

Kelly, L. G. (1969). *Twenty-five centuries of language teaching*. New York, NY: Newbury House.

This volume goes back to the Greeks and Romans and covers the teaching of all foreign languages (not just English).

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

This is a good source for a more detailed look at many of the teaching methods mentioned in this chapter.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

This text presents a thorough description and analysis of past and current second language teaching approaches.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Versions of the first part of this chapter were published in Prator with Celce-Murcia (1979) and Celce-Murcia (2001). This expanded and updated version also draws on Madsen (1979) and Brinton (2011a).
- ² Examples of such written texts are the Gutenberg Bible in German and the *Chanson de Roland* in French.
- ³ The term *direct method* is more widely used than *direct approach*; however, the former is a misnomer, since this is really an approach, not a method, if we follow Anthony's (1963) terminology or that of Richards and Rodgers (2001).
- ⁴ Firthian linguistics is best codified in the work of Firth's best-known student, M. A. K. Halliday (1973), who refers to his approach to language analysis as systemic-functional grammar. Halliday's approach is very different from Chomsky's generative grammar, a highly abstract extension of structuralism and an approach to language that paid explicit attention to the description of linguistic features (Chomsky, 1965). In addition to form and meaning, Halliday also takes social context into account in his theory and description. Halliday's system extends beyond the sentence level, whereas Chomsky's does not. Thus many applied linguists find Halliday's framework better for their purposes than Chomsky's.
- ⁵ The term *humanistic* has two meanings. One refers to the humanities (i.e., literature, history, and philosophy). The other refers to that branch of psychology concerned with the role of the socio-affective domain in human behavior. It is the latter sense that I am referring to here. However, see Stevick (1990) for an even broader perspective on humanism in language teaching.

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Communicative Language Teaching

PATRICIA A. DUFF

KEY QUESTIONS

- ▶ What is communicative language teaching?
- ▶ How is this approach related to other proficiency-based approaches to language teaching?
- ▶ How relevant or adaptable is communicative language teaching to language teaching contexts worldwide?

EXPERIENCE

Experience 1: Teaching young adult learners in an ESL context

It is Monday morning and a group of young adult English as a second language (ESL) learners have just arrived for their language class. The teacher starts the class by asking the students about their weekend:

Teacher: So what did you do this weekend?

Student 1: I ran my first marathon!

Teacher: Wow! Did you finish?

Student 1: Yes, eventually. . . . But I can barely walk today!

Several students: Congratulations! Way to go!

Student 2: I saw the latest Harry Potter movie!

Student 3: How did you like it?

Student 2: It was great but not as good as the last one.

Teacher: Did anyone else do anything interesting?

Student 4: I stayed home and finished today's assignment—ha, ha!

Several students: Groan. . . .)

The discussion continues for a few more minutes and one student finally asks the teacher if she had a good weekend. She replies and then announces the focus of today's class: producing personal narratives in the past tense.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING?

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes learning a language first and foremost for the purpose of communicating with others. Communication includes finding out about what people did on the weekend, as in Experience 1, or on their last vacation and learning about classmates' interests, activities, preferences, and opinions and conveying one's own. It may also involve explaining daily routines to others who want to know about them, discussing current events, writing an email message with some personal news, or telling others about an interesting book or article or Internet video clip. Although the concept of communication underlying CLT may seem self-evident as a goal for language education, a generation ago (and still in many parts of the world today) teaching and learning another language were often more concerned with language analysis, literary text analysis, memorization, translation, or high-stakes multiple-choice language testing. Instead of describing one's own weekend, students might have read a passage and changed all present tense forms to past tense or translated the passage into their first language (L1). Learning how to express and interpret ideas in speech or in writing in their second language (L2) and getting to know classmates or other L2 users better were not priorities. Often people did

not imagine ever needing to communicate with others using the language being taught. Or the educational culture they were in and theories of learning at the time placed a premium on linguistic knowledge, such as the ability to analyze grammar and vocabulary, rather than the ability to use the language to speak or write to others about topics of mutual concern.

