



Article Title

**CLT Theories and Practices in EFL Curricula
A Case Study of Korea**

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Abstract

This study investigates the theories and practices of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the EFL curriculum in Korea. Based on recent research on second/foreign language learning, CLT has been widely accepted as an effective way of teaching in ESL/EFL contexts. In an EFL situation, the Korean Ministry of Education have also realized the importance of CLT and made significant attempts to implement CLT through recent changes in the national English curricula. This study, in an effort to present a concrete picture of how CLT is implemented and utilized in an EFL context, discusses which specific CLT approach provides the theoretical basis for the recent national English curricula in Korea and how the curriculum contents are actualized based on the theories. Based on this discussion, this study aims to suggest a desirable future direction for curriculum development in EFL contexts where national curricula are essential in formal education.

Introduction

In Korea, the national curriculum controls the instructional procedure and the contents of general education in elementary and secondary schools: the Ministry of Education first publishes the national curriculum for a certain period of school education, private companies thereupon create textbooks, some of which the Ministry of Education authorizes to be published, and the authorized textbooks are then used in the school settings. English education is carried out through this procedure and thus proper decisions on theories, approaches, and contents in the curriculum are critical to effective ELT in Korea.

The developers of the national English curriculum in Korea first paid significant attention to CLT in the 6th curriculum in history, which was developed in 1992 and put into effect in 1995. The 6th curriculum makes explicit that its fundamental goal is to develop communicative competence. The basic philosophy of the 6th curriculum is maintained in the 7th curriculum, which was completed in 1997 and began in 2001. However, CLT is not a term for one particular type of teaching theory or methodology, but a cover term for various types of teaching procedures which have evolved a couple of decades ago when communication came to be generally recognized as the ultimate goal of language teaching. Given the dynamic features of CLT, it seems necessary to investigate the current status of the employment of CLT in an EFL context like Korea. This study therefore examines the two recent national English curricula in terms of the specific approaches to CLT that they used for theoretical bases and the actual contents presented in the curriculum documents. This study thereby aims to suggest a desirable future direction for ELT curriculum development in Korea as well as implication for similar EFL situations in other countries, especially countries where national curricula control the pedagogical situations, such as China, Japan, etc.

CLT Theories

CLT theories are different from the grammatical approach, which assumes that language consists of a finite set of rules and that these rules can be learned one by one, in an additive fashion (Nunan 1988). The principal purpose of language teaching in a grammatical syllabus is to help learners accumulate the parts until the whole structure of language has been built up. Nunan (1988) distinguishes a syllabus that assumes a simple

additive fashion of learning, namely a synthetic syllabus, from an analytic syllabus, which is organized pursuant to the purposes of language learning. Nunan points out that language learning does not occur in the linear-additive fashion that a synthetic syllabus presupposes and thus the focus of learning should alternatively be on language use rather than on the language itself.

In CLT, language learning emphasizes learning to communicate as opposed to learning a set of rules. However, whereas the ultimate goal of CLT is agreed upon as the achievement of communicative competence, differing methods and approaches produce a wide variety of syllabus designs and teaching procedures. In the earlier version of CLT, functional definitions of language were viewed as the alternative units that could be used to create communicative syllabi for language teaching (Wilkins 1972; Canale and Swain 1980). In attempting to show the system of meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language, Wilkins (1972) described two types of meanings: notional categories such as time, location, etc. and functional categories such as requests, denials, etc. In this earlier version, the terms 'functional' approach and 'notional' approach were used interchangeably with 'communicative' approach, and those functions and notions were the basic units used in organizing the syllabus. However, the notional-functional approach views language as divided into discrete units of functions and notions. Critics pointed out that this was just a new kind of synthetic syllabus, and that inventories of functions and notions do not necessarily reflect the reality of language learning any more than do inventories of grammatical points and lexical items (Nunan 1988; Long and Crookes 1992).

From a different perspective, Krashen (1982) suggested a language acquisition approach that rejects the role of explicit instruction in teaching. According to him, 'acquisition' is a system of subconscious learning processes in which learners acquire a language naturally. 'Learning,' on the other hand, is a developing process of formal, conscious knowledge about grammatical rules and the only role of conscious learning is to monitor or edit the output of the acquired system. Learners acquire syntax and vocabulary by getting and understanding input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence and their fluent speaking ability will emerge only with the help of a sufficient quantity of comprehensible input. Therefore, according to Krashen, explicit grammar instruction is not necessary in language teaching.

