

# Application of CLT in College English Vocabulary Teaching

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**Abstract:** The goal of foreign language teaching is to broaden the variety of communication settings in which the learner can concentrate on meaning without being distracted by linguistic form. Vocabulary is the center of language learning, so it is important to deal with the communication law in the application of vocabulary teaching. However, nowadays, in the college vocabulary teaching classes in China, students only passively accept the words, remember the meaning and form of words by rote, and lack the opportunity of application and communication. Therefore, applying CLT can promote the accumulation of the vocabulary which occurs more significantly in the real context.

**Keywords:** Communicative language teaching; Vocabulary teaching; College English

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## 1. Introduction

With the development of the global economy, more and more attention has been paid to the cultivation of students' ability to use English. The development of usable communication skills to suit the needs of immediate or long-term social contact has always been the purpose of most organically occurring or out-of-school language acquisition throughout the world's history (Savignon, 2007). Therefore, the communicative language teaching approach becomes more and more important in language teaching and appears to be the current trend in ESL/EFL education nowadays.

The communicative language teaching method attaches great importance to the cultivation of students' language ability, adopts real and authentic language materials, advocates sentence patterns and situations to learn the language, and encourages students to contact and use foreign languages more. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) say CLT has been described as an approach aimed at making communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and building strategies for teaching the four language skills that understand the connection between language and communication by both American and British proponents.

Therefore, the use of CLT in language teaching will also have a significant impact on students' vocabulary acquisition. Communicative approach teaching pays attention to the function of vocabulary in sentences and texts. In teaching, the teacher combines boring and abstract vocabulary teaching with the practical communication process. Students actively use language and use vocabulary to communicate in the corresponding context set by the teacher, and they can integrate specific vocabulary into the real language. In this way, it is easy to memorize words and improve the efficiency of English vocabulary learning.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Definition of CLT

Celce-Murcia (2001) points out that the creation and implementation of programs and approaches that facilitate the development of functional language ability through learner engagement in communicative events have been the primary emphasis of CLT. What's more, Savignon (2007) says that the goal of CLT is for students to participate in communication to enhance their communication skills.

Littlewood (1981) pays close attention to both functional and structural components of language, that is, when we teach language, we must examine not only the forms and rules of the language but also how to apply the forms and rules in the appropriate context and at the appropriate moment. Brown (1941) describes CLT as follows: according to CLT, the grammatical structure should be better classified under multiple functional categories. As teachers strive to improve fluency, CLT makes extensive use of actual language, but not at the price of clear, unambiguous, and direct communication. Not only are we concerned with the immediate classroom work, but also with how to support lifelong language learning among our students. According to Littlewood and Brown's interpretation of CLT, additional activities about students' real lives should be conducted by English teachers during their courses to help students make real use of the words they learn in class.

As mentioned above, different linguistics provide different definitions for CLT. CLT's purpose is to build students' communicative competence, which involves both language knowledge and understanding of how to use language effectively in communicative contexts. This is something they emphasize frequently.

## **2.2 CLT in vocabulary teaching**

The study of vocabulary teaching and learning has a long history. As the study of vocabulary has progressed, several ideas have been utilized to expand vocabulary teaching methods. Many studies think that in the process of learning a foreign or second language, CLT in vocabulary instruction should be given more attention.

There are numerous methodologies to increase vocabulary size that demand less teacher work and classroom time while also providing huge benefits. These methods entail the acquisition of vocabulary by chance because of encounters with words in speaking and writing. Although incidental learning is not as successful as direct learning for any individual word, incidental learning provides so many more possibilities that it accounts for the majority of first-language vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2013). What's more, Wallace (1982) said that now we should look at contexts at different levels and discuss how they might be used to teach vocabulary.

Widdowson (1978, p.26-31) proposed the "Teaching New Vocabulary In the Context" view. Schmitt (1995) proposes effective communication vocabulary teaching must have the following conditions (1) Learners need to master certain vocabulary to make speculation words; (2) The learner needs to have a certain understanding of the background knowledge of vocabularies; (3) There must be sufficient clues in the context to assist the guess of the words.

As mentioned above, some related literature on CLT studies in vocabulary teaching and learning has been reviewed, and a conclusion can be reached that CLT is an effective teaching method that highlights students' real-life experiences. The findings of the studies add to the body of knowledge on CLT in vocabulary teaching, as well as presenting more demand to make the best use of CLT and discover solutions to its flaws.

