

A SURVEY OF CURRENT APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE
LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN CHINA FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJORS'
COLLEGE ORAL ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

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This paper focuses on the current application of communicative language teaching (CLT) in college oral English teaching in China. The subjects are limited to non-English majors. During the research, previous surveys, investigations, interviews, questionnaires and experiments about application of CLT in English teaching in China have been studied. The data and the results are analyzed in order to explore the limits and problems in real teaching. The review of other teaching methods such as grammar-centered teaching, task-based language teaching, and cooperative learning applied in English teaching in China have contributed to the solution of the general English language learning. The advantages of developing the students' communicative competence using these methods make it possible to improve the effect of CLT in oral English teaching, especially for non-English majors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the ultimate purpose of learning a language. Communicative language teaching (CLT) sets “communicative competence” as its goal, which meets the ultimate goal of language learning. Many linguists and sociolinguists contributed to the development of this method of teaching. The research started as early as the 1970s. In the following years, the concept and term “communicative competence” have been enriched. Grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence were added to this concept. Knowledge and ability of language use were emphasized in CLT. Communicative language teaching was completed and became popular in this period. (Liao,XiaoQing, Brief introduction of CLT)

In the early 1990s, China made a big movement towards communicative language teaching (CLT) and started its curricular innovation characterized by the new textbook series – *Junior English of China (Books I, II and III)*, which was published by the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) and

designed for the development of communicative competence in cooperation with the British Longman (Liao, 2000, p. 1). Twenty years have passed since CLT was introduced in China. This paper discusses how the CLT was developed, what are the benefits that the students and teachers get from CLT, what problems were met during the application of CLT, and what strategies are likely to solve them.

The review of literature addresses the characteristics of the communicative view of language, the requirement of CLT, the elements limiting the application of CLT, and the strategies taken to overcome them based on the previous research. Some surveys, investigations, interviews, questionnaires and experiments were cited in the following study. These data and elements in previous research were analyzed. In this way, the tendency of CLT in China will be possible to find. Comparing other methods of teaching English, such as grammar-based teaching, task-based English teaching and cooperative learning, which are widely used in English teaching in China, it is possible to find out the advantages and disadvantages for the development of students' communicative competence. Application of the advantages from these methods in oral English class would provide a way to improve the situation of CLT in college oral

English teaching in China. Developing the strong points and avoiding the weak ones in teaching would improve the teaching effect in classroom.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed as a question is as follows:

How do teachers and students work to improve the application of CLT in oral English teaching, especially for non-English majors?

Definition of Terms

CLT: Communicative language teaching (CLT) is based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings. This approach to teaching emphasizes the communications of meaning over the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms (Chen, C. F.).

Grammar-Translation Approach: An approach to second language teaching which is characterized by the explicit instruction of grammatical rules and language analysis through the use of translation (Chen, C. F. n. d.)

TBET: Task-based English Teaching is a piece of classroom 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, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end (Nunan, David, 2004, p. 4).

Cooperative Learning: It is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject (See: Kennesaw State University, 2009).

EFL: English as a foreign language refers to the use or study of English by speakers with a different native language. (See: Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. 2009)

Oral English: a kind of spoken language as a human natural language in which the words are uttered through the mouth for speech communication (See: Wikipedia Foundation, Inc. 2008).

Oral English Teaching: An important course for EFL college students in China focusing on their oral communicative competence (Zhou, 1999).

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and the Library of South-central University for Nationalities, over 88 days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO with Academic Search Elite, ERIC, Professional Development Collection and Wilson Index and CNKI with Chinese Master's Degree Paper Collection Index as the primary sources. Key search topics include "CLT," "TBET," "Cooperative learning" and "Oral English Teaching."

Method

A brief review of literature on the studies of communicative language teaching was conducted. A second review of literature relating features and difficulties in the applications of CLT in oral English teaching in China was conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Oral Proficiency and Oral English Teaching

Spoken language plays an important role in human communication. Among the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking is an essential and convenient form of language use when communicating or negotiating with others both in business and many other sections. As Hedge said, “it is a skill by which first impressions are being formed and even advances people’s life chances considerably” (Wang, 2007, p.1). Speaking is a direct way to communicate. Oral proficiency and communicative competence are related with each other.

