

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIVE

**The Implementation of Communicative Approaches in English as a foreign language
in (EFL) Settings: The feasibility of Communicative Language Teaching**

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The implementation of Communicative Approaches

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AGRADECIMIENTOS

A Dios, quien me dio la vida

A mi familia

Amis profesores y amigos

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper was to provide foreign language teachers and students with an optional tool which may help them in the achievement of the objectives for the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) training, through the implementation of current communicative approaches.

The main objective of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is that language users develop their communicative competence, communicating in the target language and interacting in real situations.

In order to offer a more consistent proposal, this paper also presents current communicative approaches such as Content Based Instruction (CBI), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL), and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) which base their theoretical background on CLT.

CBI suggests a contextualized instruction that considers contents chosen by learners, CLL proposes that work in classroom be cooperative; that means that students help ones to others, and TBLT recommends the accomplishment of real-life activities and tasks for complementing the instruction. As well, the assessment will be an implicit assignment during the whole process.

Under this scenario, it would be possible to say that the SLA could be a more feasible goal to achieve, teachers could find support in their instruction, and students will probably be more engaged in an instruction which keeps in mind their preferences.

Keywords: Communication, competence, content, instruction, cooperativism, tasks, assessment.

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Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo fue ofrecer a los profesores y estudiantes de lengua extranjera una herramienta que ayude en la obtención de los objetivos propuestos para la Adquisición de una Segunda Lengua, a través de la implementación de los actuales enfoques comunicativos.

El principal objetivo del método comunicativo es que los aprendices desarrollen su competencia comunicativa, haciendo uso de la lengua objeto e interactuando en situaciones reales.

Con el fin de que la propuesta sea más consistente, se presenta algunos enfoques comunicativos actuales: La instrucción por contenidos, el aprendizaje cooperativo y el enfoque basado en tareas.

La instrucción por contenidos sugiere que la enseñanza sea contextualizada y tenga en cuenta temas elegidos por los estudiantes. El aprendizaje cooperativo propone que el trabajo desarrollado en el salón de clase sea cooperativo, apuntando a que los estudiantes se ayuden mutuamente y el enfoque basado en tareas recomienda la realización de tareas y actividades para complementar todo la instrucción. La evaluación estará implícita en todo el proceso.

Con todo lo anterior, se podría afirmar que la adquisición de una segunda lengua será una meta más posible de alcanzar, los profesores podrían encontrar soporte en la misma instrucción y los estudiantes estarán más involucrados con una instrucción que tiene en cuenta sus preferencias.

Palabras clave: Comunicación, competencia, contenido, instrucción, cooperativismo, tareas, evaluación.

The implementation of communicative approaches in English as a foreign language in (EFL) settings: the feasibility of Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and similar current approaches such as Task-based language teaching (TBLT), Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) are proposed in this paper as an alternative in the teaching and learning processes. Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests we are currently in the postmethod era and that second/foreign language teachers need to consider what is feasible in their contexts, their students' needs and the goals of teaching to make methodological decisions. This document sets forward the idea that these approaches might hearten the student's English proficiency and that the features of these approaches make them suitable to be adapted to our EFL situation despite the fact that these approaches were developed mostly for situations where English is taught as a second language (ESL). This paper seeks to show how communicative competence can be achieved in an EFL setting by means of implementing these approaches. According to the Common European Framework (CEF) the best way to achieve the goal of being able to perform in different communicative situations in the second language (L2) is through the development of the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), promoting a communicative methodology, facilitating the conditions to stimulate an environment conducive for learning. This environment would be created considering the theoretical background of CLT, and specific features of TBLT, CBI and CLL.

The acquisition of a second or foreign language (L2) is a requirement that students, teachers and all the community need to fulfill in Colombia and abroad. It can be said that it

is a more evident necessity nowadays, due to the implication of using a second language for business, job opportunities, graduate studies and tourism.

In educational institutions in this country, English is an obligatory subject; it was implemented by “Ley 115 de Febrero 8 de 1994”. It mentions that one of the objectives of education should be the acquisition of speaking, reading, and comprehension skills in at least one foreign language, making it the starting point of the creation of new regulations of foreign languages in Colombia (Sánchez & Obando, 2008).

To complement the idea that current teaching approaches are needed in Colombia if we want to achieve the goals set by the government, it is important to mention an idea that permeates CLT, TBLT, CBI and CLL: Alternative Assessment. Alternative assessment becomes a supplementary tool for teachers to recognize the students’ learning evolution through oral and written performance. In alternative assessment the learners’ strengths and weak areas are made evident, and teachers can emphasize or reinforce certain skills or functions, enhancing the whole Second Language Acquisition (SLA), reducing the anxiety and subjectivity that traditional assessment seems to exhibit.

Before describing the approaches that may be implemented in foreign language education in Colombia in order to achieve communicative competence, it is important to describe the context where current communicative approaches could be implemented.

