

# Teaching English as a foreign language today integrated approach versus communicative approach

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## Abstract

Discovering the methodology that suits your students best is the most important element in the process of teaching especially when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language. With the phenomenal introduction of the communicative approach, the traditional approach has occupied a relatively lower status in most of the language classes. This paper aims at showing that an amalgam of approaches is better than adopting one single approach. Experience and practice have shown that employing both the communicative approach and the traditional approach is more effective and efficient. While the communicative approach provides learners with the cultural context of the target language, the traditional approach introduces the functions of language and its structure mainly grammar. In most of my classrooms, teaching grammar and sentence structure has proved to be fundamental and essential since the grammar and sentence structure of Arabic (the native language) is different from that of English (the target foreign language). Hence, to improve the quality of teaching and to gain better results, the two approaches should be used. The paper also gives a brief overview of the historical background of the two teaching approaches and highlights the most important advantages and disadvantages involved in implementing the communicative and traditional approaches.

**Key Words:** communicative approach, traditional approach, grammar, structure, culture, context

## **Introduction**

*“A thousand teachers, a thousand methods-” Chinese proverb*

Through the history, teachers and educators have adopted lots of different teaching methods and approaches such as the grammar teaching method, the audio-lingual method, the direct approach, the reading approach, and many others. However, the traditional language teaching approach (sometimes called grammar translation method) and the communicative approach have been the two most widely used ones by teachers for long (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 11 & 121). Since teaching a second or a foreign language is different from teaching a first or native language, teachers, educators, and linguists are in constant search of new methods and approaches that would result in more effective teaching. After all, the ultimate aim is to satisfy the learners' needs and help them learn a second/foreign language. For this reason, it is suggested that linguists and educators stop looking for a better method and start looking for teaching practices or strategies that have been designed to satisfy local needs and experiences (Savignon, 2007, p. 207).

## **Approach, Method, Technique**

For the purpose of improving the quality of language teaching, the American applied linguist Edward Anthony (1963) identifies three important concepts called approach, method, and technique the arrangement of which is hierarchical (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 15). Approach, method, and technique are among the most frequently used terms in any academic curriculum. For the purpose of avoiding any confusion, Anthony (1963) defines each term as follows:

- a. Approach-It is a set of correlative assumptions that deal with the nature of language teaching and learning describing the nature of the subject matter to be taught.
- b. Method-It is an overall plan of the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon the selected approach. A single approach includes several methods.
- c. Technique-It is what actually takes place in a language teaching classroom such as a particular trick, strategy, or plan for accomplishing a specific objective.

(Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 15).

In other words, “the organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach.” (Anthony, 1963 in Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 15). Besides Anthony (1963), it is suggested by Celce-Murcia (2001) and Brown (2007) that among the three concepts defined above, method is the most fundamental in teaching ESL/EFL. It is a set of “systematic presentation” that teachers use in their classes for the purpose of keeping their students comfortable, pleased, and not bored (Sanjaya, 2014, p. 58).

## **English as a World Language**

*“The first among languages is that which possesses the largest number of great works.”*

*Voltaire*

As stated by The Economist (2001), English has become the global language that has influenced the whole world (Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2437). It is estimated that one-sixth of the world’s population speaks or uses English (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 1). Besides being used as a language of communication, English is used as major language of the United Nations and NATO, official language of international aviation, unofficial first language of sports, radio broadcasts, writing mail, rapidly developing technology, films, scientific research and its literature (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 1 & 3) and internet-supported job opportunities (Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2437).

Today, English is taught in 3 different settings: first language or mother tongue (L1), second language (ESL), and foreign language (EFL) (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 4; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439). Kachru (1986, 1992, 2006) describes these 3 settings as inner-circle countries, outer-circle countries, and expanding-circle countries (Savignon, 2002, p. 19; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439; Savignon, 2007, p. 210). In the inner-circle countries, English is taught and used as a first dominant language or mother tongue. It includes the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Savignon, 2002, p. 19; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439). In the outer-circle countries, English is taught and used as a second language. It includes countries like India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Tanzania, and many others as a result of the British colonialism. In these countries English is used parallel with their mother tongue (Savignon, 2002, p. 19; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439). As a second language, English is considered essential for commercial, administrative, and

educational purposes (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 4). In the expanding-circle countries, English is taught and used as a foreign language. It includes countries like China, Russia, Spain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and many others where English is considered fundamental for international news, popular culture, and advanced education (Savignon, 2002, p. 19; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439).