In her research, Wang Shuri (2007) concludes the features of the process of speaking, based on reading literatures by Brown, Lazaraton, Bailey, Savage, Bygate and Levelt. As a complex task, it involves four essential processes including “conceptualization, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring”. Because it is “a two-way communication between speaker and listener”, the

speakers' roles are interchangeable, which results in speaking as the most demanding of the four skills. Besides, "oral English is transient and improvised." To respond to interlocutor, some more skills such as "managing interaction, opening or closing conversation, managing the sharing of the time and taking turns" are involved (p.12-13). As Wang (2007, p.26) said, "The language will be acquired through carrying out the learning tasks". To achieve the speaking proficiency and meaningful communication, "conversational skills and communication strategies are as important as the intelligible pronunciation, grammatical and lexical accuracy" (p.12). Therefore, it is a challenge for the teachers to organize various activities to ensure all the students to get opportunities to practice. The learners' communicative competence would be developed in the activities.

Liao Xiaoqing (1997) introduces four basic types of communicative activities for developing communicative competence. According to the class size, "social formulas and dialogues", "community-oriented tasks", "problem-solving activities" and "role plays" can be performed in pairs, triads, foursomes, small groups and even in whole class to ensure students to participate in the practice. (p. 22-23)

Jack C. Richards (n. d.) cites six types of tasks proposed by Willis (1996) with examples as explanation as follows: Listing tasks to explain ideas while listing the items about them; sorting and ordering where activities should be ordered or sorted according to logic order; comparing, in which the students compare information to identify common and different points; problem-solving, in which real-life problems are involved for solution; sharing personal experiences where the activities such as noting points of interest, asking questions and presentation of what you have heard can be given after talking more freely about participants themselves are involved and creative tasks, in which pairs or groups of learners are involved in some kind of freer creative work, such as cooperative reading, group presentation, investigation, drama and roles play. (p.33)

Besides these, Wang (2007) listed more possible types of activities designed for oral English teaching. Here they are. Prediction tasks, in which students predict from headline, pictures or video without sound track; jumbles, in which the learners should give the correct order according to the presented parts of a complete text; restoration tasks, during which students replace words or phrases that have been omitted from a text, or identify an extra sentence paragraph that

has been added to a text. In this way, the students can be helped to restore the text to its original state; jigsaw, in which the students are encouraged to combine the information received from different sources to form a whole; memory challenge tasks, in which participants show other pairs what they can remember about the items listed or mentioned before; information-gap tasks, in which the learners interact with each other and grasp the information through exchanging information in pairs; decision-making tasks, in which the learners reach agreement through discussion, persuasion or vote among a series of choices and opinion exchange tasks, in which the participants are involved in the expression of different thoughts and exchanges of various opinions(p.26-28). These activities provide possibilities to develop the oral proficiency and communicative competence of the learners. However, it is also important to improve the efficiency of teaching through proper methods.

Communicative Language Teaching

The 1970s witnessed a shift away from the study of language seen purely as a system toward the study of language as communication. Chen, Sihui (2006) and Chang, Yuli (2006) both gave a full introduction about origin and

development of CLT in their essays. A group of experts began to investigate the possibility of developing language courses in order to meet the various needs of adults after the Cultural Cooperation Council of Europe held a seminar in 1971 (Chen, p. 3). As a response to perceived limitations in Chomsky's competence/performance model of language, a sociolinguist, Hymes (1972), responded first. Chang (2006) cited him from his *On Communicative Competence* as follows in her paper:

The goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to be to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behavior (p. 11).

This developed the concept of communicative competence. At the same time, Wilkins (1972, 1976), Widdowson (1972, 1978), and Brumfit and Johnson (1979) also saw the need to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures, emphasizing the functional and communicative potential of language (Chang, 2006, p. 11). Influenced by these views of language learning and teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) came into existence with explicit attention on “language in use”, which

expanded the dimension of language from the previous linguistic forms to communicative function. The term "communicative approach" became popular formally as an independent approach when *the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching* by C. J. Brumfit and Johnson was published in 1979 (Chen, p. 4). It was popularized that learning a foreign language is not to master its structures or forms, but to develop students' communicative competence.

