4.1. **COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TESTING**:

In determining the goal it is essential for the teacher to decide what a learner must be capable of by the end of his learning experience. Testing, assessment and evaluation are inseparable from any language learning system. But evaluation can be meaningful and effective only when viewed in the light of the specifications of teaching objectives. Testing implies much more than adhering to certain methodological positions and the designing of satisfactory test items. Testing concerns itself with many factors related to both the quality of the teaching imparted and the learning achieved. "...a good test reveals as much about the teachers as about the students... testing is not something that stands apart from teaching and learning; teachers are famous for basing their courses on the format of the final examinations ('the backwash effect'), and students and their families are equally famous for treating as irrelevant anything that is not ultimately going to be tested. The trouble here is that often, we do not teach a subject to our students, but how to pass an examination in that subject". (MacArthur, 1984:112)

The courses and the test being closely interrelated, stimulating test material can be interwoven into the teaching and learning process itself, to the benefit of teacher and taught. J.B.Heaton (1975:1) remarks that "It is unfortunate that so many examinations in the past have led to a separation of testing from teaching. Both testing and teaching are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other".
Tests, whether small-scale and given in class or large-scale and administered publicly across nations, are all extensions of the teaching/learning situation.

4.1.1. What to Test

Trim (1984:162-3) observes that language testing should be directed towards:

- Establishing that the learner has acquired the requisite competencies:
  a) Linguistic:--(phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic categories, forms, structures and rules and their associated meanings);
  b) Communicative--(functional and notional categories, pragmatics, rules of usage);
  c) Social--(background, sociocultural knowledge, principles of social interaction).

- Establishing that the learner has acquired the component skills of language production and reception.

- Establishing that the learner is able in fact to participate effectively in communicative acts as sender, receiver or interactively.

4.1.2. Recognised Test Criteria

Any test of any kind, whether oral or written, must fulfil certain important conditions.

1. Validity

Validity is concerned with relevance (Bell 1981: App.C). Test designers should ask themselves "whether they are actually
testing what ought to be tested". (Morrow, 1979:143-57) To this purpose the test objectives should be stated clearly, "break them down in the skills and abilities involved, and define them in separate elements; and then to measure such situations which come as close as possible to the real circumstances in which they will be used". (Paterno. In Allen,1965:373-92)

There are five types of validity:

a) Face validity : The test looks like a good one. 

b) Content validity : the test accurately reflects the syllabus. 

c) Predictive validity : the test accurately predicts performance in some subsequent situation. 

d) Concurrent validity : the test gives similar results to existing tests which have already been validated. 

e) Construct validity : the test reflects accurately the principles of a valid theory of foreign language learning.

2. Reliability: Reliability is objectivity. It is a "measure of the efficiency to the test as a measuring device per se". (Bell,1981). The test administered to the same candidates on different occasions and marked by the same examiner would produce the same result.

Reliability is reduced if:
- the questions are ambiguous/vague.
- the questions are so simple that the examinee is able to guess the answers.
- the test covers only a limited portion from the syllabus.
- the test unduly emphasises the qualitative judgement of the examiner.
3. **Practicability or Feasibility:**

Here the resources available for conducting the test should be taken into consideration, i.e. the test can be administered efficiently given the available material and human resources. Two parameters need careful attention:

a) **Economy:** the cost in time, money and personnel involved in testing.

b) **Ease:** the difficulty experienced in administration and scoring of tests, and interpretation of results. (Harris, 1969)

4. **Discrimination:**

The test should produce a well-spread distribution of results, whereby it is possible to place candidates in rank order. A test which produces 'bunching' (i.e. a large proportion of candidates with similar scores) is held to lack discrimination. This occurs if a test is too easy (bunching at the top end) or too difficult (bunching at the bottom end), but also if a normal distribution curve results, but with a narrow standard deviation.

4.1.3. **Communicative Test Tasks Representative of Real Life Situation:**

Morrow (1979) and Canale et al. (1980) argued that communicative language testing is not only concerned with what the learner knows about the form of the language and about how to use it appropriately in contexts of use (competence), but must also take into account the extent to which the learner is actually able to demonstrate this knowledge in a meaningful communicative situation (performance), i.e., what he can do with the language.
Performance tasks candidates have to face in creative tests should be representative of the type of tasks likely to encounter in their own real-life situation. The tasks should correspond to normal language use requiring the activation of all the communicative skills with little time to respond, or monitor language input and output. The performance should be assessed in relation to the effective generation of ideas in the context. Though the conditions for face-to-face communication are not replicable in test situations, it should none the less be made as realistic as possible as of that situation. There is a notable shift in modern language teaching, from linguistic accuracy to the ability to function reliably through language in particular contexts of use.

Brown (1979:149) remarks that traditional tests did not provide any convincing proof of the candidate's ability to use the language, to translate the competence (or lack thereof) he is demonstrating into actual performance in real-life situations, i.e. actually using the language to read, speak or listen in ways and contexts, which correspond to genuine use.

J. Carroll (1980) reiterates the above argument when he asserts "...the prime need of most learners is not for technical or analytical knowledge of the target language, but the ability to understand and be understood in that language in the context and constraints of particular language-using stances... the ultimate criterion of language mastery is the learner's effectiveness in communication for the tasks he finds himself in".
These statements reflect the emphasis that communicative language testing places on use and the concern that has been shown with communicative functions rather than with the formal language patterns of usage.

According to Canale et al. (1980:34) communicative testing "... must be devoted not only to what the learner knows about the second language and about how to use it (competence) but also to what extent the learner is able to actually demonstrate this knowledge in meaningful communicative situation".

4.1.4. The Distinguishing Features of Communicative Tests:

A test within the communicative paradigm may be expected to exhibit the following characteristics:

1. There would be an emphasis on interaction between participants, and the resultant inter-subjectivity would determine how the encounter evolves and ends.

2. The form and content of the language produced would be to some extent unpredictable.

3. It would be purposive in the sense of fulfilling some communicative function.

4. It would employ domain-relevant texts and authentic tasks.

5. Abilities would be assessed within meaningful and developing contexts and a profile of performance on these made available.

6. Where deemed appropriate and feasible, there might be an integration of the four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing.

7. The appropriateness of language used for the expression of functional meaning would have high importance.

8. It would use direct testing methods, with tasks reflecting realistic discourse processing.
9. The assessment of productive abilities would most probably be qualitative, involving the use of rating scales relating to categories of performance.


The communicative approach to language testing is still in the rudimentary stages and authorities still voice the opinion that it would be prudent to retain a number of components which sample major linguistic categories. Testing language proficiency does not amount to just communicative testing. Communicative language performance is only one aspect of language proficiency. Language competence is another important dimension of language proficiency which cannot and should not be ignored.

In keeping with the communicative paradigm, the tasks which have been devised and included in the testing operation should fit with criteria which accurately and adequately describe the significant aspects of the target activities and the conditions under which they are normally performed. If tests simulate as closely as possible the tasks students face in the target context and the conditions under which these are normally performed, then it will be possible to judge whether less direct measures of the same abilities can furnish similar information about student performance. In communicative tests the aim should be to provide the opportunity for what Widdowson (1978: 80) termed 'authentic' language use, i.e. putting the learner in position where "he is required to deal with ... genuine instance of language use" in a way that corresponds to "his normal communicative activities".
4.1.5. The Principles of Communicative Test Design

The more a test reflects the dynamic communicative characteristics appropriate to target activities, then the more relevant the language behaviour that is likely to result. Listed below are communicative characteristics which are considered important in the design of communicative tests.

1. **Realistic content**: the test task should be regarded as appropriate to the candidates' situation.

2. **Relevant information gap**: candidates should have to process new information as they might in a real-life situation.

3. **Intersubjectivity**: the tasks should involve candidates both as language receivers and language producers. The candidates should also modify their language in accordance with what their expectations of the addressee are perceived to be.

4. **Scope for development of activity by the candidates**: the tasks should enable candidates to assert their communicative independence and allowance should also be made for the creative unpredictability of communication in the tasks set and the marking schemes that are adopted.

5. **Allowance for self monitoring by candidates**: the tasks should allow candidate to use their discourse processing strategies to evaluate their communicative effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments in the course of an event.

6. **Processing of appropriately sized input**: the size and scope of the activities should be such that they are processing the kind of input they would normally be expected to.

7. **Normal time constraints operative**: the task should be accomplished under normal time constraints.
8. **Size of text**: the length of the text, receptive or productive should be appropriate to the task involved.

9. **Grammatical complexity**: the tasks should take cognizance of the grammatical complexity and range of cohesion devices required in the communicative event.

10. **Functional range**: the task should take into account the degree of variety of illocutionary acts involved in the event.

