Communicative language teaching in Georgia : from theory to practice
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CHAPTER 3: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

*"Communicative Language Teaching marks the beginning
of a major paradigm shift within language teaching
in the twentieth century"* (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 151).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter discusses the general state of the art of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) around the world. In the previous chapter, the historical background of language teaching methodologies was provided and CLT was briefly discussed in the context of other teaching methods. Chapter 3 focuses more narrowly on CLT and provides detailed information, research findings and summaries of the debates and discussions about this method.

As already mentioned, CLT was devised as an alternative to other methods that had existed before the 1970s-80s and that had proved to be inefficient and unsuitable to modern language learners' demands. In an attempt to find a better alternative to methods such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, the proponents of what became CLT engaged during the 1970s in active research and in elaborating a new and unique language teaching approach which would better serve people's modern-day language necessities. As a result, a great deal of research and literature was produced on this topic in this period. This probably explains the fact that even in modern literature about CLT many references are made to findings and information made available some decades ago. Reference to some rather dated literature presented in this chapter, alongside the more recent research findings about CLT, was inevitable, as this information reflects the basics and fundamental principles upon which CLT is built.

Chapter overview

The following Section 3.2 provides a general background to CLT. Section 3.3 deals with the theories of language and learning that CLT rests upon; the most important linguists, the so-called 'founding fathers' of CLT, who contributed to laying grounds to this method, are referred to and their theories are presented and laid alongside each other in this section. Section 3.4 is concerned with describing CLT-compatible course design and syllabus format. Section 3.5 describes the teachers' and Section 3.6 the learners' roles in the CLT class. Section 3.7 is about CLT activities and classroom interaction, whereas Section 3.8 deals with CLT teaching materials. Section 3.9 is about the criticism that has been voiced regarding CLT and Section 3.10 is concerned with CLT-related

challenges identified in various teaching contexts. The final Section 3.11 provides a summary and the concluding comments for the chapter.

3.2 GENERAL BACKGROUND TO CLT

Even though the value of language as a means of communication has always been recognized, the questioning of our understanding of "real communication" and the emergence of criticism of the ways used to develop Communicative Competence in language learners only came in the English Language Teaching field (ELT) in the late 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 153).

The origins and stimulus for the emergence of CLT can be traced back to the theories of the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) and his fellow British linguist John Firth (1890–1960). It was Firth who first emphasized the importance of focusing on the language in its "sociocultural context" and language discourse (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 158). The ideas of Malinowski and Firth influenced the linguistic theories of the American sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1927–2009) and the Bristish linguist Michael Halliday (1925), and they further contributed to the development and adoption of CLT in the language teaching field (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 158).

In Britain, CLT appeared at a time when British teaching of foreign languages, particularly in state secondary schools, was ready for a fundamental change. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT emerged when the dissatisfaction with the existing method called Situational Language Teaching reached its peak and the need for a better alternative was strongly felt (2001: 153). In the rapid socio-cultural shifts of the late 1960s, in Britain, Situational Language Teaching was perceived as incompatible with the language teaching/learning needs and requirements of the 1970s. In the United States, in the same era, the emergence of CLT was a reaction to the great dissatisfaction towards the Audio-Lingual Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 153).

One of the important factors that contributed to the popularization of Communicative Language Teaching was the necessity arising in the 1970s-80s to have more adults learn foreign languages all over Europe, which would allow better inter-country communication. Thus, adequate measures were taken by the Council of Europe to transform language teaching throughout the continent by actively supporting all activities aimed at improving the quality of foreign language instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:154). The efforts of the Council of Europe motivated researchers to produce works defining a theoretical foundation for the communicative approach in language teaching, which were promptly adopted by all agents involved in language teaching field development: textbook writers, curriculum developers, language teachers as well as by the governments "nationally and internationally". All this led to the wide employment of what is now known as "the Communicative Teaching Approaches" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:154).

3.3 THEORETICAL BASIS OF CLT

As already mentioned above (Setion 2.1), CLT has a broad theoretical background, which allows for more freedom of choice and action, as well as various interpretations of its principles, at the practical as well as theoretical level than any other method permits (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 155). Because of its "comprehensive" nature, CLT is perceived by some "as an approach (and not a method)" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:155). Savignon (2002) describes CLT as being based on a "multidisciplinary perspective that includes, at the least, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and educational research" (2002:4). According to Howatt, there are two versions of CLT: "a strong version" and "a weak version":

> The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching. The 'strong version' of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it' (Howatt, 1984:279).

The version of CLT officially proposed as a recommended foreign language teaching method in Georgia can be considered to be a "weak" one (based on the characteristics provided in the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages of Georgia; for more discussion, see Chapter 6). Consequently, the descriptions and characteristics that the sections below (3.3 - 3.8) provide are those inherent in the "weak version" of CLT.

3.3.1 Language theories

Communicative Language Teaching derives from "a theory of language as communication", and consequently, the primary goal of language teaching according to CLT is providing language learners with the ability of authentic communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:159). Below, there follow brief descriptions of language theories proposed by the 'founding fathers' of CLT. It was these theories that contributed to enhancing and further expanding the existing theoretical assumptions about language learning, and thereby played a crucial role in laying a solid ground for the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching.

Noam Chomsky (born 1928)

As regards the theoretical basis of CLT, one of the greatest contributions made was by the American linguist Noam Chomsky, who, in his book *Syntactic Structure* (1957), first started opposing the theories of structural linguistics and behavioural psychology upon which the previous language teaching methods (Situational Language Teaching, for example) had been based (Llurda, 2000:86). He argued that the existing theories did not capture the creative nature of language learning, the ways humans are able to come up with language forms and structures they have never heard or seen before. Chomsky argued that similarly creative, rather than linear and unitary, perspective needs to be adopted as far as language theory is concerned (cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001:153).