One of the most significant goals for teaching English in educational institutions in Colombia is to carry out the Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB), a project created by the Colombian government, which is expected to be fully implemented by the year 2019 and that has as a basis the Common European Framework document.

However, it is necessary to mention that in some schools, especially in public institutions, English is not very relevant yet. As the former Minister of Education suggested in the “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, 2006” document, some schools only have one hour a week to provide foreign language instruction and some schools do not have any time programmed in their schedules for English lessons. Evidently, the curriculum in those schools is created without giving enough time or importance to English as a subject matter. In addition to the issue of available time, teachers in charge of the English area are not well-prepared for teaching the foreign language, since in some cases that subject is in charge of teachers from other areas, fact that is showed when students arrive to the university and demonstrate their lack of knowledge or their feeble performance in English abilities. Consequently, neither the methods they use are adequate nor the materials are sufficient to really take students to high proficiency levels. A third element, and one closely related to this paper is that because of the elements cited before, teachers tend to make an overuse of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). What is worse, GTM is not completely applied, just parts of it (grammar instruction carried out in Spanish, bilingual lists of vocabulary), which make English lessons even more ineffective.

As a former high-school student, I can say that all the elements above mentioned cause apathy and lack of motivation in students when learning English. The lack of success of L2 instruction is made evident when people do not obtain consistent results in standardized exams like ICFES and by the low proficiency in English of first semester students in universities, including the students enrolled in teaching programs.

For all these reasons, it has thought about the possibility of supporting and enhancing the second language acquisition (SLA) process here, suggesting the creation of a communicative environment in an EFL setting, specifically in Pasto, by implementing suitable features taken from communicative approaches.

CLT has been chosen as the main approach, since it has been considered for many authors such a relevant approach in the last 40 years. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been studied by many significant authors in the field of TESOL: Savignon (1991), Galloway (1993), Canale & Swain (1980), and Brown (2001) and there is enough research done to be able to identify its potentialities and limitations. Another reason, maybe the most important one to focus on CLT, is that it is the method that the Common European Framework suggests for being applied when learning/teaching a foreign language. Accordingly, proponents of the CLT approach argue that EFL students are in need of CLT methodology in order to achieve proficiency in the L2.

The idea of writing this research paper having methodology as the focus is that this document might be relevant for different groups of people. First, it is important for licensure students, since reading and analyzing current trends in methodology can drive them to apply the knowledge acquired at University and see how theory and practice are related in real life. Second, this work will be significant for teachers, especially those who are interested in knowing more about current approaches, since this overview may lead them to make a more effective implementation of those approaches. They might be an efficient option for teachers to facilitate the SLA process, promote significant results in the academic objectives among students and achieve national and regional goals in L2 instruction. Finally, this proposal could be useful for other students who are interested in

researching about the same topic. Obviously, the literature on current approaches is extensive and this paper intends to cover them partially. The analysis and application of recent approaches is a rich research topic that can be further developed.

Despite having appeared in the 1970s, communicative approaches tend to be misunderstood or to have problems in their implementation (Hiep, 2005). These misunderstandings are also considered in this paper since it is necessary to provide readers with straightforward ideas about the background, features and application of the approaches so that the misunderstandings are overcome in practice.

An additional section in this paper will be devoted to suggesting readers principles and possible ways in which teachers can create new activities keeping in mind the principles of four communicative approaches: Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based language Teaching, Cooperative Language Learning, and Content Based Instruction.

Finally, in order to provide a rather complete view of current trends, the possible ways to assess the communicative tasks derived from the approaches will be briefly discussed.

As can be seen, CLT could represent a key source for both teachers and learners who want to make relevant progress in the teaching and learning a second language process and who want to introduce positive changes in the educational institutions of our environment.

One idea that new and experienced teachers need to keep in mind nowadays is that there is no such thing as one best method that can be applied to every language course. One

method can never suit every classroom because there are differences regarding teaching and learning conditions, goals, resources and number of hours devoted to foreign language instruction. This idea has been advocated by authors like Kumaravadivelu (2006) or Brown (2001). In the postmethod era, instead of blindly adopting one method, teachers need to diagnose the needs of their learners, come up with a treatment and assess that treatment considering the contextual factors mentioned before. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), there are three aspects that need to guide teachers in making decisions regarding methodology. He argues that teachers have to consider particularity, practicality and possibility when planning and carrying out foreign language instruction. These three principles are briefly described here:

Particularity refers to the relationship between what is being taught and the conditions in which the language teaching and learning takes place. He states that a postmethod pedagogy has to be sensitive to a particular group of teachers and students. It means that the training has to be contextualized to each situation, in a particular environment, and with particular necessities for learning”

Practicality is related to the relationship between theory and practice. Under this scenario, teachers have to analyze if theory is connected to practice, according with what they experience in each classroom, their personal beliefs, institutional constraints and external factors such as politics or socio-cultural features. The teacher is expected to do research in classroom by means of developing at the same time, knowledge and skill.

