology, the theories of various teaching methods are also developing constantly. In order to meet the changing needs, it is necessary to explore a more effective teaching system. However, there does not exist the best teaching method. The post-method era opens up a new perspective for the application of Communicative Language Teaching method. Under the background of "post-method" era, Chinese teachers should try to transcend the shackles of "method" and combine Communicative Language Teaching method with other teaching methods.

Task-based Language Teaching, which bears the same tenets with CLT, implements teaching plans through tasks in the process of language teaching, making tasks become the carrier of implementing communicative principles. Students complete learning tasks through discussion, communication, experience, cooperation and other interactive forms, and grasp language through practice. In this way, it not only makes the communication activities concrete, but also avoids the generalization of intercultural knowledge teaching. For example, when the author taught Unit 8 Thanksgiving in North America in junior high school, the author created a context, requiring students to introduce their hometown food in English to others. In order to finish the task, students can search for relevant information online after class. During the process of completing such a task, they actively exchange local food culture and develop the love of hometown. Students can make comprehensive use of the language knowledge in the process of completing the task. The classroom atmosphere is very active, students are highly engaged in the classroom. Combining Communicative Language Teaching with Take-based Language Teaching can lead to the realization of the real meaning of CLT classroom model.

6.4. Combine the Characteristics of the Network Era

The development of Internet energizes new factors into the post-method era. It is the development of the Internet communication model that has enriched the extension of CLT, says UY COOK, a teacher education researcher at King's College London. Digital communication has its own idiosyncratic English orthography, punctuation, grammar, punctuation, and punctuation. grammar, vocabulary and conventions)(Cook G,2013). Therefore, UY COOK proposed that in the process of teacher training, attention should be paid to the continuous and rapid changes in communication technology. Education should focus on the communicative. And the method of CLT needs to keep pace with time. Only change can be eternal.

7. Conclusion

Post-method era not only builds a new research perspective for Communicative Language Teaching method, but also brings new opportunities and challenges for the research of teaching methods in China. In the Post-method era, teachers should update their teaching beliefs, attach importance to specific teaching situations, try to transcend the shackles of "methods", and make Communicative Language Teaching play a better role in English teaching pedagogy in China. More detailed research will be done in the future to trace the development of CLT further, which can be treated as a basic reference to improve the foreign language teaching and learning in China.

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