11. **Referential range**: the breath and depth of lexical knowledge required to handle activities in the events should also be given due consideration.

Carroll (1980: 13) opines that a communicative test should posses the following characteristics:

- Relevance
- Acceptability
- *RACE*
- Comparability
- Economy

"A good test will show an optimum balance of these four characteristics" (Ibid:14)

By relevance is meant the extent to which the test reflects the needs of the testees as identified by needs analysis. Secondly, the test should be acceptable to both testees and the administering staff with respect to content and format. Thirdly, the test scores obtained by the candidates should be comparable. That is, the performance of one single candidate or a group of candidates is compared with that of others, or the performance of a person on one occasion is compared with the performance of another.
Carroll (1980:15) remarks that "Such comparisons are often necessary when making decisions about placement or progress. We may wish to compare an individual's level of performance at different stages of his programme or, in an experimental project, to compare the rates of improvement between groups subjected to various conditions of learning".

Finally a good test should furnish the necessary information with minimum cost in terms of time, effort and resources.

Morrow (1979) observe that a communicative test should take into account some of the features of language use which conventional tests have failed to measure. His inventory of seven characteristics of language use are:

1. **Interaction based**: Real language use is based on an interaction. Even activities such as letter writing, seemingly a solitary activity, is a form of interaction, though weak because they involve an addressee whose expectations will have to be considered by the addressee. These expectations will effect both content and expression.

2. **Unpredictability**: A vital aspect of language use is the unpredictability inherent in the development of an interaction.

3. **Context**: All language use takes place in a context and language forms will vary in accordance with the context. Two types of contexts have been enumerated:
   - context of situation: eg. physical environment, roles/status of the participants, attitude/formality.
   - linguistic context: textual cohesion.
4. **Purpose:** Every utterance has a certain purpose and participants must be able to discern the purposes of remarks and encode and decode utterances directed at him to achieve his own purposes.

5. **Performance:** Natural communication and language use is marked by conditions like memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest and errors which may be random or characteristic.

6. **Authenticity:** In real communication language is not simplified in order to come down to the linguistic level of the addresses. An important aspect of communicative ability is the participant's capacity to come to terms with what is unknown.

7. **Behaviour-based:** The success or failure of an interaction is gauged by its participants on the basis of behavioural outcomes. A communicative test must begin with the measurement of what the candidate can actually achieve through language.

The three criterion stated by Harrison (1983b:77) for a communicative test are as follows:

1. A communicative test should assess language which is used for an authentic purpose in a real-life task. The testee should not be asked to display his language competence mechanically for the sake of assessment.

2. A communicative test should provide for the bridging of an information gap.

3. A communicative test should be representative of a real-life encounter.
At present, in the construction of communicative tests the test designer is obliged to first establish the general descriptive parameters of the situation the target population has to operate in.

4.1.6. Communicative Test Methods:

Given below is a brief account of the main kinds of test formats and some of their potential advantages and disadvantages.

4.1.6.1. Testing Reading Comprehension

1. **Multiple choice questions (MCQs)**

A multiple choice test item requires the candidate to select the answer from a number of given options, only one of which is correct. The marking process is totally objective because the marker is not permitted to exercise judgement when marking the candidates answer; agreement has already been reached as to the correct answer for each item. Selecting and setting items are however subjective processes and the decision about which is the correct answer is a matter of subjective judgement on the part of the item writer.

Each item has to be rigorously edited to ensure that:

a) there is no superfluous information in the stem.

b) the spelling, grammar and punctuation are correct.

c) the language is concise at an appropriate level for candidates.

d) enough information has been given to answer the question.

e) there is only one unequivocally correct answer.

f) the distractors are wrong but plausible and discriminate at the right level.

g) the responses are homogeneous, of equal length and mutually exclusive.
h) the item is appropriate for the test

**Advantages**

a) Marker reliability is ensured since the marker is not permitted to exercise his personal judgement.
b) Marking is simple, rapid and more cost effective than other forms of written tests.
c) Items can be pre-tested easily to estimate
   - difficulty level of each item;
   - difficulty level of the test as a whole;
   - how each item contributes positively towards what the test as a whole measures;
   - ambiguities in wording of items.
d) The intentions of the test compiler are clear and unequivocal and candidates know what is required of them.

**Disadvantages:**

a) A flaw in the question might result in the candidate getting a multiple-choice item wrong.
b) It is difficult to ascertain whether candidates failure is due to lack of comprehension of text or lack of comprehension of the question.
c) A candidate might get an item right by merely eliminating wrong answers which is a different skill from being able to choose the right answers in the first place.
d) The scores gained may be suspect because the candidate might have guessed all or some of the answers. This has the effect of narrowing the range of scores.
Multiple choice tests take longer and are more expensive and difficult to prepare than open-ended examination.

Many have questioned the validity of MCQs as a measure of language ability because answering multiple choice items is an unreal task, as in real life one is rarely presented with four alternatives from which to make a choice to signal understanding.

What the test constructor has inferred as the correct answer may not be what other readers infer or necessarily be explicit in the text.

Sometimes a question may have more than one right answer particularly at the inferential level.

2. Short Answer Questions:

These sort of questions require candidates to write down specific answers in spaces provided on the question paper or elsewhere. This technique is very useful in testing both reading and listening comprehension.

Advantages:

a) It allows the candidate freedom of expression.

b) Here answers are not provided and thus if a student gets the answer right we can assume that this has not occurred for reasons other than comprehension of the text.

c) Careful formulation of the question ensures brief responses from candidates and thus a large number of questions may be set in this format enabling a wide coverage of text/syllabus.

d) The number of acceptable answers to a question being limited, marking is to a great degree objective.
e) In searching for the answer there is scope for such activities as inference, or recognition of sequence, comparison, establishing the main idea of a text, and relating of sentences in a text with other items which may be some distance away in the text.

f) They provide more reliable data about a candidate's reading ability than MCQs.

**Disadvantages:**

a) The candidate will have to write the answers and his writing ability may not equal his reading ability. Badly written answers will interfere with the assessment of his reading ability which may be quite good.

b) In questions requiring inferencing skills, answers may be varied which might lead to marker unreliability.

3. Cloze:

In the cloze procedure words are deleted from a text after allowing a few sentences of introduction. Deletions are regularly spaced, usually between every fifth and eleventh word. Candidates have to fill each gap by supplying the word they think has been deleted. According to Soudek and Soudek (1983) "the cloze procedure [is] a reliable, valid, highly efficient instrument for measuring readability, reading comprehension and for estimating the level of proficiency of learners of a second or foreign language".

**Advantages**

a) They are easy to construct and easily scored if the exact word scoring procedure is adopted.
b) They are claimed to be valid indicators of overall language proficiency, especially of reading proficiency.
c) With fifth word deletion rate a large number of items can be set on a relatively short text and these can exhibit a high degree of internal consistency.

Disadvantages

a) Any change in the text or the deletion rate or starting at a different place or altering the scoring procedure produces a totally different test in terms of reliability and validity coefficients and overall test difficulty.
b) It has been suggested that a cloze test is much less effective measure for assessing general proficiency in that it correlates less well with other established general proficiency measures when used on monolingual as against multi-lingual groups.
c) It is not suitable for restricted range groups.
d) A cloze is essentially sentence bound. The cloze procedure seems to produce more successful tests of syntax and lexis at sentence level than of reading comprehension in general or of inferential or deductive abilities, which are generally termed as higher order abilities.

4. **Selective Deletion Gap Filling:**

The drawbacks of mechanical deletion cloze have led to the view that the test constructor should use a 'rational cloze', selecting items for deletion based upon what is known about language, about difficulty in text and about the way language
works in a particular text. Linguistic reasoning is used to decide on deletions and so it is easier to state what each test is intended to measure. The technique is better referred to as selective deletion gap filling as it is not 'cloze' in the proper sense.

Advantages

a) Selective deletion gives the test constructor the freedom to determine where deletions are to be made and to focus on those items which have been selected a priori as being important to a particular target audience.

b) It is also easy for the test writer to make alterations shown to be necessary after item analysis and to maintain the required number of items.

Disadvantages

This technique of gap filling normally allows the testing of only sentence bound reading skills. If the purpose of a test is to sample a wider range of related skills such as skimming, then an additional format to gap filling is essential.

5. C-Tests

The C-test is based on the same theoretical rationale as cloze, viz., testing ability to cope with reduced redundancy and predict from context.

In the C-test every second word in the text is partially deleted. In an attempt to ensure solutions students are given first half of the deleted word. The examinee completes the word on the test paper and an exact word scoring procedure is adopted.
A large number of items can be generated on small texts. This enhances the representative nature of the language being sampled.

b) The test can be objectively scored because it is highly unlikely that there will more than one possible answer for any one gap.

c) This test is economical and results obtained so far indicate that it has reliability and internal and external validity.

