Drama in Teaching English as a Second Language -
A Communicative Approach

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1.0 Introduction

In recent years much emphasis has been put on the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) using the "Communicative approach" (CA). This has brought about changes in the approach to TESL. The learner is now seen as an active participant in the process of language learning in the classroom. Teachers who advocate the Communicative Approach are expected to come up with activities that would promote self-learning, group interaction in authentic situations and peer teaching. It is a task not easy for the teacher.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the merits or demerits of the CA and the controversies that come along with it. This paper is an attempt to relate the use of drama to the CA in TESL. It first discusses the general concept of the CA and Communicative Activities. It then discusses some definitions related to drama and the value of drama in education. This is followed by a description of two dramatic techniques - role-play and simulation. The merits and demerits of these techniques and how these techniques can be used in the ESL classroom will also be discussed.

2.0 The Communicative Approach

The term "approach" refers to the theories about the nature of how language is learnt. (Richards, 1985). It takes into account the basic units of language structure and the nature of language proficiency. It also considers the psycholinguistic and cognitive processes involved in language learning and the conditions that allow for effective learning to take place.

The Communicative Approach thus refers to the beliefs and theories of language teaching which emphasize that the goal of language learning is communicative competence. (Richards, 1985). "Communicative competence" here refers not only to a knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language and how to form grammatical sentences but also to know when, where and to whom to use these sentences in a speech community. (Richards, 1985, and Hymes, 1971).

Communicative "Methodology" refers to the different ways of teaching language using the communicative approach. The term 'techniques' refers to different classroom activities. In this paper they will be called communicative activities.

Das (1984), talks about the "What" and "How" of language teaching and learning in the Communicative Approach. The 'what' refers to the contents to be taught to the learners. The emphasis is more on the use of language for communication of meaning than learning the language structures, forms and vocabulary (Wilkins, 1976 and Widdowson, 1976). However, this does not imply that the grammatical and lexical aspects are neglected. In fact, they do have a place in the Communicative Method of language teaching.

In the CA the language needs of the learner is given important consideration. Ultimately the 'what' aims towards 'communicative competence' in the language i.e. the ability to use the language reasonably 'accurately' and 'appropriately'.

The 'how' of language teaching and learning refers to the specific techniques and procedures used to unconsciously 'acquire' and consciously 'learn' a language through communication. According to Brumfit (1984), a 'fluent' and an 'accurate' user of the language would be facilitated by the use of the 'communicative' activities.

2.1 Communicative Activities

'Communicative activities' refers to the techniques which are employed in the communicative method in language teaching. Examples of such activities are games, exercises, practices and projects which make use of the Target language. The activities involve 'doing' things with language e.g. making choices, evaluating and bridging the information gap. The language-using activities for communication is not restricted to conversation and may involve listening, speaking, reading, writing or an integration of two or more skills.

Communicative activities have the following characteristics:

1. They are purposeful. They are beyond strictly practising particular structures.
2. They are interactive. The activities are often conducted with others and often involve some form of discussion.
3. Authentic materials are used. The situations in which the learners have to use language should be as realistic as possible. The language models given should be authentic.
4. They are based on the information gap principle.

Morrow (1981) has provided some guiding principles behind the use of communicative activities as language teaching and learning techniques. They are as follows:

> *1. 'Know what you are doing'*

This principle makes sure that each part of the lesson focuses on some operation which the student would want to perform in the target language. For example in teaching listening, the task could be to listen to the arrival and departure times of the aeroplane.

> *2. 'The whole is more than the sum of its parts'*

In communication, it is necessary to work in the context of the whole. Communication cannot easily be analysed into its various components without its nature being destroyed in the process. For example you may teach the component of various forms of greeting but it is no guarantee that the student will be able to use it appropriately in a given situation.

3. 'The processes are as important as the forms'

The processes of communication: information gap, choice, feedback, should be as far as possible replicated in trying to develop the ability of the student to communicate in the target language.

4. 'To learn it, do it'

Only by practising communicative activities would students learn to communicate. The role of the teacher thus changes. She no longer dominates the learning situation. She is there to provide all the help the student needs to play an active role in his own learning.

5. 'Mistakes are not a/ways mistakes'

There is the need for flexibility in deciding to treat different things as 'mistakes' at different stages of the learning process towards communicative competence.