Chomsky was influenced by the earlier theories put forward by a Swiss linguist and semiotician de Saussure (1857–1913), who was first to draw clear lines between what he called "langue" and "parole"; the former referring to the language system and the latter to the actual act of language use (Guy, 1996:12). According to Guy (1996), "Saussures's distinction between langue and parole has now largely been subsumed by Chomsky's contrast between competence and performance" (1996:11). Guy further observes that Chomsky was even more radical in his definitions of what constitutes language competence and performance than Saussure had been. According to Chomsky, language competence is an abstract ability that all language learners are in possession of innately, and equals to grammatical competence, that is, "the abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language", not in an explicit but an implicit manner (Chomsky, 1965:3). As for "performance", Chomsky describes it as a less idealized process of application of the language knowledge in actual communication (Chomsky, 1965:3), and remarks that it "surely cannot constitute the actual subject matter of linguistics, if this is to be a serious discipline" (1965:4).

Chomsky's theories were important, as they triggered much interest in the field of linguistics and stimulated further research to make the theory of Communicative Competence more elaborate and complete (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:158; Llurda, 2000:86). Scholars who further advanced Chomsky's ideas were Dell Hymes, Michael Halliday and Henry Widdowson. These were the scholars who started advocating making use of the social, functional and communicative potential of the language in classroom teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:153). Their contributions will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

Dell Hymes (1927–2009)

Dell Hymes became famous for his theories of language as communication in 1972. He sought to build upon the theories proposed by Chomsky regarding how language competence could be interpreted, which, according to Hymes, bore a somewhat incomprehensive and idealized character (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:159). Unlike Chomsky, Hymes thought that it was not right to focus on language learners' abstract language abilities, measured through "ideal" situations, nor to limit language competence to grammatical abilities only; grammatical competence – morphology, syntax, lexis and phonology, according to Hymes– is just the first step towards overall language competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:159). Thus, Hymes held that competence in a foreign language needed to be defined in broader terms. He added the adjective "communicative" to the word "competence", creating the term Communicative Competence (1972), a concept incorporating, alongside grammatical competence, discourse and socio-cultural language competences. According to Hymes, what is implied by knowing a language (Savignon, 2002:2) is the development of Communicative Competence, in the complete sense of the term, including all the components that real life communication is comprised of (for a more detailed discussion on Communicative Competence, see Section 3.3.3).

Michael Halliday (born 1925)

Another source of influence on the theoretical underpinnings of CLT, which complemented well the linguistic theories Hymes elaborated, is the British functional linguist Halliday with his "functional account of language use" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:159). According to Halliday, "linguistics... is concerned ...with the description of speech acts or texts, since only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language, and therefore all components of meaning, brought into focus" (1970:145). Halliday (1975) wrote important books and articles about the functional value of the language, which he divides into seven categories: "1. Instrumental 2. Regulatory 3. Interactional 4. Personal 5. Heuristic 6. Imaginative 7. Representational. Thus, according to Halliday, language teaching/learning also has to involve focus on these functions in order to extract maximum benefit from the experience (Halliday, 1975:11-17). According to Widdowson (2007), Haliday's views differ from those of Hymes's in that whereas the former is concerned with the "relationship between the internal semantic functions encoded in the language as meaning potential", the former deals with "the external functions of language as pragmatic realizations of this potential" (Widdowson, 2007: 218).

Henry Widdowson (born 1935)

Widdowson is a prominent British linguist best known for his contribution to the theory of Communicative Language Teaching. He came up with the terms language usage and language use, referring to the two aspects of communicative performance, and making a clear distinction between the two — the former representing the ability to produce correct sentences, or manifestations of the linguistic system, and the latter being concerned with the ability to use the knowledge of the rules for effective communication (Widdowson, 1978:3). These notions correspond to Chomskian ideas about linguistic competence and performance. Widdowson goes even further and distinguishes two different kinds of meaning attached to usage and use: 'signification' and 'value'; the former being defined as "the meaning attached to a sentence as an instance of language usage, isolated from context, whereas the latter implies the meaning taken by a sentence when it is put to use for communicative purposes" (Widdowson, 1978:10-12).

According to Hymes, children acquire knowledge of socio-cultural rules such as "when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner", together with the ability to produce grammatically accurate speech (Hymes, 1972:277). Widdowson, taking up Hymes's viewpoint, rejects the idea that once the linguistic knowledge is acquired, communication abilities will automatically be taken care of, and strongly recommends that communication skills be developed alongside the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. Thus, Widdowson suggests that the classroom should be providing opportunities for knowledge acquisition in tandem with language practice. Furthermore, language practice activities must be at the service of natural communication skills development rather than aimed at the attainment of theoretical knowledge about the language only (Widdowson, 1978:4-10); language teaching material ought to be chosen according to the potential of language use rather than usage that it can provide (1978:12-15).

3.3.2 Theories of learning underlying CLT

Having examined the theories of language which paved the way for CLT, we now turn to analyzing the theories of language learning underlying this method. Here it should be noted that as far as learning and teaching are concerned, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT does not adhere to one particular theory only. Rather CLT draws theories about learning and teaching from a wide range of areas such as cognitive science, educational psychology and second language acquisition (SLA). Thus, it encompasses and combines many different approaches and points of view about language learning and teaching (Richards & Rogers, 2001:161). According to Breen and Candlin (1980:95), language teaching should be providing opportunities for "expression", "negotiation" and "interpretation"; however, teaching grammar

should not be neglected either, as the combination of both – conscious learning of language forms (accuracy) and spontaneous, fluency-oriented practice – is believed in this model to be contributory to language learning (cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006:119). "Meaningfulness" and "authenticity" of the activities and tasks, are also regarded as one of the key factors affecting the efficiency of language learning for communicative purposes (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:161; Kumaravadivelu, 2006:118). With regard to learning theories underlying CLT Widdowson (1978:207-215) concludes that even though there are many scholars who are considered to be in support of CLT as far as the theory of learning is concerned (e.g., Krashen), there is no direct link or evidence that CLT principles originate from the theories of these scholars and that their origin remains open to speculation. In line with Widdowson, Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that theories of learning underlying CLT can be "discerned" only in some of its practices.

3.3.3 The concept of Communicative Competence

> *"There are rules of use without which the rules*
> *of grammar would be useless"* (Hymes, 1972:278).

