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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SITUATIONAL LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS СИТУАТИВНА МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАННЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Abstract. The paper investigates the efficiency of university English teaching to non-English majors. The aim of the present research is to explore the teaching environment, identify constraints that hinder the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in higher educational institutions in Ukraine and suggest a way of improving learners' English proficiency. The work followed the qualitative methods to evoke the required data. The findings revealed that the Situational Language Teaching as a complimentary approach to the Communicative Foreign Language instruction suits the needs of the learning context and effectively support university English teaching. The article gives sample lesson plans for use to demonstrate the application of situational technology in English as a Foreign Language classroom.

Key words: university English teaching, non-English majors, learning contexts, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, Situational Language Teaching (SLT), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Introduction

Most language learners at National Universities of Ukraine would like to acquire both types of learning skills: academic skills needed to succeed in a classroom or on in an exam and communicative skills needed to achieve a reasonable degree of communicative proficiency in a foreign language. Thus, most methodologists are now faced with the task of teaching to test well (to score well at university examinations) and teaching students to be communicatively competent in a speech community. This means that the selection and organization of certain teaching materials used in EFL classes must reflect the particular needs of the target learners.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is considered the most effective theoretical model in English language teaching since early 1970s. The research supports the principal propositions of the CLT, which help the students acquire both communicative competence as well as linguistic competence. Nevertheless more and more Ukrainian educators have been complaining on difficulties in implementing the CLT to actual classroom and insist on incorporating complimentary approaches to resolve the long-standing problem of deficient university English teaching and learning for non-English majors. While the merits of the CLT approach cannot be denied, there is a need to adapt the CLT techniques according to the context in which they are being applied.

Stephen Bax, Principal Lecturer in Language Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University College, in his book "The end of CLT: a context approach to



language teaching” argues that the CLT has always neglected one key aspect of language teaching – namely the context in which it takes place – and that the consequences of this are serious, to the extent that we need to demote CLT as our main paradigm, and adopt something more similar to what he terms a Context Approach [1]. Other practically oriented classroom teachers and theorists exploring the effectiveness of different instructional strategies and methods in the classroom have developed theories cited as compatible with the principles of CLT. Dr. Gianfranco Conti, co-author of 'The Language Teacher toolkit', award-winning blogger and resource writer for TES, founder of www.language-gym.com offers a “reflective approach” which admits two different language teaching instructions, the Grammar-Translation methodology, still used in quite a lot of institutions worldwide and the Communicative Language Teaching approach, possibly today’s most popular instructional method worldwide [2]. Respected ELT author, Robert O’Neill, argues that there is no scientific evidence of any kind that proves or even suggests that typical CLT techniques work well or work at all under all conditions and with all learners. He suggests that the integration of different teaching instructions can improve academic performance, enhance motivation, and promote learning [3]. Robert J. Blake, distinguished professor of Spanish linguistics at UC Davis and director of the Davis Language Center, points out that there is not a fix framework of CLT. As learners and the learning contexts are dynamic, when CLT is applied to a certain context, the adaptation and innovation of it is necessary. His review article posits a more complex, interactive, and integrated model of language. New computer-assisted language learning (CALL) coupled with a TBLT goal-oriented approach can contribute to language growth in terms of these four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing [4]. William Littlewood, who was involved in language teaching and teacher education in the United Kingdom for many years, has proposed his version of the approach, which he has named COLT or 'communicative-oriented language teaching'. COLT seeks to adapt the western practices of CLT where the goals of the approach remain the same but the means vary according to the contexts in which the English language is being taught [5]. Jack C. Richards in his book “Communicative Language Teaching Today” states that communicative language teaching has continued to evolve and today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals, and so on. He examines two current methodologies content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based instruction (TBI) that can be described as extensions of the CLT movement but which take different routes to achieve the goal of communicative language teaching – to develop learners’ communicative competence [6]. Ellis Rod in his article “Informal and Formal Approaches to Communicative Language Teaching” discusses the use of the term "communicative" in describing approaches to foreign- or second-language teaching. He suggests that a distinction should be drawn between informal communicative approaches which promote second-language acquisition and formal communicative approaches which promote conscious learning. He examines conditions for achieving both acquisition and learning in the classroom [7].

