

# The Application of CLT in College English Vocabulary Teaching

---

Yiwei WU\*

Linyi Normal University

**Abstract:** The Communicative Language Teaching (CA) occurred in 1970s puts emphasis on the communicative principle. In China the author finds that lexical problems frequently interfere with communication; communication breaks down when people do not use the right words. And the ultimate goal of learning language is to communicate. The essay tries to expound the necessity and significance of the CLT application in College English Vocabulary Teaching in China.

**Key Words:** vocabulary teaching, CA, college English study in China

## I.A Brief Survey of Vocabulary Teaching

### 1. The importance of English vocabulary learning

Vocabulary is the tool of thought, self-expression, translation and communication. In any language teaching, vocabulary plays a tremendously important role. The famous linguist Wilkins said people could describe few things without grammar, but they could express nothing without vocabulary. Widdowson thought that the native English speaker can understand those language material with correct vocabulary but not so proper in grammar rules rather than those with correct grammar rules but not so proper in vocabulary use. Lewis(1993) held the idea that vocabulary acquisition is the main task of Second Language Acquisition and the language skills as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating all can not go without vocabulary. Non-native language learners usually trend to make mistakes about vocabulary; the most difficult thing in listening is vocabulary. Foreign language teaching methods are various but all show the importance of vocabulary teaching. To start learning a foreign language is connected with learning the words.

### 2. The simplification and neglect of vocabulary teaching

Traditional English language teaching in China is dominated by a teacher-central, exam-oriented, grammar & vocabulary-based method. In China, the teaching and learning of English vocabulary have typically been undervalued and neglected in our English language instruction. English teacher usually prioritize syntax or phonology as central to linguistic theory and more critical to language pedagogy. They don't think that vocabulary is central to language and words are of

---

\* Foreign Language School, Linyi Normal University, Shandong Province, 276000, China.  
E-mail: yiweiwu@sina.com

critical importance to the typical language learners. Simply increasing learner's vocabulary without putting its knowledge to use may not be effective

## **II. The Application of CLT in Vocabulary Teaching**

### **1. The Theory of CLT**

The communicative approach appears in the peaceful times in the early 1970s. Weak version of the Communicative approach stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes. The strong version of Communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication. Anyway, these approaches can be described as "learning to use" or "using English to learn it".

### **2. The Application of CLT in College English Vocabulary Teaching**

#### **2.1. Choosing Suitable Topics According to the Unit Theme**

The college English textbooks are usually including several units where there are concerned words in the glossary. Usually teachers first explain every words, its pronunciation, spelling, word structure, word collocation, its part of speech, and so on. The Integrated Course of The new version college English student's textbook contains several themes, each of which is embodied in one unit. For example, in Unit One of Book 1 the theme is Growing Up, so the teacher could choose several topics for students to discuss. Everyone has experienced the process of growing up, during which so many things happened that help you to be mature and successful. So the topics of Generation Gap, My Honored Teacher, Encouragement, To Be Sincere Towards Life, and etc. can be chosen. The teachers instruct and assign students to prepare for the presentation of their discussion. Thus, the related words are practiced.

#### **2.2. Explain the Word Meaning in a Situation**

The nature of communication may be the guidance in the communicative words teaching approach. That is to say, whatever word teaching activities the students are involved in, if it is really promoting language use, the students should have a desire to communicate. If they do not want to be involved in communication then that communicating will probably be not effective. The students should have some kind of communicative purposes, then their attention will be centered on the situational use of words of what is being said or written, they will have to deal with a variety of languages, rather than just one spelling forms or grammatical construction use. Therefore, in the word teaching, what teachers should do most importantly is to arouse the students' communicative consciousness, activate their communicative motivation. To comprehend a word' real communicative meaning and use, if there is a great amount of situation knowledge in learner's mind. Thus, what the teachers should do is to enlarge readers' situation knowledge, arouse their communicative desire to attain the communicative aim. So the following are two ways to use:

##### **2.2.1. Role play (deducing meaning from the context)**

Littlewood (1981) proposed two types of communicative activities: the precommunicative

activities and the communicative activities, both of which are needed in the communicative language teaching classroom.

