

## TEACHER'S FUNCTIONS IN TEACHING LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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**Statement of problem and the analysis of the last researches and publication.** Every teacher has his/her personal style of teaching. As far as teaching communicative competence is concerned, each teacher has also some preferences in choosing tasks and approaches. The purpose of this article is to present the main teacher roles in teaching communicative competence and to define how they change depending on the change of this current aims of study.

The concept of communicative competence was originally developed by the sociolinguist Hymes, as a response to perceived limitations in Chomsky's competence/performance model of language. It was then further developed by Michael Canale, Merrill Swain and Sandra Savignon. According to Canale, communicative competence refers to «the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication» [2, p. 5].

Since the 1970s psychologists and linguists have placed emphasis on interpersonal relationships, the nature of communication and the interactive process of language. As a result, the language teaching profession has responded with methods that emphasize communicative competence, and that stress group work, interaction and group learning. Teachers now find themselves trying to move away from teaching of rules, patterns and definitions (linguistic competence) towards teaching students how to communicate genuinely, spontaneously and meaningfully in the foreign language (communicative competence).

**The aim** of the article is to present the main teacher's functions in teaching foreign communicative competence.

**Presentation of the main content of the research.** Several roles are assumed for teachers in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the importance of particular roles being determined by the view of CLT adopted. Breen and Candlin describe teacher roles in the following terms:

The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts (teacher as a facilitator). The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; first, as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself, second as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. The third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities [1, p. 99].

Other roles assumed for teachers are needs analyst, counselor and group process manager.

The CLT teacher assumes a responsibility for determining and responding to learner language needs. This may be done informally and personally through one-to-one sessions with students or formally through administering a needs assessment instrument. Typically, such formal assessments contain items that attempt to determine an individual's motivation for studying the language. On the basis of such needs assessments, teachers being needs analysts are expected to plan group and individual instruction that responds to the learners' needs.

Another role assumed by several CLT approaches is that of counselor, similar to the way this role is defined in Community Language Learning. In this role, the teacher counselor is expected to exemplify an effective communicative seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker intention and hearer interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation, and feedback [8, p. 45].

CLT procedures often require teachers to acquire less teacher-centered classroom management skills. It is the teacher's responsibility to organize the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities. Guidelines for classroom practice (e.g., Littlewood, 1981) suggest that an activity the teacher monitors, encourages and suppresses the inclination to supply gaps in lexis, grammar and strategy but notes such gaps for later commentary and communicative practice. At the

conclusion of group activities, the teacher leads in the debriefing of the activity, pointing out alternatives and extensions and assisting groups in self-correction discussion. This function of the teacher is that of a group process manager.

Three key pedagogical principles that developed CLT were: the presentation of language forms in context, the importance of genuine communication, and the need for learner-centred teaching. These were widely acknowledged but nevertheless open to interpretation, resulting in what Howatt [3, p. 24] described as weak and strong versions of CLT. The former includes pre-communicative tasks (such as drills, close exercises, and controlled dialogue practice) along with communicative activities. Littlewood [5, p. 79], for example, described precommunicative activities as a necessary stage between controlled and uncontrolled language use.

The example of such approach to CLT is what is known as the PPP lesson (for presentation, practice and production). Language forms are first presented under the guidance of the teacher, then practiced in a series of exercises, again under the teacher supervision. The chosen forms are finally produced by the learners themselves in the context of communicative activities that can be less or more related to the learners' real lives and interests.

According to this structure of a lesson a teacher has to play specific roles at different stages of learning process.

At the presentation stage the teacher's main task is to serve as a kind of informant. He/she knows the language, selects the new material to be learned (using the textbook normally but supplementing and modifying it as required) and presents it in such a way that the meaning of the new language is as clear and memorable as possible. The students listen and try to understand. Although they are probably saying very little at this stage, except when invited to join in, they are by no means passive.

At the practice stage it is the students' turn to do most of the talking, while the teacher's main task is to devise and provide the maximum amount of practice, which must at the same time be both meaningful and memorable. The role of a teacher, then, is radically different from that at the presentation stage. The teacher does the minimum amount of talking, being «like a skillful conductor of an orchestra, giving each of the performers a chance to participate and monitoring their performance to see that it is satisfactory» [6, p. 2]. So the teacher performs the role of a conductor.

Language learning often stops short at the practice stage (or at least does not regularly go beyond it). Many teachers feel that they have done their job if they have presented the new material well and have given their students adequate, though usually controlled, practice in it. All the same, no real learning should be assumed to have taken place until the students are able to use the language for themselves, and unless opportunities are available for them to do this outside the classroom, provision must be made as part of the lesson. According to Nunan, at any level of attainment, from elementary to advanced, the students need to be given regular and frequent opportunities to use language freely, even if they sometimes make mistakes as a result. This doesn't mean that mistakes are unimportant, but that free expression is more important, and it is a great mistake to deprive students of this opportunity. For it is through these opportunities to use language as they wish, to try to express their own ideas, that the students become more aware that they have learned something useful to them personally and are encouraged to go on learning – perhaps the most vital factor at all in helping to keep interest in language learning alive [6, p. 85]. Thus, in providing the students with activities for free expression and in discreetly watching over them as they carry them out (which is one of the best ways of finding out whether the students are really making progress), the teacher takes on the role of manager and guide (or adviser).

