

Necessity of Modification in the Existing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract: In Bangladesh, English language learning and teaching have always been facing obstacles to bring out positive and effective results. To make a progressing change, recently our education system has adopted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) terminating the years-long practice of the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM). But unfortunately, the CLT approach has also been proved to have disastrous effect in the outcome of ELT in Bangladesh. Considering all these issues, the present study attempts to find out whether there exists any necessity to make any change in the existing CLT approach, and if any, what might be the probable changes to be brought for the betterment of our ELT environment.

Keywords: English Language Teaching (ELT); English as a Native Language (ENL); English as a Second Language (ESL); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Target Language (TL); Grammar Translation Method (GTM); Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

I. Introduction

English, a widely used language throughout the world, has the status of international language. The distribution of English language throughout the world is distinguished into three contexts: English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Though English is used as a second language in almost all the former British colonies, still, being a former colony, Bangladesh is under the territory of EFL context. In EFL context people generally learn the English language for occupational purposes, and also for education, recreation and interaction. In a developing country like Bangladesh, English is used frequently in a particular class of people, and few use the language in a certain condition and rest of the natives of Bangladesh do not use the language after the academic life, sometimes even stop using it before the completion of graduation. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the most modern adopted approach to improve the belonging English Language Teaching (ELT) situation at the period of the traditional practice of Grammar Translation Method (GTM). To give backup for the drawbacks of GTM and to fulfill the present global need, CLT was adopted in Bangladesh at the late twentieth century. And now in the beginning of the twenty first century, again the necessity of modifying CLT approach has become vital issue for getting a fruitful result.

Communicative language teaching does not inevitably mean the elimination of familiar materials, what matters that is the teachers' indulgent of how language learning ensues. The fundamental attitude of communicative language teaching is concerned with an orientation in the direction of collective partaking and collaboration of both learners as well as the teachers. Language learners must be involved in as many situations as doable where they might have the span to share information from their own dispute, they must learn it in a methodical way to so that they can master it functionally and successfully even in a non-English environment like ours.

II. Objectives

The research objective of this paper is to determine the prevailing problem factors of the existing CLT approach in Bangladesh. This work will also suggest the probable solutions to improve the ELT environment of the country.

III. Methodology

The study first considers the basics of the CLT approach and tries to assess the ELT situation of the country. The study also evaluates different works on ELT, CLT and relevant issues, and also goes on analyzing

the historical sequences of the ELT condition in Bangladesh and its outcomes up to the present time. Considering the outcomes of the GTM and CLT approaches, findings and suggestions are made for bringing positive results in the field of English language learning and teaching in Bangladesh.

IV. Background of ELT in Bangladesh

The historical trace of English language in Bangladesh shows how prestigious the language has been from the past and also how influential it has always been to make an impact on the socio-cultural context of national and international levels. In the 18th century (when the Mughal Empire was on decline) English was first introduced by the British in the South Asian subcontinent. In this subcontinent, the necessity of teaching English was first addressed by Lord Mcaulay's minute of 1835. Christian missionaries were established in India as far back as 1759, and 1787 dispatch welcomed the efforts of Rev. Swartz to establish schools for teaching English. Gradually, the dominance of English upon the socio-historical context started to take a shape at least by the end of the 18th century, and this is supported by *The Tutor*, the first book written to teach English to the non-Europeans. One of the famous scholars McArthur (1996) locates Bangladesh in the ESL territories. However, in another place he also mentions that in Bangladesh English is neither a second language nor is it a foreign language. After the liberation in 1971, Bangladesh made Bengali the state language and suddenly the status of English was significantly reduced. Bengali replaced English in all official communications and correspondences except those in foreign missions and in armies, where English is still used as official language. Not only that, in academic sectors the same condition was applied, like in secondary and higher secondary education Bengali became the only major medium of learning. This result made to translate English books into Bengali to meet the needs of books in different subjects. However, English was still a compulsory subject through secondary and higher secondary levels. From the graduation (degree) level English was also withdrawn as a compulsory subject moreover, the Bengali Implementation Act of 1987 ceased English to be used as an official second language (Hasan, 2004).