Krashen's naturalistic position has been criticized by recent branches of CLT since the natural approach emphasize learners' individual thinking and behavior only and overlooks the social aspects of the learning environment such as interpersonal negotiation of what is to be done, why, and how (Nunan 1988). Nunan (1989) thus advocates new practice devices utilizing and at the same time facilitating classroom interaction, namely 'tasks.' Based on this notion of tasks, researchers such as Long and Crookes (1992) propose an analytic syllabus, task-based language teaching (TBLT). They say that tasks provide learners with appropriate target language samples and comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty. Nunan (1989) also advocates classroom tasks that replicate the tasks that learners would need to carry out in the real world and at the same time stimulate internal learning processes.

Another important point made from TBLT perspective is that formal instruction can have a positive effect on language learning to a certain degree (Long and Crookes

1992). Long and Crookes say that awareness of certain types of linguistic forms in the input is necessary for learning to occur, and that drawing learners' attention to those forms facilitates development when certain conditions are met. Long (1991) also proposes the "interactional hypothesis": that negotiation for meaning through interaction is crucial to language development in that it increases a learner's comprehension of input, provides important information about form-function relationships, and elicits negative feedback from the recipient. The negative feedback, which is the recipient's correct reformulation of a learner's incorrect utterances, draws learners' attention to differences between input and output, that is, causes them to focus on form, and thereby leads them to learn the language effectively. This interaction hypothesis motivates the 'focus on form' approach, which maintains the primary emphasis on communicative meaning while simultaneously dealing with student errors, and the usefulness of which usefulness has been supported by many research findings (Carroll and Swain 1993; Doughty and Williams 1998; Lyster and Ranta 1997; among others).

As seen thus far, the CLT theories have taken various shapes depending on the primary focus. Despite the variety of CLT approaches, a consensus is found regarding the process of language learning: language cannot be learned through synthetic units such as grammar, functions, or notions in a discrete and linear way, and nor can it be learned separate from language use. Therefore, analytic syllabi, rather than synthetic, will appropriately reflect the language learning process.

Theories in the Two Recent English National Curricula

The 1st through 5th national English curricula for secondary schools in Korea have been criticized due to their heavy grammar-orientation (Ministry of Education 1992; Bae and Han 1994). The Korean government realized that the grammatical syllabus does not help much to develop learners' communicative competence, and decided that a fundamental goal of the 6th curriculum would be to introduce CLT into the Korean teaching context. In order to accomplish this goal, the Ministry of Education (1992) maintains, new kinds of units are applied in the 6th curriculum in organizing the syllabus, namely units with communicative functions such as 'exchanging information,' 'solving problems,' 'asking favors,' 'expressing feelings,' etc. By replacing grammar with the communicative functions as the units of a lesson, the curriculum intends to develop learners' communicative competence more effectively.

Some ELT experts have criticized the 6th curriculum since the emphasis on fluency in the 6th curriculum has led to a lack of grammatical accuracy in learners' speech and writing. The developers of the 7th curricula have thus decided to include linguistic forms in a supplementary guide to complement the communicative functions (Choi et al. 1997). Kwon (2000) defines the 7th curriculum as a grammatical-functional syllabus which provides both communicative functions and grammatical structures. However, the basic philosophy of the 7th English curriculum is not much different from that of the 6th in that communicative competence and fluency are emphasized.

The curriculum developers' main arguments summarized above show that the specific CLT approach of the two curricula is basically the notional-functional approach, which is the earliest version of CLT. Both curricula design the syllabus based on various

‘communicative functions,’ without grammatical guidelines in the 6th and with supplementary grammar in the 7th curriculum. Regarding the specific approach of the curricula, I find important issues necessary to address. First, the extreme resistance to grammar found in the goals of the 6th curriculum is not a feature of CLT. As discussed earlier, linguistic competence is part of the communicative competence that CLT approaches desire to develop, and recent CLT approaches acknowledge the effectiveness of utilizing certain types of formal instruction in communicative classrooms. Therefore, the 6th curriculum's opposition to grammar does not appropriately reflect the viewpoint of CLT. In fact, criticism on this point was raised after the 6th curriculum was introduced, and this led the 7th curriculum to include grammar structures as a supplementary guideline to the communicative functions.

