

## CLT in ESL and EFL Context: A Challenge to Civil Engineering Teachers in Indonesia

**Endah P. Haryono<sup>1</sup>**

Program Studi D-IV Konstruksi Bangunan Gedung  
Jurusan Teknik Sipil, Politeknik Negeri Manado  
e-mail: [endahtuty65@gmail.com](mailto:endahtuty65@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Characteristic and Principle of the communication approach to language learning and teaching has given appropriate and positive strategies in order to produce student's ability in communicative competence. One of its positive principles of this approach is students learn English not in order to know the language rules but in order to use it in communication. However it can be said that this approach only gives specific advantages to ESL countries but not for EFL context. It is because there are many EFL teachers such as English teachers in Indonesia still encounter difficulties in applying CLT in their classroom. This article gives essential solutions in order to encounter this issue towards teaching English in civil engineering classroom in Indonesia as EFL country. It is said that in order to accomplish the success in language teaching, English teachers in civil Engineering should improve their quality in communicative competence as well as their teaching strategy to combine and implement into communicative classroom approach, syllabus and material based on learner needs and interest in authentic situation.*

**Key Words**—Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English as second language (ESL), English as foreign language (EFL), teaching approach, language teaching.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which started in the early 1970s within the Council of Europe, nowadays can be said has become dominant language teaching methodology in most part of the world. CLT is regarded as the most effective and generally accepted approach in language teaching. This is because this approach according to Knight (2001: 112) “has its desired outcome that is learners will be able to communicate successfully in the target language in real situations, rather than have conscious understanding of the rules governing the language.” Due to its popularity in the western world, English as second language (ESL) countries such as, Singapore, India, Hongkong, etc. and English as foreign language (EFL) countries such as; Indonesia, Korea, Japan, etc. also adopted and developed CLT in their language curriculum and classroom applications. Interestingly, however, the studies in second language learning show that the widespread adoption of CLT in EFL countries in particular, has generally been difficult (e.g. Sano et al, 1984; Ellis, 1994; Li, 2001).

In this article I shall attempt to examine what CLT is, what the main advantages and disadvantages of this approach in ESL and EFL context as well as how this approach can inform

the language teachers especially English teachers in Indonesia as EFL country in teaching English.

## 2. WHAT IS COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

CLT emerged in the last thirty years as a replacement to the previous methodology as; audio lingual, situational language teaching or grammar translation which emphasized the structure and form more than meaning. The characteristic of these traditional methods like; wholly teacher-centered classroom, learning language is learning structures or words, language is learnt by exact repetition, learners speaking only when spoken to by the teacher, etc. Educators and language practitioners at the time felt that these methods could not provide the learners with the basis of language that they can use in real-life situation. They saw the need to focus on language teaching that can engage learners to use language they learn by real practice in communicating, by risking making mistakes with the goal of making real meanings (Perrett, 1995). That is CLT that can accommodate this need.

Brown (1994) points out that CLT is best understood as an approach, not a method therefore according to him, it is a unified but broad-based theoretical position about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching. CLT is based on a theory of language as communication that is “language is seen as social tool which speakers use to make meaning: speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing” (Savignon, 2003 : 57) and the basic goal of language teaching is to develop learners’ *communicative competence* (Richards and Rogers, 2001). The notion of communicative competence is introduced by Hymes (1979) as a response to Chomsky’s *competence* and *performance* model of language. Chomsky distinguishes competence from performance: competence is defined as the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of the language while performance is seen as the actual use of the language in concrete situations (Hymes, 1979).

The concept of communicative competence then is further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) into four different components. They suggest that to be able to *perform competently* in communicating, a learner has to draw upon the four areas of knowledge and skill required for communication. They are; first, *grammatical* competence; the knowledge of rules of morphology, syntax and phonology. Second, *discourse* competence; the knowledge of rules governing cohesion and coherence. Third, *sociolinguistic* competence; the knowledge of sociocultural rules that requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used. Fourth, *Strategic* competence; the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal strategies (Canale and Swain, 1980). From its basic goal of CLT in language teaching, it can therefore be specified that CLT provides actual language classroom practice and activities that can encourage learners to communicate and operate effectively the knowledge of the language they learn in real situations.

In CLT classroom practice and producers in which the theory of language and language learning underlying it, Richards and Rogers suggest several principles; *First* learners learn a language through using it to communicate. *Second*, authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of the classroom activities. *Third*, fluency is an important dimension of communication. *Fourth*, communication involves the integration of different language skills.

*Fifth*, learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

Concerning learner and teacher's role in CLT, it can be said the development of CLT leads to dramatic changes, which is totally different from the traditional methods. Breen and Candlin (2000) identify the teacher and learner's role within CLT as follows:

"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 text. The second role is to act as independent participant within the learning teaching group. .... These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher: First, as an organizer of resources and as resource himself, second as the guide within the class procedures and activities. .... A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner" (p. 17-18). On the contrary, the role of the learners according to them is "as negotiator-between the self, the learning process and the object learning-emerges from interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way" (p. 19).

All these theoretical interests discussed above, in turn, refer to what we can describe as CLT. Actually, there have been many descriptions of CLT but unfortunately, it seems quite difficult to obtain the best definition of CLT from any literatures. However, for the sake of simplicity and directness, the following six interconnected characteristic offered by Brown (2001) might be regarded as a further description of CLT:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intervene the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purpose. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and the accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in the order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use
4. Students in a communicative class ultimately 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
5. Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development off appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.
6. 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.

### **3. THE MAIN ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CLT IN ESL AND EFL CONTEXT**

The development of communicative language teaching in the world has had a positive effect on the improvement of language teaching methodology in ESL and EFL countries. It is

not surprising, however, that CLT was adopted more quickly in ESL teaching than in EFL teaching. In many EFL situations around the world the approach is still not used but, in many others, it is (Perrett, 1995).

