

IN THE NAME OF GOD

**TEACHING PERSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE THROUGH
THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH**

**BY
SOLEIMAN FARAJI MARZANGO**

THESIS

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EVALUATED AND APPROVED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE AS: VERY GOOD

M. Yamini..... **M. YAMINI, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF.
OF TEFL, (CHAIRMAN)**

A.M. Riazi..... **A. RIAZI, Ph.D., ASSIST. PROF. OF
TEFL.**

Gh. Tajalli..... **GH. TAJALLI, M.A., LECTURER IN
ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS**

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Abstract

Teaching Persian as a Foreign Language Through Communicative Approach

By

Soleiman Faraji

In this study, it was attempted to do an experiment to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching Persian as a foreign language through Communicative Approach. To do so, two methods of teaching Persian as a foreign language were compared. Two classes, 11-15 students in each, were randomly selected from among the foreign students at the International University of Imam Khomeini in Qazvin. They were at an intermediate level of proficiency. The proficiency level of the participants was measured by administering a pre-test to them. One class was the experimental group and was exposed to the Communicative Approach. The other was the control group which received a method other than the Communicative Approach. Both groups were taught the same materials. The data necessary for the study were collected by means of two separate tests (pre and post) designed for the foreign students.

After the period of language teaching through Communicative Approach, a post-test was given to both groups. This post-test was in fact an achievement test.

To analyze the data (the proficiency test as the pre-test and the achievement test as the post-test) a t-test was run to evaluate the effect of the Communicative Approach on the students' achievement. The analysis proved that there was no significant difference between the students' performance in the conventional method of teaching and Communicative Approach. That is, the difference between the two means was not so high to support our claim about the special instruction.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Preliminaries

It was not until the beginning of this century that the teaching of foreign languages gained position as a subject for practical use and communication. Before the opening decades of this century, foreign languages used to be taught at schools and universities as a subject to help learners grow intellectually and be able to “read and appreciate foreign language literature” (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 4). It was assumed that learners would never use the language for oral production. Brown (1994) stated that, in early 1960s, there was a great tendency towards the scientific analysis of the structure of language and its application to language teaching. Later on, there was a period of intense study into the nature of the interlanguage systems of learners, with a focus on errors as major keys to finding out the make up of those systems. He maintained that both of those strains of study were important as we head toward the twenty first century. But there has been a new wave of interest in the last two decades of the 20th century, “a focus on Communicative Language Teaching--teaching second languages for the ultimate goal of

communication with other speakers of the second language” (Brown, 1994: 226).

Pointing out the importance of communicative approach in teaching second languages, Yule (1985) stated:

It [communicative approach] is partially a reaction against the artificiality of ‘pattern-practice’ and against the belief that consciously learning the grammar of a language will result in an ability to use the language. Although there are different versions of how to create ‘communicative’ experiences in the L2 classroom, they are all based on a view that the functions of language (i.e. what is used for) should be emphasized rather than the forms of the language (i.e. correct grammatical or phonological structure). Lessons are likely to be organized around concepts such as “asking for things” in different social contexts, rather than “the forms of past tense” in different sentences (p. 194).

The Communicative Approach focuses on speaking and listening skills for specific communicative purposes. The present study intends to find ways to teach Farsi communicatively and observe the possible efficiency of the approach.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The present study aims at finding out how the Communicative Approach functions with the learners of Persian as a foreign language. In this regard, the Communicative Approach is compared with the conventional method to see if there is a difference in the learners’ performance in relation to the method of teaching. Therefore, the following research question is raised:

Does teaching through the Communicative Approach yield different results from teaching through the conventional method?

Accordingly, the following null hypothesis can be stated:

H₀: There is no significant difference between the two groups whether they receive the Communicative Approach or the conventional method.

1.2. Significance of the Study

As far as the Communicative Approach is concerned, to date, no such study has been done with foreign students in Iran. This is why the present researcher is so concerned about trying it out with foreign students at the International University of Imam Khomeini in Qazvin. This study also intends to provide some suggestions as how to revise the books written for the students of Persian as a foreign language and also how to improve the present situation of teaching Farsi.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Toosi (1367/1988) states that a great tendency toward the Communicative Language Teaching has happened since when the need for communication was felt.

Those who are in favor of the Communicative Approach believe that preparation for communication is not enough if only structures and words are taught. Johnson and Morrow (1981, cited in Chastain, 1998) believe that a large number of students consciously know the structure of the language, but they are

communicatively incompetent, i.e. they are unable to use that language to communicate. This has led the second language experts to think about certain activities that might enable the second or foreign language students develop communication skills.

