THE (IN)APPROPRIATENESS AND (IN)EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPORTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING TO TAIWAN

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This study examines whether or not a communicative approach is an appropriate methodology to be implemented in Taiwan. The data on which this study is based were obtained from a junior high school in Taipei. Through the use of multiple-data-collection methods, that is, observation, interviewing, and document collection, a better understanding of the English language education system in Taiwan was achieved. This study reveals that there is little congruence between the actual English teaching in the classrooms and the objectives stated in English instruction policy of the Ministry Education in Taiwan. In order for a teaching approach to work in a specific cultural context, attention should be paid to students’ needs, teachers’ qualifications, and traditional customs and beliefs about language teaching and learning. Bringing in a new cultural system and imposing it on the existing culture only guarantees failure.

INTRODUCTION

Language teaching has a long history. Since 1850, many language teaching methods and approaches have been developed, such as the direct method, the audiolingual method, the silent way, suggestopedia, total physical response, the natural approach, and the communicative approach. Each of these methods or approaches offers some new insights which are crucial to systematic and effective language teaching, and inevitably each has some inadequacies, too. Among these methods and approaches, communicative language teaching is an approach about which a large amount of literature has been written, and it has been highly recommended by numerous experts in recent years. As Lightbown and Spada (1990) put it, "Over the past 20 years there have been many changes in L2 instruction. The major change is the shift from an explicit focus on language itself to an emphasis on the expression and comprehension of meaning through language" (p. 430).

However, what is recommended in language teaching in western countries is not necessarily exportable. This paper is intended to describe English education in Taiwan, and to clarify what communicative language teaching (CLT) is. It also attempts to explore the government educational policy about English teaching.
in Taiwan. I will draw on my classroom observations and the views of EFL teachers from Taiwan in discussing the issues of CLT. In addition, factors such as teachers' and learners' beliefs about language teaching and learning, cultural differences, learners' communicative needs, examinations, as well as the constraints on implementing the communicative approach in EFL settings will be explored in order to examine whether or not CLT is an appropriate methodology in a non-western context. Finally, this study also seeks to answer why the traditional way dies hard.

To focus this study, the following research questions are posed at the outset:
1. What are the positive and negative aspects of communicative language teaching when it is implemented in Taiwan?
2. What are the problems when the communicative approach is adopted in Taiwan?
3. Why does the old way die hard? To what extent can the communicative approach be adapted?

**METHODOLOGY**

The use of multiple data collection methods--triangulation in qualitative research--can contribute to the quality and the trustworthiness of the findings (Fetterman, 1989; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this study, triangulation will be achieved through three data-gathering techniques which dominate in qualitative research; that is, observation, interviewing, and document collection. The data on which this study is based were obtained from a junior high school in Taipei county. Hsin-Tien is a large junior high school with more than four thousand students, and each class consists of more than fifty students. The amount of class time for English instruction is 3-4 hours weekly. I observed three to four times per week for an entire month during the Fall semester 1994 in this school, acting as a participant-observer in three English classes taught by different teachers, one novice, and two experts. I did not participate in the classroom lessons unless, on a few occasions, the teacher requested my assistance. In addition to classroom observations, data were also gathered from teachers' monthly meetings, and through formal and informal interviews with twelve English teachers (mostly volunteers), twenty-one students (some volunteers and others recommended by their teachers), the principle, and the dean of studies in Hsin-Tien junior high (example interview protocols are included in Appendix A). Occasionally, I also had informal talks with students' parents when they visited the school. Tape recordings were made when appropriate and with consent of informants. From the observations, tape-
recorded interviews, and fieldnotes, I looked for patterns in order to investigate the problems confronted by the teachers as well as to study why the old ways die so hard. I also observed some classes in Chinese Language and Literature Department (CHN) and the Hawai'i English Language Program (HELP) in order to have a better understanding of the so-called communicative classroom.

In addition, the government educational policy about English teaching in Taiwan was obtained and translated in order to have a better understanding of the aims for English instruction in junior and senior high schools, as well as the congruence between the actual English teaching and the objectives stated in English instruction policy of the Ministry of Education in Taiwan.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

Overview

Savignon (1991) states that "communicative language teaching is seen to be not a British, European, or U.S. phenomenon, but rather an international effort to respond to the needs of present-day language learners in many different contexts of learning" (p. 261). It seems that communicative language teaching is the hottest direction in ESL/EFL teaching nowadays. "Dozens of books, journal articles, and conference papers, in addition to an array of teaching materials, have been written under the banner of this movement" (Berns, 1984, p. 4). The communicative approach is generally regarded as the most effective means for obtaining oral fluency in the target language, and it is also an approach which is more likely to produce the kinds of competence needed in language learning (Savignon, 1972, 1983, 1991; Maley, 1984).

