Communicative approach in Technology-enhanced ESL Teaching-Learning

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Abstract: English language, in the present times, is the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca for economic, scientific, and political exchange. Therefore, command over the English language attains central place among the determinant of access to higher education and employment possibilities especially in a multilingual country like India. But traditionally “Chalk and Talk” method is used in Indian class-rooms, doesn’t develop communicative abilities among ESL learners. But in recent decades, ESL teaching and Learning have undergone a clear shift in the ways and means within and outside the classroom which is completely fuelled by technology. With emerging technologies, access to portable, wireless and cost-effective gadgets along with affordable high-speed data, present-day teachers and learners enjoy a plethora of options. This has led to the restructuring of the centuries old theories and practices in ESL teaching-learning milieu, making a clear departure from traditional Grammar-Translation method and “Chalk and Talk” method to Communicative approach and its methods.

Against this backdrop, this paper discusses the transition in the ESL teaching-learning milieu that has been fuelled by the change in theoretical underpinnings of language-acquisition and intrusion of technology on educational landscape in general and ESL teaching in particular.

Keywords: ESL teaching, Communicative approach in ESL/EFL.

I. INTRODUCTION

English language, in the present times, is the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca for economic, scientific, and political exchange. “Therefore, command over the English language attains central place among the determinant of access to higher education and employment possibilities especially in a multilingual country like India. But traditionally “Chalk and Talk” method is used in Indian class-rooms, doesn’t develop communicative abilities among ESL learners” (Sharma & Kiran, 2016). But in recent decades, ESL teaching and Learning have undergone a clear shift in the ways and means within and outside the classroom which is completely fuelled by technology. With emerging technologies, access to portable, wireless and cost-effective gadgets along with affordable high-speed data, present-day teachers and learners enjoy a plethora of options. This has led to the restructuring of the centuries old theories and practices in ESL teaching-learning milieu, making a clear departure from traditional Grammar-Translation method and “Chalk and Talk” method to Communicative approach and its methods.

This seems to be a continuation of the trend in which teachers, in the past also, have found various methods or models for teaching languages to improve its outcome. In the same way, within the last quarter century, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been put forth around the world as a new or innovative approach to teach English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). In communicative approach, both the means and the goal are that of developing communicative ability among ESL learners. This suits the requirement of rapidly globalising educational milieu in which the prime requirement is the ability to communicate whether in trade or commerce or any other sphere of life.

Definition of an ESL Student: As per the ESL Policy Framework Document of Ministry of Education, British Columbia titled English Language - study and teaching as a second language, English as a Second Language (ESL) students are those whose primary language(s) or language(s) of the home, is other than English and who may therefore require additional services in order to develop their individual potential within British Columbia’s school system. Some students speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in the broader Canadian society and in school; they may require ESL support. (ESL Policy Framework, 1999)

Definition of Communicative Language Teaching:

“Communicative Approach in language learning is an approach that is used in learning the second language or foreign language that emphasizes on the improvement of communicative ability”, that is “the ability of applying the language principle in order to produce grammatical sentences and understand ‘when, where, and to whom’ the sentences used” (Richard, 1997). Communicative method focuses on language as a medium of communication. It recognises that communication has a social purpose – learner which has something to say or...
find out.” Communication embraces a whole spectrum of functions and notions” (Richards, Jack C. & Rogers, Theodore S., 2001).

Generally, dimensions of communicative ability is said to be formed by four competences including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategy competencies. Grammatical competence refers to mastery over language system which includes mastery over vocabulary, word formation, and sentence meaning. Sociolinguistic competence is a competence to understand and produce language according to the social context. Discourse competence is related to the ability of combining the form and the meaning of a language besides to understand the kinds of discourse which is cohesive and coherent. Strategy competence corresponds to the ability of overcoming the obstacles while improving the effectiveness of communication (Conale, 1983).

“Communicative approach is much more pupil-orientated, because dictated by pupil’s needs and interests. Communicative approach seeks to personalise and localise language and adapt it to interests of pupils. Communicative approach seeks to use authentic resources, more interesting and motivating. In foreign language classroom authentic texts serves as partial substitute for community of native speaker. Newspaper and magazine articles, poems, annuals, recipes, telephone directories, videos, new bulletins, discussion programmes – all can be exploited in variety of ways” (Richards, Jack C. & Rogers, Theodore S., 2001).

