

Comparing Student Feedback on Roleplay and Speech Oral Speaking Activities with respect to Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims to provide a means for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to acquire language to become confident and competent communicators in the foreign language. Communicative language courses are designed based on the principle that language is intended to convey meaningful and appropriate language. Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence is perhaps the standard theory of language used in communicative course design. This framework consists of four language competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Communicative language courses are designed with activities to practice and enhance student ability to acquire and use language based on these four language competences. This research project examines student feedback on two prominent classroom activities, roleplay and speeches, in an attempt to gain student perspective on the effectiveness of each activity relative to the key components of communicative competence. The results of an end of course survey confirms general assumptions about the communicative nature of these activities and also provides some valuable insight. Future course design could benefit by focusing more on providing a variety of communicative activities which aim to give students a balanced approach to developing communicative competence.

Keywords

communicative competence, communicative activities, student feedback

1. Introduction

In recent years, EFL courses that focus on speaking are often called "English Communication" rather than "Oral English" or "Speaking". Perhaps this is to stress that the primary purpose of spoken English or any other language is to express meaning and communicate with others. Although this may seem obvious, a communicative approach to language teaching is a rather new development in the world of linguistics.

In the 1950s and 60s, language was viewed predominately in terms of syntax and semantics. Therefore, the most logical way to learn language was by memorizing grammar structures and

vocabulary. One of the major methodologies at the time, the Audiolingual Method (see Richards and Rodgers (2001); and Omaggio (1986)), was based on behaviorism as a theory of learning and structuralism (see Richards & Rodgers (2001); Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999)) as a theory of language. This methodology, which relied on activities to repeat and manipulate grammar structures, was unable to account for the situational use of language and generally left learners uninspired.

In response to the limitations of methodologies based on grammar and behaviorism, language teachers began to focus more on encouraging their students to convey meaning to perform acts or functions rather than strictly producing grammatically correct utterances. Also, fluency began to be stressed over accuracy. This focus on meaning over grammar became the basis of a new approach in the 1970s called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this approach, learning is facilitated by active participation by learners to comprehend and produce language that is meaningful and accomplishes a purpose. The theory of language, known as communicative competence, includes not only grammar but the ability to communicate effectively in different social contexts along with other competencies.

With language being defined more in terms of meaning rather than form, CLT places more emphasis on the “function” as a unit of expression which may vary in meaning and effect depending on social situations. Functions enable a speaker to perform linguistic acts such as apologizing, expression one’s opinion, asking a favor, and so on. In terms of course design, a communicative syllabus is based on functions and is often referred to as a notational / functional syllabus (Yalden (1981); Krahke (1987); and Richards & Rodgers (1983)). This type of syllabus is organized into units according to themes or topics which include the relevant functions and vocabulary required to communicate effectively in that situation. Yalden (1983) identifies six types of communicative syllabi which depend on factors such as level of learner and focus of the course. One major type of communicative syllabus is the task-based syllabus (Long & Crookes (1992)) which is arranged in “tasks” where students must use the foreign language to report, respond, discuss, and negotiate to solve problems or complete tasks.

CLT classroom activities are often designed to have a purpose, such as to share information to solve a problem or complete a task. Students must use the foreign language to communicate, negotiate and decide an outcome. Littlewood (1981) classifies communicative activities into two groups “functional communicative activities” and “social interaction activities.” Functional interactional activities are where students use the language they are capable of to exchange information to solve a problem or complete a task. Some examples of this involve pair work where each student has a slightly different picture or map from each other and they have to figure out the differences. Social interaction activities require students to use socially correct language in a particular situation. This type of activity includes roleplays, skits, conversations, discussions, and debates. For teaching oral skills, Lazaraton (2001) suggest four major speaking activities: conversations, discussions, speeches, and roleplay.

The classroom activities described above are indeed communicative; however, details on how each type of activity can improve specific language competencies is not clearly indicated. Lazaraton (2001), for example, does provide the language benefits of roleplay as, “... particularly suitable for practicing the sociocultural variations in speech acts, such as complimenting, complaining, and the like.” (p. 107)

Though, descriptions as such are not common, thus requiring course developers and language teachers to make their own assumptions about how communicative activities specifically improve the communicative language competencies of their students.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to give relevant background on the development of communicative competence theory as it relates to this project.

