



## Communicative Approach in Foreign Language Teaching: Advantages and Limitations

Shehla Salmanova

Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University

<https://doi.org/10.69760/egille.250009>

### Abstract

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has transformed foreign language education by prioritizing fluency, interaction, and real-world communication over rote memorization and grammar drills. This method promotes student-centered learning, task-based instruction, and the use of authentic materials, making language acquisition more engaging and effective. However, despite its advantages, CLT faces several challenges, including limited emphasis on grammatical accuracy, difficulties in assessment, and resistance in non-native English-speaking contexts. Traditional grammar-based testing often fails to measure communicative competence, highlighting the need for more effective assessment models. Additionally, teacher preparedness and classroom management remain barriers to CLT's full implementation, especially in large class settings and regions where traditional teaching methods dominate. Future developments in blended learning, adaptive teaching strategies, and AI-driven assessment tools could help bridge the gap between fluency and linguistic accuracy, ensuring that learners develop both communication skills and structural competence. This paper explores the advantages and limitations of CLT, discussing potential solutions for integrating communicative approaches with structured learning methodologies to create a balanced and effective language teaching framework.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching, fluency, task-based instruction, language assessment, foreign language education

### 1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a widely recognized approach in foreign language education that prioritizes meaningful communication and interaction over rote memorization and grammar drills. Unlike traditional methods that emphasize grammatical accuracy, CLT encourages students to develop fluency, pragmatic competence, and real-world language skills through task-based activities and authentic interactions (Richards, 2005). The approach views language as a tool for communication rather than merely a set of rules, making it particularly effective for enhancing communicative competence in second-language learners.

The roots of CLT can be traced back to the 1970s, when linguists and educators began to question structural and grammar-translation methods, which primarily focused on accuracy rather than communication. The influence of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis played a significant role in shaping the communicative approach, as researchers such as Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that effective language use involves



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Euro-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language Education  
Vilnius, Lithuania

not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence. This shift marked a departure from traditional drill-based learning towards a learner-centered, interaction-driven methodology that better prepares students for real-life language use.

While CLT offers numerous advantages, including improved fluency, increased student engagement, and cultural awareness, it is not without its challenges. Critics argue that the focus on communication often comes at the expense of grammatical accuracy, making it difficult for learners to develop structured proficiency in writing and formal language use (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Additionally, assessing communicative competence remains a complex issue, as standardized language tests often fail to capture authentic language use. Moreover, implementing CLT in non-native English-speaking countries can be challenging due to educational traditions, teacher preparedness, and institutional constraints (Yu, 2001). This article explores the advantages and limitations of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching, offering insights into its effectiveness, challenges, and future directions.

## 2. The Advantages of the Communicative Approach

### *Enhancing Language Fluency and Real-World Communication*

One of the primary advantages of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is its ability to improve students' fluency and real-world communication skills. Unlike traditional language teaching methods that focus heavily on grammar rules and memorization, CLT emphasizes interaction and practical language use. This approach encourages students to engage in conversations, express their ideas, and respond to real-life situations, which helps them develop confidence in their speaking abilities (Savignon, 1987).

A key feature of CLT is its focus on meaningful communication rather than mechanical language exercises. Instead of practicing isolated sentences, students participate in discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving activities that require them to use the language in context. This communicative focus enhances their ability to navigate social interactions, negotiate meaning, and adjust their speech according to the situation. As a result, learners develop not only grammatical competence but also pragmatic and discourse competence, which are essential for effective communication (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Moreover, studies have shown that CLT significantly improves fluency, as students are exposed to authentic conversations and interactive tasks. By reducing the fear of making mistakes and shifting the focus to meaning rather than accuracy, this approach creates a more engaging and motivating learning environment. Research indicates that students trained under communicative methods demonstrate higher levels of spontaneous speech production and better comprehension in real-life communication scenarios (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). Therefore, CLT plays a crucial role in preparing language learners for real-world interactions, making it a highly effective approach in foreign language education.

### *Student-Centered Learning and Engagement*

A defining characteristic of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is its learner-centered nature, which shifts the focus from the teacher as the primary source of knowledge to the students as active participants in their own learning. Unlike traditional teacher-fronted methods, CLT encourages student autonomy, interaction, and engagement, fostering a learning environment where students take responsibility for their language development. By emphasizing real-world communication tasks, this approach helps learners develop confidence and motivation in using the target language in practical situations (Richards, 2005).