Lately, it is argued that the number of non-native speakers of English is more than that of the monolingual native speakers of English. According to Savignon (2007), the ratio is more than two to one. Hence, as the global language of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Cairo Egyptian Gazette proclaims that English is the property of the entire world and not just Americans or other inner-circle countries (Savignon, 2007, p. 210; Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 4; Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2439).

### **English as a Second Language**

In addition to what has already been said, in a second language setting English is significantly present in 4 different domains. First of all, English is the main language of the mass media that is the language of newspapers, radio, and television. In addition, English is the language of official institutions such as the law court and the government (local and central). Moreover, it is the language used at the educational institutions especially schools and universities. Last but not least, English is considered an essential component of the commercial and industrial organizations. In the outer-circle countries, an excellent command of English as a second language provides people with a smooth passage towards social development and economic progress. It goes without saying that English as a second language is not only learnt in the outer-circle countries, but also in the inner-circle countries. Immigrants in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada or Australia learn English for “integrative” purposes which allow them to identify with the native language community of the host country and to use it as a lingua franca with people from other linguistic backgrounds than theirs (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 6).

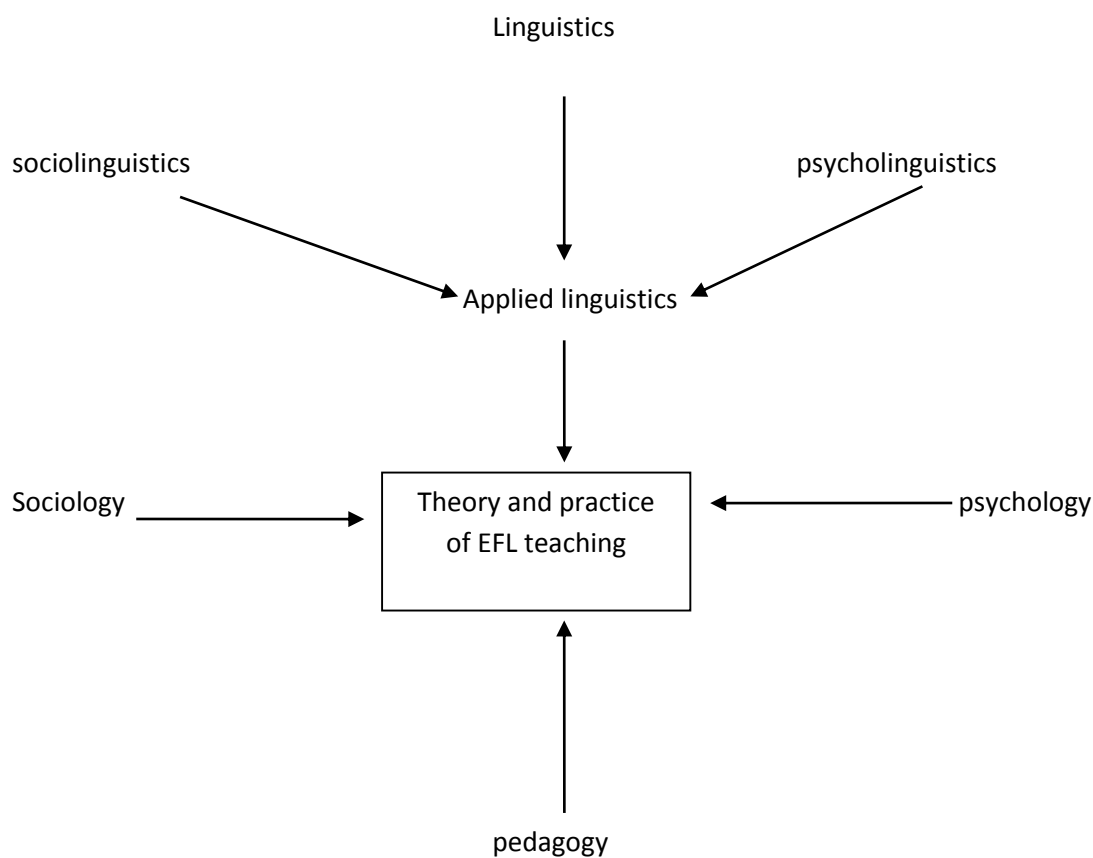
### **English as a Foreign Language**

It is believed that people learn a foreign language for 2 different purposes. On one hand, they learn a foreign language for “instrumental” purposes. This group of learners includes tourists, salesmen, and science students. They need the foreign language for “operational” purposes such as reading a book in the target language and communicating with other speakers of that

language. Based on this, people learn English as a foreign language either to visit England, to communicate with other tourists who speak English, or to read English books and newspapers. On the other hand, some people learn a foreign language for “integrative” purposes. Learners of this group have the urge to identify with the speech community of the target language (foreign language). By knowing the language, they feel at home and understand the attitude and world view of that speech community (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 6). According to Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas (2003), unlike English as a second language, EFL is only taught in schools; it has nothing to do with the national or social life of the learners (p. 6).