2.1 Communicative Competence

Theories of communicative competence were born out of the limitations of grammar equal language theories. Ironically the questioning of grammar centric theories may have been initiated by Chomsky (1965) who proposed that there is a performance factor involved in communication to account for the tendency of native speakers with perfect implicit knowledge of grammar to produce language which is less than perfect. Chomsky referred to this 'gap' as "linguistic competence" and "linguistic performance". To Hymes (1972) the reasons given for this gap, such as psychological factors or memory recall issues, seemed inadequate and failed to consider situational conditions such as place, relationship between interlocutors, and so on. Hymes referred to these as sociocultural factors, "Given, then, the assumption that the competency of users of language entails abilities and judgements relative to, and interdependent with, sociocultural features, one can see how to extend the notion to allow for this." (p.59)

Thus, Hymes redefines linguistic competence and linguistic performance as "competence" and "acceptability",

In the linguistic theory under discussion, judgements are said to be of two kinds: of grammaticality, with respect to competence, and of acceptability, with respect to performance. Each pair of terms is strictly matched; the critical analysis just given requires analysis of the other. In particular, the analysis just given requires that explicit distinctions be made within the notion of "acceptability" to match the distinctions of kinds of "performance", and at the same time, the entire set of terms must be examined and recast with respect to the communicative as a whole. (p.65)

In an attempt to explain the gap between competence and acceptability, Hymes concluded that sociocultural competence, the ability to respond appropriately in a given social situation, was the biggest piece of the puzzle missing from previous theories of language. This led to Hymes's theory which can best be summarized by Canale and Swain (1980) as,

Communicative competence is thus viewed by Hymes as the interaction of grammatical (what is formally possible), psycholinguistic (what is feasible in terms of human information processing), sociolinguistic (what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance), and probabilistic (what actually occurs) systems of competence. (p.16)

Building on Hymes and others, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a framework of communicative competence which initially consisted of three competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Similar to Hymes, grammatical competence refers to the ability to understand and produce syntactically and semantically correct language. This also includes the mastery of pronunciation and use of intonation. Sociolinguistic competence, which is derived from Hymes's sociocultural competence, consists of two components: sociolinguistic rules and rules of discourse. Discourse refers to the joining of utterances or written text through cohesive devices to make coherent discourse. Canale and Swain define sociolinguistic rules as follows:

... the ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately with respect to the components of communicative events ... The primary focus of these rules is on the extent to which certain proposition and communicative functions are appropriate within a given sociocultural context depending on contextual factors such as topic, role of participants, setting, and norms of interaction. A secondary concern of such rules is the extent to which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context. (p.30)

The third component of the Canale and Swain framework of communicative competence is referred to as strategic competence which is the ability to compensate for a lack of language ability when communicating and the ability to repair communication breakdown using a set of verbal and non-verbal tools. For instance, the ability to paraphrase is a useful strategy when one does not know or remember a particular word in the foreign language. Also, this includes useful functions for asking for repetition, meaning, and so on to aid in understanding.

In a later version of the Canale and Swain framework, Canale (1983) makes a clear distinction between sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. Canale expands on the original idea of discourse competence for both written and spoken language by explaining how cohesive devices such as the use of pronouns, conjunction, and transition can aid in unity. Along with cohesion, coherence or the logical development of ideas, can be enhanced through transitional expressions, progression of meaning, and the exclusion of irrelevant information.

The Canale and Swain framework presents one of the most comprehensive views on communicative competence. However, the framework does not give any insight on how the four components interact nor suggest how other mental processes are involved. Canale (1983), however, does acknowledge that "... this theory of communicative competence interacts in as yet unspecified ways with other systems of knowledge and skill ..." (p. 6) Perhaps in response to this Bachman (1990) presents a framework which suggests how the various constructs of language competencies and mental processes interact. He calls this framework Communicative Language Ability (CLA) which "... can be described as consisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use." (p. 64)

Bachman's CLA framework consists of three language components and can be visualized to work on three levels. On the upper most level, perhaps on a deep subconscious level, language competence

provides the knowledge of language and non-language knowledge structures provide worldly knowledge. These two components interact with the next subconscious level component, strategic competence, which provides the contextual or sociocultural knowledge of language use. The third level, psychophysiological mechanisms, are responsible to activate sensory organs to make the physical act of receiving, comprehending, and responding to a specific situation possible.

