

# The Study of Communicative Language Teaching Method

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## **Abstract**

Taiwan Ministry of Education have implemented Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English course to emphasize on the four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) than on linguistic knowledge only. Some studies indicated that communicative language teaching (CLT) is one of the effective methods in English teaching field because it provides more opportunities for students to practice English in real life situation. There are many studies investigated teachers' perspectives of CLT from elementary, junior, and senior school. However, there is only few studies focus on college instructors' beliefs toward CLT. Thus, the purpose of this study was to applied quantitative research methods to explore the college instructors' perspectives toward communicative language teaching and to investigate whether the instructors take CLT into practice in classes. The participants of this study were 55 college instructors. The major finding of this study indicated college instructors' perspective toward CLT is positive and they also do take CLT into classroom practices. Besides, college instructors thought CLT is an effective teaching method for students to practice English. Pedagogical implications are briefly discussed based on the findings of this study.

**Key words:** communicative language teaching (CLT), communicative competence

## **Introduction**

There is no doubt that English is the leading language in the world. English has been the major course in many counties, especially in Taiwan. Several teaching methods have been used in English teaching. However, the traditional English teaching method such as “grammar translation teaching method” does not improve students’ English ability a lot. Many of them still fail to use English in real-life situation after six years of English instruction at secondary schools. Thus, the communicative language teaching has emerged to be the mainstream in the field of English teaching in Taiwan (Chang, 2001). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is one of the effective methods in English teaching field because the purpose of this teaching is to foster students to communicate in English and to apply English to real life. Hsu (2003) indicated that CLT unlike the traditional English approach, which is focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, etc, it emphasizes more on communicative activities of real-life situations and the use of four language skills--listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although CLT is one of the effective methods, it has not been used completely in the field of English teaching in Taiwan. Some scholars believe that college instructors provide more class practices for students in university than junior and senior teachers who have pressures on students’ entrance exam. Teachers play an important role in English teaching. There are many studies investigated elementary, junior, and senior school teachers’ perspectives of CLT. However, learning English is still important in college, few studies showed college instructors’ beliefs of CLT. Thus, this study applied quantitative methods to explore the college instructors’ perspectives toward communicative language teaching and to investigate whether the instructors take CLT into practice in classes.

## **Research Question**

1. What are the perspectives of college instructors toward CLT in Taiwan?
2. Do college instructors take CLT into classroom practices effectively?

## **Hypothesis**

1. College instructors have positive perspectives toward CLT in Taiwan.
2. College instructors take CLT into classroom practices effectively.

## **Literature Review**

### **I. Communicative language teaching (CLT)**

Language teaching began to innovate since 1970s. In the intervening years, the communicative language teaching (CLT) has been adapted to be the main stream in English teaching field. And it

has been adopted commonly to teach foreign language.

Rao (2002) mentioned that CLT views learning as skill development. This differs from the Chinese traditional approach, which views learning as a knowledge receiving process. CLT consists of varied activities, such as games, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and small group activities. One of the well-known characteristics of CLT is the learner-centered classroom. Moreover, Hu (2002) once mentioned that language teaching should involve in both grammatical and functional teaching and furthermore, the social, cultural and pragmatic aspects of language are also vital in communicative language teaching for the full development of communicative competence.

Furthermore, in order to increase chances for teacher-student and student-student interactions and for communicative language practice, there should be designed based on small classes. To be concluded, Nattinger (1984) classified communicative language teaching into the following three tenets: (1) communicative competence is the goal, (2) interaction between the learner and the environment is primary and (3) using language to learn, to negotiate meaning and to make sense of messages are vital (as cited in Wang, 2008).

## **II. The Communicative Competence**

Communicative competence was looked upon as one aspect of people's competence, enabling them to convey and interpret messages. Further, this competence helped to negotiate meanings with people in specific situations. In a study published in 1991, Savignon indicated that this sociolinguist's communicative competence was centered on language as a social behavior.

According to Chang (2001), being communicatively competent refers to the ability of making appropriate choices of register and style in terms of the situation and the other participants, and it is only through performance that communicative competence can be developed, maintained, and evaluated. Communicative competence is relative; therefore, the cooperation of all participants involved is also a crucial part in communication.

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed the notion of communicative competence, which was modified by Canale (1983) later. They are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Afterwards, the analysis by Canale and Swain has been widely quoted, and communicative competence is generally regarded as a goal of second/foreign language teaching (as cited in Chang, 2001).

### **III. Problems of implementing CLT in EFL context in Taiwan**

#### **A. Problems Posed by English Teachers**

Some scholars' studies stated some problems, which are pointed out by English teachers. The crucial factors in deciding ultimate success or failure in a new methodology or a curriculum innovation are teachers' attitude, belief and perception (Wang, 2008).

