

Motivating Students to Perform Better Orally in a Communicative Language Teaching Framework

Abstract

“Communicative Language Teaching” is a method used to motivate the students to better oral performance. In this article, we have presented the characteristics of this method that we have tested through a study realized in the department of Foreign Language at Mentouri University Constantine. The results that we have obtained after the signing of two questionnaires, one addressed to a sample of teachers and another to a sample of second year L.M.D. students of English, demonstrated that the method is motivating and helps students for a better oral performance.

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Introduction

1. Background of the Study

In the very early months of studying English, I thought about the theme of my Master dissertation. It was very gloomy that time, but Oral Expression and motivation were always there. Such a choice was influenced by the problems that my classmates, that time, were facing during the Oral Expression lectures; I always asked myself the question “why don’t they take part in our conversations?” In trying to find an answer to this question, I asked it loudly, and was surprised at the very many different answers that everyone was giving me: “I fear the teacher”, “I feel terribly shy if one of our classmates is going to laugh at me”, “English was not my first choice” or “I am not interested, it becomes routine!!”

Years later, my vision vis-à-vis this issue became clearer when having T.E.F.L.

ملخص

يتطرق هذا المقال إلى طريقة التعليم التواصلي والمستخدم لتحفيز الطلبة على التعبير الشفهي بكيفية أحسن والتي تم اختبارها في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بجامعة منتوري قسنطينة. أعطت النتائج الدراسة التي أجريت على عينة من الأساتذة وطلبة السنة الثانية نظام (ليسانس، ماستر، دكتوراه) أن هذه الطريقة محفزة وتساعد المتعلمين على التعبير شفها بشكل أفضل.

(Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and Psycho pedagogy as two essential modules in the option “Language Sciences”.

After reading several books, I noticed that many theoreticians have poured huge amount of ink trying to find out the best method of teaching a foreign language. According to Vygotsky, Krashen (in Richards & Rodgers; 1986) and many other authors, language is best acquired by social interaction or by meaningful input and negotiation (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In trying to make the link between the several methods suggested and the students’ answers, I thought, as many did, about Communicative Language Teaching.

2. Aim of the Study

Through this research, we aim at investigating the relationship between the oral proficiency and motivation, using Communicative Language Teaching. We believe that this study will provide learners, as they are future teachers, with the appropriate ways (techniques) to develop the speaking skill. Learners must be given some opportunities that help them decipher their thoughts and thus develop their oral skill using the target language. Our aim, in the present piece of research, is to propose Communicative Language Teaching as an effective method to meet our objectives; to motivate students to perform better in the speaking skill.

3. Statement of the Problem

Usually, when someone shows his/ her ability to speak proficiently a foreign language, we hear people around him/her saying that learning a foreign language is a matter of motivation. Very often, people think spontaneously that learning effectively a foreign language involves motivation on the part of the learner. In psycho pedagogical contexts, motivation is crucial to all sorts of learning.

Educators, throughout history and across the world, have been eager to know the best method that keeps students motivated to learn a foreign language. To find out a solution to this issue, many methods have been developed. Every method has its own principles which are viewed as being the methods’ pillars that help the teachers choose the one they think is better to motivate students, and help them develop a given skill while the learning of the foreign language takes place.

Educators shifted attention to the affective aspect of learning, in the 1970’s, and introduced the Communicative Language Teaching as an innovative method. They suggested that Communicative Language Teaching is a better method of teaching a foreign language since it helps students “know when and how to say what to whom” (Larsen- Freeman, 2000: 121) to get them involved and participate in an anxiety free atmosphere.

In the present study, at the department of English, university of Constantine, we tried to implement the Communicative Language Teaching in a second year English L.M.D. classroom seeking to investigate the relationship, if there is any, between the language oral proficiency and motivation in a Communicative Language Teaching environment.

4. Hypotheses

For many students, it is like gambling talking in the classroom. They may give correct sentences and win the teacher's praise as they may fail transmitting what they want to and then feel ridiculous, frustrated, or embarrassed. This failure is sometimes due to: linguistic factors such as lack of vocabulary or using the wrong tense, or to non-linguistic features such as hesitation or fear. (Brown, 2007)

As an antidote to such non-linguistic features, the teacher has to "establish an adequate affective framework" (Brown, 2007: 160) so that the learners feel comfortable and courageous enough to participate without giving importance to making mistakes.

Our first hypothesis is that an affective learning environment has to be set in order for students to perform better orally. In other words, if the teacher creates a motivating atmosphere, the students are going to feel relaxed then they could perform better orally.

The first hypothesis makes us think of the second one which is in one way or another linked to it. To motivate students, the teacher has to figure out the right teaching method. Our second hypothesis is that if Communicative Language Teaching is the method used in the class, students would perform better orally.