The perception of "what it means to 'know' a language" has widened as a result of the developments in the field of sociolinguistics (Mitchell, 1994:34) as well as in response to the new demands placed on foreign language teaching and learning that emerged starting in the 1970s (for more discussion of this, see Section 2.4). Thus, it became necessary to specify which competences exactly language learners needed to have in a foreign language in order to function effectively in real-life settings. Many applied linguists have given their own valuable contributions to defining what exactly competence in communication means. The exact definition of Communicative Competence has caused much debate among scholars. According to Savignon:

> It [Communicative Competence] is a way of describing what it is a native speaker knows which enables him to interact effectively with other native speakers. This kind of interaction is, by definition, spontaneous, i.e. unrehearsed. (Savignon 1976:4)

As it can be seen from the quote above, it is the "native speaker" characteristics that Savignon considers indispensible for being communicatively competent in a foreign language. According to Richards (2006), being communicatively competent implies "mastering" linguistic forms as well as acquiring an ability for real-life communication, the latter competence being the more important than the former (Richards, 2006:3). According to Saville-Troike (2006), Communicative Competence means "everything that a speaker needs to know in order to communicate appropriately within a particular community"

(2006:134). Below, the contributions of those whose theoretical reflections and work have had the most effect on the theory of Communicative Competence will be briefly discussed.

As mentioned above, it was Hymes (1972) who first came up with the term Communicative Competence to demonstrate his reaction against Chomsky's (1965) definition of language competence and of the distinction between linguistic competence and performance (see also Section 3.2). Consequently, Hymes's attempts resulted in a broadening of the understanding of language competence, "bringing sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence" (Bagaric, 2007:95).

The further extension of Hymes's definition of Communicative Competence was reflected in the work of Canale and Swain (1980) who provided a more sophisticated, widely-accepted model of Communicative Competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), Communicative Competence breaks down into four main components: Grammatical Competence, implying knowledge of the phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon of a language; Socio-cultural Competence, which means understanding the language in its cultural context, control of speech and writing styles appropriate to different situations, and a knowledge of the rules of politeness; Discourse Competence, aimed at developing the learner's knowledge of the rules governing the structure of longer texts (cohesion and coherence); and Strategic Competence, an ability to avoid communication breakdown – introducing coping strategies which can keep communication going when language knowledge is still imperfect (Canale & Swain, 1983:5). A more recent survey of Communicative Competence by Bachman (1990) divides it into the broad headings of "organizational competence", which includes both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence, and "pragmatic competence", which includes both sociolinguistic and "illocutionary" competence (Bachman, 1990:6). A graphical representation of Communicative Competence and its constituent parts, offered by Verhoeven and Vermeer (1992), is presented in Figure 3.1 below.
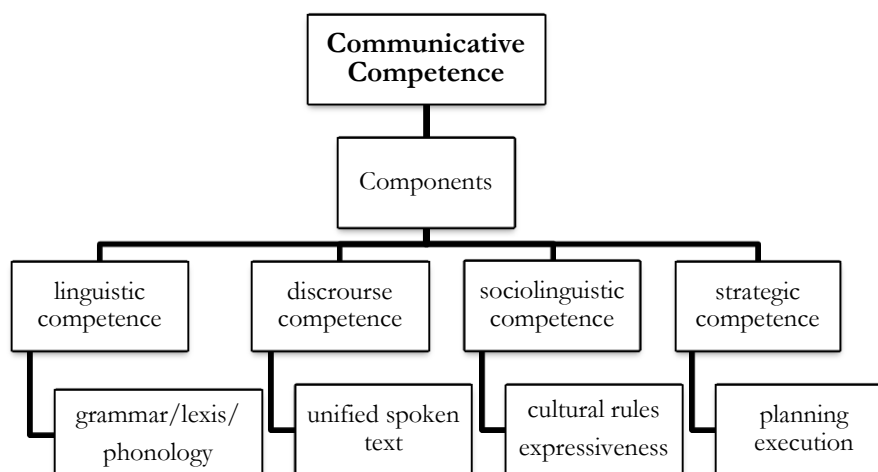
Communicative
Competence

Components

linguistic
competence

discrourse
competence

sociolinguistic
competence

strategic
competence

grammar/lexis/
phonology

unified spoken
text

cultural rules
expressiveness

planning
execution

Figure 3.1: Framework for describing Communicative Competence
(Pillar, 2011:6)

The broadening of the concept of what Communicative Competence embraces led to more comprehensive language teaching/learning goals, which from then on have aimed not only to provide students with the rules of linguistic usage, but also to prepare them for real-life communication (Widdowson, 1978:3), as knowledge of the forms of a language alone is, in most cases, insufficient (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:128).

Having defined Communicative Competence and its various interpretations, it is also equally important to determine how to develop this ability in language learners, and how to encourage communicative teaching in the classroom. According to Mitchell (1994), in order to be effective in acquiring Communicative Competence in a language, it is necessary to have all four language skills developed almost simultaneously (1994:34). Even though certain skills work is done in more form-focused language teaching besides, it is the approach taken and the communicative value intended to be exploited in the process through appropriate tasks that matters. "Pseudo-skills work" is therefore how such activities are regarded as listening to or reading unauthentic texts (for reading and listening skills improvement); repeating sentences, reciting texts by heart (for speaking skill improvement), or writing dictations (for writing skill improvement). It is clear that not much communicative value can be derived from such quasi-skills-oriented activities. Also, out of the four language skills, in order to improve learners' communicative competence, Widdowson (1978) emphasizes the importance of focusing on listening and speaking skills, and on making the tasks as authentic as possible (1978:57-61). Widdowson further argues that even though some activities which might seem to have less communicative value at first glance can actually be exploited in

such a way that their communicative properties and benefit become obvious (Widdowson, 1978:61-64).

According to Savignon (1976:5), in order to encourage communicative language teaching in the classroom, it is important to adopt tests that measure learners' Communicative Competence in an appropriate manner. Having a relevant testing system in place, in Savignon's opinion, serves as a great motivating factor and sends the right message to students (Savignon, 1976:5). She adds: "If we teach for Communicative Competence, we have to test for Communicative Competence" (Savignon, 1976:6; for more discussion on CLT-compatible assessment approaches, see Section 10.2.3).

Having discussed the theoretical background of Communicative Language Teaching, I now turn to describing the properties of this method manifested at the pratical and procedural level.

