



SLT and CLL in the ELT classroom: revisited

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considers the merits of two approaches to teaching.

What is the continuing influence of Situational Language Teaching (SLT) and Community Language Learning (CLL) in the modern ELT classroom and how do they connect to second language acquisition (SLA) theories? Where SLT strongly emphasises oral practice, grammar and sentence patterns, CLL offers specific techniques based on counselling rather than a method in its own right.

How do they compare?

In regard to the workflow and procedures of SLT, one of its most relevant and continuing legacies is the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) format: introduction of a new teaching item in context; controlled practice of the item; and a freer practice stage. There have been textbooks written according to its principles. Richards & Rodgers (2014) state that as SLT offers a practical methodology well suited to countries where national EFL and ESL syllabi are grammar based, hence it continues to be used in some parts of the world today.

CLL, on the other hand, might be better employed as a source of specific techniques. It rightfully has a lot to offer as a socially oriented collaborative learning

experience in the modern ELT context, especially in online social networking. Thornbury (2017) writes about its potential to provide both a context and a motivation (presumably intrinsic) for jointly constructed learning opportunities, for example, websites that provide a venue for users of different languages to interact and 'teach' one another or translate and edit each other's writing. Additionally, translation (as a feature of CLL) isn't as frowned upon as it was.

The theories behind SLT and CLL

The theoretical framework that represents the backbone of SLT is structuralism, i.e. language consists of a system of grammatical patterns and structures that have to be mastered in learning it; speech is regarded to be the basis of language and structure is considered to be at the core of the ability to speak. British theoreticians (Hornby & West) had a slightly different additional focus, that being 'situation'. It follows that the oral practice of controlled sentence patterns should be given in situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to the learner.

CLL is backgrounded in line with the interactional view of language, as Richards

and Rodgers (2014) put it: language is people, language is persons in contact, language is persons in response (attributed to La Forge, 1971).

CLL interactions are of two distinct and fundamental types: interactions between learners and interactions between learners and knowers. CLL is aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory; Vygotsky argued that in a supportive interactive environment, learners are able to advance to higher levels of knowledge and performance (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). In CLL, learner exchanges typically involve exchanges of affect and deepening of intimacy, which pushes learners to keep pace with their peers' learning and motivates them.

Both SLT and CLL are present in my teaching (context) and they are relevant to language learning in the following ways.

Two styles combine

As years pass, becoming a more experienced teacher in tertiary education (Year 1 English majors, CEFR B2+) has allowed me to be enveloped in several roles (freely changing from one to another), thus fitting the description of both SLT and CLL approaches.

SLT teacher roles:

- serving as a model setting up situations (e.g. job interviews);
- modelling the structures (e.g. past simple / present perfect);
- a skilful orchestra conductor; and
- a skilful manipulator for the purpose of elicitation.

In my teaching, I set the pace and the timing, being ever on the lookout for grammatical and structural errors that can form the basis of subsequent lessons (**I've worked as an IKEA regional manager in 2008.*) In the same context, I've noticed my specific roles in teaching vary, following more of the CLL approach.

CLL teacher roles:

- being supportive (when providing target language translations);
- a monitor of learner utterances;
- a nurturing parent;
- even becoming dependent on the learner.

CLL is exemplified as a humanistic approach, in which learning is a unified and social experience. Based on this, in my teaching I take a holistic approach (including the affective realm and linguistic knowledge) and try not to make the learners feel isolated, but rather part of a community. The content of my classes stems from topics learners are eager to talk about (e.g. travel, adventures, life lessons) and in this way I give them control of the curriculum.

Why SLT suits my teaching context

Most of the principles and techniques of SLT are not challenging to put into practice in my context in North Macedonia since these learners come with prefabricated ideas about how the learning process is organised. This can also be said to be true at the institutional level here: accuracy in both pronunciation and grammar is regarded as crucial. The pressure that learners feel to pass or fail the subject – leading to a high or low grade point average (GPA) – underlies their openness for accepting a structural

model. They are used to guided repetition and substitution activities, as well as drilling and controlled tasks (remnants from their high school days).

The institution where I work luckily gives me the freedom to organise my lessons and syllabus. I have not taught a whole semester in accordance with CLL principles, as it's tricky at university level not to have a clear syllabus and overall objectives. In my broader context, learners have already created a picture of what learning looks like, thus they approach the learning process as form focused, accuracy based and teacher oriented because their previous secondary education has been such. L1 use in the classroom is encouraged because these learners are studying not only to become EFL teachers but also translators.

An SLT-based activity

The following is a brief outline of one activity clearly rooted in and informed by SLT. The lesson topic is job interviews, and the lesson aim is to practise language (structures) used in such situations. This activity consists of the teacher asking the learners (directed and preplanned) questions so they can come up with the structures appropriate for the setting – as if they were the applicant in a job interview. The learners are expected to come up with sentences containing past simple and present perfect tenses, trying to make a distinction between the two in the specific situation. The teacher supports this process by asking a question (*'What were your responsibilities at IKEA?'*), after which a learner answers (*'I managed a team of 20'*). If a learner makes an error (wrong tense or pronunciation), the teacher invites another learner to correct it.

This activity follows the SLT principles, since automatic control of basic structures and sentence patterns is fundamental to reading and writing skills, and this is achieved through speech work. It's through speech work that I elicit the structures (within sentences) suitable for the given situation. The vocabulary has been previously chosen according to how well it enables these sentence patterns to be taught. I am in manipulator mode and use questions to elicit the structures. Using an inductive approach to teach grammar, the learners should work out the rules of

use for themselves, so I avoid explaining. There is also peer correction in regard to accuracy of grammar and pronunciation. Moreover, this activity is purposeful and related to a real-world situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the enduring influence of SLT and CLL in modern ELT classrooms demonstrates the versatility and adaptability of these approaches. SLT's structured and grammar-focused methods, particularly the P-P-P model, continue to thrive in contexts where form-focused instruction and accuracy are prioritised. Its emphasis on situational contexts and spoken language provides a solid foundation for learners to develop practical communication skills. Meanwhile, CLL's focus on collaboration, interaction and affective engagement aligns well with contemporary sociocultural theories of SLA. Its techniques are particularly valuable in creating inclusive, community-driven learning environments, even in technologically mediated contexts such as online learning platforms. By fostering motivation and interpersonal connections, CLL enriches the language learning experience in ways that traditional methods may overlook.

References

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