Possibility is based on the theory of Paulo Freire and his followers in which it is established that pedagogy is linked to power and dominance and students have to develop forms of knowledge and practices to work with the experiences that people have to face. Possibility is also concerned to language ideology and learner identity. (pp. 171 - 175)

This current view involves important concepts such as contexts, integration of skills, beliefs and identity among others. However, it might seem that this reflection and the inclusion of these concepts are not prevalent in high schools in Pasto or Nariño. It also seems that we have not reached the postmethod era, by judging current practices we could say that we are far from it. This is evident if we observe the way L2 instruction is conducted in most institutions. It seems that students are trained in just one area of language, which is the grammatical part and, now, reading comprehension, which is what students “need” to get good scores in the ICFES test. The integration of skills is one common aspect among current communicative approaches and neglecting it could cause learners to not feel confident enough to use the L2 in communicative situations or contexts.

Why do teachers focus on isolated skills? As Celce-Murcia (2001) states, very few language teachers are aware of the meaning of being familiar with the methods for teaching foreign languages, their historical background and their implications for both teachers and students when applying them. All in all, teachers are not conscious of the options they have at their disposal to deliver effective instruction. Since our teaching practices cannot be assimilated to the postmethod era, it is important to determine where we are and try to figure out which methods are in use in Colombia. Thus, this paper introduces now the

features of communicative approaches, their similarities and potentialities. Celce-Murcia is right when suggesting that teachers be informed on the theoretical background of their profession, which includes knowing about approaches and methods before actually applying them.

An Overview of Early Language Teaching Approaches

Since the time when the Latin and Greek were *lingua francas*, diverse methods and techniques for obtaining consistent results in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have appeared. A brief overview is presented here in order to show the context that gave rise to current communicative approaches.

The predominating early method was the early version of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) until 1631, when Johann Amos Comenius published books setting forward new techniques used for teaching a language. Among these techniques, the most relevant involved using imitation instead of rules to teach a language; repetition, the use of limited vocabulary in early instruction stages, the practice of reading and speaking, and the use of pictures to provide students with meaning (Celce – Murcia, 2001).

Despite the fact that these ideas are still used nowadays and were partially adopted by methods such as Audio-Lingualism (ALM) or the Direct Method (DM), GTM gained importance again since German scholars decided that German should be equal in importance to the early *lingua francas*. This led them to focus on developing a method that placed a lot of importance on explicit grammar instruction, translation, bilingual lists of vocabulary and extensive use of the L1 (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). This excessive emphasis on accuracy and the lack of communicative skills caused GTM to lose importance at the end of the nineteenth century, and a new alternative in methodology arose.

The DM emphasized the notion that a language cannot be taught through explicit grammar instruction in the learners' first language. DM suggested that the role of teachers is the creation of some conditions for learning the second language, taking into account features like focusing on the oral part of the target language, which has to be taught, and accuracy in speaking, aiming to a native-like pronunciation, and developing the oral skills among students. All this had to be achieved using exclusively the L2 and teaching everyday language that learners could use in communicative exchanges. Unfortunately, the idea of having a native speaker in every classroom was difficult to put into practice and although DM was implemented in private schools, it could not be widely used in public schools (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

The next important trend in L2 methodology in the first half of the 20th century was the ALM. It arose in the 1940s and had military purposes since, at that time, World War II was taking place and countries like the United States required its army to understand the communications with other armed forces. This method emphasized achieving native-like proficiency and accuracy through over-learning drills and dialogues and was implemented in a modified way in different courses at different levels. This was the first time that the natural order of acquisition of the skills was considered. Instruction started with listening and speaking and then it built on reading and writing.

However, as a reaction to the previous approaches, the cognitive approach influenced by cognitive psychology emerged. It highlighted aspects such as instruction and learning, depending basically on the students' responsibility, grammar was learned in an implicit way, allowing students to perceive language rules. Another option that appeared at the time was the Humanistic Approach, which emphasis on the students' feelings and one

important feature, the teacher was seen as a counselor or facilitator, rather than an authority in the classroom.

Where does the Communicative Approach Come From?

After the notions established by the humanistic approach, the Communicative Approach appears like an outgrowth of the work of scholars from different disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and foreign language teaching such as Hymes, Halliday and Savignon (Celce - Murcia, 2001).

Celce – Murcia (2001) describes some characteristics of CLT, which aims at making communicative competence the goal when learning a second language: in this method, communication (understood as interaction) is the main goal. However, accuracy is also important and the courses have to include linguistic structures, semantic notions and social functions to really say that they are communicative. In order to make communication and meaning negotiation possible, teachers need to use pair work, role play and dramatizations, where students are engaged for adjusting language in different social situations. In more advanced stages, tasks based on negotiation of meaning and decision making take place. Additionally, when bringing communicative approaches into practice, it is necessary to keep in mind that all the activities carried out and the materials have to be authentic and provide the integration of the four skills. One important characteristic of communicative approaches is that the role of the teacher is no longer that of the center of the class and authority, but a facilitator for student-student interaction, a source of knowledge when students need him/her and the person who structures tasks in order to obtain output. One element that characterizes teachers is the proficient and extensive use of the second/foreign language in every class.