**Disadvantages**

a) This technique is of recent appearance and there is little empirical evidence of its value.

b) Students may find it irritating to have to process heavily mutilated texts and the face validity of the procedure is low.

6. **Cloze Elide**

A technique which is being viewed with interest is where words which do not belong are inserted into a reading passage and candidates have to indicate where these insertions have been made. This technique is also referred to as intrusive word technique.

**Advantage**

The candidate is not faced with the problem of understanding the question.

**Disadvantages**

Scoring is highly problematic as candidates may delete items which are correct, but redundant.

7. **Information Transfer**

In testing both reading and listening comprehension the problem of measurement distortion arises when testees have to
employ writing to record answers. To avoid this misinterpretation such tasks have been designed whereby the information transmitted verbally is transferred to a non-verbal form, eg. labelling a diagram, completing a chart or numbering a sequence of events.

**Advantages**

a) Measurement contamination is avoided which may result from students having to write answers out in full.

b) The tasks are realistic, interesting and authentic besides having high face validity in these contexts.

**Disadvantages**

a) There is the danger that sometimes students may be able to understand the text but not what is expected of them in the transfer phase.

b) Students in certain subject areas may also be disadvantaged. For example, some students may not be as adept in working in a non-verbal medium as their counterparts in science disciplines.

4.1.6.2. **Testing Listening Comprehension**

4.1.6.2.1. **Testing Extensive Listening**

1. **Multiple Choice Questions**

In the consideration of the use of this technique in the assessment of reading it is evident that the disadvantages of using this procedure far outweigh any advantages it might have. These disadvantages apply equally to the testing of listening.

The serial nature of the listening process creates additional problems in employing this technique as a measure of listening ability. In processing the question the candidate is faced with the extra burden of having to keep four options in mind.
The format is artificial and is slowly being discarded as being an invalid method for assessing comprehension by teachers, material designers and language testers.

2. **Short Answer Questions (SAQs)**

**Advantages**

a) SAQs can be a realistic activity for testing listening comprehension, for example, to stimulate real life activities where notes are taken as somebody communicates a spoken message. Care could be taken so as to limit responses thus avoiding the danger of the writing process interfacing with the measurement of listening.

b) In contrast to MCQs or true/false formats, one can be more certain that correct answers have not been arrived at by chance.

**Disadvantages**

If the candidate has to write an answer at the same time as listening to continuous discourse an unnecessary load might be placed on the memory and vital information in the ongoing discourse might be missed while the answer to a previous question is being recorded.

3. **Information Transfer Technique**

**Advantages**

a) The student does not have to process written questions while trying to make sense of the spoken output.

b) It is particularly efficient for testing the understanding of sequence, process, relationships in a text.
Disadvantages

It is often difficult to find spoken texts which is suitable for use in a non-verbal format. The range of listening texts from authentic sources suited to this purpose is severely limited.

Limitations on the testing of Extensive Listening:

a) It is very difficult for students to backtrack and focus on very specific features of discourse while listening to and attempting to understand a non-interactive, uninterrupted monologue. To preserve the integrative nature of the test there is need to focus questions on the more global processing skills such as inferencing, listening for specific information or identifying the main ideas.

b) Generally tape recorders are used in testing extensive listening and this may cause a few serious problems. The visual element which provides a wealth of exophoric reference and paralinguistic information is not available to the candidate and this makes the listening task much more difficult for the candidate. In real life the listener does not normally have to process disembodied sounds from a tape recorder except when he occasionally listens to the radio.

c) The use of video equipment to overcome the artificiality of a straight audio listening brings with it its own practical difficulties. For example, the number of screens required so that all viewers are treated equally or the incompatibility of various systems. Regardless of whether audio or video
equipment is used, in a test situation the student is denied the natural context provided by the experience of using the language in contiguous situations.

4.1.6.2.2. **The Testing of Intensive Listening:**

1. **Dictation:**

   It is important to see to it that as far as possible the dictated material incorporates oral messages typical of those the learner might have to listen to in the target situation.

   **Advantages:**

   a) It is reliable and valid.

   b) Dictation correlates highly with a great variety of other tests, particularly with other interactive tests such as cloze and it is a useful measure of general proficiency.

   c) Dictation is integrative in nature as it tests a broad range of skills and thus reflects more faithfully how people process language in real life contexts.

   d) Research indicates that dictation test results were powerful predictors of language ability as measured by other kinds of language tests. The success with which the candidate reconstructs the message depends upon the extent to which his internalised 'emergency grammar' replicates that of the native speaker. Fluent native speakers nearly always score 100% on a well administered dictation while non-native learners make errors of omission, insertion, word order, inversion, etc., indicating that their internalised grammars are, inaccurate and incomplete. They fail to understand fully what they hear and what they reencode is correspondingly different from the original.
Disadvantages:

a) Research evidence concerning dictation is inconclusive and it is useful only as part of a battery of listening tests rather than a single solution.
b) Dictation will be ineffective unless the short term memory of the students is challenged and the length of the utterances dictated will depend on the listener's ability up to the limit that native speaker counterparts could handle.
c) Marking will not be objective. Markers may take different views about the seriousness of errors and may adopt a more communicatively oriented marking scheme where a mark is given if the candidate has understood the substance of the message and redundant features are ignored.
d) If the dictation is not recorded on tape, the test will be less reliable, as there will be differences in the speed of delivery of the text to different audiences.
e) The exercise can be unrealistic if the texts used have been previously created to be read rather than heard.

2. Listening Recall

The student is given a printed copy of the passage from which certain words have been omitted. The deletions are checked in advance to ensure that they cannot be repaired by reading. The words deleted are normally "content words felt to be important to an understanding of the discourse and the blanks occur at increasingly frequent intervals.

Students are given a short period of time to read over the text and then are required to fill in the blanks, having heard a short period allowed for writing the answers. They hear the passage a second time and then are allowed a short period of
Advantages:

a) It can be administered rapidly.
b) It can be scored objectively.
c) It allows the tester to focus on items which are deemed to be more important.
d) It correlates highly with other more direct tests of listening and with test totals for listening batteries.
e) It is easy to construct, administer and mark.

Disadvantages:

a) One cannot state specifically what it is that is being tested. As only one word is deleted it may not be testing anything more than an ability to match sounds with symbols aided by an ability to read the printed passage containing the gaps.
b) It is an inauthentic task and involves reading ability as well as listening. Careful construction is needed to ensure that the students cannot fill in the blanks simply by reading the passage without having to listen at all.

4.1.6.3. Testing Writing:

Two different approaches for assessing writing ability can be adopted. First, writing can be divided into discrete levels, for example, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, and these elements can be treated separately by the use of objective tests. Secondly, more direct extended writing tasks of various types could be constructed. These would have greater construct, content, face and washback validity but would require more subjective assessment.
4.1.6.3.1. The Indirect Testing of Writing:

1. **Editing Task:**

In the editing task the student is given a text containing a number of errors or grammar, spelling and punctuation of the type noted as common by remedial teachers of students in the target group and is asked to rewrite the passage making all the necessary corrections.

**Advantages:**

a) This task may have a good washback effect in that students may be taught and encouraged to edit their written work more carefully.

**Disadvantages:**

a) If the student rewrites the passage in his own words instead of just correcting the errors, the problems of marking are considerable.

b) There is also some doubt as to whether the ability to correct somebody else's errors equates with an ability to correct one's own.

c) Marking is adversely affected if a candidate alters something which is already correct; a sin of commission rather than omission.

4.1.6.3.2. The Direct Testing of Writing:

With a more integrative and direct approach to the testing of writing, such items can be incorporated which tests a candidate's ability to perform certain of the functional tasks required in the performance of duties in the target situation.
For doctors in a hospital this might involve writing a letter to a local practitioner about a patient on the basis of a set of printed case notes. For a student in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) context it might involve search reading of an academic text to extract specified information for use in a written summary.

1. Essay Tests:

The essay is a sample of connected writing that can vary in length from a limited number of words to several sentences. The topics are often general. The candidates are not usually guided in any way as to how they are expected to answer the question.

**Advantages:**

a) The essay has traditionally been accorded a high prestige as a testing technique.

b) The topics are extremely easy to set.

c) It is a familiar testing technique to both the candidates and the users of the test results.

d) It is a suitable vehicle for testing skills, such as the ability to develop an extended argument in a logical manner, which cannot be tested in other ways.

e) It provides a sample of writing which can provide a tangible point of reference for comparison in the future.