From the above we see that different teaching settings, ought to be adopted,



ideally, fused to reach the fundamental feature of language learning: the ability to create novel and unique sentences.

This article is advocating the view that the Situational Language Teaching (SLT) being complemented with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) might be beneficially applicable for the Ukrainian non-English majors. We assume that activities based on the SLT approach being compatible with CLT formal instructions could effectively facilitates both the exam preparation (the acquisition of grammatical accuracy) and communicative fluency.

Thus, the **purpose** of this study is to prove the effectiveness of complementing CLT approach with SLT approach in the EFL context of Ukrainian Universities.

The **objectives** of this study are:

1. to elaborate on other research findings in the field of EFL teaching issues in applying SLT;
2. to investigate EFL teaching context in Ukrainian academic education and provide a list of shortcomings that failed to assist teachers in implementing CLT;
3. to explore the principals of situational approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and comment on their appropriateness for the teaching environment in Ukrainian higher education institutions;
4. to provide an example of application of the SLT approach in an EFL classroom.

Research context

According to Stephen Bax, the learning context is the key factor in successful language learning. Language teaching everywhere will benefit from fuller attention to the contexts [1]. We offer to evaluate some obstacles to practicing the CLT that may lead to the low students' English performance and provide some possible solutions for such problems.

1. Low motivation. Among many shortcomings leading to the failure of communicative language teaching in EFL classes is the inability to make students highly motivated. All non-English students majoring in various fields of studies have to pass English as a compulsory subject. They are not highly-motivated enough, because the major subject remains in priority whereas English is only a compulsory subject, which requires less efforts, persistence and commitment. Motivation becomes more a product of curricular demands, pressure from exams, academic success, instead of demand for communication. So, compulsory nature of EFL learning in state-owned educational institutions makes CLT inefficient.

2. Lack of English-speaking environment. Insufficient access to the target language both inside and outside of the classroom in EFL contexts certainly is an obstacle that negatively affects students' learning efficiency. As H. G. Widdowson (Professor of TESOL at the University of London and of applied linguistics at the University of Essex) perceived, the English language teaching that takes communicative competence as the invariable goal doesn't fit in the EFL contexts where learners' engagement in social interaction with native English speakers is minimal [8]. H. H. Stern in his article "Issues and options in language teaching" noted that one of the most difficult problems in making classroom learning communicative is the absence of native speakers. Stern points out that CLT has



become more successful in ESL (English as a second language) settings, but failed to make classroom interaction as communicative as possible in EFL contexts [9]. EFL learners generally do not practice target language (TL) with English native speakers and normally return to the real world speaking their mother tongue as soon as they leave the classroom [10].

3. Shortage of training facilities on the CLT for teachers. More teachers' training is needed for the CLT to be appropriately implemented. However, the cost of this training program is pretty high. Financial difficulties limit access to the newest and the best teaching materials and equipment. Only a few universities can afford to get their teachers trained from the British Council. Even the teachers, who are able to get training in CLT, cannot implement their CLT technique in their institutions due to students' exam-oriented mentality and institutional and technical constraints.

4. Insufficient learning time. Limited class hours means poor language input for learners. The National University curriculum has not been modified to follow the communicative approach. It offers a 1,5 hour intensive training per week over the course of a couple of years which is insufficient for learners to assimilate the taught material and be tested on it.

5. Discrepancy among CLT objectivities, exam requirements and university curriculum. The CLT method does not reflect the objectives of the University Entrance Exam. Since the majority of these exams focus on assessing aspects rather than communicative ability, they would negatively affect the CLT methodology, no matter how hard the teacher may try to apply CLT principles. Most of the students in Ukraine are exam-oriented and want to get good grades in the test rather than improving the communicative competence in English. So, naturally, the teacher has become the "facilitator of examinations rather than of communicative competence" [11].

6. Mixed classes. English teaching in Ukrainian universities always takes a form of mixed-ability classes with few hours a week insufficient learning time. The different level of training (low proficiency in the target language) will create problems to conduct a CLT classroom successfully. It is not possible for English teachers to organize group (pair) work activities with beginning-level and upper-intermediate students. CLT approach works better with learners who had relatively higher proficiency in the target language. Conversely, CLT approach might create problems for low level learners as they cannot cope with vocabulary items and participate in classroom activities successfully.

