

The Communicative Approach in Language Pedagogy: Its Foundations, Characteristics, and Mechanisms of Implementation

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Abstract

Language pedagogy is, first and foremost, an interdisciplinary field, as it connects to multiple areas of research. Educational theories and teaching approaches draw on bodies of knowledge from diverse humanistic and technical domains, since their principal aim is to transfer knowledge from a human agent who possesses that knowledge and is versed in the means of conveying it to another human agent who lacks it but has the capacity to comprehend what is presented provided that it is delivered correctly, in a manner consistent with the learner's psychological and social formation, and in step with the developments shaping the learner's environment. Hence, reliance on multiple fields within the educational process is imperative rather than optional. This is evident in the most recent approaches to language teaching, which are primarily interactive and enable the mobilisation of the various means available within the learner's immediate context. Among the most prominent of these is the active communicative approach, a flexible approach that accommodates diverse mindsets. Accordingly, it has been adopted in language teaching through different methods and is based on established linguistic, social and psychological, theories. From this perspective, the present study emerges, shedding light on three focal points: the nature of the approach, its foundations, and its implementation.

Keywords: Communicative approach; language pedagogy; function; communicative process.

Introduction:

Education constitutes the cornerstone upon which strong states are built; for this reason, it has been accorded unparalleled attention. However, its status as a cornerstone is not the sole reason for such concern. Instead, there are multiple factors, foremost among which education is a field that combines two dimensions: one abstract and the other concrete. The concrete dimension is represented by the two human agents participating in the learning process. In contrast, the abstract dimension is embodied in the body of knowledge that is to be imparted to the learner or, at the very least, consolidated in the learner's mind. The association of education with these elements has transformed it from a mere art grounded in experience into a science with its own foundations and theories.

Among the fields that have attracted the most significant degree of theoretical attention is language education, since languages constitute the key to knowledge; indeed, they are the key to the sciences. Consequently, many theories have emerged, beginning with traditional theories and extending to modern ones, in response to changes in the conditions of successive generations, as well as in their dispositions and cognitive capacities. Each stage thus requires a specific pedagogical approach. Nevertheless, the two most prominent approaches in our time are the structural approach, which aims to consolidate linguistic structure, and the communicative approach, which seeks to endow the learner with communicative competence. Possession of linguistic units without the ability to employ them is a limitation that characterised earlier approaches in language pedagogy, leading to the adoption of the communicative approach, which fulfils the requirements of language use in real-life contexts. As a result, the social dimension of language has become a central concern for educators, raising the question of how to enable language users to achieve communicative competence in interactions with others.

On this basis, the following research problem is posed:

What is the communicative approach, and how can it be employed within the educational process?

In undertaking this study, we aim to achieve the following objectives:

Cognitive objectives:

- To enable researchers to become acquainted with the communicative approach and the mechanisms for its implementation in the educational process.
- To enable researchers to understand Roman Jakobson's communicative theory in its pedagogical dimension, given that it is literary in origin but has been pedagogically applied.

Behavioural objectives:

- To enable researchers to employ the elements of the communicative approach in the educational process of linguistic content.

Affective objectives:

- To enable researchers to attain a comprehensive understanding of the communicative process in all its psychological dimensions.

The relationship between linguistics and communication theory is complementary. 'Abd al-Qādir Ghazālī maintains that "if the two disciplines share a unity of research object, represented in the exchange of messages, then linguistics, which is concerned with issues of linguistic structures and the various forms of messages used in everyday speech or grounded in aesthetic features in artistic expressions, derives from communication theory several means and procedures for analysing the types of messages and identifying the particularities of each type; it likewise provides the latter with effective tools for various problems."¹

Although Dr 'Abd al-Qādir's statement is purely theoretical, it clearly indicates the

¹ Abd al-Qādir al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Naẓariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 1st ed. (Latakia, Syria: Dār al-Ḥiwār for Publishing and Distribution, 2003), 22.

importance of communication as a theoretical framework for addressing problems across different fields.