The communicative approach to language teaching is based on the idea that language is used for communication. It aims at developing students' communicative competence, which is the competence of knowing when, how, and what to speak. In Canale and Swain's (1980) analysis, four dimensions of communicative competence are identified: Grammatical competence--knowledge of the rules of grammar; sociolinguistic competence--knowledge of the rules of language uses; discourse competence--knowledge of the ways in which sentences combine together in meaningful sequences; and strategic competence--that is, the verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that can help language learners to cope with or remedy breakdowns in communication which result from lack of proficiency in the target language.
Communicative approaches hold that "when we acquire a language we do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence, we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose" (Widdowson, 1978, p. 2). Consequently, communicative language teaching is an approach which advocates the learning of languages through meaningful communication, the value of words through practical use, and the illocutionary force of utterances through discourses. It is an approach which puts more emphasis on fluency than accuracy, on appropriateness than correctness. Littlewood (1981) states that "one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view" (p. 1).

In addition, according to proponents, the communicative classroom is student-centered. Students are encouraged to speak as much as possible, and they are given an opportunity to express their own opinions. It is claimed that teachers' roles are less dominant and students are seen as more responsible managers of their own learning. Students can learn the language through communicative activities such as language games, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks which are more interesting and enjoyable than the grammatical points in the grammar translation method, the drills in audiolingual method, and the practice of using colored wooden rods in the silent way. However, these are assertions and recommendations. There is surprisingly little empirical research on communicative classrooms, and there is no consensus about what a communicative classroom is.

*Communicative Classrooms*

Although communicative language teaching has gained increasing popularity, little research has been undertaken to describe what actually goes on in communicative classrooms, and little is actually communicated in the language classroom though teachers claim to be teaching communicatively. In order to examine the extent to which genuine communication is evident in communicative language classes, Nunan (1987) carried out a study for the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program in which five genuine communicative language lessons were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. All of the teachers in his study were highly qualified with MA degrees in TESOL or applied linguistics and knowledgeable about the concepts associated with communicative language teaching. They all claimed to be teaching communicatively.
However, when the patterns of interaction were examined more closely, they turned out to be traditional patterns of classroom interaction instead of genuine interaction. As Savignon (1991) states, "even when all lessons ostensibly focus on functional aspects of language use, patterns of classroom interaction provide little genuine communication between teacher and learner or between learner and learner" (p. 271).

There is no consensus about what a communicative classroom is and what constitutes the instructional practices and procedures in a communicative classroom. The elementary Chinese class I observed in CHN was also claimed to be a communicative classroom. During class time, however, the teacher read some phrases and sentences in Chinese, explaining them in English. Then he re-read and had the students repeat after him. The students put a lot of effort into pattern practices rather than communication. In addition, the classroom was teacher-centered. It was the teacher who directed and controlled the language behavior of his students. Furthermore, the language used in class was mostly the students' native language. The teacher used English to explain complicated grammar to make it easier for students to understand. The students also used their native language to ask questions about grammar or structures they were not familiar with. Their security was initially enhanced by using their mother tongue, and this might have encouraged them to ask questions without hesitation, but what happened in class seemed to contradict the concept that "the students' native language has no particular role in the communicative approach. The target language should be used not only during communicative activities, but also in explaining the activities to the students or in assigning homework" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 135).

The pronunciation class I observed in HELP was communicative in nature. The instruction, most of the time, focused on meaning-based activities. Students were offered opportunities for the negotiation of meaning in group work, and they basically had rich, varied, and comprehensible input. I expected that the teacher would ignore the errors students made in order to create opportunities for students to use English in a more natural and spontaneous way. Larsen-Freeman (1986) states that "errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills" (p. 129). However, the teacher did not treat errors as part of the development process in language learning. Instead, he tried to correct or recast every single mistake students made. What he did in class was contradictory to the concept that "correcting speech errors directly is not just merely useless, but actually harmful to progress in language acquisition" (Terrell, 1982, p. 126).
Communicative language teaching seems to be a bandwagon and catchall term, and teachers who claim to teach communicatively may have different interpretations of what a communicative classroom is.

**Positive Aspects of Communicative Language Teaching**

Being unsatisfied with the traditional way of teaching for a long period of time, some teachers are eager to try out a new way of teaching, hoping that it will enliven the language classrooms in Taiwan. The communicative approach claims to have various virtues which can compensate for the shortcomings of the grammar translation method and the audiolingual method.

Despite the fact that some so-called communicative classrooms may not be entirely communicative, focusing on the positive aspects, it may be said that communicative language teaching brings the insights of sociolinguistics into language teaching, which makes the teaching more communicative, practical, and meaningful. In addition, it replaces boring, mechanical, and monotonous exercises with exciting and interesting activities. It treats language as an integrated whole rather than as a group of isolated units. Furthermore, the communicative classroom is student-centered, which greatly arouses students’ initiative and motivation.

**Negative Aspects of Communicative Language Teaching**

Balet (1985) claims that "a second language is best learnt...by using it in real-life situations" (p. 178). It goes without saying that real life is an ideal situation, and a language is best learned in it. However, it must be recognized that a classroom is not the outside world and learning a language is not the same as using language. It is almost impossible to create a real-life setting within a four-walled classroom, especially in an EFL setting. Classroom activities such as role-plays, problem-solving tasks, tests, and assignments are all artificial. They are not authentic language used in the outside world. In the introduction of Savignon’s Communication competence: An experiment in foreign language teaching, Jakobovits (1972) points out that "language use refers to what people do with words and utterances in real life setting," and "typical language teaching activities such as pattern practices, structured dialogues, question-answer exchanges...and the like are all 'pretend' language teaching activities. These occur minimally, if at all, in natural language acquisition settings, first or second" (p. 4).
TAIWAN GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

At present, English is the only required foreign language in Taiwan, beginning in grade 7 and continuing through grade 12 in Taiwan. The importance of English as a subject in the educational system can be seen in the fact that not only has English been one of the required courses for high school students for a long time, but it has also been one of the required subjects in high school and university entrance examinations.

