

Dogme in ELT: A CLT Perspective.

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The ability to communicate in English is needed for higher education and employment. To develop the communicative competence in target language certain methodologies are employed. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) serves the purpose of developing the communicative competence since it focuses on meaning rather than form. The acknowledgement of diverse socio-cultural realities lead to the emergence of context-sensitive pedagogies, demanding the desertion of CLT due to its inadequacies in adapting to context. This article forefronts the shortcomings and the criticisms that are laid against CLT and intends to give an insight on Dogme in English Language Teaching (ELT) which is an offshoot of CLT. Dogme Approach in ELT promises the practitioners of CLT a different perspective which can be an effective tool in achieving the desired learning outcomes. This article assesses the objectives of CLT and substantiates on the application of Dogme approach as an effective alternative teaching pedagogy to CLT.

Keywords: CLT, Dogme approach, communicative competence, context.

Introduction

The methodologies, approaches and theories in ELT undergo progressive transformation to facilitate a better learning and teaching experience in the academic domain. Similarly CLT which is predominantly prevalent in Indian ELT context is also being questioned and discussed by various practitioners regarding its adaptability, practicality, context, and other aspects that it claims to promote. These discussions led to valid disparagements against CLT. On the other hand there is an ongoing argument between CLT as a method and as an approach. CLT to this very day is being used globally in spite of the heavily laid criticisms. Hence Dogme in ELT has come to be a promising alternative to CLT since it seems to cover up its shortcomings. Dogme approach does not neglect CLT. The undue importance given to CLT has to be reconsidered for establishing a better teaching and learning module in ESL classroom. Since learning to teach is a dynamic process which transforms and reconstructs the prevailing practices to adapt to the individual and local needs of the ESL context.

Objectives

The main objective of this article is to discuss the goals of CLT in local context and the prominent criticisms laid against its practice and thereby highlighting the application of Dogme approach as an alternative pedagogical replacement to CLT. This article also attempts to find answers to research questions such as

1. Do CLT practices have to be re-evaluated under the social-cultural context?
2. Can Dogme in ELT affirm to be an effective alternative to CLT?

Discussion

Traditionally ELT methodologies focussed on the structures of language rather than the functions of language. The emphasis was on grammar, structures and making grammatically correct sentences. Form was important over meaning. CLT approach bloomed as a counter to the traditional practices as it focussed on developing the communicative competence. The reductionism of grammar-centric approaches laid the foundation for CLT. CLT is based on certain key principles such as meaning being the paramount importance, fluency and accuracy, practical use of language inside the classroom, learner-centred instruction and an emphasis on promoting the LSRW skills.

CLT is being practiced and considered to be an effective pedagogy. CLT was designed in the West but it has been adapted to the teaching situations in a country like India for which it is not so well prepared to adapt to the local requirements as the socio-cultural and contextual factors affect the implementation of CLT. Such a development of context-sensitive pedagogies call for localised practices rather than globalized methods. As the field of language teaching and learning lays emphasis on the social background, teachers have to consider the context in which they teach and understand that the social context is indisputable. The dominance of CLT has led to the neglect of a crucial aspect that is the ground reality in which the pedagogy takes place. Stephen Bax in 2003 wrote an article on accentuating the paucity of CLT towards the social situations. He calls for a Context Approach to language teaching. He is of the opinion that a paradigm shift should take place considering the context as the priority and then to consider the teaching approach. An overshadowing of CLT attitude is also seen in material production. This has led to the negligence of the local variables and considering it to be insignificant in learning and teaching of a language.

CLT practitioners have failed to recreate a real-life communication inside their classroom as well as they have failed to generate conditions conducive for developing

communication skills. CLT approach, practices Pseudo-communication and it is unproductive to ask a student a question to which the teacher already knows the answer, there is no genuine communication taking place. Another untoward result of CLT has been text books that are really nothing more than a series of recipes for activities. One of the most dangerous assumptions of CLT approach is the idea that if students are communicating, then they must be learning. On the other hand there is an ongoing tiff between CLT as a method and as an approach. CLT as an approach is not prescriptive but CLT as a method is prescriptive and it will have clear guidelines for classroom application. CLT as a method, being prescriptive cannot promote a genuine communication inside the classroom since it has definite classroom goals to be attained at the end of the lesson.

Scott Thornbury and Luke Meddings are the pioneers of Dogme in ELT. They foregrounded the idea of abstaining the classes from excessive materials/resources and focussing on the inner life of students since Dogme lesson can be explained as the one that is grounded in the experience, beliefs, desires and knowledge of the people in the room. Thornbury and Meddings framed three main principles of Dogme ELT. They are Conversation-driven, Materials light and Focus on emergent language. Firstly inside the classroom conversation plays a significant role in Dogme approach. Since Dogme in ELT is an approach it does not have any clear classroom guidelines and conversation in classrooms become a rich resource for the learners. Secondly Dogme approach liberates the classrooms from materials, photocopies and technological aids though it is not material-free teaching but a material light teaching and therefore Dogme approach can be called as the 'pedagogy of bare essentials.' Lastly it focusses on the emergent language because Dogme approach argues that learning is an emergent process and it has less to do with covering the syllabus.

Dogme approach is an offshoot of CLT and they share a few ideas in common but they are not similar to each other. CLT uses communication as the primary tool for learning and so does Dogme which is conversation-driven. Communication serves the purpose of learning in both however in CLT, the classroom talks are institutionalised talks and the goals of communication inside the classroom are restricted by the goals of students and teachers. Since CLT as a method has specific goals to be attained at the end of a lesson, Nunan(1989) attempts to make a distinction between 'real-world' and 'pedagogical tasks.' In Dogme approach the conversation is relevant to the learners' interest and it happens to promote genuine communication inside the classroom. The text books of CLT are nothing more than a series of activities which happen to limit the real communication whereas, Dogme approach

being a material-light pedagogy the learners, teachers and their experiences become the resources of learning.

Language is the product of context and without appropriate social background there can never be any language in its true sense. Context maybe physical/mental as it stimulates the mind. Being communicative means paying attention to context, roles and topics however CLT seems to pay less attention to the social context. The flexibility and the adaptability of Dogme approach makes it context sensitive whereas, CLT side lines the ground reality in which one teaches. CLT is more often considered as a method rather than an approach and having methodology at the forefront of profession, learning opportunities will be limited. Methodology means having a clear classroom application, teacher-proof and has definite goals to be attained at the end of each lesson. Dogme in ELT is an approach and hence it is not prescriptive. In general, Dogme approach seems to share a common ground with a few other theories of language teaching altogether it stands apart with its novelty and thereby supporting the three pillars of post-method pedagogy.

Conclusion

By highlighting the merits of Dogme approach and its application in ELT, it can be considered as an effective alternative to CLT. Since Dogme approach takes the context into account it promises the practitioners of CLT to be a better alternative. Finally it is time that we think of a methodology that lays less emphasis on the over reliance on textbooks and other materials and brings the cultural context to the centre.

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