3.4 COURSE DESIGN AND SYLLABUS

The primary preoccupation of the course designers promoting CLT is to cater to the needs of concrete groups of students. In CLT, the emphasis is not only on the teaching methodology – *how* to teach a foreign language – but also on teaching material – *what* to teach. Consequently, the contents of the course has to be selected and organized in such a way that it suits and satisfies the language learners' needs and interests (Littlewood, 1981:78-79). Language skills – reading, writing, speaking, listening – have to be prioritized, as it is through language skills that a target foreign language can be exploited in real practice. Also, the course should be developed around the aspects of Communicative Competence (see Section 3.3.3 above): whereas at the lower levels the linguistic aspect of Communicative Competence might be emphasized, at higher levels the focus needs to shift towards development of more subtle components of Communicative Competence, which are strategic, discourse and sociolinguistic competences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:163).

As for the syllabus, this is an aspect that has always had great importance in CLT. Littlewood discusses the changes that took place on the way to developing a communicative syllabus. He talks about three main types of communicative syllabi: the Functional Syllabus, which is a communicative syllabus based on language functions (Brumfit, 1980); the Notional Syllabus,[1] which draws attention to language notions (Wilkins, 1976), such as ways of expressing quantity, future time, and deals with different topics relevant to

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[1] The Notional Syllabus by Wilkins was further expanded and elaborated by the Council of Europe. The descriptions of the situations that common European citizens might find themselves in, topics that they might need to talk about and language functions they were likely to need, together with grammar and vocabulary, were included in this syllabus. Arising from this syllabus, the book *Threshold Level English* was published by Van Ek and Alexander in 1980.

students' needs and interests (Van Ek & Alexander, 1980); and the Combination Syllabus, which is based on a combination of different organizational principles (Littlewood, 1981). A more elaborate list of CLT syllabi has been proposed by Richards and Rodgers (2001:164) and is presented below:

Table 3.1: Summary of CLT syllabi propounded

Classification of communicative syllabi types
1. Structures and functions
2. Functional spiral around structure
3. Structural functional, instrumental
4. Functional
5. Notional
6. Interactional
7. Task-based
8. Learner-generated

The syllabus issue in CLT has caused many debates and differences in opinion. This dissension arises from the fact that students' having a list of things to be learned, no matter whether it is a list of grammatical structures or functions and notions, restricts the freedom, spontaneity and flexibility of instruction, the very aspect of language teaching that CLT tries to promote (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:165). Even though interactional, task-based and learner-generated syllabi would seem to provide much more freedom of action and spontaneity in the lesson, there is, according to the most radical critics, no need for any pre-determined syllabus at all, as the specific requirements of a concrete group of learners have to be the basis for a tailor-made syllabus. According to Mitchell, the 'one-size-fits-all' type of approach has proved to be inefficient before (1994:37). Thus, an ideal syllabus "consists of well-selected experiences and the learning materials, which need to be developed on the basis of the particular needs manifested by the class" (Applebee 1974:119, 150).

However, the above arguments have their critics as well. Opponents argue that while a tailor-made syllabus might prove efficient with adult learners, who know the exact purpose of their language learning, the same type of approach will not work at a school level, with many teenagers demonstrating little or no motivation to learn a language (Breen, 1987:82). Consequently, the issue of the communicative syllabus remains open and subject to debate.

3.5 TEACHER ROLES

Compared to earlier methods, in Communicative Language Teaching, the teacher's traditional role is dramatically different from the one adopted in more grammar-driven teaching (Littlewood, 1981:91). A CLT teacher is no more the center of attention and the focus has shifted to the learner and his/her needs.

Also, in CLT, the traditional role of the teacher as 'knowledge provider' is changed into that of 'resource provider' and 'rehearsal monitor', providing learners with the right language input and resources as well as supervising the language practice process (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005:340). In CLT, teacher talking time is considerably reduced as compared with that of a traditional language instructor (Littlewood, 1981:92); he/she acts as "a facilitator" and "a classroom process manager", setting up activities, ensuring that planned activities proceed smoothly from one stage to the next, and leading discussions and debates (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005:340).

The CLT teacher observes or monitors activities without interfering too much. As Littlewood points out, in the natural environment foreign language acquisition takes place quite successfully without any teacher involvement. According to Littlewood (2006), although it does not mean that teachers are useless, it should also be noted that "learning does not only take place as a direct result of the teacher's instruction. There are some aspects of learning that can take place more efficiently if, once the teacher has initiated an activity, he/she takes no further part in it" (Littlewood, 1981:92).

Despite little involvement on the teacher's part in communicative activities, there are times in CLT lessons when the instructor might assume the role of 'co-communicator' and might become involved in the process of a discussion or a debate, contributing personal ideas and attitudes, and thus giving the whole communication process a more authentic and stimulating nature. This type of teacher intervention usually has a positive effect on the general classroom atmosphere in a communicative lesson.

Another important function that the teacher performs in the CLT classroom is providing feedback to students. Thus, other roles that a CLT teacher assumes, which are very different from the traditional ones and bear considerable importance for successful CLT implementation, are those of 'feedback provider' and 'error corrector'. As Littlewood (1981) points out "[i]f the teacher consistently corrects linguistic forms, this indicates that the success is now being measured by formal criteria, and that the learner should therefore focus his attention (partly or wholly) on the production of correct linguistic forms (1981:90-91).

Since CLT puts the main emphasis on communicating the meaning, and focus on the form, though significant, is of secondary importance, it is essential that the feedback the teacher gives be primarily a reaction to a message the learner has conveyed. According to Coskun (2011), in CLT errors are considered as natural phenomena in the process of learning a language, and practicing too much error correction, as was done in previous language teaching models, is considered to be discouraging for students, hindering the process of natural communication (2011:4).

Another function of the teacher in the CLT classroom is that of 'needs analyst'. It is the teacher who should find out what his/her students are trying

to learn and for what purposes, and then adequately cater to these needs. Other roles that the CLT teacher might assume are that of 'advisor', 'organizer of resources' and a resource himself/herself (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:167).

3.6 LEARNER ROLES

As Communicative Language Teaching is a learner-centered language teaching method, there are quite a few roles that students assume in the study process: that of 'communicator' and 'manager of their own learning', for example (Larsen-Freeman, 2004:129). As Harmer remarks, "learners should take as much responsibility for their own learning as teachers do for their teaching" (Harmer, 2003:291). Breen and Candlin define the learner's role as "a negotiator between self, the learning process and the object of learning" (1980:110).

