CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS ON COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA

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Abstract: On a clear recognition of the English language as an important resource that the nation can harness in its drive to modernization there has been a top-down movement to reform English language teaching in the last quarter of century. The Communicative language teaching is an important component of this reform. It, however, could not fulfill the expected impact of English language teaching in India. A different socio-cultural milieu posed several potential constraints on the adoption of communicative language teaching in India. The Indian culture of learning and communicative language teaching are in conflict in several respects including assumptions about nature of teaching and learning, perceptions of the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers and students, learning strategies encouraged and qualities valued in teachers and students. The fundamental cultural differences either in attitude, ideology or pedagogical innovations create unproductive impact and influences in teaching and learning English language. In view of such innate differences the paper focuses on various cultural constraints be it social, economical, psychological, attitudinal inferiority complex which makes hurdle in the process of communicative teaching and learning. It concludes by arguing for the necessity of taking proper and judicious approach and making well informed pedagogical alternatives that are essential in an understanding of socio-cultural influence in communicative language teaching.

Keywords: Modernization, Reform, Component, Constraints, Assumptions, Responsibilities, Perceptions, Differences, Pedagogical, Attitudinal, Influence.

Introduction: After the clear recognition of the English Language, as resource for modernization, an important reform movement has taken place in English Language Teaching. The communicative language Teaching was the important component of this reform movement. However, it could not be fulfilled the expected impact of English Language Teaching in India. A different socio-cultural milieu posed several potential constraints on the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching. The Indian culture of learning and Communicative Language Teaching are in conflict in several respects. Before we talk about the barriers and constraints of Communicative Language Teaching, it is necessary to consider about the role and importance of English in India.

The adoption of English Language in Indian education system by Lord Maicale became the link language among all the regional stales of India before and after independence. It brought all the people together and enhanced the national feeling. English became the means and medium for promoting international exchange, acquiring scientific knowledge and technological expertise, fostering economic progress and participating in international competition. The demand, importance and prestige of English language was ever growing everywhere in India. English Language acquired the superior position in country's modernization programme. It became the status symbol; therefore English Language Teaching received a great deal of attention from every sections of the society. But initially the teaching of English in India was in conventional and traditional approach. It includes the grammar translation method and audiolingualism, which is characterized by systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of comparison and translation, memorization of structural patterns and vocabulary, painstaking effort to form good verbal habits and emphasis on written language. It is obvious that this traditional approach has taken root in and has drawn strong support from large sections of the society. However, the approach has failed to develop an adequate level of communicative competence. Most of the people are unable to use English Language for authentic communication.

In order to solve this problem and to interface with modern developments in language pedagogy an impressive reform movement started in English Language teaching since late 1980s. Communicative language teaching is an important component of this reform movement. To promote Communicative Language Teaching tremendous efforts and resources have been expended on revamping curricula for various levels of education, updating syllabuses, producing communication oriented textbooks, developing skill oriented examinations and updating teacher's knowledge of new language learning theories and pedagogies. Despite these governmental efforts numerous teachers and students do not seem to have gone through any fundamental changes in communicative competency, in language instructions and in their daily practices. The reality is that Communicative Language Teaching has not received widespread support and there has been resistance against Communicative Language Teaching since its

introduction. An outcome of debate during seminar, workshop and conference and several survey reports clearly indicate that a host of constraints posed hurdles in its effectiveness. The constraints, among other things lack of necessary resources, student's mindset, limited instructional time, teacher's lack of language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence, examination pressure and cultural factors. The Communicative Language Teaching has been developed in totally different social cultural and economic environment and this has been adopted and implemented in altogether different align social, cultural and economic milieu of India. As a result there has been growing scepticism about introducing drastic changes in the classroom and uncritically adopting pedagogies.