To complete the ELT, corresponding to the need of the developing country, the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was replaced by the CLT approach. In GTM language is treated as a set of structure, and purpose of learning was to develop only the reading and writing skills. CLT approach came with the improvement of communicative purpose and to develop the four basic skills (listening, speaking reading and writing) in a balanced way; utterly, it plays an important role.

In Bangladesh, under the Ministry of Education (MoE), the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) was framed to promote teaching and learning of English in the secondary level education in Bangladesh since July 1997. ELTIP introduced the Communicative Language Teaching approach in the national English curriculum of the country for the first time (Rahman, 2001).

In the initial stage of CLT adaptation the decision was very praiseworthy among the academic scholars of Bangladesh and many steps were taken to support this new method in an EFL context. But the outcome of the new CLT is turned upside down unfortunately, and now a modification is mandatory.

V. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach

Language is an oral phenomenon which we use for communication and interaction. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach starts from a theory of language as communication. Here language is considered as a system for the expression of meaning and serves its primary functions: interaction and communication (Hasan, 2004). In a word according to Hymes it is communicative competence and through communication meaningful task can be performed which has the ability to promote learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2002). In this approach theory of learning includes activities related with real communication, carrying out meaningful tasks and promotes learning considering learners' level of comprehensiveness (Alam, 2008; Numan, 1989).

The main aim of this approach reflects the need of the learner and includes functional skill as well as linguistic objectives (Alam, 2008; Numan, 1989). Piepho (1981) also includes an effective level of interpersonal relationships and conduct and also a general educational level of extra-linguistic goals in the objective part of this approach (Richards and Rodgers, 2002).

The syllabus of CLT covers almost all the necessary requirements to learn a foreign language effectively. Structures, functions, notions, themes, tasks – all items are guided or arranged according to their hierarchy. Activity types include facilitating the students to be busy with their learning materials and processes: sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. Here learners function as negotiators and interactions, of course not in one way rather giving as well as talking. In this method teacher's role is to work as a facilitator, catalyst, counselor and process manager in creating effective communication from the students. Here the teacher provides feedback according to the need of the learners. The required materials in this approach are authentically task-based to promote communicative language in practical use in real life situations (Alam, 2008; Numan, 1989).

VI. The Present Condition of CLT Approach in Bangladesh

Contemporary condition of ELT situation of Bangladesh is dominated by the newly introduced method CLT. On the 1st of April 1998 with the objective of improving the quality of ELT through the CLT approach in the general academic levels of primary, secondary and higher-secondary education in Bangladesh the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) had been established. Eventually, in the academic years of 2001 and 2002 ELTIP produced two new textbooks for the higher-secondary and secondary levels. These two new textbooks are:

1. English for Today (Classes 11-12)
2. English for Today (Classes 9-10) (Admin, 2004)

For many reasons CLT techniques and activities are adopted in a developing country like Bangladesh considering it to be effective for the ELT condition of Bangladesh. CLT attempts to make the students communicate in the target language with the integration of four fundamental language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The CLT textbook is supposed to contain not only different literary genres, but also authentic, factual and realistic samples of Target Language (TL) discourse with the context-based exercises of relevant inductive grammar and various listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks and activities. Essential grammatical elements are here taught through context-based inductive process, learners have the opportunity to practice the receptive skills of reading and writing, as well as, the productive skills of writing and speaking simultaneously almost during all the lessons (Admin, 2004). In a sentence, international purpose of a language is to fulfill communication with comprehensive pronunciations and CLT approach is working to complete such role.

Before introducing CLT proposed syllabus, teachers of schools and colleges were facilitated by some guidelines to use CLT effectively. There are three levels or stages of secondary education in the combined education curriculum. These are – Junior Secondary, Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. In the Secondary and Higher Secondary Levels, there are three sub-systems:

1. General Education
2. Madrasah Education
3. Vocational Education

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is responsible for preparing the curriculum and syllabus for the eight general education boards. The responsibility of the preparation of curriculum and syllabuses for the Madrasah and Vocational education is assigned to the Madrasah Education Board and Technical Education Board respectively. They are also responsible for arranging examinations and offering certificates to their students (Admin, 2004).