Perret (1995) in her paper given at 1993 MLTA Conference states that many language practitioners in ESL and EFL teaching has used this method. This might be because, compared to any others traditional methods, CLT ensures learners to get enough exposure to the target language. It gives learners opportunity to use the various types of knowledge about their second or foreign language they learn appropriately, spontaneously and fluently in real communication. The strategy of CLT focusing on practicing to use the target language leads students become familiar with situations they are likely to experience in real situation (Perret, 1995). This is of a great benefit, because the main reason that students learn another language in order to use it for communication. As Liao says "Because CLT aims at communicative competence. Students might be more competent in the use of English for communication. A good level of English will help them considerably to enter and graduated from university, to study abroad, to obtain better jobs especially those in companies which have international connections" (Liao,2002:2).

Another advantage of CLT is, in *second* language teaching situations where people are living in the target language environment and many second language classes are multilingual groups, here, according to Perrett (1995) learners feel very great communicative pressure where they need to use the language to communicate the moment they step outside the classroom. Therefore, she says, practicing communicating inside the class makes obvious sense for the learners (1995). However, it can be said that this situation, only gives specific advantages to ESL countries but for EFL context it doesn't. As Sano, et al. (1984, cited in Li, 2000) state in Japan, students learn English but generally do not feel a pressing need to use it, so that the goal of communicative competence seem too distant for them.

This is supported by Defeng Li (2001) in her study concerning the implementation of CLT in South Korea. She points out that South Korean EFL teachers encounter difficulties in applying CLT in their classroom. One of those difficulties found is caused by teacher himself such as deficiency in spoken English and deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence. She says that South Korean teachers' ability in speaking or communicating are not adequate to conduct the communicative classes necessarily involved in CLT. Another difficulty she finds comes from students who generally have low English proficiency. As a result, it is hard for teachers to do any oral communicative activities with them. Student's little motivation for communicative competence, resistance to class participation and large classes are also considered as the principle constraint on their attempts to use CLT in South Korea. She also reports that the difficulties encountered in South Korea also caused by CLT itself. CLT is regarded has not taken into consideration about the great differences between ESL and EFL teaching and learning situations. From the findings, it indicates that there are many constrains that should have to be taken into account by language teachers concerning CLT and its implementation particularly in EFL teaching context.

#### **4. THE IMPLICATION OF CLT APPROACH TO EFL TEACHERS IN INDONESIA**

The characteristic and principles of the communicative approach to language learning and teaching, which foster the use of appropriate and positive strategies in order to produce

student's ability in communicative competence, also challenge the language teachers in Indonesia as EFL country. The widespread adoption of CLT has also engaged the language teachers in Manado State Polytechnic particularly in civil engineering classroom to take into account these principles that teaching English is not only teaching grammar. And also, students learn English is not in order to know the language rule but in order to be able to use it for communication. CLT, therefore, informs the engineering English teachers that in language teaching, any aspects of language given, as Larsen-Freeman (1986) says, should be given with *communicative intent* so that students can be engaged in meaningful language use rather than in mechanical practice of language forms. It doesn't mean that grammar is not important, but grammar is given in real context to carry meaning ( Savignon, 1991).

Realizing the positive effect of CLT, it is, therefore, necessary for the teachers to implement and develop the principles of communicative approach through their language classroom syllabus, methodology and materials so that the desired outcome can be achieved effectively and successfully. In short, the syllabus design should be based on learner-centered approach with the goal to develop student's communicative competence in relevance to student's needs and interests such as; speaking, listening, reading and writing in which the strategies should focus on meaningful communication by setting-up communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, problem-solving tasks, information gaps, simulation, etc). The activities should encourage learners to develop the skills they need through a real and meaningful interaction between learner and learner or learner and teacher spontaneously, appropriately and fluently. In terms of materials, it should be authentic materials in order to build up student's capacity to negotiate meaning and to understand the language as actually used by native speakers.

This is, however, not easy regarding the teachers position as language teachers in EFL teaching situation in which this approach is considered difficult to put into practice. However, for the sake of student's communicative need, it reminds the civil Engineering English teachers to put aside the drawback and try to find out an appropriate solution. Li (2001) says that one of the constrain comes from the teacher her/himself. This means that the first thing we should do for the success of language teaching is; attempt to improve our quality as a teacher particularly in communicative competence and also our commitment in applying communicative principles. As Savignon says, "in our effort to improve language teaching is, we have overlooked the language teacher" (1991: 272). Hence eventually teachers are expected to be able to solve any other complicated constrains encountered in classroom easily.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The innovation in English language teaching has shown us how CLT has changed the concept of traditional language teaching toward a new paradigm of communicative approach. However, despite the widespread adoption of CLT in ESL and EFL countries, it still raises a question mark for language practitioners whether or not CLT provide essential implications in EFL context. To answer this question, it is necessary to note here the nature of language learning which says that a language is learnt best through using it to communicate. It means that language teachers in Manado State Polytechnic particularly in civil engineering classroom should take into account these principles that teaching English is not only teaching grammar.

And also, students learn English is not in order to know the language rule but in order to be able to use it for communication. Based on this point of view it is expected that in teaching English for civil Engineering, teachers should have adequate exposures in CLT principles that require adequate quality in both communicative competence and language teaching strategy. Therefore in order to gain successful communicative skills, syllabus design should be based on learner-centered approach with the goal to develop student's communicative competence in relevance to student's needs and interests such as, material and activity chosen should encourage learners to develop the skills they need through a real and meaningful communicative interaction. Finally teachers' strong commitments in applying this principle become one of the main factors in order to accomplish a success in language teaching and learning in civil engineering classroom.

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