Communicative Language Teaching

Background
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) started in the late 1960s and continues to evolve. It is not actually a method but an approach to teaching based on the view that learning a language means learning how to communicate effectively in the world outside the classroom. It developed mainly as a reaction to the limitations of previous methods which put little, if any, emphasis on the ability to communicate or interact. It was also influenced by developments in the way the language was described – taking into account the communicative function of language, i.e. that we use language to do things like suggest, invite, agree, request, criticize, predict, and so on.

Features
Here are some of the main features of CLT:

– The goal is to learn to communicate in the target language.
– There is an emphasis on meaning and using the language rather than on the structure and form of the language.
– Oral and written activities may be used from the start, for example, role plays, dialogues, games, and problem-solving.
– One role for the teacher is that of a ‘facilitator’ who helps learners to communicate in English and motivates them to work with the language.
– Learners often interact with each other through pair or group work.
– The four skills are developed simultaneously.

Many CLT classrooms use a Presentation–Practice–Production or PPP model of teaching. The teacher first ‘presents’ the new language, possibly by playing a recorded dialogue or getting the learners to read a written text. Then the learners ‘practise’ the new language in a controlled way, possibly by completing written exercises using the new language or in controlled pair work practising similar dialogues. Finally, the learners ‘produce’ the language in a freer activity that allows them to communicate, hopefully using the language they have just studied.

An example of a PPP lesson at an elementary level would be introducing the language of giving directions. First, the teacher might present the target language by asking the learners to listen to a recording of someone asking for directions and to complete some sentences on a worksheet. The sentences would include the language of directions. The learners then practice this language using simple maps provided by the teacher (see Figure 2.3).
Finally, they can produce the language more freely by giving directions to places they actually know, possibly using real maps brought into the classroom for this purpose by the teacher or drawn by the learners themselves.

Role playing is a common feature of the CLT classroom and involves the learners acting as someone else, for example, a customer, a ticket sales person, etc. in a situation where they need to use English, for example, to order a meal or buy tickets at a railway station. In this case, one learner would

**EVERYDAY ENGLISH**

**Directions 1**

1. Look at the street map. Where can you buy these things?

   - some sauce
   - a plane ticket
   - a newspaper
   - a book
   - some stamps

   ![Street map with various locations labeled]

2. Listen to the conversations and complete them.

   1. A man and his wife are in the street. Where is the bank?
      - It's on the corner.
      - Thanks.

   2. A man is standing next to a clothes shop. Is there a post office near here?
      - Yes, it's on the corner.
      - Thanks.

   3. A woman is standing near a supermarket. Is there a chemist's shop near here?
      - Yes, it's on the corner.
      - Thanks.

3. Make more conversations with your partner. Ask and answer about these places:

   - a booking
   - a cinema
   - a bank
   - a phone box
   - a public toilet
   - a newsagent's shop
   - a newsagent
   - a supermarket
   - a bus stop
   - a post office
   - a pub

4. Talk about where you can go there.

   - The cinema is near here.
   - It's in the center.
   - A chemist's shop.
   - What about a bookshop near here?
   - A supermarket.

**Figure 2.3** A page from an English coursebook published in 2000 (Headway Elementary).
be the customer asking questions about the train times and ticket prices, etc, while another would be the ticket seller giving the information.

**ACTIVITY 3**

Imagine you are preparing your learners for the following role plays. Note down for each of the situations below some of the language you would teach before the role play. Take into account the learners’ age and level.

1. Meeting someone for the first time  
   - Young beginners
2. Planning a night out with friends  
   - Teenage intermediate learners

The original PPP model has been developed and modified since it was first introduced and no longer represents CLT as the only teaching model. Language can be introduced and practised in a variety of ways. Learners can be encouraged to discover the patterns of the language for themselves through reading or listening to texts and answering questions about the patterns of the language contained in the texts. For example:

- Who's going to the cinema? We are.
- Who'll go to the cinema? We will.
- Who's been to the cinema? We have.
- Who goes to the cinema? We do.
- Who went to the cinema? We did.