The ELTIP, in association with the British Council, has published a Teacher's Guide (TG) for higher secondary English teachers to facilitate them to use the new textbook in an effectively communicative way. It offers a compact package of CLT tools providing the rationale for the tasks and activities, a detailed suggestion of techniques that can be implied in the class, suggestions for the teachers to plan their lessons ahead and to devise interesting ways of classroom teaching which would be attractive and enjoyable for the students, open-ended sample answers, suggestions to frame the test items within the new format of the NCTB and to assess the students' language skills during classroom activities. The producers of TG claim that the book, if used judiciously, can play an important role in the teacher development and training (Islam, et. al, 2001).

Students of the academic session of 2001-2003 having been passed the HSC examination in the academic year of 2004 from the education boards of Bangladesh were the first higher secondary batch of the ELT situation of CLT. New CLT textbooks were also being followed in all classes of the primary and secondary levels. In this connection ELTIP, BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and UKBET (United Kingdom and Bangladesh Education Trust) ran several training programs for the secondary English teachers to conduct effective CLT classes (Billah, 2005; Islam, et. al, 2001; Admin, 2004).

V. Findings

1.1. Is the present practice of CLT appropriate in Bangladesh?

Now, for fair reasons, observations can authentically be made on the fact that the techniques and methods of the CLT approach are appropriate to teach a second language, but in terms of applying it in an EFL environment in a developing country like Bangladesh, some modifications are needed for getting the most of it.

All schools and madrasahs in our country do not have the same opportunities nor are they facilitated equally. Some urban schools, for example, include computer education as a compulsory subject; appoint well to do teaching staff for educating their students in a proper way. But in a few urban schools only, there are modern facilities available for language teaching. Many village schools do not have an English subject-teacher. Teachers of other subjects, in many schools, teach English. Moreover, different types of textbooks are adopted in different

schools. Although all schools across the country under the eight general education boards have to teach their students the book English for Today published by the NCTB as the main textbook, the teaching methods differ from school to school considerably. It can be mentioned here that for the classes VI to XII the NCTB has published two sets of books (in English and Bengali versions) for all curricular subjects except English and Bengali. In a few urban schools, students have the two options to choose either set. In general, those who take English version show better proficiency than those who take Bengali version. Besides, there are some English medium schools, which do not follow the curriculum of the NCTB. The majority of these schools claim to follow British curricula and their students prepare to sit for GEC 'O' and 'A' level examinations. Some other schools, however, follow American curricula while some others follow others. Students of these English medium schools, though are better in English, their condition in Bengali is equally worse (Hasan, 2004).

Ultimately, even after shifting from the years-long practice of the traditional and age-old GTM to the most modern and advanced method CLT has made the same or to some extent more devastating result in producing scholastic generations in English, the all-expected medium for international communication. While the GTM once produced some scholars of English in Bangladesh, the CLT has been found to be a failure to do so in the recent days. It has been clearly observed from the last few years' education boards' results that the same academic institutions are doing comparatively better in making good results in English as before. But, what is more dangerous than before is, now, the inferior students of different institutions throughout the country are also coming forward with good English scores while their actual communicative competence is undoubtedly questionable.

1.2. CLT in Classroom: Bona Fide Picture

From the accounts of the English language teachers from all over the country, the major factors that can be identified as limitations to put into the practice of CLT in Bangladesh are inefficiency of ELT practitioners, economic constraints, administrative set-up, cultural conflicts, seating arrangement in classroom, class size and language teaching and learning techniques.

Interaction plays a key function to provide this purpose. This interaction can be made by some activities in the classroom through pair and group work. To have significant interaction there is no substitute to pair and group work. There are many things that people do when they join in a group as an obligation. In the pair and group work, learners have the chance to share their ideas assertively. They feel liberated when they confer things with their peers. But this depends on how teachers in the classroom initiate and encourage the students to do the task.