Chastain (1998) points out that in Communicative Language Teaching we pay less attention to the discussion of grammatical rules than what traditionally was done. Authentic language is widely used in Communicative Language teaching as we try to make fluency. When we communicate, we use the language to perform some functions, such as promising, inviting or arguing. We do these functions in a social context. Therefore, "in the Communicative Approach the notion of what it takes to be communicatively competent is much expanded" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 131).

Taylor (1983, cited in Chastain, 1998) lists five characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching:

1. Materials of the textbooks should be authentic.
2. There should be an information gap in conversation.
3. The students should have choices about what they are going to say and how they are going to say it.
4. When asking the questions, a definite purpose in mind is intended.
5. The conversation should be about real topics in real situations.

The researcher believes that it is necessary for teachers to be familiar with the basic principles of the Communicative Approach. Then, they will be able to save time and make their teaching more effective and fruitful.

1.4. Outline and Organization of the Study

The present study has five chapters. Chapter One is the introduction. It elaborates on the issue under study, its purpose and significance. Chapter Two contains a historical review on Communicative Approaches. It is also related to the trends in teaching and learning persian as a foreign language. Chapter Three is about the methodology. Chapter Four is concerned with the results of the study. Chapter five is related to summary, making a conclusion and putting forward some suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

2.0. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on teaching and learning Persian as a foreign language. The first section deals with the review on Communicative Approaches. The second section is related to the trends of teaching and learning Persian as a foreign language.

2.1. Review on Communicative Approaches

Early in this century, the complex technologies and growing economic, commercial, political and military inter-dependence between the countries made the communication in foreign languages inevitable. On the other hand, the development in such scientific fields as cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics resulted in the introduction of various modern approaches to the teaching of foreign languages appropriate for the achievement of the new aims and objectives. In this respect, Richards & Rodgers, (1988) believe that the late 1960s was characterized by a great importance on communicative language teaching.

Enabling students to communicate using target language is the primary goal of Communicative Approach. A number of methodologists emphasize the acquisition of linguistic structures or vocabulary. Those who are in favor of the Communicative Approach emphasize that vocabulary and structures are important. However, they feel that “preparation for communication will be inadequate if only these are taught. Students may know the language usage, but will be unable to use the language”. (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 123). British applied linguists then emphasized the functional and communicative potential of language. They saw the need to focus in language teaching on “communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures” (Richards & Rodgers, 1988: 64). Richards & Rodgers (1988) state that Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson, John Firth, M.A.K. Halliday, Dell Hymes, John Gumperz, William Labov, John Austin and John Searle were in favor of this view of language.

According to the needs of language learners, Wilkins (1972, cited in Richard & Rodgers, 1988) suggested functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. “Rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, Wilkins attempted to demonstrate the systems of meanings that lay behind the

communicative uses of language” (p. 65). Ziahosseini (1368/1998: 91) believes:

Instead of teaching linguistic structures this method aims at the instruction of communication functions which are intended to provide the appropriate use of language, i.e., these functions deal with the actual and authentic use of language in appropriate social settings. In other words, these functions are selected in terms of who is talking to whom, when and under what circumstances (p. 91).

According to Wilkins (1977, cited in Ziahosseini, 1367/1987: 92) the basis of a notional approach to language teaching originates from “The conviction that what people want to do through language is more important than mastery of the language as an unapplied system”.

According to Wilkins, language can be divided into two parts: language notions and language functions: “notional categories, (concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency) and categories of communicative function (concepts such as requests, denials, offers, complaints)” (1972, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1988: 65).

With regard to what was mentioned above, the functional-notional approach seems to focus on “the learners’ needs rather than on some prescribed objectives. That is, language instruction becomes more learner-centered than it used to be (Ziahosseini, 1368/1989: 92). Therefore, in this approach the learner’s need should be identified.

Wilkins' Notional Syllabus (1976) had a great influence on the development of communicative language teaching and had a strong influence on the design of communicative language programs and textbooks in Europe. Although the movement had a focus on alternative conceptions of a syllabus, since the mid 1970s the scope of Communicative Language Teaching has expanded. "The notion of identifying the learner's communicative needs has opened a new area in teaching ESL referred to as the teaching of English for Specific Purposes" (Farhadi, 1980, cited in Toosi, 1367/1988: 57). Related to the communicative test, Heaton (1996) states that communicative tests must reflect the culture of a special country because of their emphasis on context and the use of authentic materials. He continues that the tasks should relate to real-life situations, which are specific to a particular country or culture. He believes that the most important criterion for communicative tests should be related to the detailed specifications of the needs of the learners, hence their special suitability for the testing of English for Specific Purposes. In relation to the above matter, Jafarpur (1997) believes that constructing the communicative test is a difficult task in the present situation since there is no clear definition for communicative competence. He also maintains that we do not have a general overview about Overall Language Ability which is inseparable and unitary that can not be put into pieces. Communicative Language Teaching is considered as