MODIFYING EFL COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR INDONESIAN CONTEXT

Sugeng Susilo Adi

University of Brawijaya

Abstract

This article is talking about the problems of implementing Communicative language teaching (CLT) in Indonesia. The main problem of applying the teaching approach is the gap between the theory and its classroom practices. Other problems such as classroom size in term of student number and student learning styles are also highlighted in this article. Accordingly, this article suggests an audio lingual communicative language teaching strategies that might be applicable for the majority of Indonesian junior and senior high schools. These strategies were derived form an empirical research that the writer conducted in Islamic Junior High Schools in Indonesia.

Keywords: *communicative language teaching, learning styles, audio lingual, teaching strategies*

***

When the trend of English language teaching in Indonesia is more focusing on the praxis of Communicative language teaching (CLT), some problems are still found in the implementation at the classroom level. Communicative language teaching that theoretically requires the language use as communication tools, in Indonesia sometimes it could not be implemented successfully. Several constraints are becoming obstacles of the CLT implementation such as the number of students in one classroom, the students learning styles, and non-native speaker teachers.

It is quite often stated that the weaknesses of CLT implementation in some East Asian countries, including Indonesia is that the approach in some cases is not appropriate with cultural local context. Baker (2008:1) states that an essential element in fostering successful intercultural communication is developing cultural awareness as part of ELT pedagogy. To illustrate this, a case study of Thailand is presented examining English use, English teaching policy and practice, and local cultural attitudes towards ELT. This then leads to suggestions on how locally relevant intercultural communicative practices can form part of ELT classroom pedagogy in Thailand with the aim of developing learners' cultural awareness. It is argued that similar analyses may be applied to other Asian contexts, which may share features with the Thai context. This can lead to the development of teaching practices, which through engaging learners in intercultural reflection will result in English language users who are better able to manage intercultural communication through English.

Three interesting issues are highlighted in this article dealing with the CLT implementation in Indonesian context, particularly how the approach could fit to the Indonesian context which culturally is a part of East Asian context. There issues include the essence of CLT, Indonesian context as an East Asian one, and audio lingual communcative: an emprical base.

Communicative language teaching: the essence

The essence of Communicative language teaching (CLT) is teaching language for communication. Richards (2006: 5-23) says that Communicative language teaching is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching which reflects a certain model or research paradigm, or a theory. This language teaching approach is based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication. Its primary goal is for learners to develop communicative competence ability. Furthermore, he adds that as far as theories of learning and effective strategies in teaching are concerned, CLT does not adhere to one particular theory or method. It draws its theories about learning and teaching from a wide range of areas such as cognitive science, educational psychology, and second language acquisition (SLA). CLT methodologies embrace an eclectic approach to teaching, which means they borrow teaching practices from a wide array of methods that have been found effective and that are in accordance with principles of learning as suggested by research findings in research in SLA and cognitive psychology. Its open-ended or principle-based approach allows for a great deal of flexibility, which makes it adaptable to many individual programmatic and learner needs and goals.

Savignon (2012: 212) says that communicative language teaching requires several principles in its classroom practices, they are: *(1).* Language teaching is based on a view of language as communication. That is, language is seen as a social tool which speakers and writers use to make meaning; we communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing. *(2).* Diversity is recognized and accepted as part of language development and use in second language learners and users as it is with first language users. *(3).* A learner's competence is considered in relative, not absolute, terms of correctness. *(4).* More than one variety of a language is recognized as a model for learning and teaching. *(5).* Culture is seen to play an instrumental role in shaping speakers' communicative competence, both in their first and subsequent languages. *(6).* No single methodology or fixed set of techniques is prescribed. *(7).* Language use is recognized as serving the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual functions, as defined by Halliday, and is related to the development of learners' competence in each. *(8).* It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language, that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes, in all phases of learning. Learner expectations and attitudes have increasingly come to be recognized for their role in advancing or impeding curricular change. Numerous sociolinguistic issues await attention.

In addition, Asassfeh, *(*2012) explain that one important distinctive feature of CLT is its emphasis on meaning-oriented instruction (MOI), a term that emerged in response to language teaching methods that emphasized the mastery of language forms. Educators' increasing awareness that learners acquire a foreign language best when their attention is focused on the meaning communicated rather than on the linguistic form led to a lack of interest in such methods as grammar translation and audiolingualism. Today, meaning-oriented communicative language teaching methodology has the overarching principles of focus on real communication, providing learners with opportunities to try out what they know, tolerance of learners' errors as a healthy sign of progress in developing the communicative competence, integrating the different skills. In other words, its goal is to make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication (Asassfeh: 525-535).

