

The Implementation of Communicative Approach in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

One of the objectives of communicative approach is language learners are able to reach communicative competence. The term was first introduced by Dell Hymes in terms of the “appropriateness of sociocultural significance of utterance”. It was later on developed by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) into four areas of competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. In general, the emphasis of communicative competence is language learners can use the language they learn appropriately. Appropriately in this context refers to all aspects of language, including its culture. Thus, not only should English language learners be knowledgeable of how to speak and write English accurately, but they should also be able to understand its culture so that there will not be understanding when communicating with native speakers of English. Taking this concept into account, the primary objective of this research is to examine the implementation of communicative competence in English classes, particularly the one dealing with cultural competence. The subjects of the research are English teachers who teach General English and English Conversation classes. Their responses to the questions regarding the inclusion and the implementation of cultural competence or components in their classes and in the materials used in teaching-learning sessions are discussed in this study.

Keywords: *communicative competence and cultural competence*

1. Introduction

One of the objectives of learning a language is to reach communicative competence, which is the main goal of communicative approach. The term was first introduced by Dell Hymes in 1967 and was later on developed by Canadian linguists, Canale and Swain in 1980 (Jedynak, 2011) and Bachman in 1990 (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Canale and Swain’s framework of communicative competence encompasses grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence while Bachman’s includes organizational competence and pragmatic competence.

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In general, the emphasis of communicative competence is language learners can use the language they learn appropriately. Appropriately in this context refers to all aspects of language, including its culture. Thus, not only should English language learners be knowledgeable of how to speak and write English accurately, but they should also be able to understand its culture so that there will not be misunderstanding when communicating with native speakers of English. This is line with what Dell Hymes proposed regarding communicative competence—“appropriateness of sociocultural significance of utterance”. In addition, the inclusion of culture in English language teaching and learning is in line with Canale and Swain’s framework of communicative competence (particularly sociolinguistic competence) and Bachman’s (pragmatic competence).

2. Research questions

To examine the implementation of communicative competence, particularly the inclusion of cultural competence in English classes, I propose the following research questions.

1. Are the course books used by the teachers include cultural components?
2. How do they deliver the cultural components in the class so that the learners can reach cultural competence as part of communicative competence?

3. Literature Review

As mentioned above, communicative competence was first introduced by Dell Hymes in 1967. He used an acronym SPEAKING to describe factors included in communicative competence. (Kumaravadivelu, 2006)

“*Setting* refers to the place and time where communicative events take place.

Participants refers to speakers and hearers and their role relationships. *Ends* refers to the stated or unstated objectives the participants wish to accomplish.

Act sequence refers to the form, content, and sequence of utterance.

Key refers to the manner and tone (serious, sarcastic, etc) of the utterance.

Instrumentalities refers to the channel (oral or written) and the code (formal or informal).

Norms refers to conventions of interaction and interpretation based on shared knowledge.

Genre refers to categories of communication such as lecture, report, essay, poem, and so forth.”

Hymes’s notion of communicative competence was developed by Canale and Swain in 1980 and 1983. Four areas of competence proposed by Canale and Swain were grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence includes “knowledge of lexical items and the rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar, semantics, and phonology” while sociolinguistics competence, according to Canale and Swain, constitutes the knowledge of “the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction.” This competence is similar with the one proposed by Hymes which discusses “appropriateness of sociocultural significance of utterance”. (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Discourse and strategic competence deal with aspects of language such as how utterances are connected into a whole text (spoken or written) while strategic competence discusses “verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.” (Canale and Swain, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Examples of strategic competence in language use are paraphrase, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and shifts in register and style.

Bachman (1990, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006) proposed other formulations of language competence. He divides the language competence into two broad categories: organizational and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence includes grammatical and textual competence while pragmatic competence deals with illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence. Some other linguists such as Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1995, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006) divided communicative competence into five areas of competence namely linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, and actional competence.

According to Richards (2006), communicative competence includes the following aspects:

- a. Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions.
- b. Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication).
- c. Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations).
- d. Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)."

In language teaching, the implementation of communicative competence is called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Richards (2006) states that "CLT sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence." Brown (2001) categorizes communicative competence as one of linguistic principles when teaching a language. Communicative competence in linguistic principles is a combination of the areas of competence proposed by Canale & Swain and Bachman (Brown, 2001). It consists of:

- Organizational competence (grammatical and discourse)
- Pragmatic competence (functional and sociolinguistic)
- Strategic competence
- Psychomotor skills

Thus the principle of communicative competence in language learning and teaching, according to Brown (2001), is

"Given that communicative competence is the goal of language classroom, instruction needs to be point toward all its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world."

This principle is reflected through the following characteristic of CLT (Brown, 2001).

- “1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intertwine the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.
5. Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.
6. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing bestower of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others.”

