Communicative Language Teaching for the Twenty-First Century

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In "Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for the Twenty-First Century," Savignon identifies five components of a communicative curriculum. She sees the identification of learner communicative needs and goals as the first step in the development of a teaching program that involves learners as active participants in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning.

You may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores. You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother. You may not dress in bright colors. You must wear at least two petticoats. You must start the fire at 7 A.M. so the school room will be warm by 8 A.M.

Rules for teachers,
Goodland, Kansas (1915)

What do you think of the above 1915 Rules for Teachers? Do they seem somewhat strange or outdated? Do they make you smile? If you had been a talented new teacher in Goodland, Kansas, in 1915, you most likely would have found these rules to be the mark of a school system with high standards. No doubt the standards set for students were as high as those set for teachers. Teachers in Goodland could count on students to be respectful and diligent. In turn, teachers were expected to set a good example.

Teachers have always been expected to set a good example for learners, to provide a model of behavior. But as the 1915 rules for teachers so clearly remind us, the model can and does change. What seems a good example in one time or place, a given context of situation, may seem quite strange or inappropriate in another time or place. And so it is with language teaching. As this volume’s introductory chapter by Marianne Celce-Murcia shows, teachers have found many ways or methods for teaching languages. All have been admired models in some time or place, often to be ridiculed, perhaps, or dismissed as inappropriate in yet another. Times change, fashions change. What may once appear new and promising can subsequently seem strange and outdated.

Within the last quarter century, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been put forth around the world as the “new,” or “innovative,” way to teach English as a second or foreign language. Teaching materials, course descriptions, and curriculum guidelines proclaim a goal of communicative competence. For example, The Course of Study for Senior High School, guidelines published by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (Mombusho) state the objectives of ELT: “To develop students’ ability to understand and to express themselves in a foreign language; to foster students’ positive attitude towards communicating in a foreign language, and to heighten their interest in language and culture, thus deepening international understanding” (Wada 1994, p. 1). Minoru Wada, a university professor and a senior advisor to Mombusho in promoting ELT reform in Japan, explains the significance of these guidelines:

The Mombusho Guidelines, or course of study, is one of the most important legal precepts in the Japanese educational system. It establishes national standards for elementary and secondary schools. It also regulates content, the standard number of annual teaching hours at lower level secondary [junior high] schools, subject areas,
subjects, and the standard number of required credits at upper level secondary [senior high] schools. The course of study for the teaching of English as a foreign language announced by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture in 1989 stands as a landmark in the history of English education in Japan. For the first time it introduced into English education at both secondary school levels the concept of communicative competence. In 1989, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture revised the course of study for primary as well as secondary schools on the basis of proposals made in a 1987 report by the Council on the School Curriculum, an advisory group to the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture. The basic goal of the revision was to prepare students to cope with the rapidly occurring changes toward a more global society. The report urged Japanese teachers to place much more emphasis on the development of communicative competence in English.

Parallel efforts are underway in nearby Taiwan for similar reasons. Based on in-depth interviews of expert teacher educators, Wang (in press) reports on the progress (see also Wang 2000):

Much has been done to meet the demand for competent English users and effective teaching in Taiwan. Current improvements, according to the teacher experts, include the change in entrance examinations, the new curriculum with a goal of teaching for communicative competence, and the island-wide implementation in 2001 of English education in the elementary schools. However, more has to be done to ensure quality teaching and learning in the classrooms. Based on the teacher experts’ accounts, further improvements can be stratified into three interrelated levels related to teachers, school authorities, and the government. Each is essential to the success of the others’ efforts.

This chapter looks at the phenomenon of communicative language teaching (CLT). What is CLT? How and why did it develop? What are the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to language teaching? How has CLT been interpreted and implemented in various contexts? Keeping in mind the needs and goals of learners and the traditions of classroom teaching, what are some ways for teachers to shape a more communicative approach to ELT in the context of their own situation?

WHAT IS CLT?

Not long ago, when American structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology were the prevailing influences in language teaching methods and materials, second/foreign language teachers talked about communication in terms of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skill categories were widely accepted and provided a ready-made framework for methods manuals, learner course materials, and teacher education programs. Speaking and writing were collectively described as active skills, reading and listening as passive skills.

Today, listeners and readers no longer are regarded as passive. They are seen as active participants in the negotiation of meaning. Schemata, expectations, and top-down/bottom-up processing are among the terms now used to capture the necessarily complex, interactive nature of this negotiation. Yet full and widespread understanding of communication as negotiation has been hindered by the terms that came to replace the earlier active/passive dichotomy. The skills needed to engage in speaking and writing activities were described subsequently as productive, whereas listening and reading skills were said to be receptive.

While certainly an improvement over the earlier active/passive representation, the terms "productive" and "receptive" fall short of capturing the interactive nature of communication. Lost
in this productive/receptive, message sending/receiving representation is the collaborative nature of making meaning. Meaning appears fixed, to be sent and received, not unlike a football in the hands of a team quarterback. The interest of a football game lies of course not in the football, but in the moves and strategies of the players as they punt, pass, and fake their way along the field. The interest of communication lies similarly in the moves and strategies of the participants. The terms that best represent the collaborative nature of what goes on are interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning. The communicative competence needed for participation includes not only grammatical competence, but pragmatic competence.