Second, although the fundamental goal of the 6th and 7th curriculum is to implement CLT, they seem to fail to reach the goal because of the inadequate choice of a specific approach. The notional-functional approach, as mentioned earlier, has been criticized by CLT advocates because of its use of a synthetic type of syllabus. Synthetic syllabi, in which language is divided into discrete units of whatever type, misrepresent the nature of language as communication and thus is not helpful to developing communicative competence. The linear-additive fashion in the two curricula will be further discussed with reference to the actual curriculum contents in the following section.

Practices in the Curricula

In the two curricula, the target functions to teach are represented by exemplary sentences. The exemplary sentences are used for the first time in the 6th curriculum, under

the name of *Example Sentences*, as the actual contents to teach. Since utilizing *Example Sentences* instead of grammatical structures was considered to play a positive role in adopting CLT, they continue to be used in the 7th curriculum. The following are a few instances of the sentences in each curriculum:

[The 6th curriculum]

Possibility: I can do it./ He can't swim well.

a. I can swim./ b. I cannot speak Chinese./ c. Can you swim well?

Joy/Anger/Sorrow/Pleasure: I'm happy.

a. We are happy./ b. She is angry.

[The 7th curriculum]

Possibility, Impossibility

- Asking and Expressing : Can you swim?

about Capability

Will you be able to go to the concert next Sunday?

Sure, I can.

He can swim.

I might be able to go with you.

- Expressing about : Sorry, I can't.

Impossibility

That's impossible.

I am not sure if I can do that.

Joy/Anger/Sorrow/Pleasure

- Expressing Joy : I'm happy./ I'm sad.

and Sorrow

I'm glad to hear that.

- She is very pleased about the restaurant.
- Comforting Sorrow : Cheer up.
Don't take it so hard.
Look on the bright side.
 - Expressing Anger : He is angry.
I'm very unhappy about this.
I'm very upset.
It really makes me mad.
 - Expressing Surprise : What a surprise!/ It's surprising.
I just can't believe this.
That's incredible!
I'm surprised you feel that way about it.

As demonstrated above, the 7th curriculum presents exemplary sentences in a more detailed way than the 6th. For example, the 6th curriculum categorizes joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure as one type of notion and presents only a couple of exemplary sentences for the whole category. On the other hand, the 7th curriculum further divides the category into four and presents several exemplary sentences for each sub-category. However, for the 6th curriculum, the Ministry of Education publishes an explication version (Bae and Han 1994) and provides more detailed explanations and descriptions of each function and how to relate similar functions or sentences in the practice of teaching.

An analysis of the explication version of the 6th curriculum reveals that the discussions of each *Example Sentence* more often involve the grammar items that the

sentence represents than the communicative functions. An instance follows (Bae and Han 1994: 82).

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Expressing physical feeling | He is too tired to walk. |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|

This is a sentence that expresses physical feeling, however, it also indicates the necessity to make the students understand the structure of ‘too... to’ in terms of the linguistic form.

He is so tired that he cannot walk.

Therefore, the teachers are recommended to teach the structure of ‘so...that.’

The instance above is the explanation of the function ‘expressing physical feeling’ which is represented through the *Example Sentence*, ‘He is too tired to walk.’ This explanation, except for the first sentence (‘This is a sentence that expresses physical feeling,’), focuses on the grammar to be taught: it mentions the structures ‘too... to’ and ‘so... that,’ and how to transform one into the other. However, it does not address the contexts such as the situation in which people can use such sentences or the sequence of talk in which such sentences can be embedded.

The following is another example (Bae and Han 1994: 95-96).

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| • Expressing emotional feeling | It is a pity that she got her arm broken.
English is easy to learn. |
|--------------------------------|--|

The example of ‘It is a pity that...’ is an expression showing sorrow and sympathy. Also, in terms of the linguistic form, the passive voice in English needs to be taught compared to the active in Korean.

- a. She *got* her arm broken. (= Her arm was broken by accident.)
- b. She *had* her hair cut.