The amount of time spent in teaching English is two to three hours per week in the first year of junior high school, four hours per week in the second year and four to six hours weekly in the last year.

Teaching Objectives

In Taiwan, the current objectives for English instruction established by the Ministry of Education are as follows (Translated from Ministry and Department of Education, 1990):

* Aims for English Instruction in Junior High School
  1. To enable the students to acquire the basic skills of understanding, speaking, reading, and writing simple, modern English.
  2. To establish firm grounds for the students' subsequent study of English.
  3. To provide students with a background in English necessary for future educational or vocational aims.

* Aims for English Instruction in Senior High School
  1. To enable students to use English which is practical in everyday life.
  2. To strengthen students' reading and writing ability in English in order to establish a firm foundation for higher academic study.
  3. To arouse the students' interest in studying the culture of English-speaking peoples.

Teaching Requirements and Guidelines

1. Standardized textbooks and tapes, which focus on comprehensive and practical daily life materials, should be included.

2. Teachers should emphasize training in the ability to use the language, guide students in practical language use, and cultivate their ability to actually use the language in expressing themselves.

3. English classes should be characterized by a great deal of practice. Only after
much practice has led to a definite automatic proficiency should concise summary explanations be given.

4. Training should consolidate and emphasize stages. In studying a foreign language, practice in listening, speaking, reading, and writing cannot be separated. Four skills are complementary and help promote each other. Listening and speaking training should be paramount in the beginning stages, accompanied by appropriate reading and writing practice.

5. Pronunciation teaching must supply many opportunities for listening in order to clarify the complex relationship between English spelling and pronunciation. The difference between phonemes and allophones should be clarified. Stress, word-stress, phrase-stress, and intonation should be introduced as well.

6. Printed form should be taught before cursive form. Have students copy the text exercises correctly, with proper small and capitalized letters, and punctuation.

7. Teachers should use English as much as possible and use the native language appropriately. English should be used as much as possible in asking questions and explaining. Students are encouraged to ask questions in the target language.

8. In addition to speaking English during classroom activities, it is necessary to hold all kinds of extracurricular activities such as recitations, story-telling, joke-telling, singing songs, spelling-contest, and so on. It provides students with more practical opportunities and improves their study and enthusiasm, and accustoms them to using English.

9. Students should be trained and encouraged to use dictionaries.

10. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be equally included in daily quizzes and monthly tests. Avoid decontextualized multiple-choice items and complicated grammatical points in testing.

In a word, the purpose of English teaching at high school is to provide students with basic training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to cultivate in students a basic ability to use elementary English, both orally and in written form, and to prepare them for their vocation or for further academic study. Broadly speaking, these objectives appear to call for the ability to communicate in English. Therefore, adopting the communicative approach seems to be desperately needed in order for these objectives to be met.
ENGLISH EDUCATION IN TAIWAN

The present government policy advocates a communicative approach, and the purpose of teaching English is to provide students with basic training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in order to cultivate in students a basic ability to use elementary English, both orally and in written form. However, the reality of classroom teaching in Taiwan is very different from the objectives stated in the government policy.

Observations in Taiwanese English language classrooms revealed that the structure of classroom discourse is mainly teacher-centered, grammar-centered, and textbook-centered with minimal interaction between teachers and students. English is still taught using the traditional approach, the grammar translation method. It emphasizes training students to understand the grammar of the target language and to write the language accurately through translation exercises from students’ native language into the target language. In this method, students’ passive recognition ability is emphasized rather than their active manipulation ability. Little attention is paid to accurate pronunciation, intonation, and communication skills. The weakness of this method is that students learn a lot of rules and structures. They are very good at grammar, but they are not able to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the outside world, the real-life communication in the target language. They are "structurally competent but communicative incompetent students" (Johnson, 1981).

In addition, the audiolingual method is used in teaching English as a foreign language in Taiwan. According to proponents of this method, the practice of pattern drill is employed rather than the explanation of grammatical rules. Students are treated like machines. They have to practice a lot of mechanical drills and learn the target language though imitation and repetition. They are expected to practice pattern drills over and over again until they can rattle them off without effort.

Unfortunately, in Taiwan classrooms, the approach to language teaching is audiolingual in theory, but it becomes less audiolingual when it reaches the classroom so that what is audiolingual by design becomes grammar translation in practice. Even in universities, except for language laboratory practices, the grammar translation method still plays an important part in English teaching. Supposedly, grammar translation facilitates the learning of grammatical structures. In fact, it emphasizes the explanation of grammatical rules and translation of the content into Chinese rather than the training in the use of English utterances. Consequently, students have
difficulty attaining mastery in English sentences and applying this skill to daily life communication.