The nature of language and language learning in Communicative Language Teaching is largely based upon the conception of communicative competence rather than linguistic competence. The communicative competence consists of grammar – a knowledge of the linguistic system of the target language, sociolinguistic competence – an understanding of the dynamics of communication in social contexts, discourse competence – ability to interpret individual elements of a piece of discourse in terms of their interconnectedness and their relationship to the entire discourse and strategic competence – the ability to employ various strategies, effectively to get communication done. Therefore it stresses the interdependence between form and meaning and tries to attend to both functional and structural aspects of language.

All versions of Communicative Language Teaching generally share a number of pedagogical principles and practices and take the position that meaning is primary and that teaching should be centered on communicative function rather than linguistic knowledge and ability to manipulate structural patterns. In other words social cultural and pragmatic features of language should be taught along with linguistic structures and knowledge of the target linguistic system must be matched by a practical ability to use the linguistic resources to achieve communicative purposes. Thus teaching should be learner centered and experience based. Students should be negotiators, communicators, discoverers and contributors of knowledge and information while doing these roles students should try to establish a link between classroom activities and real-world tasks using authentic materials, situations as an elements of entertainment for making learning process light hearted and pleasant experience.

Although, the salient features of Communicative Language Teaching described above seem to be natural and make intuitive sense to many language specialists but some of them represent radical conceptual changes in Indian context of teaching and learning. It confronted with whole set of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions preferences, experiences and behaviours with regard to teaching and learning. These cultural behaviors can not be generalized and taken for granted for it is an important constraint in the process of teaching and learning. The traditional Indian educations have shaped perceptions of the process of teaching and learning and expectations of the qualities that a good teacher and a good student should possess. Teaching methods are largely expository in nature and teaching process is teacher dominated. The teacher selects points of knowledge from authoritative sources (Usually textbooks and classics), interprets, analyses and elaborates on these points for the students, helps them connect the new points of knowledge with old knowledge and delivers a carefully sequenced and optimally mediated dose of knowledge for the students to memorize, repeat and understand. Therefore, the focus of teaching is not on how teachers and students can create, construct and apply knowledge in an experiential approach, but on how extant authoritative knowledge can be transmitted and internalized in a most effective and efficient way. The 'learn by using' approach promoted by communicative language teaching does not fit in with the traditional 'learn to use' philosophy.

The high expectation about the role of the teacher is an important constraint in communicative language teaching. To cultivate good citizenship a teacher must first and foremost be a paragon of socially desired behavior to emulate, the role of mentor and fundamental responsibility to ensure that all student progress satisfactorily. It is a common belief that a teacher must assume a directive role, having the sole prerogative in deciding what to teach and exerting complete control over the class all the time. But in actuality most of the teachers are contrary to the expected roles. In this connection many teachers are not qualified and have not effective skills to impart his or her knowledge. They are lacking the high level of proficiency and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Therefore teachers of English find communicative language teaching highly threatening and are at the risk of losing face. If a student fails to learn what is taught and progress unsatisfactorily, it is considered teacher's failure to motivate the student to learn, to present knowledge clear enough, or to supervise the learning process.

Similarly, there have been many expectations from the students with the importance of education and nature of learning. To begin with, student should have positive attitudes towards learning and school work, ready to embrace knowledge from their teacher and books and aspire high academic achievement so

as to be useful people to society. To achieve all these they must take learning seriously, be prepared to sacrifice other pursuits (e.g. social life) for the sake of study and be willing to spend a great deal of time on study even on apparently boring tasks. But real picture is opposed to these expectations students are passive, diversion from diligence, perseverance and fortitude and have lost patience and tolerance. Because of these reasons students tend to feel uneasy in a more egalitarian communicative learning environment and find it difficult to suspend their beliefs to engage in light hearted learning activities on the one hand and critical self-expression on the other.

In view of these expectations and roles of teachers and students, it is little wonder that learner – centered, interactive methodologies such as communicative language teaching that allow freedom, unpredictability, spontaneity and student initiatives in the classroom are generally not well received. By the same measure traditional pedagogical approaches like the grammar translation method and audiolingualism that offer teachers maximum planning, control and opportunity to transmit knowledge are in favour with most Indian teachers.

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