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SPEAKING AND LISTENING PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AT HSC LEVEL

P. M. I. SERAJ¹ and M. A. A. MAMUN²

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to pick up some problems and give some suggestions to learn speaking and listening skills through CLT at Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level. Speaking and listening which are very important to communicate through target language are two of the four language skills. Speaking is a productive skill whereas listening is a receptive one. Without proper practice of these two language skills learning can not be held effectively. Communicative language teaching is the best way to learn target language in which four skills are equally emphasized. Bangladesh has already been introduced CLT at HSC level. But, in 2011 the study finds that learners at this level are still lagged behind and are facing many problems to be communicative in English.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Higher Secondary Certificate, Second Language (L₂), Grammar Translation Method (GTM), English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) and International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

INTRODUCTION

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command of English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. In Bangladesh English has been taught since class 1 as compulsory at any form of educational institutions (Madrasha/Modern) since the very first day of its birth. Before 2000 English has been taught in each and every level of education through Grammar-translation method in which learning is held through translating from first language to second language or vice versa and only reading and writing are emphasized. For the failure of GTM (Grammar Translation Method) making learners interactive and communicative the changes are a must in the field of learning English as L₂ (Second Language). In 2001 the communicative approach has been introduced and developed a textbook by English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) to teach English at HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) level. There is no denying the fact that such a method is highly pragmatic and the entire procedure of teaching and learning is performed on a reciprocal basis, where students are provided with ample opportunity to ventilate their pent-up feelings pertaining to any sort of grammatical or linguistic problems they are confronted with. It is worthwhile to mention that such a method of teaching is prevalent in a good number of developed countries where the students are harvesting its benefit optimally. But a dismal scenario is noticed in Bangladesh in this regard as the progress achieved so far is not up to the level of satisfaction and there are a variety of factors, which stand in the way of its implementation. The main cause of getting up to mark is that we totally ignore practicing speaking and listening skills in classroom. To be communicative in a target language (TL) there is no other way to proper speaking and listening practice. Due to time and resource constraints research has been conducted only among the students and teachers of Sylhet division. It mainly focuses the present conditions of speaking and listening skill practice in English through CLT in classroom at HSC level. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a method based that the target of language teaching and learning is effective communication. The emphasis is on the ability to communicate rather than to acquire or display knowledge. This trend represents a shift away from a linguistic approach to a more social or cultural orientation both in understanding and teaching language.

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It can be said that the aim of CLT is to help learners to attain a reasonable level of communicative competence which is the ability to use language interactively.

According to Diane (2004) the goal of CLT is to enable students to communicate in the target language. To do this, students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. In his role, one of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. Whereas students are communicators and they are actively engaged in negotiating meaning- in trying to make them understood and in understanding others. Richards *et al.* (2002) reported that CLT combines innovative learning tasks and activities with conventional ones in its syllabus. They include:

Translation: A learner utters a message or meaning he or she wants to express, the teacher translates it into the target language and the learner repeats the teacher's translation.

Group work: learners may engage in various group tasks such as small group discussion of a topic, preparing a conversation, preparing a summary of a topic for presentation to another group, preparing story that will be presented to the teachers and to the rest of class.

Recording: Students record conversations in the target language.

Transcription: students transcribe utterances and conversations they have recorded for practice and analysis of linguistic forms.

Analysis: Students analysis and study transcriptions of target language sentences in order to focus on particular lexical usage or on the application of particular grammar rules.

Reflection and observation: Student reflect and report on their experiences of the class, as a class or a group.

Listening: Students listen to a monologue by the teacher involves elements they might have elicited or overheard in class interactions.

Free conversation: Students engage in free conversation with the teachers or with the other learners.

In the book *Materials and Methods in ELT*, McDonough and Christopher (1998) reported that different types of activities to promote speaking and listening skills. For speaking they mention communication games, problem solving and role play. They divide listening activities into four categories:

Pre-listening activities

- A short reading passage on a similar topic
- Predicting content from the title
- Reading through comprehension questions in advance
- Commenting on a picture or photograph

Listening activities

- Putting pictures in a correct sequence
- Following directions on a map
- Completing a grid, timetable, chart of information
- Answering true/false or multiple choice questions
- Constructing a coherent set of notes
- Filling gaps with missing words
- Picking out particular facts

Language material

- Attending a lecture
- Following instructions or directions

- Listening to an interview or story or to people describing their jobPost listening activities:
- Using notes made while listening to write a summary
- Reading a related text
- Doing a role play
- Studying new grammatical structures
- Practicing pronunciation

According to (Ur Penny, 2003) divides listening activities into four categories which are

No overt response: Under this category listening can be held telling stories singing songs and entertaining students through videos or films to motivate students to understand without the need for any further task.