Different theorists have offered different definitions of Communicative Language Teaching. However, they set clear and proper expressions as the purpose of language using and emphasize the importance of language practice in communicative settings. Widdowson's (1996) earlier description of Communicative Approach to language teaching is as follows:

In general, we might characterize the recommended approach (CA) as one which combines situational presentation with structural practice. Language items are presented in situation in the classroom to ensure that their meaning is clear, and then practices as formal structures by means of exercises of sufficient numbers to establish the structures in the learner's memory.

(p.116)

Also, Littlewood (1984) suggests that focusing on learner's language use for communication is a noteworthy characteristic of communicative approach. In his description of Communicative Language Teaching, Littlewood says:

A communicative approach opens up a wider perspective on language teaching. In particular, it makes us more strongly aware that it is not enough to teach learner how to manipulate the structure of foreign language. They must also develop strategies for relating these structures to their communicative functions in real situations and real time. We must therefore provide learners with ample opportunities to use the language themselves for communicative purpose. (p. x-xi)

That is to say, Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to emphasizing "the communications of meaning over the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms" (Chen, C. F., n. d.). In the view of CLT, successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings. Oral proficiency depends on the development of communicative competence. The goal of language teaching is to

develop learners' "communicative competence"(CC), which is the knowledge enabling someone to use a language effectively, and their ability actually to use this knowledge for communication.

Some researchers identify communicative competence in their studies. According to Hymes, communicative competence should include not only the linguistic forms of the language but also its social-cultural rules, the knowledge of different communicative strategies depending on the situation, tasks, and roles of the participants (Wang, 2007, p. 16). Canale and Swain (1980) argue that to achieve the oral proficiency, communicative competence minimally includes the four areas of knowledge and skills: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Liao, 2000, p.2). Also, Sandra J. Savignon (2001) sketched the theoretical and research bases for communicative language teaching and outlined a five-component approach to shaping a communicative curriculum. She concluded that "[w]here communicative competence is a goal, however, the most successful programs all have one feature in common: they involve the whole learner in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events" (p. 235). On one hand, communicative language teaching requires "the involvement of

learners in the dynamic and interactive process of communication” (p. 237). That is to say, second-language experiences should be “affective and physical as well as cognitive” (p. 237). On the other hand, it implies CLT has poised higher demand for teacher’s language ability and the ability to design and organize activities in class. Meanwhile, successful communicative language teaching raised higher requirements for the strong communicative awareness of the language learners. Sandra J. Savignon (2001) suggested five components including “language arts, language for a purpose, personal language use, theatre arts and beyond the classroom” (p. 238). Among them, “language arts”, “language for a purpose” and “theatre arts” need the further development of teachers’ specialization. They should master the rules of usage, provide full explanations of how language works, and focus on “providing occasions for language use through the establishment of” a certain language “as the medium of instruction in the general curriculum” (p. 238), which is famous for the immersion programs that have emerged in elementary schools across the United States. In addition, the roles in real life are allowed to play in the class. To make it more effective, the teacher should design it as an integral part of the classroom program fully considering the possible outcomes. The rest of the components

require more about language learners. They should be eager to share their feelings and experience using the second language for self-expression and prepare themselves for the second-language world beyond the classroom.

To sum up, the CLT emphasizes that one of the most important functions of language is communication; therefore, the aim of learning a language is to acquire the competence to conduct effective communication in the target language, meanwhile, the structure and the function of the target language should be equally treated. CLT developed language fluency and the appropriateness of the discourse but failed to improve grammatical competence effectively (Wang, 2007, p.15). To integrate fluency and accuracy together, other methods of English teaching would contribute to its development and make the oral English teaching more efficient.