Bachman's definition of language competence within the CLA framework is somewhat different from Canale and Swain. Bachman subdivides language competence into organizational competence consisting of grammatical competence and textual (discourse) competence and pragmatic competence. Bachman (1990) describes pragmatic competence as follows:

Pragmatics is thus concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances, which can be called the illocutionary force of utterances, and the characteristics of the context of language use that determine the appropriateness of utterances. The notion of pragmatic competence presented here thus includes illocutionary competence, or the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context. (p.89-90)

2.2 Research Project

This project focuses on the communicative competence framework proposed by Canale and Swain consisting of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) provides a list of communication objectives that can be incorporated into a communicative course syllabus. That list formed the basis of the questionnaire used in this project to query student feedback on communicative speaking activities roleplay and speech.

Research Question:

1. How do students compare the benefits of communicative speaking tasks roleplay and speech with respect to certain language points?
2. Is there a correlation between student feedback and how CLT might view these activities in terms of communicative competence?

3. Methods

3.1 The Course

The focus of this study is a "Speaking" EFL class for first year students at a major university in Tokyo, Japan. This class consists of 12 female and 10 male students (n = 22) between the ages of 18 and 19 years old. All students entering the university are required to take the TOEIC test and student

placement is according to their TOEIC test scores. The students in this particular class scored between 500 and 550 which is defined by the university as “lower intermediate”.

This course follows a CLT syllabus based on the course textbooks: *Speak Now 4*, by Jack C. Richards and David Bohike (Oxford University Press) and *Impact Issues 2* by Richard R. Day, Joseph Shaules and Junko Yamanaka (Pearson/Longman). The general goals of this course are: 1) To develop students’ fluency, complexity and vocabulary of spoken English; 2) To prepare students’ skills to discuss ideas and make presentations in English; 3) To develop students’ abilities to cooperate and work effectively and efficiently in small groups; and 4) To develop students’ conversation and discussion strategies.

This is a two semester course meeting twice a week for 15 weeks in both the spring term and fall term. Assessment for each term consists of: 20% for attendance and participation; 20% for homework and pre-class preparation; 30% for midterm oral test; and 30% for final oral test. The midterm test was held on the 8th week of classes and the final on the 15th week.

As mentioned previously, the course textbook for the spring term, *Speak Now 4*, followed a communicative syllabus with a focus on conversation practice and roleplay. Therefore the midterm and final tests for the spring term were based on roleplays using topics from the textbook. Assessment was based on memorization, content, voice, and performance.

The textbook for the fall term, *Impact Issues 2*, focused more on discussion and speech. (at the end of each unit, students were required to give a mini speech in groups based on one of the topic questions) For the fall midterm and final tests students were required to give a 2-3-minute speech based on one of the topics in the textbook covered in that section of the course. Students could choose the topic in advance; however, they were forbidden to look at any notes or cue cards. Assessment again was based on memorization, content, voice, and performance.

3.2 Instrumentation

A questionnaire was designed to ask the students to compare language points identified by Canale (1983) as being possible objectives characteristic of each of the four language competencies of the Canale and Swain framework of communicative Competence. Students were asked to read through a list of questions (“Which method helped you ...?”) and choose roleplay (R), speech (S), or no difference (N).

3.3 Procedure

At the end of the course in January 2016, students were asked to complete the questionnaire (see appendix) and this took approximately 10 minutes. Students were asked not to write their names on the questionnaire and were told that their answers had no bearing on their final grade what so ever. Students were also told that the information from the questionnaire may be used for research purposes and completion of the survey was optional. All students complied, completed and submitted the questionnaire.

4. Data and Results

After the questionnaire, the numbers were tallied and the results converted into percentages.

Table 1 *Results of Questionnaire*

Which method helped you ...? (R = roleplay; S = speech; N = no difference)		R	S	N
1	Improve pronunciation	32%	14%	54%
2	Improve hearing and practicing intonation	41%	18%	41%
3	Understand the meaning of new words, expression, and idioms	50%	18%	32%
4	Understand and use grammar	32%	50%	18%
5	Learn and use language functions (e.g., apologizing, requests)	77%	18%	5%
6	Use the correct language function in social settings	55%	9%	36%
7	Use the correct grammar in different situations or social settings	18%	27%	55%
8	Using the correct vocabulary in different situations or social settings	45%	10%	45%
9	Use the correct language to discuss a variety of topics	55%	32%	13%
10	Organize and sequence your ideas	0%	77%	23%
11	Express complex ideas	4%	82%	14%
12	Improve your ability to ask for repetition, clarification, or slower speech	50%	36%	14%
13	Improve your to paraphrase	68%	27%	5%
14	Use or practice nonverbal cues or gestures	32%	59%	9%
15	Use of fillers (hmm, oh, well..., etc)	68%	27%	5%
16	Active listening (really, ok, I see, right, etc)	82%	14%	4%
17	Overall, which method of study did you find most useful to help you learn English?	41%	18%	41%
18	Which method did you enjoy the most?	56%	22%	22%
19	Which method did you find the most difficult?	9%	77%	14%
20	Which method motivated you the most to study?	41%	32%	27%

The results of the data has been analyzed in terms of how they relate to the four competencies of the Canale and Swain framework of communicative competence. The final section looks at the students overall assessment of these language activities.