In this chapter, I examine the principles and history of CLT, how and why it has evolved, what it represents today, and directions for CLT in the future. The relationship between CLT and other proficiency- or competency-based approaches to language education is also considered. Finally, I consider how communicative competence might be reconceptualized for the purposes of language education given the changes in the nature of communication in the twenty-first century. This involves a growing assortment of new media and interfaces for communicating and sharing information, especially using English.

Reflections on your own experiences as a language learner

Think of your own experiences of learning another language through formal instruction. Was the language you learned a modern language that is used in everyday communication in some region of the world? Or was it a classical language, such as Latin, learned more for the study or reproduction of particular sacred or literary texts but not widely spoken in society? What were your goals for learning the language? Did the instructional methods used support those goals? Did you have opportunities to interact with others in the classroom using the language or in other contexts outside of class or online? Or did the instruction place much more emphasis on memorizing lists of vocabulary items, grammatical forms, sentence patterns, and rules mainly for the purpose of using those structures appropriately on tests of grammar, vocabulary, and translation?

Historically, classical and modern languages were often required courses at school and university and taught as a form of intellectual and literary enrichment, with no expectation that students would ever have the opportunity to use the language for either face-to-face communication or to correspond with other readers and writers of the language for their own purposes. In some

contexts, however, the requirements might be much more rigorous, involving speaking and listening and not just reading and writing, beginning with primary education and continuing throughout one's educational and professional career. Yet many such programs place considerable emphasis on grammatical and lexical sophistication and accuracy with much less emphasis on fluency and the ability to use the language for meaningful communication with others.

The traditional grammar- and text-based approach to teaching and learning language for the sake of engaging with literary works or mastering the grammatical conventions of language is still cultivated in many institutions and can constitute important intellectual and metalinguistic activity (i.e., building an awareness of how language functions as a system). However, people have many other reasons for learning languages than the study of grammar and classical literary texts; these reasons relate to the increasing levels of immigration and transnationalism worldwide, migrant worker programs, and opportunities for travel and international education. In addition, the Internet, globalization, more knowledge-based economies, and new information and communication technologies have all had an impact on language learning and use as well as on perceptions about its significance in people's lives. Learners may need to learn and use a second or foreign language such as English to participate in public education; to obtain employment; to communicate with relatives, friends, or colleagues who speak that language; to travel to regions of the world where the language is spoken; or to communicate with newcomers in their own neighborhoods who speak the language.

Experience 2: CLT in a secondary school English as a foreign language class

It has sometimes been argued that CLT is more appropriate in ESL curricular contexts, as in Experience 1, where English is spoken more widely in the local community, than in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, where it is not the dominant local language. Indeed, there has sometimes been resistance to CLT in EFL contexts (Littlewood, 2011). Yet there are still ways that the principles of CLT can be applied, adopted,

or adapted in EFL contexts. This was apparent in a 40-minute lesson I observed in 2009 in a well-resourced, urban, public secondary school classroom in China with over 50 grade 11 (senior year 2) students.

The topic is art and architecture, based on a unit in the textbook *Senior English for China, Student Book 2A* (PEP Curriculum Team, 2003b, Unit 3). The teacher begins by asking the students to generate words or phrases that they associate with the word *art* (e.g., they volunteer *beauty, creative, opera, music, architecture, and culture*). Using a PowerPoint (PPT) presentation, she then shows them images of some famous works of both modern and classical art (e.g., the *Mona Lisa* and a famous Chinese painting) and then iconic architectural landmarks from around the world, such as the Eiffel Tower. The teacher asks students to guess the name and location of the works shown and to decide what they have in common. They offer such responses as *They are special . . . beautiful . . . creatively designed . . . famous*. The linguistic goal of the lesson is to introduce and review vocabulary related to art and architecture, and also the grammatical structures for expressing a preference for one artistic or architectural style over another, such as the advantages and disadvantages of traditional versus modern Chinese houses. Guided by the teacher, students compare images of modern houses (apartments) and more traditional courtyard-style houses. Then, in groups of four, the students discuss which housing style they would want to live in and why. Students exchange their personal preferences and compare the different layouts of traditional and modern housing and ways of describing them. Finally, for the main task of the lesson, which takes 10–15 minutes, the students, in small groups again, discuss and design their “dream house” and then present it to the class, after which others give their impressions of the dream house. The lesson ends with a summary of the main conceptual and linguistic points of the lesson (modern versus traditional architecture; shapes and styles of housing; and building materials, such as concrete or wood).