Indonesian context as an East Asian one

The problems of ELT practice in Indonesia, English continues to be the most popular foreign language in Indonesia schools. Since 1994, ELT has been introduced from grade four of elementary level in public schools. With a reorientation objective in 1994 (which is regarded to be important in ELT in Indonesia in the last few years), the focus has been on listening and speaking skills in elementary schools and on speaking and reading skills in secondary schools. Also the language policy for education in Indonesia has made English language learning compulsory. Although the policy has attributed teaching English from early grades in elementary schools, it has not

been fully implemented largely because of lack of primary teachers both in numbers and skills level. Nevertheless, there has been an attempt in the last ten years to strengthen and improve the ELT through curriculum revision and development as well as decentralization reform (Imperiani, online, p.6). English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesian context is obviously explained in Impreriani's abovementioned that the curriculum have been experienced may experimaentation. Besides that, some characteristics can be highlighted to illuminate the ELT in the Indonesian context such as the big class size with arround 40 students and South East Asian students' language learning styles.

Especially interesting is about the big size classroom as a problem, Bruhwiler and Blatchford (2011) say that in many studies of class size effects, teacher characteristics are missing, even though many argue it is not class size that is important but teacher quality. In the present study teachers' effectiveness on the learning progress was assessed while teaching a unit with predefined learning objectives. To measure adaptive teaching competency a multi-method approach was employed. Smaller classes led to higher academic learning progresses, better knowledge of students, and better classroom processes. Adaptive teacher competency remained relevant in smaller classes, that is, class size and teacher quality were independently important. There are several limitations of research on class size effects which have informed this paper. One limitation of most class size research is that effects are examined in relation to academic outcomes and, more recently, in relation to classroom processes, but rarely are the effects of class size and classroom processes systematically examined in the same study. Studies also tend to examine effects at a ''macro'' level, for example, in terms of progress over a whole school year, rather than examine effects of class size in terms of specific curriculum units (Bruhwiler and Blatchford, 2011: 95-108).

About the Indonesian learning style, it might be concluded that Indonesian students learning styles are similar with other East Asian learning styles. Zhenhui (2001) in *Matching Teaching Styles with Learning Styles in East Asian Contexts* states that in East Asia, most students see knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners. At the second place, the teacher-centered classroom teaching in East Asia also leads to a closure-oriented style for most East Asian students. These closure-oriented students dislike ambiguity, uncertainty or fuzziness. Another most popular East Asian learning styles originated from the traditional book-centered and grammar-translation method are analytic and field-independent. The final East Asian preferred learning style is concrete-sequential. Students with such a learning style are likely to follow the teacher's guidelines to the letter, to be focused on the present, and demand full information. They prefer language learning materials and techniques that involve combinations of sound, movement, sight, and touch and that can be applied in a concrete, sequential, linear manner. Oxford & Burry-Stock (1995) discovered that Chinese and Japanese are concrete-sequential learners, who use a variety of strategies such as memorization, planning, analysis, sequenced repetition, detailed outlines and lists, structured review and a search for perfection.

The implementation of CLT in Indonesia is well representing other East Asian countries in terms of its gap between theory and practices. Liao & Zhao (2001) states that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has become the prevailing language teaching methodology across the world. Language teachers' application of CLT in foreign language teaching has yet to be explored in past research. The CLT practice is still constrained by the lack of strategies that can be used to make CLT happen in class. For example, some beginning teachers believe that CLT not only can be used to teach the spoken but also the written language. They have created some ideas about using CLT to teach reading and writing activities. Yet, in reality the CLT practice only happens when they speak Chinese for creating the target language environment.

To bridge the theory-practice gap on CLT, Liao (2001) proposed some interesting principle strategies that are relevant to apply in the Indonesian context. The strategies constitute: Teaching should start with listening and speaking, drills on language form should not be excessive, English should be used in class, use of translation should be limited, audio-visual aids like realia, pictures, over-head transparencies, audio-tapes, videos, and computers should be fully utilized, the teacher's role should be a facilitator and helper to guide students to develop effective learning habits, teachers should be aware of the individual differences among students in the learning process, and appropriate encouragement should be given to students to reinforce their initiatives.