This model incorporates both the 'traditional' and 'progressive' view of the three stages of learning because we can move either from presentation to practice to production or from production to presentation to practice according to the level of the students, their needs and the type of teaching materials being used.

The mentioned above teacher roles relate closely to the three stages of learning. One other key role that cuts across these three stages is the teacher as motivator. Whatever you are doing in the classroom, your ability to motivate the students, to arouse their interest and involve in what they are doing, will be crucial. Some key factors here will be your own 'performance' – your mastery of teaching skills, often depend on careful preparation; your selection and preparation of topics and

activities (it may often be necessary to make them interesting) and, of course< your own personality, which in language teaching must be flexible enough to allow you to be both authoritative and friendly at the same time» [7, p. 210].

The roles which teachers and learners choose to adopt, or have forced upon them by institutional constraints, curricular exigencies, or classroom tasks, will have a critical bearing on classroom atmosphere, patterns of interaction, and ultimately student learning. It is unlikely that the teacher and learners will always adopt the same role relationships. In the language classroom, as in life outside the classroom, teachers and learners adopt a range of roles, although in any given classroom, the teacher or student may be characterized by a limited set of roles. These roles are not discrete, they overlap, which can cause complications, confusion, and even conflict.

An additional factor to consider is that roles are dynamic, not static, and are subject to change according to the psychological factors brought by participants into the classroom and also the dynamics of groups activity within the classroom. In a key text on roles in language learning, Wright identifies two groups of factors that are likely to affect roles. The first of these relates to interpersonal aspects, the second to task-related aspects.

- Social and psychological factors. These include views about status and position, attitudes and values held by individuals and group and individuals' personalities. (Interpersonal aspects of role.)

- Teachers' and learners' expectations about the nature of learning tasks and the way in which individuals and groups deal with learning tasks. (Task related aspects of role.) [9, p. 12]

The first set of factors derives from the personality and previous learning experiences of the teacher and students, and the expectations that they have about what is appropriate behavior for teachers and learners in the classroom. Behavior problems can occur if there is a mismatch between the perceptions held by teachers and learners about their respective roles. If learners expect that their role is to be passive recipient of wisdom dispensed by the teacher, while the teacher expects the learners to be active participants in their own learning processes, then there is likely to be confusion, tension, and even conflict. If these are not resolved (or even acknowledged) through discussion and negotiation, the effectiveness of the classroom will almost certainly be affected and may even be destroyed.

The second set of factors identified by Wright relates to the role relationships inherent in classroom tasks. Underlying each and every classroom task, whether it to be a role play, simulation, drill, test, etc., is some sort of learning strategy (e.g., memorization, classifying, brainstorming, personalizing). Inherent in each strategy is a role for the learner. If the appropriate role is not identified and acted upon, the effectiveness of the task will be reduced.

One more characteristic feature of teaching communicative competence is that the teacher is required to take a 'less dominant role' and the learners are encouraged to be 'more responsible managers of their own learning' [4, p. 131]. Rather than a presentation and practice approach to language forms, the teacher begins with communicative classroom activities that allow learners to actively learn for themselves how the language works as a formal system.

Another important factor in teaching communicative competence is the classroom atmosphere. One of the teacher's largest responsibilities is to develop in the students a positive attitude to learning a language. Along with a positive attitude students require a climate which is safe and secure. Promoting an environment where it is safe to talk and where no judgments are made, will encourage students to use the language. As a result they become more willing to experiment; to become more risk-takers. Teachers will experience greater success when activities are planned around the students' interests and take into account subjects that they have some knowledge about.

In the traditional second language classroom, the teacher was always in the centre, explaining grammar and vocabulary, asking questions and correcting exercises. In an approach which provides opportunities for communication, the teacher's role is different but remains equally important. Not only does the teacher serve as the language model and facilitator, the teacher also act as a guide.

As a teacher's role changes, so do the expectations of students. In keeping with creating a safe and secure environment, certain allowances are made in terms of structural errors, especially at the early stages of language learning. Making errors is a natural step in the process of learning a language. If students are to be risk-takers, teachers must learn to correct errors in context. If specific errors occur with frequency or if they distort the meaning of a message, teachers should deal with the error either

with the entire class or with an individual student. Encouragement and positive reinforcement promote self-confidence they feel secure enough to take chances and are not afraid to make mistakes.

The teacher still serves as a language model for the students and is of course responsible for the classroom. While remaining the person with whom students will communicate most often, one of the main functions of the teacher will now be to discover or invent ways to encourage students to communicate meaningfully with each other. Instead of actively directing and controlling all activities the teacher will aim to set up conditions for meaningful practice and then take on the role of a resource person. Keeping in mind the spiral approach, material should be presented at the appropriate level and provisions should be made for re-entry and review. Teachers must be aware of the program objectives and ensure that these are being met. Instructions and evaluation must reflect these objectives.

**Conclusions.** The teacher will benefit from using a variety of strategies. As the students often work in a small groups the teacher will observe the activities, noting problem areas for future work. During these activities, the teacher will interrupt to correct students if the errors are so serious as to block communication. The classroom becomes studentcentred rather than teacher-centred; the students do most of the talking and the role of the teacher is to facilitate, advise, assist and offer direction.

Students learn a language more quickly and more easily if they are comfortable and secure. It is the teacher's responsibility to create a warm, supporting learning environment. Only through rewarding and successful experiences can students learn effectively and retain a positive attitude toward the language.

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