In their lesson the following day, they continue with this theme, discussing a reading about some of the buildings designed for the Beijing 2008 Olympics, such as the “Bird’s Nest” national stadium. Most of the class is conducted in English.

What aspects of this class are consistent with CLT? First, like the teacher in Experience 1, this

teacher has students communicating in English, to the extent possible or desirable, about their personal experiences, opinions, and interests. Second, they discuss students’ knowledge and understandings of art and architecture. They also discuss their preferences for certain kinds of artistic form. Third, a great deal of interaction (questions, responses, and requests for more information and for their opinions) occurs between the teacher and students. Fourth, to encourage additional oral language practice and a more personalized discussion of the topic, the teacher has students work together, here in groups of four, to create the prototype of their “dream house.” They are therefore communicating with one another—negotiating meanings and preferences and showing their creativity through drawings—and then communicating with others in the class, as well. Finally, the students are asked to explain why they chose certain features and not others. There are many points of intersection between the curriculum and the students’ own lives, their background knowledge, perspectives, and even hopes or dreams.

The teacher’s approach to teaching this lesson is constrained by a number of factors in addition to class size: lesson length, prescribed textbook materials (supplemented by the teacher’s PPT slides), and learning outcomes. Teachers and students are held accountable for the curriculum with monthly examinations for all classes in the same grade, culminating in their final year with the high-stakes College Entrance Examination, which determines students’ higher education prospects and places considerable emphasis on English grammar. Even so, this very experienced teacher has managed to find ways of engaging students in interactions about the topic and has also highlighted both the language structures required to complete the task effectively that were also in the textbook (e.g., nouns: *architecture, balcony, furniture*; adjectives: *classical, modern*; expressions of preference: *I’d rather . . . , In my opinion, . . . , What I like is . . .*) and the grammar (past participles used as object complements: *We want traditional materials [to be] used*; hypothetical conditionals: *If I were to build a house, I would . . .*). The students seem genuinely interested in the lesson and are able to express themselves. The teacher espouses CLT but concedes that she must provide balanced instruction given the very language-focused curriculum mandated by the province.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF CLT

The CLT movement, often also referred to as the communicative approach, began in the 1970s to address shifting priorities in both education and society associated with socioeconomic trends at the time in continental Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Addressing the needs of mobile or migrant language learners wishing to convey and interpret meanings in actual social contexts became paramount. These learners often had very practical needs like getting a job, buying groceries, finding housing, or speaking to neighbors. Giving learners the tools to communicate and some choice regarding what they might want to say or write as well as the freedom to experiment with language use distinguished CLT from other widely used approaches based on pattern drilling, recitation, and grammatical analysis (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

An important parallel development taking place within theoretical linguistics was an emphasis on understanding the functions of language in a variety of social contexts. This included analyzing the kinds of adaptations that competent speakers know how to make when speaking to others of higher versus lower status, when speaking formally versus informally, when talking about technical or academic topics versus everyday subjects, and when interpreting others' speech and writing, among other facets of sociolinguistics (the study of language use in society). Savignon (1983, 2001, 2005, 2007), an American proponent of CLT, documented some of these shifts in European and British functional linguistics and also their impact on language teaching internationally since then.

