The ways of developing communicative skills

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The article has its main roots in the so-called “communicative” approach, which has been influential in foreign language teaching since the early 1970s. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was a reaction to much that had gone before - namely the grammatical patterning of structural-situationalism and the rigidity of the drill-type methodology that Audio-lingualism (and later PPP) made varying use of.

Therefore it opens up a wider perspective on language learning; in particular, it makes the English teachers in Kazakhstan more strongly aware that it is not enough to teach learners how to manipulate the structures of the foreign language. It is important also to develop strategies for relating these structures to their communicative functions in real situations and real time [1:65].

CLT has two main guiding principles: the first is that language is not just patterns of grammar with vocabulary items slotted in, but also involves language functions such as inviting, agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting, which students should learn how to perform using a variety of language exponents (e.g. we can invite by saying 'Would you like to come to the cinema?', 'D'you fancy coming to the cinema?', 'What about coming to the cinema?', 'How about a film?', 'Are you on for a film?', etc). Students also need to be aware of the need for appropriacy when talking and writing to people in terms of the kind of language they use (formal, informal, tentative, technical, etc). CLT is not just about the language, in other words, it is about how it is used.

The second principle of Communicative Language Teaching is that if students get enough exposure to language and opportunities for language use - and if they are motivated - then language learning will take care of itself. Thus CLT has a lot in common with the acquisition view of language absorption. As a result, the focus of much CLT has been on students communicating real messages, and not just grammatically controlled language. The deployment of many communicative activities, where students use all and any language they know to communicate, shows this aspect of CLT at work [2;73].

Communicative Language Teaching has had a thoroughly beneficial effect since it reminded teachers that people learn languages not so that they know about them, but so that they can communicate with them. Giving students different kinds of language, pointing them towards aspects of style and appropriacy, and above all giving them opportunities to try out real language within the classroom humanized what had sometimes been too rigidly controlled.

Teaching communicative skills is one of the most urgent tasks for any ESL teacher in my country. This is because successful communicative skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice.

Nevertheless I’d like to point out that developing listening skills is the most actual for students in my classroom. It's frustrating for students because there are no rules as in grammar teaching. Speaking and writing also have very specific exercises that can lead to improved skills. This is not to say that there are not ways of improving listening skills; however they are difficult to quantify.

One of the largest inhibitors for students is often mental block. While listening, a student suddenly decides that he or she doesn't understand what is being said. At this point, many students just tune out or get caught up in an internal dialogue trying translating a specific word.

Some students convince themselves that they are not able to understand spoken English well and create problems for themselves.

They key to helping students improve their listening skills is to convince them that not understanding is OK. This is more of an attitude adjustment than anything else, and it is easier
for some students to accept than others. Another important point that I try to teach my students (with differing amounts of success) is that they need to listen to English as often as possible, but for short periods of time.

Encourage them to get a film, or listen to an English radio station, but not to watch an entire film or listen for two hours. Students should often listen, but they should listen for short periods - five to ten minutes. This should happen four or five times a week. Even if they don't understand anything, five to ten minutes is a minor investment. However, for this strategy to work, students must not expect improved understanding too quickly. The brain is capable of amazing things if given time, students must have the patience to wait for results. If a student continues this exercise over two to three months their listening comprehension skills will greatly improve.

The most prominent ESL teacher, trainer, and content developer is Kenneth Lindblom. Kenneth is the founder of Lingofeeds, dedicated to English for specific professions, and Dialogue Consulting LLC, which specializes in ESL learning materials development.

Language being acquired needs to be repeated in a various number of guises before it can be actively used by the student. Studies have shown that new linguistic functions need to be repeated at least six times before most learners can consider the new piece of language theirs. After six repetitions, the newly acquired language skills are usually still only passively activated. The learner will require many more repetitions before he/she will be able to use the skills actively in everyday conversation!

Employing all four linguistic skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking - when working through a lesson will help you recycle language during the lesson. Learning rules is important, but, in my opinion, practicing the language is even more important. Bringing all these aspects into a lesson will add variety to the lesson - and help the learner pragmatically practice the language. As an example, I've met many learners who can knock off a grammar sheet without a mistake and then, when asked, "Could you describe your daily routines?", have problems. This is generally due to the emphasis given in many school systems to learning grammar.

So, now you understand the basic tenets of teaching English effectively. You might be asking yourself the question: "What do I teach?!" When planning a course most course books build their curriculum around certain themes which help glue everything together. Use this type of outline to build your lesson and remember to provide a number of elements including listening, reading, writing and speaking and you should find that your lessons will have purpose and specific objectives which are clearly definable - helping you and your learners recognize the progress you are making!