The earliest signs of interest in communication theory began in the 1940s in the United States, where the theory of communication initially emerged within physical and mathematical studies. Subsequently, communication theory developed its own cognitive framework, and linguistic communication became a component and branch of the fields it studied. The subject of this theory is the distinctive features of each system of signs used between two beings, living or nonliving, directed towards communicative aims.²

Communication: Definition and Parties

Definition of communication: In its simplest definition, communication consists “in the transmission of information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another.”³

Communication occurs between at least two parties, or more, as they exchange messages.

Parties and elements of communication: Communication theory provides a deeper understanding of the communicative process by determining the elements of communication, represented in the following:⁴

Code: a set of phonemes and morphemes in natural languages.

Sender (Émetteur): the source of the message and the producer of the communicative material, namely, spoken and written language.

Receiver (Recepteur): This concept encompasses all the mechanisms that decode the message.

Channel of communication and transmission (Canal): the medium through which the message is conveyed in its physical form; air is the channel in direct communication, whereas electrical wires and Wi-Fi waves constitute the channel of communication in communication via the internet.

² See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Nazariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 23–24.

³ Edwin Emery and Philip H. Ault, *al-Ittiṣāl al-Jamāhīrī* [Mass Communication], trans. Ibrāhīm Salāmah Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 2000), 17.

⁴ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Nazariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 24–28.

Message: the message is the communicative material or content that is transmitted, upon which the communicative process is founded.

The Communicative Approach: Concept and Emergence

The emergence of the communicative approach:

The researcher Najwā Fīrān maintains that the idea of language teaching on the basis of the communicative approach initially emerged in the United States, where scholars focused on dimensions of language that had not been addressed within the linguistic approaches then in use. Researchers have sought to prioritise communicative effectiveness rather than linguistic structures. Among the pioneers of this orientation were Candlin and Widdowson, whose intellectual backgrounds were influenced by Halliday, Harris, Firth, John Searle, and Austin. In addition, Dell Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence in response to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence.⁵

Definition of the communicative approach:

Aḥmad ‘Abduh ‘Awād argues that, through the adoption of the communicative approach, educators aim to construct communicative competence. He states, “It remains to be noted that communicative language teaching, just as it seeks to equip learners with the four language skills and to develop them, and to enable them to acquire communicative skills and to use grammatical rules in order to perform specific communicative functions in particular situations, also creates natural individual and collective communicative situations, directly, through linguistic content. In this context, priority is given to training learners first in oral conversation, followed by training in the remaining language skills, with preference given to their integration in teaching.”⁶ Through the adoption of the communicative approach, the objective is not limited to skill development alone but also extends to the creation of communicative situations by constructing linguistic content that directly contributes to this aim.

⁵ See Najwā Fīrān, “Āliyyāt Binā’ al-Kifāyah al-Tawāṣuliyyah lil-Muta‘allim Ḏimna al-Manhaj al-Tawāṣulī fī Ta‘līmiyyat al-Lughāt,” *Majallat Ta‘līmiyyāt* 1, no. 3 (2020): 64.

⁶ Aḥmad ‘Abduh ‘Awād, *Madākhil Ta‘līm al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah: Dirāsah Mashīyyah Naqdīyyah*, 1st ed. (Mecca: Umm al-Qurā University, Institute of Scientific Research, Centre for Educational and Psychological Research, 2000), 69.

Communicative competence:

This concept is closely associated with social linguistic performance. "The task of communicative competence is encapsulated in the functional-pragmatic performance of language, enabling the language user to master its rules while simultaneously enabling them to employ it effectively within different communicative contexts."⁷ Thus, communicative competence refers to the possession of the minimum linguistic skills required to achieve effective language performance in the real world.

Theories of the Communicative Approach

Ferdinand de Saussure's model:

This model is based on the distinction between *langue*, which constitutes the collective linguistic repository shared by individuals, and *parole*, which represents individual realisation within different contexts.⁸ The schema adopted by Saussure in modelling the communicative process includes the following components:⁹

- **The external component:** the sound frequencies that are transmitted from the speaker's mouth to the listener's ear.
- **The psychological and nonpsychological components:** the nonpsychological component encompasses the physiological movements accompanying the act of articulation.
- **The active and passive components** are the effects accompanying the communicative act, in which initiative resides with the speaker, while the recipient assumes an interactive role.