With regard to the second example sentence, ‘English is easy to learn,’ its structure needs to be taught and practiced.

c. It is easy to learn English. (= English is easy to learn.)

d. I am glad to meet you.

As for (d), it cannot be transformed like (c) because the subject of the sentence is the agent.

As indicated, the target function that the two exemplary sentences are supposed to represent is ‘expressing emotional feeling,’ and the expression in the first sentence, ‘it is a pity that...,’ can be used to ‘express a kind of emotional feeling.’ Other than that, however, the explanations mostly discuss the grammar relevant to these sentences. The explication of the first example sentence leads to the explicit mention of the necessity to teach the ‘passive voice’ grammar point, and then it also leads to another structure of ‘have/get + object + past participle.’ The second exemplary sentence, ‘English is easy to learn,’ is a sentence totally irrelevant to the function of ‘expressing feelings’: there is neither expression of nor showing of feelings, nor is the meaning of the sentence relevant to feelings.

The analysis of other exemplary sentences in the 6th curriculum yields similar results. Most of the explanations seem to focus on which grammar items should be taught and how those items should be taught related to others. That is, the 6th curriculum, contrary to the claims, seems to remain a structural syllabus just as the preceding ones were although the format is changed on the surface level.

In the 7th curriculum, two sets of exemplary sentences are provided, one of which represents the communicative functions and the other demonstrates the grammatical structures to teach. The exemplary sentences of communicative functions are designed, as mentioned earlier, in a more sophisticated manner than those in the 6th curriculum. The grammatical structures are also included since the developers of the 7th curriculum acknowledge the effectiveness of some kind of formal instruction. The grammar items are represented not through linguistic terminology, but through exemplary sentences with the target grammar emphasized in boldface as seen in the following:

1. He **takes** a walk everyday.

We **went** on a picnic yesterday.

She **will** go abroad next year.

I **am going to** finish my work.

2. He **is sleeping** right now.

I **was studying** when they came.

She **will be coming** soon.

...

The two sets of exemplary sentences above represent the grammar points of ‘tense’ and ‘progressive’ respectively. The representations of grammar through exemplary sentences instead of explicit linguistic terminology are done to ensure that linguistic structures are merely supplementary to communicative functions in the syllabus.

The curriculum contents seem to be improved in the 7th curriculum in that the actual contents are in more accord with the goal than in the 6th: the exemplary sentences in the 6th

curriculum represent communicative functions to teach only in a superficial way, but those in the 7th determine the functions in a more specific and refined manner. Also, the role of linguistic forms in language learning is acknowledged to a certain degree in the 7th whereas the 6th curriculum intends to exclude it. However, the 7th curriculum still has limitations: it does not provide further discussions regarding how the sentences represent the communicative functions, how those functions should be taught, or how the functions are accomplished interactively. Furthermore, it still suggests a synthetic syllabus assuming that communicative functions can be represented by sets of exemplary sentences and learning can occur through mastering those inventories in a linear way. Although it is significant that the 6th curriculum makes an attempt to implement CLT and the 7th improves the contents, the fundamental goals of the two curricula seem hard to reach because of the inappropriate selection of the notional-functional approach, which CLT proponents have criticized due to its assumption of a linear-additive fashion of language learning. More recent versions of CLT assume that communicative language use cannot be learned through individual sentences isolated from broader communicative contexts. However, the two recent curricula fail to present the exemplary sentences within broad contexts, and thus they fail to provide a strong basis to reach the goal of developing communicative competence.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the attempts to implement CLT through the recent curricula changes in an EFL situation in Korea and the limitations of those attempts, one of which is the inadequate choice of the notional-functional approach. The

notional-functional approach, initially seen as different from the grammatical syllabus, turned out to be very similar in practice (Nunan 1988: 40). Therefore, in order to apply CLT, curriculum developers should consider more essential features of communication rather than simply replacing grammar with functions in syllabus design: broader contexts should be presented at the discourse level, and interaction or negotiation procedures among speakers should also be taken into account.

Additionally, in other EFL situations in which CLT has received attention, it is necessary to investigate which specific approach among various CLT versions currently gives the best theoretical basis, how actual teaching is carried out under its influence, and how the curriculum could be improved by changing or refining the curricular decisions.

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