4. Research method and data collection

To answer the research questions, I made a questionnaire consisting of five open-ended questions. Thus the data of the research were taken from the respondents' responses to the questions. As the data were non-numerical data, this study is categorized as a qualitative research.

The following is the questions given in the questionnaire.

1. Do you think the course books used now for the classes you are teaching incorporate cultural components? If so, provide examples of the cultural components included in the course books.
2. If the course books include cultural components, how do you deliver them in class? Please provide examples.

3. Do you teach or introduce other cultural components other than the ones incorporated in the course books? For example, when you teach “yes/no questions” in present simple to your students, do you tell your students that they can not ask personal questions such as marital status, e.g. “are you married?” (which is a very common question in Indonesia) to someone they have just met?
4. Do you think that incorporating cultural components in language learning is important? Why? Provide your explanations.
5. If you believe that learning a language is not merely about learning the language form, what other aspects of language do you teach to your students? For example, do you include meaning, language functions, and contexts in teaching the language?

5. Subjects of the research

The subjects of the research were English teachers who teach General English and English Conversation classes. 16 English teachers were involved in this study.

6. Results and discussion

The responses to the questions varied greatly. For question 1, most of the teachers agree that in the course books they use now for the classes they are teaching incorporate cultural components of English language. For example, how people live a particular English speaking country, topics to start a conversation with someone new, topics that people should avoid discussing or taboo topics on the first acquaintance, how to start and end a conversation, and the way to call names related to title and first, middle, and surname/family/surname. Another example is American food, such as hamburger and what Americans do when they are having lunch. Some other examples are what questions should not be asked when we are meeting someone for the first time and different expressions for both American and British English, and bird-watching and DIY (Do It Yourself), which are not common in Indonesia.

The responses to question 2 also varied greatly. For example, teacher A said that she sometimes shows her students videos on awkward situation happening between a native speaker and a beginner EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) learner in which a cultural gap happening between the two speakers. Teacher B delivers the cultural components by comparing cultural topics or issues by asking the students how it is different from Indonesian culture. Teacher C has different ways to deliver the cultural components in class. She explicitly explains the culture and the students to apply the knowledge into practice. An interesting response comes from teacher D. To introduce English culture, he usually starts with an anecdote about culture shock between Indonesian people and foreigners. He further said that sometimes students are not aware of different culture that might irritate other people from different culture. He gave an example of inviting people to have dinner. He explained that it is not common to invite people for breakfast or lunch except at weekends whereas it is common in Indonesia to invite people or neighbors for breakfast and lunch. The other teachers said that they will ask the students to do a role play. For instance, the students can practice language expressions in ordering food in a restaurant. They can also practice how American people eat while in a restaurant.

Another response to question 2 is to compare cultural component presented in the book with a similar cultural component in the students' culture and to connect the cultural components introduced in the book to students' real life. Some other responses are the teacher usually has some vocabulary activities like elicitation, picture match, etc as she said that cultural components mostly appear in vocabulary sections. She will then explain the background culture of some specific words to the students since this activity also applies to other skills besides vocabulary, e.g. language expressions, grammar, and writing. Informing the students how we greet people is another way to deliver cultural components. For example, in Indonesia, we call someone who is older as "Pak" (male) or "Bu" (female) the followed by their names while in western countries we call them *Mr* and *Mrs* followed by their surnames.

Responses to question 3 are a bit similar from one teacher to another. Mostly they teach or introduce other cultural components other than the ones incorporated in the course books and they believe it is important for the students to know such things as learning a foreign language means learning its culture as well. For instance, when teaching “getting to know at the first time”, foreigners like to talk about weather. They do not like to talk about religion and private matters. Another example is giving response to negative questions or statement like “Would you mind closing the door?”. The answer to this question by Indonesian learners is usually “yes” as an expression of agreement and then they do what they are asked to do. Comparing the American and British to Indonesian culture is also an example given by one of the respondents to teach cultural components. In addition, one of teachers said that there are some important issues the students should be aware of regarding ones’ culture. When they go abroad, they should be knowledgeable of some uncommon ‘cultural things’ to avoid being a stranger.

The respondents’ answers to question 3 are not only about examples of cultural components, but also about when teachers should introduce them. Teacher A, for example, teaches English culture to her students; however, it will depend on the topics discussed in the course books. Another teacher said that introducing culture to the students will depend on the students’ level of proficiency. She would do that more often with students with higher level of proficiency because they are ready not only to learn about the language point but also with more complex cultural issues. In other words, they are more ready to discuss beyond the language point taught. With lower level of students who are still struggling with basic language points, she would probably avoid it unless the cultural component is very simple.