Other Methods of English Teaching

Other methods of English teaching are applied in oral English teaching widely. Task-based Approach is one of them. Wang (2007) indicates that “TBA (Task-based Approach) is an innovative of CLT” (p.15). What is Task-based

approach? The term 'task' refers to pedagogical tasks, which is different from the tasks in real world. Nunan, David (2004) defines it in the following way:

a piece of classroom 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, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end. (p. 4)

It's clear that pedagogical tasks involve communicative language use in which meaning and form are highly interrelated. Nunan presents that "the development of CLT has had a profound effect on both methodology and syllabus design, and has greatly enhanced the status of the concept of 'task' within the curriculum" (p. 10). The difference between CLT and TBLT lies on the levels they focus on. CLT is "a broad, philosophical approach to the language curriculum that draws on theory and research in linguistics, anthropology, psychology and sociology" (p. 10). While "[t]ask-based language teaching represents a realization of this

philosophy at the levels of syllabus design and methodology” (p.10). This implies that TBLT made it possible to provide more effective ways in the application of CLT. Also, Markee (1994) defined Task-based Language Teaching as follows:

An analytic approach to syllabus design and methodology in which chains of information-gathering, problem-solving and evaluative tasks are used to organize language teaching and learning; these interdependent pedagogical tasks, which combine insights from socio-linguistic and psycholinguistic research, are designed to methodologically simulate the communicative events which learners encounter in specific second language-using environments (See University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 1988).

TBLT focuses as much on the process of learning as on its products and that it is organized in terms of methodologically -induced opportunities to use and learn language.

Cooperative Learning (CL) is another possible way to teach oral English especially for big-size class. It is defined as a technique that de-emphasizes

competition and instead encourages the learners to work together and succeed as a team. CL emphasizes learning by doing and creates genuine communication within classrooms. Five basic elements make cooperative efforts work best. They are positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing. Positive interdependence requires each group member to make effort for group success, being responsible for relative but different roles or tasks. Face-to-face interaction provides the group members opportunities to orally explain how to solve problems, teach what they know to others, check for understanding, discuss concepts being learned and connect present with past learning. The great individual and group accountability asks for small size of the group. The group members are aware of possible responsibilities by giving an individual test to each student, randomly examining students orally, asking them to observe each group and learn from each other. Interpersonal small-group skills should be used in group work and help the students to play the social roles as leader, to build trust with each other, to make decisions and to communicate to deal with possible conflicts among group members. Group processing asks group members to discuss how well they achieve their goals and maintain effective working

relationships (Susan E. Gruber, 1989, p4-5).

For most of adult English learners, they feel more confident to output when they have enough input. They have stronger desire to speak English at the same linguistic level of their native language. Since speaking is a way of output, they would like to remember enough expressions or vocabulary with clear meanings in native language and know how English works as a language. Grammar-based Teaching meets their needs. “GBT uses grammar as the base, the starting point and foundation, for the development of all language skills”(Azar, 2007, p.6). Grammar-based Teaching helps learners discover the nature of the language” (Azar, B., 2007, p.2). Researches show that individuals who understand these concepts of grammar have a distinct advantage while using the language. Those who wish to use a language to the best of their ability need the help of fundamental understandings of its grammar (Azar, 2007, p.3). GBT describes how English works. “GBT makes available explicit linguistic information about the structure of the English language in order to help speed and otherwise facilitate the development of the students’ inter-language” (Azar, 2007, p.3). That is to say, GBT seeks to create awareness and understanding of English structures. This awareness could be seen as one of the first steps many students

rely upon in the process of creating their inter-language. Understanding how a structure works helps many students formulate how to say what they mean and helps lead to successful communication experiences, the building blocks of second-language acquisition. (p.8) Grammar-Translation Approach is also used for warming up in oral English teaching

Application of CLT in College Oral English in China

In her essay, *Communicative Language Teaching Innovation in China: Difficulties and Solutions*, Liao, Xiaoqing (2000) introduced an innovation from the traditional teaching into communicative language teaching in China in 1992 and pointed out that the new English Teaching Syllabus and the new textbook series characterized the innovation (p. 1). Chang Yuli continued to pay close attention to the innovation. In her essay, *Communicative Language Teaching in Oral English Instruction*, she reports as following:

In 1999, the new syllabus issued by the Ministry of Education emphasizes on a student-centered approach instead of a teacher-centered one. Again in 2004, the Ministry of Education issued *the Teaching Requirements*

for College English Curriculum which places great emphasis on cultivating the ability of students in learning English for the purpose of training the qualified personnel who will be creative and competent to meet the needs of the international communication in all aspects. (p.8)