CLT, an overview

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a method that appears in the 1960's, as a result of the new inventions with the communicative approach in the language teaching and learning processes.

In the 1970s, both American and British proponents saw CLT as an approach rather than a method, which aims to make Communicative Competence the goal of language teaching and the procedures' development for the teaching of the four language skills, allowing the interdependence of language and communication. "The communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as communicative competence" (Richards and Rodgers, 1998).

The theory of communicative competence proposed by Hymes was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. According to Hymes, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of means of implementation available;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;

4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

Other important features of CLT are exposed by Hoa Hiep (2005), who states the following: “CLT is based on the work of sociolinguistics, particularly that of Hymes (1972)”. Arguing against Chomsky (1975), Hymes proposed that knowing a language involves more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules. In order to use the language effectively, Hymes posited, learners need to develop *communicative competence*- the ability to use the language they are learning appropriately in a given social encounter (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 281).

Widdowson (1978) in Brown (2000) presented a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text ability to use language for different purposes. A more recent but related analysis of communicative competence is found in Canale and Swain (1980) also cited by Brown (2000), in which four dimensions of communicative competence are identified: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. *Grammatical competence* refers to what is “formally possible”. It is the domain of grammatical and lexical capacity. *Sociolinguistic competence* refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose for their interaction. *Discourse competence* refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse

or text. *Strategic competence* refers to the coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication.

In order to complete this, Brown also names some characteristics of CLT. Some of them are:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals, therefore, must intertwine the organizational aspects of language with pragmatics.
2. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.
3. Students in a communicative class have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts while they focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.
5. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing bestower of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others. (pp. 42-43)

Misconceptions about CLT

As it is well-known, the goal for teaching a second language in Colombia is to develop it into a bilingual country, as it is established in “Estándares Básicos de

Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, 2006”, making use, of communicative approaches to obtain this goal.

In this part of the paper some misconceptions of CLT are mentioned, in order to gain clarity and overcome them when applying it.

Thompson (1996) illustrates us in relation to some misconceptions of CLT, “Although communicative language teaching is accepted by many applied linguists and teachers as the most effective approach among those in general use, there are still a number of misconceptions about what it involves. There are four of the main misconceptions teachers have for the reason that some of them are confused about what CLT means, and this is a product of the lack of knowledge referring to CLT”.

The first misconception discussed in this article is that for some teachers CLT means not teaching grammar: one line of argument is that grammar teaching is impossible because the knowledge that a speaker needs to achieve in order to use a language is simply too complex (Prabhu, 1987, cited by Thompson) or that grammar teaching is unnecessary then knowledge is of a kind which cannot be passed on in the form of stable rules, but can only be acquired unconsciously through exposure to it. This situation is explainable, seeing that CLT is considered a reaction against structural methods, which featured grammar and neglected spontaneous communication. In CLT grammar is inductive and it is implicated in the activities that students perform, so that they discover, use and, assimilate it rather than memorize it.

The second misconception is that CLT means only emphasize on speaking when teaching the foreign language. In the most of the cases, students are guided to communicate without taking into account the other skills that have the same relevance like writing, listening and reading. It is notable that students can benefit from those skills as much as they do from speaking. The main task for teachers should be to provide learners with opportunities to communicate in all the possible contexts and real situations, simulating them in the classroom.

Another misconception is that CLT means pair work which means role play. The role play is seen as the only way to put CLT into practice. Not only flooding of dialogues is communication; so it is recommendable to try to offer students more alternatives, encouraging them to make variations in vocabulary, phrasal verbs, answers, and exchange of ideas. In this way, students can appropriate the language, making use of it in their real life, taking the knowledge acquired in daily situations. Some alternatives are presented in this paper when referring certain communicative activities.

People who do not know the real features of this method can also think that CLT means expecting too much from the teacher. Teachers have to be ready for listening to what learners say and not just how they say it, interacting with them in a natural way. Non-native speakers of English probably need a higher level of language proficiency to be able to communicate with ease. Teachers are given the opportunity to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices; they have an incentive to develop their skills, while they are encouraged to enjoy themselves in their work, avoiding repetition of the same predictable set of materials, activities and answers.

The above mentioned misconceptions surrounding communicative language teaching lead us to clarify the real features of communicative language teaching (CLT), and, by extension, those of other communicative approaches. Now that we know what CLT does not entail, and given that CLT was the basis for current methodological approaches, some features related to those approaches can be presented.