The use of communicative activities is a technique to achieve one of the aims of the communicative approach, which is to obtain communicative competence. The essence of this approach is to communicate with another person in the classroom and in the long term, the society. Drama used in the classroom can be considered a communicative activity since it fosters communication between learners and provides opportunities to use the target language in various 'make believe' situations.

3.0 Drama and Dramatic Techniques

Susan Holden (1981) defines drama as any activity which asks the participant to portray himself in an imaginary situation; or to portray another person in an imaginary situation. Drama is thus concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'. It provides an opportunity for a person to express himself through verbal expressions and gestures using his imagination and memory.

In this paper, drama refers more to informal drama (creative dramatics) as it is used in the language classroom and not on stage. The participants in the drama activities are thus learners and not actors.

3.1 The Value of Drama in Education

The basic idea to the development of creative drama was the realization that the need to play is an important developmental process in a child (Redington, 1983). When educationists realized this need, more attention was given to the use of drama in education.

Below is a summary of the values of drama in education as given by educators and researchers in linguistics.

1. Drama according to Maley and Duff (1978) releases imagination and energy and this could be considered as an educational objective. Fernandez and Coil, (1986) stated that drama encourages students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination and thus makes learning more realistic and meaningful.

2. As an educational tool, the use of drama fosters the social, intellectual and the linguistic development of the child (Dougill, 1987). Early and Tarlington (1982) concurs with Dougill and states that drama centers around language development, personal awareness, group co-operation, sensory awareness, and imaginative growth.

3. Drama increases motivation and provides the incentive to work hard (Mordecai, 1985; Scharengnivel, 1970). The activities using drama tend to be purposeful. The student sees the need to communicate and concentrates on how to go about a task since drama provides him with a meaningful context.

4. Drama fosters a sense of responsibility and co-operation among the students (Early and Tarlington, 1983; Scharengnivel, 1970; Mordecai, 1985). Drama activities normally take the form of group work and students cannot afford to stay passive for too long. There is a need to belong to the group and to complete the task. The students develop a sense of selfworth of themselves as they work together.

5. Drama has a therapeutic effect. It can help solve emotional and behaviourial problems (Stern, 1980; Scharengnivel, 1970). It is a way for a 'troublesome kid' to expend his energy and encourage the shy and uncooperative student to participate.

6. Fernandez and Coll (1986), state that drama encourages students to exercise their sensitivity and imagination. Temporary suspension of the ego occurs when students participate in dramatic activities. They have to perceive an experience through the roles they, take on which are often different from their own. In role-play for example, a student is given a chance to understand and relate to the feelings of others. This develops a sense of empathy in the student as he learns to look beyond himself. Drama develops moral and social qualities in a student (Scharengnivel, 1970).

7. It motivates the teacher to meet the needs of the student (Mordecai, 1985). The drama activities provide opportunities to understand the thoughts and feelings of the students as they express themselves in the drama activities. From the constant feedback provided by the activities, the teacher can plan better strategies for more effective learning and teaching.

8. Drama can lead pupils to an appreciation of drama as an art form (Scharengnivel, 1970).

Perhaps the value of drama can be summed up by Susan Stern (1980) who looked into drama in second language learning from a psycholinguistic point of view. She stated that drama heightened self-esteem, motivation, spontaneity, increased capacity for empathy, and lowered sensitivity to rejection. All these facilitate communication and provide an appropriate psycholinguistic climate for language learning.

3.2 The Use of Drama In TESL

According to Via (1985), drama has been used for language teaching since the middle ages. About 10 years ago, many teachers used to scoff at the idea of using drama to teach a second language. The change in attitude towards the use of drama in language teaching came about due to a greater emphasis on meaningful communicative activities instead of mechanical drills.

Drama can be used in the teaching of English as a Second language for a variety of purposes.

1. Language is used in meaningful situations (Scharengnivei, 1970; Early and Tarlington, 1982; Mordecai, 1985). Drama contextualises the language in real or imagined situations in and out of the classroom. Language in the class that uses drama activities is explored, tried out and practised in meaningful situations.

2. Drama activities can be used as a means of reinforcement of language learnt (Mordecai, 1985; Fernandez and CoIl, 1986). It helps to extend, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication games.