For question 4, most of the respondents came up with similar ideas that incorporating cultural components in language learning is important though one of them said that it is not that important to include culture in language learning. He further said he feels that students do not care much for the cultural aspects. They are more interested in learning the more practical aspects of English and how to

apply them in their work. One of those who agree with the idea of the inclusion of cultural aspects explained that for one thing, she wants her students to be aware not to make cultural blunders when communicating with people from other culture. Another thing is she believes that cultural awareness is part of communicative competence. Someone can be more efficient in communication if she/he has cultural awareness because they can act and react more appropriately in certain situations. Thus, what is grammatically correct may not be culturally appropriate. Another teacher believes that when we learn a language, it is inevitable that we will also learn the culture. Hence, as a teacher, she tries to introduce the culture that is related to the lessons studies, not to brainwash the students, but to give them some background information to open their mind, deepen their understanding on the language and the context, and broaden their knowledge too.

Some other teachers point out that language is part of the culture, so it is imperative to really understand the culture. That way, students are expected to not only use the language correctly but also appropriately based on the contexts. They further said that awkward situations or misunderstanding might occur when we do not have enough concept about the culture; what things to say or how to react when listening to a respond are also influenced by understanding and knowledge to the culture. Another response to question 4 is talking and learning a language will become a dull activity if it is not incorporated with culture. Furthermore, learning a language is not merely learning about language form, but it also has to be integrated with its culture. For example, when learning about food, students have to be introduced to kinds of food the foreigners eat, how they eat, and when they eat.

Most of the respondents have similar responses to the last question of the questionnaire. They believe that learning a language is not merely about learning the language form. One teacher said that language is just a medium. The most important thing is the message being delivered. Most people may have known the rules, but they cannot use the language spontaneously and appropriately if they seldom practice, and when we practice using it, we merge with the culture of the

people who own the language. Another teacher underlined that the inclusion of meaning, language functions, and contexts in teaching a language is imperative as the students will be able to use particular forms in particular situation. By building the context, it helps them know when and how to use the language forms.

One of the respondents stated that teaching language forms will only result in producing correct sentences. Therefore, it is very substantial to teach the form along with the meaning, function, and context. Incorporating those components promotes communicative teaching which will help students use the language appropriately. Another respondent explained that cultural concepts or knowledge would often be one aspect that she teaches in class. In addition, meaning, language functions, or contexts, are inseparable aspects in learning a language.

Other than cultural components, one respondent said that she often teaches students pronunciation, in order to help them both in speaking and listening skills. For English conversation classes, she also gives more explanations on language functions and contexts in spoken English, as it sometimes differs from written English. Knowing the meaning of some words and expressions are also important, and she often allows students to ask the meaning of difficult words that lead them to know the meaning with context clues or with a dictionary. Another one stated that she always tries to include meaning, language functions, and contexts in her class as meaning and contexts are inseparable and they are central in language teaching. She further said that language functions are important to teach so that the students can produce natural utterances or use the language appropriately.

It can be inferred from all of the responses to the questions given through the questionnaire that most of the English language teachers who became the respondents in this small study have implemented the communicative approach in order to reach communicative competence. They are aware of the importance of incorporating cultural aspects or components in English language and have made efforts to integrate cultural components, meaning, language functions, and contexts in language teaching. They underlined that learning a language would not be learning the “real” language if teachers merely teach the language form without

integrating cultural components, meaning, language functions, and contexts in language teaching.

Although communicative competence should be one of the goals of learning a language, some linguists seem to be unsatisfied with this competence. According to Jedynek (2011), “in communicative competence, models native speaker competence is emphasised. In the second half of the 90s in the last century intercultural component has been distinguished in communicative competence.” Kramersch (1996, as cited in Jedynek, 2011) points out that “authentic communication contexts and texts did not guarantee that a learner will use the target language corresponding to cultural norms.” She underlines that “the imitation of L2 community does not guarantee that a learner will be accepted by native speakers of the target language.” Kramersch further said that “the knowledge of L2 cultural context allows a learner to behave as someone belonging to the group and the primary objective of intercultural approach is finding the learners place between native and foreign cultures.”

Intercultural component which is part of intercultural approach aims to reach intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural approach, according to Corbett (2003, as cited in Jedynek, 2011), is the extension of the communicative approach. The similarities between these two approaches are they use the same techniques such as group problem-solving, project work, and simulation games. However, there are some differences between these approaches.

Communicative Approach	Intercultural Approach
1. The primary objective is communication.	1. The main objective is to maintain contact, to express identity, to build a bond with own and foreign culture.
2. It provides the information about L2 culture to the learners, but the development of four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) is the	2. It integrates culture teaching and L2 teaching.

priority.	
3. It is interested in target language culture.	3. It puts emphasis on the importance of reflection on comparison of L1 and L2 cultures leading to the development of learners' identity.
4. The content of teaching in communicative approach is unimportant because the main objective is to develop the four skills.	4. It puts emphasis on the integrated content from various disciplines.
5. The effect of communicative approach is communicative competence.	5. The effect of intercultural approach is intercultural communicative competence.
6. Communicative approach is based on linguistic competence of a native speaker.	6. Intercultural approach characterizes an educated intercultural mediator and not necessarily a native speaker.