Those students who are successful in such classes usually have a good knowledge of the grammar of the target language. When asked to perform on multiple-choice grammar tests, they can do so. However, "students who do well on discrete-point tests of language proficiency are not always able to carry on a conversation in the foreign language" (Savignon, 1972, p. 154).

Thus, the most serious problem of English education in Taiwan is that students who have received formal English instruction throughout high school and college frequently remain deficient in the ability to communicate with English native speakers. Though the aim of teaching a foreign language in Taiwan is to train students in the abilities to manipulate language patterns and communicate in the target language, most students in Taiwan can neither apply English to real life communication nor form correct and appropriate English sentences in oral production after receiving more than seven years of English education. The blame for this situation is placed on pedagogical methods--the grammar translation method and a version of the audiolingual method.

PROBLEMS WITH THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TAIWAN

Nonnative Speakers

It is very difficult for nonnative speakers to teach using the communicative approach. In communicative language teaching, students are usually divided into groups for discussion. The teacher will go around and help students when they have questions. Therefore, the teacher must have a fairly high level of communicative competence in order to carry out his/her role effectively. Unfortunately, most junior high English teachers I interviewed are far from meeting such requirements, for a lot of them have never been to an English-speaking country, and they are unable to use an English-only approach to presentation and practice. They do not have adequate knowledge of sociolinguistic and strategic competence, which is required in order to tell a grammatical sentence from an appropriate one. Consequently, the safest method for the Taiwanese teachers with less than native-speaker competence is to base English teaching firmly on given texts.

Wolfson (1989) points out that "the only information teachers who wish to take this approach have available to them is to use their own intuitions about what is and is
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not appropriate in a given situation" (p. 45). If the communicative aspects of language such as expressing oneself politely and participating smoothly in a conversation are absorbed unconsciously, and they "remain entirely in the intuition knowledge base of native speakers, teachers of second or foreign languages who have little experience with real communication in the target language have no way of developing communicative-teaching techniques" (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, pp. 234-235).

In addition to lacking intuition and sociolinguistic competence, unfamiliarity with authentic materials is another problem NNS teachers confront when adopting the communicative approach. Teachers complain that it is difficult "to work with a curriculum in which the lesson content and exercises were not provided" (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 228). They have to spend much more time than native speaker teachers preparing the lessons. For the time being, a set of standardized textbooks is used by all high school English teachers in Taiwan, and students are evaluated by how well they know the materials covered in the textbooks in the competitive monthly tests and entrance examinations.

Learners' Communicative Needs

Some English teachers in Taiwan feel strongly that the communicative approach is good for teaching students who are about to go to an English-speaking country for further study, but not for other students of English. Canale and Swain (1980) state that "a communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's communicative needs" (p. 27). Students in EFL settings usually do not have a strong desire to learn English communicatively because they do not need the language to communicate and to survive. The purposes of learning English in EFL countries, in Chinese teachers' views, are very different from those in ESL countries. One teacher I interviewed pointed out that:

CLT may be the best way to teach students from other language backgrounds in America and the most efficient kind of training those who need to be a part of the American culture, it doesn't meet the needs of our students here, who are learning the language for a different purpose and who have no desire to live in the US.

Most Chinese students learn the analytical skills and knowledge of English grammar just to meet the needs of reading English textbooks. It is a fact that these attitudes toward English learning and teaching are in contradiction to the objectives stated in English instruction policy of the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. However, the objectives are set too high for the front line troops (the teachers) to
accomplish, and they may not meet the actual needs and purposes of all high school students in Taiwan.

Though Canale (1983) says that "the second language learner must have the opportunity to take part in meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language--that is, to respond to genuine communicative needs and interests in realistic second language situations" (p. 18), there are few highly competent English speakers in Taiwan for students to interact with, and it is extremely difficult to create a realistic second language situation for learners who have no real-life communicative needs in the target language.

**Examinations**

In Taiwan, taking an entrance examination is known to be one of the most important, influential, and decisive occurrences in a young person's life. The students' scores on the exam are the only determining criterion for admission as well as the criterion for assignment to schools of different ranks. Passing the entrance examination and getting into a prestigious school means not only obtaining the opportunity of getting into the next level of education, but it is also regarded as a great honor and a stepping stone for future advancement and success. For these reasons, from junior high school on, students are pressed to study hard to pass the extremely competitive entrance examinations in order to have opportunities for further study.

Theoretically, the curriculum standards guide the preparation of teaching materials and teaching activities, and the exam in turn evaluates the teaching procedures and learning achievement. However, the situation in Taiwan is the opposite. The entrance examinations into senior high school and college determine the teaching method and modify the teaching materials and actual curricula of junior and senior high schools. One teacher I interviewed pointed out:

If you take a look at the monthly tests and the entrance exam, you will understand why I teach in this way. Exams not only reflect but also determine what aspects of teaching and learning process receive attention. My job is to prepare my students for these exams, that's the whole purpose, and high scores are the key to acceptance at the best possible school.