3. Drama improves oral communication. As a form of communication methodology, drama provides the opportunity for the student to use language meaningfully and appropriately. Maley and Duff (1978) state that drama puts back some of the forgotten emotional content into language. Appropriacy and meaning are more important than form or structure of the language. Drama can help restore the totality of the situation by reversing the learning process, beginning with meaning and moving towards language form. This makes language learning more meaningful and attempts to prepare the student for real-life situations.

4. Learning a second language can be enjoyable, stimulating and meaningful when combined with drama activities (Mordecai, 1985).

5. The problem of mixed ability is reduced when drama activities are used. Students who are more fluent can take the main roles which require more oral communication, while the weaker students compensate for their lack of linguistic ability by paralinguistic communication e.g. body language and general acting ability (miming).

6. Earl Stevick (1980), states that language learning must appeal to the creative intuitive aspect of personality as well as the conscious and rational part. Drama activities can be used to provide opportunities for the student to be involved actively. The activities involve the student's whole personality and not merely his mental process. Effective learning takes place as the student involves himself in the tasks and is motivated to use the target language.

The above are just some of the uses of drama in TESL. The list is not exhaustive. Generally it can be said that the use of drama and drama activities in TESL do adhere to the principles of the Communicative Approach. One of the aims (as it is in the Communicative Approach) is for the learner to achieve communicative competence. It is the hope of the advocators of the dramatic techniques, that the learner will become more imaginative, creative and sensitive as he becomes more self-confident in the process of learning English as a Second Language.

3.3 Role-Play and Simulation

Role-play and simulation are two types of drama activities. Both are common activities in the classroom. Different interpretations by teachers and their users are often given to these two terms.

They are often used together thus the term role-simulation has been formed. For the purpose of this paper, role-play and simulation are defined separately.

3.3.1 Role-play

Assuming a role is an essential element in drama. Some theorists see it as intrinsic to all human behaviour whether in games children play 'or roles that adults play each day. Heathcote, (1984) concurs that role-taking is so flexible that when applied in education, it will suit all personalities and teaching circumstances.

Generally speaking, role-play involves being an imaginary person usually in a hypothetical situation and sometimes in a real one (Venugopal, 1986). It also involves a finite interaction between characters within a range of possibilities.

Livingstone (1983) sees role-play as a class activity which gives the students the opportunities to practise the language aspects of role-behavior, the actual roles they may need outside the classroom.

According to Richards (1985), role-play involves a situation in which a setting, participants and a goal problem are described. Participants are to accomplish the task given, drawing on whatever language resources they can.

From the above definitions, role-play is thus an activity which requires a person to take on a role that is real or imaginary. It involves spontaneous interaction of participants as they attempt to complete a task.

There is a whole range of role-play activities. It ranges from the simple to the complex, from the structured to the unstructured. Some examples of the types of role-play are socio-drama, sketches, story dramatization, mock interviews, business meetings and even debates.

3.3.2 Simulation

Simulation can be defined as a structured set of circumstances that mirror real life and participants act as instructed (Dougill, 1987).

Jones (1982) defines simulation as reality of function in a simulated and structured environment. He further states that reality of function is the key concept in simulation.

Behaviour is not controlled in a simulation and the participants bring to the situation their own skills, experience and knowledge.

Simulation is often a problem-solving activity to which the student brings his own personality, experience and opinions (Livingstone, 1983). It involves being oneself or someone else in a simulated real-life situation. Authencity and credibility are important elements in simulation. Often documents and materials of validity and even realia to fix the setting are used to make the simulation as true to life as possible.

Simulation was originally used as a learning technique in business and military training. The outcome of the simulation is of paramount importance. However, in the ESL class, the end product of the decision reached is of less importance than the language used and generated to achieve it.

The definitions of role-play and simulation show that there is no clear distinction between the two. They tend to overlap in characteristics and functions. Livingstone (1983) pointed out that the differences between role-play and simulation is not important but what really matters are the opportunities they offer to the language teacher. Role-play is frequently used in simulation and this brings about the term role-simulation.

3.3.3 Role-simulation

In role-simulation, the participant remains the same individual while reacting to a task that has been simulated on the basis of his own personal experience or professional training (Venugopal, 1986).