Activities and materials which engage students in the classroom communication include: games, music, discussions, stimulating pictures, dramatic stories, amusing anecdotes, role play and the etc.

Role-play is to create the presence of a real life situation in the classroom. It is important in the classroom communication because it gives students an opportunity to practice communicatively in different social contexts and in different social roles. The language applied in this activity is varied according to the character's status, attitudes, mood, and different situations.

### 2.2.2 Reading Authentic Materials

In communicative principle, authentic material is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used by native speakers. According to Tomlinson, authentic materials are "materials such as newspaper articles, brochures, train tickets, letters, advertisements, recording of news, airport announcements, etc., which were originally used in real situations and were not designed for use in language teaching. Such materials are used in the classroom to expose the learners to language in real use". For communicative method, the authentic material is the effective way for learners to acquire communicative abilities. When students pay attention to the really useful materials and the real language situations, the words seem easy to master. The following is an advertisement: experience the sheer pleasure of pure silk against your skin. Slip into a billowy silk shirt, an indispensable and luxurious addition to your wardrobe. Throw it on over leggings of jeans and, of course, it's perfect for work or dressed up for special occasions. Available in three colors—brilliant blue, shocking pink or ivory, it's terrific value at only £ 29.95. This is a small indulgence you just can't afford to miss. This is a shirt advertisement, all the word in which is colorful and superb. Several adj.s are used to indicate its texture, value, pleasure, low price, necessity of purchase, color and etc. In the wonderful description of the shirt, it is better and easier for students to feel the word billowy means free, easy and elegant than just telling them its Chinese meaning.

### 2.3. Reading Extensively

The aim of language teaching is to let students learn how to use language in spoken English or written English. So all kinds of words related to all fields should be mastered and one word can be used in several fields. Students should be available to English newspapers and magazines in the original, especially those freshly published. So in such ways, they have the opportunities to learn authentic English, to add authentic English to their vocabulary and to grasp the up-to-dateness of English expression. Reading material should be various, such as literary books (novels, dramas, poems and etc.), scientific books, everyday life books and so on.

We admit that we can listen to such English broadcasting as VOA and BBC through radio programs. To break the obstacles of new words, there will be a great progress. So after the limited hours for English teaching, teachers should encourage and instruct students to get in

touch with the authentic materials. It benefits and makes effective.

### **III. The Disadvantage of Communicative Approach**

As a new approach to foreign language teaching and learning, the communicative approach is based on many modern linguistic theories. Since its birth, it has been embraced by teachers of foreign languages throughout the world.

In terms of preparation and sheer professional skill in knowing when and how to intervene productively, it demands more energies and adaptability from the teacher. The teacher also needs to be more confidently competent in the foreign language. Secondly, it does not offer the teacher the security of the textbook, while with more traditional approaches, it is sufficient for the teacher to follow the prescription offered by textbook. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to select, adapt and invent the materials he or she uses. Thirdly, it may perplex students who are taught by other approaches, at least at the initial stages. Finally, it is more difficult to evaluate the performance of students.

### **IV. Conclusions**

Every communicative language teaching methods used in grammar, text, listening, writing and the etc are all closely related with vocabulary. Without the acquisition of vocabulary, that is equal to that a capable housewife feels it difficult to cook porridge without rice. As for a teacher, it really of significance to master the principles & spirits of Communicative Approach to help students to improve their learning strategies and building up the communicative consciousness to help them enlarge their vocabulary, enhance the vocabulary knowledge so that the abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing will develop and the communicative capability will be improved. The author will keep the communicative principle in mind during the vocabulary teaching. More works need to be done and researched.

### **References:**

Ellis, R..Second Language Acquisition[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2000.

Kramsch, C.. Context and Culture in Language Teaching[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1999.

Lewis. The Lexical Approach[M]. London: Language Teaching Publication, 1993.

Littlewood, W.. Communicative Language Teaching[M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000.

Peng feng. An Application of Lexical Approach to Teaching Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Context of China[MA]. Jiangxi: Jiangxi Normal University, 2004.