CHAPTER I

Communicative Approach: An Introduction

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1.0   Introduction :

Communicative Approach draws inspiration from current ideas about language and has resulted from the conjunction of need to teach language as a social tool with the availability of new ideas about the nature of language as social tool.   Communicative Approach gives preference to equipping learners with the ability to communicate. It widens the scope of the goal and of the range of appropriate activities. It requires to revaluate all ideas and techniques in terms of wider conception of communication and learning. In this Chapter, Communicate Approach is discussed in relation with its nature, its developments, its application to syllabus design and language teaching, etc..

1.1   Nature of Communicative Approach :

The original motivation for adopting Communicative Approach in the early seventies was remedial, an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of existing structural syllabus, materials and methods. As Widdowson, for example,   put   it   in   his   article   'The   teaching   of   English   as Communcation'(1972) : 'The problem is that students and especially students in developing countries who have received several years of formal English teaching frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language, and to understand its use, in normal communication, whether in spoken or written mode.'

The goal of Communicative Approach is acquisition of communicative competence and the development of communication skills. Hymes coined the term 'communicative competence'. He used this term in contrast to Chomsky's notion of 'linguistic competence'.   Linguistic

competence means the native speaker's ability to produce and understand the grammatically correct sentences of his/her language. Communicative competence means the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences. According to Hymes (1972:281), a person who acquires the communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language with respect to :

i.   Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;

ii.   Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;

iii. Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;

iv.   The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

Howatt (1984: 279) describes two versions of Communicative Approach – a 'strong' version and a 'weak' version. According to him, the weak version stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language teaching. In order to avoid the charge that communicative activities are merely sideshows, efforts are made to ensure that they relate to the purpose of the course as specified in the syllabus, hence the importance of proposals to include semantic as well as purely structural features in a syllabus design. The strong version of communicative teaching advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but rather of stimulating the development of the language system itself. He describes the weaker version as 'learning to use' English and the stronger version as 'using English to teach it'.

In short, Communicative Approach is based on and responds to the learners' communication needs. Its aim is to develop communicative competence.

1.2 Development of Communicative Approach :

The Communicative philosophy of the seventies encouraged three different approaches to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), though they shared many common principles. One emphasized a functionalist interpretation of 'the way English is used'. The second drew on the notional rather than functional strand in the new approach with categories such as dimension, measurement and so on. The third type took different starting point, not in language use but rather in the communicative activities and skills, which the learner would have to perform in his studies, his work or whatever he was preparing for. This approach stressed the importance of training useful communicative strategies (for reading, listening to lectures etc.) rather than analyzing the detailed linguistic features of representative texts.

The central concern of many linguists during and before the early fifties was linguistic structure. The goal of structural linguistics was to develop a system of identifying and classifying the structures occurring in a given language.   Little or no consideration was given to how the structures might be used. Then, the change began. And, it is this change that provides the linguistic background to communicative language teaching. In 1970, Campbell and Wales argued that 'if we wish to understand language acquisition, then studies of how the child learns the grammatical and phonological systems, are not enough. We have to consider how the child acquires systemic competence and how it learns to communicate i.e., how it develops communicative competence. The theme of 'appropriateness' is treated by Hymes in his article entitled "On Communicative Competence". The articles by Campbell and Wales and Hymes exemplify a shift which is taking place within linguistics. It is a shift away from the study of language seen purely as a system, away from the study of 'the possible'. It is a shift towards the study of language as communication, towards the study of (among

other factors) 'the appropriate'. This shift in emphasis provides the theoretical background to the Communicative Approach.

An important step was taken in 1966 with the decision to set·up a materials development project at the University of Leeds Institute of Education, in Britain to produce a course of English for immigrant children of primary school age. It was funded by the Schools Council. It began work in 1966 and the materials, Scope, Stage 1, were published in 1969, with two further stages appearing in 1972. *Scope* foreshadowed one of the principal themes of the Communicative Approach. The emphasis was laid on the social and cultural background of the children in the teacher's support materials.

In 1971, Council of Europe Symposium was held in Switzerland which is known as 'The Threshold Level' or 'T-Level'. As a result of this three position papers were commissioned. The first set out a model of the archetypal adult learner of foreign languages in Europe in terms of and analysis of communicative needs. It appeared in the following year as ' A model for the definition of language needs of adults' by Rene Richterich. It is divided into two sections, language needs and learning needs. It provided the starting point for a more elaborate version by John Munby in *Communicative Syllabus Design* in 1978. The second and third papers, by J.A. Van-Ek (1973) and D.A. Wilkins,(1972) both address themselves to the same basic issue : the specification of a syllabus for the fundamental 'common core' which all learners would be expected to acquire before moving to their specific professional or other interests. Widdowson's *Teaching English as Communication* came in 1972. The conference on 'The Communicative Teaching of English' was organized by C. N. Candlin in 1973. Widdowson's *Teaching Language as Communication* appeared in 1978. The Bangalore Project began in 1979. It was directed by N.S. Prabhu. The basic assumption of the project is that 'form is best learnt when the learner's attention is on meaning'. All these events contributed to the development of Communicative Approach. Along with these events Wilkin's *Notional Syllabuses* (1976), Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978) Brumfit and Johnson's *The*

4

Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (1979) contributed to the development of Communicative Approach.