⁷ Kāsiyā 'Alayk, *al-Marja 'iyyah al-Lisāniyyah lil-Muqārabah al-Tawāṣuliyyah fī Ta 'līm al-Lughāt wa-Ta 'allumiḥā: Mukawwināt al-Kifāyah al-Tawāṣuliyyah ladā Muta 'allimī al-Sanah al-Khāmisah min al-Ta 'līm al-Ibtidā 'i Unmūdhajan* (PhD diss., Mouloud Mammeri University, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Tizi Ouzou, 2014), 115.

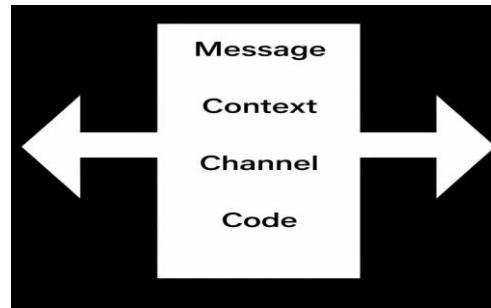
⁸ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Naṣariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 35–36.

⁹ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Naṣariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 37.

Roman Jakobson's model:

The communicative model formulated by Roman Jakobson consists of several concepts, namely:¹⁰

- **Sender:** the agent who composes the message.
- **Addressee:** the agent who receives the message and decodes its signs.
- **Message:** the purpose of communication.
- **Context (context):** For Roman Jakobson, context refers to the content apprehended by the addressee, content that can be rendered into speech.
- **Physical channel of communication (contact):** This channel establishes a psychological connection between the elements of communication.
- **Code:** This process is divided into encoding (*encodage*), decoding (*decodage*), and reencoding (*recodage*). Encoding generally proceeds from the syntactic and lexical levels to the phonological level, whereas decoding follows the reverse path, moving from sound to meaning and from linguistic elements to symbols.



Foundations of the Communicative Approach: The foundations and principles of communicative theory may be summarised in the following elements:¹¹

1. The theory underpinning communicative theory is cognitive theory. Despite the importance of behavioural theory, it does not account for social habits and behaviours.

¹⁰ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Naẓariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 37–39.

¹¹ See Nāyif Kharmā and ‘Alī Ḥajjāj, *al-Lughāt al-Ajnabiyyah: Ta ‘līmuḥā wa-Ta ‘allumuḥā* (Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1988), 171–72.

2. Linguistic competence, in addition to being linguistic, is also social competence.
3. Communicative theory presents linguistic material not on the basis of linguistic gradation but rather on functional, communicative gradation.
4. The selection of content is based on a communicative function, not on progression within linguistic material.
5. The communicative method attends to the learner from cognitive and cultural perspectives, enabling the learner to use language in social situations.
6. The communicative method focuses on real-life activities. Communicative theory does not rely on a single method of teaching; instead, it relies on interwoven methods because educational situations are not uniform.
7. To achieve the objectives previously set out, it is necessary to adopt a variety of teaching aids, including audiovisual materials, images, and audio recordings.

Principles of the Communicative Approach: Among the most important principles upon which the communicative approach is based are the following:¹²

- **The principle of communication:** Learning is reinforced through communicative language activities.
- **The principle of tasks:** Language is the learner's means of accomplishing tasks; it is not an end in itself.
- **The principle of meaningfulness:** communicative theory focuses on meaning and the function that language performs.

Functions of Language within Communicative Theory: Among the principal functions performed by language, those based on the concept of language that frames communicative theory are the following:¹³

- **The cognitive, situational, or referential function (cognitive):** a conventional, stipulative function agreed upon by a given group.
- **The expressive or affective function (Expressive):** an impressionistic function through which the moods of language users are determined.

¹² See Najwā Fīrān, “Āliyyāt Binā’ al-Kifāyah al-Tawāṣuliyyah lil-Muta‘allim Ḥimna al-Manhaj al-Tawāṣulī fī Ta‘līmiyyat al-Lughāt,” 65.

¹³ See al-Ghazālī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Nazariyyat al-Tawāṣul*, 47–50.

- **The conative function (Conative):** This function is achieved through the addition of further meanings to language so that it may perform the communicative function effectively.
- **The phatic function (Phatic):** through this function, language sustains the continuity of effective communication.
- **The metalinguistic function (metalinguistic):** the descriptive language employed in scientific study or the explanatory language used in everyday communication.
- **The poetic function (Poetic):** through this function, language foregrounds the value of words.

