What does ‘communicative' mean?: A research discussion for language teachers

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About us:

Reed

- BYU-H Chinese Instructor
- textbook-sequence, CCLT*, performance-based assessments
- Teacher support since 2009
  - workshops, articles (e.g. HITESOL)
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*Comprehension-based Communicative Language Teaching (see ACTFL special interest group)

Jeenna

- High School Spanish Teacher on Maui since 2006
- Versed in CCLT pedagogy and research and theory on SLA
- Passionate about improving my teaching
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Context: Exploring teacher questions about pedagogy and connecting our questions to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and theory

Goals: After this presentation participants will be able to:

- Understand some research connections to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Understand why there is often a disconnect between SLA researchers, teachers, and textbooks
- Recognize examples and non-examples of CLT activities and/or strategies
- Make connections between your own teaching and CLT principles
A note on Definitions

- Researchers provide a unique definition at the start of each study they write up, so definitions typically vary.
- Goals between researchers vary widely; only some connect with teaching;
- “micro-bridge”-building is a third kind of work--not teaching and not research
Research definitions

**Communication** (using the target language)
VanPatten (2017): “Communication is the expression, interpretation, and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context. What is more, communication is also purposeful” (p. 3).

**Meaning**
- **Actions**: asking, answering, warning, playing, more… vs. drilling
- **Develop topics**: personal info, task ideas, story ideas...
- **Talk about language**: use TL to discuss words, grammar

**Context**
- Institutional: classroom ✓ vs. restaurant, bank, taxi, etc.
- Non-institutional: vs. home, family, friends

**Purposeful** = use TL to accomplish a goal (versus just learn language)
PLEASE PUT YOUR QUESTIONS IN THE CHAT...
Q: Vocabulary Lists

At the start of a unit or lesson I will sometimes create a vocabulary list with terms and words that I know we will be using for that lesson. We will review the vocab before engaging in the content and then I will use the vocabulary throughout the lesson. Is this targeting of vocabulary considered communicative?
Q: Grammar

Although I avoid teaching grammar explicitly, I will sometimes point out a grammar item in context. Does this really help the students in any way or is it just a waste of time?
I used to use a textbook, but have not in many years. However, I know that many teachers still do and this is a big question. How well does the research on SLA and CLT align with language textbooks?
Q: Input

In my lower level classes, I focus the majority of my efforts into providing the students with comprehensible and meaning-based input with little demand for them to provide true output. Should I be doing more, or is this enough?
Q: Tasks

I have read that a communicative classroom uses tasks to provide content and context. I don’t always use tasks, does that mean that my classroom is less communicative?
Q: Turn and Talk

In my lessons in the Face-to-Face classes, I will often have students turn and talk and either summarize what we are doing in Spanish, or ask one another a question. How communicative is this type of activity?
Q: Tasks in Breakout Rooms

With online instruction, I try to use breakout rooms sometimes to get students to interact in smaller groups, but it is not very effective because a lot of time they just speak in English. Is there any research on working in groups and keeping it communicative?
Additional Resources