CLT promotes collaborative learning through activities such as pair work, group discussions, and role-playing, which encourage students to engage with their peers in meaningful conversations. These communicative tasks require learners to exchange information, negotiate meaning, and solve problems together, helping them develop not only linguistic competence but also social and cognitive skills. Research suggests that collaborative learning environments lead to greater student motivation and improved retention of new vocabulary and grammatical structures, as learners actively construct knowledge rather than passively receiving it (Dos Santos, 2020).

Additionally, the interactive nature of CLT helps reduce anxiety in language learning, as students practice speaking in a supportive and engaging atmosphere. When learners work in pairs or small groups, they feel less pressured compared to speaking in front of the whole class, which increases their willingness to take risks and experiment with the language. This sense of security and active participation enhances both language fluency and confidence, making CLT an effective approach for promoting student-centered learning in foreign language education (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

### *Task-Based Learning and Authentic Materials*

One of the key strengths of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is its emphasis on task-based learning and the use of authentic materials to enhance language acquisition. Unlike traditional methods that rely on scripted dialogues and artificial exercises, CLT incorporates real-world texts, multimedia content, and interactive tasks that reflect everyday language use. Authentic materials, such as newspaper articles, podcasts, interviews, and real-life conversations, expose learners to the natural rhythms, vocabulary, and cultural nuances of the target language. This approach increases motivation and engagement, as students see the immediate relevance of what they are learning to real-world communication (Brandl, 2008).

Task-based instruction in CLT also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as students must navigate language challenges through meaningful interaction. Rather than passively absorbing grammar rules, learners participate in role-playing activities, debates, simulations, and project-based tasks that require them to analyze, synthesize, and apply their linguistic knowledge in dynamic contexts. For example, a task that requires students to plan a trip, negotiate a business deal, or conduct a survey in the target language pushes them to think strategically and use the language in an authentic and purposeful way (Lee & VanPatten, 1995).

Furthermore, task-based learning helps students develop autonomous learning strategies, as they must adapt to different linguistic and situational demands. Research indicates that learners engaged in interactive, task-driven environments demonstrate higher retention rates, increased language flexibility, and improved problem-solving skills compared to those following traditional grammar-based instruction (Hiep, 2007). By integrating real-world tasks and authentic materials, CLT provides students with the tools and confidence necessary to communicate effectively in diverse settings, making it a highly effective approach in foreign language education.

### *Cultural Competence and Pragmatic Awareness*

One of the essential aspects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is its role in developing intercultural communication skills. Language is not just a set of grammatical structures; it is deeply connected to culture, social norms, and pragmatic conventions. CLT emphasizes real-world communication, which includes understanding the cultural context in which language is used. Through authentic dialogues, role-plays, and exposure to diverse communicative situations, students learn how to



interpret meaning beyond literal translations and interact appropriately in different cultural settings (Savignon, 2007).

A major advantage of CLT is that it encourages students to develop pragmatic awareness, helping them use language in ways that are socially and culturally appropriate. For instance, learners may know how to form a grammatically correct sentence, but without pragmatic competence, they might struggle with tone, politeness levels, or indirect expressions. CLT addresses this by integrating situational dialogues, cross-cultural discussions, and exposure to native speakers, ensuring that students not only speak accurately but also appropriately in various communication contexts (Hiep, 2007).

Understanding social and cultural contexts is crucial for avoiding miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings, especially in an era of global connectivity. CLT-based instruction often includes media resources, real-life case studies, and intercultural exchange activities, allowing students to experience language as it is used in different cultures. Research has shown that learners exposed to CLT develop better adaptability and confidence in cross-cultural communication compared to those following rigid, grammar-centered curricula (Yu, 2001). By fostering cultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency, CLT ensures that learners are better prepared to engage effectively in international and multilingual environments.