As CLT is aimed at promoting learner autonomy, the cooperative rather than the competitive mode of interaction is encouraged among learners in the classroom. Students are given freedom to express themselves freely and the idea of the learner as an active and unique individual with unique needs, interests and styles is stressed (Lee, 1998:282). Even though encouraging the learner's independence and self-instruction sounds like an efficient idea to many specialists and experts, CLT is the subject of criticism by others on these very grounds (see Section 3.9).

3.7 COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES AND CLASSROOM INTERACTION

According to Johnson and Morrow (1981) a truly communicative activity is characterized by three features: existence of the information gap, free choice of action in the study process and an opportunity to give and receive feedback during the communication (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000:129). If there is no information gap between speakers, if in the process of communication speakers do not have free choice to decide what they are going to say and how, and if there is no opportunity for the listener to provide feedback to what his/her interlocutor is saying, then real communication will not take place (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:129). Consequently, highly controlled activities, such as chain drills, substitution drills, or pre-formed question and answer patterns, fail to provide real communication opportunities to students, restricting their freedom of choice and plunging them in a quasi-communicative situation. Conversely, activities such as role-plays, simulations, problem-solving, information gap activities, games, jigsaw activities, discussions and debates promote communicative language practice.

Littlewood (1981) classifies communicative language activities into two categories: functional communication activities, such as 'find the differences' exercises, following directions, and crosswords; and social interaction activities,

such as discussions, debates, dialogues and simulations. Whereas the former type of activities are mostly aimed at promoting accuracy and are focused on form, social interaction activities are fluency-oriented and provide much freedom in the process of communication to the learner (Littlewood, 1981:22, 43).

As for classroom interaction, in the CLT class this shifts from a teacher-student to a student-student pattern. The teacher is no longer the center of attention in the lesson and most of the activities are carried out in pairs/groups. This type of interaction has a number of advantages in the study process: it helps shift the class's attention from the teacher onto learners, and to enhance communication among students and maximize their interaction time. Moreover, according to Coskun (2011), pair/group work provides peer-teaching opportunities, which is highly beneficial for language acquisition (Coskun, 2011:87). Also, as Thompson suggests, pair/group work activities lead to more meaningful language production on the learners' part (1996:12), as in pairs and groups students have direct communication and are given a chance to be involved in the process of peer-evaluation and feedback provision with regard to the meaning, rather than just the form, of the languages (Rao, 1996:465). Pair/group work also provides learners with plenty of time for rehearsal before having to perform in front of the whole class, which can be quite an intimidating and daunting experience for most students. Thus, pair/group work helps boost learners' self-confidence and lower their anxiousness in the process of learning. One more advantage that can be attributed to pair/group work in the CLT class is the cooperative and a pleasant atmosphere that this interaction pattern promotes, thereby contributing to students' feeling comfortable and at ease while involved in the study process.

3.8 TEACHING MATERIAL

Since the need to teach languages for communication has become obvious and the goal of language teaching has emphasized developing communicative proficiency in language learners, the designers of language materials, in order to make their products more relevant and appealing, have started accommodating as many principles of Communicative Language Teaching as possible. The range of teaching materials available today consists of coursebooks, teacher's books, workbooks, supplementary resources, audio and video materials, Internet resources and other authentic materials (Rossener, 1988:143-144). Each material should be exploited in different ways and for different purposes in order to efficiently supplement one another. If rightly selected, teaching material can help boost learners' motivation and interest, and increase the degree of their involvement in the study process, which is essential for making language learning process efficient (Rossener, 1988:143). As Rossener (1988) observes "[m]aterials themselves have not suddenly become 'communicative'; rather, materials have become more and more varied as the drive for more and

more interesting, and less and less constraining ways of carrying out language 'practice' in the classroom has gathered pace" (1988:142).

Richards and Rodgers (2001) sort teaching resources into three categories: text-based, task-based and realia (2001:168). Various coursebooks present different types of texts, normally revolving around one given topic that seems relevant to the interests of the particular age group that the book is aimed at. Some of these texts represent a more or less traditional format, whereas others can take the form of just a picture, a visual cue or a sentence fragment aimed at initiating conversation among students. As for the task-based materials used in a communicative lesson, these are mostly games, role-plays and other resources students work on in pairs or groups. The use of authentic materials is believed to promote learners' communicative proficiency the most. They can be exploited for conveying the meaning, focusing on form as well as emphasizing the cultural value of the language (Spelleri, 2002:16). Authentic materials are also the ones that learners find most enjoyable, which increase their motivation best and provide natural communication opportunities in the artificial context of the language classroom (Nunan, 1999:212).

3.9 A CRITICAL LOOK AT COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Even though the positive impact of CLT on foreign language teaching has been recognized by many language professionals, nevertheless, as the initial wave of enthusiasm around Communicative Language Teaching has subsided, some of the claims of this approach have been looked at more critically. Swan was rather harsh in his remarks with regard to CLT as early as in 1985:

> As the approach matures we become more conscious of its limitations, and identify issues in our current practice which require debate and experimentation. It [CLT] makes exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents the currents of thought it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with jargon. (1985:2)

Below follows a discussion of some of the most frequently criticized aspects of Communicative Language Teaching identified in the relevant literature.

3.9.1 Aimed at developing language fluency, not accuracy

Communicative Language Teaching is criticized by some for focusing predominantly on developing fluency in language learners and for widely ignoring language accuracy (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012:28). Gatbon and Segalowitz

suggest that while focusing on the development of fluency in learners, the application of form-focused activities is also vital (2005:328). They argue that students very often, while involved in communication, do not notice form-related mistakes that they make and need to be provided with some repetition opportunities, and even grammar explanations in some cases (Gatbon & Segalowitz, 2005:341). The same view is shared by Hammerly, who illustrates this weakness of communicative approach by referring to French immersion courses, where, after several years of immersion in language programs, learners still do not live up to the expected levels of accuracy (1987:395, 399). Moreover, in some cultures whose local language is very different structurally from the foreign language that is being learned, students feel that they benefit greatly from learning rules and understanding the different system of the target foreign language: "We would like to know what happens, because if we understand the system, we can use English more effectively" (Harvey, 1985:183).

