# Communicative approach in learning French as Foreign Language: Using Photos as Authentic Texts

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## Abstract

In this paper, we are going to discuss different principles of Communicative Language Teaching. Also, this paper will analyze the use of photos as authentic texts to arrive at a communicative goal in a French as a Foreign Language classroom at a beginner's level.

## Key words

Communicative approach, Authentic texts, Photos, Culture

## Introduction

We will start this paper by giving the three main principles of Communicative Language Teaching.

1. "Using"Language in Foreign Language Classroom

« Communicative Language Teaching » or (CLT) in short is one of the methods of Foreign Language Teaching which was developed in 1970s. Though, each teacher can interpret this method in their own way, this method is focused mainly on "communication" or "morality". But, this communication does not happen in a vacuum, it happens in a context. In other words, students learn to use the language in a situation. Thus, in a "communicative approach", the main focus is to learn to use language in a real-life situation such as going to a shop to buy a gift or going to an airport. We can say that the "functionality" of the language became more important than the language itself, i.e. the grammar and the vocabulary of the language became subordinate to the "use" of the language in daily life.

2. Using Authentic Texts in the Foreign Language Classroom

Another very important aspect of "communicative approach" in Foreign Language Classroom teaching is the use of authentic texts and authentic materials.  Dr. Garza defines authentic language in the following manner:

"Language produced by native speakers for native speakers to be consumed in a native environment"(Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning, The University of Texas at Austin)

Thus, as Dr. Garza explains in the video, authentic texts include literature of a particular foreign country as well as anything in the media, film or television. But the Foreign Language teachers must choose the appropriate texts to be used in the classroom as any "authentic" texts can't be used. Dr. Garza uses the term "manipulating and massaging" the authentic texts to make it appropriate for the target students.

3. <u>Integrating the four components of Communication</u>

The four components of communication are speaking, listening, reading and writing. One of the major challenges of a foreign language teacher is to integrate these four components. Based on these components are based four learning skills. These are written expression, written comprehension, oral expression and oral comprehension. Dr. Garza(Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning, The University of Texas at Austin)believes that these four components are a "construct of culture", in other words, these four skills support each other and are used together in real –life language use. While discussing the importance of integration of the four components of communication Dr. Garza says:

*In talking about, let's say four skills that we want to focus on. When we are talking to teachers, about how they will talk to students, we can use terms like skills isolation, focusing in on listening, focusing on reading, focusing on speaking, precisely as that, as I want now for us to pay special attention to this one skill but the overall approach to class needing to be much more integrated. The one, over-arching, some call it a skill, but the overarching to me phenomenon in the language classroom, of course is culture. It's where, that's a classic question how integration really becomes organizing principle of a classroom. Culture simply cannot be taught in isolations; we can't just give, that becomes a different course basically, it can't be taught apart from language, but instead had to be taught as we give a listening test, text as we let them writing, as we coach them through their speaking, as they read about their culture (....) about the country (...), culture is integrated throughout (....)*(Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning, The University of Texas at Austin)

Thus, we can say that culture becomes a medium to integrate the four skills in a Foreign language classroom using a communicative approach. At the same time, we agree that, integration is not an easy process, it requires a lot of practice and experience. Teachers, as well as the curriculum, find the task of integrating and balancing culture into the four skills very challenging and they often tend to separate culture as the fifth skill giving it a space at the end of any module. Integrating the four skills is a major challenge to Foreign Language Learning, so as sequencing these four components. For sequencing, the teacher need to have a bigger picture, the

lesson plan, so that he/she can arrange the activities in a hierarchical order of difficulty to attain a final goal or the objective of the lesson. Veronica (Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning, The University of Texas at Austin), a beginning language teacher, calls sequencing as a "layering process" or a "step-by-step" process. In this process, a bigger activity or the final activity is divided into smaller activities to enable the students to reach the final activity. Also, in the process of attaining the final goal, the students tend to become autonomous, they tend to learn different small steps involved in attaining the final goals and they tend to apply the same method while learning something else in their learning process.