Relevant Aspects of Communicative Approaches

Following the emergence of the communicative approach, a variety of approaches, methods and techniques that foster communication in the L2 teaching/learning process appeared. Those approaches and methods might guide institutions in the creation of tasks and activities for supporting the SLA process.

Considering the current teaching scenario in Colombia, it is important to present an overview of the most relevant features of the communicative approaches chosen to be analyzed in this paper.

Content Based Instruction (CBI), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) and Task – Based Language Teaching (TBLT): The Commonalities

The communicative approaches that are going to be discussed integrate features which make them suitable for use in EFL settings, and that could yield noteworthy outcomes. Let us begin by discussing the objectives of these approaches

First of all, the goal of the approaches chosen for this paper is the development of communicative competence. In all these approaches it is evident that they push for the integration of the skills, and the inclusion of listening, speaking, reading and writing from early stages of instruction. Another common feature and a natural consequence of the integration of the skills is the use of tasks as a central strategy in order to achieve

communicative competence. The articles revised for this paper show that all these contemporary approaches encourage teachers to use activities where students are the ones who have to manipulate, understand and produce language, not just follow the lead from the teacher. This change from drills or traditional activities to tasks consequently produces changes in the roles of teachers. In these approaches teachers are closer to the roles for teachers described by Richards and Rodgers (2001). They are no longer the center of the class, but a facilitator, the one who organizes interaction among students. Teachers now need to be fluent and effective speakers of the language they are teaching and should be able to diagnose their students' needs, design tasks and assess learners' performance in the L2.

Another similarity among CBI, TBLT, CLT and CLL is that the assessment is not only based on written grammar exams or reading comprehension tests. The assessment of the integrated skills is carried out through tasks that require students to speak or write in the L2 and show how much they have learned. They are also asked to interact and produce original texts and it is common to find jigsaw tasks.

Besides, those approaches generate cooperation, and the learners who show a more effective performance might help classmates who show difficulties in any aspect of language. Cooperative work is a powerful tool in this process. To support this idea, Brown (2000) refers to the connotation of Learner-centered instruction, discussing that in educative institutions, the curriculum and syllabi should emphasize the creation of techniques that enable students to work together, aiming to an enhanced training. Even though in occasions the input and output provided does not suit the goal of the class, this class organization will surely allow students to explore their creativity and innovation.

Of course, there may be more features to be discussed, but for now, let us explore briefly the particular features of each communicative approach.

The Uniqueness of Each Approach

The similarities found when reading about the approaches were presented. Now it is time to discuss how each approach is unique so that teachers can decide which one to use according to their teaching situation. Although the approaches are very closely related to each other, there are certain issues that differentiate them from one another. Let us begin with CBI.

Content Based Instruction integrates the knowledge of some specific subject-matter content with the learning of a second language, allowing students to evolve from simpler to more complex linguistic skills (Brown, 2000). CBI is an umbrella term and inside CBI there are three models: the Theme-based model is a type of Content-Based Instruction in which selected topics or themes provide the content from which teachers extract language activities (Snow, cited by Celce-Murcia, 2001 p. 306). In the Theme-based model, the teacher presents students a set of topics, so that they can choose the ones that interest them; making use of readings, videos, audiotapes, software, lectures, among others. In doing so, students pay attention to a specific content, for example environmental care, global warming, human rights, extreme sports and so on. Likewise, students can be conscious of what they are doing, what they are learning and what topics are relevant for them when developing any activity.

TBLT takes tasks as the central element of instruction. Tasks are not only the strategies used to encourage interaction and communication, but they are also the basis for creating the syllabus and the assessment activities in the language course. Tasks can be

carried out and organized individually or in groups, they can be written or oral and they can be focused on written or oral production. Task based Language Learning (TBLT) begins with the Bangalore ELT Project implemented by Prabhu in 1982 where the use of tasks in the second language instruction is highlighted aiming at communicational purposes. It is interesting to note that there are many definitions for the term “task”. Nunan provides one of them, one that can relate directly to the work of teacher in the classroom : “It is a piece of work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language, while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning” (2004, p 4).

Brown (2004) cites Oxford (1997) pointing out that Cooperative Language Learning focuses on the work in groups, in which aspects such as intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, creativity, care, and altruistic relationships are promoted in learners, as well as facts that endorse interaction; give and take information among them. Cooperative language learning bases the interaction and procedures of a class on structured group work, heartening cooperation rather than competition, facilitating students’ mutual support or what Larsen-Freeman (2002) call “positive interdependence”, stretching cooperative feedback and reducing stress by the simulation of real situations in which the target language is used.

Besides that, “Cooperative learning has become increasingly popular as a feature of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with benefits that include increased student interest due to the quick pace of cooperative tasks, improved critical thinking ability, and the opportunity to practice both the productive and receptive skills in a natural context” (Hammond, 2009).