This approach, which was developed in the 1980s as a reaction to grammar based approaches, emphasizes the use of language for meaningful purposes in authentic situation. It is an approach for ESL/EFL teaching which mainly focuses on development of communicative competence through engaging the learner in the real communications.

The main principles of communicative approach include:
- Development of ability of effective communication as a means and the end.
- Focus on meaning, appropriate usage, fluency and accuracy
- Use of authentic materials (material which has been written for a purpose other than language teaching)
- Methods that makes the learner reflect on real life situation,
- Integration of four basic language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Communicative Approach aims at enabling the learners to communicate with others in real-life situations with a fairly intelligible expression. As is said by Littlewood (1988) “Communicative Approach in the language learning pays attention to the language structural aspects and its functional aspects. Language structural aspects focus on language form grammatically, while language functional aspects relate to the functions of language form itself”.

**Fundamental Propositions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

- Basic assumptions or propositions of CLT can be summarized into the following points:
  - When learners engage in interaction and meaningful communication, second-language learning is facilitated.
  - Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises offer students the opportunity to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, see how language is used, and participate in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
  - Meaningful communication results when students engage with relevant, purposeful, interesting and engaging content.
  - Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
  - Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language and trial and error. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
  - A language teacher’s role in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.

These propositions of CLT auger well in a classroom that incorporates technology to provide its learners multiple opportunities to have inputs of ESL, experience its culture, engage in a personalised meaning-making process and express in a variety of contexts.

**Transition in ESL Teaching Methodologies**

“After the prolonged period of more or less rigid and static pedagogical realm which comprised fixed knowledge, fixed methods of teaching and fixed ingredients (teacher and students), social media broke into it to make it more dynamic, flexible and learner-centred (Gupta and Kiran, 2013). Twenty first century has witnessed a complete paradigmatic change in ideologies and pedagogies of ESL which seems to be resulting from the ineffectiveness of previously used methodologies. Teachers who practiced Grammar Translation method at some point of the preceding decade completely trusted black board as the most apt device to impart conversation skills and the nuances of English language. Later on, over head projectors, acted as another medium for the teacher dominated class room. Such teachers believed in the dictum of drill and practice. As such, audio tapes acted as medium of Audio-lingual method. In the later years of 1970s, audio lingual method fell into disregard. During 1980s and 1990s, there was a sweeping change over the existing trends then, and more emphasis was
laid on authentic and meaningful contextualized discourse. Communication is the groundwork based on which any idea can progress and develop into a full fledged one. Without that, sustenance in any field is impossible. Some of the recent trends in the ESL are quite apparent while the others are still to make their presence felt. Some are yet to come into existence and therefore subject to evolution and change. At present hand-held, portable devices such as smart-phones, tabs, electronic notebooks etc have changed the language learning milieu to more student-centric, flexible (anytime anywhere learning) and more contextual which enable a learner to engage in real-life communications through active participation which is the heart of the communicative approach.

This shift in the theoretical underpinnings of the ESL teaching of the past decade seems to be in sync with observation of B.F. Skinner’s Theory of Learning in which Skinner accounted for language development by means of environmental influence which brought a revolution in the ideology of language learning as well as language acquisition. Skinner argued that children learn language based on behaviourist reinforcement principles by associating words with meanings. Correct utterances are positively reinforced when the child realizes the communicative value of words and phrases. For example, when the child says ‘milk’ and the mother will smile and give her some as a result, the child will find this outcome rewarding, enhancing the child's language development (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011).

In addition to this, Krashen’s theory of Second Language Acquisition further added spice to flavour. His main hypotheses were

- Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill.
- Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers is concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.
- The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production.
- In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful.

The Total Physical Response Theory of James Asher advocated that an adult’s second language learning is a parallel process to a child’s first language acquisition. It is based on the coordination of language and physical movement. In TPR, instructors give commands to students in the target language, and students respond with whole-body actions. The method is an example of the comprehension approach to language teaching. The listening and responding (with actions) serves two purposes: It is a means of quickly recognizing meaning in the language being learned, and a means of passively learning the structure of the language itself. Grammar is not taught explicitly, but can be learned from the language input. TPR is a valuable way to learn vocabulary, especially idiomatic terms, e.g., phrasal verbs.

**Linkage between Modern theories and Technology-assisted Language Acquisition**

Due to the modern linguistic theories discussed above, the emphasis has shifted from teaching to learning that has created a more interactive learning environment for teachers and learners and from instruction to communication. These new environments have changed the roles of teachers and students. The role of a teacher/tutor changes from a knowledge giver to that of a facilitator in a technology-assisted/virtual classroom. The changing roles do not reduce the importance of an adult’s second language learning but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. The changing roles do not reduce the importance of a teacher but require new LT skills. The tutors must be aware of pedagogical, social, managerial and technical areas during the planning and implementation of the materials and the course supporting the idea of more interactive and learner-centred environment which in the essence of communicative approach.