Finally, the lesson generally will be divided into three principle sections:

1. Introduction - introducing or reviewing the grammar or function.
2. Development - taking that grammar and working on it in a reading, listening, or other form. This section should make up the bulk of your lesson and include a number of different activities if possible.
3. Review - review the principle concepts covered during the lesson. This can be very straight forward and either student or teacher led depending on the level of your learners. Take a look at some of the lesson plans here at esl.about.com and notice how the various methods mentioned above are employed while focusing on one specific linguistic function.

Now that a growing majority of Internet users have broadband, YouTube and other video clip sites (Google Video, Revver, etc.) have become very popular - especially with young adults. These sites also provide English learners and classes with a new tool to improve listening skills. The real advantage to these sites - at least from a language learning point of view - is that they offer authentic examples of everyday English used by everyday people. Of course, this is the challenge as well. Students may enjoy watching these clips, but poor sound quality, pronunciation and slang can make these short videos even more difficult to understand. On the
other hand, students are attracted to the "real life" nature of these videos. By creating context for these short videos you can help your students explore a world of online English learning possibilities.

Thus I’d like to provide a simple example developing communicative skills

**Aim:** Improve listening skills

**Activity:** Sharing YouTube videos

**Level:** Intermediate to advanced

**Outline:**
- At the end of one of your classes, decide on a particular topic that your class would enjoy. You can do this as a poll, take suggestions or choose a topic on your own that fits in well with your curriculum.
- Before the next lesson begins, go to YouTube and search for short videos on the topic your class has chosen. Once you have found appropriate videos, save the urls in your browser. If you do not have an Internet connection in class, go to Keepvid. This site allows you to download the video to your computer which you can later use in class.
- Watch the video a few times and create a difficult vocabulary guide. Write a short introduction to the videos you will watch. The more context you provide the better your students will understand the videos they are about to watch. Include both the short introduction and difficult vocabulary list on a class handout. Make sure to include the url (web page address) of the YouTube video.
- Create a short quiz based on the videos.
- Hand out the introduction sheets and go through the introduction and difficult vocabulary list to make sure everyone understands.
- Watch the videos together as a class. If you have a computer lab this will work better as students can pair up and watch videos repeatedly. Students can then work on the quiz sheet in small groups or in pairs.
- Most likely, your videos will be amusing and students will want to watch many more. This is to be encouraged! If possible, give students 20 minutes or so at the computers to explore YouTube.
- For homework: In groups of four to five students, students should find a short video of their own to present to the class. Ask them to provide a short introduction, difficult vocabulary list and follow-up quiz modeled on the worksheet you have created for your class. Remind students to include the url (web page address) of the YouTube video.
- Have students exchange worksheets with another group and complete the exercise. Students can then compare notes on the videos they have watched.

But the most difficult key point is listening lesson based on conclusions. Upper level listening tasks often depend on the student's ability to make assumptions and conclusions based on a listening comprehension selection. This lesson focuses solely on some of the most common forms of this task, it includes example exercises with RealAudio streaming audio which can be used in class - or used as models on which to base further exercises. All activities have awareness raising concerning some of the most common forms of statements on which assumptions or conclusions are based by listening exercises.

**Outline:**
- Introduce exercise by asking students to make conclusions based on the sentences on the worksheet.
- Call attention to the fact that certain types of formulations are especially useful for showing the relationship between situations on which assumptions and conclusions are based. These include: conditional sentences, paired conjunctions, confusing phrasal verbs, time clauses and slight changes in verb conjugations, non-committal verbs, etc.
- Ask students to take another look at the example sentences and identify the type of formulation.
• Give students the first set of listening assumption questions and play the first exercise (RealAudio from the Internet, or sentences read aloud by the teacher).
• Correct exercise in class.
• Give students the second set of listening assumption questions and play the first exercise (RealAudio from the Internet, or sentences read aloud by the teacher).
• Correct exercise in class.
• Arrange students in small groups of four to five and ask them to create their own sentences and questions based on the exercises.
• Have students from different group’s pair up and read their questions aloud to their partners - asking them to make conclusions based on what they hear.
• Choose the correct conclusion based on what you hear.