Thus, a student "learn to learn"

a. to give an example of small steps, we can say that it can include grammatical components and vocabulary to attain a final "communicative" goal at the end of the lesson.
b. Using Communicative approach: a pedagogical example.

In this part, we will take an example of Communicative approach in learning French as Foreign Language at beginner's level.

Objective: Introduce somebody

Level: Beginner's level

To attain the communicative goal to be able to introduce somebody we can use authentic texts such as the photos of the different celebrities of India as well as of other countries. While learning how to introduce somebody, students will also learn the adjectives of nationalities and how to tell the age and the place where they live.

Different sequences used to attain the final goal is as follows:

a. Oral practice
b. Written practice
c. Grammar component
d. Vocabulary

**a. Oral practice**

In the first step towards enabling students to introduce somebody, the teacher starts by saying

*Je m'appelleKavita - My name is Kavita* (as an example)

The teacher can choose a boy and she can say

*Il s'appelle Harish -  His name is Harish.*

The next time, the teacher can choose a girl and she can say

*Elle s'appelle - Her name is Nikita.*

The teacher can repeat this activity two to three times and ask the students to listen to her carefully. Consequently, students are asked to introduce their neighbours themselves. Each student says first his or her name and then tells the name of his or her neighbour. The teacher corrects the pronunciation of the said sentences if there are any mistakes. By the end of this exercise the students have learnt orally how to introduce somebody in a very simple structure. The pronunciation gets better and better as they listen to each and every student saying the same structure again and again.

By the end of this activity, students have learnt how to say *Her name is / His name is.* They have also made a distinction in pronunciation between *his/her*. But, they still do not know how to write what they have just said. So, the second sequence would be written.

### b. Written practice

In the second sequence, the teacher writes the two sentences separately

> *Il s'appelle - His name is Harish*
> *Elle s'appelle - Her name is Nikita.*

In this sequence, the teacher points at the words and then pronounces them simultaneously, so that the students can identify the pronunciations with the words. In French language, it is a very important step as the words are not pronounced in the same manner as they are written as in case of few Foreign languages such as Spanish.

The teacher, after having completed the second sequence, i.e the written practice, does not go the third sequence, i.e. the grammar part, but she repeats the first and the second sequence three times to add some more information while introducing somebody such as giving the age and nationalities of their neighbours. Students can tell different ages of their neighbours only if they know how to tell numbers. Thus, learning how to tell numbers, atleast from 1-50 is a pre-requisite of this exercise. Also, telling nationalities in French is not same as same as saying in English. In English *Indian,* the nationality of Indian people, remain unchanged irrespective of the gender of the subject. In French, the adjectives of nationalities change according to the gender of the subject. The teacher brings this difference into notice to students when she herself pronounces the sentences in the context of a girl student and a boy student. She makes sure that the students have distinguished this difference in French language. Since, most of the students present would be Indian, the teacher need not give vocabulary of other nationalities at this step.

The teacher, after having completed the oral practice will move on to the written practice as in the first step so that students identifies the oral with the written. At the end of this exercise, the students have learnt how to tell the name, age and the nationality of their neighbours while introducing him or her. The three sentences are as follows:

*Il/ Elle  s'appelle - His/ Her name is …*

*Il/Elle a - His/Her  is 18 years old.*

*Il/ elle est indien(ne)- He/ sheisIndian.*

In the end, the teacher can also add a fourth information regarding place of living of their neighbours. The same steps are repeated by the teacher as for the three information above. In this step, teachers stick to the names of cities instead of going to the name of countries.

Thus, a student has learnt four sentences by now

*IL/Elle s'appelle - His/ Her name is …*

*Il/Elle a - His/Her  is 18 years old.*

*Il/Elle est Indien(ne) - He/ sheisIndian.*

*Il/Elle habite à Patna - He/she lives in Patna.*

**C. Grammar component**

As the Grammar component is long, time consuming and would require the full attention of students, it should preferably be started in a fresh class.