**Operationalisation of Communicative approach in a technology-enhanced ESL classroom**

All over the world, the student-centred English language teachers seem to have realized that gone are the days when teachers reigned their class with all monopoly where the students remained as passive. There is rethinking regarding the growing interest of implementing the basic educational goals. Having realized the need of the hour, the English teachers convene different types of conferences and seminars to create a platform and to get to know the upcoming ideologies in the ESL Teaching and also to upgrade themselves professionally. Now student is at the forefront of acquisition of knowledge and teacher has assumed the role of a mediator of facilitator in the era of globalisation of knowledge and onslaught of ICT. The field of the ESL Teaching has been deeply pervaded by the ICT. The easy access to technology has made information possible for enhancement of learning programme and about 80% of it is in English. At the outset, the English teachers regarded internet as one of the alternative media to teach language. The followings are some of the ICT enabled teaching activities.
Computer Mediated English Communication

“English, has been undoubtedly the lingua franca of the internet. The Computer Mediated English uses the language as per convenience and not by convention. For instance, using a single letter or number for a word. For instance, ‘e’ for ‘see’, ‘u’ for ‘you’ and ‘2’ for ‘two’ or ‘to’ the use of acronyms like TTYL (talk to you later) WUATB (wish you all the best): using asterisks” *” for emphasis and emoticons for smile, for frown etc. Realizing its significance as a source of communication, the linguistic elements and discourse of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) needs a serious review.

Web Based Learning

A web based learning also called technology based learning/distance learning/on line education/e learning is one of the fastest developing areas. It provides opportunities to create well–designed, learner–centred, affordable, interactive, officiate, flexible e-learning environment (Khan, 2005). There are thousands of English web based classes that offer trainings for a variety of basic language skills such as Learning, Speaking, Reading and Writing and are made interactive in a variety of ways. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are the latest breakthrough in this field that are very important for easy and affordable means to language leaning. Some of the common technologies available for promotion of education are as follows:

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

In Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), computer and mobile phone give a stimulus to the learner by being not a mere tool but also a tutor. They give a real-time feedback to the learner. For instance, an ESL student is no longer dependent on teacher to know the correct pronunciation, meaning and usage of word. Everything is available on a click of the mouse or finger tip in such a way that learner can engage in language-learning at anytime and anywhere without the requirement of a physical classroom or teacher. So many times learners have to read the commands that pop-up on smart-phone and computer to be accepted or rejected which subconsciously cause English language-acquisition through technology-instigated communication. Texting applications, such as Whatsapp, Line, Viber, Messenger, and SMS also provide venues for communication with a variety of people.

Blogs

Blogs are a recent phenomenon which entails updating a personal or professional journal frequently for public consumption. The blogs enable uploading and linking the files which is very much suited to serve as on line personal journals for students. Blogging becomes communicative and interactive when participants assume multiple roles in the writing process, as readers/reviewers who respond to other writers’ posts, and as writers-readers who, returning to their own posts, react to criticism of their own posts. The readers in turn can comment on what they read, although blogs can be placed in secured environments as well.

Skype

Skype is a tool for online video-conferencing in which using the technological instruments like laptops with cameras. The students can communicate with their teachers and friends who are at remote places. Likewise, they could very well communicate with the speakers of native language and get their pronunciation checked so as to improve their speaking.

MOOCs

Massive open online courses are online courses which are quite popular these days and aim at unlimited participation and open access via the web. In addition to traditional course materials such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive user forums through chat rooms to support community interactions between students and teachers.

II. CONCLUSION

In order to stay relevant and useful, everything has to adapt to the change and update itself, so is true about a teaching-learning methods and approaches. Therefore, teacher-centric traditional method such as Grammar-Translation method of ESL teaching needs to be replaced with the current trends and communicative methods of the ESL Teaching. The theories and methods are constantly evolving in the ESL Teaching, for example; CALL, MALL, use of video-conferencing and texting applications, MOOCs; all of which auger well with communicative approach and facilitate the development of communicative abilities among learners which is the need of the hour. Teacher’s roles as a facilitator, planner and context-creator are also important in making this transition smooth and meaningful.

III. REFERENCES


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