Teachers lacking of professional training in communicative language teaching both theoretically and practically may be the reason for the tendency - most teachers still remain their teaching in grammatical structure analysis and sentence pattern drills that deviated from the tenet of CLT. Besides, according to Jia and Jia(2003), unfamiliarity might cause failure to arrive a full understanding about CLT. Even some teachers expressed that there were no conferences related to communicative language teaching for nearly three years, which was a situation unlikely for teachers to be familiar with CLT theory and practice but likely for them to choose whatever familiar with them in their beliefs by teaching in traditional ways.

English teachers admitted that they conducted games and question-answer activities in intention to make students practice sentence patterns rather than experience real-life communication. Moreover, none of them mentioned the importance of grammatical elements when they were asked the question 'what is communicative language teaching', as if these did not exist (Lin, 2000). Such ignorance of grammatical elements is completely wrong in communicative language teaching. This wrong concept might be dangerous and counterproductive to students' development of grammatical competence (Thompson, 1996).

#### **B. Problems Posed by Educational System**

Because of the exam-oriented nature of educational system in Taiwan, the grammar-based examination (the Basic Competence Test, BCT) is considered to be the biggest challenge for English teachers teaching under communicative language teaching. Teachers always have clear goals in mind: that is to help students pass and get high scores in the examination (Lin, 2000). Nevertheless, English teachers are always encountering the dilemma of happy learning and of pressure from tests.

In a more recent study, Wang (2008) observed that English teaching is expected to move from mechanical drillings toward more meaningful communicative activities in order to match the objectives of the new curriculum in communicative language teaching. However, BCT is still administered in the paper-pencil and multiple-choice format without tapping listening and speaking communicatively.

Since oral communicative ability is not measured in the examination, teachers view themselves as having the errand of getting students successful in grammatical elements and high pass the examination (Chen, 2002). At last, one thing to be mentioned is that there may be either negative (harmful) or positive (beneficial) washback effect. Tests with contents that are contradictory to the course objectives are likely to generate negative washback effect; in opposite, items with direct relation to the intended ability measured are likely to result in positive effect.

Finally, as mentioned in Wang's (2008) study, one thing should be concerned is that if the curriculum design without accompanying reform of appropriate evaluation system, any curriculum innovation may lead to failure.

### **Methodology**

Quantitative research design was applied in this study. The questionnaire aimed to investigate the college instructors' perspectives toward communicative language teaching (CLT).

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 55 college instructors who were all teaching in English department. All of them were invited to share their experience and viewpoints of communicative language teaching (CLT). It contained private universities which are located in southern Taiwan.

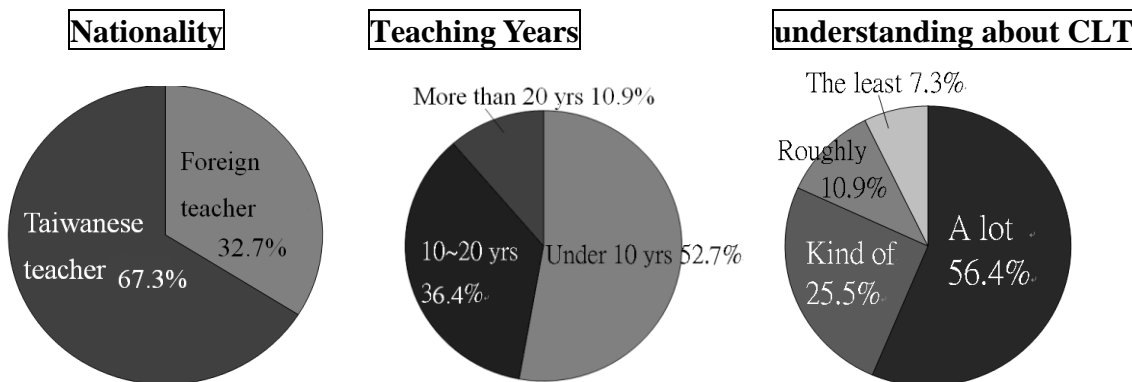
### **Instruments**

The instructors who participated in this study completed one questionnaire (see Appendix A), which included two parts: 6 background information and 25 questions. The questions included four parts: participants' prior knowledge of CLT, the teacher-student roles of CLT in class, classroom practices and the feasibility of CLT. This instrument was developed from the questionnaire employed by Wang (2008), with some modification by the author. This was 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

### **Result and Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to examine the college instructors' perspectives toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It also investigated how instructors take CLT into classroom practices, and whether they consider CLT to be a feasible approach. The author distributed 19 questionnaires in college and then received 19 back. So the return rate of questionnaire is 100%. In the other way, in terms of the media way, the author sent about 360 questionnaires to other college instructors, however, there were only 36 received. Therefore, the

return rate is relatively low 10%. Based on the results of the questionnaire, some major findings are discussed in the following. First of all, there are 3 personal information that would be shown following. They are nationality, years of experience in college English teaching and understanding about CLT.