In the pursuit of our aims, our general hypothesis which synthesizes the two above hypotheses is that if Communicative Language Teaching enhances motivation in students, then they would perform better orally.

These last could be reformulated in the form of a research question: In what ways does Communicative Language Teaching enhance motivation and how does the latter lead students to perform better orally?

5. Tools of the Study and Population

In order to test our hypotheses and to obtain the information required from our subjects, to fit the objectives of our study in the present research, we used one main tool: the questionnaire.

We proposed two formal questionnaires; one for students and another for teachers. The questionnaires contain questions of the multiple choice type, where the teachers/students put a tick in the corresponding boxes after reading the questions attentively. Both of them were designed to show whether Communicative Language Teaching motivates students to perform better orally.

The students' questionnaire was composed of (23) questions composed of five parts; the first part dealt with background information about the students, the second part involved questions about the students' attitudes and their level of motivation towards speaking English. Part number three dealt with the personality of the learners (extroversion vs. introversion). Part number four dealt with the atmosphere in the classroom and "accuracy". And finally, part five dealt with the role of the teacher in a Communicative Language Teaching frame work.

While the teachers' questionnaire was composed of (25) questions composed of five parts; the first part was about background information about teachers. The second

part dealt with the learners' attitudes from the teachers' perspective. The third part involved questions about the role of the teacher in a Communicative Language Teaching framework, part number four questions' dealt with communicative language teaching, and eventually, part number five dealt with level of the teachers' motivation towards teaching at university.

The students' questionnaire was designed to second year L.M.D. students of English at university of Constantine. It was administered to two groups gathered together, making up 50 students. We dealt with a sample of fifty (50) students, from a total population of 800 students. The participants, in this study were recruited from two classes. Again, a random selection made up the final sample which consisted of twenty five (25) students (males~ 8%; females~ 92%). Students were given identical instructions, before they complete the questionnaire, on how to do so and for what reason it was designed. They were notified that: a) questionnaires are not tests, b) questionnaires are important components in our study, c) their participation is going to be really appreciated, d) what matters is their opinions (no true or false answers), and e) the answers they will provide would remain completely confidential (even though they were not asked to write their names). The questionnaire took the students nearly 60 minutes of their time (which is largely enough for them to answer). With what mentioned above, we do believe that our questionnaire was administered in good conditions.

The teachers' questionnaire was designed to teachers of English at university of Constantine, as well. We dealt with a sample of ten (10) teachers selected randomly, from the entire population of about eighty (80) teachers. All the participants in this study (professors, doctors, and set-teachers) at least have taught (or still teach) oral expression. The reason behind such a choice was to examine the degree to which teachers' awareness of the important role of Communicative Language Teaching in fostering motivation in learners. Since teachers are familiar with this type of studies, all that we can say is that the questionnaire took them nearly 30 minutes of their time.

The questionnaires' results are of a vital importance for our research. The analysis of both of the teachers' and the students' questionnaires has shown us to which extent their responses correlate either positively or negatively with our hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the students' questionnaire reveals that the principles of Communicative Language Teaching do really influence the level of the students' motivation towards oral performance. The learners' answers, in part two, demonstrated that those who are really willing to study the English language show a great deal of interest and enthusiasm during an oral class. For instance, students, when were asked how often they use English outside the classroom, are believed to be intrinsically motivated and this makes up two categories; the minority of (2%) of the participants who stated that they "frequently" use the language outside the classroom, and the majority of (72%) of the participants who stated that they "sometimes" do so. In contrast to (16%) who affirmed that English is "rarely" used by them outside the classroom, and to (8%) who opted for "never" as an answer to that question.

The analysis of the third part's answers revealed that there is a strong link between the students' personality and participation in the classroom. It seems that the great majority (72%) appear to be somehow sociable or extrovert. While (28%) is the portion of students who are shy, but not necessarily introverts. Extroverts' sociable behavior helps a lot in bettering their level of performance in an oral class since they are usually risk takers, and less inhibited than introverts. Introverts are believed to be shy and inhibited; hence the role of the teacher is to set an anxiety free atmosphere to enhance motivation in his/her learners. Teachers, as it was mentioned above, have to encourage their students to take risks to participate in an oral class. (36%) state that they always are encouraged to speak by their teachers. (16%) opted for often, (20%) is the percentage obtained by the participants who opted for sometimes and rarely. This is what the four and the fifth parts answers' analysis affirmed.