## **3. Discussion**

In this part, I will discuss three principles of CLT in college English vocabulary teaching in China.

### **3.1 Learning vocabulary in context**

It's easy to comprehend a word's real communicative meaning and use it if there is a great amount of situation knowledge in students' minds. Thus, what the teachers should do is to enlarge students' situation knowledge, arouse their communicative desire to attain the communicative aim. The teacher can show some pictures and put forward some questions in the lead-in part to draw students' attention and arouse students' interest in the new vocabulary they will learn.

Nowadays, although some teachers can explain the pronunciation, common structure, different meanings, and usage of words, they also give different example sentences for students to translate when they teach English vocabulary, the text is out of touch with real life and is less vivid. When students encounter words in future learning, they often cannot remember the context created by the teacher, and it is difficult to deeply remember the meaning of the words. It is easy for students to have a mechanical passive rote learning way.

As Wallace (1982) says, teaching vocabulary in a spoken or written context has solid grounds. Therefore, it is important to improve the efficiency of memorizing words by creating real context and cultivating students' communicative competence. What's more, teachers should not only connect words to context but also create new, rich and interesting contexts that can help students understand the meaning of words.

### **3.2 Apply words for communication**

The fundamental task of our language teaching is to cultivate students' future language communication abilities. Language-communication is parasitic in real life. Therefore, in order to improve the efficiency of students' vocabulary learning and memory, we must focus on improving students' communicative competence. To improve interpersonal skills, teachers should place students in a communicative environment where they learn to use different vocabulary in different environments.

Allen (1983) mentions that vocabulary issues and communication are closely related. However, in the history of Chinese foreign language teaching, grammar is always dominated in language teaching, and most of the vocabularies are self-study by students, so it is difficult for students to master communicative skills. What's more, in the most English classes in Chinese college, teachers are given a significant role in the teaching process. Teachers use the traditional method to teach students the meanings of vocabulary, while students' activities are often more focused on linguistic analysis than on practicing using the vocabulary in conversation, and they have few opportunities to practice with other students using the new vocabularies they learn. Students will become bored with studying vocabulary as time goes on and will see memorizing vocabulary as a chore; as a result, they will be unable to learn English effectively in or after class. Therefore, it is extremely necessary to apply CLT in vocabulary learning and give students more chances and initiative to communicate and practice with new words.

### 3.3 Use language appropriately in certain situations

As mentioned above, there are lots of authors who argue that it is important to use language in different social contexts appropriately. Especially Hymes (1972) accentuates the importance of appropriateness of the use of language in the specific context. What's more, Palmer and Bachman (1982) point out the definition of strategic competence which deserves to be thought of in vocabulary teaching. He says that the term "strategic competence" refers to a set of verbal and nonverbal communication methods used to compensate for grammatical and sociolinguistic inadequacies, as well as to adapt to the fluctuations of the communication context. In other words, it refers to a person's mental ability to employ a wide range of language knowledge in a given communication setting. As a result, strategic competence acts as a bridge between the classroom and the real world, helping students to put what they've learned into practice. However, in China, although most English teachers can pay more attention to the meaning of vocabulary, they seldom set different contexts to let students have chances to apply words, and students do not know how to choose different words in different settings appropriately, which is extremely critical to students' communicative competence. Therefore, it is true that the ability of college students of using vocabulary in communication in certain situations is necessary to be improved.

In summary, for college students, only knowing the meaning, pronunciation, form of the word is not enough. They must learn how to use words in daily communication and be able to use the right and proper words in different situations to achieve the purpose of communication.

## 4. Conclusion

There is no doubt that CLT makes a positive influence on the strategies of learning vocabulary. With the training of communicating with the new words, putting the explanation in the context, and introducing some building of words and words learning strategies, students' ability to use the meaning from the context and some other affixes were improved which can indicate that CLT is more effective in helping students to memorize words. This may prove that CLT has a positive influence on the strategies of learning vocabulary.

However, taking CLT into English vocabulary teaching does not mean that the traditional teaching method is abandoned. Each teaching method has its own merits and shortcomings. And the traditional teaching method has made a contribution to English teaching in the aspect of ensuring accuracy indeed. In China, students' English courses are taught as a foreign language, so to update the English teaching method in college English classes, all the situations need to be considered and the best way to exploit the advantages of these two teaching methods is to combine the CLT with traditional teaching structures.

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