Audio Lingual Communcative: an Emprical Base

One of alternatives the writer suggests ia a midified communicative language teaching which is called Audio Lingual Communcative (ALC) approach. This approach is derived from the empirical research and developemnet (R&D) conducted by the writer in 2010. In this developmental project, the writer creates a product consisting of textual learning materials assisted by audio recordings. This development also results in a learning design contained in a teaching manual, which is an integral part of this developmental product. In the learning design contained in the manual, the developer applies a learning strategy which the developer calls the Audio Lingual Communicative (ALC) learning strategy, reflected by the available learning activities.

The ALC learning strategy is an eclectic learning strategy which combines different language learning methods, in particular the Audio Lingual Method with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in order to adapt to real situations in the classroom. The real situation in the classroom found by target student observation has shown that classes are composed of at least 40 pupils, the school does not have a language laboratory, teaching materials used were still written exercise-based, and the teacher is still the central figure in learning. One of the reasons that the ALC learning strategy was chosen is because that strategy had been proven successful in China and Vietnam. Both countries have English language learning contexts which are similar to the context of the target students in this development. In 1990, CLT which had been modified with local contexts had been applied in Vietnam and China. In Vietnam, students enjoyed speaking in a large classroom setting, so real communication was directed to answer questions from the teacher in the form of an oral symphony (Rao, 2006; Pham, 2005).

As a learning strategy that combines the Audio Lingual Method with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, ALC adopts several principles from both teaching methods in the classroom learning praxis. In the Audio Lingual Method, usually a simple laboratory tool which tends to be "audio passive" is used, which stresses listening practice and speaking by way of hearing foreign language expressions using said tool. Using this method stresses the oral skills of speaking and listening.

In the learning practices toward the experimental class used in this development, the ALC strategy applied relies on several principles, among them: 1) giving students the chance to participate in communication by using the language in various activities; 2) keeping the given communicative activities comprehensible and relevant to the students' interests, 3) putting the communicative activities on a gradation, starting from the simplest and moving to the more complex; and 4) integrating the four language abilities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing into the audio-assisted learning. The consequences of those principles are manifested in the learning activities as the following, among others: 1) listening to the audio, imitating it, and demonstrating the conversation together, creating a spoken orchestra in the classroom; 2) demonstrating the conversation in pairs and groups, seated and in front of the class; 3) reading texts, metered verse, poetry, dialogue, and words aloud, together and individually; 4) working in groups, in pairs, and individually on written text practice; and 5) other challenging student-oriented activities.

Field observations have shown that the ALC strategy adopted in the learning design of this developmental product was able to facilitate target students, which are the middle school students in the Ma'arif NU Sidoarjo educational environment, to be actively involved in English language learning. Several of the learning activities above were done well by the students.

The teaching materials were organized by the elaboration model (Reigeluth, 1983) which covers selection, sequencing, synthesizing, and summarizing. Content selection was done by collecting relevant materials for English language learning, taken from various sources, including the Internet, domestic- and internationally-published English language books, dictionaries, children's encyclopedia, and other relevant sources. Sequencing was established by ordering units and sub-units according to the degree of difficulty of the language functions, creating a functional syllabus. Synthesizing was done by keeping the units and sub-units connected with each other. Finally, summarizing was done by showing a vocabulary list at the end of each unit, where students are not only able to find

out the meanings of words but are also able to construct sentences with them and read them aloud.

Field observations done on the experimental class used in this development show that students can be actively involved in learning through meaningful language activities such as demonstrating dialogue, finding the meanings of words in a dictionary, reading aloud, singing, and reading poetry or metered verse. Meaningful activities can facilitate the achievement of the general goal of learning which is for students to be able to understand the meaning in very simple transactional and interpersonal conversations, to interact with their surrounding environment.

Based on reviews by experts, teachers, and field tests on the developmental product consisting of audio-assisted teaching materials, the result obtained is that the developmental product is proven feasible and can facilitate the achievement of learning goals. Field test results with the experimental class in this development have shown that students' judgment regarding the textual teaching materials shows a percentage of 86.75%, while the audio recordings show 87.19%. Results of the post-test of the experimental class using this developmental product shows a significant difference compared to the control class which used a different learning package. This developmental product, which has been developed and revised based on experiments, has its own unique characteristics compared to other learning devices. Audio Lingual Communicative (ALC) learning strategy which combines the Audio Lingual method with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is applied in the learning design from this development, can be concluded as the proper strategy for the English language learning context in the middle schools of the LP Ma'arif NU Sidoarjo environment. The selection of the ALC learning strategy was based on the eclecticism philosophy which combines several foreign language principles and learning methods, adjusted to student context.