It is clear that the kinds of questions asked in the exams have tremendous bearing on teaching methods. As Arnold (1985) puts it, "the types of questions asked in these examinations determine to a large extent the content and the teaching techniques in
Unfortunately, in these examinations, there are no test items which have been developed and employed to test students’ listening comprehension and speaking ability. The English tests generally follow the traditional format. Test items are primarily of the discrete-point type, and the content of the exam focuses on language elements such as vocabulary and grammar rather than on language skills. The following items are a few examples taken from the monthly test in Hsin-Tien junior high:

1. C Birthday is also Teacher’s Day.
2. Chinese New Year always comes during winter y n.
3. I had him ( a. to repair  b. repair  c. repaired  d. repairs ) my car.
4. The new house is ( a. big  b. bigger  c. bigger  d. more big ) than the old one.
5. She is ( a. Mary and Helen  b. Mary and Helen’s  c. Mary’s and Helen’s  d. Mary’s and Helen ) mother.

Consequently, English teachers at high school level have rarely paid attention to oral communication, even the teaching of reading emphasizes only the translation of vocabulary, and the explanation of grammatical rules rather than understanding them as a part of the whole language because of the problems in testing methods and evaluation criteria. It is quite natural that few teachers and students are willing to devote their time and energy to language skills unrelated to the test areas. Burnaby and Sun (1989) note that "there are strong expectations that the content and form will be similar to that of traditional national examinations" (p. 228).

Most of the English classes I observed in Hsin-Tien were grammar-oriented and test-oriented. The following class conducted in Mandarin is a classical example. During the class time, the teacher emphasized again and again how important it is to memorize the grammatical rules in order to get good scores. English was dissected and grammatical patterns were taught as discrete items in order to facilitate test-taking.
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T: 第四個節日要記的...秋茹，是什麼？ (The fourth holiday you have to remember is...Chiu-Ru, do you know what it is?)
S: 是Youth Day。 (Youth Day.)
T: Youth後面要不要加一撇？ (Do you need an apostrophe for the noun ‘Youth’?)
S: 要／不要。 (Yes／No.)
T: 要記住什麼時候要加，什麼時候不用，那是考覈的重點。下一個節日是 New year’s Eve，要加一撇嗎？ (You have to memorize when an apostrophe is needed and when is not. Those are important test items. The next holiday is New year’s Eve. Need an apostrophe?)
S: 要，當然要。有沒有問題？ (Yes, of course. Any question?)
T: 好，翻到六十四頁，開始看課文。 (OK. Turn your book to page 64, we are going to go over the reading.)
T: 把書翻到十四課，我們昨天學了節日的名稱，你們要把這些節日記起來。第一個要記的是國父誕辰，第二要記孔子誕辰。Confucius之後有沒有一撇？ (Turn your books to Lesson Eleven. We learned the names of the holidays yesterday. You have to learn those holidays by heart. The first one you have to remember is Dr. Sun Yet-sen’s Birthday and the second is Confucius’ Birthday. Is there a apostrophe after ‘Confucius’?)
S: 有。 (Yes.)
T: 在 S 的前面還是後面。 (Is it before or after ‘S’?)
S: 後面。 (After.)
T: 對了，假如是單數名詞，S結尾只要再加一撇就好。那複數名詞像 girls 或 men 呢？ (That’s right! If a singular noun ends in -s, add only an apostrophe. How about plural nouns like ‘girls’ or ‘men’?)
S: 天阿！又忘記了？告訴過你們好多次囉！要把規則記住，不然下次考試就完啦。要記住 S 結尾的複數名詞，所有格只加一撇就好。 (Boy! You forget again? I have told you for many times. You got to memorize the rules; otherwise, how can you get good scores for the coming test? Remember! For a possessive form of a plural noun that ends in -s, add only an apostrophe to it.)

(Write girls’ and students’ on the blackboard.)

T: 但是複數名詞不是 S 結尾的要加一撇再加 S。 (But add an apostrophe and -s to plural nouns that do not end in -s.)

(Write men’s on the blackboard and most students copy the rules down in their textbooks.)

T: 好了，Confucius’ Birthday 也是... (So...Confucius’ Birthday is also.....)
S: Teacher’s Day.
Teachers and principals are very concerned about the examinations because schools and teachers are usually evaluated according to the scores students get. When I approached the dean of studies in Hsin-Tien junior high and made a request to observe some English classes, I asked for permission to observe classes taught by teachers recently graduated from university as well as teachers who had years of teaching experience. The dean of studies looked puzzled and insisted that I should observe classes taught by "expert" teachers instead of novice ones. He cried, "Why do you want to see these greenhorns? They're not good at teaching. You should go and see Ms. X's and Ms. XX's classes. They are the experts at our school, and they help us promote the rank of our school among hundreds of junior high schools in Taipei." He also showed me the printout of the scores from the second monthly test, trying to persuade me to observe the classes he recommended. It is a brutal fact that people rank schools by how well students perform on the entrance examinations, and schools rank teachers by students' performance. Consequently, teachers and administrators are more or less under pressure for their own sakes and students' educational future as well.