Critique of the Communicative Approach: The researcher Najwā Fīrān presented the principal views that opposed the communicative approach, among them:¹⁴

- This approach lacks coherence among its units since the communicative competence sought by learners focuses primarily on the value of linguistic elements in context.
- Communicative theory focuses chiefly on linguistic forms, whereas the learner needs grammatical rules.
- It is not possible to adopt a fixed progression in the use of linguistic functions, as these functions may overlap with one another.
- The lack of organisation may result in confusion and distraction for the learner.
- This approach requires a specially trained teacher.
- This approach neglects the two fundamental dimensions of language: social and civilisational.
- This approach requires a specific method for its implementation and for the design of evaluative tests.

The Communicative Approach and Language Pedagogy:

The following table summarises the essential concepts for designing the curriculum and determining instructional methods in accordance with communicative theory.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Najwā Fīrān, “Āliyyāt Binā’ al-Kifāyah al-Tawāṣuliyyah lil-Muta‘allim Ḥimna al-Manhaj al-Tawāṣulī fī Ta‘līmiyyat al-Lughāt,” 66–67.

¹⁵ See Kharmā and Hajjāj, *al-Lughāt al-Ajnabiyyah: Ta‘līmuhā wa-Ta‘allumu hā*, 172–73.

Procedure	Explanation	Applied model
Focusing on the learner's knowledge and significant affective dimensions	Such as reinforcing social values, for example, selecting instructional content to develop cultural competence among nonnative learners of Arabic	For example, the concept of tolerance and reconciliation. Teaching the social customs accompanying this value.
Presenting the material in a circular manner rather than a linear one, so that the learner can develop knowledge and the capacity to use language, rather than developing language as rigid templates; in other words, presenting the material so that it develops the learner's communicative capacities.	For example, selecting content and adopting a dialogic method among students.	In the preceding example, for instance, a conflict arises between two friends and one assaults the other; the group works to reconcile them; then a set of commonly used expressions is selected, along with a pedagogical situation that serves this aim.
Dividing learning units into activities rather than linguistic units	Selecting the characters and distributing tasks	For example, the first student is the victim's father. The second student is the head of the family who sought reconciliation and assumed responsibility.
Continuity of learning through multiple activities within a single instructional unit	Selecting a set of activities accompanying the pedagogical situation	For example: introducing Islam and the scriptural text that calls for it; reading certain surahs and verses and interpreting them; for example, showing a video of reconciliation among Arab tribes after Islam, both in the past and in the present.

<p>Conducting the learning process on a negotiated basis between one learner and another learner, or other learners; between the learner and the teacher; and between the learner and the book or instructional material</p>	<p>Here, the door to dialogue is opened.</p>	<p>For example: the offender's father speaks, saying, "We apologise to you for what issued from our son, and we will assume the consequences of this assault." The victim's father says, "We appreciate your generous visit and accept your apology." The group then exchanges congratulations (the remaining students, on the basis that they are the relatives of both parties) using expressions of reconciliation and tolerance.</p>
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Conclusion:

On the basis of what has been presented in this research paper, we arrive at a set of findings:

- The communicative approach is, in essence, a complementary and interactive approach that transfers linguistic structure from a state of stability and consolidation to one of activation and actualisation, which renders the learner eloquent and articulate.
- The communicative approach represents the culmination of earlier experiences involving the adoption of numerous approaches in language pedagogy; it is not the final approach, since education is bound to two human agents, which means that teaching approaches develop and change as their dispositions change.
- The communicative approach aims to develop communicative competence, enabling the language user to employ linguistic skills in real-world contexts.
- The communicative approach prioritises communicative skills over linguistic skills, assuming that linguistic skills have already been consolidated through the structural approach.

- Communicative competence is the minimum level of language required for communication.
- The elements of the communicative process are the speaker, the addressee, and the message. Roman Jakobson's communication theory is regarded as one of the most important communicative theories, as it is founded on the duality of persuasion and influence, both of which are rhetorical elements that secure an acquisition of communicative aptitude for the speaker.

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