### 3. Limitations and Challenges of the Communicative Approach

#### *Lack of Emphasis on Grammar and Accuracy*

One of the most common criticisms of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is that it prioritizes fluency over grammatical accuracy, potentially leading to learners who can communicate effectively but with persistent structural errors. Critics argue that while CLT enhances spontaneous communication, it does not provide enough explicit grammar instruction, which is essential for developing a strong foundation in language structure. As a result, students may develop confidence in speaking but struggle with accuracy in formal writing and academic settings (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

The challenge lies in balancing communicative competence with linguistic correctness. While real-world interaction is crucial, an overemphasis on fluency without reinforcing grammar rules may result in fossilized errors—mistakes that become ingrained in learners' language use over time. This issue is particularly problematic in academic and professional settings, where precise language use is expected. Some researchers suggest that a hybrid approach, which integrates explicit grammar instruction alongside communicative activities, may provide a more balanced method for developing both accuracy and fluency (Dörnyei, 2009).

Furthermore, in some educational systems where standardized testing plays a significant role, students who learn through CLT may find it difficult to meet traditional grammar-based assessment criteria. Since many exams still emphasize syntax, vocabulary, and written accuracy, learners trained solely in communicative methods may underperform in structured assessments (Yu, 2001). Therefore, while CLT is highly effective in fostering communication skills, it must be supplemented with structured grammar practice to ensure that students gain both communicative confidence and linguistic precision.

#### Difficulties in Assessment and Standardized Testing

One of the major challenges of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is the difficulty of assessing communicative competence objectively. Traditional language assessments focus primarily on



grammar accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension, which can be measured through standardized testing methods such as multiple-choice questions and fill-in-the-blank exercises. However, communicative competence is a multidimensional skill that includes fluency, interaction, pragmatics, and contextual appropriateness, making it more complex to evaluate using conventional exams (Savignon, 2007).

A key limitation of CLT is the mismatch between traditional grammar-based exams and performance-based evaluations. Many standardized tests, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries, still emphasize rote memorization and written accuracy, which does not align with the core principles of CLT. In contrast, communicative-based assessments, such as oral interviews, role-plays, and situational dialogues, provide a more accurate measure of language proficiency in real-life contexts. However, these assessments require trained evaluators, more time, and subjective judgment, making them more challenging to implement on a large scale (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Another issue is that many educational institutions continue to prioritize test scores over communicative ability, leading to resistance in fully adopting CLT. Since standardized tests often dictate teaching methodologies, some educators feel pressured to return to traditional grammar-focused instruction to help students achieve higher test results (Yu, 2001). This creates a dilemma for teachers who support CLT but must prepare students for exams that do not measure communicative competence effectively. To bridge this gap, some researchers advocate for the development of integrated assessment models that combine both structured testing and communicative performance evaluations, ensuring that learners are assessed fairly on all aspects of language proficiency (Richards, 2005).

#### *Classroom Management and Teacher Preparedness*

The successful implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) largely depends on well-trained teachers who can effectively apply its principles in the classroom. Unlike traditional grammar-based methods, which follow structured lesson plans and predictable exercises, CLT requires teachers to facilitate dynamic, student-centered learning environments where interaction, discussion, and real-life communication are prioritized. However, many teachers, particularly in non-native English-speaking countries, lack adequate training in communicative methodologies, making it difficult to transition from traditional instruction to learner-centered approaches (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

One of the major challenges teachers face in CLT classrooms is managing large class sizes while ensuring meaningful interaction among students. Since CLT relies on pair work, group discussions, and interactive tasks, maintaining classroom discipline and ensuring that all students remain engaged can be difficult, especially in overcrowded settings. In large classes, not all students have equal opportunities to participate, and teachers may struggle to provide individualized feedback on communicative performance. This often results in some students dominating discussions while others remain passive, reducing the overall effectiveness of the approach (Dos Santos, 2020).

Additionally, teachers implementing CLT must be able to adapt lesson plans, manage time effectively, and assess communicative competence in real-time. Many educators report feeling unprepared to handle the flexibility required by CLT, particularly when balancing fluency-focused activities with grammar instruction. Without proper training and institutional support, teachers may revert to traditional teaching methods that emphasize structured drills and grammar exercises rather than communicative tasks (Yu, 2001). To address these challenges, ongoing professional development programs, teacher training workshops, and curriculum adjustments are necessary to equip educators with the skills and confidence to



effectively manage CLT classrooms while maintaining a balance between interaction, accuracy, and engagement (Richards, 2005).