The inadequacy of a four-skills model of language use is now recognized. And the shortcomings of audiolingual methodology are widely acknowledged. There is general acceptance of the complexity and interrelatedness of skills in both written and oral communication and of the need for learners to have the experiences of communication, to participate in the negotiation of meaning. Newer, more comprehensive theories of language and language behavior have replaced those that looked to American structuralism and behaviorist psychology for support. The expanded, interactive view of language behavior they offer presents a number of challenges for teachers. Among them, how should form and function be integrated in an instructional sequence? What is an appropriate norm for learners? How is it determined? What is an error? And what, if anything, should be done when one occurs? How is language learning success to be measured? Acceptance of communicative criteria entails a commitment to address these admittedly complex issues.

**HOW AND WHY DID CLT DEVELOP?**

The origins of contemporary CLT can be traced to concurrent developments in both Europe and North America. In Europe, the language needs of a rapidly increasing group of immigrants and guest workers, as well as a rich British linguistic tradition including social as well as linguistic context in description of language behavior led the Council of Europe to develop a syllabus for learners based on notional-functional concepts of language use. Derived from neo-Firthian systemic or functional linguistics that views language as meaning potential and maintains the centrality of context of situation in understanding language systems and how they work, a Threshold Level of language ability was described for each of the major languages of Europe in terms of what learners should be able to do with the language (van Ek 1975). Functions were based on assessment of learner needs and specified the end result, the goal of an instructional program. The term communicative attached itself to programs that used a functional-notional syllabus based on needs assessment, and the language for specific purposes (TSP) movement was launched.

Other European developments focused on the process of communicative classroom language learning. In Germany, for example, against a backdrop of social democratic concerns for individual empowerment, articulated in the writings of the contemporary philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1979), language teaching methodologists took the lead in the development of classroom materials that encouraged learner choice (Candlin 1978). Their systematic collection of exercise types for communicatively oriented English language teaching were used in teacher in-service courses and workshops to guide curriculum change. Exercises were designed to exploit the variety of social meanings contained within particular grammatical structures. A system of "chains" encouraged teachers and learners to define their own learning path through principled selection of relevant exercises (Piepho 1974; Piepho and Bredella 1976). Similar exploratory projects were also initiated by Candlin at his then academic home, the University of Lancaster in England, and by Holec (1979) and his colleagues at the University of Nancy in France. Supplementary teacher resource materials promoting classroom CLT became increasingly popular during the 1970s (e.g., Maley and Duff 1978).
Meanwhile, in the United States, Hymes (1971) had reacted to Chomsky's (1965) characterization of the linguistic competence of the "ideal native speaker" and proposed the term communicative competence to represent the use of language in social context, or the observance of sociolinguistic norms of appropriacy. His concern with speech communities and the integration of language, communication, and culture was not unlike that of Halliday in the British linguistic tradition (see Halliday 1978). Hymes's communicative competence may be seen as the equivalent of Halliday's meaning potential. Similarly, his focus was not language learning, but language as social behavior. In subsequent interpretations of the significance of Hymes's views for learners, methodologists working in the United States tended to focus on native speaker cultural norms and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of authentically representing them in a classroom of nonnative speakers. In light of this difficulty, the appropriateness of communicative competence as an instructional goal was questioned (e.g., Paulston 1974).

At the same time, in a research project at the University of Illinois, Savignon (1979) used the term "communicative competence" to characterize the ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to recite dialogs or perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge. At a time when pattern practice and error avoidance were the rule in language teaching, this study of adult classroom acquisition of French looked at the effect of practice on the use of coping strategies as part of an instructional program. By encouraging learners to ask for information, to seek clarification, to use circumlocution and whatever other linguistic and nonlinguistic resources they could muster to negotiate meaning and stick to the communicative task at hand, teachers were invariably leading learners to take risks and speak in other than memorized patterns. The coping strategies identified in this study became the basis for subsequent identification by Canale and Swain (1980) of strategic competence which—along with grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence—appeared in their three component framework for communicative competence. (The original Canale and Swain framework with subsequent modifications is discussed below.) Test results at the end of the instructional period showed conclusively that learners who had practiced communication in lieu of laboratory pattern drills performed with no less accuracy on discrete-point tests of grammatical structure. On the other hand, their communicative competence as measured in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, effort, and amount of communication in unprepared oral communicative tasks significantly surpassed that of learners who had had no such practice. Learner reactions to the test format lent further support to the view that even beginners respond well to activities that let them focus on meaning as opposed to formal features.

A collection of role plays, games, and other communicative classroom activities were subsequently developed for inclusion in adapting the French CREFL² materials, Voix et Visages de la France. The accompanying guide (Savignon 1974) described their purpose as that of involving learners in the experience of communication. Teachers were encouraged to provide learners with the French equivalent of expressions that would help them to participate in the negotiation of meaning such as "What's the word for . . .?" "Please repeat," "I don't understand." Not unlike the efforts of Candlin and his colleagues working in a European EFL context, the focus here was on classroom process and learner autonomy. The use of games, role play, pair work, and other small-group activities has gained acceptance and is now widely recommended for inclusion in language teaching programs.