The essay of Chen Sihui (2006), *An Investigation into the application of CLT in College English Teaching of China*, concludes the similar situation in Chinese colleges. “Administrators of educational departments are trying their efforts to provide opportunities for English teachers’ training and retraining”(p. i). “The traditional grammar-based examinations are being changed to better forms in CLT. Spoken English test have been already added to CET4 test for the students who can score high” (p. i). As a result of this training and requirement, many teachers have come to realize that English teaching is not equal to the grammar teaching. All of these indicated that the goal of English teaching tended to develop the learners’ communicative competence in English. The requirement highlighted the shift of the focus of the teaching syllabus from reading to listening and speaking.

In China, non-English majors and English majors have different English curriculums. For most of non-English majors, intensive reading are their only required English course while English majors have many different required English courses aiming at different language and communicative skills. Questionnaires of 27 teachers from Harbin University of Science and Technology, Harbin engineering University and Northeast Agricultural University (Wang, 2007) and the investigations concerning the present situation of oral English teaching in Shandong Normal University, Dezhou college and Shangdong Agriculture University (Han, 2006) indicate the same situation that “a majority of universities have no oral English lessons for non-English majors”. “Most of the students have four English classes that means four hours each week. They have to finish 6-8 units in one semester.”(Han, 2006, p.6) Big class size is another trait for non-English majors. “In China, for non-English major students, there are at least 40 students in one language class.”(Wang, 2007, p. 39) Oral English teaching for non-English majors is mainly limited in class. In Wang’s investigation, two classes of non-English majors in the same grade and 27 English teachers whose teaching time varies from one to twenty years are involved. In each class, over half of them spent less than 10 minutes on oral

English teaching, 40.7% of them spend less than 20 minutes and few of them spend more than 20 minutes on speaking. The limited time and “[t]he big class size make it impossible to monitor the group work or pair works effectively.” “The data shows that it is difficult to design speaking activities to get all students involved in”. (p.39) The most frequently used activities are as following: “read aloud the articles or dialogues in the text book, answer the teacher’s questions, recite dialogues or the articles in the text and pattern practice”(p.40). Few of the teachers investigated have used discussion or debate, role- play and small group activities in the intensive English class. However, such classroom activities “cannot improve students’ oral competence effectively” and “do not put students into ‘meaningful communication’.”(p.39)

Also, Chang Yuli (2006) has the similar findings in her investigation, which involved 80 college students of Grade Two in five different English classes in Shanghai University Science and Technology, 92 specialized teachers and 28 non-specialized teachers. He found teachers’ words are much more than their students’ in class. “Over 60% of the words are given by the teachers, while only 20% of the words are presented by the students” (p.29). Inadequate interactive activities are produced in college English classroom. “The average number of

'turns' taking place between teachers and students is 26" and "almost all the conversations are sponsored by the teachers and centered on the teaching materials." As "passive receivers" and "memory machines", the students "have few opportunities to express themselves in class."(p.30)

In Han Bing's study, 100 non-English majors selected at random and 30 English teachers are invited to do the questionnaires. He found "students have little time and opportunities to practice their oral English." (p.9) "Teachers seldom consider students' needs" because "they regard finishing teaching the textbook as their teaching aim" (p.8) in the limited time in class. The data in the questionnaires indicates that majority of the teachers used only half of a class for oral English training each week. 84% of teachers spend 30-40 minutes to explain grammar points each class. "The common method to practice oral English in class is the asking and answering circle"(p.6). Under the observation, Han found that "active and extravert students like to talk with their teachers and peer in English, while those who did not get high marks or introverted students are usually taciturn in class."(p.7) 30% of the students do not have enough time to improve their speaking.

All of the above data show that the application of CLT in China has not

achieved the expected result, as Hu (2002) states categorically “the approach, (CLT as applied in China) has failed to develop an adequate level of communicative competence (i.e. the ability to use the target language for authentic communication) in millions of Chinese learners of English”(p. 94). Some educators described as follows: Although many teachers are trying to incorporate the communicative approach in the classroom, the traditional way of teaching still remains. In fact, the real situation is more serious as the interview made to more than 900 university English teachers in 48 universities and colleges by the Chinese Foreign Language Teaching and Research Center mentioned by Chang, Yuli (2006) in her article, showed that “more than 60% of the interviewed college English teachers chose pair work or group work as the rarest activities in their classroom teaching but they chose explaining the text and doing exercises in the textbook as the most frequent ones. 84.5% of the interviewed teachers thought it was a waste of time letting students participate in oral activities in class and only 3% of them asked students to practice oral English after class” (p.8). It implies that the situation of application of CLT in China is not successful really. It shows the attitudes of the teachers and the learners towards the position of oral English play the important roles in teaching.