**Disadvantages**

a) Free, open-ended writing is problematic. An ability to write on general, open-ended topics may depend
on the candidate's background or cultural knowledge, imagination or creativity. These may not be factors we wish to assess.
b) The candidate may not have any interest in the topic he is given which will affect his writing adversely.
c) If a selection of topics is provided it is very difficult to compare performances especially if the production of different text types is involved.
d) Candidates tend to approach an open-ended question in different ways and examiners have to assess the relative merits of these different approaches. This increases the difficulty of marking the essays in a precise and reliable manner.
e) Time pressure is often an unrealistic constraint for extended writing and writing timed essays is not normally done outside of academic life. In a real life context the writing process is generally lengthier and may involve several drafts before a finished version is produced.
f) The inclusion of an extended writing component in an examination is time consuming in terms of the total amount of test items that is available for testing all the skills.

2. Controlled Writing Tasks:

Here writing is controlled with the use of various types of stimuli which may be written, (specific instructions and guidelines), spoken or non-verbal, for example, a graph, plan, or drawing which the student is asked to interpret in writing.

Advantages:
a) Clear and precise non-verbal stimuli is advantageous as the candidate does not have to spend a long period of time decoding a written text.
b) Different stimuli can be used to elicit written performance of a number of different language functions such as argumentation, description of a process, comparison and contrast or writing a set of instructions.

Disadvantages:
If the subject matter is confined to an extremely specialised area such as bookbinding or mediaeval helmets for its visual stimuli, difficulties are bound to crop up. Often candidates are unable to cope with the mental challenge of taking this sort of test and give it up rather than undertake the necessary effort to get into the writing task. Here the complexity of the stimuli is likely to obstruct the desired result.

3. Summary:

Summaries are very suitable for testing a student's ability in terms of the tasks he has to cope with in an academic situation. Summary of the main points of a text involves the ability to write a controlled composition containing the essential ideas of a piece of writing and omitting non-essentials.

Disadvantages:

a) Marking cannot be made reliable and consistent.

b) A student in the field of science or engineering may not be able to summarise a piece of 'general' or 'neutral' test but he might be able to summarise the salient features of a process. In such cases serious validity problems arise.
4.1.6.4. Testing Speaking:

Testing speaking ability offers plenty of scope for meeting the criteria for communicative testing. These are:
- tasks should be purposive, interesting and motivating, with a positive wash back effect on teaching that precedes the test;
- interaction should be a key feature;
- there should be a degree of intersubjectivity amongst participants;
- the output should be to a certain extent unpredictable;
- a realistic context should be provided and processing should be done in real time.

It is possible to incorporate into the testing of speaking a number of the dynamic characteristics of actual communication. But this positive aspect is counterbalanced by the enormous practical constraints on the largescale testing of spoken language proficiency. For example, the administrative costs and difficulties, and the resources necessary for standardising and paying a large number of examiners. The problems of assessing speech reliably pose greater problems than those for assessing writing because the interaction, unless captured on tape or video, is fleeting and cannot be checked later.

The first step for the test designer is to establish clearly
- what activities the candidate is expected to perform;
- how far the dynamic communicative characteristics associated with these activities can be incorporated into the test:
what the task dimensions will be in terms of complexity, size, referential and functional range of the discourse to be processed and produced.

There is available a range of formats of varying degrees of directness to test the speaking ability. It encompasses more direct types such as the face to face interview and the more indirect multiple choice, pencil and paper tests of speaking ability which can be scored by computer.

Given below is a brief review of some of the more useful and potentially valid formats for testing speaking ability.
1. **Verbal Essay**

The candidate is asked to speak (sometimes directly into a tape) for three minutes on either one or more specified general topics.

**Advantages**

The candidate has to speak at length which enables a wide range of criteria including fluency to be applied to the output. Short answer questions often severely limit the range of criteria that are applicable.

**Disadvantages:**

a) The topic specified may not be of interest to the candidate.

b) Extempore speech is not something we are asked to do in real life.

c) Where there is a choice of topics it is difficult to compare performance.

d) Students performance is dependent not only his communicative skills but also background, cultural knowledge, imagination,
creativity. Thus it is difficult to maintain reliability in assessment.

2. Oral Presentation

The student is expected to give a short talk on a topic which he has either been asked to prepare beforehand or has been informed of shortly before the test.

Advantages:

a) By integrating the activity with previously read texts the oral task can be made to equate realistically with real life tasks that the candidate might have to perform in the target situation.

b) It is often very effective to get the candidate to talk about himself. It elicits a sufficient sample of a candidate's speech for sensible assessments to be made.

Disadvantages

a) If the candidate knows the topic well in advance there is the danger that he can learn it by heart.

b) If little time given for preparation then one faces the problem that what is being tested may be knowledge rather than linguistic ability.

c) If the task is integrated with a prior reading passage to ensure that all students have a common set of information available to them then one is faced with the problem of reading possibly interfering with the measurement.

d) The multiplicity of interpretations of broad topics may create problems in assessment.
3. The Free Interview

In this type of interview the conversation develops in an unstructured fashion and no set of procedures is laid down in advance.

Advantages

a) It has face and content validity and thus it is popularly used to test a person's oral skills.

b) The discourse being unstructured and allowed to unfold in an uncontrolled manner, approximates more closely to the normal pattern of informal social interaction in real life where no carefully formulated agenda is apparent.

Disadvantages

a) Since there is no set of procedures for eliciting language, performances are likely to vary from event to event where different topics may be broached and differences may occur in the way the interview is conducted.

b) The procedure is time consuming and difficult to administer if there are large numbers of candidates.

4. The Controlled Interview:

Here the interview is structured and controlled by a set of procedures determined in advance for eliciting performance.

Advantage

a) The procedure being controlled, candidates might be asked similar questions. Thus it is easier to make comparisons across performances.

b) It has a high degree of content and face validity.
c) With this technique sufficient reliability may be achieved with proper training and standardisation of examiners to the procedures and scales employed.

Disadvantages

a) In this kind of interview it is difficult to replicate all the features of real life communication such as motivation, purpose and role appropriacy.

b) Even when the procedures for eliciting performance are specified in advance there is still no guarantee that candidates will be asked the question in the same manner even by the same examiner.

5. Information Transfer: Description of Picture Sequence:

The candidate sees a panel of pictures depicting a chronologically ordered sequence of events and has to tell the story in the past tense. Time is allowed at the beginning for the candidate to study the pictures.

Advantages

a) The task required of the candidates is clear. They are not required to read or listen and thereby avoids the criticism of contamination of measurement provided the pictures are not culturally or educationally biased.

b) It is an efficient and straightforward procedure to elicit from candidates an extended sample of connected speech which allows the application of a wide range of criteria in assessment.
c) Because all candidates are constrained by common information provided by pictures of drawings it permits a comparison of candidates performance.

Disadvantages

a) Describing something which has happened tells us very little about the candidate's ability to interact orally.

b) Quality of the picture may effect the candidate's performance.

c) Differences in interpretations might also introduce unreliability into the marking.

6. Information Transfer: Questions on a Single Picture:

The examiner asks the candidate a number of questions about the content of a picture which he has had time to study. The examiner may even extend the questions to include discussions about future developments arising out of what is depicted.

Advantages

More or less the same as those mentioned in (5) above.

Disadvantages

a) The candidate is cast in the sole role of respondent and is denied the opportunity to ask questions.

b) The pictures need to be clear and unequivocal without educational and cultural bias.

c) If a large number of candidates are to be examined over several days then the question or test security arises if the same pictures are to be employed.

d) Reliability is reduced if different pictures are to be used besides giving rise to the issue of comparability.

7. Interaction Tasks

These could be between student and student or student and examiner.
7. a) **Information Gap: Student-student**

In these tasks students normally work in pairs and each is given only part of the information necessary for completion of the task. They have to complete the task by getting missing information from each other. Candidates have to communicate to fill in an information gap in a meaningful situation.

**Advantages**

a) The communication is purposeful, contextualised and interactive thus making it a genuinely communicative test. If candidates are free to choose their partners they will be interacting with somebody they know and feel happy communicating with.

b) The unpredictability of communicative situations is recognised and candidates are required to exhibit the ability to generate original sentences and not the ability to repeat rehearsed phrases.

**Disadvantages:**

a) If one of the participants dominates the interaction the other candidate may have a more limited opportunity to demonstrate communicative potential.

b) If there is a large difference in proficiency between the two participants it may influence performance and the judgement made on it.

c) If one of the candidates is more interested in the topic of task the interaction may become onesided.

d) Other practical constraints are the time available, the difficulties of administration and the maintenance of test security.
7.b) **Information Gap: Student-examiner**

Here the examiner or a teacher with whom the candidates would feel comfortable is one of the participants. Candidates may be given a diagram or a set of notes, etc., from which information is missing and their task is to request the missing information from the examiner/teacher.

**Advantages:**

The main advantage is that there is a stronger chance that the interlocutors will react in a similar manner with all candidates allowing a more equitable comparison of their performance.