Recently, the more global English becomes thinner does the line between ESL and EFL become. Besides, the status of English has started changing in many countries. For example, with the decreasing role of English in countries like India and Sri Lanka the emphasis has shifted from being a second language to more of a foreign language. At the same time, the opposite is true to other countries. Linguistic and political decisions in many European countries such as Sweden and Holland have facilitated the shift from a foreign language situation to a more second language situation (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 6-7).

Whether first, second, or foreign language, Savignon (2007) argues that the emergence of English as a global language has had a great impact on the whole concept of language teaching (p. 210). For Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas (2003), English is either the language of a “neighboring” country or that of a language of global importance as a result of which educators allocate more teaching hours for English rather than other languages or subjects of the curriculum (p. 11). Regardless of the methodology used in language classes and the wide range of educational settings used worldwide, all good language teaching classes share some basic principles that are derived from the interaction of aspects that contribute to the theory and practice of EFL (figure 1) (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, pp. 37-38).



*Figure 2.* Basic principles that contribute to the theory and practice of EFL (adapted from Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 2003, p. 38).

## **The Traditional Language Teaching Approach**

Teacher-centred, rote learning, memorizing rules and vocabulary, passive learners, and separate desks are some of the terms that describe the traditional language teaching approach (Chunyang, 2014, p. 32). It mainly focuses on the rules and structure of the target language for which the teacher uses well-organized and structured text books. One of the unique features of the traditional language teaching approach is that teachers use face-to-face explanations of grammatical rule. They cater for their learners by adjusting their lesson plans and the material taught according to the requirements of the class.

On the other hand, the traditional language teaching approach has few drawbacks. Being a teacher-centred approach, it leaves little space for learners' creativity. During the process of teaching, the learners receive the input passively. The teacher explains a specific language rule thoroughly and objectively giving almost no chance for learners to think. It is worth saying that both teacher-student and student-student interactions are minimal-a quiet class that leads to boredom.

According to Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011), the major characteristics of the traditional language teaching methods include:

1. Translation from foreign language to native language
2. Learning grammar deductively
3. Memorization of native language equivalents for foreign language vocabulary
4. Teacher-centred class
5. Little teacher-student and student-student interaction
6. Focus on vocabulary and grammar rules more than meaning
7. Immediate correction of errors
8. Significance of accurate structure (pp. 19 & 20).