7. Technical constraints. Being a developing country, Ukraine does not have adequate technological support in the field of education. The classrooms in majority of educational institutions are not equipped with modern teaching aids.

8. Speaking as the highest anxiety-causing activity. The CLT approach has to reckon with the personality psycho of the students. CLT requires that students should be active participants in classroom activities. However, in a teaching context where learners have low proficiency in the target language interactive activities with an emphasis on productive skills can only bring about confusion. English teachers generally take the teaching tactic of "pushing" students to speak. That "pushing" students to speak is unpleasant for them and becomes a source of angst or thrill.



Students' resistance to class participation, fears of committing mistakes and shy feelings act as an obstacle to make use of communicative activities in the classes.

Thereby, it has become clear that a communicative approach cannot be effectively applied for non-English majors in university language teaching, it is not equally suited to the exam requirements and CLT goals, it is not appropriate for non-native teachers, it cannot be adopted in situations where students have different level of language training. Low motivation, lack of English-speaking environment, shortage of training opportunities, insufficient learning time, mismatches between CLT objectivities and exam requirements, mixed classes, speaking anxiety, technological constraints, test-oriented teaching/learning are seen as the main obstacles to having an ideal communicative teaching/learning environment for implementing CLT.

To overcome these challenges Ukrainian language-teaching specialists took initiative to modify the English instructional strategies in the classroom to meet local educational realities. Therefore, we recommend a communicative approach be complimented with existing SLT fixed set of techniques in order to produce an integrated teaching methodology that has greater potential for learning than either one of the two approaches. Especially since the CLT approach is usually characterized as a broad approach to teaching, rather than as a teaching method with a clearly defined set of classroom practices. We are not going to reject CLT or replace it with SLT. Our aim is to incorporate critically some of the ideas of SLT with CLT to suit local teaching environment and to promote learners' both grammatical and communicative competence. SLT helps learners master skills necessary to make sentences. CLT helps learners use them for a meaningful communication and thus have sufficient communicative competence. In Situational Language Teaching language is taught by practicing basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities. In Communicative Language Teaching focus is on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures. SLT gives knowledge about language forms. CLT gives knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively. In SLT Language is a system consisting of interrelated structures. In CLT Language is a system for the expression of meaning. If we combine two approaches, we will get language as a system of interrelated structures for the expression of meaning. The CLT approach highlights learners' communicative competence, which is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language. In order to do so, learners need to acquire the grammatical forms and structures of the target language. We assume that learners achieve communicative skills through language competency. It is suggested that communicative competence is developed and acquired through use of the basic structures and sentence patterns for communicative purposes. Acquisition of communicative proficiency requires mastering grammatical forms and structures. Grammatical competence is an important constituent of communicative competence. Learning grammar does not include only rules but use of the rules as a part of fluent communication [12]. In other words, practicing basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities does provide learners with scaffolds needed to successfully achieve communications in real-life situations. The main ideas of the SLT that could beneficially be revived now is the oral presentation



of structures in situations with different drills for mastering them. After oral practice (different drills for mastering sentence patterns) students get scaffolds to actively participate in classroom activities based on real-life situations that necessitate communication. Accordingly, the SLT approach is effective in enabling learners to know the forms of the language as a medium. It emphasizes the oral presentation of structures in situations. CLT emphasizes the communicative function of grammar structures used to express a purpose. So, SLT method emphasizes 'knowing', CLT emphasizes 'doing'. Knowing and doing should be the two sides of language learning according to Widdowson H. G. [8]. We points out that some kind of combination of these two approaches appears to be the best policy to adopt in an EFL class for non-English majors since it enables students both to produce sentences accurately in a lesson and use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom.

We suggest a 3-staged sample lesson plan for use.

- presentation of structures in situations;
- drill-based manner of practicing new sentence patterns;
- train new sentence patterns automatically, spontaneously in speech.