Although cooperativism is an aspect which belongs to a wider trend which is collaborative language learning, it is relevant to establish the main difference between collaboration and cooperativism; since in cooperative learning students work together to accomplish shared goals, argues (Smith, 1995 in Kozar 2010) and collaborative learning implies working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual's contribution (McInnerney and Robert 2004 cited by Kozar, 2010). Roschelle and Teasley (1995) also cited by Kozar (2010) argue that cooperative work is a task accomplished by dividing it among members, in which each person is responsible for a portion of the problem solving, which means that collaborative work engage the participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together. This approach may perhaps be adopted by EFL teachers, since it does not require a special type of syllabus; which means that CLL is flexible for any kind of curriculum and it can vary for diverse aspects like culture, individual learning styles and personality (Crandall, 1999 in Brown 2001).

Cooperative Language Learning suggests three types of groups for students to work: specific task, in which learners work together from one to several weeks, informal cooperative groups which is used for students to focus in the learning during direct teaching, and finally Cooperative - based groups for students obtain academic goals within the impulse given by each other in the group.

In the upcoming part of this paper, the principles and practical ways in which communicative approaches can be implemented in EFL settings are explained.

Communicative Activities and Alternative Assessment

The following activities, which reflect in a practical way the principles discussed previously in this paper, have been put into practice in EFL settings by their authors, and it can be seen that aspects such as interaction and collaboration are promoted, aiming to the encouragement of the communicative competence.

As well, in this section it is going to mention and describe alternatives for assessment and suggest how these alternatives could help teachers enhance the instruction and assessment processes. Along this paper the principles and features of approaches that focus on communication and that could be used in our setting have been discussed. However, it is also important to discuss how the assessment would have to change if we adapt those approaches to our daily teaching. According to Brown, 2004, whatever students do in the classroom, comment, express or perform in any skill, incidental or intended, is a matter for teachers to assess implicitly or explicitly. In words of Brown: “a good teacher never ceases to assess students” (p. 4).

For assessing the outcomes of the communicative methods suggested in this paper, and complement the whole SLA, it is also recommended the use of alternative assessment. Now, some of its characteristics are going to be presented.

According to Ghaith (2002), Alternative Assessment makes use of a variety of sources, such as checklists, journals, portfolios, videos of role-plays, self-evaluation questionnaires, teachers’ observations, among others; and it is directly related with every activity or task developed in the classroom, then it does not require a different block of time to be administrated (p. 26-27).

Supporting this, Brown (2004) names certain characteristics of what alternative assessment implies for teachers to consider when elaborating tests or evaluating activities. He refers that alternative assessment is an ongoing and long-term process that entails free response formats. Besides, it is contextualized and oriented to the development of the syllabus, a communicative syllabus, in this case, providing individualization in aspects such as feedback and washback. Alternative assessment also promotes open-ended and creative answers, for this reason we can assume that students are going to be promoted in their critical thinking, without feeling that the teacher is coercing them. This feature might reinforce what Brown, refers to as criterion referenced scores, avoiding subjectivity for teachers when grading, since they need to measure students' academic abilities, skills, and competencies as well as their attitudes and work habit (Johnson and Johnson, 1996a in Ghaith, 2002).

Moreover, alternative assessment is formative which means that the assessment process is part of the knowledge construction, since it is based on the day-to-day instructional activities (Ghaith, 2002). Likewise, this kind of assessment promotes interactive performance and group work, a common feature of the approaches that have been mentioned in this same paper, and also stressed by Ghaith (2002): "It is assumed that cooperative learning facilitates language assessment given that it provides opportunities for continuous improvement and possibilities for assessing individual and group outcomes in a supportive and stress-reduced environment (p. 27)". This fosters intrinsic motivation in students, then high levels of anxiety tend to diminish when students perform or execute any activity in which they have to apply what they have learnt. In so doing, students raise

aspects like self-confidence and self-assurance, regarding the progress of their students in the cognitive and non-cognitive domains of schooling (Ghaith, 2002).

This paper has attempted to describe the current methodological approaches that can foster the achievement of communicative competence in an EFL setting like ours. The last part described the characteristics of the assessment that should take place when implementing communicative approaches in L2 classrooms. The upcoming section presents practical activities that can be used by L2 teachers to foster and assess the communicative outcomes in students and that can complement traditional assessment (written exams, grammar tests, etc). The purpose is that the next activities be implemented in our EFL settings, so that teachers can feel confident in the creation of new ones.

Activity 1: “Preparing a structured survey” by Kozar, 2010.