*Hypothesis 1. College instructors have positive perspectives toward communicative language teaching in Taiwan.*

The first and second part (questions 1 to 12, see Table 1) of the questionnaire focused on the college instructors' perspectives toward CLT. The mean score are 4.15 and 4.19 which can prove that most of them have positive perspectives toward CLT. According to the statistics and experts above, the results fit the first hypothesis.

**Table 1 Mean Score Distribution of Questionnaire**

Item I.	Mean
Your prior knowledge of CLT	
1. CLT views learning as language skill development.	3.89
2. CLT emphasizes more on language functions and the equal four language skills than on linguistic knowledge.	4.07
3. CLT fosters students to communicate in English and to apply it into real life.	4.12
4. CLT consists of varied activities.	4.32
5. CLT is the learner-centered classroom.	4.32
6. CLT class should be designed based on small classes.	4.18
Item II	Mean
The Teacher-Student Roles of CLT in Class	
7. Teachers should encourage students to be active communicators and negotiators.	4.49
8. Teachers should be a counselor and guidance in a student-centered class.	4.20
9. Teachers should increase students' positive learning motivation by practicing communicative activities.	4.40
10. Make students feel free to express ideas is the main focus; error correction is the minor focus.	4.14
11. Teachers should use student portfolio to keep track of their learning progress.	3.87
12. Teachers should enable students to draw inference and to understand grammar structure by real communication and the context.	4.07

*Hypothesis 2. College instructors take communicative language teaching into classroom practices effectively.*

The second part (questions 7 to 13, see Table 2) of the questionnaire focused on the college instructors' class practices toward CLT. The mean score is 4.10 which mean that most of the learners agreed that they do take CLT into Class Practices. According to the statistics and experts above, the results fit the second hypothesis.

**Table 2 Mean Score Distribution of Questionnaire**

Item	Mean
<b>Take CLT into Class Practices</b>	
13. Using CLT in teaching can facilitate students to practice oral communicative.	4.36
14. Teacher uses CLT activities to make students practice how to express ideas and to exchange information in English.	4.34
15. Teacher uses realia to help teaching certain concept.	4.09
16. Teacher uses CLT to teach grammatical items in real-life language functions.	3.90
17. The using of CLT makes students practice the four language skills.	4.07
18. Teacher uses simple English to enhance students' listening and chances to access English.	3.96
19. Generally speaking, I am a teacher who does take CLT into Class Practices.	4.00

### Discussion and Conclusion

The study investigated the following four aspects: (a) college instructors' perspectives toward communicative language teaching in terms of their prior knowledge of communicative language teaching and the teacher-student roles; (b) instructors' classroom practice.

Firstly, after presenting the findings, it is found that, the result supports the previous studies (Wu, 2006; Wang, 2008; and Rao, 2002). Most of the college instructors show positive perspective toward communicative language teaching. The college instructors consider this English teaching method to be good because of the student-centered, so it's better for students to understand what teachers are teaching. Also, it encourages and offers students opportunities to speak out. Besides, instructors think that use realia, design real-life activities and give them practices in class can really underscore students' learning motivation.

Secondly, the result data shows that college instructors take communicative language teaching into practice effectively in classes which supports the previous studies (Lin, 2000; Hsu, 2003; Rao, 2002; Chang, 2001). College instructors design some discussion, and try to make the students as a center of the orientation. Also, they organize different group activities, so there would be students' collaboration, cooperation learning, and then maximize the interaction among peers. However, in the same time, instructors mentioned that there are still some difficulties or challenges for them to promote CLT. Those can be students' proficiency (it means whether they have basic foundation in



English grammar); classroom setting (it means whether those chairs are conveniently movable to do the class activities); other factors such as the size and the limit of the classes, and etc. Nevertheless, except for those interferences, instructors do take communicative language teaching into practice effectively in classes.

To sum up, according to the research results of the present study, the grounded is that communicative language teaching is one of the effective methods and has been gradually used in English teaching in Taiwan. From investigating college instructors' perspectives, one thing can be confirmed, that is college instructors do have positive perspectives toward CLT. In addition, they take CLT into classroom practices as well. However, some instructors think that CLT is not very feasible when promoting in college because they still need to take students' English abilities into account. However, they still think that CLT is a good way that they can use in teaching. Finally, one thing should mention is that the small scale and the lack of time for conducting the experiment still cause the limitation to research the generalizability.

