

## On English Grammar Teaching with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

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**Abstract:** *Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of the study. Language learners in environments utilizing CLT techniques learn and practice the target language through interaction with one another and the instructor. This paper makes a brief analysis of traditional grammar teaching and communicative language teaching, the role of grammar in Communicative Language Teaching, and the advantages of implementing the communicative approach in grammar lessons. It is concluded that the communicative approach can help English teachers improve their grammar lessons*

**Keywords:** *Communicative language teaching (CLT); grammar teaching; the role of grammar*

### 1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that “grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language.” If learners master grammar well, they can write sentences accurately. Grammar is an indispensable part of a language. Because of its importance, the teachers and students have always paid great attention to grammar teaching and learning. So how to make grammar teaching and learning both effective and efficient is an important task for both English teachers and researchers. Although great changes have taken place in English teaching and learning research in China during the past decades, the adoption of the traditional teaching method is still used in the current grammar teaching. It is called the Grammar Translation Method. With this model, teachers show language structures, learners practice them in the form of spoken or written exercises, and then the learners use them in less controlled speaking or writing activities. Although the students’ mastery of the grammatical rules can be improved through the traditional grammar teaching method, they cannot use these rules flexibly and appropriately in communication. In other words, the disadvantage of the traditional grammar teaching method is that it prevents the students from developing their communicative competence. The traditional grammar teaching method is teacher-centered. As a result, the majority of the classroom time is spent on the teachers’ elaborate explanation of English grammar rules, while all the students are either listening or taking notes. Thus little attention is paid to the development of English communicative competence. The students accept the English knowledge passively in the procedures set ahead of time by English teachers step by step. The students have little time using the English language. The typical exercise is to translate sentences from English into Chinese or vice versa, to fill in the blank with a proper word and to correct errors in a sentence. So the students lack English communicative opportunities. The basic learning techniques are memorization and rote learning, so students’ interest can’t be aroused. This kind of method can’t build the students’ self-confidence or improve their communicative strategies in English learning but makes them fear English grammar learning. There is a better way to teach grammar. It is called the Communicative Approach. The Communicative Approach makes language teaching as in a real-world situation. Grammar learning is emphasized by communication through the approaches of “learning by doing,” through students’ participation or co-operative completion of teaching tasks between or among students and teachers, then learners can learn grammar naturally.

### 2. Definition of grammar

Grammar is “multi-dimensional” and has multi-meanings. People generally think that grammar is a set of rules for choosing words and putting words together to make sense. Every language has grammar. It has been universally accepted that a language can be compared to a building, the words can be compared to bricks, and the grammar can be compared to the architect’s plan. One may have a million bricks, but can not make a building without a plan. Similarly, if a person knows a million English words, but he doesn’t know how to put them together, then he cannot speak English. In other words, grammar is a framework to describe languages.

### 3 . The role of grammar in CLT

The “revolutionary” Communicative Approach is different from the Grammar Translation Method. It shifts attention from language competence to communicative competence. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) originated from Europe, with the increasing interdependence of European countries in the 1960s. Its aim is to make communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills. The Communicative Language Teaching emphasizes the importance of providing students with chances to use English for communicative purposes and tries to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching. The purpose of teaching and learning is to communicate well. It presupposes that language always appears in a social context, and it should not be separated from its original context when it is being taught. Learning for communication is now very common. There is a widespread belief that Communicative Language Teaching does not include any grammar. In fact, that widespread belief that CLT doesn't pay attention to grammar is only partly true, since although CLT syllabuses are organized according to categories of meaning or functions, they still have a strong grammar basis, that is to say, the functions into which CLT syllabuses are organized are connected with their correspondent grammatical points. Discussing the role of grammar within any communicative approach can be controversial, due to these misconceptions and also to the influence of Natural Approaches, which ascribed no grammar role in language learning. However, when explaining the role of grammar specifically in CLT, some of that controversy may be solved if we do not talk about one single type of CLT but about two main types, the shallow-end approach and the deep-end approach to CLT. The shallow-end approach to Communicative Language Teaching is based on the thought that in order to make the learner use language in a communicative situation it is necessary first to learn the grammatical rules and then apply them in that communicative situation; on the other hand, the deep-end approach to CLT is based on the belief that grammar is acquired unconsciously during the performance on those communicative situations, so it would be useless to teach grammar previously and explicitly . According to this, CLT does deal with grammar, at least in its shallow-end approach. However, the fact that there is grammar teaching in the shallow-end approach does not mean that this version of Communicative Language Teaching is not communicative. Grammar is considered as a means towards communication. In the shallow-end to CLT, grammar is taught in a way that we can define as inductive: learners are not presented with a list of grammatical rules that they have to learn by heart (presentation practice-production cycle) but rather, the teacher provides them with examples from which the learners will have to infer the rules by themselves. This inductive way of teaching can be called consciousness-raising. By means of this consciousness-raising, the teacher makes the learners relate the new grammatical concepts to other grammatical information that they already have. Contrary from the shallow-end approach, the deep-end methodology claimed that grammar should be acquired unconsciously. The cycle of input-intake-output reflected in this theory assumed no role for grammar, as it would affect the final aim of communication. This model has had a great influence on ELT, and there is still a belief that the teaching of grammar might be harmful for communicative competence, as it claims that conscious reflection about grammar affects negatively input processing and performance. The reaction, in deep-end approaches, was not to teach grammar, as learners would be unable to integrate it within communication processes. However, even when the contradiction about teaching grammar still exists in ELT literature, in the classroom the deep-end approach is not currently used, as most authors and teachers attach a role to grammar, without diminishing the main target of communication.