The growing convergence in social and functional orientations in linguistics, along with the needs of learners seeking practical language skills for social, academic, occupational, and other purposes in the United Kingdom and continental Europe, gave rise to a very pragmatic and learner-centered approach to language teaching and learning. In the United States, similarly, a more socially oriented linguistics was proposed by Hymes (1971). He argued that to function in society, to be able to use language appropriately in social situations, speakers must know how to produce and interpret language for a wide range of purposes, as part of different types of activities in many settings,

and with a variety of interlocutors. This ability to use language effectively, which native speakers of a language often take for granted, is known as *communicative competence*. Communicative competence was contrasted with idealized, abstract representations of grammatical knowledge (linguistic competence) or intuitions that native speakers have about language (e.g., Chomsky, 1965) with little reference to the observed real-world linguistic behaviors, needs, or intentions of speakers.

In addition to changes in society and linguistics that gave rise to the new field of sociolinguistics, psychological theories of learning were also evolving from more behavioral to more cognitive and social approaches. New insights about the nature of L1 and L2 learning, skill acquisition, comprehension, production, and memory, in particular, acknowledged the interplay of multiple factors in successful language learning and education, going well beyond rote skills. Among the many insights generated by the newer learning theories was that learners need to be actively and socially engaged in constructing meaning (either as readers/listeners or as speakers/writers) by interacting with both their textual environment (e.g., linguistic and nonlinguistic material, ideas, and texts) and with other language users. They need to attend simultaneously to the basic building blocks of language, such as morphemes (the smallest units of meaning or structure in language), words (which may include more than one morpheme), and grammatical structures (a bottom-up approach to processing information), and also to the larger meanings and types of discourse being conveyed (a more top-down holistic approach).

In our earlier examples, students were engaged in discourse about past events and leisure activities (Experience 1) and preferred types of art, architecture, and housing (Experience 2). Students need to become effective communicators in their L2 using many kinds of language (or discourse)—to compare and contrast items, describe sequences in a complicated process or narrative, categorize and classify information, present the causes and effects of different actions or events, provide evaluations, persuade people by making a good argument, or use language creatively to express themselves. Thus, the ability to learn and use grammar effectively, though clearly important, is only part of being able to communicate well. Appropriate registers or styles of speech

(academic, nonacademic; formal, informal) and other socially appropriate ways of engaging in oral or written communication (making requests, complimenting others, complaining, apologizing, and expressing humor or passion) are also required in particular situations.

To develop communicative abilities, it was argued, learners need to experience or practice communicating in the language they are learning by negotiating meanings with others (e.g., Scarcella, Andersen, & Krashen, 1990). The term *negotiation of meaning* comes up often in discussions of CLT, and it refers to efforts to make oneself understood and to understand others—to convey messages or meanings—by asking such questions as “Is this what you mean?” and “Do you understand what I’m trying to say?” After all, communication—and learning—cannot occur if people do not understand what others have tried to express. The first wave of research in the new subfield of second language acquisition (SLA) also provided compelling evidence that learners do not simply learn what they are taught or are exposed to, especially if the grammatical and lexical (vocabulary) structures are too complicated or too numerous, or if students are not cognitively (mentally) ready to acquire them (R. Ellis, 1994b). (See also Ellis, this volume.)

In Canada, French immersion researchers Canale and Swain (1980) began to operationalize communicative competence for the purposes of instructing and assessing English-speaking learners of French in special programs in which most of the instruction was delivered in French. They sought to compare students' ability to communicate in their L2, French, with that of native French speakers or of learners of French in more traditional L2 programs. In addition to grammatical competence, long the hallmark of language teaching internationally, the following three components were added: sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and later, discourse competence (Canale, 1983). These four kinds of competence represent interrelated aspects of speakers' being able to use language effectively for purposes of communication both inside and outside classrooms.

Whereas *grammatical competence* refers to the ability to use and interpret sentence-level features of language effectively, including vocabulary (lexis), syntax (grammar), morphology (word construction), semantics (meaning), and phonology

(the mapping of structure and meaning onto sound patterns), the other three domains of competence operate across different levels of language—from the word or sentence level to the larger social and discourse contexts. These larger units of language involve strings of phrases, sentences, or spoken utterances and the ability to cope with communicative needs in interactional contexts in strategic ways. An example of strategic language use is speakers' being able to paraphrase or find a synonym when unable to retrieve a word or other desired expression. So, if learners cannot think of the English word *enormous* but produce *very large*, *huge*, or *gigantic*, they have strategically managed their communication by finding a similar expression.