CLT thus can be seen to derive from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at a minimum, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research. Its focus has been the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learner participation in communicative events. Central to CLT is the understanding of language learning as both an educational and a political issue. Language teaching is inextricably

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tied to language policy. Viewed from a multicultural international as well as international perspective, diverse sociopolitical contexts mandate not only a diverse set of language learning goals, but a diverse set of teaching strategies. Program design and implementation depend on negotiation between policy makers, linguists, researchers, and teachers. And evaluation of program success requires a similar collaborative effort. The selection of methods and materials appropriate to both the goals and context of teaching begins with an analysis of socially defined learner needs and styles of learning.

HOW HAS CLT BEEN INTERPRETED?

The classroom model shows the hypothetical integration of four components that have been advanced as comprising communicative competence (Savignon 1972, 1988, 1987, in press; Canale and Swain 1980; Canale 1983a; Byram 1997). Adapted from the familiar "inverted pyramid" classroom model proposed by Savignon (1983), it shows how, through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts and events, learners gradually expand their communicative competence, consisting of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. Although the relative importance of the various components depends on the overall level of communicative competence, each one is essential. Moreover, all components are interrelated. They cannot be developed or measured in isolation and one cannot go from one component to the other as one strings beads to make a necklace. Rather, an increase in one component interacts with other components to produce a corresponding increase in overall communicative competence.

Grammatical competence refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological feature of a language and to make use of these features to interpret and form words and sentences. Grammatical competence is not linked to any single theory of grammar and does not include the ability to state rules of usage. One demonstrates grammatical competence not by stating a rule but by using a rule in the interpretation, expression, or negotiation of meaning.

![Diagram of Communicative Competence](image)

**Figure 1.** Components of Communicative Competence

Discourse competence is concerned not with isolated words or phrases but with the interconnectedness of a series of utterances, written words, and/or phrases to form a text, a meaningful whole. The text might be a poem, an e-mail message, a speech, a telephone conversation, or a novel. Identification of isolated sounds or words contribute to interpretation of the overall meaning of the text. This is known as bottom-up processing. On the other hand, understanding of the theme or purpose of the text helps in the interpretation of isolated sounds or words. This is known as top-down processing. Both are important in communicative competence.

Two other familiar concepts in talking about discourse competence are text coherence and cohesion. Text coherence is the relation of all sentences or utterances in a text to a single global proposition. The establishment of a global meaning, or topic, for a text is an integral part of
both expression and interpretation and makes possible the interpretation of the individual sentences that make up the text. Local connections or structural links between individual sentences provide cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) are well-known for their identification of various cohesive devices used in English, and their work has influenced teacher education materials for ESL/EFL (for illustration, see Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999).

Sociocultural competence extends well beyond linguistic forms and is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use. Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Although we have yet to provide a satisfactory description of grammar, we are even further from an adequate description of sociocultural rules of appropriateness. And yet we use them to communicate successfully in many different contexts of situation.

It is of course not feasible for learners to anticipate the sociocultural aspects for every context. Moreover, English often serves as a language of communication between speakers of different primary languages. Participants in multicultural communication are sensitive not only to the cultural meanings attached to the language itself, but also to social conventions concerning language use, such as turn-taking, appropriacy of content, nonverbal language, and tone of voice. These conventions influence how messages are interpreted. Cultural awareness rather than cultural knowledge thus becomes increasingly important. Just knowing something about the culture of an English-speaking country will not suffice. What must be learned is a general empathy and openness towards other cultures. Sociocultural competence therefore includes a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning along with a willingness to suspend judgement and take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences in conventions or use. Together these features might be subsumed under the term cultural flexibility or cultural awareness.

The “ideal native speaker,” someone who knows a language perfectly and uses it appropriately in all social interactions, exists in theory only. None of us knows all there is to know of English in its many manifestations, both around the world and in our own backyards. Communicative competence is always relative. The coping strategies that we use in unfamiliar contexts, with constraints due to imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue or distraction, are represented as strategic competence. With practice and experience, we gain in grammatical, discourse, and sociocultural competence. The relative importance of strategic competence thus decreases. However, the effective use of coping strategies is important for communicative competence in all contexts and distinguishes highly competent communicators from those who are less so.

By definition, CLT puts the focus on the learner. Learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence. This implies a global, qualitative evaluation of learner achievement as opposed to quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic features. Controversy over appropriate language testing measures persists, and many a curricular innovation has been undone by failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation. Current efforts at educational reform favor essay writing, in-class presentations, and other more holistic assessments of learner competence. Some programs have initiated portfolio assessment, the collection and evaluation of learner poems, reports, stories, videotapes, and similar projects in an effort to better represent and encourage learner achievement.

Although it now has a new name and is enjoying widespread recognition and research attention, CLT is not a new idea. Throughout the long history of language teaching, there always have been advocates of a focus on meaning, as opposed to form, and of developing learner ability to actually use the language for communication. The more immediate the communicative needs, the more readily communicative methods
seem to be adopted. In her book *Breaking Tradition*, Musumeci (1997) provides a fascinating account of language teaching reform efforts dating back to the Middle Ages when Latin, not English, was the lingua franca. *Breaking Tradition* is a favorite reading of my students. They find it a refreshing and reassuring reminder that discussions of methods and goals for language teaching predate the twentieth century by far.