Students' parents also care about the entrance examinations. They hope that everything taught at school will be related to the exams and enable their children to get good scores. They argue that even TOEFL has a large number of multiple-choice components focusing on discrete-point grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, and their argument is true. A majority of students I interviewed suggest that basic English oral and listening skills are crucial.\(^1\) English is an international language which is needed for international communication, cultural exchanges, and technological development. It is essential for economic development and foreign trade. However, for the time being, scoring well on the entrance examinations is the main focus of their study, and it would be a burden for them if listening and speaking were included in the tests.

In addition, the communicative approach is usually based on a notional or functional syllabus. It will not introduce grammar and sentence patterns step by step. According to some teachers' views, it is very easy for students to run into trouble and feel frustrated because some structures in English are rather complicated, such as the

\(^1\) Though some teachers and students mentioned that English is needed only in reading, other students suggested that oral communication is important and will be needed in the future. They would like to have more opportunities to practice listening and speaking in class, but they do not want a section about listening comprehension to be included in the high school examination.
comparative and the passive. It is easy for beginners to mix them up and get confused (Swan, 1985). Teachers are afraid that using the new method will not serve the examination preparation needs of their students. Under such circumstances, the grammar translation method rather than the communicative approach is considered effective in meeting the needs of students’ educational goals.

**Authentic Materials**

One of the arguments made in the communicative approach is that authentic materials should be used in order to overcome the problem that students cannot transfer what they learn in the classroom to the outside world setting (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 135). However, it is not easy for English teachers in Taiwan to have access to authentic, from-life materials such as advertisements, timetables, or newspapers. As one of the teachers I interviewed remarked:

I hate to let students spend a large portion of class time listening to explanations of language structure and engaging in dull and decontextualized drills. English is tedious to me and my students if I teach in this way, but that’s what the standard textbooks are about. I don’t know exactly what authentic materials are, and I have no idea where I can get it.

Even if such authentic materials were available and being introduced into an EFL classroom, they might not be culturally appropriate and relevant. As another teacher pointed out:

It is impossible for my students to understand those authentic unadjusted materials, they are just beginners. Even I myself have a hard time reading *Time* and *Newsweek*, a lot of articles about football, political views of the Republicans versus Democrats, and so on are unintelligible to me, culturally irrelevant most of the time.

Authentic materials can help students relate what they learn to out-of-class settings, but the use of authentic, unadjusted materials would discourage learning, especially at the beginning level. Nonnative speakers benefit more from input which is adjusted. As Swan (1985, p. 84) points out:

If students are exposed only to authentic materials, they are unlikely (in the time available for the average language course) to meet all the high-frequency items they need to learn. And elementary students, faced with authentic materials that is not very carefully chosen, may find it so difficult that they get bogged down in a morass of unfamiliar lexis and idiom.
Class Size and Schedule

Taiwan's secondary schools are always crowded because of a large population living on a small island. A class consisting of more than fifty students is another big issue teachers confront when thinking of adopting the communicative approach. In Hsin-Tien, each class has up to fifty-five students, and it is a luxury for students to have any individual attention from the teacher in such a huge class. The most common strategy used by the teachers I observed in Hsin-Tien is lecture because "the easiest way to handle such a large group is to have everyone do the same thing at the same time, such as copying a passage from a book, writing exercises, listening to the teacher lecture, or reciting" (Katchen, 1989, p. 82).

Two out of the twelve teachers I interviewed remark that class size is not an issue at all. If the entrance examination was abolished, they would not be under pressure to cover the curriculum in a limited amount of time and would be able to conduct English classes in a more communicative way. However, the rest of the teachers make the opposite comment. One teacher mentioned to me that she has tried to include group work, role plays, and information gap activities in her class, but finally she lost her initial enthusiasm to change the dominant way of teaching and acquiesced to the traditional procedures because it is impossible to ask fifty-five students to practice conversation skills and keep them QUIET at the same time. Other teachers complain about the noise and the dean of studies comes and asks if I need any help for my poor class management. I have to sacrifice what I believe in language teaching; otherwise, I am doing what Romans don’t do in Rome.\(^2\)

In Hsin-Tien junior high, the amount of class time for English instruction is three to five hours per week. Many teachers complain that the English course has too much material to cover, even for five hours per week in the third year. Usually, they have to finish four lessons from the Standard Junior-high-school English Textbook Series in every five-week period, plus a number of exercises in the standard workbook. With so much to accomplish, teachers are probably forced to emphasize a few objectives while downplaying others. As one teacher stated, "I usually skip the listening practice section in the textbook. I ask students to practice it at home because there is not enough time and this activity is a waste of class time. It bears no

\(^2\) She is doing what Romans do not do in Rome because of the cultural expectation for order and quiet. Good students are supposed to keep quiet and listen attentively to what the teacher says.
direct relevance to the exam." Some teachers even declare that if they had extra
time, they would spend it on more test-taking practice rather than on "impractical
stuff." Teachers are usually the main target for blame and the ones who take
responsibility for the consequences if students fail the entrance examination.
Consequently, they defend the grammar translation approach on the grounds that it
provides the great advantage of preparing students for the entrance examination.
Although the traditional, out-dated approach cannot produce brilliant speakers of
English, it is, at least for the time being, the most effective way of teaching and one
that most of the teachers I interviewed feel comfortable with under such conditions.
　In addition to the factors mentioned above, lack of resources and insufficient
equipment are problems that need to be solved. Hsin-Tien is a school in the urban
area in Taipei, but only audio tapes and recorders are available. Audiovisual
equipment, a language lab, and photocopiers are not accessible to teachers.
　Furthermore, dealing with the holistic evaluation of the communicative approach
troubles many teachers. Communicative testing is very expensive in terms of time
and money, for it requires "specialized personnel to administer and assess" (Burnaby
& Sun, 1989, p. 235). It is definitely easier to evaluate pencil-and-paper tests or
multiple-choice test items with a single right answer, though it is not a good way to
test the outcomes of language learning. As long as large-scale, standardized,
multiple-choice tests exist, it will be hard to effect any change in the teaching
methods, especially in Taiwan.