3.4 Advantages and Disadvantages in the Use of Role-play and Simulation In an ESL Classroom

The value of drama and its uses in the classroom discussed earlier can also be considered as advantages for role-play and simulation since the aims and goals are similar. Below are more specific advantages of the use of role-play and simulation in the ESL classroom.

3.4.1 Advantages

1. Stimulates authentic conversations

Role-play and simulation activities stimulate authentic learner-to-learner conversational interaction (Richards, 1985). The activities also develop conversational competence among second language learners.

2. Is a fluency activity

Brumfit (1983) refers to role-play as a fluency activity where opportunities arise for the learner to use language freely and creatively. Role-play focuses on using language as a conversational resource.

3. Is suitable for consolidation

Since role-play and simulation activities are more practice/revision activities than teaching activities, they are useful and more suitable for consolidating and practising aspects of conversational proficiency than teaching new forms.

4. Creates sensitivity and a sense of awareness

Role-play and simulation brings the outside world into the classroom. This could have affective effects in terms of social interaction and cultural awareness.

5. Increases motivation

Role-play and simulation prompts mental and bodily activity. The activities require active participation. Concentration is also often required and it is not easy for a student to stay passive for long. Situations are created for the students to use the language meaningfully and this would motivate the students towards participation. The less motivated students will be gradually drawn into the activity when they see the rest of the group having a good time.

6. A break from routine

The use of role-play and simulation activities is a break from the usual textbook teaching and the 'chalk and talk' method of the teacher. The students have opportunities to mix around and to act out different roles. The atmosphere in the classroom is less formal and this can reduce tension.

7. Prepare students for real life and unpredictability

Real life situations and communication are unpredictable. A student may learn all the correct forms of communication but may not know when to use them appropriately. Role-play and simulation provide opportunities to react to these situations and to give the students a taste of real life.

3.4.2 Disadvantages

1. Activity is artificial

Richards (1985) observed that although role-play is supposed to provide authentic situations for students to use language, the situations sometimes created were artificial and not relevant to the needs of the students.

2. Activities are difficult to monitor

With so much activity both physical and verbal going on, it is sometimes difficult for the teacher to monitor a student's performance. There is the fear among teachers that the students are having too much fun and that no learning is taking place.

3. Causes embarrassment

In some situations, especially among adult learners, role-play and simulation activities cause a lot of embarrassment, awkwardness and very little spontaneous language use. The choice of appropriate roles for different students is thus very important.

4. Encourages incorrect forms

Since the teacher is not encouraged to correct mistakes immediately so as not to discourage students, this provides opportunities for learners to produce and practise ungrammatical and inappropriate forms.

5. Has cultural bias

According to Richards (1985), these activities are more suited for learners from cultures where drama activities and learner - directed activities in teaching is common. in cultures where the teacher-dominated classroom is still the norm, the learners may not respond willingly to the activities.

6. Teachers' fear of losing control

Since the activities require the full participation of the students and minimum participation from the teacher, the teacher may fear that he may lose control of the class. Furthermore the students may get carried away and become disruptive.

7. Spontaneity is lost

Very often the students get too caught up with WHAT to say. They hesitate to choose their words and do not interact spontaneously.

8. Timing lessons is difficult

The teacher has to spend a lot of time in preparation work especially for simulations. He is not able to predict the amount of class time that will be taken to carry out the activity since the ability of each class varies.

9. Activities may not be suitable for all levels

Role-play and simulation involve a lot of conversation and discussion. Thus it may not be very suitable for low proficiency students who do not have the necessary communicative competence to carry out the activity. These activities would be more suitable for intermediate and advanced learners.

The above disadvantages however can be solved if careful thought and planning could be given before the activities are used in the classroom. The teacher himself must be convinced of the effective use of these activities if he wants to encourage students to have a positive attitude towards these novel ideas in language learning.

5. Conclusion

The use of drama activities (role-play and simulation) in TESL can be used. as an innovative method in language teaching. With the emphasis on the use of the Communicative Approach in language teaching, drama in the ESL classroom provides a meaningful way of learning the language. However, it should not be used in isolation but should be used in an integrated approach for language teaching. It should not be treated as a 'last resort' when all else fails. It should be part and parcel of the communicative classroom methodology in teaching English as a second language.

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