Grammatical Competence

Questions one to four ask about language points which relate to grammatical competence. For the first three questions, students seem to prefer roleplay as the better language task to improve pronunciation, hearing and intonation, and the understanding of the meaning of new words, expressions and idioms. Several students commented that listening to their partner and making sure that their partner understands them helped them to focus on pronunciation and to some extent intonation. A few students who chose "S" for number 2 commented that listening to long speeches by their classmates were easy to understand and were useful for hearing. These students recognized that peer presentations are a valuable source of comprehensible input. In response to question three, one student commented that roleplay allowed him to learn words and expressions that are useful in conversation while two students mentioned that in

preparing for their speech, they had to look up new words and this helped them to build vocabulary. In contrast, 50% of students choose speech as the better way to understand and use grammar. Several students commented that they felt the need to be more careful about grammar when giving a speech and that writing out a script helped them to focus on grammar.

Sociolinguistic Competence

Questions five through eight deal with sociolinguistic factors and perhaps not surprisingly 77% of students chose roleplay as the better activity to learn and use language functions. Several students commented that functions are needed in conversation and helped them to express their feelings. Also, students preferred roleplay for using the correct language function in social settings and using the correct vocabulary in different situations or social setting, though many students decided that there was no difference between the two tasks for using the correct function and vocabulary in a social setting. As with grammatical competence, students again chose speech as the preferred method to use the correct grammar in different situations or social settings. The reasons given for this were similar to those given for question four in which speech requires greater accuracy with grammar and in conversation they can 'get away with' simpler grammar.

Discourse Competence

Questions nine through eleven were intended to obtain feedback about general features of discourse competence. Question nine asked about the correct use of language to talk about a variety of topics which could also be interpreted in the realm of sociolinguistic competence. Over half of the students indicated that roleplay helped best to achieve this objective. The other two questions, organizing and sequencing ideas and expressing complex ideas, students showed a strong preference to speech. This would make sense since preparing for a speech or a presentation would give students the time to organize their thoughts and consider more complex ways of expression. This was confirmed by several students' comments.

Strategic Competence

Questions thirteen to sixteen are concerned with objectives relating to strategic competence. Not surprisingly students found roleplay to be the better activity to improve asking for repetition, clarification, slower speech, paraphrasing, and the use of fillers and active listening responses since these are conversation based actions. Students chose speech as the better way to practice nonverbal cues or gestures probably since this was a required part of their speech presentations.

Motivation

Questions 17 to 20 ask about preference and motivation. More students found roleplay to be the more useful activity to learn English, though almost half chose 'both'. Several students commented that they felt face-to-face communication was the most important thing when studying spoken English. However, two students who chose 'speech' indicated so because it allowed them to express their opinions. For the next question, the majority of students enjoyed roleplay more than speech. Interestingly, there were more comments about speech, such as enjoying listening to friends speeches, and gaining confidence in giving speeches. For question 19, almost 80% of students found giving speeches more difficult than roleplay

which is not surprising. Several comments were made concerning the difficulty organizing ideas and using correct grammar. Finally, more students were motivated practicing roleplay than speech; however, the difference between the two was less than 10%. The comments were varied; however, most acknowledged the value of both activities for improving speaking skill.

5. Conclusion

Generally the student assessment of these communicative activities in terms of communicative competence is probably very similar to how a language teacher or course designer would rate them, though the students in this study did not make a unanimous distinction on most questions. What this research project does show is that these students have demonstrated very good analytical skills to analyze these activities.

In regards to grammatical competence more students chose 'speech' over roleplay which makes logical sense since students need to focus more on correct grammar to produce long monologues such as a speech or presentation. However, more students found roleplay to be more effective to learn and practice proper pronunciation and intonation.

In terms of sociolinguistic competence, the majority of students chose roleplay which conforms to the general opinion that conversation and roleplay are the best activities to promote and enhance social awareness in language use.

The survey questions regarding discourse analysis indicate a preference for speech as a preferred activity to practice discourse competence. This makes sense since a long monologue such as a speech or presentation requires more attention to cohesion and the organization of speech in logical order.