3.9.2 Non-academic teaching method, focused on the oral aspect of the language

According to Henry Widdowson (2007), the idea of CLT was so appealing at the time when it appeared that it was promptly adopted by a number of teachers without giving much thought to what it really was about, leading to the oversimplification of CLT and its perception as simply a means of teaching everyday communication (2007:217). Thus, another argument against CLT is that it is a largely oral approach, and that the skills of reading and writing are marginalized, rather than being reimagined as components of the overall approach (Mitchell, 1994:41). Consequently, such a method might be regarded as non-academic, one aimed at developing speaking skills mainly.

3.9.3 Unnecessary focus on meta-linguistic skills

According to Swan, the *tabula rasa* attitude – a "belief that students do not possess, or cannot transfer from their mother tongue, normal communication skills" – is one of the drawbacks of CLT (1985:10). He observes that in the CLT classroom, it sometimes happens that during a speaking activity there is a predominant focus on "conversational strategies (a therapeutical procedure which might seem more relevant to the teaching of psycho-social disorders than to language instruction)", as well as on discourse and meta-language analysis, language input provision thus being the least important aspect in the study process. Swan finishes his argument by stating about such a CLT lesson: "it is in fact by no means clear what language teaching is going on here, if any at all" (1985:10-11).

Teaching metalinguistic language skills, according to Swan, is unnecessary, since these are the skills learners are already in possession of in their mother tongue. For example, while learners are doing a reading activity, in CLT the focus can be on teaching them how to adopt the following strategies: prediction, skimming and scanning, in the sense of deduction. But if one knows how to scan a text in one's native language, this skill can easily be transferred into the target foreign language. Certainly, if the learner is too young to benefit from the cross-reference to his/her mother tongue, or is not in possession of such linguistic skills or strategies in his/her own language either, then additional support might be given in that area, the experience which will result in metalinguistic ability acquisition (Swan, 1985:10).

Another accusation that Swan puts forward against CLT is its underestimating the value of lexis and overestimating the importance of "appropriateness" in language teaching (Swan, 1985:7). In many cases, it is a lack of lexical knowledge and not an ignorance of the rules of the abstract concept of "appropriateness" that accounts for the inability of most students to come up with acceptable utterances. Contrary to Widdowson's assumption, Swan believes that for learners with common sense and life experience, it is naturally comprehensible what is meant by a concrete utterance, as long as the structural and lexical meaning is clear (Swan, 1985:3–4).

3.9.4 CLT and local contexts

According to Coskun (2011), as CLT is a Western-born method that has spread all around the world, its application might be challenging in some contexts not only because of the teachers' perception and attitudes but also due to certain cultural factors. Techniques and teaching methods pioneered in a largely Western context should not be exported uncritically to other learning/teaching contexts, as evidence abounds to indicate that while CLT might be extremely efficient in western environments, it might be totally useless in non-Western ones (Coskun, 2011:92; Li, 1998:677).

In Asian countries, for example, the culture of learning, generally, is perceived as a process of knowledge accumulation rather than as a process of using the acquired knowledge for practical purposes immediately (Littlewood, 2007:245). Consequently, there exist certain conflicting perceptions between the general Asian culture of learning and the underpinnings of CLT (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004:253). In the Chinese culture, it is considered to be inappropriate for a student to be active in the lesson and mistakes must not be tolerated; students are supposed to be quiet and obedient and should not ask questions.Thus, the language class might be the only place in a Chinese school where pupils may take an active role in the lesson, whereas the same behaviour would still be considered unacceptable in other classes, which might be confusing for learners (Li, 1998:691). Below are presented some comments about CLT by the teachers from non-Western backgrounds:

A Japanese teacher:

> If I do group work or open-ended communicative activities, the students and other colleagues will feel that I am not really teaching them. They will feel that I didn't have anything really planned for the lesson and that I'm filling in time.

An Egyptian teacher:

> When I present a reading text to the class, the students expect me to go through it word by word and explain every point of vocabulary or grammar: They would be uncomfortable if I left it for them to work it out on their own or if I asked them just to try to understand the main ideas. (cited in Richards, 2011:1)

According to Bax (2003), teaching has to be constructed around analyzing the context in the first place, and only afterwards deciding on an appropriate methodology for each particular context. This is why it is highly advisable that on CLT training courses teachers are trained not only in methodology, but also in dealing with contextual challenges as the most important skill in language teaching (Bax, 2003:285). Widdowson (2007) reveals a comparable attitude towards the importance of the context for language teaching: "Although in the past there was a tendency to think of it [CLT] in global terms, it can only really exist through how it is locally interpreted and realized" (2007:219).

Harmer agrees with Bax in that he finds "the wholesale adoption of practices from one culture into another totally dissimilar one is a mistake", and elaborates, that teachers cannot arbitrarily take up any cultural tradition or norm in which they find themselves. Teachers must not be "merely reactive" and let go of their moral position about the ways in which knowledge can be acquired (Harmer, 2003:293). What he suggests is achieving some compromise between the teaching on the one hand and students on the other, so that neither teachers nor students have to surrender their beliefs, but rather find "the golden middle", where methodology and context "meet in the way that is most appropriate for all concerned" (Harmer, 2003:294).

Ultimately, despite the context-related challenges discussed above, it is not the case that the transfer of CLT from Western to non-Western educational contexts cannot be beneficial. According to Harmer (2003), problems in relation to CLT usually arise not from the methodology itself, but from the inability to adapt and amend it to fit the needs of a particular group in a particular context (Harmer, 2003:292). As Larsen-Freeman (2000) comments, by being intolerant towards imported methods "we may fail to understand the cause of the problem and run the risk of overacting and losing something valuable in the process" (2000:67), which might lead to falling behind in education developments and result in the "deskilling of teachers" (Hiep, 2007:196).