#### *Contextual Challenges in Non-Native English-Speaking Countries*

The implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in non-native English-speaking countries often faces significant resistance due to deeply rooted traditional teaching practices. Many educational systems, particularly in Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Europe, have historically emphasized grammar-translation and rote memorization methods, where language learning is viewed as the mastery of rules rather than a communicative skill. As a result, both educators and students may struggle to adapt to CLT, which prioritizes fluency, interaction, and real-world language use over structural accuracy (Yu, 2001).

One of the key barriers to CLT adoption is the influence of national educational policies and assessment standards. In many countries, high-stakes examinations continue to test students primarily on grammar, vocabulary, and written comprehension, rather than spoken communication. Since students' academic success and future job opportunities often depend on standardized test results, teachers feel pressured to focus on exam preparation rather than communicative competence. This misalignment between testing systems and CLT principles discourages schools from fully implementing communicative teaching methods (Savignon, 2007).

Additionally, teacher training and student expectations play a crucial role in determining the success of CLT in non-native English-speaking environments. Many teachers in such contexts have been trained using traditional, teacher-centered methodologies and may lack the confidence or experience needed to facilitate communicative lessons. Moreover, students who are accustomed to passive learning approaches may initially feel uncomfortable with CLT, as it requires them to take an active role in discussions, group work, and interactive tasks. Some learners even believe that grammar-based instruction is the only effective way to learn a language, leading to resistance against communicative activities (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

To overcome these challenges, curriculum designers, policymakers, and educators must work together to create a balanced approach that integrates communicative elements alongside structured language instruction. Providing teacher training programs, revising assessment methods, and gradually introducing CLT principles into the curriculum can help bridge the gap between traditional and communicative approaches, making language learning both effective and culturally adaptable (Richards, 2005).

#### **4. Future Perspectives on Communicative Language Teaching**

##### *Integrating CLT with Other Teaching Approaches*

As language education continues to evolve, many researchers and educators advocate for a balanced approach that integrates Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with explicit grammar instruction. While CLT has proven effective in developing fluency, interaction skills, and real-world communication abilities, its lack of focus on linguistic accuracy remains a concern. To address this limitation, hybrid teaching models that combine task-based learning, structured grammar exercises, and communicative activities have gained popularity. This integration ensures that students develop both communicative competence and grammatical precision, making them more proficient in both spoken and written language (Richards, 2005).





One notable framework that supports this balanced approach is Dörnyei's (2009) Principled Communicative Approach (PCA). Unlike traditional CLT, which sometimes neglects explicit grammar instruction, PCA emphasizes the importance of systematic language input alongside communicative interaction. This approach suggests that effective language teaching should incorporate focused grammar practice, controlled fluency-building exercises, and real-life communicative tasks, ensuring that students develop linguistic accuracy without sacrificing spontaneity and engagement. By combining structured teaching with communicative techniques, PCA addresses CLT's limitations while maintaining its strengths (Dörnyei, 2009).

Furthermore, integrating blended learning methods—such as incorporating digital tools, online exercises, and flipped classroom models—can further enhance CLT's effectiveness. These approaches allow students to engage in self-paced grammar study outside the classroom, freeing up more time for interactive communication during lessons. Research suggests that students who receive explicit grammar instruction alongside CLT-based practice tend to achieve higher levels of accuracy and confidence in language use compared to those who follow strictly communicative methods (Hiep, 2007).

Moving forward, the future of CLT lies in adopting flexible, multi-dimensional teaching approaches that cater to different learning styles, linguistic needs, and assessment demands. By striking a balance between fluency and accuracy, communication and structure, educators can ensure that students acquire a well-rounded linguistic foundation, making them more effective and confident language users in both academic and real-world settings.

#### *Technology and the Evolution of CLT*

The integration of technology in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has significantly transformed how students acquire and practice foreign languages. Digital tools, online collaboration platforms, and virtual exchange programs have expanded opportunities for authentic communication, allowing learners to interact with native speakers, engage in real-time discussions, and receive instant feedback. With advancements in video conferencing, discussion forums, and AI-powered language assistants, students can now practice communication beyond the traditional classroom, fostering a more immersive and interactive learning experience (Warschauer & Meskill, 2013).

One of the key benefits of incorporating technology into CLT is the ability to simulate real-world communicative situations. For instance, virtual exchange programs allow students from different countries to collaborate on projects, discuss cultural topics, and practice the target language in authentic settings. These interactions bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life communication, making language acquisition more meaningful and contextually relevant. Additionally, online platforms such as language learning apps, virtual classrooms, and AI-driven chatbots provide learners with continuous opportunities to engage in task-based communicative activities, reinforcing fluency and confidence (Singhal, 1997).