The teachers as the guide to control the classes should have good language abilities to meet such positions. But what problems do they have in CLT?

Difficulties in Teaching Practice

What are the results in the present oral English teaching? Some people attempt to find out the difficulties in the teaching practice and provide solutions. Chen, Sihui and Liao, Xiaoqing are two of such researchers.

Based on the investigation and analysis, Chen, Sihui (2006) found that “most teachers are trying to use CLT, but for a variety of reasons, most of them use it to a limited extent” (p. 28). Among the reasons, the CET4 backwash is considered as the main block, which can “affect the students to achieve in communicative competence” (p. 29); the students’ low English proficiency, the lack of an English-speaking environment out of class and students’ lack of cooperation made the design and organization of pair works more difficult; the lack of teacher training and the influence of traditional teaching methods contributed to teachers’ failure of using CLT. (Chen, 2006, p. 29)

Liao, Xiaoqing (2000) had the similar findings. She attributed the failure to teacher's inability to teach communicatively, negative influence from the Chinese teaching traditions that is teachers are knowledge givers and students are knowledge receivers and the grammar-oriented examination pressure (p. 5-8).

Besides, according to the investigation and questionnaires mentioned, it is obvious that limited time and big class size are two typical obstacles.

In addition, the attitudes of teachers and students towards CLT affect the oral English teaching in practice and even create obstacles to some degree, which is reflected in Chang's investigation. Chang, Yuli (2006) provided an investigation on Chinese teachers' attitude towards CLT, in her essay *Communicative Language Teaching in Oral English Instruction*. The investigation was carried out within five colleges in Shanghai and the sample of teachers included variations in age, gender, teaching experience and specialization. Their teaching experience recorded ranged between one year and seventeen years. She found that "experienced teachers appear to be least favorably disposed towards communicative attitudes and practices" (p. 25). "Specialist teachers appear to be more willing to adopt communicative practices

than non-specialist teachers.” “The findings indicate that teachers' attitudes are situated in particular physical and social contexts” (p. 25). With heavy workloads, many teachers use Grammar-Translation Method, which is easier to be carried out.

Based on the questionnaire and classroom observation, a similar investigation and research about students' attitudes towards CLT was also carried out among 80 college students of Grade Two in Shanghai University of Science and Technology. The results indicated that most of them focus on linguistic competence. Chang (2006) found that:

Although 60% of the college students believe oral communicative competence plays the most significant role in English study, they prefer college teachers to spend most of the class time on word explanation and the improvement of their reading ability (60%) rather than on oral ability, for they think words and reading comprehensive ability are of the utmost importance in English examinations. (p. 28)

“100%of the college students believe learning English can help them get the Bachelor Degree and help them find good jobs” (p.28). The strong “instrumental

motivation” college students have results in their negative attitude towards CLT. Such phenomenon would be more serious in Chinese middle schools, which largely affects College English teaching.

Furthermore, lack of efficient teaching methods or approaches, which can provide direct instruction or practical activities and easy to be combined with CLT is another obstacle. Han (2006) found it in his observation. In the class, where the teacher controls the teaching process and students have no chance to express themselves and to do creative activities, the learners are passive. Without the interactive activities, the students are supervised and corrected. (p.8) Without awareness of purpose of using language and enough activities to take part in, the learners lose interest in language learning and fail to develop communicative competence.