Finally here I’d like to describe in detail the communicative activities on phrasal verbs. Getting students to come to terms with phrasal verbs is a constant challenge. The fact of the matter is that phrasal verbs are just rather difficult to learn. Learning phrasal verbs out of the dictionary can help, but students really need to read and hear phrasal verbs in context for them to be able to truly understand the correct usage of phrasal verbs. This lesson takes a two pronged approach to helping student learn phrasal verbs. It begins with a reading comprehension which can also serve to introduce some interesting student stories for discussion. This comprehension is peppered with phrasal verbs which can then be discussed as a class. The second part of the lesson includes a brainstorming session for students to create lists of phrasal verbs to share with one another.

**Aim:** Improve phrasal verb vocabulary  
**Activity:** Reading comprehension followed by brainstorming session and discussion  
**Level:** Intermediate  
**Outline:**
- Have the students listen to or read the short story full of phrasal verbs.
- Ask them some general comprehension questions about the text. Once they have read the text, ask them to tell a story of their own from their youth.

**Adventures Growing Up**

I was brought up in a small town in the countryside. Growing up in the countryside offered lots of advantages for young people. The only problem was that we often got into trouble as we made up stories that we acted out around town. I can remember one particular adventure in particular: One day as we were coming back from school, we came up with the brilliant idea to make out that we were pirates looking for treasure. My best friend Tom said that he made out an enemy ship in the distance. We all ran for cover and picked up a number of rocks to use for ammunition against the ship as we got ready to put together our plan of action. We were ready to set off on our attack; we slowly went along the path until we were face to face with our enemy - the postman's truck! The postman was dropping off a package at Mrs. Brown's house, so we got into his truck. At that point, we really didn't have any idea about what we were going do next.

The radio was playing so we turned down the volume to discuss what we would do next. Jack was all for switching on the motor and getting away with the stolen mail! Of course, we were just children, but the idea of actually making off with a truck was too much for us to believe. We all broke out in nervous laughter at the thought of us driving down the road in this stolen Postal Truck. Luckily for us, the postman came running towards us shouting, "What are you kids up to?!" Of course, we all got out of that truck as quickly as we could and took off down the road [3].
Now that you have discussed the text, ask the students to find the phrasal verbs from the list which occur in the reading selection. Once the students have found these phrasal verbs, ask the students to provide synonyms for the phrasal verbs.

Tell the students a little bit about what you have done that teaching day:
Example: I got up at seven this morning. After I had breakfast, I put together tonight's lesson plan and came to school. I got into the bus at X square and got off at Y square....

Ask students which of the verbs you used were phrasal verbs and ask them to repeat those verbs. At this point, you might want to ask them if they have ever taken a look under the heading 'get' in a dictionary. Ask them what they discovered.

Explain that phrasal verbs are very important in English - especially for native speakers of the language. You can point out that it might not be important for them to be able to use a lot of phrasal verbs if they use their English with other non-native speakers. However, it is important that they have a passive knowledge of phrasal verbs, as they will need to understand more and more phrasal verbs as they become used to reading, listening, seeing and exploring authentic materials in English. Obviously, if they are going to use their English with native speakers, they will really need to buckle down and get used to using and understanding phrasal verbs.

Write a list of common verbs that combine with prepositions to make phrasal verbs. I would suggest the following list:
- Take
- Get
- Make
- Put
- Bring
- Turn
- Be
- Carry

Divide students into small groups of 3-4 each, ask students to choose three of the verbs from the list and then brainstorm to come up with as many phrasal verbs using each of the three verbs that they can. They should also write example sentences for each of the phrasal verbs.

As a class, ask students to take notes while you write the phrasal verbs down that each group provides. You should then give a spoken example or two for each of the phrasal verbs so that students can understand the phrasal verbs from the context of what you are saying.

Once you have provided the students with examples, ask the students to read their own examples and check to make sure that they have used the phrasal verbs correctly.

**Phrasal Verbs**

- to make out
- to make off with
- to drop off
- to set off
- to get out of
- to get into
- to get ready
- to be up to
- to take off
- to grow up
- to make up
- to set off
- to turn down
- to get into
- to bring up
p) to break out

- There are at least 7 other phrasal verbs in the text. Can you find them?
  The most remarkable point is not introduce the idea of separable and inseparable phrasal verbs at this point. The students will already be dealing with almost too much new information.
  However, it is important to consider the overall learning diet that the students receive. Try to think about the balance of skills and activities, not just within a single lesson but over a series of lessons which take place on the same day or over a number of days or weeks. If you are sharing a class with others you should also make sure that your lesson fits in with what has gone before and what is to follow. This is especially important if you are sharing an integrated lesson.

References:
3. I. S. P. Nation Teaching. ESL/EFL Reading and Writing. Routledge, 2009