3.9.5 Too demanding towards teachers as well as learners

Some psycho-cignitive arguments have been put forward against CLT as well. Stratton (1977), in her article – *Putting Communicative Syllabus in its Place* – argues that the appropriateness and feasibility of implementing the communicative syllabus largely depends on the age, cognitive development and the language proficiency level of the learner. According to Stratton (1977), and based on the theories proposed by Piaget (1971), a communicative syllabus can be very demanding, if not unrealistic for beginner learners, and in particular for the youngest, in the age range of five to twelve years. For this group of learners, decent Communicative Competence and speaking techniques are beyond their capacities even in their own language; thus, it is highly probable that a communicative syllabus will prove inefficient with their regard (1977:138). In these circumstances, as Stratton further recommends, employing a structural/situational syllabus at an initial stage, and only later introducing a communicative one, would seem a rational decision. At a later stage, Stratton suggests, "reversing the balance" and making the communicative character of the syllabus more prominent and applying the structural approach only for "remedial purposes" seems more practical (1997:138).

Some other critics of CLT claim that this method relies too much on the students' self-sufficiency and sense of responsibility in order to achieve success in the language learning process. Thus, for the successful implementation of this method, we need to have an extremely motivated and dedicated group of learners, which is not always the case (Harmer, 2003:291). Littlewood makes the following comments in this regard:

> Many of the teachers may not find these particular procedures sufficiently appealing to sustain the engagement of any but the most motivated or serious-minded of their students. (Littlewood, 2008:216)

To conclude, according to the critics, the younger, less motivated and less proficient in the target foreign language the group is, the less likely it is that the application of CLT will be successful.

3.9.6 CLT-related ambiguity

Another aspect of CLT that has troubled some critics is its ambiguous nature. As many researchers have argued, CLT is more of an approach than a concrete method, leaving much space for teachers to interpret things in their own way, which often leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the main principles of CLT on the teachers' part (Mangubhai, 2005:33). Evidence confirming the above assumption abounds in the literature dealing with the theoretical and practical aspects of CLT. Mitchell's in-depth investigation of 59 CLT teachers in Scotland, an experiment by Karavas-Doukas (1996) involving

39 teachers, and Sato and Kleinsasses' (1999) study with 10 Japanese teachers, all revealed that it is quite frequent for teachers' inconsistent understandings of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT to lead to a similarly confused and eclectic type of teaching.

However, there are also a number of studies (Gatbon & Segalowitz, 2005; Savignon, 2002; Thompson, 1996; Williams, 1995; Whitley, 1993; Rollmann, 1994; Nunan, 1987 – cited in Mangubhai et al., 2005:33) which indicate that even in those cases when teachers do hold adequate understandings of CLT principles, this quite often still proves not enough to inform their classroom practice substantially (Mangubhai et al., 2005:58-59).

Having looked at some of the main drawbacks that are attributed to CLT by some of its critics, in the next section I turn to discussing the practical challenges that this method can potentially encounter when actually applied in classroom teaching.

3.10 POTENTIAL CHALLENGES RELATED TO COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Below follows a summary of some of the general factors that account for the resistance that CLT encounters in the language teaching process, the factors that might be preventing teachers from using CLT.

3.10.1 Lack of teaching skills and knowledge of CLT theory

According to Li, conducting a CLT-based lesson requires certain skills as well as theoretical knowledge of CLT-related theory on the part of the teacher; thus, unless the teacher is well-prepared, applying CLT in actual practice is not an easy task to accomplish (Richards, 2011:5-10). Even though CLT is no longer a novel method in the Western world, there are many non-Western countries where this method has not yet been mastered by the practicing teachers (Richards, 2011:2); consequently, novice teachers, or those for whom the proposed method is unfamiliar, need to acquire at least some basic teaching skills in order to function effectively in a communicative language classroom.

3.10.2 Language proficiency factor

In a communicative language class, more demand is placed on non-native teachers than there was in the case of form-focused language teaching approaches (Lee, 2005:291). Even though it is not indispensable for a teacher to be a native speaker of the target language in order to teach communicatively, there is nevertheless a certain level of communicative proficiency and experience of language use required in order for a teacher to achieve his/her teaching goals (Richards, 2011:3). Thus, in foreign language teaching contexts,

teachers' target language proficiency might become an issue and could prevent CLT from being effectively implemented. Teachers who themselves have never been immersed in the foreign language they are teaching and who lack enough communicative competence in that language are likely to feel overwhelmed and daunted by the spontaneity and unpredictability of the lesson proceedings. Such teachers are likely to have the tendency to "want to hide behind the structure drills, dialogues, and grammar analyses rather than make extreme efforts to create truly communicative environment in the classroom" (Savignon, 1976:15). One of the teachers in the experiment conducted by Li comments: "I am good at English grammar, reading, and writing. But my oral English is very poor. Since I can't speak English well, how can I teach it to my students?" (Li, 1998:686). Also, in his overview of fifteen countries, Ho (2004:26) names teachers' lack of oral proficiency in the foreign language as a factor complicating the introduction of communicative methods.

3.10.3 Classroom management-related problems

Putting CLT in place with large classes is often fraught with many difficulties (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012:27) and if the teacher is not skillful enough in the teaching process, this might result in a disorganized, chaotic situation, where students do not benefit much from this type of language instruction (Coskun, 2011:85). With large classes, it is also difficult for the teacher to give enough attention to each student individually and guarantee that everybody is on task (Li, 1998:692). Littlewood (2007) has similar observations, arguing that it is always very difficult to control classroom interaction when students are engaged in independent task-based work, resulting in a slightly chaotic atmosphere (Littlewood, 2007:244).

   Other concerns related to successful CLT implementation include the difficulty of balancing learners' talking time and encouraging equal classroom participation. It is not uncommon in a CLT lesson that the study process is dominated by just one or two active group members (Littlewood, 2007:245). A Chinese teacher of English interviewed in the study by Li (2003), talked about the classroom management issues: "Many students just sit there idling their time…I am frustrated. Then I have to pull them back to grammar and exercises" (Li, 2003:76).

   Classroom arrangement can be another practical issue placing constraints on successful application of CLT. According to Li (1998), sometimes it is really impossible, whether because the furniture is fixed to the floor or for some other reason, to arrange the classroom in such a way that students can interact or move around in a way envisaged by those who recommend CLT. This restricts the possibilities of communicative interaction patterns in the lesson and consequently also the successful implementation of communicative language activities (Li, 1998:692).