According to Bryam's model intercultural communicative competence, there are four areas of competence covered in intercultural communicative competence: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse and intercultural competence (Bryam 1997, as cited in Jedynak, 2011). Lussier et al (2007, as cited in Jedynak, 2011) argue that to assess intercultural communicative competence, we can use three dimensions called *knowledge/savoirs*, *know-how/savoir-faire*, and *being/savoir-être*. The first dimension, according to Lussier et al, refers to "intercultural awareness involving the understanding of similarities and distinctive differences between the native and target language communities."

The second dimension implies that beginner and elementary learners should be introduced to the linguistic competence first. Then, when they are in intermediate and advanced level, they should be able to interact in different contexts, integrate new experiences, and to be able to use communicative competence efficiently. The last dimension, according to Lussier et al (2007, as

cited in Jedynak, 2011), is indicated by the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles, and personality linked to personal identity.

As the objectives of this study are to examine the implementation of communicative approach in terms of the inclusion of cultural content in English language teaching, the discussion can be expanded to the questions “what should teachers teach?, which or whose culture should be taught?, should English culture be taught at all considering English has now become an international language?” (Kasztelanic, 2011)

The last question regarding English as an international language seems to be interesting to discuss. According to Crystal (2003), English has become a global language, has a special status in some countries, and it is used as an official language in at least 75 countries. Sharifian (2009) states that as English has widely spread in many countries around the world, and it has serious impacts on linguistics and culture, pedagogy, and politics. In addition, many publications, such as international journals, which have to be published in English, have made English popular all over the world and thus, it becomes an international language.

Sharifian (2009) further said that “English as an international language emphasizes that English, with its many varieties, is a language of international, and therefore intercultural, communication.” In addition, he points out that English as an international language contexts are the situations where English is used by speakers coming from different nations and having different cultural backgrounds.

Matsuda (as cited in Sharifian, 2009) says that “English as an international language also emphasizes the relevance of World Englishes to English Language Teaching.” Matsuda (2003) further says that in reference to World Englishes, “English is taught and learned in many countries because it is an international language.” Hence, the pedagogical approaches used to teach English an international language should incorporate varieties of World Englishes.

However, English language teaching practices in some countries are still dominated by the teaching of English as an inner-circle language, e.g. American English or British English. (Matsuda, 2003). In Japan, for instance, the textbooks

used still include the characters and the cultural topics from the English speaking countries that belong to inner circle. (Iwata et al., 2002; Kiryu, Shibata, Tagaya, & Wada, 1999; Matsuda, 2002 as cited in Matsuda 2003).

Kirkpatrick (2007) suggests requirements for English language teachers who intend to work in outer and expanding circle countries such as Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and Japan.

- “1. Be multilingual and multicultural and ideally know the language of their students and understand the educational, social, and cultural contexts in which they are working;
2. Either be able to provide an appropriate and attainable model for their students or, if they speak another variety, understand that the local variety of English is an appropriate and well-formed variety that is not inferior to their own;
3. Understand how different varieties of English have developed linguistically and the ways in which they differ phonologically, lexically, grammatically, rhetorically, and culturally;
4. Understand how English has developed in specific contexts and how it has spread across the world;
5. Understand the role (s) of English in the community and how these interrelate with other local languages;
6. Be able to evaluate English language teaching materials critically to ensure that these do not, either explicitly or implicitly, promote a particular variety of English or culture at the expense of others;
7. Be able to evaluate that specific needs of their students and teach towards those needs; and
8. Be prepared to contribute to the extra-curricular life of the institution in which they are working.”

7. Conclusion

To sum up, most of the teachers who became the respondents of this research have implemented the communicative approach in their classes in order to help their students reach communicative competence. The communicative competence which becomes the main concern of my study is whether or not the teachers include English cultural aspects or content, including meaning, contexts, and language functions, when teaching English. The cultural aspects of a language could be part of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, which are two areas covered in communicative competence. However, some experts in language and

culture feel unsatisfied with communicative competence as native speakers of the language are the model in this competence while in the second half of the 90s in the last century intercultural component has been distinguished in communicative competence. Consequently, communicative competence should not be the target competence anymore. Intercultural communicative competence, which is the extension of communicative competence, should now be the target of language learning. This is line with the status of English which has become an international language. As an international language, English has more varieties and therefore the ideas of incorporating English speaking country culture in English language teaching materials should be reviewed and re-evaluated.

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