**Disadvantages**

a) Many candidates find interacting with a teacher, or an examiner, more disconcerting than interacting with their peers.

b) The examiner being a participant in the interaction, might tend inadvertently to assess his own performance in addition to that of the candidates.

**Role Play**

The candidate is expected to play one of the roles in an interaction which might be reasonably expected of him in the real world. The interaction can take place between two students or the examiner could play one of the parts.

**Advantages:**

The technique can have both face and content validity in a wide variety of situations. It is a practical and potentially a highly valid and reliable means of assessing a candidate's ability to participate effectively in oral interaction.
disadvantages

a) When the examiner plays one of the roles (i) it will be difficult for him to make an assessment at the same time as taking part in the interaction (ii) there is a danger that the marks awarded will reflect the latter's view of his own performance as well as of the students.

b) There is a danger that the histrionic abilities of some candidates may weigh in their favour at the expense of the more introverted.

c) Sometimes a candidate cannot think what to say.

d) The question of role familiarity arises and some candidates may not know what it is normal to do in certain situations.

e) There are practical constraints such as the time available and the difficulties of administration especially in large scale testing operations.

Conclusion:

For testing within a communicative paradigm careful attention should be paid to test efficiency and reliability which may be more difficult to achieve with communicative tests. The test tasks should not only reflect realistic discourse processing but also cover a wide range of the activities candidates will have to cope with and enabling skills they will need in a real life situation. Efforts must be made to ensure that there is at least one task in each skill area which directly attempts to simulate an appropriate communicative context. As far as possible direct testing methods should be employed using relevant
texts and authentic tasks. Performance tasks, such as controlled writing tasks, listening to lectures and note-taking, and face-to-face spoken interaction tasks, are receiving increased attention in the testing literature and test designers should take cognizance of its growing popularity. Adequate attention should also be paid to the development of relevant and adequate scoring criteria and examiners must be trained and standardised in the use of these. Communicative language testing is still in the process of development and its full potentials are yet to be recognised and realised. None the less, the close compatibility between the teaching objectives and evaluation should be borne in mind at every stage of the testing procedure by the teacher.
4.2. A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: ITS MERITS AND DRAWBACKS.

A critical analysis of CLT apropos to actual classroom practice has brought to light its relative merits and drawbacks.

4.2.1. THE MERITS OF CLT

1. Learning goals/objectives are appropriate to pupils' needs and interests:

The communicative approach offers learning goals which are more appropriate to pupils' needs and interests since they are more topical, relevant and useful. The standards are more realistic with at least some stated objectives being attainable by all pupils. Language learning objectives are specified in behavioural terms, on the basis of a needs analysis.

2. Learners are aware of the aims and objectives: Learners recognise and know the aims and objectives of all exercises and activities. They are aware as to 'why' they are doing what they are doing, so classroom procedures become meaningful and motivating.

3. Syllabus, curriculum and content are needs related: The learners' actual and foreseeable academic, social and vocational needs underlie all aspects of the programme's linguistic and cultural content. While due attention is given to certain aspects of selection and grading of linguistic-cultural content, the primary consideration are those functions that persons of a particular age level, in a particular situation, would wish or need to express. The curriculum and content is more immediately
relevant since it offers the learner the opportunity of using the language for his own purpose earlier than other approaches do.

4. **The syllabus and curriculum is kept flexible:** The CLT syllabus and curriculum is fairly flexible. The teacher is not pressurized into ploughing his way through the whole course content in a rigid and systematic manner. A communicative view of language can provide the teacher with alternative ways of organising the content into teaching units. (e.g., lessons or sequences of lessons)

5. **Learners' differences are catered to:** CLT shows a sensitivity to learners' differences. Other approaches expect all students to proceed through the same material at the same pace. CLT frowns upon this 'lockstep' approach. The teaching/learning materials are so designed that it enables each student to proceed at his own pace, according to his own needs, interests and capacities. The unit/credit system, as envisaged by the Council of Europe was designed solely from the point of view of learner differences.

6. **The criteria for sequencing is determined by needs and interests:** In traditional language teaching approaches, the language contents to be taught were selected and graded on the basis of a universal teaching maxim—'from simple to complex'. So simple structures were taught first and later the more complicated ones. CLT selects and grades its language content on the basis of the learners' needs—so complicated but frequently used structures (e.g., the present and past perfect tenses) may find precedence over simpler but less frequently used structures. The
advantage is that the language learnt can be put to immediate use by the learner.

7. Creative foreign language use: CLT allows ample scope for creative foreign language use, even in the initial stages of learning.

8. Opportunities for learners to express their own personalities: Communicative interaction gives learners more opportunities to express their own individuality in the classroom. It also helps them to integrate the foreign language with their own personality and thus to feel more emotionally secure with it.

9. It is less wasteful of time and effort: The communicative approach is less wasteful of time and effort than approaches which attempt to teach the whole language system since here only what is relevant and necessary is taught.

10. It is potentially more interesting and motivating for pupils: CLT concerns itself with useful communicative language rather than mere abstract grammar and texts. Language learnt in the classroom can be made use of in real life communication, which motivates students to learn the language.

"The act of communication, even at elementary levels, will be intrinsically motivating simply because it expresses basic, universal communicative functions of the language and because it makes use of notions that are most appropriate to complete the specific function or functions being expressed". (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983:18)
11. **Authentic communication is sought through real-world language:**

CLT attempts to achieve communication through the use of authentic language in simulated real life situations. It emphasises the fact that the students and their communicative purposes are at the very core of the teaching program.

"It provides for the teaching of everyday, real-world language use in a variety of socio-cultural situations in which features of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and culture are selected and graded according to their priority in actual communication, and intermeshed meaningfully from the first lesson at the beginning level of learning to serve the learner's immediate communicative purpose". (Ibid.:18)

"In the long term they equip the learners with the appropriate skills for tackling the language in the real world, since the approach is based on a close approximation of such uses". (Maley, 1986: 90)

12. **Authentic learning/teaching materials:** Learning/teaching materials attempt to relate itself to life outside the classroom and deals with the kinds of things the student needs to know. The subject matter and content is topical and the language colloquial/informal.
13. **Realistic Learning tasks**: CLT sets realistic learning tasks in which full-class or individualised instruction may be utilised.

14. The real purpose of language is stressed: It recognises that while the language used in any speech act should be based on the situation or setting in which it occurs and be grammatically and semantically appropriate, the speaker must, above all, have a real purpose for speaking and something to talk about.

15. The emphasis on speaking abilities are based on the process of natural language acquisition: By emphasising the development of the speaking abilities CLT follows the process of natural language acquisition which begins with learners listening to the target language, then attempting to speak via imitation with reading preceding writing.

16. **Active student participation in classroom activities**: Student participation in the classroom is good. Pair and group work promotes involvement of all students and we see a quantitative increase in opportunities to speak for individual pupils.

17. The mother tongue (L1) skills are put to use: Unlike some other methods and approaches CLT does not banish the use of the mother tongue from the classroom. In the initial stages of learning attempts to communicate in the target language may not be very successful. So the communicative approach allows a
judicious use of the mother tongue where necessary. In fact, sometimes the L1 might even facilitate acquisition of L2 especially when aspects of similarity between the two languages are pointed out. Atkinson (1987:422) advocates a judicious use of L1 in the classroom on the grounds that it is a "learner-preferred strategy" wherein learners attempt to equate or relate a target language structure or lexical item with one in the mother tongue and methodology should work with this natural tendency rather than against it. Secondly, it is a humanistic approach permitting students to say what they want. Above all, there is an efficient use of time when certain concepts, words and ideas are briefly explained in the mother tongue.

18. The use of additional teaching/learning materials: CLT makes use of additional materials other than the textbook-magazines, newspaper reports, interesting and relevant articles, maps, charts, graphs, photographs, etc. This makes learning not only more realistic but interesting as well wherein the outside world is brought into the classroom.

19. Greater pupil autonomy and responsibility for learning: CLT is learner centred and allows pupils greater autonomy and responsibility for learning. The teacher's role in the learning process now changes from the dominating dispenser of knowledge to that of co-communicator. Much more emphasis is placed on the learners' contribution through independent thinking and individual or group work. Many people are of the
mistaken view that in CLT the teacher's role is one of passivity. But in reality the teacher has to work much harder than before in order to keep himself in the background and subtly steer the learners to self-learning.

20. The advantage of pair/group work: Pair/group work has many advantages such as the following:

- gives individual learners ample opportunity to speak in the target language.

- instils in learners responsible learning attitudes and autonomy.

- pupil-pupil interaction is more relaxed and less stressful than teacher-pupil interaction.

- enables students to develop confidence in the use of the target language.

- pupils find it enjoyable.

- adds variety to pupils' experience.

- it allows for differentiated activity.