How do we give a short response to a 'wh' question? (use the full form of the original auxiliary or 'do' if there is no auxiliary; the main verb and indirect object are omitted.)

An alternative to this would be to give the learners a rule and then give them an exercise to practise the application of the rule. For example:

To make a comparison we add '-er' to words of one syllable, for example, 'tall' → 'taller', and 'more' before words of three syllables, for example, 'beautiful' → 'more beautiful'. For words of one syllable ending in 'y' we change the 'y' to 'i' and add '-er', for example, 'happy' → 'happier'.

1. John is (short) than Paul.
2. Your boots are (dirty) than mine.
3. This garden is (attractive) than the other one.

The Test-Teach-Test (T'T'T') approach is useful when the teacher is not sure whether the learners are familiar with a particular item of language. For example, the class are asked to work in pairs and arrange a time to meet using a pre-prepared schedule. The learners do the activity and the teacher monitors and notes down the use of tenses referring to the future, for example, 'I will meet John tomorrow', 'I will go shopping on Saturday', etc.
Based on these results the teacher decides which areas the learners need to do more work on and devises an activity that introduces the present continuous to talk about arrangements (‘I’m meeting John tomorrow.’) and ‘going to’ to talk about intentions (‘I’m going to go shopping on Saturday’). The learners then do a practice activity similar to the original one.

Current status

CLT is very widely used in language teaching all over the world. It has shifted the focus in language teaching from learning about the language to learning to communicate in the language. However, there are problems associated with CLT:

– The emphasis on pair and group work can create problems in some classes. Some learners, particularly adults, think it is a waste of time talking to other L2 speakers rather than a native-speaker teacher.
– Native-speaker teachers do not need to know much about the language in order to become teachers.
– The approach can lead to too much emphasis on speaking and listening.
– Dividing the language up into discrete units under the headings of ‘vocabulary’, ‘grammar’, and ‘functions’ and the four skills is misleading. Communication involves using all these elements simultaneously.
– Learners do not necessarily learn what they are taught, i.e. the discrete language items, in the order that they are taught.

The most serious criticism of CLT is that it is not as effective as it claims to be. A lot of learners complete their studies but are still unable to communicate in English. One reaction to this has been to change the learning focus from the content, i.e. the structures, functions, and vocabulary, to the process, that is ‘to use English to learn it’ rather than ‘to learn to use English’. This brings us to the next model of learning, Task-Based Learning.

Activity 4

Look at these typical CLT-related problems and think of possible solutions that you could use with your learners.

1. Learners are shy about working in pairs or groups.
2. The class is very large and the seats and desks cannot be moved.
3. The class has to prepare for written, not spoken, exams.
4. Learners often ask for new vocabulary in English which you are unprepared for.

Task-Based Learning

Task-Based Learning (TBL) focuses on the ‘process’ of communicating by setting learners tasks to complete using the target language. During this
process, it is claimed, the learners acquire language as they try to express themselves and understand others. The tasks can range from information gap to problem-solving tasks. One advantage of TBL is that learners are given the opportunity to use the full range of skills and language they have at the same time, rather than in discrete units, as they sometimes do with the CLT model.

A typical task sequence may include:

- pre-tasks: these are activities which prepare learners to complete a task, for example, by guiding learners through an example of the task they will have to do. There can be a number of pre-tasks in one lesson.
- tasks: these form the main body of the lesson and can involve a number of steps. For example, learners working in pairs or groups may first complete the task, then prepare a report on the task, and finally present the report to the class.
- post-tasks: these move away from activities designed to promote fluency to those designed to promote accuracy.

An example of a task might be to plan a journey by train. The class is divided into groups of five. Each learner in the group has information which the rest of the groups need, for example, train times, the route, the price of tickets, etc. By sharing this information the group can successfully plan the trip and in doing so consolidate and extend their language ability.

There are several uncertainties regarding TBL. What language the learners acquire depends on how the task is performed, so it is difficult to state what language will be learnt, if any – the learners may avoid learning or using new language and make do with the language they have. Learners may also feel