## **Historical Background of Communicative Language Teaching**

The origins of the communicative language teaching approach are traced back to the late 1960s, the time when the British language teaching system was looking for a change (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 64). During the process of investigating new teaching theories the studies of the British linguist D. A. Wilkins (1972) played a major role. According to him, instead of describing and teaching language through its traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, a system of meanings for communicative uses of language was demonstrated. For him the meanings include notional categories such as time, sequence, quantity, location, and frequency and categories of communicative functions such as requests, denials, offers, and complaints (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 64). It is worth mentioning that the communicative language teaching has become a "buzzword in discussions of the practice and theory of second and foreign language teaching" after the emergence of English as a global language (Savignon, 2007, pp. 208 & 210).

## **Communicative Language Teaching Approach**

As a reaction to the drawbacks of the traditional language teaching approach, the communicative language teaching approach was introduced (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Linguists attempted to design a teaching approach that helps learners use language for communication since the traditional approach failed to achieve that goal (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Hence, the concept of teaching in isolation has been replaced by the concept of teaching language in context, and to be more precise, in a social context (Savignon 1991, 2007; Wei, 2011, p. 1).

Unlike the traditional language teaching approach, the terms that best describe the communicative language teaching approach are student-centred, active learners, group work, and context based.

During the process of communicative teaching, the teacher is considered to be a mere facilitator. Students work on tasks in small groups. As a result, they have the chance to interact more and use language for communication. In addition, the communicative language teaching approach prepares learners to use the target language for real life situations. Nevertheless, less attention is given to the form and structure of language. Teachers focus on meaning more and avoid correcting errors (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 122-125).

According to Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) and Wei (2011), the major characteristics of the communicative language teaching approach include:

1. Communicative purpose of almost all activities
2. Communicative activities usage (games, role plays)
3. Communication for a purpose
4. Authentic material usage
5. Application of group work
6. Learning grammar inductively
7. Student-centred classes
8. Interaction between students
9. Student motivation
10. Target language usage for explanation and instruction
11. Focus on the four skills of language
12. Tolerance of inaccurate structure
13. Teachers as facilitators
14. Fluency above accuracy (pp. 122-125; p. 1).



It is believed that ESL classes become more “practical and useful tool to communicate, interact, discover, and create,” if CLT is employed in classes that have 5 main goals in mind:

1. Teaching of communicative competence
2. Using language for a variety of purposes and functions
3. Changing and modifying language use based on the setting and participants involved such as formal or informal
4. Producing and understanding a wide range of texts such as interviews, reports, and narratives
5. Using different communicative strategies, regardless of all the limitations learners have, in order to keep up communication (Badilla & Chacon, 2013, pp. 268-9).

It is worth pointing out that finding out the methodology that suits your students best is the key factor in the process of teaching, especially teaching English as a foreign language. With the phenomenal introduction of the communicative approach, it has soon become many ESL/EFL teachers’ favourite for the purpose of improving the learners’ sociolinguistic competence (Zhong-guo & Min-yan, 2007, p. 62). Consequently, the traditional approach, especially teaching grammar and structure, has occupied a relatively lower status in most of the language classes. In fact, to improve the quality of teaching and to gain better results, an integrated approach that encompasses both traditional and communicative approaches is recommended to be implemented for teaching English as a second/foreign language.

### **Competence versus Performance**

The terms ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ form the bedrock of Chomsky’s discussion of grammar especially in discussion of second language (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 3).

According to Chomsky (1965), competence refers to the knowledge of grammar while performance refers to actual use of language

We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)...In actual fact, it obviously could not directly reflect competence. A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4).

Linguistic theories based on the notion of competence have been criticized for being too idealistic. Hymes (1972) and Campbell and Wales (1970) go beyond Chomsky's definition of competence and suggest the concept of "communicative concept" which not only includes knowledge of rules of grammar but also "contextual or sociolinguistic" competence (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 4). For Hymes, the communicative competence is the interaction of the "grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and probabilistic" systems of competence (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 16). He defines grammatical as "what is formally possible", psycholinguistic as "what is feasible in terms of human information processing", sociocultural as "what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance", and probabilistic as "what actually occurs" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 16). Campbell and Wales (1970) believe that "by far the most important linguistic ability" is that of being able to "produce or understand utterances which are not so much *grammatical* but, more importantly, *appropriate to the context in which they are made*" (p. 247).