- it promotes cooperation among pupils.

21. Receptive and interpretative activities precede performance

It leads us to emphasise the need for numerous, varied, receptive and interpretative activities before rushing learners into premature performance.

22. CLT is based on sound psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, linguistic and educational principles: CLT combines a 'communicative grammar' with cognitivism and humanism.

Emphasis has shifted from the former overweening preoccupation with structure and setting to the communicative purpose of the speech act... Since... communication takes place in definite but varied sociolinguistic situations, both linguistic and extralinguistic factors are taken into considera-
tion... The approach takes cognizance of the fact that the social roles and the psychological attitudes of the participants towards each other in a conversation... the place and time of the communication act, and the activity or topics being discussed will determine to a large extent the form, tone and the appropriateness of any oral or written message.

( Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983:22)

23. Constant correction is avoided: Learners are not constantly corrected. Errors are regarded with greater tolerance, as a completely normal phenomenon in the development of communicative skills. Immediate and constant correction is an irritant in the language learning process and it may dampen students' motivation to learn or even instil in the learner an aversion for the target language. Successful learning is dependent on the student overcoming his inhibitions and he should feel that errors are acceptable up to a certain point so long as he communicates successfully. "Mistakes are no longer foregrounded, but seen as inevitable and often instructive deviations along the way to more successful communication".

(Lee, W.R., 1991)

24. It is adaptable to traditional methodologies: CLT can develop naturally from existing teaching methodology. Curriculum writers and teachers may, thus, use an eclectic approach, taking what has been found best and most suited to their teaching personalities from direct, audio-lingual, structural, situational or any other method and integrate relevant features of each into a communicative approach.
25. **Perfect mastery of language is not demanded:** CLT does not insist upon mastery of any body of material when it is presented. A spiral, expandable curriculum is envisaged so that grammatical and topical or cultural materials can be studied in greater depth when ever relevant during the course.

26. **CLT produces or attempts to produce overall competence in the learner:** CLT is "more likely to produce the various kinds of competence as outlined by Canale and Swain, Halliday, Hymes and et al. than more purely language centred approaches". (Maley, 1986:90)

28. **Mechanical language practice is avoided:** Mechanical drilling of linguistic items and structures is discarded and explanation of grammatical rules is avoided. CLT holds that repetition and the memorization of abstract rules do not facilitate the development of pupils' practical competence. Rather, they may even hinder language learning since they make it boring and tedious.

29. **An amicable relationship between teachers and pupils is engendered with a relaxed classroom atmosphere:** Communicative interaction provides more opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge not only between the learners but also between learners and teachers. The teachers role as 'co-communicator' places him on an equal basis with the learners. This helps to break down tensions and barriers between them. The classroom environment is relaxed and informal.
30. **Communication starts from day one:** Traditional approaches delay language use until usage is mastered. But CLT attempts to make learners communicate from the very first day of language learning. Speaking, reading, writing in the target language may begin from the very beginning. Thus, the earlier incubation period is discarded. The communicative approach presents certain language items to the learner and then encourages them to make use of it as soon as possible for his own personal and immediate use.

31. **It accepts English in all its varieties:** Today English enjoys an international status. CLT acknowledges language variations arising from different socio-cultural and political boundaries, accepting the language as it is actually spoken by the "Dallas oilman, a Bombay clerk, a London bus-driver or a Lagos doctor. Gone is the notion that there is necessarily a 'right' and a 'wrong' way of speaking English". (Joffe 1994) It even accepts phrases that may sound odd to native English speakers such as the Nigerian phrase 'side a person' as against the British version 'side with a person'.

4.2.2. **THE DRAWBACKS OF CLT**

1. **Teacher competence is demanded:** CLT demands that the learner communicate in the language he is learning. It is so demanding that even the above average teacher finds it difficult to practice in the classroom. The teacher has to react to all sorts of communicative situations in the class which implies that he also needs to be more confidently competent in the
target language. Communicative teaching is extremely difficult unless the teacher has communicative competence. The teacher's professional training is taxed to the fullest extent in terms of preparation and skilful intuition in knowing when and how to intervene productively. The teacher is called upon to be much more energetic and adaptable. Teacher withdrawal is not the same as teacher inactivity.

The communicative classroom requires a teacher of extraordinary abilities: a multidimensional, high-tech, wizard of-Oz-like super person-yet of flesh and blood. he or she must be confident without being conceited, judicious without being unbridled, technically skilled without being pedantic, far-sighted without being far-fetched, down-to-earth without being earth bound, inquiring without being inquisitive - the list is endless. (Medgyes, 1985).

The net result is that many teachers, especially non-native ones, do not feel very comfortable or confident when it comes to putting theory into practice.

2. Drilling and repetitious language practice is disapproved:
CLT, in keeping with the cognitive code theory, affirms that the language code is acquired through the cognitive processes of the mind. So any act of overt attention to the language may be harmful. All kinds of practice, rote/role learning is proscribed. CLT advocates believe that when the learner is given sufficient time to employ his inbuilt capabilities of acquiring language, he will acquire it, not just as a collection of discrete structural items but as a cognitive code which is similar to the native speaker's own competence in knowledge and use.
According to Bhaskaran (1985:22):

It is easy enough to reject the central tenet in the theory. If we do not know anything of the language-learning mechanism of the mind, we cannot know whether it is harmful or beneficial to try and strengthen or speed up the process of acquiring the code... by using language-oriented presentation and practice. One of the widely used techniques, by its very nature of a mechanical kind, is the oral drill. The strong version of the communicative approach disapproves of all drills because they are instruments of overt attention to language... and overt attention to language is harmful. Of course, mechanical drills do not exactly bring a sparkle to the pupil's eye, but how do we know that they are harmful.

Besides certain structures and language patterns have to be repeated time and again before the student is able to use them competently for personal communication.

3. The emphasis is on natural language and a rejection of pre-selected language items: The communicative approach stands against any kind of interference with natural language in the classroom. A syllabus based on discrete language items is anathema to CLT. The drawback is that the learner in the initial stages may be faced with the onerous task of learning complicated structures which occurs in everyday natural speech.

CLT disapproves of pre-selection of language, but its 'communicational sect' recommends the use of 'simple English' for the early years. The sect describes simple English as parallel to the kind of 'simple mother tongue
that adults use when dealing with children'. This is of course pre-selection of language both in terms of sentence structure and vocabulary. What they recommend, then, is not the strictly codified and graded arrangement that is to be found in structural syllabuses but a milder form of pre-selection.

4. CLT assumes that it is possible to develop the ability to produce sentences through problem solving activities: The strong version of the communicative approach claims that the ability to produce and use sentences appropriately can be developed via problem solving and other interesting and mind engaging activities which produce natural language in the classroom. CLT attempts to replicate the ideal language learning situation within the classroom. In the real world this ideal situation is one in which the learner is removed from his own language community and is placed in an English-speaking community for a period of time to be bombarded by the target language. The learner's very survival is at stake as he cannot function in this community unless he learns the language quickly.

But the above concept is open to several objections. The advocates of CLT want the teacher to achieve in the classroom what the whole community in which the learner is placed will achieve. However, educational and classroom realities spell a different picture. Motivation is lacking
and exposure to the target language is limited to a brief interaction of one or two hours a day between the teacher and the learner.

5. Concentration of the mind does not necessarily bring about a superior rate of language absorption: CLT disregards the widely held belief that the quantity of language input in itself is one of the essential factors in successful language learning. The communicative activists argue that in a communicative teaching operation the mind is raised to a higher level of concentration and in this state of concentration the mind’s capacity to absorb is not only far superior to the absorption produced by mere heavy exposure but that the latter by itself does not help the mind absorb or retain. But it has been observed that genuinely communicative situations produce just the limited amount of language necessary for communicative acts. The result is that the amount of language that would be generated in the classroom in exclusively ‘communicative teaching’ is likely to be far less than that produced during language-intensive procedures. When mind engaging activities are pursued, there will be limits to language input. On the other hand language-intensive procedures highlight and explain certain features of the language code. It is illogical to assume that highlighting certain features of the code will necessarily prevent the code being learnt.

6. The myth of learner-centredness: Robert O’Neill (1990) has exposed the inadequacies of the ‘learner-centred’ notion advocated by CLT. The communicative approach believes that
teacher-talk is wasteful and should be avoided as much as possible. But it is a well known fact that "a key part of the process of learning a foreign language is the struggle to use fairly standard forms accurately in order to express something, and...students need good models in order to do this". (Ibid) In the class-room the teacher is the only available source of an accurate model. O'Neill poignantly questions:

...why...should the teacher's refusal (or failure) to intervene be rated so highly? What are teachers supposed to do even in the most 'learner-centred' classroom, when the 'communication' going on in the class can be called 'communication' only if we accept the shallowest definition of the word (mouths are moving, words are coming out, even if all the lights inside the students' minds have been turned off). What is the distinction between 'student-centredness' and 'student neglect'?