1. To start with the grammar component, the teacher starts with the first sentence

*Il s'appelle Harish - His name is Harish.*

*Elle s'appelle Nikita- Her name is Nikita.*

It is interesting to note that the French equivalent of the expressions *His/Her name is…* is totally different. If we translate literally, the sentence would be *he/she calls himself/herself.* Also, there are six subject pronouns in French and for each subject the verb conjugation changes. Thus, for the teacher, it is the right time to teach the conjugation of the verb to *call herself/himself.* Let us see the conjugation of the verb in French and then its English translation. The teacher can restrict to three subject pronouns only at this step and touch upon the other subject pronouns later.

S'appeler = to call oneself

Je m'appelleKavita  ---- My name is Kavita.

Tut'appelles Harish. ------ Your name is Harish.

Il s'appelleKunal. ------- His name is Kunal.

Elle s'appelle Nikita. ------ Her name is Nikita.

S'appeler is a regular verb ending with –er whose conjugation can be divided into two parts, root and ending. Hereis the example:

Je m'appell    e

Tu t'appelle    es

Il/elle s'appelle e

The root here is m'appell, t'appell and s'appell and the endings are e, es, e. The endings remain same for all the regular verbs.

Students should also note that, though the spelling of different forms of the verb s'appeler changes, the pronunciations remain same.

2.  In the second sentence the students have learnt how to express the age of his or her neighbour. Again, it is interesting to note that in French, the verb *to be* is not used as in English to express age, but rather the verb *avoir* is used which means *to have*. Thus, a sentence like *He is 20 years old* would be translated as *Il a 20 ans*in French Language which is *I have 20 years* in English. Here, the teacher gets the opportunity to teach students the conjugation of the verb *avoir*(to have).  Here is the conjugation with the English translation.

   Avoir (to have)

J'ai . --- I have

Tuas  – You have

Il/ elle a – He/She have

Again, the three different forms of conjugation of *avoir*has the same pronunciations but have different spellings. Also, the teacher has an apt opportunity, at this moment,  to introduce the concept of apostrophes in French Language. Je (I) has an apostrophe as it is followed by a vowel. The different vowels in French language are a, e, i, o, u and also h.

3. In the third sentence *he/ she is Indian*, the students, not only gets the opportunity to learn the conjugation of the verb *to be (is)* but also varied vocabulary related to nationality and their modifications according to the gender of the subject pronouns. Let us see the conjugation of the verb *to be (être)* in French language.

Etre (to be)

Je suis – I am

Tues – you are

Il/elleest – He/ she is

At this stage, the teacher can point out that the verb *Être*like the verb *Avoir* is an irregular verb. Also, the teacher can introduce different accents in French Language by taking an example of the accent used above the alphabet E in the verb *ÊTRE*.

4. The fourth sentence learnt by the students is *He/she lives in Patna.*

Thus, the teacher teaches the conjugation of the verb *to live (habiter)*, which is similar to s'appeler as both are regular verbs ending with –er. Also, students learn a very important preposition i.e*à* which is used before the city's name. Here, the teacher can also exploit the opportunity of giving vocabulary of different cities of different parts of the world in French Language.

In the end, teachers must evaluate what students have learnt so far. To do so, she can use photos of different celebrities from different parts of the world (authentic text) and ask them to tell about their name, nationality, age and place where they live. This would be an oral exercise. Then, the teacher can also ask the students to write the same, so that the teacher can correct the grammatical and spelling errors made by the students.

**Conclusion**

Using photos in learning French as Foreign Language can be used in various other ways. The example used in this paper is exploited as a pedagogical tool at the beginner's level. As photos of different celebrities are included in the final evaluation, the culture component is integrated in the communicative skills and not separated as a different skill altogether. Also, "communicative approach" can be combined with other approaches of teaching in advanced levels of learning French as a Foreign Language.

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