Depending upon their own preparation and experience, teachers themselves differ in their reactions to CLT. Some feel understandable frustration at the seeming ambiguity in discussions of communicative ability. Negotiation of meaning may be a lofty goal, but this view of language behavior lacks precision and does not provide a universal scale for assessment of individual learners. Ability is viewed as variable and highly dependent upon context and purpose as well as on the roles and attitudes of all involved. Other teachers who welcome the opportunity to select and/or develop their own materials, providing learners with a range of communicative tasks, are comfortable relying on more global, integrative judgments of learner progress.

An additional source of frustration for some teachers are second language acquisition research findings that show the rate, if not the range, of language acquisition to be largely unaffected by classroom instruction. First language cross-linguistic studies of developmental universals initiated in the 1970s were soon followed by similar second language studies. Acquisition, assessed on the basis of expression in unrehearsed, oral communicative contexts, appeared to follow a describable morphosyntactic sequence regardless of learner age or context of learning. Although they served to bear out teachers’ informal observations, namely that textbook presentation and drill do not ensure learner use of taught structures in learners’ spontaneous expression, the findings were nonetheless disconcerting. They contradicted both grammar-translation and audiolingual precepts that placed the burden of learner acquisition on teacher explanation of grammar and controlled practice with insistence on learner accuracy. They were further at odds with textbooks that promise “mastery” of “basic” English, Spanish, French, etc. Teacher rejection of research findings, renewed insistence on tests of discrete grammatical structures, and even exclusive reliance in the classroom on the learners’ native or first language, where possible, to be sure they “get the grammar,” have been in some cases reactions to the frustration of teaching for communication.

**SHAPING A COMMUNICATIVE CURRICULUM**

In recent years, many innovations in curriculum planning have been proposed that offer both novice and veteran teachers a dizzying array of alternatives. Games, yoga, juggling, and jazz have been proposed as aids to language learning. Rapidly increasing opportunities for computer-mediated communication, both synchronous—online chat rooms—and asynchronous—the full spectrum of information and interactions available on the Internet as well as specialized bulletin boards and e-mail—hold promise for further integration of communicative opportunities for learners worldwide.

In attempting to convey the meaning of CLT to both pre-service and in-service teachers of English as a second or foreign language in a wide range of contexts, I have found it helpful to think of a communicative curriculum as potentially made up of five components. These components may be regarded as thematic clusters of activities or experiences related to language use and usage, providing a useful way of categorizing teaching strategies that promote communicative language use. Use of the term component to categorize these activities seems particularly appropriate in that it avoids any suggestion of sequence or level. Experimentation with communicative teaching methods has shown that all five components can be profitably blended at all stages of instruction. Organization of learning activities into the following components serve not to sequence an ELT program, but rather to highlight the range of options available in curriculum planning and to suggest ways in which their very interrelatedness benefit the learner.
Language Arts, or language analysis, is the first component on the list. Language Arts includes those things that language teachers often do best. In fact, it may be all they have been taught to do. This component includes many of the exercises used in mother tongue programs to focus attention on formal accuracy. In ELT, Language Arts focuses on forms of English, including syntax, morphology, and phonology. Spelling tests, for example, are important if writing is a goal. Familiar activities such as translation, dictation, and rote memorization can be helpful in bringing attention to form. Vocabulary expansion can be enhanced through definition, synonyms, and antonyms as well as attention to cognates and false cognates when applicable. Pronunciation exercises and patterned repetition of verb paradigms and other structural features can be useful in focusing on form, along with the explanation of regular syntactic features, rules of grammar. There are also many Language Arts games that learners of all ages enjoy for the variety and group interaction they provide. So long as they are not overused and are not promoted as the solution to all manner of language learning problems, these games can be a welcome addition to a teacher’s repertoire.

Language for a Purpose, or language experience, is the second component. In contrast with language analysis, language experience is the use of English for real and immediate communicative goals. Not all learners are learning English for the same reasons. Attention to the specific communicative needs of the learners is important in the selection and sequencing of materials. Regardless of how distant or unspecific the communicative needs of the learners may be, every program with a goal of communicative competence should give attention to opportunities for meaningful English use, opportunities to focus on meaning rather than on form.

In an ESL classroom where English is the language of instruction, there is an immediate and natural need for learners to use English. Where this happens, Language for a Purpose is a built-in feature of the learning environment. In an EFL setting where the teacher may have a language other than English in common with learners, special attention needs to be given to providing opportunities for English language experience. Exclusive use of English in the classroom is an option. In so-called content-based instruction, the focus is other than the English language. The content, for example history, music, or literature, is taught through the use of English. Immersion programs at the elementary, secondary, or even university level where the entire curriculum is taught in English offer a maximum amount of Language for a Purpose (see Snow’s chapter in this volume). In addition, task-based curricula are designed to provide learners with maximum opportunity to use Language for a Purpose (see chapters by Nunan; Johns and Price-Machado; and Crookes in this volume).