Hence, in terms of the two approaches discussed above, the structuralist and traditional approaches target "competence", while the functional and communicative approaches target "performance" (Kempson, 1977, pp. 54-55). She argues that a competence theory is the one that characterizes the regularities of language while a performance theory is the one which characterizes the "interaction between that linguistic characterisation and all the other factors which determine the full gamut of regularities of communication." In other words, a theory of performance is simply a communicative competence when a speaker uses language in context (Kempson, 1977, pp. 54-55). In other words, Chomsky's structuralist view of language (linguistic competence) was challenged by Halliday's functional approach and Hyme's communicative approach thus bringing about the communicative competence and communicative teaching of second language (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Savignon, 1991; Widdowson, 1978, 1979).

According to the functional approach of language teaching, especially second language learning, that the ultimate aim of effective learning is that the learner must participate in real-life context of language; that is, the learner has to be able to use language mainly for communicative functions such as apologizing, inviting, promising (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 4; Breshneh, 2014, p. 438). However, this notion of functional approach to second language is not applicable in all societies. For instance, it is easily applied in India where English is

considered a second national language. Koosha and Yakhabi (2013) state that students who live in a second language environment have a “high intrinsic motivation” to learn English since it is part of their everyday life. They use it for different daily needs such as communication, searching for a job, etc (p. 65). Learners of English as a second language have exposure to it and the chance of practicing it outside the class. Nonetheless, the notion is hard to apply in societies such as Lebanon where the native language is Arabic. Although English has started replacing French in one way or another, it is still considered a foreign language. Most of the learners are exposed to English during the language class only. To use a foreign language, students need motivation first. According to Wei 2011, without the English-speaking environment, learners have one goal in mind-to learn English to pass their academic exams. Campbell (2004) claims that as soon as EFL learners leave the classroom, they return to their “real world” where they use their mother tongue immediately (Koosha and Yakhabi, 2013, p. 65-66).

In addition to that, home culture and values prevent the application of the communicative language teaching of English in an EFL environment. In such cases, CLT is socio culturally considered inappropriate (Koosha and Yakhabi, 2013, p. 67). For instance, books that follow the communicative language teaching approach include real-life situations that are different from the learners’ culture in Lebanon. Hence, it is not practiced in a native context especially that majority of the students have not visited an English speaking country. It goes without saying that, even the context of some English books, especially stories, is offensive to some societies or culturally unacceptable. For that reason, books have to be modified. For example, during my teaching years in the Gulf, I have encountered parents who have expressed on more than one occasion that the story of “The Sleeping Beauty” is unethical and should not be read by children since it includes sexual connotations. Some parents have filed complaints on more than one occasion. Some have requested blocking pictures of the prince kissing the beauty, while others have requested cancelling the story from the requirements.

It is worth mentioning that in many Asian countries the long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority hinders the process of applying CLT in the EFL setting. In those countries the teacher is the central figure and must be honoured all the time. For learners of Asian culture, teachers are the sole and authoritarian supplier of knowledge. Hence, it is not easy for them to perceive their teachers as facilitators only. Until today, hierarchy determines the nature of interaction between teachers and students. It is believed that “the teacher is

assumed to be superior, omniscient figure while the students are a group of individuals who must obey and receive the teacher's explanations" (Koosha and Yakhabi, 2013, p. 67-68)

In his article "English for Specific Purposes World," Prasad (2013) presents a detailed interpretation of CLT using the "inverted pyramid" classroom model that has been proposed by Savignon (1983) (figure 2). According to this model, learners' communicative competence is progressively and little by little developed and increased through practicing and using an extensively varied range of communicative context and events. It consists of a group of 4 different competences: grammatical competence, discourse competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. He states that not only each competence is essential but they are also interrelated (p. 2).

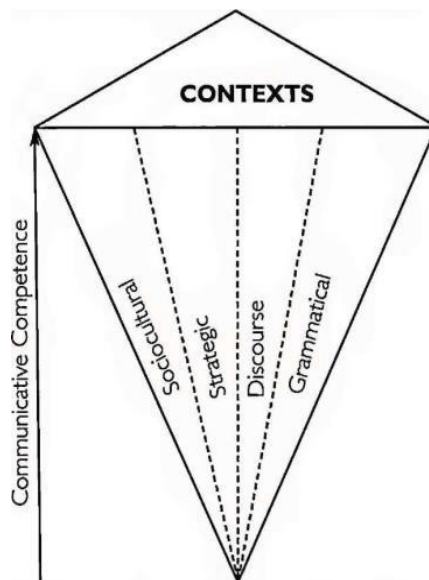


Figure 2. Savignon's "inverted pyramid" classroom model (Prasad, 2013, p. 2).

*Grammatical Competence:* It refers to the ability of recognizing and using lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological features of a language to form words and sentences. The grammatical competence is neither related to any grammatical theory nor does it include the ability to state usage rules. Learners do not demonstrate grammatical competence by stating a rule; they use a rule in the interpretation, expression, or negotiation of meaning (Prasad, 2013, p. 2).

*Discourse Competence:* It refers to a series of utterances, written words, and/or phrases that are interconnected to form a text or a meaningful whole (Prasad, 2013, p. 3).

*Socio-cultural Competence*: It refers to the social rules of language use, hence going beyond the linguistic form of language. For learners/speakers to acquire the socio-cultural competence of language, they need to understand the social context in which language is used; that is, to understand the roles of the participants, to be aware of their shared information, and to know the function of the interaction. For a communication between multicultural learners, social conventions such as turn-taking, appropriacy of content, nonverbal language, and tone of voice are as important as cultural meanings attached to the target language of communication. Since the conventions mentioned have a great impact on how messages are interpreted, cultural awareness becomes more important than cultural knowledge (Prasad, 2013, p. 3).

*Strategic Competence*: it refers to the coping strategies that speakers use during a conversation/communication especially in unfamiliar context due to imperfect knowledge of rules or limiting factors such as fatigue or distraction. Prasad (2013) suggests that the “ideal native speaker” exists only in theory. No speaker of any language knows a language perfectly or uses it appropriately in all social interactions. Nonetheless, the more experience learners get in grammatical, discourse, and socio-cultural competence, the less they rely on their strategic competence (Prasad, 2013, p. 3).

## **The Role of the Native Language**

In addition to the socio-cultural aspect, the native language of the learners plays a major role in learning the second language. In the traditional language teaching approach the learners’ native language is used to understand the target language. When teaching grammar, teachers try to explain it using the native language (Sanjaya, 2014, p. 61; Chang, 2011, p. 16). The learners’ first language shapes their use of the structure of the second language especially word order and sentence structure (Chang, 2011, p. 16). However, this is useful when the native language and the target language follow the same sentence structure. For example, Sadighi & Bavali (2008) state that languages vary in terms of ‘relative position of heads with respect to their complements within phrases.’ They continue saying that while English is a head-first language, Japanese is a head-last language (p. 14). This issue is also applied to learners in Lebanon. The sentence structure of Arabic is different from that of English. Hence, instruction is needed where the teacher explains the rules of not only sentence structure (subject-verb-object) but also the rules of word order (English → adjective + noun; Arabic → noun + adjective). In his definition of grammar, Brumfit (2000) suggests,

If a language is a building, the words are bricks and the grammar is the architect's plan. One may have a million bricks, but do 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 Chang, 2011, p. 14).

## **The Role of Grammar**

*"A man's grammar, like Caesar's wife, should not only be pure, but above suspicion of impurity." Edgar Allan Poe*

As stated by Thornbury (1999), differences in attitudes towards the role of grammar in language teaching highlight the differences between methods applied in class, teachers, and learners. He believes that during the last 50 years no other issue has ever kept theorists and linguists busy as the issue of teaching grammar in the foreign language classrooms. He continues stating that the whole history of language teaching could be summarized in the claims and counterclaims for and against teaching grammar (p. 14).