However, the similar investigation among 150 sophomores and 32 teachers from two universities carried out by Chen, Sihui (2006) provides different findings. The results of the investigation about the attitudes towards CLT of the students and teachers demonstrate that their attitudes towards the teacher’s main role, the necessity of organizing pair/group work and the grammar teaching are quite different. But among the differences, “it is evident that there is a much

greater enthusiasm among the students for non-traditional teaching methods. Moreover, there is an indication of misapprehension, on the part of the teachers as to how the students want to be taught” (p. 27). The students “feel frustrated by the tedium of teacher-led instruction and the absence of communicative classroom activities” while “their lack of confidence in English renders them mute in class and in turn their behaviors reassure the teachers in their misunderstanding that the students are only studying English for the short-term advantage”(p. 44). In addition, “the teachers regard accuracy as more important than fluency and persist in emphasizing grammar teaching, while the whole purpose of language teaching is ignored which is to cultivate ‘the ability to use the target language for authentic communication’”(p. 44). The different voice indicates the learners’ desire to interactive activities and more efficient ways to develop their communicative component, which can keep balance of the linguistic fluency and accuracy in real language teaching.

Possible Solutions

Wang Shuri (2007) applies Task-based Approach in college oral English teaching and recommends suitable activities in speaking teaching in the intensive

class, including information-gap activities, role play and free discussion. Among them, information gap activity requires each learner in a pair or group to possess information the others do not have, and share to achieve an outcome. It is proved to help learner acquire communicative ability, improve motivation, allow natural learning and create a context supporting learning. (p.49) “The role-play activities can be suitable for the intensive English class if they are performed in pairs and groups rather than group acting in front of the class”. In free discussion, students are encouraged to “talk about a range of topics which engage their interests, opinions, histories and experiences”, which “provides the opportunity to practice the interpersonal strategies”. (p.50)

Han Bing (2006) introduces Cooperative Learning, “an approach to structuring learning in classrooms, which is based on small group work, collaboration and cooperation”. (p.16) The CLA is characterized by its face-to-face interaction, language practice for working together, group processing, the relationship of positive interdependence and individual accountability between group members, which answer for the needs of the oral ability improvement. (p.16-20) In his three-month experiment, 32 students in Grade Two are involved. In order to get harmonious atmosphere, they are divided into 6 groups, according

to their oral test grades, their personality and gender. The group members play different roles as the controller, observer, listener, addresser and timer to complete the same task. Han found “defined tasks and roles of a good cooperative learning seem to stimulate the enthusiasm of speaking out” and a more “comfortable and non-stressful environment” has been built for English learning and practice. All the students take part in the real communicative process. (p.58) The data from experiment indicate that Cooperative Learning Approach is efficient to “improve the usage of the discourse and communication among students”, provide enough activities for each students to take part in practice, solving the problem caused by big class size, and change the teacher-centered teaching to student-centered one (p.56-57).

An Weiwei (2007) proposes the importance of the student’s reflective learning ability in foreign language teaching and builds the links between communicative teaching approach and the development of student abilities for reflective learning through the comparison of teaching principles in CLT and major principles in cultivating students’ reflective learning ability. Reflective learning, “an ability to reflect on action or observation and respond” (p.7), can be displayed in the following procedures: scanning existed learning activities,

interpreting and judging whether the learning process and result is satisfying, detecting the problem, analyzing the problem, offering solutions, checking in practice and summarizing the experience. (p.12) The seven steps enable the learners “to progress and improve the quality of their learning experience” (p.7). Reflective learning ability cultivation is characterized by the learners’ “initiative participation” (p.42), creation of the context to enhance learners’ thinking ability and encourage their creativity, individual feedback and the principle of advancing gradually from simplicity to complexity (p.43) while CLT is featured by its purpose of communication, the learners’ “control of certain linguistic forms” (p.44), its “learner-centered principle” (p.45) and its various tasks. Through analysis, “the four principles in CLT accord with the major principles in cultivating students’ reflective learning ability”. (p.52) Cultivation of students’ reflective learning ability provides possibility to improve the quality of CLT in oral English teaching.