3.10.4 Communicative Competence assessment-related difficulties

With regard to CLT assessment, it should be noted that testing learners' communicative abilities is a much more complicated and demanding process, requiring much better preparation, understanding of qualitative assessment systems and skills, together with more time and resources being needed on the part of the teacher, than grammar and vocabulary testing is (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008:18).

Difficulty with communicative language testing might also have a negative 'wash-back' impact on the nature and focus of the teaching process itself, as teachers might be inclined to teach those things which they feel will be easier for them to test at the end of the semester or academic year.

3.10.5 Pre-determined curriculum

Having to follow an officially pre-defined study plan or a coursebook while teaching a foreign language is, firstly, an obligation that restricts teachers' freedom to choose materials suited for their particular group of learners, thus contradicting the principles of CLT (Ngoc & Iwashita, 20012:27); secondly, the realization that teachers have to complete coursebooks by the end of the year and hold an examination based on the knowledge acquired through these materials puts much pressure on teachers. They feel urged to cover the coursebook material rather than focus on useful language and on the communicative value of language learning. This leads to the situation whereby learners' practical language needs and interests are widely ignored and the material and activities are imposed on them by the teacher.

The problem is further intensified if the time allocated for language teaching in schools is insufficient. According to Ngoc and Iwashita, "[d]ue to such large student numbers and the limited time allocated to each lesson, it is challenging for teachers to carry out supplementary communicative activities when there is a strict requirement to cover all the items in the curriculum" (2012:28). As a result, the foreign language is taught as an academic subject, rather than a mean of communication.

3.10.6 Negative effect of the previous exposure to grammar-driven language teaching

Teachers' beliefs and practices largely stem from their own learning experiences, and it takes much time and effort to help them change their ways. As research conducted by Miller and Aldred (2000) revealed, "teachers schooled in teacher-centered classrooms maintained beliefs and attitudes that made it difficult for them to embrace CLT" (cited in Gatbonton & Segalwitz, 2005:327). Similar views were voiced by Tkemaladze et al. (2001), referring to Georgian language teachers' exposure to Soviet language teaching

methodologies as a very negative factor in the process of their transformation into communicative language teachers (2001:36). Teachers as well as learners used to the language form-focused way of language instruction often have difficulty seeing the learning value of CLT activities. In some cases, they might feel that they are not teaching/learning anything if they do not teach/learn new words and grammar in each lesson (Li, 1998:677; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005:327).

3.10.7 CLT material related difficulties

Bax (2003) also criticizes CLT teaching materials for total negligence of the variety of contexts in which it might be used, and claims that the CLT material has a 'one size fits all' character. According to him, the very fact that quite often coursebooks and other teaching resources are advertised under the term "produced for the global market" implies that the material will work anywhere in the world (Bax, 2003:283-285). This sends the wrong message to language teachers: that they should fight "against the context when they should be working with it" (Bax, 2003:286). Rossener (1988) further observes that the ELT field is dominated by teaching resources which are produced by British or American authors. Consequently, they are "unable to avoid projecting through their topics, and their approaches to them, through the language they select, and through the very ethos of the activities they craft, values and educational attitudes which are intrinsically Western and mainly Anglo-Saxon" (1988:160).

However, Rossener also adds that it is not the British or American writers who should be held responsible for making materials suitable for their end-users, but rather local material producers and language educators, who need to look critically at what is available at the international market and to try to come up with their own publications, ones more closely relating and responsive to the needs of local language learners (1988:161). This is not an easy task to achieve, however. Very often, locally-published language teaching materials, in non-native contexts by non-native authors, are not of high quality, providing artificial language and inadequate communication models (*TLG: Annual Report,* 2011). As for adapting the material, even though it is recommended that the teacher modifies and supplements all the materials available according to learners' unique demands, interests and styles (Rossener, 1988:161; Appelebee 1974:119), this is not an easy goal for most teachers to accomplish either. As a result, teachers are left with teaching material which might not be suitable for or even relevant to their own context and thus difficult to exploit for authentic communication.

Coskun (2011) discusses the constraints that teaching material poses upon the implementation of CLT in the language classroom in EFL countries or in poorer communities. It is quite common, he argues, that in such contexts there is little or no access to such teaching resources as authentic materials or teachnologies, CD players, for instance, let alone adequate opportunities to

exploit the Internet. Such circumstances render the CLT implementation process ineffective, as the efficiency of this method, especially in present times, with their modernized technology and communication opportunities, heavily relies on and is strongly defined by the integration of such resources into classroom teaching/learning (2011:92).

3.10.8 Lack of time and expertise to prepare for CLT lessons

Getting ready for a CLT lesson takes much more preparation time for a teacher than grammar-focused teaching methods did. Language teachers who are encouraged to search for authentic, tailor-made teaching materials to cater to the individual needs of their learners need to look for such materials outside their coursebooks. For this purpose, more time as well as knowledge and competence of what, where and how to find the appropriate material, as well as how to exploit it in the lesson, is required on the teachers' part. This might prove overwhelming for teachers with an already heavy workload (Coskun, 2011:85).

A considerable number of teachers involved in the study conducted by Li (1998) confessed that they had neither enough time nor expertise to develop appropriate teaching materials for their classroom use. "I really do not have time for any extra work," complained one of the teachers (1998:689). Comments by practicing teachers reveal how much the practicalities of everyday teaching, which are often overlooked, may be playing a key role in preventing the successful implementation of CLT in different places.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to provide a general theoretical background to Communicative Language Teaching. Information on how this method originated and evolved into its present-day form was provided and the main principles behind CLT were identified. The chapter also discussed in detail what criticism exists of CLT and what challenges are associated with this method.

It turns out that even though CLT has enjoyed great popularity and has triggered much enthusiasm among scholars as well as administrators and teachers, there are also many obvious obstacles on the way to the implementation of CLT in various teaching and learning contexts. Thus, the need "to adapt rather than adopt" (Littlewood, 2007:245) CLT becomes obvious, which, in turn, requires careful analysis of local situations with regard to foreign language teaching and learning before the method is officially recommended, particularly in non-native speaker contexts.

Having explored language teaching history in general terms (Chapter 2), and having looked at CLT separately in more detail (the present Chapter), in Chapter 4 technological innovations which can further boost the opportunities CLT offers are discussed.