Finally, students chose roleplay as a better activity to learn and practice strategic competence. This conforms to the general approach taken by language teachers to introduce language functions to develop strategic competence in conversations, especially with lower level learners.

In CLT discussion and roleplay are perhaps the most favored activities since they are the basis for the communicative act of language. Indeed, this survey of student feedback tends to support this idea. However, even though a long monologue such as a speech may not involve face-to-face communication, student feedback indicates students do indeed benefit by developing discourse competence and to some extent, grammatical competence.

Discussion

Obtaining student feedback on classroom activities is a very useful endeavor, but is often overlooked. In course development student feedback allows teachers to make changes in the course syllabus to better serve student needs. Feedback on classroom activities should be no different.

Even though this survey was on a small scale and not statistically significant, it demonstrates that student needs will vary and teachers should include a variety of activities and avoid certain biases. For

example, roleplay is considered one of the best activities to raise awareness and practice sociolinguistic functions which is argued to be the focus of the communicative approach. However, as this survey has demonstrated, 'speech' which may not be considered "communicative" does offer value as a language activity to students.

Further research into student feedback of a wider range of communicative activities could provide language teachers with the information necessary to make decisions on how to provide a balance with respect the language competencies of communicative competence.

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*Appendix**S1 Speaking: Questionnaire*

I would like your feedback about the different styles of language learning that we studied in this course. In the spring term we focused on conversation practice and roleplays. For the midterm and final tests in the spring, you were asked to create and present a roleplay based on one of the themes in the textbook. In the fall term, we focused on mini presentations. For the midterm and final tests in the fall, you had to make and give a speech based on one of the topics in the textbook.

Please read the points below and circle the learning style that you think is the better way for you to learn (“R” = roleplay; “S” = speech; “N” = no difference). Any comments are appreciated.

Which method helped you...?

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. improve pronunciation | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 2. improve hearing and practicing intonation | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 3. understand the meaning of new words, expressions, and idioms | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 4. understand and use grammar | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 5. learn and use language functions (for example; apologizing, making requests, expressing opinions) | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 6. use the correct language functions in social settings (for example; when talking to friends, when talking to your boss) | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 7. use the correct grammar in different situations or social settings | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 8. use the correct vocabulary in different situations or social settings | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 9. use the correct language to discuss a variety of topics | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 10. organize or sequence your ideas | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 11. express complex ideas | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 12. improve your ability to ask for repetition, clarification, or slower speech | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 13. Improve your ability to paraphrase (repeat something using different words) | | | |
| | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 14. use or practice nonverbal cues or gestures | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 15. use of pause fillers (umm, oh, well, etc) | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 16. Active listening (really, ok, I see, right, etc) | R | S | N |
| <i>Comments:</i> | | | |
| 17. Overall, which method of study did you find most useful to help you learn English? | | | |
| | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 18. Which method did you enjoy the most? | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 19. Which method did you find the most difficult? | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |
| 20. Which method motivated you the most to study? | R | S | N |
| <i>Comment:</i> | | | |

ロールプレイのコミュニケーションスキルと音声口頭発話の 学生フィードバックの比較

Darrell HARDY

[要約]

コミュニケーション・ランゲージ・ティーチング (CLT) は、外国語 (EFL) の学生が外国語として自信を持って能力のあるコミュニケーターになるための言語を取得する手段を提供することを目指しています。コミュニカティブな語学コースは、有意義で適切な言語を伝えることを目的としているという原則に基づいて設計されています。Canale and Swain (1980) のコミュニケーション能力の枠組みは、おそらく、コミュニケーション・コースデザインで使用される言語の標準理論である。この枠組みは、文法的能力、社会言語学的能力、談話能力、および戦略的能力の4つの言語能力からなる。コミュニカティブな語学コースは、これらの4つの語学能力に基づいて、語学を習得し、使用する能力を習得し、向上させる活動を計画しています。この研究プロジェクトは、コミュニケーション能力の主要な要素に関連する各活動の有効性に関する学生の視点を得るために、2つの顕著な教室活動、ロールプレイングおよびスピーチに関する生徒のフィードバックを調べます。コース調査の終了の結果は、これらの活動のコミュニケーションの性質に関する一般的な前提を確認し、またいくつかの貴重な洞察を提供します。将来のコースデザインは、コミュニケーション能力の開発にバランスのとれたアプローチを与えることを目的としたさまざまなコミュニケーション活動を提供することによって利益を得ることができます。

[キーワード]

コミュニケーション能力 コミュニケーション活動 学生のフィードバック