Short response: This activity includes obeying instructions, ticking off, detecting mistakes, cloze and guessing definition, skimming and scanning.

Longer response: This activity includes answering questions, note-taking, paraphrasing and translating, summarizing and long gap filling.

Extended response: It includes problem-solving and interpretation.

Some activities of speaking are mentioned such as describing pictures, picture differences, things in common, shopping list and solving problems.

The objectives of the study are: i. to view the syllabus and learning activities of CLT for teaching speaking and listening at HSC level, ii. to find out the problems in executing the syllabus for teaching listening and speaking at HSC level, iii. to expose whether every institutions have the facilities to teach four skills simultaneously in the class room, iv. to come across the problems of a teacher in class room, v. to find out whether the necessary instruments are available to implement this method at HSC level and vi. to identify the measures that can be taken to overcome the difficulties and barriers for learning English communicatively.

METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted in Sylhet Division in 2011 based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected by observing closely English language teaching classrooms, discussed with teachers, students and educationists who shared their valued opinions regarding this issue. The data were collected of the students of HSC at different colleges in Sylhet through the interview schedule. Researchers have used convenience sampling procedure. Books and modern websites have extensively been used. Existing English syllabus of HSC have been analyzed. The information has been analyzed to asses the present learning situations in Bangladesh and its impact on Bangladeshi learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The HSC English textbook “English for Today” has designed on the basis of learning English at classroom through CLT. According to the preface of the book, we have come to the point that the book is based on the principles of learning four language skills in an interactive mode underlies the communicative approach to language learning (Shahidul, 2010). For serving this purpose at the end of lessons of some units there is the focus of speaking and listening along with other skills. The focus of speaking is mentioned in the following units; unit 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,15,16,17,18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and listening is in the unit 6,7,12, 10, 13, 14, 18, 19 among twenty four units of the book. Considering the importance of listening and speaking in English language learning and to find out the status of speaking and listening in language curriculum at HSC level a interview schedule (Appendix) has been served among the students who are following communicative approach at HSC level at different institutes of Sylhet division. In response to the first question 90% students answered

that they do not practice speaking skill at all, 8% practice sometimes and 2% practice always inside the classroom and outside the classroom. In response to the second question 25% students informed that their teachers always use English as their instructional medium, 55 % use sometimes and 20% don't use at all in the classroom. In answer to the third question 95% students answered that they do not practice listening activities at all, 5% practice sometimes and no one practices always inside the classroom and outside the classroom. In response to the fourth question 85% students answered that they do not have any scope to practice listening skill at all, 10% practice sometimes and 5% practice always inside the classroom and outside the classroom. In response to the fifth question all students replied that as there is no scope to practice listening they do not do it at all with their teachers in the classroom. In response to the sixth question 70% students answered that their teacher sometimes encourage them to speak in English in the classroom , 25% practice not at all and 5% practice always inside the classroom and outside the classroom. In response to the seventh question 95% students tell that they do not understand English as their instructional medium and 5% student say that they can sometimes understand it. In response to the eighth question all the students inform that they don not have any form of speaking and listening test in the classroom. In response to the ninth question all the students inform that they do not have language laboratory at all but the feel it in their campus. In answer to the tenth question all the students answered that they can communicate by writing but they do not it orally at all. In response to the eleventh question 35% student answer that their teachers are always friendly, 55% are sometimes and 10% are not at all inside the classroom and outside the classroom.