Learners who are accustomed to being taught exclusively in their mother tongue may at first be uncomfortable if the teacher speaks to them in English, expecting them not only to understand but, perhaps, to respond. When this happens, teachers need to take special care to help learners realize that they are not expected to understand every word, any more than they are expected to express themselves in natively English. Making an effort to get the gist and using strategies to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning are important to the development of communicative competence. For learners who are accustomed to grammar translation courses taught in their mother tongue with an emphasis on grammar and accuracy, the transition will not be easy. Kiyoko Kusano Hubbell (in press), a Japanese teacher of English in Tokyo, recounts some struggles in her determined effort to teach communicatively:

Many Japanese students have been taught that they have to really know every word in a sentence or a phrase.
in order to understand a foreign language. They are not taught to use the strategies that they already use in their native Japanese, that is, to guess the meaning from the context. When the blackboard is full of writing and I am busy in class, I ask a student, “Please erase the blackboard”, handing him an eraser and pointing to the dirty blackboard. If he does not move, it is not because he is offended. He just did not recognize the word “erase,” and to him that means he did not understand me. If he is willing to accept the ambiguity, he gets up and cleans the board.

With encouragement and help from their teacher in developing the strategic competence they need to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning, learners express satisfaction and even surprise. Kuniko Hubbell goes on to report the positive reactions she receives at the end of the term. (All comments have been translated from Japanese by the author.)

“Completely different from any class I’ve ever had!”

“I have never expressed my own ideas in English before. Work was always to translate this section, to fill in the blanks or read. It was all passive.”

“In my career of English education from Jr. High to Cram School there was no teacher who spoke English other than to read the textbooks.”

My Language Is Me: Personal English Language Use, the third component in a communicative curriculum, relates to the learner’s emerging identity in English. Learner attitude is without a doubt the single most important factor in learner success. Whether a learner’s motivations are integrative or instrumental, the development of communicative competence involves the whole learner. The most successful teaching programs are those that take into account the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of language learning. They seek to involve learners psychologically as well as intellectually.

In planning for CLT, teachers should remember that not everyone is comfortable in the same role. Within classroom communities, as well as within society at large, there are leaders and there are those who prefer to be followers. Both are essential to the success of group activities. In group discussions, there are always some who seem to do the most talking. Those who often remain silent in larger groups typically participate more easily in pair work. Or they may prefer to work on an individual project. The wider the variety of communicative, or meaning-based, activities, the greater the chance for involving all learners.

My Language Is Me implies, above all, respect for learners as they use English for self-expression. Although Language Arts activities provide an appropriate context for attention to form, accuracy, Personal English Language Use does not. Most teachers know this and intuitively focus on meaning rather than on form as learners express their personal feelings or experiences. However, repeated emphasis on structural accuracy in textbooks or on tests may cause teachers to feel uncomfortable about their inattention to non-nativelike features that do not impede meaning. An understanding of the importance of opportunities for the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning in CLT and of the distinction between Language Arts and My Language Is Me can help to reassure teachers that the communicative practice they are providing is important for their learners.

Respect for learners as they use English for self-expression requires more than simply restraint in attention to formal “errors” that do not interfere with meaning. It includes recognition that so-called “nativelike” performance may not, in fact, even be a goal for learners. Language teaching has come a long way from audiolingual days when “native” pronunciation and use was held up as an ideal. Reference to the terms “native” or “nativelike” in the evaluation of communicative competence is inappropriate in today’s postcolonial, multicultural world. As observed earlier, we now recognize that native speakers are never “ideal” and, in fact, vary widely in range and style of communicative abilities.
Moreover, as the English language is increasingly used as a language of global communication, so called "non-native" users of its many varieties overwhelmingly outnumber so-called "native speakers." The decision of what is or is not one's "native" language is arbitrary and irrelevant for ELT and is perhaps best left to the individual concerned. Chen-Hsiang Lai, a graduate MATEFL candidate studying in the United States, expresses his views:

As to the definition of "native" or "first" language we discussed in today's class, I came up with the idea that we have no say about whether a person's native language is this one or that one. It is the speaker who has the right to feel which language is his native one. The native language should be the one in which the speaker feels most comfortable or natural when making daily communication, or more abstractly, the one in which the speaker does all his thinking. There are two major languages spoken in Taiwan: Mandarin and Taiwanese. I don't have any slightest problem using either of them since I use both every day in equal proportion. But when I do my thinking, considering things, or even kind of talking to myself, my "mental" language is Mandarin. Because of this, I would say that my native language is Mandarin. ... We probably can say that a person's native language can actually "switch" from one to another during stages of his life.

Since a personality inevitably takes on a new dimension through expression in another language, that dimension needs to be discovered on its own terms. Learners should not only be given the opportunity to say what they want to say in English, they also should be encouraged to develop an English language personality with which they are comfortable. They may feel more comfortable maintaining a degree of formality not found in the interpersonal transactions of native speakers. The diary entry of a Japanese learner of English offers important insight on the matter of identity:

I just don't know what to do right now. I might have been wrong since I began to learn English; I always tried to be better and wanted to be a good speaker. It was wrong, absolutely wrong! When I got to California, I started imitating Americans and picked up the words that I heard. So my English became just like Americans. I couldn't help it. I must have been funny to them, because I am a Japanese and have my own culture and background. I think I almost lost the most important thing I should not have. I got California English, including intonation, pronunciation, the way they act, which are not mine. I have to have my own English, be myself when I speak English (Preston 1981, p. 113).