1. The situational presentation of new sentence patterns.

According to Situational Language Teaching, a lesson starts with setting up situation in which the target structure is created. Situation refers to the manner of presenting and practicing sentence patterns. By situation Pittman means the use of concrete objects, pictures, and realia, which together with actions and gestures can be used to demonstrate the meanings of new language items [13]. Students receive the new sentence patterns presented orally first. The structures (sentence patterns) being taught in the sample lesson are "I have already done ", "Have you ever been ...", "I have never been (done)..." The new words and sentence patterns are demonstrated visually (with objects, pictures, action, visual aids, wall charts, flashcards, pictures, mimes, tablets and smart phones, prompt words, gestures, etc.) and not through grammatical explanation or description (inductive approach to grammar). The teacher serves as a model, knowledge dispensers rather than facilitators. The goal of this stage is to present the material not to gain instant comprehension and understanding. This is the beginning of comprehensible input and it will give the learners an opportunity to grasp what they will be learning about.

2. The oral practice of structures (sentence patterns).

Students fix new sentence patterns in the memory by repetition. The practice techniques consisted generally of guided repetition of model sentences and substitution activities, including chorus repetition, dictation, drills to practice new sentence patterns, controlled reading aloud dialogues. The emphasis is on grammar learning through verb drills and the memorization of wordlists. Focus is much more on the oral use of the language and vocabulary memorization. Choral substitution drilling: – I have already been to ... , I have never been to.... Have you ever been to She has already been to ... etc.

The teacher gets one student to ask a question and another to answer until most student in the class have practiced asking and answering the new question form. The focus is mainly on ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations



through structure. Such speech habits can be cultivated by blind imitative drill (language learning as habit-formation). The learners often feel secure with sense of achievement, as they are learning any grammar rules and vocabulary usage consciously. The teacher creates controlled practice for the learners through controlled activities. These activities can include but are not limited to question and answer, choral response, read and repeat, worksheets, prewritten role plays, etc. The goal of the practice stage is to give the students boundaries in which they can safely use the language. The teacher is required to be a skillful manipulator, using questions, commands, and other cues to elicit sentences from the learners like the skillful conductor of an orchestra, drawing the music out of the performers.

3. Shift from repetition to the real context where language is used to fulfill communicative and functional purposes.

Consequently, teachers adopt the communicative teaching tasks in the classroom. Focus is on communicative proficiency (communicative functions of language) rather than on mere mastery of structures. Students who already have a solid grounding in grammar (sentence patterns) are given more of an opportunity to practice using *sentence* patterns in actual practice in less controlled situation. Learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns). The teacher and the learners can use activities such as pair and group work, interviews with unique answers, gathering information, creating dialogue, stories or role-playing, and games with unique answers to assist in regulating the classroom. The teacher has one main role – to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom.

We stress that language learning comes about through practicing language skills then through using language communicatively. Three stages of the lesson procedure (the act of receiving knowledge; repetition to fix that knowledge in memory; the use of the knowledge in actual practice until it becomes a personal skill) are likely to be comforted in learning by passing through three different kinds of practice gradually – mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. Mechanical practice refers to a controlled practice activity (repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items). Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. Communicative practice refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable [14].

Conclusion

The problem of teaching non-English majors effectively always haunts college English teachers in Ukraine.

The findings indicate that while a substantial number of teachers at universities find the CLT approach a useful way to teach English, there are some problems that can cause the method turn out not to be so much successful and the learning outcome not to be efficient enough. Factor that negatively affect implementation of the CLT in



the EFL classrooms are: low motivation of non-English majors, lack of English-speaking environment, shortage of training opportunities for teachers, insufficient learning time, discrepancy between CLT objectives and exam requirements, mixed-level classes (where students have different abilities, backgrounds and interests), foreign language speaking anxiety, technological constraints.

From the above analyses, we can conclude that for the CLT approach to be effective in non-native contexts it has to be complemented with the SLT to enhance students' learning efficiency, to better accomplish English teaching tasks.

We have discussed above, that two approaches are characterized by different sets of language teaching and learning principles as they rest on diametrically opposite educational philosophy and epistemological assumptions. From the above description, we can see that under the instruction of SLT method, language is viewed as a body of knowledge and students are taught the grammar rules in an organised and systematic way. Under the instruction of Communicative method, language is viewed as an instrument for communicating and functioning effectively in the real world and students are taught to interact in a given social context. The SLT employs more structured activities in order to exercise some control over learner output. The CLT employs communicative tasks with little or no structure, which aim at fostering spontaneous interaction. Generally speaking, the SLT method tends to rely more on a classification of English grammatical structures into sentence patterns. The Communicative Language Teaching stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use basic structures and sentence patterns quickly and accurately in speech situations for communicative purposes.