These additional, newly elaborated, and tested kinds of competence under the larger umbrella of communicative competence were important because they signaled to teachers, administrators, textbook writers, testers, and language learners themselves that learning phrase-level or sentence-level grammar and vocabulary alone does not enable one to communicate well across a variety of contexts. Furthermore, people must learn to create and comprehend cohesive and coherent oral and written texts on different topics (reflecting discourse competence); that is, they must produce language that makes sense, with ideas tied together in a logical, smooth manner so the relationship between ideas and sentences is clear, involving neither too much repetition nor too much disconnected switching between topics or other things being discussed. They must also learn to produce and interpret different genres or types of language use (e.g., a dialogue, a short narrative, a news or weather report, a personal letter, or a research paper) and in different disciplines or content areas (e.g., in the sciences versus the humanities). Nevertheless, learners cannot be expected to know everything there is to know about language across disciplines—not even native speakers do—since language learning, including L1 learning, is a lifetime process guided by need and opportunity.

Other aspects of language education not originally given prominence in CLT include critical thinking (e.g., Benesch, 1993) and critical literacies (e.g., Pennycook, 1999), which are now sometimes folded into CLT as well. *Critical thinking* is the ability to analyze information rationally, solve problems, and discern and evaluate implicit

assumptions, values, and points of view while considering alternative perspectives; *critical literacies* are similar analytic skills applied to various kinds of texts—reading between the lines—to expose issues of bias (both explicit and implicit), misrepresentation, and possible manipulation of readers and listeners by texts and to consider alternative interpretations or versions of the same texts.

Despite CLT's origins in the teaching of European languages in Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America, its current reach is much more global, with educators worldwide recognizing the importance of a more functional and practical approach to language education. CLT is by no means a uniform method, however. If anything, like the term *democracy*, CLT is used to describe an increasingly diverse array of practices, principles, and contexts.

Indeed, many scholars have wondered whether the term CLT has outlived its usefulness because of the many different ways it has been interpreted and applied. However, Littlewood (2011) argues that "CLT still serves as a valuable reminder that the aim of teaching is not to learn bits of language but to 'improve the students' ability to communicate'" and that "every country needs people who can communicate internationally" (p. 542). He also asserts that both analytical and experiential aspects of language learning are valuable. Therefore, CLT should emphasize learners' experiences with language, life, and the curriculum *and* language analysis.

As I have suggested, the implementation of CLT is very context-dependent, based on local language education policies, educational cultures, assessment practices, and the availability of proficient and trained teachers and resources (e.g., textbooks, multimedia, classroom layouts, and number of students per class). Local demographics, languages, and the primary purposes for which languages are being taught and learned must be considered. No two countries or contexts are identical.

According to J. Richards (2006a), language instruction and learning in the early decades of CLT focused on fluency and the integration of language skills, rewarding learners' efforts to speak or write even if errors resulted. Many kinds of instructional activities were recommended, from mechanical language practice initially, involving the entire class or individuals, to much more open-ended communicative practice, some of it

requiring either one-way or two-way exchanges of information through activities in which partners need to share and consolidate information to carry out the task. These principles still apply. However, now other types of activities, such as inductive discovery-oriented learning, are also encouraged where students try to find patterns in language texts and data sets (e.g., common collocations of words) and guess their meanings or usage. The teacher's role is to create a nurturing, collaborative learning community and worthwhile activities for students. Richards's own English language textbooks embody CLT principles as well (e.g., *New Interchange*, J. Richards, 2012; *Passages*, Richards & Sandy, 2008). The existence of a flexible curriculum (over which the teacher and students have a fair amount of control and input), small class sizes, and relatively little formal assessment is assumed in much CLT pedagogy, unlike the situation in Experience 2.