A variety of people are to be involved in this activity, since they have to interact asking and answering questions. Aspects like cooperativism, grammar and real communication are encouraged with this activity. It may be possible to incorporate writing and reading skills, so that the activity integrates the skills in an effective way. The procedure for the activity is as follows:

Firstly, the teacher or the students prepare different sets of survey questions to practice targeted grammatical structures: “Where did you use to live? What do you prefer to drink with your meals? Where are you going after school?” Students have to provide complete sentences. Then in groups, students use diverse questions to interview their classmates. A scribe, assigned in each group will record the answers, so that another member, who will participate as a representative, will present their group’s survey responses to another group or to the whole class (Jigsaw). This activity will provide

learners with the chance to practice questions and answers, to work in groups and to use higher thinking skills such as summarizing, note-taking and organizing their ideas to present results to others.

Activity 2: “Extended brainstorming” by Rosenberg, 2009.

In this activity, teachers encourage students to select one topic (Theme-Based Model from CBI) and ask them to form groups.

Firstly, the teacher gives each group an investigative W-H question: What? Where? When? Why? Who? How?; so that they provide explanations related to that topic: e.g.

Topic: Global Warming

If students do not have much information about the topic, the teacher should introduce it with articles, pictures or readings. Each group prepares the answers, agreeing with the W-H question assigned:

“What” group: What is Global warming? What are the implications of global warming?

“Who” group: Who can result affected with global Warming?

“How” group: How are animals affected with global warming?

“When” group: When does the critical stage at global warming begin?

After speaking about the topic, teacher and students move to establish some conclusions and the activity might finish with the creation of a message which could be published in any visible part of the school, or internet. This activity gives learners the opportunity to research information about a certain topic in case they are intermediate or advanced learners, or to summarize and manipulate the information provided by the teacher. This activity also integrates the skills in a natural and engaging way and the

procedure contributes to helping learners get information about the topic and to focus on meaning while peripherally learning vocabulary and grammar structures.

Activity 3 “Gapping – Riddle schmooze” By Rosenberg, 2009

The objective in this activity is to exchange information among students.

Materials: (Depending on the teacher’s preferences) Paper, story readings, drawings, etc.

The teacher selects one topic with which s/he can strengthen any theme. S/he organizes small groups, providing each group with parts of the topic: a story reading, a drawing, statements divided into question/answer sentences or riddles.

Students read or speak about the piece of information they have, so that they can look for the corresponding parts by sharing the information with their classmates (CLL). They have to do this activity by using the target language. In the case of drawings, they have to describe the piece and found the correct sequence of the story. When finishing, they join new groups, so that they can put together the whole information. At the end, they are going to be able to reinforce a grammatical or lexical topic, and know what it was about. A product can be obtained from this activity in either oral or written form so that students make an effort to get the information right and so that the interaction is purposeful as the communicative approaches advocate. To make the activity more challenging the exchange of information can be done only orally or, in order to focus attention on meaning, false and true or conflicting information can be provided by the teacher. Then, the learners can discuss and try to infer what is true and what is not and what pieces of information can be used in their final presentation or in the expected product.

Activity 4: “Scenarios and role Play” By Rosenberg, 2009.

Role plays constitute an easy-to-learn and fun-to-use tool when learning a Second Language; meanwhile users are encouraged to communicate in real life situations.

Nevertheless in this case, students are not going to learn a script or memorize a pile of sentences, but they have to create an ending for each story.

After having organized the whole class in groups, the teacher gives stories in which problematic situations are presented, through the use of pictures or readings. Students select one problem for working cooperatively; they have to re-create the situation, negotiating the meaning, and providing the solution in each circumstance.

Also, the teacher could divide one story into pieces, depending on the number of groups. Students perform the correspondent part, but they, altogether have to create the end. To make the activity more engaging and useful for the students' life, the teacher can ask them to brainstorm about problematic situations in their context. Then, they can get in groups to provide realistic solutions that can be applied here. A written product resulting from the group work (a newspaper, a comment on a blog, a brochure) can be used to assess the effectiveness of the project.

Activity 5 “Group Projects” (Ghaith, 2002)

The following activity allows teachers to observe and realize the students' performance when executing an assignment.

At random, the teacher forms groups of three or four, assigning each group with a project. Considering the level of proficiency, students have to prepare a poster, summarize a chapter, write a report, or elaborate a brochure for presenting it to the rest of the class. Developing relevant evaluation criteria such as accuracy, oral fluency, connection between

new and old knowledge, as well as clarity in exposing the topic, cooperation, relationships, and integration among the members of the group, and others, students and the teacher will determine which the most original project is.

For driving the students' effort, the teacher could argue that the best project will be published on the internet, the school's newspaper or other spaces.

Activity 6 “Group Processing” (Ghaith, 2002)

Group processing enables students to assess and reflect on the quality of their own behavior or performance when working and the performance and habits of their classmates, in aspects like punctuality, preparedness to learn and also positive attitudes towards self, peers, subject matter, the teacher and the school.

Having formed small groups, students are given a checklist about their individual work habits. After that, they are asked to compare their self-ratings with the ratings of their group mates. At this moment, students have the chance to discuss their learning experiences, individually and in the group, in terms of their achievement of goals and cooperation. Similarly, they could specify what was most successful and what aspects they can improve for future experiences.