The theoretical precursors of Communicative Approach were Firth who was working on the specialized varieties of language related to particular social roles, professional interests, working activities, etc.; Halliday who had consistent concern to preserve the unity of language and language use, Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (1962) and Searle, *Speech Acts* (1969) both explored the nature of 'speech acts' and their general orientation. The work which did most to crystallize the approach was that of Hymes. Among the pioneers in syllabus design were Wilkins, Munby, etc.

1.3   Communicative Syllabus :

During the 1970s, communicative views of language teaching began to be incorporated into syllabus design. The realization that language teaching must aim at teaching 'communicative competence' has forced to look for new criteria of course design in order to teach language effectively. There has been a switch from 'content' which normally meant grammar and lexis, to 'objectives'. Content was specified not only in terms of grammatical element which the learners were expected to master, but also in terms of the functional skills they would need to master to communicate successfully. The aim of Communicative Syllabus is to develop communicative competence. Widdowson (1979:257) writes that in designing the syllabus, our aim is to order the language items to be learned in such a way that they build up into larger communicative unit. Wilkins (1976) insists on the centrality of meaning in acts of communication. Wilkins and Munby both see communicative needs as the basis for any syllabus aiming at communicative competence.

According to Yalden (1983:86-87) if we wish to ensure that our learners acquire the ability to communicate in a more appropriate and efficient way, we have to consider number of components into the make-up of the syllabus. These components could be listed as follows:

i.   the purposes for which the learners wish to acquire the target language;

ii. the setting in which they want to use the target language;

iii. the socially defined role the learners will assume in the target language, as well as, the roles of their interlocutors;

iv. the communicative events in which the learners will participate;

v. the language functions involved in these events; or what the learners will need to be able to do with or through the language;

vi. the notions involved, what the learner will need to be able to talk about;

vii. the skills involved in the 'knitting together' of discourse; discourse and rhetorical skills;

viii. the variety or varieties of the target language that will be needed, and the levels in the spoken and written language which the learners will need to reach;

ix. the grammatical content that will be needed;

x. the lexical content that will be needed.

Communicative Syllabus takes into account all these ten components. It considers everything required to assure communication.

Communicative Syllabi are known by a variety of terms like, Situational, Contextual, Functional-notional, Threshold level, Analytic and so on. Communicative syllabi are grouped into three categories like Situational, Topical and Notional. Communicative course design takes account of the elements like functions, notions, settings, roles, style, grammar, vocabulary, prosodic and paralinguistic features.

As it is already stated, the aim of communicative syllabus is to develop communicative competence. In this regard, Munby (1978) has given model for specifying communicative competence in which he discusses Communicative Needs Processor (CNP). In the CNP, we take account of the variables that affect communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other. These parameters are of two kinds, those that process non-linguistic data (a posteriori) and those that provide the data in the first place (a priori). The priori parameters are: purposive domain, setting, interaction and instrumentality. The posteriori parameters are :

6

dialect, target level, communicative events and communicative key. These parameters help while designing the Communicative Syllabus. Munby further talks on about language skills selector, Meaning processor, Linguistic encoder, Communicative competence specification, participant, etc..

1.4 Communicative Approach and Language Teaching Material:

During the 1970s, there was a great boom in the publication of teaching materials designed according to communicative principles. Certain terms like, communication, real-life, use, functions, appropriate, meaningful, context, setting and discourse recur in a number of standard published materials which claim for this 'new direction'. Mc Donough and Shaw (1993:26) discuss seven implications which have most helped to form the kinds of teaching materials. These are as follows:

i.   'Communicative' implies 'semantic' a concern with the meaning potential of language.

ii.   There is a complex relationship between language form and language function.

iii.   Form and function operate as part of a wider network of factors.

iv.   Appropriacy of language use has to be considered alongside accuracy. This has implications for attitudes to error.

v.   'Communicative' is relevant to all four language skills.

vi.   The concept of communication takes us beyond the level of the sentence.

vii.   'Communicative' can refer both to the properties of language and to behavior.

The relative importance of these implications depends on the skills being practiced and on the nature and purpose of particular classroom.