On the other hand, learners may discover a new freedom of self-expression in their new language. When asked what it is like to write in English, a language that is not her native tongue, the Korean writer Mia Yun, author of House of the Winds (1998), replied that it was "like putting on a new dress." Writing in English made her feel fresh, see herself in a new way, offered her freedom to experiment. When expressing themselves in a new language, writers are not the only ones to experience the feeling of "putting on a new dress." My Language Is Me calls for recognition and respect for the individual personality of the learner. (We will return to the matter of the "native/non-native" distinction with respect to users of English later when discussing sociolinguistic issues.)

You Be, I'll Be: Theater Arts is the fourth component of a communicative curriculum. "All the world's a stage," in the familiar words of Shakespeare (As You Like It, II, viii; 199). And on this stage we play many roles, roles for which we improvise scripts from the models we observe around us. Child, parent, sister, brother, employer, employee, doctor, or teacher—all are roles that include certain expected ways of behaving and using language. Sociocultural rules of appropriateness have to do with these expected ways. Familiar roles may be played with little
conscious attention to style. On the other hand, new and unfamiliar roles require practice, with an awareness of how the meanings are being interpreted by others. Sometimes there are no models. In the last half of the twentieth century, women who suddenly found themselves in what had been a “man’s world,” whether as firefighters, professors, or CEOs, had to adapt existing models to ones with which they could be comfortable. And the transition is far from complete. With the exception of Great Britain, no major world power to date has had a woman head of state. By the end of the twenty-first century there no doubt will be numerous models from which to choose.

If the world can be thought of as a stage, with actors and actresses who play their parts as best they can, theater may be seen as an opportunity to experiment with roles, to try things out. Fantasy and playacting are a natural and important part of childhood. Make-believe and the “you be, I’ll be” improvisations familiar to children the world over are important to self-discovery and growth. They allow young learners to experiment and to try things out, such as hats and wigs, moods and postures, gestures and words. As occasions for language use, role-playing and the many related activities that constitute Theater Arts are likewise a natural component of language learning. They allow learners to experiment with the roles they play or may be called upon to play in real life. Theater Arts can provide learners with the tools they need to act, that is, to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in a new language. Activities can include both scripted and unscripted role plays, simulations, and even pantomime. Ensemble-building activities familiar in theater training have been used very successfully in ELT to create a climate of trust so necessary for the incorporation of Theater Arts activities (see Savignon 1997). The role of the teacher in Theater Arts is that of a coach, providing support, strategies, and encouragement for learners as they explore new ways of being.

Beyond the Classroom is the fifth and final component of a communicative curriculum. Regardless of the variety of communicative activities in the ESL/EFL classroom, their purpose remains to prepare learners to use English in the world beyond. This is the world upon which learners will depend for the maintenance and development of their communicative competence once classes are over. The classroom is but a rehearsal. Development of the Beyond the Classroom component in a communicative curriculum begins with the discovery of learners’ interests and needs and of opportunities to respond to but, more importantly, to develop those interests and needs through English language use beyond the classroom itself.

In an ESL setting, opportunities to use English outside the classroom abound. Systematic “field experiences” may successfully become the core of the course, which then could become a workshop in which learners can compare notes, seek clarification, and expand the range of domains in which they learn to function in English. Classroom visits to a courtroom trial, a public auction, or a church bazaar provide introductions to aspects of the local culture that learners might not experience on their own. Conversation partners, apprenticeships, and activities with host families can be arranged. Residents of nearby retirement communities can be recruited as valuable resources for a range of research projects. Senior citizens often welcome the opportunity to interact with international visitors or new arrivals and offer a wealth of knowledge and experience. They could be interviewed about noteworthy historical events, child rearing in earlier decades, or their views on politics, health care, or grandparenting.

In an EFL setting, on the other hand, the challenge for incorporating a Beyond the Classroom component may be greater, but certainly not insurmountable, and is essential for both teacher and learners. As a child, I looked forward to receiving letters from my pen pals. They would arrive bearing colorful stamps from France, Wales, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia. I had yet to learn a second language, so our correspondence was all in English. However, this regular exchange of letters put a small town midwestern American girl in touch with other places around the globe and with other users of English. Technology has since brought the whole world much closer. English language radio and television programs, videos, and feature length
films are readily available in many EFL settings, along with newspapers and magazines. English speaking residents or visitors may be available to visit the classroom. The Internet now provides opportunities to interact with English speaking peers on a variety of topics, to develop grammatical, discourse, sociocultural, and strategic competence. These opportunities for computer-mediated communication (CMC) will increase dramatically in the years ahead. The following excerpt from an e-mail exchange between classes of secondary school students in Germany and the United States on the topic of the death penalty reveals the potential for developing sociocultural and strategic skills in addition to grammatical and discourse competence (Roithmeier and Savignon in press):

GER 1: Death Penalty—an *inhumane* punishment
GER 3: ... Finally, I think nobody has the right to kill other people but to kill a person because of mercy is *inhumane* and should never be a law in certain democratic states or countries.

USA 2: ... I can see both sides of the death penalty. I believe when discussing this *inhumane* treatment you must think about the victims of these people.

USA 4: ... Basically, I think the death penalty is wrong and *inhumane*.

USA 6: The death penalty is *inhumane*...

Examples such as the above provide strong support for the claim that members of a discussion group are strongly influenced by prior postings and that the language they use is influenced by what they read from participants. In addition to prearranged exchanges, learners can check World Wide Web sites for a range of information, schedules, rates, locations, descriptions, and the like.