Now a day English is taught at HSC through communicative approach in which four skills simultaneously get the same importance. But the reality is that learners at this level do same as they did earlier. Speaking and listening activities are totally absent in the classroom. Most of the colleges do not have facilities to practice speaking and listening skills. Teachers are not trained enough to teach four skills simultaneously. They still are following grammar-translation method to cover communicative syllabus. They do not speak in English and thus they dare not use English as the medium of communication. They are expert of dictation of only and this is their only tool to teach. Some teachers are found to be competent to use English as the medium of communication but they cannot go for extra care for speaking and listening. Though some of them are interested to do that, but they face some problems like big classroom or shortened time or lack of proper instruments in their institutions. Moreover, the students do not get a support from surroundings. In the syllabus of HSC level there is no specific task for listening and speaking activities. Reading and writing are strongly maintained in the classroom. In any form of examinations there is no test of speaking and listening. They appear in their final examination for 200 marks only on reading and writing. That's why students do not feel any motivation to practice speaking and listening. Regarding this matter the aim of CLT is totally failed to make students interactive and communicative. In the classroom there are no proper facilities to practice speaking and listening activities. Most of the classroom is big in size containing 80 to 160 students. This is a great problem to get tranquil setting for language teaching. Moreover students do not have scope to practice them practically. Language lab facilities are totally absent in many institutions. Though some institutions provide some equipments and modern classroom setting, they remain useless because of lack of competence of teachers using them. Students can not understand English as their medium of instruction solely for their lack of knowledge of proper pronunciation. Even they can not understand English to English pronunciation from English to English dictionary. They are not familiar with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. They do not have scope to practice transcription.

Recommendation

- The HSC curriculum should be made on the basis of full-fledged syllabus of communicative approach. Text should be taken from authentic text in which speaking and listening are equally valued along with reading and writing. More speaking and listening activities should be included in the syllabus practiced much. In the examination there should be speaking and

listening test. To learn proper pronunciation the task on IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols should be included in the syllabus as students can study individual or group proper pronunciation from English to English dictionary.

- The government should take some necessary measures to provide a number of trained teachers who will be able to follow Communicative Language Teaching properly. The communicative approach should be known to teachers in details. Government should emphasis on teacher's different types of short term, long term, in service or pre-service training program on CLT approach and teachers must be trained how to teach every single topic in the syllabus. Moreover, there should be a monitoring group who monitors the teaching activities. Government should also supply teaching aids such as projector, notebook, CD, DVD etc. appropriate for CLT.
- The size of class should be made small (not more than 40) as students and teachers make an interactive class. The classroom should be built with the facilities of modern electric equipments such as sound systems, whiteboard etc. In a word the environment of classroom must be in favor of CLT. Duration of class should be extended. For speaking and listening skill, extra classes should be taken. Teachers should be friendly in the class and outside the class. They should think that they are facilitators not their guide.

CONCLUSION

The study and analysis clearly indicates that the techniques and procedures of teaching English through CLT at HSC level in our country are not properly and wholly practiced. Most of our teachers are still using the techniques and procedures of traditional method. They are extensively using Bengali as their medium of instruction and interaction in the classroom. They are teaching grammar deductively rather making students communicative in English. Moreover all teachers are not trained in four skills. They are bound in using the traditional method mainly because of their lack of training in the principles and techniques of CLT. Their lack of efficiency in using language which is basic requirements for CLT teacher also compels them to use the traditional model. Thus, nor is traditional or communicative educational system used wholly in our country. Our teachers feel easier on the traditional method, though our syllabus is based on communicative purpose. In spite of these in our examination there must include speaking and listening test as learners feel to practice as well as develop our class room environment with modern amenities. If the lacks of teachers, of authority and also of equipments like-audio visual aid are solved, learning can bring a language to life and appeal directly to develop the sense of organs of the learners and others are improved, only then the purpose of communicative syllabus will be achieved and learners will be socially communicative to use English as their medium of communication.

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Appendix

Data were collection through the interview schedule

SL No.	Question	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
1.	Do you practice speaking activities in Classroom?	90%	8%	2%
2.	Do your teachers speak in English in classroom?	20%	55%	25%
3.	Do you practice listening activities in and outside the Classroom?	95%	5%	Nil
4.	Do you have scope to listen English in and outside the classroom?	85%	10%	5%
5.	Do your teachers practice you listening?	100%	Nil	Nil
6.	Do your teachers ask you to speak in English?	25%	70%	5%
7.	Can you understand instructions in English?	95%	5%	Nil
8.	Did you face any speaking or listening test?	100%	Nil	Nil
9.	Do you have language laboratory?	100%	Nil	Nil
10.	Can you communicate orally in English?	100%	Nil	Nil
11.	Are your teachers friendly in the classroom?	10%	55%	35%