According to the common problems existing the listening and speaking teaching and the communicative features of *New College English*, a popular college English textbook in China, Wu, Yan (2006) calls for TBLT to improve the current situation of college students’ listening and speaking skills. In her

research, in the pre-task activities, core activities, supporting activities and evaluation of these main procedures, the students have more competence during the communication compared with the traditional teaching approach. More students can speak more fluent and more accurate English, for their more opportunities to exchange the ideas and opinions with others. More interesting and more enjoyable teaching and learning activities make teaching and learning environment favorable for the students. During the different tasks and activities, students' motivation of learning language well can be tremendously aroused and promoted, and it is the high motivation that causes successful learning. (p. 37-39)

Chou, Lijun (2007) expressed the similar view and gave countermeasures to develop the affect and cognitive factors of learners in TBLT in college including reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, student-centeredness in the language classroom, opportunities for learners to develop higher order and critical thinking skills and enhancing positive interdependence and individual accountability by a variety of well-directed activities or tasks. (p. 79-87)

Ye Sining (2005) emphasizes the importance of motivation of language

learners and gives good suggestions to stimulate and enhance it in her essay *Application of Motivation Theories to Oral English Teaching*. Motivation is “some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action” and “the desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction and satisfaction with the task.” (p.2) Ye shows that the students’ de-motivational participation in oral English learning is caused by internal and external factors, which include anxiety, poor self-confidence and lack of risk-taking of learners, teachers’ factors, teaching methods, teaching materials, activities and evaluating systems. Among these, teachers’ factors outweigh and arouse students’ motivation efficiently. (p.21-30) To revive learners motivation is a primary responsibility of the teacher. As a qualified facilitator, the teachers “should be expert at language learning and teaching”(p.33), create a pleasant situation “where learners can use the language without embarrassment” and fear and “where activities lead to feelings of success, not failure” (p.34) by making full use of competitions, giving more reward than punishment, only correcting the students’ errors which “cause difficulty in communication”, “occur frequently in their speech” and “are highly stigmatized”(p. 35), and providing enough and equal opportunities for students to speak. Ye (2005), recommends efficient

activities to stimulate the learners' motivation as follows: brainstorming could be designed as warming up before speaking tasks. It is believed to be helpful to build relaxed atmosphere;(p.37) role-playing and songs learning can arouse the learners enthusiasm of learning by stimulating realistic conversations and effective communication and enhancing learner involvement;(p.38) the learners can be also motivated to be actively involved in learning English in debate; videos and movies can arouse the interest of the students by making them learn English in an "authentic situation to help students understand real language" and enhancing their confidence in speaking (p.39).

Chapter 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since communicative language teaching was proposed in the 1970s, “its focus has shifted to procedures for identifying learners’ communicative needs” which “resulted in proposals to make needs analysis an essential component of communicative methodology” from “proposal for the organization of syllabuses in terms of functions and notions rather than grammatical structures” (Richards, n. d., p. 45). In China, among different types of English class, oral English teaching focusing on improving language proficiency and fostering communicative ability meets more challenges. As language learners, the students should not only learn the usage of the language, they should also know how to use the language to fulfill communicative purposes and even use the “the knowledge learned” and “the language ability developed” to obtain new knowledge and to cultivate new language ability.

To achieve such linguistic goals, it’s necessary to improve old teaching

approach and keep trying new methods in teaching. It's practical to learn from the strong points of new methods to offset the weaknesses existing in old teaching approach.

As Jack C. Richards expresses in his article *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, "today CLT can be seen as describing a set of core principles about language learning and teaching" (p.45). Even beset by objective difficulties, CLT has been applied in English classes more or less in China. However, the most urgent problem is how to provide more opportunities to practice the approach of CLT.

One of the most significant solutions is involved in the progress made in the fields of classroom activities. Those "sharing the most important characteristics of communication and having proved to be very effective in motivating the learner and extremely helpful in cultivating his communicative competence" (Chen, 2005, p.48) are welcome. For such purpose, trends in other fields can also have a cross-over effect on language teaching. Psychology, sociology, science technology and methodology can contribute to designing the better classroom language activities. Brainstorming, songs learning, videos and movies are good examples to stimulate learners' motivations and arouse their interests;

role-playing and debate creates realistic language environment and effective communication; cooperative learning approach and its related activities enhance the language learners' involvement; task-based teaching citing CLT as its source provides more efficient activities to apply CLT in teaching.

In conclusion, in order to enable students to become fluent speakers in meaningful communication, language teachers should be aware of four components of communicative competence and design suitable tasks to help the development of these abilities in the language classrooms.

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