The teachers' questionnaire analysis, as the students' one, affirm that Communicative Language Teaching is an effective method that promotes motivation and encourages learners to speak the language and, thus, develop their oral production. In the second part, the majority of the teachers' answers revealed that they see that their students are really motivated in their oral expression classes giving many justifications to support their points of view, the teachers' answers varied between frequently (70%) and sometimes (30%) while rarely (0) and never (0) were excluded. (40%) of the teachers related the reasons of students' motivation to the use of different topics and activities proposed by them, when (50%) related that to the teachers' stimulating behavior. However, (10%) assumed that motivation has to do with the students' own personality (extroversion and introversion)

The analysis of the third part's answers demonstrated that all teachers seem to agree that in order for their learners to feel relaxed and less inhibited; they should play the role of guides who encourage them to take part in their lectures. The vast majority of teachers (90%) affirmed that teachers should be guides. However, one teacher, making the equivalent of (10%) believed the contrary.

The fourth part dealt with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching. After the analysis of the answers, some of the Communicative Language Teaching principles seemed to be applied in oral classes and teachers avowed that they focus more on the communicative side of the language than on its correctness. Eventually, the fifth parts' analysis of the answers gave us an idea about the various reasons that teachers gave to explain their motivational attitude towards teaching.

Conclusion

The present study has dealt with the connections that exist between oral proficiency and motivation in a Communicative Language Teaching setting. Its main concern was investigating whether the use of Communicative Language Teaching motivates students to perform better orally on second year students of English at the university of Constantine.

All teachers, around the world, agreed upon the idea that Communicative Language Teaching is a very motivating method that helps the learners develop their oral skill; this is confirmed after the analysis of the students' and the teachers' questionnaire

which demonstrated that the majority of the students (extroverts) show a great deal of motivation and willingness to participate in oral expression lectures for the sake of improving and developing their speaking skill. However the opposite was revealed by the minority (introverts). It could be explained that if its principles are not well grasped and not well implemented, Communicative Language Teaching may not enhance motivation and get rid of the unwillingness to learn on the part of the learners.

As a matter of fact, the Communicative Language teaching is an effective method because it focuses on the learners' affect. This focus is confirmed in the various principles that are its strong pillars. It gets the learners engaged in the various activities that create an anxiety free atmosphere and, at the same time, make them understand that the teacher is there to guide them since they give more attention to fluency rather than accuracy. Accordingly, the Communicative Language Teaching Principles are recommended to be implemented in language classes in general and oral classes specifically.

As a final point, we hope that the present study will shed some light on the significance of Communicative Language Teaching in fostering motivation in learners for bettering the students' oral performance. And that it may be supported by further research for the sake of improving teaching/learning at the level of university.

Definition of terms:

Communicative Language Teaching

Over the past few decades, teaching foreign languages has witnessed tremendous changes. However, the teachers' aim remained the same; getting students communicate spontaneously in the foreign language. Theoreticians were very much concerned with the best method to teach learners the foreign language. They put forward several methods to facilitate the foreign language teaching and learning processes. Various methods have been suggested for this sake, yet Communicative Language Teaching is our main concern.

By the 1970's, innovativeness introduced "Communicative Language Teaching" as a reaction against the "artificiality of pattern- practice" and to the "conscious" learning of grammatical rules (Yule, 2006:166).The focal point of Communicative Language Teaching encompasses the form of the language (grammar and vocabulary) to the functions of language (the use of the language in communication) together with the learners' affectivity. This reason, actually, enhanced its implementation in languages schools.

Motivation

A school boy was asked whether he likes playing video games in his spare time; he answered: "No, I prefer to play foot ball, I am very good at it!!" and a university student was asked about her reading preferences: "Oh! I prefer romantic novels, I read them so fast!!" was her reply. The interpretation of these two examples, pragmatically, involves one major affective concept that is Motivation. Being "very good" at playing foot ball or reading romantic novels "so fast" show how deeply these two persons are

motivated for doing these tasks. As in playing or reading, motivation is very essential in learning languages.

Psychologists, over the globe, showed great deal of interest to understand the complexity of motivation. Myriad definitions were put forward, yet all meet in one point that motivation is: “what gets you going, keeps you going, and determines where you’re going to go.” (Slavin, 2003: 329) In other words, motivation is the drive that helps one meet his/her desired goals. Motivation, indeed, is fundamental in learning in the sense that it controls the students’ behavior; it serves as an evidence for teachers to interpret how much students are willing to learn.

Speaking

To define speaking, Petrie (1987; in John Lyons, R. Coates et al.: 336) cited that “speaking is an activity which most of us spend a great deal of time engaged in, apparently without any effort and with not very much thought.” Indeed, people all over the globe, produce thousands and thousands of words without making any remarkable effort. So, speaking could be defined as an exchange of meaning using verbal and non-verbal features in different situations.

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