So far as the two methodologies are very different in their philosophy, goals, and in the way they conceptualize language acquisition they may be integrated, for they compensate for each other to suit the needs of the context in which the English language is being taught. The teaching strategies that combine different language methods, in particular the CLT with the SLT appear to be the best policy to adopt in order to adapt to real situations in the classroom, to cater to the actual needs of non-English majors. Therefore, it seems attempting to conclude that activities based on the SLT approach being compatible with the CLT popular instructional method could effectively facilitates the exam preparation (acquisition of grammatical accuracy) and communicative competence (ability to efficiently express in the target language). A major strength of complementary teaching strategy which combines different language learning methods, in particular the SLT with the CLT is a gradual transition from non-communicative learning (teachers create a 'context' for students to practice the rules, and the students apply the learned rules), through pre-communicative language practice (learners still work with a predictable range of language but use it to convey information), to communicative language practice (learners use recently taught language as a basis for information exchange).

Therefore, it seems attempting to conclude that no one method is perfect for every teaching situation thus the elements of each instructional method could be combined in order to produce an integrated teaching methodology that has greater potential for learning and can effectively transform the current educational model and significantly improve students' English performance.



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Анотація. Студенты высших учебных заведений Украины с одной стороны стремятся подтвердить знание английского документально: сдав международный экзамен или получив сертификат независимого тестирования, с другой – изучить английский для коммуникации в непрофессиональной сфере, для использования языка в отдельных ситуациях повседневного общения. В университетах коммуникативный подход берут за основу обучения иностранному языку. Однако в условиях высшей школы (отсутствие языковой среды, преподаватели «не носители языка», обучение «с нуля», недостаточное количество занятий на практику и качественную отработку материала, «языковой барьер», гонка за прохождением уровней и баллами) этот подход не дает желаемых результатов. Отсюда известная неудовлетворенность как преподавателей, так и студентов результатами обучения иноязычному общению и попытки использовать достоинства, присущие иным методам. Сочетание сразу нескольких методик, ситуативно используя их преимущества, является идеальным форматом подачи материала в зависимости от индивидуальных особенностей групп и учебного плана.



Мы предлагаем комбинирование коммуникативного подхода с методом ситуативного обучения языку.

Согласно принципам ситуативного метода, процесс обучения направлен на интенсивную тренировку грамматических структур-образцов и языкового материала, которые вводятся и тренируются в ситуациях. Под ситуацией понимается использование различных предметов, объектов, картин и реалий наряду с действиями и жестами с целью демонстрации значения изучаемой языковой единицы. Тренировка структур не заканчивается выполнением языковых упражнений, а предполагает условно-речевые и подлинно-речевые упражнения, правильный отбор и организация которых обеспечивают овладение языковым материалом с целью его коммуникативного использования. И только после интенсивной тренировки грамматических структур и лексических единиц происходит переход к коммуникативным задачам. Используя уже знакомые лексические конструкции и грамматические структуры-образцы, студенты разыгрывают различные бытовые диалоги и повседневные ситуации, принимают участие в ролевых и дискуссионных играх. Суммируя вышесказанное, следует отметить, что процесс обучения достигает своей цели, когда автоматизация речевых навыков (заучивание моделей-штампов) облегчает сознательный выбор средств выражения и позволяет употреблять структуры в речи т.е. способствует свободному конструированию речи.

Метод ситуативного обучения формирует языковую компетенцию (владение языковым материалом для его использования в виде речевых высказываний). Целью обучения языку является коммуникативная компетенция, которая включает в себя языковую компетенцию, и представляет собой способность эффективно и адекватно использовать языковой материал для передачи сообщений в реальных ситуациях общения. Процесс обучения должен разумно сочетать ситуативный и коммуникативный подходы, включая в себя работу как над успешным усвоением определенных речевых структур, так и над их свободным употреблением в речи.