How does CLT relate to other proficiency-based approaches to language teaching?

As CLT was developing, particularly for adult English language teaching, other highly compatible theoretical frameworks were being developed. Three are discussed in this section.

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Standards. The first related proficiency framework or model that arose alongside CLT was the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) *Standards for Foreign Language Learning for the 21st Century*, also known as the Five Cs model. This model consisted of the following components:

1. *Communication*: fostering communication within and across cultures (oral and written)
2. *Cultures*: encouraging the development of deep cultural understanding and insight
3. *Connections*: forging connections with other disciplines and information sources
4. *Comparisons*: facilitating metalinguistic and metacultural understanding by comparing one's own and the target language
5. *Communities*: making connections with multilingual communities of target-language

speakers near and far and becoming lifelong learners (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, n.d.)

Each component represents an interlocking knowledge domain for language education, although communication (the first C) is part of all of them. This model, which evolved in the late twentieth century, is widely used in postsecondary and, increasingly, elementary and secondary foreign language ("world language") programs across the United States (Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Like CLT, the ACTFL Standards movement stresses contextualizing language itself, contextualizing learning activities and language use, fostering communication, and integrating the learning of language, culture, communication, and (academic) content of different types within and across communities. An emphasis on oral-aural language, particularly at lower levels, was a remedy to earlier approaches devoted to written literary text analysis and interpretation at the expense of a wider range of functional oral abilities on the part of college-level learners in particular (Higgs & Clifford, 1982).¹

Also like CLT, learning theories informing the model underscored both top-down and bottom-up orientations to learning and processing language. People must be able to attend to global meanings and structures of texts (What is the overall purpose and meaning of the text, and what cultural or other background knowledge is relevant?) and to details (What vocabulary or grammatical forms are involved, and what meanings are being conveyed by these?) at more or less the same time (see Shrum & Glisan, 2010). However, when first exposed to oral or written texts, students may need to focus initially on more holistic, top-down strategies that enable them to understand the linguistic elements used. In addition, the three primary modes of communication cultivated by this proficiency-based approach are known as *interpersonal* (e.g., conversing, and exchanging ideas or information with others), *interpretive* (providing impressions or understandings of content), and *presentational* (e.g., communicating through oral or written reports and public speaking). Assessment, according to ACTFL guidelines, includes determining the functional level of students as Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, or Superior.²

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The second framework or model with communicative ability and proficiency at its core originated in Europe and is now spreading to other parts of the world. It is known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2011). Developed under the direction of the Council of Europe, CEFR is an impressive functional approach to task-based teaching and assessment designed for at least 20 languages across a broad spectrum of proficiency levels (Broeder & Martyniuk, 2008; Little, 2007). CEFR now guides language teaching policies, planning, and assessment in countries in the European Union and is gaining ground in the Asia-Pacific region, Canada, and elsewhere. CEFR encourages learners, teachers, and teacher educators to collect evidence of learners' proficiency and language learning biographies through various media, including multimedia personal learning portfolios that include statements and illustrations of what learners can *do* in the various languages that are part of their L2 or multilingual repertoire (Duff, 2008; Little, 2007).

Like ACTFL, which provides descriptors of different levels of proficiency, CEFR is based on a common template that enables people working in different program contexts to have the same (i.e., common) frame of reference for what is meant by a Basic, Independent, and Proficient user (to use the CEFR labels). Functional descriptors help direct pedagogy by focusing teachers' and students' attention on practical competencies and serve as a means of assessing students' abilities and progress. Having a shared framework that is understood by other end users also allows for greater mobility and information sharing as learners move across or through different institutions and countries. Increasingly, programs adopting one or the other scale (i.e., ACTFL or CEFR) also specify the expected learning outcomes in terms of the level students are expected to reach after specified types and amounts (hours or years) of instruction. For example, a Basic A2-level learner, according to CEFR (2011), can (or is expected to) do the following:

Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal