

Communicative Teaching of a Foreign Language and its Practical Significance

Kambarova Dilorom Yusupovna,
Fergana State University
associate professor
of the department of foreign languages

Annotatsiya

Recently, in the field of learning foreign languages, the concept of “communication” and “communicative approach” in teaching has become especially popular. In foreign methodological literature, this concept is referred to as Communicative language teaching (CLT) or Communicative approach. In a broad sense, these terms denote an approach to teaching a foreign language in which communication, the process of interaction with a speech partner, is both a means and a goal of learning. In this article, we will consider the issues of communicative learning of a foreign language.

Keywords: Communication, communication approach, language structure, social skills, competence, communication, rechemyslitel'naya activity, contact, situation, functionality, content.

This approach to learning appeared in the 70s-80s of the last century as a result of numerous independent research and developments both in Europe and in the United States¹. On the one hand, this happened because with the creation of the European Economic Community, the demand for foreign languages increased significantly, especially in Europe. This increased demand has led to teachers having to change their approach to teaching foreign languages. Traditional methods, such as grammar-translation, meant that students begin to learn a foreign language several years before they have to use it in real life. But these settings were not suitable for adult learners who were busy with work, and for schoolchildren whose learning abilities were not yet sufficiently developed. As a result, it became clear that a higher impact approach was needed for these categories of students.

On the other hand, scientists have made a significant contribution to the development of the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages. For example, in the UK, applied linguistics experts questioned the effectiveness of the situational learning method that was dominant in the country at that time. This happened partly in response to Kholmsky's ideas about the nature of language. Chomsky demonstrated that the then widespread structural theories of language could not explain all the creative diversity of the real communication process². In addition, British linguists Christopher Candlin and Henry Widdowson found that increased attention to the structure of a language does not contribute to its better acquisition. They believed that by mastering grammatical structures, students also needed to develop communication skills and an understanding of language functions.

¹ Savignon, Sandra J. «Communicative language teaching». In Byram, Michael. Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning. [Книга].— London: Routledge, 2000.— стр. 125–129.

² Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, T. S. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001–171 p.

In the United States, linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes developed the concept of communicative competence. This was done in response to Chomsky's concept of the linguistic competence of the ideal native speaker. Communicative competence clarified what it means to “know a language.” In addition to the speaker's mastery of the structures of language, communicative competence also implies the ability to adequately use these structural elements in various communication situations. This idea was cleverly formulated in Hymes's statement that “there are rules of usage, without which the rules of grammar are useless”³. Hymes did not develop a specific definition of the concept of “communicative competence,” but subsequent authors, in particular M. Canale, associated this concept with foreign language teaching.

In the fields of pedagogy, scientific research was also conducted on this topic and the concept of communicative teaching of a foreign language was developed. Russian scientist, founder of the Lipetsk Methodical School, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, E. I. Passov, created his own theory of communicative foreign language education. According to this theory, the concept of communicability is considered from two perspectives: theoretical, i.e. as a category (concept), and practical (empirical), i.e. as technology. Interpreting communication as a technology or strategy of education, E. I. Passov identifies its following characteristics⁴:

- Motivation of any action and any activity of the student;
- The purposefulness of any action and any activity of the Student,
- Personal meaning in all the student’s work.
- Speech and mental activity, i.e. constant involvement in the process of solving communication problems, constant connection of cognitive and communicative thinking.
- An attitude of personal interest, which involves the expression of a personal attitude towards problems and subjects of discussion.
- The connection of communication with various forms of activity - educational and cognitive, social, labor, sports, artistic, everyday.
- Interaction of communicators, i.e. coordination actions, mutual assistance, support for each other, cooperation, trusting cooperation.
- Contact in three levels: emotional, semantic and personal.
- Situationalism, which is expressed in the fact that communication between students and teachers and students among themselves in the process of mastering speech material can always be characterized as a system of relationships generated by the situational positions of the communicants.
- Functionality, meaning that the process of mastering speech material always occurs in the presence of speech functions that have priority over the form of speech units.
- Heuristics as the organization of material and the process of its assimilation, excluding arbitrary memorization and reproduction of what has been memorized.
- Content as an objective characteristic and informativeness as a subjective characteristic of educational materials;
- Problematicism as a way of organizing and presenting educational materials;
- Expressiveness in the use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication.

Only compliance with all the listed parameters and their optimal use gives the right to call the educational process communicative. It is this quality of the model that is the basis of this concept.

³ Hymes, D. H. *Sociolinguistics. Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1972 pp. 269–293.