WHY DOES THE OLD WAY DIE HARD?

Cultural Differences
　Communicative language teaching assumes that all students are motivated and will
be actively involved in discussion; they will show great interest no matter what the
topic is. However, not all students are active, outgoing, and vocal. Partly due to the
long history of feudalism and cultural traditions and partly due to the special
disposition of the people in the eastern world, Chinese students, generally speaking,
are not accustomed to speaking up, especially to voicing viewpoints which are
contradictory to the majority. As the saying goes, a bottle full of water does not
make any noise while a half-full bottle makes all kinds of noises. Chinese people
have traditionally placed high value on silence, believing that a person of few words
is thoughtful, knowledgeable, and respectable. Powell and Andersen (1994) also state
that "Chinese culture tends to reflect a Buddhist tradition which holds that knowledge, truth, and wisdom come to those whose quiet silence allows the spirit to enter" (p. 324). Some students I interviewed mentioned that "only those who want to show themselves off speak up, either volunteer an answer to the question the teacher asks or offer an idea of one's own. We don't want to demonstrate our individual superiority over our classmates, and it will display our ignorance to our peers if we make mistakes." Consequently, students are more comfortable with the passive way of learning. They usually expect the teacher to tell them exactly what to do.

Throughout the whole teaching process, students usually sit in the classroom silently and passively neither speaking English nor having any opportunity to listen to spoken English.

The classrooms I observed in Hsin-Tien junior high, especially those taught by the two expert teachers, were very traditional, teacher-centered, and book-centered. Most of the talk was by the teacher, and the students' time was spent overwhelmingly in listening. The teacher, whose role was as the supplier of knowledge, explained everything to the students, and the students were treated as empty receptacles, whose roles were only to memorize the knowledge conveyed by the teacher, and students were expected to adopt everything uncritically.

Language teaching is viewed as a knowledge-imparting process, and language learning is a knowledge-receiving process (Li, 1990). Students do not have to take any initiative, just wait to be filled with knowledge. As Hou (1987) points out "because of teacher-as-dominant, student-as-submissive role relationships, students are accustomed to being silent. A fear of losing face, a desire to avoid confrontation, a reluctance to be singled out, a fear of making mistakes, a hesitancy about answering questions make students reluctant to participate in class activities" (p. 26). Though these characteristics are not merits, they can neither be ignored nor easily changed, and must be taken into consideration when a language teaching method is chosen.

In addition, in communicative language teaching, "often there is no text, grammar rules are not presented, classroom arrangement is nonstandard, students are expected to interact primarily with each other rather than with teacher, and correction of errors may be absent or infrequent" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 77). These ideas of teaching and learning seem to contradict those in the Chinese traditions. Teachers in China often remark that "the activities common in communicative language teaching seemed like games rather than serious learning" (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 29). Many teachers I interviewed also pointed out that they feel they were not really
teaching or providing any contribution to students if they used communicative activities, and they feel a bit uprooted when they strayed from the expected authoritarian teaching style. One teacher even mentioned a bad experience she had years ago:

My English conversation teacher in Taiwan Normal University, what she did every class was to assign the task and then break us into groups for discussion. Usually she sat on the desk to observe but sometimes she just did her own stuff, you know. It was a torture because every time we seemed to drag our feet getting started and worked only minimally with each other when she didn’t take notice of. We talked nonsense and off-topic. Sometimes one person in the group took over the task while the rest of us hardly participated, so we waited for the bell ring. That’s all I remember!

The classes taught by the novice teacher I observed usually included some communicative tasks such as role-play, information-gap, and problem-solving activities for students to manipulate. Sometimes, she let students play games in order to get them to speak English and sing songs with some words missing from the lyric to practice listening comprehension. However, some students in her class remarked that they did not like those communicative activities because they "do not learn much," and they complained that playing communicative games for language practice was of little value, and it was a waste of time. Others stated that the communicative activities were fun, but they did not know what the point or purpose of instruction was. It seems difficult for them to associate games, songs, role plays, and so on with serious learning. Those communicative activities, to them, function exclusively as entertainment rather than as various ways of learning a language.

**Learning Style--Memorization**

Memorization and recitation are highly valued and have deep roots in traditional Chinese ideas about education. In ancient Chinese schools, the memorization and reciting of texts by students was considered one of the best ways of attaining a real mastering of anything.