Furthermore, blended learning and flipped classrooms have enhanced the communicative potential of CLT. In a flipped classroom model, students study grammar rules, vocabulary, and theoretical concepts through pre-recorded lectures, interactive modules, or online exercises before attending class. This approach frees up classroom time for communicative practice, allowing teachers to focus on discussion-based activities, role-playing, and real-time collaboration. Research suggests that students in blended learning environments demonstrate higher engagement and improved speaking proficiency, as they have more opportunities to actively use the language in meaningful ways (Brandl, 2008).



As technology continues to evolve, its role in enhancing communicative competence will only expand. By integrating digital resources, virtual collaboration tools, and interactive platforms, educators can strengthen the effectiveness of CLT, ensuring that students gain both linguistic proficiency and practical communication skills in an increasingly globalized world.

### *Developing Standardized Communicative Assessment Tools*

One of the ongoing challenges in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the lack of standardized assessment tools that effectively measure fluency, interaction, and pragmatic competence. Traditional language assessments have primarily focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, often neglecting real-world communicative ability. As CLT continues to evolve, future assessment models must prioritize performance-based evaluations that capture a learner's ability to engage in meaningful conversations, respond appropriately in social contexts, and adapt language use according to situational demands (Savignon, 2007).

A key development in communicative assessment is the use of task-based performance tests, where learners are evaluated based on their ability to complete communicative tasks in realistic scenarios. Unlike traditional multiple-choice exams, these assessments focus on interactional competence, including turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and the appropriate use of discourse strategies. Researchers advocate for the integration of role-plays, interviews, and real-time discussions as part of standardized testing, ensuring that students are evaluated based on their actual communicative ability rather than their memorization of grammatical structures (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Additionally, the role of AI and adaptive learning technologies is expected to transform communicative assessment in the coming years. AI-powered language assessment tools can analyze spoken and written responses, providing instant feedback on fluency, pronunciation, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. These technologies, combined with natural language processing (NLP) algorithms, can track a learner's progress over time and offer personalized recommendations for improvement. AI-driven speaking assessment platforms, such as automated conversation evaluators and virtual tutors, can also simulate real-life conversations, ensuring that assessments align with CLT's core principles of interaction and meaningful communication (Warschauer & Meskill, 2013).

As technology-driven assessment methods become more sophisticated, the future of CLT will rely on comprehensive evaluation models that integrate both traditional linguistic measures and communicative performance metrics. By developing standardized assessment tools that accurately measure fluency, interaction, and pragmatic competence, educators can ensure that language learners are not only proficient in grammatical structures but also capable of effective communication in real-world settings.

### **Conclusion**

The Communicative Approach (CLT) has revolutionized foreign language teaching by shifting the focus from rote memorization and grammar drills to fluency, interaction, and meaningful communication. By emphasizing real-world language use, student-centered learning, and task-based instruction, CLT has proven to be an effective method for developing linguistic confidence and pragmatic competence. However, despite its strengths, the approach faces several challenges, particularly in balancing fluency with grammatical accuracy, assessing communicative competence objectively, and adapting to different educational contexts. Many critics argue that CLT's lack of emphasis on formal grammar instruction can lead to fossilized errors, making it necessary to integrate explicit linguistic input within communicative





tasks. Furthermore, the difficulty of assessing communicative ability through standardized tests remains a barrier to widespread adoption, requiring new performance-based evaluation models that accurately measure fluency, interaction, and pragmatic skills. Additionally, in non-native English-speaking countries, the successful implementation of CLT is often hindered by traditional educational policies, teacher training limitations, and resistance to change, highlighting the need for institutional support and gradual curriculum modifications. Moving forward, a balanced teaching approach that incorporates structured grammar instruction, task-based learning, technology-enhanced communication, and standardized communicative assessments is essential to maximizing the effectiveness of CLT. By combining the strengths of traditional and communicative methods, educators can ensure that language learners develop both fluency and accuracy, preparing them for academic, professional, and real-world language use in an increasingly globalized society.

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Received: 01.02.2025

Revised: 05.02.2025

Accepted: 09.02.2025

Published: 15.02.2025



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Euro-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language Education  
Vilnius, Lithuania