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

How do we put it all together? Is there an optimum combination of Language Arts, Personal Language Use, Language for a Purpose, Theater Arts, and Beyond the Classroom? These questions must be answered by individual language teachers in the context in which they teach. Cultural expectations, goals, and styles of learning are but some of the ways in which learners may differ from each other. To the complexity of the learner must be added the complexities of teachers and of the settings in which they teach. Established routines, or institutional belief about what is important, weigh heavily in a teacher’s decisions as to what and how to teach and often makes innovation difficult (see Sato in press; Wang in press). Finally, the need for variety must be taken into account. Learners who are bored with rule recitation or sentence translation may just as easily lose interest in games or role play, if these are allowed to become routine. Difficult as it is, the teacher’s task is to understand the many factors involved and respond to them creatively.

Teachers cannot do this alone, of course. They need the support of administrators, the community, and the learners themselves. Methodologists and teacher education programs have a responsibility as well. They should provide classroom teachers with the perspective and experiences they need to respond to the realities of their world, a changing world in which the old ways of ELT may not be the best ways. The optimum combination of the analytical and the experiential in ESL/EFL for a given context is a focus of ongoing research. However, a well-established research tradition in second/foreign language learning/teaching has clearly shown the importance of attention to language use, or experience, in addition to language usage, or analysis. But the overwhelming emphasis in most school programs is on the latter, often to the complete exclusion of the former.

**WHAT ABOUT GRAMMAR?**

Discussions of CLI not infrequently lead to questions of grammatical or formal accuracy. The perceived displacement of attention to morphosyntactic features in learner expression in favor of a focus on meaning has led in some cases to the impression that grammar is not important,
or that proponents of CLT favor learner self-expression without regard to form. While involvement in communicative events is seen as central to language development, this involvement necessarily requires attention to form. The nature of the contribution to language development of both form-focused and meaning-focused classroom activity remains a question in ongoing research. The optimum combination of these activities in any given instructional setting depends no doubt on learner age, nature and length of instructional sequence, opportunities for language contact outside the classroom, teacher preparation, and other factors. However, for the development of communicative ability, research findings overwhelmingly support the integration of form-focused exercises with meaning-focused experience. Grammar is important, and learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communicative needs and experiences.

Communicative competence obviously does not mean the wholesale rejection of familiar materials. There is nothing to prevent communicatively-based materials from being subjected to grammar-translation treatment, just as there may be nothing to prevent a teacher with only an old grammar-translation book at his or her disposal from teaching communicatively. What matters is the teacher's conception of what learning a language is and how it happens. The basic principle involved is an orientation towards collective participation in a process of use and discovery achieved by cooperation between individual learners as well as between learners and teachers.

**SOCIOLINGUISTIC ISSUES**

Numerous sociolinguistic issues await attention. Variation in the speech community and its relationship to language change are central to sociolinguistic inquiry. As we have seen above, sociolinguistic perspectives on variability and change highlight the folly of describing native speaker competence, let alone non-native speaker competence, in terms of "mastery" or "command" of a system. All language systems show instability and variation. Learner language systems show even greater instability and variability in terms of both the amount and rate of change. Moreover, sociolinguistic concerns with identity and accommodation help to explain the construction by bilinguals of a "variation space" that is different from that of a native speaker. This may include retention of any number of features of a previously acquired code or system of phonology and syntax as well as features of discourse and pragmatics, including communication strategies. The phenomenon may be individual or, in those settings where there is a community of learners, general. Differences not only in the code itself but in the semantic meanings attributed to these different encodings contribute to identification with a speech community or culture, the way a speech community views itself and the world. This often includes code mixing and code switching, the use by bilinguals of resources from more than one speech community.

Sociolinguistic perspectives have been important in understanding the implications of norm, appropriacy, and variability for CLT and continue to suggest avenues of inquiry for further research and materials development. Use of authentic language data has underscored the importance of context, such as setting, roles, and genre, in interpreting the meaning of a text. A range of both oral and written texts in context provides learners with a variety of language experiences, which they need to construct their own "variation space" and to make determinations of appropriacy in their own expression of meaning. "Competent" in this instance is not necessarily synonymous with "nativelike." Negotiation in CLT highlights the need for interlinguistic, that is, intercultural, awareness on the part of all involved (Byram 1997). Better understanding of the strategies used in the negotiation of meaning offers a potential for improving classroom practice of the needed skills.

**Natives and Foreigners**

We might begin by asking ourselves whose language we teach and for what purpose. What is our own relationship with English? Do we consider it to be a foreign, second, or native language?
Webster’s New International Dictionary, 2nd edition, published in 1950, a time when language teaching in the United States was on the threshold of a period of unprecedented scrutiny, experimentation, and growth, provides the following definitions of these terms we use so often with respect to language. Foreign derives from Middle English forien, foren, Old French forain and Latin foras, meaning outside. Related words are foreclose, forest, forfeit. Modern definitions include “situated outside one’s own country; born in, belonging to, derived from, or characteristic of some place other than the one under consideration; alien in character; not connected or pertinent,” etc.