Some teachers believe in the misconception that the application of communicative language teaching means not teaching grammar. Larsen-Freeman (1986), and Johnson (1982) suggest that in communicative language teaching use of language for communication or function of the language is given primary importance while structure or form is given a secondary importance (in Breshneh, 2014, p. 439). On the contrary, teaching grammar and structure is essential for the reasons discussed above. Using language for communication does not mean using grammatically incorrect sentences. Majority of the ESL learners need English for employment purposes, writing emails, and presenting reports. It is unacceptable to write sentences with inaccurate grammar and structure. For instance, let us consider the 2 sentences below:

*Let's eat grandpa.*

*Let's eat, grandpa.*

In these 2 sentences the comma has a great impact on the meaning. Hence, knowledge of correct punctuation is necessary for understanding the meaning of a sentence.

As native speakers of Arabic, speaking and listening to Arabic all day, it is difficult for them to think in English. Most students think in Arabic and translate to English. Sometimes the

meaning is not conveyed due to poor translation; other times they write sentences that follow the word order of an Arabic sentence. Another example is the verb tenses. Instruction is needed to teach students the form of each tense in English. It is unacceptable for a college student to write an essay where all the tenses are written wrong. Thus, the integration of ‘form-focused’ exercises with ‘meaning-focused’ experience is highly supported (Breshneh, 2014, p. 440).

In addition to that, implementation of the communicative approach is more difficult in EFL classes (teaching English as a foreign language) (Breshneh, 2014, p. 444). The classroom is the only place where the learners receive input in the target language and in most cases not more than 2 periods per week. Hence, it is very difficult for them to use the foreign language to perform a communicative task.

### **The Role of Error Correction**

According to most research, in communicative language teaching fluency and functions of language are more important than accuracy of form and structure which results in inaccurate sentences (Thompson, 1996, 10). Most teachers who apply the communicative language teaching approach do not correct the errors made by their students. Although they do this to allow students speak without any extra stress, it leads to serious disadvantages (Breshneh, 2014, p. 439). First of all, when errors are ignored and not corrected during an activity, it would be very difficult to correct them later. It is believed that as a result of ignoring inaccuracy constantly, certain grammatical inaccuracies will be “fossilized” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 11). They state that when teachers do not emphasize grammatical accuracy, a permanent “interlanguage” is created in class which satisfies the learners’ communicative purposes while speaking but does not correspond to the language system of the native speakers of the target second language (p. 11).

In addition, errors in spelling and pronunciation lead to misunderstanding. Imagine the word desert (a dry, barren, sandy region) is pronounced /di-zərt/ instead of /dez-ərt/. How would it look like when they misspell ‘peace’ and write ‘piece’ instead? Consequently, prioritizing fluency and communication over grammar, pronunciation, and spelling is considered a drawback of the communicative language teaching approach.

## **University Entrance Exam & Official Exams**

It should be noted that the type of university entrance exam that the students have to take determines the methodology teachers have to apply in class. Most of these exams are objective and based on grammar and reading rather than communication. Consequently, teachers who teach high school classes are often under the pressure of the university entrance exams that their students have to pass for the purpose of achieving the perfect score that allows them the passage to a decent prestigious university (Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013, p. 66). For example, all Emirati high school students have to take the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) to check the students' eligibility to one of the federal higher education institutions. CEPA is a locally developed standardized placement test that is based on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. As a teacher in the United Arab Emirates, I had to teach CEPA for 7 years. During those sessions, I had to change my methodology in class and use pure traditional language teaching methodology to make sure that my students will score higher than 180 and will get a direct entry to the university program and not foundation classes.

Another factor that has influenced my choice of class methodology is the requirements of the Lebanese official exams. In Lebanon, it is rather difficult for grade 9 and grade 12 teachers to apply CLT in their classes since they have a special curriculum to complete which is mainly based on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. As a teacher, my priority has always been training my students how to answer such traditional language questions and guarantee their success.