⁴ Пассов, Е. И. *Коммуникативное иноязычное образование: готовим к диалогу культур [Текст]: Пособие для учителей учреждений, обеспечивающих получение общего среднего образования / Е. И. Пассов; Мн.: Лексис, 2003.— 184с.*

Experts in the field of applied linguistics and education, authors of numerous professional articles and textbooks, J. Richards and T. Rogers, express their point of view on the issue of communicative teaching of a foreign language. They believe that communicative language teaching is an approach rather than a method. They describe the communicative approach to language teaching through the specific principles and goals of language teaching, how learners learn language, the types of tasks and exercises used in teaching, and the roles of teacher and learner in the learning process. According to this approach, the basic principles of training are the following⁵:

- Communicative principle: learning occurs through exercises that stimulate real communication,
- The principle of communicative tasks: learning occurs through exercises in which language is used to perform interesting and meaningful tasks,
- The principle of significance and meaning: learning occurs through language that the learner uses meaningfully. Learning tasks are selected based on how actively they engage the learner in authentic and meaningful communication (as opposed to merely rote use of language patterns).

Commenting on the idea of J. Richards and T. Rogers that the communicative approach to teaching “can be called an approach rather than a method,” Peter Lucantoni, an international consultant in the field of English teacher education and author of a number of textbooks at the University of Cambridge, makes several conclusions⁶:

- The word “approach” opens up wide opportunities for the teacher in teaching a foreign language. That is, thanks to this interpretation, the teacher receives the right to teach a foreign language in the way that best suits the specific learning situation.
- This also means that teachers are free to interpret teaching rules depending on the tasks they are given.
- Teachers can use a wide range of tasks and exercises when teaching a foreign language.
- And most importantly, this should help us avoid situations where students who are “grammatically competent” turn out to be “incompetent in communication”.

The last point means that there are students who have a good command of grammatical material, know all the rules, can easily build grammatical structures, but when it comes to real communication, they have problems. Accordingly, what we need to strive for is to make our students “communicatively competent.” This doesn't mean they have to be “grammatically incompetent”, grammar is, of course, very important. But no less important is the connection between form and meaning, the function of the grammatical structure being studied. Therefore, it is very important that after students become familiar with a certain grammatical construction, learn to transform and combine it, and do a sufficient number of exercises with a given execution mechanism, they also learn to easily and freely use this construction in real communication situations.

One can continue to argue about whether the communicative approach to teaching a foreign language is an “approach” or a “methodology”, but this is a theoretical question. For us, foreign language teachers, the practical aspect of this concept is important. A communicative approach to teaching a foreign language allows you to create a situation of genuine communication in the classroom, fill students’ statements with meaning, and teach them to use authentic remarks characteristic of native speakers in their speech. This task is feasible even in the early stages of learning a foreign language, when students’ knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures is still limited. An experienced

⁵ Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, T. S. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001–171 p.

⁶ Lucantoni, Peter. *Teaching and assessing skills in English as a second language* / Peter Lucantoni.— Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.— 82 p

teacher will be able to create a context for interaction in the classroom where even small phrases will be meaningful and correspond to the situation of real communication.

Another advantage of the communicative approach is that it does not provide strict instructions for teachers regarding the relationship between literacy and fluency in speech. The communicative approach allows us to place emphasis between these aspects and make learning balanced. Sometimes we can actually pay more attention to grammatical rules and structures to the detriment of their communicative value. For example, when studying the rule about the order of adjectives in English. Teachers often give students the task of constructing a phrase with a large number of adjectives (“a strong, orange, Norwegian, canvas tent”). Of course, this sounds very unnatural; in most cases we use two or three adjectives in speech. Another similar example is the topic of direction of movement in English. We invite students to figure out the direction of travel and follow a route that often resembles a maze. In reality, we may need a maximum of three clues in order to find the way to the desired object. But in these cases, excessive attention to the accuracy of the formulation of these structures is justified. We do this so that our students have enough opportunity to practice speech patterns that they can later apply in real life.

Grammatical accuracy will be more important if the teacher wants to achieve clarity in students' statements, correct their speech, and measure the success of their learning. Freer speech practice gives students more choice, can be more vague, and implies less involvement from the teacher. Communicatively-oriented learning implies a personality-oriented approach, the emphasis is shifted to the students themselves, they are given more initiative and freedom in the classroom. But this does not mean that foreign language lessons are spontaneous. They are clearly structured by the teacher, who plays a very important role in the learning process. He does a lot of preparatory work, organizes communication, and gives communicatively significant tasks. Work on verbal literacy serves as the basis for verbal fluency. The communicative approach involves teaching students vocabulary, grammatical structures and functions, as well as communication strategies, so that they can successfully solve the problems they face in the communication process.

Thanks to its universality, flexibility and practicality, the communicative approach remains the focus of attention of both Russian and foreign scientists, continues to develop, and will be a subject for research, improvement and development in the practice of teaching foreign languages in Russia and abroad for a long time.

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