O'Neill reinforces his point by referring to the study undertaken by Lily Wong-Fillmore of the University of California, Berkeley, of the individual differences in second language learning and how teacher-talk influences the learning of language. The focus was on LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students. This is what she has to say:

A common belief held by language-learning specialists is that the best situation for language learning is one that is relatively 'open' in structure, in which students can talk freely with one another even during instructional activities. We assume that in such settings students can get maximum contact with classmates who speak the same language, and through this contact get the practice they need in using it. But this seemed not to be the case
For the classes that have been studied here, by and large, the most successful classes for language learning were the ones that made greatest use of teacher-directed activities. In such classes, individual work was assigned mostly as follow-up activities to formal lessons during which teachers led students through the materials they were being taught and directed them in discussions of that material. Indeed, classes that were open in their structure and those that made heavy use of individual work were among those found to be the least successful for language-learning.

(Wong-Fillmore, 1985: 24)

Peter Medgyes (1985) calls the term 'learner-centred' "the greatest gimmick of today" which is brandished by the communicative approach with particular vehemence and dedication. Wong-Fillmore does not claim that 'teacher-centred' methods are always better. However, her investigations indicated that when used skilfully, they were conspicuously more successful than learner-centred ones. CLT's assumption that 'no teacher intervention' is conducive to language acquisition needs to be carefully re-considered in the light of recent findings. Learner-centred approaches are appropriate to very small classes and certain tasks. "The critical skills teachers need to exercise lies in being able to judge and select which of the two types of approaches is most likely to yield fruitful results with a particular class at a particular time" (O'Neill, 1990)

I find the distinction that some experts draw between 'teaching' and 'learning' or 'teacher-centred' approaches and 'student-centred' ones, at best shallow and
at worst specious and confusing. There is
good teaching and there is bad teaching.
Good teaching is characterised by a variety
of styles to promote learning. And teaching
can just as easily be of the
'student-centred' type, favouring group
work and no teacher intervention, as it can
be rooted in 'chalk and talk' (or 'drone
and groan') traditions. 'Learner-centred'
techniques—in this narrow, jargonistic
definition—may be a suitable approach in
some circumstances, but it should never be
assumed that they are automatically
superior or even more suitable than the
styles of teaching which Wong-Fillmore
describes as 'teacher-centred'. (Ibid.)

7. The argument against non-intervention: Non-intervention by
the teacher may not always be beneficial. Teachers are
inclined to oppose the idea of teacher non-intervention. Many
teachers rightly argue that non-intervention is fine provided
the students have already been thoroughly drilled in the basic
language structures. They can benefit from opportunities for
practice, only if they have some language to practice with. So
non-intervention is possible only after certain amount of
overt language teaching has taken place. Otherwise the
teacher may find students sitting bewildered, unable to work
with the material in hand.

8. The concept of teacher non-intervention may engender the
lazy teacher: Incompetent teachers may assign some
communicative task to the pupils, which may be of a long term
duration—one or two hours. Then this gives the teacher ample
time to do nothing but sit back and relax with the very
convenient excuse that he is not supposed to intervene in the
language acquiring process.
9. **The questionable assumption that communication will take place in the target language:** With its emphasis on student initiative and pair/group work, CLT assumes that communication will take place in the target language. But how far is this going to prove true. Generally when a group of students speaking the same mother tongue get together, the natural tendency is to regress back to communicating in the mother tongue which proves itself a quicker and more effective means of communication. Thus exposure to the target language will be minimal and consequently language acquisition will also be minimal.

10. **The 'fluent-but-fossilized' student:** CLT produces the 'fluent-but-fossilized' student, i.e. a student who speaks fluently but to a large extent inaccurately, playing havoc with the rules of grammar. To quote Helen Johnson (1991):

> We have all come across them at one time or another. Easily recognisable by their inability to move in any direction except sideways and by the glazing of their eyes when you mention the present perfect tense, I am, of course, referring to the students suffering from chronic 'intermediate-itis', student whose fluent and extensive output consists almost entirely of communication strategies and very little grammar—the 'fluent-but-fossilized'. Encouraged to follow the communicative path, these students have become hapless victims of their own success at achieving the goals we set up for them. Every method has its Frankenstein's monsters, grotesque parodies of whatever it is the teaching has emphasised, and these tediously inaccurate chatterers are the unfortunate creations of the communicative approach.

CLT believes the much correction is wasteful of time and unproductive and pupils should be given plenty of opportunities to make mistakes, that sustained exposure to the
target language is sufficient for pupil competence to 'come right' in the end. This concept works well only when the learner is immersed in the community of the target language. Otherwise non-correction of errors may instil wrong language habits which the teacher will find difficult to eradicate later on.

Vigil and Oller (1976) point out that the nature of the feedback which people receive during their attempts to communicate determines whether their grammatical systems function or not: "any forms that elicit favourable feedback ('I understand') will tend to fossilize". The drawback of an over favourable response by the teacher is that the student stops progress especially in the direction of grammatical accuracy. To counter this over-positive tendency Vigil and Oller argue forcefully for the necessity of corrective teacher feedback.

11. CLT emphasises not only acquisition of the target language but also the target culture: The communicative approach attempts to teach the target culture along with the target language because it holds that all language is governed by socio-cultural norms peculiar to a native speech community. Therefore, the teaching of language use involves the teaching of cultural values and must accompany a replacement of one type of social behaviour by another.

Widdowson remarks:

... communicative functions are culture-specific in the same way as linguistic forms are language specific. Just as what we call present tense or
perfective aspect will not necessarily correspond directly with grammatical categories in another language, so what we call a complaint or a promise will necessarily correspond directly with 'categories of communicative function' in another culture... The teaching of communicative functions, then necessarily involves the teaching of cultural values. (1979:66)

This view is expressed also in Criper and Widdowson who say:

Let us... place language teaching itself in a social perspective. It may be described as an activity which aims at developing in people certain form of social behaviour which are different from those that they already practice... If language is taught in such a way as to preserve its essential character, and not as a distortion represented simply as a set of grammatical facts, then it must be taught as a form of social behaviour. (1975:180-1).

Candlin (1976:254) seems to have a socio-cultural view of communication in mind when he says: "In pragmatics we hope to understand social interaction, and in CLT we are involved in manipulating behaviour".

All the above statements assume that there is a categorical tie between language and a particular 'social reality' in which it is used; that learning how to use a language necessarily involves acculturation. In the process of this alleged acculturation learners are called to question their own cultural values in the light of the many new ideas and attitudes they confront in the new language.

CLT asserts that it is necessary for learners to adopt the total communication pattern of the native speakers of the target language. Brumfit succinctly remarks:
It is assumed... when teachers advocate the teaching of the semiotic system of the target culture, so that students learn to raise their eyebrows, or cross their legs, or nod their heads like an Englishman. It is assumed also, when ever it is suggested that foreign speakers of English are aiming to adopt the habits and thought patterns of native speakers. In fact, surely, the aim of most foreign learners is not assimilation but contact. To understand a wide range of communication patterns typical of native speakers is clearly desirable: to become indistinguishable from any type of native speaker might well be embarrassing,[and]...would involve a repudiation of one's own origins and personality which few students would want to undertake. (1986:119)

The concept of acculturation negates the learners' own cultural and social backgrounds to the detriment of the healthy development of his personality. Kohli argues:

...that what is socio-culturally specific to a speech community should be taught and what is amenable to reasoning should be interpreted by learner and teacher. In this way, language learning can fully exploit not only the language learners' memory (for convention) but also his intellect (for reasoning and interpretation). Only then can it become an optimally useful means for the emancipation from ethnocentricity of both teacher and learner. (1989:46)

Kohli suggests that although the advocates of CLT are not always clear about what their theoretical perspective about language is, there is some general agreement that language teaching is the teaching of social behaviour. She further suggests that the root of the matter was a possible confusion between teaching how to perform certain social functions with language(such as speech acts, which is behaviour) with the teaching of
Learning is replacing one type of social behaviour by another or of manipulating behaviour, but of adding new dimensions to social behaviour if social interaction is what the learner wishes to engage in. In saying this, she intends to suggest that learning social behaviour is not a necessary part of learning a language.