VI. Significance of Some Modifications in the Present CLT Practice

The choice of a methodology in the language classroom is to a greater extent determined by to what extent the language is used in everyday life or outside classroom. In a monolingual language situation like Bangladesh, students have very little scope to use English in everyday life. And it is seen that upper class people are more proficient in English than the middle and lower class people, and the middle class people are more proficient than the lower class in the target language i.e. English.

Still, the need to cope-up with the modern society, learning the target language, i.e., English, with comprehensive pronunciation is needed too along with meaningful effective communication. Planning for the approach of CLT practice according to the context and the level of the students' proficiency is needed, and syllabus and activities considering the handling ability of the target language of both the students and the teachers will also enhance the outcome of the CLT method in Bangladesh.

From the research work titled *A Linguistic Study of English Language Curriculum at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh – A Communicative Approach to Curriculum Development* by Md. Kamrul Hasan founded the following as necessary components of a language syllabus:

1. The situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics which will be dealt with;
2. The language activities in which the learner will be engaged;
3. The language functions which the learner will fulfill;
4. What the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic;
5. The general notions which the learner will be able to handle;
6. The specific (topic-related) notions which the learner will be able to handle;
7. The language forms which the learner will be able to use;
8. The degree of skill which the learner will be able to perform (Hasan, 2004; Numan, 1988; van Ek, 1975).

VII. Effectiveness of CLT in the Context of Bangladesh

The communicative approach offers learners the opportunity to practice the four basic language skills in a well-balanced way. It promotes learners' interest of learning. It also promotes learners' ability of using English from their real life situation. The variety of contexts and tasks with interaction among students and

between students and teachers allows the learners to use the language creatively and accurately. Learners themselves learn by discussing in group and pair and the whole process is a spontaneous participation of the learners themselves which is based on 'learning by doing'. So, the classroom is learner-centered where the learners themselves are directly involved in the learning process. *English for Today* provides learners every opportunity to learn from their own real context, almost every textbook from class VI to class XII having a TG (Teacher's Guide) for the teachers to help and guide in order to make a lesson plan for the lesson, to know the aim of the lesson, how to teach vocabulary, how to use and where to get visual aids, how to deal with a large class and so on. So, teachers who have been teaching the old book need to change their techniques in teaching as per requirements.

VIII. Suggestions

In a monolingual perspective like Bangladesh, a developing country in the EFL context, just adopting a communicative syllabus and textbooks is not certainly ensuring an effective teaching and learning environment. If the teachers fail to use this in a proper way, everything will dismiss. So, a teacher development programme should be arranged at each school and Madrasah, which will continue for a certain period. Some development programmes can be taken at sub-district level and experts from a higher authority can monitor these programs. Self-development scheme can also help teachers to develop their teaching skills. School and Madrasah level teacher training in primary, secondary and also higher secondary levels is necessary because the foundation of a language helps the students earn proficiency and confident to develop the control over the target language.

Along with the technical facilities the CLT approach also needs some modification and addition. Complete structural knowledge of a language which was the theory of language of GTM can be reintroduced along with its translation parts according to the learners' need; oral practice keeping in mind that language is related with situation can be practiced vividly for comprehensive pronunciation and meaningful communication providing or creating low-anxiety mode as much as possible at the time of learning. Qualified and economically solvent teacher along with the limited number of students considering the ability of the teacher's control over the class, content, time to ensure the best effort from the teacher's part should also be the important points to consider.

IX. Conclusion

Learning English is supposed to be comparatively easier in CLT than in other methods. But if the method does not stay for long the effort will be in vain. Government should take proper steps in this regard. We have enough scholars of GTM in our country because it had ruled our English teaching system for about fifty years academically. But meanwhile approaches have been changed for several times. It perturbs our learners. Ultimately our students could not be efficient in English for having new methods and rules in the last two decades.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method is used worldwide to teach the target language in both EFL and ESL contexts. In a developing country like Bangladesh the CLT approach was adopted excluding the world's oldest and traditional GTM with lots of expectation and hope to improve the contemporary status of ELT situation. Eventually it was not that much prolific because of some inadequacy and limitations of this method. So, few modifications are quite necessary for the development of Communicative Language Teaching approach in the present ELT context of Bangladesh.

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