Conclusion

There are several constraints which are becoming obstacles of the CLT implementation in Indonesia. The implementation problem of CLT in Indonesia is that the approach in is always not appropriate with Indonesia socio cultural context. An empirical base which is called audio lingual communicative could be an alternative in modifying the CLT to be fitting to the Indonesian context. The strategies suggest an eclectic learning strategy which combines different language learning methods, in particular the Audio Lingual Method with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in order to adapt to real situations in the classroom. As a learning strategy that combines the Audio Lingual Method with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, ALC adopts several principles from both teaching methods in the classroom learning praxis. In the Audio Lingual Method, usually a simple laboratory tool which tends to be "audio passive" is used, which stresses listening practice and speaking by way of hearing foreign language expressions using said tool (Adi, 2010, 2011).

References

Adi, Sugeng S. 2010. Pengembangan bahan ajar tekstual berbantuan rekaman audio bagi siswa kelas VII SMP/MTs di lingkungan Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'arif NU Sidoarjo. Unpublished Dissertation. Postgraduate Program, State University of Malang

Adi, Sugeng S. 2011. Communicative language teaching: is it appropriate for Indonesian context? *International Journal of Educational Technology and Distance Learning*. Vol. 8, Number 11, December 2011. Online. (http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Dec_11/Dec_11.pdf, retrieved January 2, 2012)

Asassfeh, Sahail M. 2012. Communicative Language Teaching in an EFL Context: Learners' Attitudes and Perceived Implementation (pp. 525-535). *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 3, No. 3, May 2012

Baker, Will. 2008. A Critical Examination of ELT in Thailand : The Role of Cultural Awareness. *RELC Journal.* Vol. 39, No. 1, 2008. Online. (http://rel.sagepub.com/content/39/1/131 retrieved October 2, 2011)

Bruhwiler, C. and Blatchford, P. 2011 Effects of class size and adaptive teaching competency on classroom processes and academic outcome (pp. 95-108).*Learning and Instruction*, Vol. 21, 2011

Imperiani, Erni, D.A. English Language Teaching in Indonesia and its relation to the role of English as an International Language. Online. (http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/psg/article/view/43 retrieved, August 5, 2011)

Liao, J. and Zhao, D. 2006. Grounded Theory Approach to Beginning Teachers' Perspectives of Communicative Language Teaching Practice (pp. 76-90).*Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching,* Vol. 9, Number 1, 2012

Liao, Xiao Qing. 2000. How Communicative Language Teaching Became Acceptable in Secondary Schools in China. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VI, No. 10, October 2000. Online.(http://iteslj.org/Articles/Liao-CLTinChina.html retrieved August 1, 2010)

Pham, Hoa. H. (2005) "Imported" Communicative Language Teaching: Implications for Local Teachers (pp. 2-13). *English Teaching Forum*, Vol 43. Number 4 2005

Richards, Jack C. 2006. *Communicative Language Teaching Today*.Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

Savignon, Sandra J. 2002. *Interpreting CommunicativeLanguage Teaching: Contexts and concerns in teacher education.* Yale University Press: London

Savignon, Sandra J. 2007. Beyond communicative language teaching: What's ahead? (pp.207-220). *Journal of Pragmatics*,Vol. 39, 2007

Zhenhui, Rao. 2001. Matching Teaching Styles with Learning Styles in East AsianContexts. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. VII, No. 7, July 2001. Online. (http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Zhenhui-TeachingStyles.html retrieved July 2, 2011

NOTE ABOUT THE WRITER

Dr. Sugeng Susilo Adi, *M.Hum., M.Ed.* got his Bachelor from the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta in 1992. His first Master degree is in American Studies which he earned from Postgraduate Program, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta in 1997. His second master degree is Master of Education (M.Ed.) in TEFL which he got from The School of Education, University of South Australia, Adelaide (2002). In 2010 he got his Doctor in Instructional Technology from State University of Malang (UM). One of the summer courses he participated was Study of the US Institutes for Secondary Educators in the University of Chicago at Illinois (UIC), USA in 2008. He is currently teaching at the Department of English Education, Faculty of Cultural Studies, University of Brawijaya (UB), Malang, Indonesia.