The Chinese have long associated the learning of language and literature with memorization, not only language rules and words, but memorizing sentences and even whole pieces of literary writing. There is an old saying which suggests that if one reads the 300 Tang (a dynasty in ancient China which is well known for its economic and cultural prosperity) Poem to the extent that s/he can recite them, s/he will sound
well educated even if s/he is not a poet. Children, even nowadays, are required to memorize some Chinese classics without expecting to comprehend what they memorize. "Texts were memorized mechanically with the belief that years later, as the child matured, appropriate quotes would return in flashes as needed and would then be comprehended" (Scovel, 1983, p. 106).

Some teachers I interviewed still strongly believe in this process of language learning. They state that students learn best when they start with rote memorization, grammar rules and sentence construction. The most important strategy for learning a foreign language is memorization. As a teacher in Hsin-Tien asserted, "I learn English in this way, and it works pretty well for me. I still call upon a large repertoire of English words, phases, idioms and even passages I have committed to memory when I was a secondary school pupil." The perceptions and beliefs of the classroom teachers have salient impact on what students are taught and how they are taught. It is easy to find traces of this traditional view of teaching and learning in the English education in Taiwan, and that is why many teachers still stick to the old way that English has been taught for years and years.

CONCLUSION

All cultures change, and those that resist change are destined to die. However, there will be fierce resistance to any methodology if its activities and techniques go against the traditional beliefs. Change is systemic and the systems are hierarchical; higher-level systems are more influential and powerful than subsystems. The hierarchy of interrelating subsystems in which an innovation has to operate, from the top to the bottom, is cultural, political, administrative, educational, institutional, and classroom innovation (Kennedy, 1988). The culture system is on the top of the hierarchy, and it is the most powerful and influential one. Consequently, it is impossible to bring in a new culture system and impose it on the existing culture without examining the traditional beliefs and customs. Kennedy (1988) points out that "what distinguishes cultures is their degree of openness to change and their speed of change" (p. 334). One has to take cultural differences into consideration when trying to innovate in the classroom. For innovation is always being resisted when cultural conceptions mismatch.

Nurtured in traditional culture, Chinese people are usually reluctant to adopt any radical changes. As Liu (1988) put it, "any attempt at rapid transformation in
teaching methods will evoke strong opposition" (p. 76). However, the existing English education in Taiwan is far from satisfactory, and the ultimate goal of English instruction stated in the government policy definitely is not to train a huge group of multiple-choice experts, but rather to train students to master the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The grammar translation method is definitely not sufficient to accomplish these goals because no one can master a language by studying its grammar exclusively.

Change is inevitable. No social institution can escape the process of change and education is no exception. However, what is needed in Taiwan is a complete reform of the English language education system. Innovation in testing is the first and foremost step for change because the test format has an influence on pedagogy to a large extent. As one of the Chinese teachers pointed out, "my responsibility is to get students to pass the test. If the test remains the same, if jobs remain the same, the pressure will be there. Changes in examination form and content may help unravel the powerful hold on my teaching." It is true that entrance examinations are powerful determinants of students’ future, and there will not be any changes in teaching methods and materials if the test items remain the same.

Change in examination policies and practices are the first steps toward change. However, other factors such as class size, a lack of resources and equipment, a lack of teacher proficiency in English, and variations in students’ needs and purposes must be taken into account when revising Taiwanese English language curriculum. In order to bring about effective English language curricular change in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education, teacher training colleges, and schools in Taiwan will need to work closely together in lowering the barriers blocking teachers’ efforts to meet students’ English language needs and purposes.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

**Teachers:**
1. How many years have you taught English?
2. Do you enjoy teaching English, why and why not?
3. Could you talk about your personal philosophy of language learning and teaching?
4. Have you heard of communicative language teaching?
5. Have you ever tried communicative approach in your teaching?
6. Do you think communicative language teaching can be used in your teaching situations now? Why and why not?
7. Does communicative approach work? Why and why not? What dilemma have you faced? Are there any solutions to these problems?
8. Do you think that listening and speaking is crucial in language learning? Is it possible to include them in testing? Why and why not?

**Students:**
1. When do you start learning English?
2. Do you enjoy learning English? Why and why not?
3. Do you like the way your teacher conducts English classes? Why not why not? What could be changed, if any, in your opinions, to meet your expectations?
4. What is the purpose of learning English, from your own points of view?
5. Have your teacher and parents ever told you about the purpose of studying English?
6. Compared with your Chinese classes, are your English classes conducted in a different way? How about other subjects, like math, chemistry, history etc.?
7. Do you study English in the same way as you study other subjects?
8. Have you ever practiced speaking and listening in class? Do you like it? Why and why not?
9. Do you think listening and speaking is crucial in language learning? Why and why not?
10. Is it a good idea, in your opinions, to include listening and speaking in testing? Why and why not?
Dean of Studies:
1. What are the objectives of English education in high schools?
2. Do you think these goals of teaching and learning are reasonable and not difficult for teachers as well as students to shoot at?
3. Do the aims stated in the government policies are congruence or incongruence with the actual teaching? What do you think?
4. How is the senior high school entrance examination conducted? What components are included?
5. Is there any need for changes in English education in high schools?
6. What changes, if any, can be made to improve the teaching and learning process? Is there any hope for changes?

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