Richards and Rodgers (1986) discuss three kinds of materials. The first is text-based materials. There are numerous textbooks designed to direct and support communicative language teaching. Their tables of contents sometimes suggest a kind of grading and sequencing of language practice. A typical lesson consists of a theme (e.g. relaying information), a task analysis

7

for thematic development, a practice situation description, a stimulus presentation, comprehension questions and paraphrase exercises. The second is task-based material. A variety of games, role plays, simulations and task-based communication activities have been prepared to support communicative language teaching. These are in the form of one-of-a kind items: exercise handbooks, cue-cards, activity cards, pair-communication practice materials, and student-interaction practice booklets. The third is realia, it means use of authentic materials in the classroom. These may include signs, magazines, advertisements and news papers or graphic and visual sources such as maps, pictures, symbols, graphs and charts.

. The teaching materials used with Communicative Approach often teach the language needed to express and understand different kinds of functions. They emphasize the processes of communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations, using language to perform different kinds of tasks, using language for social interaction with other people.

1.5 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

In the Communicative Language Teaching, the heart of the language lesson is the communicative activity itself and communicative syllabus would consist of a series of such activities. Such activities are information gap activities, role-plays, simulations, language games of various kinds and so on. Communicative methodology makes fluency the goal of much of its classroom practice. The result of that would be a transformation of classroom procedure from the traditional pattern of presentation-practice-production to production-presentation-practice. Keith Morrow (1981) suggests five principles of Communicative Language Teaching. These are as follows :

i.   The knowledge of what you are doing is important.

ii.   The whole is more than the sum of its parts.

iii.   The processes are as important as their forms.

iv.   The learning is the doing.

v.   Mistakes are not always mistakes.

The role of the teacher and the learner in CLT is very important because the development of communicative skills can only take place if the learners have motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and to relate with the people around them. It, therefore, requires a learning atmosphere which gives them a sense of security and value as individuals. The teacher's role in the learning process is recognized as less dominant. More emphasis is placed on the learner's contribution through independent learning. The emphasis on communicative interaction provides more opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge, both among learners and between teacher and learners. Communicative interaction gives learners more opportunities to express their own individuality in the classroom. It also helps· them to integrate the foreign language with their own personality and feel secure with it. These point are reinforced by the large number of activities like group work. The teacher's role as 'Co-communicator' places him on an equal basis with the learners. This helps to break down tension and barriers between them. Learners are not being constantly corrected. Errors are considered as normal phenomenon in the development of communicative skills. In short, communicative teaching methods leave the learners scope to contribute his own personality to the learning process.

1.6 Assessment :

Communicative Approach is praised as well as criticized. It is praised because it provides a richer teaching and learning environment. It includes wider considerations of what is appropriate as well as what is accurate. It covers texts and conversation as well as sentences. It provides realistic and motivating language practice. It uses what learners 'know' about the functions of language from their experience with their own mother tongues.

At the same time, Communicative Approach is criticized. Widdowson (1979:252) says that Communicative Approach is being rapidly adopted, adopted indeed with almost indecent haste as the new orthodoxy in language teaching, adopted, almost inevitably, without critical examination.

The criticism was made that Communicative Approach fails to take into account the knowledge and skills which a language student bring with him/her from his/her mother tongue.

The switch of attention from teaching the language system to teaching the language as communication highlighted a potentially difficult problems in organizing syllabus, materials, and other forms of classroom activities.

Deepti Gupta (2004) has pointed out some reasons of the failure of the implementation of Communicative Approach in India. Communicative Approach was implemented in hurry. Most teachers were not familiar with the whole concept of CLT. The evaluation set up was not prepared for the radical change in examination, modules.

Stephen Bax (2003) argues that we are in the middle of a shift towards an emphasis on context in language teaching. This is an important step in the move to more effective teaching.

In short, Communicative Approach is praised for its wider consideration of language; on the other hand, it is criticized for the way it is implemented.

1.7   Conclusion :

Communicative Approach is learner oriented. It tries to fulfill the basic needs of learners. It is centralized with 'communicative competence'. Though it was criticized, the researcher thinks that Communicative Approach is useful for L2 learners. When we acquire a language, we do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences, we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose. Communicative has become the watch- word of the world. The changing situations in Economics, Politics, Information and Technology demand fluency and accuracy in communication. These requirements can be fulfilled by Communicative Approach. When we think of India and its future we realize the need of proficiency in communication. In an article 'Urban Lexicon' published in Times of India, dated 16th Dec. 2005, Surendrean wrote 'India's future is in English..... English which was once a Jinni of the Elite is now the

10

handyman of the commoner. .....English is the social revolution Marx never thought of. It's not just a language. English is an instrument of radical change. The article states the importance of English. In this case, it is essential to make learners equipped with language tools to communicate properly. For this purpose, the proper implementation of Communicative Approach is necessary. That's why though Communicative Approach is criticized, it is used widely at present.

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