### **Suggestion for Teacher and Future Researcher**

To gain an overall view of the application of CLT in Taiwan, there are some recommendations for teacher and future researcher. Teacher can more broadly use communicative language teaching as one of their teaching method, because it offers students opportunity and encourages them to speak out. Besides, teacher should decrease students' anxiety, increase their confidence and self-esteem. Let student think that learning English is fun, but not a painful thing.

And future researcher can include more college instructors from different areas in Taiwan. Investigate college students' perspectives toward CLT. Do more interview between different colleges, to see whether there is any significant difference between different colleges in terms of CLT. Finally, replicate this research to assess the changes of teacher beliefs and teachers' classroom practices of CLT, and the improvement of the teaching environment in different periods of time.

**Appendix A**

**Questionnaire**

**A Questionnaire for College Instructors’ Perspectives and Classroom Practices toward Communicative Language Teaching**

**(I) Personal Information:**

- 1)  Foreign Teacher     Taiwanese Teacher
- 2) Gender:  Female  Male
- 3) Experience in college English teaching: \_\_\_\_\_yrs
- 4) Your Title:  professor  associate professor  assistant professor  lecturer
- 5) Related degree in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) or having taken related courses:  
 yes ( oversea school  local school)  no
- 6) Understanding about CLT:  a lot  kind of  roughly  the least

**(II) Questionnaire**

Directions: Please tick the appropriate box to express your opinions.

**5:** Strongly Agree; **4:** Agree; **3:** Neutral; **2:** Disagree; **1:** Strongly Disagree

<b>Part One: Your prior knowledge of CLT</b>		<b>5</b> Strongly Agree	<b>4</b> Agree	<b>3</b> Neutra l	<b>2</b> Disagre e	<b>1</b> Strongly Disagre e
1.	CLT views learning as language skill development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>5</b> Strongly Agree	<b>4</b> Agree	<b>3</b> Neutra l	<b>2</b> Disagre e	<b>1</b> Strongly Disagre e
2.	CLT emphasizes more on language functions and the equal importance of the four language skills than on linguistic knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.	CLT is an effective method in English teaching field because it foster students to communicate in English and to apply it into real life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	CLT consists of varied activities, such as games, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and small group activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	CLT is the learner-centered classroom, rather than teacher as an authoritative.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	In order to increase chances for teacher-student and interactions and for communicative language practice, there should be designed based on small classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Part Two: The Teacher-Student Roles of CLT in Class</b>		<b>5</b> Strongly Agree	<b>4</b> Agree	<b>3</b> Neutra l	<b>2</b> Disagre e	<b>1</b> Strongly Disagree
7.	Through CLT, teachers should encourage students to be active communicators and negotiators with teacher and classmates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Through CLT, teachers should be a counselor and guidance who subordinates the authority to a student-centered class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Through CLT, teachers should increase students' positive learning motivation by practicing communicative activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>5</b> Strongly Agree	<b>4</b> Agree	<b>3</b> Neutra l	<b>2</b> Disagre e	<b>1</b> Strongly Disagree
10.	Through CLT, teachers should make students feel free to express ideas in oral English as the main focus; error correction is the minor focus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11.	Through CLT, teachers should use student portfolio to keep track of their learning progress. Ex: to collect students' note-takings in the class to evaluate their learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Through CLT, teachers should enable students to draw inference and to understand grammar structure through real communication and the context in which they are used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Part Three: Take CLT into Class Practices</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13.	Using CLT in teaching can facilitate students to practice oral communicative. Ex: provide oral-oriented activities to increase speaking opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Teacher uses CLT activities such as group work, role play and information gap to make students practice how to express ideas, meanings and to exchange information in English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	Teacher uses realia to help teaching certain concept. Ex: maps help to show students how to express directions and relative positions in English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16.	Teacher uses CLT to teach grammatical items in real-life language functions. Ex: Teach how to use the imperative structure to give command or request others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	The using of CLT makes students practice the four language skills in authentic contexts. Ex: listen to the radio, have dialogues with others, read magazines and write simple e-mails or articles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	In CLT class, teacher uses simple English to enhance students' listening and chances to access English. Ex: use daily and classroom routine languages such as: <i>turn to page...</i> ; <i>volunteers?</i> ; <i>anything else?</i> and etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	Generally speaking, I am a teacher who does take CLT into Class Practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Part Four: The Feasibility of CLT</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20.	CLT is feasible in college under the limited instructional hour (3hr/lesson).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21.	CLT is feasible in college under the class size of 15~20 students per class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22.	CLT is feasible in college in terms of students' mixed proficiency and disability in taking communicative activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neutra l	2 Disagre e	1 Strongly Disagree
23.	CLT is feasible in college when teacher is familiar with CLT theory and practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24.	CLT is feasible in college without the pressure from students' English performance. (The pressure comes from the Taiwan Ministry of Education)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25.	Generally speaking, CLT is feasible when promoted in college.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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