## **The Most Common Misconceptions of CLT**

The list below includes the most common misconceptions of the communicative language teaching approach.

- a. Excluding teaching grammar-Many linguists and theorists rejected teaching grammar; for them grammar makes language more complex. However, many others have pointed out its necessity for an efficient communication (Thompson, 1996, pp. 10-13, Rama & Agulló, 2012, p. 181). In the early days of CLT, the new syllabi were mainly based on tasks such a booking a hotel room, calling the doctor, or ordering pizza. Those syllabi ignored the fact that learners need the knowledge of grammar or language to perform those tasks (Thompson, 1996, p. 10). Nevertheless, Spada (2007)



argues that the concept of exclusive focus on meaning and the necessity of excluding grammar from teaching language is just a “myth” (Rama & Agulló, 2012, p. 181).

Halliday (1997) strongly believes that CLT does include grammar. According to him,

First, it just dresses up the grammatical structures into communicative functions; although they are not presented explicitly, they are still there.

Second, if we have a functional, Hallidayan concept of grammar, the explicit teaching of functions would still be grammar teaching: according to Halliday, grammar is the study of linguistic forms (wordings) realizing functions or meanings; both wordings and functions are studied by grammar (in Rama & Agulló, 2012, p. 181).

- b. Teaching oral skills only-Teachers had the misconception that the only place learners might need the second/foreign language is outside the classroom-when encountering a native speaker of the second language or when visiting a foreign country. They have always excluded the possibility of using the target language for academic purposes (writing an essay or reading for a course). It is suggested that communication does not occur while talking alone; it is also achieved through reading and writing too. It is true that in student-centred CLT classes students speak with each other more to complete the assigned tasks; however, it should be noted that they do read more as well. They read a wide variety of texts such as articles, books, and stories and most of the time they respond to what they have read through writing assignments/tasks (Thompson, 1996, p. 11).
- c. Employing pair work for role play only-In most CLT classes, pair work is restricted to role play. For example, in a conversation between a hotel manager and a customer, one of the learners acts as the manager and the other as the customer. Nonetheless, even in such a CLT class learners are told what to say as practice rather than improvising the situation. Hence, students need to be given the chance to make choices and use language in a more authentic manner. Instead of adopting role play as the sole practice task, students can practice the language by discussing an answer to a reading comprehension question or solving some grammar activities and discussing their choices (Thompson, 1996, pp. 11-12).
- d. Expecting too much from the teacher-Teachers are usually seen as “super human beings”. Native speaker teachers are always preferred; however, non-native speaker

teachers with high proficiency are allowed to teach as well. They are expected to attend professional development sessions to improve their teaching skills and to learn new techniques. They are nonstop expected to create new materials for their classes and students. (Thompson, 1996, pp. 10-13)

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, to improve the quality of teaching and to get the best results teachers ought to combine the advantages of both approaches and apply in their classrooms. While Hymes (1972) suggests that rules of grammar would be useless without rules of language use, Canale & Swain (1980) suggest that rules of language use would be useless without rules of grammar (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 5). In fact, Prabhu (1990) states that some teachers believe that in teaching “the best approach” has never existed; for them different contexts need different approaches (in Wei, 2011, p. 2); thus, making teaching become more challenging. For Bax (2003), Burns (2013), Kumaravadivelu (2012), and McKay (2011) the best pedagogical approach is attained by blending “local and global considerations” which results in getting the desired local results and the global needs at the same time (in Spicer-Escalante & de Jonge-Kannan, 2014, p. 2442). If teachers teach using the communicative approach blindly and never comment on the rules of sentence structure and word order, if they do not pin point mistakes and inaccuracies at the proper time, students will fail producing grammatically accurate sentences and identifying their mistakes when compared to other sentences. It is advised not to ignore any approach no matter what. Teachers can teach grammar and structure to help learners produce accurate sentences during communication; they can teach how to use language for communication where they can benefit from their knowledge of language rules. Finally, the future is yet unknown. A new day, a new approach, a new language theory is always waiting to be discovered.

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