### 4 .Communicative teaching strategies

To make grammar classes active, vivid and creative is a constant challenge for most grammar teachers. This is not an easy task since it requires language teachers to develop and implement catchy activities to provoke students' enthusiasm and interest. The traditional exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks, drills, multiple choice and rewriting sentences, among others, have not sufficed to fulfill the teacher's main objective, which is to enable students to learn grammar. Teachers feel they should push students to memorize structures that are not contextualized or used in everyday speech, and this is why students don't know how to use those

structures in a flexible and practical way. However, there are some helpful and enjoyable activities proposed by various specialists that can make language teachers' classes more fun and task-oriented:

1. Choose a topic in which specific noun phrases must be used. Provide the list of noun phrases and verbal phrases you want the students to use. Using that information, students (individually or in groups) will write a story of three or four paragraphs. Here, they will focus on meaning and organization.

2. Have students write a questionnaire including open or closed questions as well as pictures or paragraphs. Once it is checked by the language teacher, students will look for three or four interviewees to answer the questions about different topics, the content in the paragraphs, or to describe the pictures. The main purpose of this activity is to monitor others' grammatical structures and be capable of identifying grammatical errors. Testing others' knowledge allows students to go through the self-assessment process.

3. Students sit down in a circle. The language teacher asks the students for a catchy and challenging topic to talk about. When the topic is chosen, the teacher chooses a verb tense and begins the story by providing the thesis statement to be developed orally by the students. Then, the first student on his right side continues by adding two or three sentences. Each student adds something until finally, the last participant gives the concluding sentence to end the story. The idea is to keep the same verb tense throughout the story and see how students insert new information and vocabulary and use simple or complex verbal phrases. They become story-tellers.

4. Give students a history textbook, a paragraph, or a newspaper article in English. Ask students to identify the tense, keywords, simple or complex sentences, and use of connectors. They must also analyze the discourse pattern that alternates between subjects or perspectives. This task will make students anticipate the forms and structures the text will have since it follows a predictable format. This will develop their predicting skills.

5. Teacher and students can ask and answer questions about any topic. Here, the teacher will implement communicative drills that will encourage students to connect form, meaning, and use several grammatical structures to enable the speaker's message to be understood by the listener. Students are not repeating the same idea or set content; they will develop the ability to use language to convey ideas and information and to encounter the grammar rule in a variety of contexts. This encourages speaker-listener communication.

6. The teacher matches grammatical patterns to particular communicative meanings, and the learners choose the right pattern to express ideas and feelings about a particular topic. This will help them to use grammar to express different communicative meanings, thus to see the connection between form and function.

7. The teacher encourages students to bring their own authentic data into the classroom and assists them in seeing how grammatical forms operate in context by enabling speakers and writers to make communicative meanings through different tasks. Learners encounter target language items in the kinds of contexts where they naturally occur and experience language items in interactions with other closely related grammatical and discourse elements.

8. The teacher and students engage in a short discussion on ways of relating the content of a grammar structure to picture sequences of learners' own lives. Learners are encouraged to bring their background knowledge to the discussion. In doing so, the teacher focuses on the use of referential questions in order to review grammar forms with the students, while genuine communication, content-based topic nominations, student interactions and the negotiation of meaning by students and teacher are used.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, all communicative approaches have a role for grammar teaching. Grammar can be taught within any communicative approach without interrupting the communicative mood; in fact, grammar can even help to enhance that communicative mood. As Harmer remarks, "at this stage, it is enough to say that grammar

teaching –of both the overt and covert kind- has a real and important place in the classroom”. Language teachers should visualize the shift towards CLT as an open door to implement new teaching strategies. This way, they will have the opportunity to develop their creativity and interest in topics to be developed in the class. Those activities will have grammar as their focal point.

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