

BALANCING FLUENCY AND ACCURACY IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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Abstract, *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes meaningful interaction and spontaneous communication in second language acquisition. However, one of the most debated issues within CLT is the balance between fluency and grammatical accuracy. While communicative approaches encourage learners to speak freely, insufficient attention to form may result in persistent grammatical errors. This article examines theoretical perspectives on fluency and accuracy, analyzes potential risks such as fossilization, and proposes an integrated instructional model that combines communicative tasks with focused grammar feedback. The study argues that effective language development occurs when fluency-oriented activities are systematically supported by structured form-focused instruction. The findings highlight the necessity of pedagogical balance in ensuring long-term communicative competence.*

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, fluency, accuracy, communicative competence, form-focused instruction, speaking skills*

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching emerged as a response to structural and grammar-centered methods of language instruction. Instead of prioritizing memorization of rules, CLT focuses on the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Dell Hymes, broadened the understanding of language proficiency beyond grammar²⁹

Hymes emphasized the importance of appropriate language use in social contexts:

Earlier, Noam Chomsky defined linguistic competence as knowledge of grammatical structures:

²⁹ “There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless”
(Hymes, 1972, p. 278).

These theoretical differences created a foundation for modern debates about fluency and accuracy. While CLT prioritizes communication, concerns have arisen regarding the long-term grammatical development of learners. This article explores whether fluency and accuracy are competing goals or complementary dimensions of communicative competence.

Main Body

1. Understanding Fluency and Accuracy

Fluency refers to the ability to produce language smoothly, confidently, and spontaneously without excessive hesitation. It involves speed, rhythm, and natural expression. Accuracy, in contrast, refers to correct grammar, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation. In communicative classrooms, fluency often receives priority because learners are encouraged to express meaning freely. However, accuracy remains essential for clear communication³⁰.

This statement confirms that effective instruction must integrate both dimensions rather than choose one over the other.

2. Risks of Overemphasizing Fluency

When fluency is emphasized without corrective feedback, learners may develop incorrect language patterns. This phenomenon is known as fossilization. Fossilized errors become habitual and difficult to eliminate at advanced stages³¹.

While errors are natural in language learning, systematic neglect of form may allow them to become permanent. Therefore, teachers must decide when and how to correct mistakes without interrupting communication.

Table 1. Comparison of Fluency-Oriented and Accuracy-Oriented Instruction

Aspect	Fluency-Oriented Instruction	Accuracy-Oriented Instruction
Main Focus	Meaning and communication	Grammar and form
Error Treatment	Delayed correction	Immediate correction
Student Experience	Confidence and spontaneity	Structural awareness
Potential Risk	Fossilization	Speaking anxiety

³⁰ Brown (2007) explains: “Fluency and accuracy are both important goals in communicative language teaching” (p. 267).

³¹ Larsen-Freeman (2000) notes: “Errors are evidence of learners’ developing systems” (p. 121).

Table 1 demonstrates that both approaches have advantages and limitations. Exclusive reliance on either model may reduce overall language competence.

3. The Integrated “Focus on Form” Approach

Modern CLT incorporates form-focused instruction within communicative tasks.

This balanced approach allows learners to engage in meaningful interaction while also improving grammatical accuracy.

The integrated model consists of four stages:

1. Pre-task grammar clarification
2. Meaning-focused communicative task
3. Delayed error analysis
4. Individualized corrective feedback

Such a structure maintains communicative flow while ensuring systematic language improvement

4. Psychological Considerations

Immediate correction during communication may interrupt learners and increase anxiety. Excessive correction discourages participation. Conversely, absence of feedback reduces grammatical awareness. Therefore, teachers should adopt delayed correction strategies, such as:

- Noting errors during discussion
- Reviewing common mistakes after the task
- Providing written feedback
- Encouraging peer correction

Such techniques maintain confidence while promoting structural precision.

5. Implications for Uzbek Classrooms

In Uzbekistan, where traditional grammar-based instruction remains influential, the shift toward communicative teaching sometimes results in imbalance. Some teachers avoid grammar explanation entirely, believing it contradicts CLT principles. However, communicative teaching does not reject grammar; it integrates grammar meaningfully.

An effective classroom model in the Uzbek context should:

- Combine communicative speaking tasks with short grammar review sessions
- Use contextualized examples
- Encourage student self-correction
- Apply performance-based assessment

Balancing fluency and accuracy is particularly important for national exams, international testing (IELTS, CEFR-based assessment), and academic writing requirements.

Conclusion, Fluency and accuracy should not be viewed as opposing objectives but as interconnected components of communicative competence. While CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, grammatical precision remains essential for long-term proficiency. An integrated instructional model that combines communicative practice with systematic feedback ensures sustainable language development. Teachers must maintain equilibrium between learner confidence and structural correctness. Ultimately, successful language acquisition occurs when fluency and accuracy support each other within a well-designed pedagogical framework.

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