Those identified as teaching a foreign language, perhaps even in a Department of Foreign Languages, should ask, “Why?” What does the label “foreign” signal to colleagues, learners, and the community at large? Today we are concerned with global ecology and global economy. And English has been described as a “global language” (Crystal 1997). Nonetheless, one might object, “foreign” is still a useful term to use in distinguishing between teaching English in, say, Pattaya, Thailand, and teaching English in Youngstown, Ohio. In Youngstown, English is taught as a second language whereas in Pattaya it is a foreign language. The contexts of learning are not the same, to be sure. Neither are the learners. Nor the teachers. But do these facts change the nature of the language? And what about the teaching of Spanish in Chicago, in Barcelona, in Buenos Aires, in Guatemala City, in Miami, or in Madrid? In what sense can Spanish in each of these contexts be described as “foreign” or “second”? And what are the implications of the label selected for the learners? For the teachers?

Having taught French in Urbana, Illinois, for many years, I can easily identify with the problems of teachers of English in Pattaya. More so, perhaps, than those who teach ESL in Urbana with easy access to English speaking communities outside the classroom. On the other hand, teaching French in Urbana or English in Pattaya is no excuse for ignoring or avoiding opportunities for communication, both written and oral. The potential of computer-mediated negotiation of meaning for language learning and language change in the decades ahead will be increasingly recognized, both inside and outside language classrooms.

What may be a problem is the teacher’s communicative competence. Is he or she a native speaker? If not, does he or she consider him or herself bilingual? If not, why not? Is it a lack of communicative competence? Or, rather, a lack of communicative confidence? Is he or she intimidated by “native” speakers? Native Speaker is the title of a moving first novel by Chang-rae Lee, an American raised in a Korean immigrant family in New Jersey. It documents the struggle and frustration of knowing two cultures and at the same time not completely belonging to either one. As such, it serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges of bilingualism and biculturalism. How does one “belong”? What does it mean to be bilingual? To be bicultural? To be a native speaker?

Again, the example of English is important. Such widespread adoption of one language is unprecedented. English users today include those who live in countries where English is a primary language—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; those who live in countries where English is an additional, international language of communication—for example, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Philippines, and Tanzania; those who use English primarily in international contexts—countries such as China, Indonesia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. By conservative estimates the number of non-native speakers of English in the world today outnumber native speakers by more than 2 to 1, and the ratio is increasing. Models of appropriacy vary from context to context. So much, in fact, that some scholars speak not only of varieties of English but of World Englishes, the title of a new journal devoted to discussion of descriptive, pedagogical, and other issues in the global spread of the English
language. As we have seen above, depending on the context as well as learner needs, “native” speakers may or may not be appropriate models (see also Kachru 1992).

**WHAT CLT IS NOT**

Disappointment with both grammar-translation and audiolingual methods for their inability to prepare learners for the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning, along with enthusiasm for an array of alternative methods increasingly labeled *communicative*, has resulted in no small amount of uncertainty as to what are and are not essential features of CLT. Thus, this summary description would be incomplete without brief mention of what CLT is not.

CLT is not exclusively concerned with face-to-face oral communication. The principles of CLT apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers engaged in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning; the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context. CLT does not require small-group or pair work; group tasks have been found helpful in many contexts as a way of providing increased opportunity and motivation for communication. However, classroom group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts. Finally, CLT does not exclude a focus on metalinguistic awareness or knowledge of rules of syntax, discourse, and social appropriateness.

The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication in order to allow them to develop their communicative competence. Terms sometimes used to refer to features of CLT include *process oriented*, *task-based*, and *inductive*, or *discovery oriented*. Inasmuch as strict adherence to a given text is not likely to be true to its processes and goals, CLT cannot be found in any one textbook or set of curricular materials. In keeping with the notion of context of situation, CLT is properly seen as an approach or theory of intercultural communicative competence to be used in developing materials and methods appropriate to a given context of learning. Contexts change. A world of carriages and petticoats evolves into one of genomes and cyberspace. No less than the means and norms of communication they are designed to reflect, communicative teaching methods designed to enhance the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning will continue to be explored and adapted.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. If you had to choose three adjectives to describe CLT, what would they be?
2. What might be some obstacles encountered by teachers who wish to implement a communicative approach to language teaching? How might these obstacles be overcome?
3. Do you feel English to be a foreign, second, or native language? How might your feelings influence your classroom teaching?
4. Of the five described components of a communicative curriculum, which are the most familiar to you as a language learner? As a language teacher?
5. Who sets the norm for English language use in your particular context of situation? How? Why?

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

1. Request permission to observe two or three different introductory level ESL or EFL classes. Note the interaction between the teacher and the learners. Who does most of the talking? How much of the talking that you hear is in English? Why?
2. Interview some language learners for their views on why they are learning a foreign or second language.
3. Look at the inverted pyramid diagram of communicative competence on page 17. Do you agree with the proportions drawn? Draw your own diagram to show the relationship between the four components of communicative competence.

4. Select one of the five components of a communicative curriculum described in this chapter. Make a list of corresponding learner activities or experiences that you would like to use in your teaching.

FURTHER READING


ENDNOTES

1 The author copied this passage many years ago while visiting the Union School, a country school building that was moved to the city of Goodland, Kansas, by the Sherman County Historical Society. It is owned and operated as a school museum by the society.

2 CREIDF is the acronym for Centre de Recherche et d’Etude pour la Diffusion du Français. It was an institution specializing in French as a foreign language and functioned in association with the École Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud from 1959 to 1996.