Despite this, it is clear that the teacher could make apply alternative assessment, as well as summative tests, in which grammar or other educational topics are evaluated, as a complement in the entire process, so s/he is not going to be expected to grade a pile of paper when finishing a period or a course.

Conclusions

After having written this paper it is noteworthy to mention that the purpose of this paper was to present to English Teachers in Pasto CLT and the current communicative approaches for providing them with a tool, which will probably help language users to obtain the objectives established by Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN), that states that Colombia has to become a bilingual country, making English an official Second Language (L2).

As it has been mentioned, CLT and the current communicative approaches presented here generate in the classroom an atmosphere conducive for learning since students can gain confidence when developing assigned activities and tasks. Let us remember that, for example in Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) students help their classmates and promote in the classroom aspects such as self-confidence, allowing shy students to feel confidence to speak and share their ideas, questions and answers. The learning process also could be more effective, when applying the principles of Content Based Instruction (CBI): students are going to be more interested in the topics that catch their attention and, at the same time, to work on activities related to those topics and real-life situations will lead to more effective tasks.

All these aspects can make possible the development of the communicative competence, as well as a more helpful tool for reinforcing the whole process.

However, it is necessary to say the reality in our schools displays aspects that are not as easy to overcome as it appears.

The approach recommended by the Common European Framework (CEF) for facilitating the acquisition of the L2 is CLT, and of course, the approaches that founded

their bases in it. In Colombia, the MEN has adopted the CEF model with the same objective, though European educational conditions are not the same to ours.

In our classroom it is easy to find aspects like a lack of suitability of some English teachers in public schools, a limited time for English classes, the poor materials used in the classroom, an underestimate attitude towards English from some teachers and students, and other features mentioned before, which makes that the SLA walks on a trembling path.

In addition, there is a commonly found problem which is large classes, but this situation can be overcome by using cooperative learning activities such as projects (newspapers, posters, portfolios, brochures, journals) and jigsaw activities where every student is held accountable for participation and knowledge, as well as TBLT suggests for its implementation. The teacher divides the whole group into small groups so that students perform a specified task or a required activity.

This can be reinforced by using topics that catch the interest of students, as CBI recommends. Those groups can vary in the number of members, depending on the syllabus or the specific necessities. In so doing, cooperativeness is practiced and students could push motivation and participation among them, especially for those students who present a low proficiency in any skill.

The materials used can also change, depending on the creativity of the teacher and the necessities in each case. The communicative approaches mentioned in this paper agree to the employment of videos, readings, audios, interviews, and other resources that support the exposure to input.

For making possible the English instruction in an institution with scarce materials, teachers might substitute the audios for readings, visits to museums, parks, landmarks or

cultural places in which some topics can be “alive” and wake up the attention and motivation in students. For updated topics, teachers might use newspapers or download some world news from internet; providing each group with a specific one. The use of realia is also significant.

For language users to overcome the lack of exposure to real English, it is indispensable that teachers get actively involved in providing and eliciting better production of the L2, in terms of pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy, a fact that can be possible through the training in the everyday application of their knowledge; since in languages, as in other disciplines, practice makes perfect. Teachers have to encourage the creativity when using topics associated with the world in which his/her students live, which means that for making possible a debate or a conversation in the L2, a teacher has to search for updated information, news, tendencies and so on, aspects that could encourage the critical thinking for students. As it has been said before, if the instruction is related with the social environment of students, they can feel more feasibility for speaking about what they know and are familiar with, by learning about updated situations in which they are aware or implicated. By applying this, students can be also promoted in their investigative abilities so that they can take the opportunities for searching information in real contexts.

Another obstacle in our classrooms is the poor time devoted to English classes, which is no more than three hours in public institutions. In European countries, the instruction of a L2 is more feasible since time used for this end is more extensive, as well as the contact that students have for acquiring another language in real contexts. To compensate this situation and implement the communicative approaches, it is suggested firstly that the language used in the classroom be English; the more the students are

exposed to real language, the more they can familiarize with it. If the tasks and activities promote researching, students could share the knowledge obtained through the use of their skills. By doing this, students will be aware that they are responsible and the builders of their own learning. Researching and some tasks could take extracurricular time to be carried out and the classes would be the guidance for teachers to accompany the evolution of students in a specific area. Teachers would use the English class time for answering questions, deepening any topic, and consultancy in the case of activities like presentations or oral reports. The jigsaw activity might be an adequate option in the classroom for saving time, since in it, students have the chance to comment the topics they studied and exchange the information with their classmates. However it is needful to say that it depends on the institutions to look for suitable staff for the English teaching to obtain improved outcomes in the whole process.

With those elements, implemented altogether, the SLA process could be more practical and the goals for allowing students to acquire the L2 might be obtained. If at the end of a course students feel a real motivation for learning English, it is possible to say that the process has been effective.

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