12. CLT ignores the fact that communication is a relative term: According to Brumfit:

'Communicative competence' implies that any language which communicates must be accepted by the teacher. This view is surprisingly widespread, and ignores the fact that communication is a relative term. Each communication, native or foreign, is negotiated, as the speakers ascertain how much information they share, what ranges of meaning are now being accepted or rejected in the forms of words chosen, and so on. What the foreign learner needs to learn is the process of negotiation. A communicative utterance only exists in a communicative situation, and what will be satisfactory with a teacher will not necessarily work with other speakers. Once again, we need to emphasise the ability of the student to use his limited amount of language for as wide a range of purposes as possible... only accurate speech will communicate effectively with a wide range of listeners in many different situations. (1980: 118)

13. The term 'authentic' is both relative and ambiguous: The term 'authenticity' is relative. What may seem authentic to one teacher may not concur with another teacher's ideas of authenticity. The communicative approach asserts that we need language teaching materials that are authentically communicative. Kohli takes a critical look at how communicative stalwarts have dealt with authenticity. She
cities Widdowson's example (1978:8) (cited also by Candlin, 1981) of the teacher who in order to demonstrate the use of the present continuous tense says 'I am walking to the door' while performing the action involved. Such use of language does not constitute the authentic communicative use of language according to Widdowson and Candlin. And, since authentic language data is what is wanted, this would constitute bad teaching, they would argue.

Such teaching is poor and uninspired and uninspiring, and might well be thoroughly ineffective; however, the objection to the technique, Kohli argues, has no theoretical validity. If all language has communicative value, then the sentence spoken by the teacher also has communicative value, as well as an expressive value. To regard its communicative value as non-existant would be contradictory to stated views; the learner who hears the teacher's sentence and sees the action that is being performed, if he knows sufficient English, will realise that although the sentence has communicative value, its enunciation is to indicate that another type of intention is being conveyed. This intention is that learners should recognise the link between the grammatical structure that indicates the present continuous tense, and the relationship of an activity to it.

Kohli's argument is simply that no language is more authentic than another. "... we cannot legitimately suggest that some language is 'authentic' and that some is not; and, ... there is no difference between teaching physics by constructing an experiment to demonstrate a law of physics.
and teaching the present continuous tense by demonstrating its link with an ongoing action". (1989:78).

O'Neill (1990) has also questioned the validity of the term 'authentic':

...What do we mean by 'authentic'. How authentic is it to be forced to listen to some one without being able to see them and their gestures? Is it not also 'authentic' for a native speaker to modify her or his speech slightly so that the pauses between word-groups are a little longer, the choice of words themselves is a little more careful and the style of speech allows and even encourages students to ask questions, to focus on what they don't understand and to interact in other ways with the native speakers? Or does 'authentic' only mean 'native-speaker to native-speaker'? If so, what are the implications for the rest of the theory behind it? That non-native speakers learn only or learn best by hearing and reading only the kinds of things that are written or spoken for people who already possess the full code? Is it, in other words wrong for parents to modify their speech when talking to their children? Is it wrong for teachers of French in the highly published experiments with subject teaching to anglophone Canadians at tertiary level to adopt a way of presenting information and a style of language that is simpler, more considered, and more direct than the language they use when teaching the same subject to francophone Canadians?

It is obvious that 'authenticity' is open to several interpretations and the above arguments have stressed the need to redefine 'authenticity' in terms of real classroom teaching to facilitate the process of language acquisition.

14. The notion of appropriateness is open to various interpretations: One of the initial assumptions of CLT is that the aim of language teaching ought to "represent the
learners terminal behaviour as communicative rather than grammatical competence". (Widdowson, 1979:65) Kohli questions this assumption:

By placing language into an intersubjective domain and by emphasising its role in human behaviour, the CLT theorists quite naturally espouse the view that what ought to be taught is the appropriate use of language.

Serious questions are raised when we consider how the notion of appropriateness has been interpreted. In its essentials, it is a 'context-based' notion (Candlin 1973, Munby 1977, Savignon 1972, Corder 1973, Allen and Widdowson 1975, Widdowson 1978, 1979). The notion of context is defined/treated as being relevant along many different linguistic parameters (1989:31).

An important point to be noted is that "there is no consensus in the precise meanings allocated to words like 'appropriateness' and 'communicative competence'...[it is not] possible to provide a clear categorization of what the language learning task is seen to involve and where the applied linguists' notion of communicative competence fits into a cogent theory of language". (Ibid, 1989:31)

15. CLT does not offer the security of the textbook: With more traditional approaches it is sufficient for the teacher to follow the prescription offered by the textbook. With the advent of the communicative approach the textbook is suspect as being too general, boring, restricting the scope of natural communication, artificial, etc. CLT may or may not have a prescribed
Even if a textbook is used, the teacher will be required to select, adapt and sometimes even invent materials he uses. This may leave many non-native teachers in non-English speaking environments in a dilemma. They will find themselves deprived of the textbook which ensured a great deal of linguistic safety.

16. **The deficiency in existing CLT textbooks:** Many communicative texts contain exercises in structure similar to those found in textbooks designed in keeping with grammatical syllabuses. They differ only in their presentation of language units: the communicative materials organize the units around functional labels.

Aslam (1989:77) quotes from Jones (1977:41-3)(given on page 222) to illustrate the ambiguity of the language items presented: "... eleven ways of asking permission are presented, grading them in order of politeness. Whether there are eleven ways or only two, the problem with these textbooks is that they fail to say when it is appropriate to say, for example, 'Would you mind if...?' and when to say 'I wonder if...?'".

"No two exponents are exactly the same in terms of when it is appropriate to use them"(Jan Roberts, 1982:185)

CLT textbooks present different activities such as discussions, group/pair work/role play, that are undertaken to achieve 'communication' in the classroom, with emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy. But there is little agreement on
whether structural drills should form part of classroom activity and whether they should follow the communicative exercises or precede them. Littlewood (1981) suggests that 'structural activities' and 'quasi-communicative activities' should precede 'communicative activities'. But Savignon (1983) recommends direct communicative exercises from the very start. Brumfit (1983, 1984, 1985) has been advocating a balanced approach in presenting the two types of activities.

17. The limitations of CLT's concept of needs-related teaching: The communicative approach envisages a needs-related teaching programme formulated on the basis of a needs analysis. This is a relatively easy task to perform, provided the group is homogeneous enough in terms of interests, occupations, age, cultural and educational background, linguistic level, intelligence, etc. But in most cases all over the world English is taught for no obvious reasons in regular school and college curriculums. (Medgyes 1985) terms it 'TENOR'-Teaching of English for No Obvious Reasons). The future needs of these learners cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. Motivation to learn is conspicuously absent and the teacher is faced with the sole responsibility of fostering motivation. When language needs are difficult to predict then what aspects of communication is the teacher to focus on in the classroom? The choice is vast and the teacher is faced with the onerous task of attempting to predict the presumably unpredictable needs of learners.
18. **Lack of additional authentic teaching materials:** CLT demands the use of a lot of additional teaching/learning materials with special focus on the authenticity of the material. It is believed that the authenticity ensures real communication. But such authentic materials may not be easily accessible to the teacher. On the other hand, some authentic materials may be unsuitable for classroom use.

19. **Heterogeneity of views about CLT classroom procedures:** There has been no consistent application of CLT principles even by those who advocated it. No homogeneous view exists about the way a communicative syllabus can be interpreted in terms of classroom teaching. As a result, much idiosyncrasy is discerned at the level of classroom presentation of the language. CLT fails to suggest any workable methodology through which its principles could be realised.

20. **The disadvantage of pair/group work:** Pair/group brings with it the following disadvantages:
- it poses discipline problems especially in large classes.
- the teacher will have to shoulder a great organisational and managerial load.
- pupils errors would inevitably go uncorrected.
- lazy and unmotivated students will take advantage of the situation to be idle.
- it is noisy.

21. **Effective CLT demands limiting the number of students:** CLT has proved itself exceedingly successful in very small classes of highly motivated students. But Indian classrooms are overcrowded and in particular pre-university classes where the
strength ranges anywhere between 80 to 130. In such a situation any attempt at communicating quickly deteriorates into confusion where high spirited students take the opportunity to create a noise. Group/ pair work, role play, simulation, etc, are just not possible in large classes in view of related discipline problems.

22. Grammar explanations are neglected: CLT believes that grammar explanations and terminological details are of no use to the learner. But in some cases explaining a few rules of grammar might enable students to make correct use of certain structures. Teaching certain structures without grammatical rules might bewilder the students, especially in the initial stages. This is how Brimfit (1985:20) puts it: "...a number of writers have expressed concern about the concentration on peripheral aspects of language learning at the expense of essential ones. It may not be sufficient to master the grammatical and phonological systems, but it is certainly necessary".

Swan (1985) observes that "grammar has not become any easier to learn since the communicative revolution... Some points of grammar are difficult to learn and need to be studied in isolation before students can do interesting things with them".

23. CLT ignores the development of reading skills: In India English is and will remain, a source language, not a language of social communication. The development of reading skills is of prime importance. With its emphasis on cerebral activities
in the classroom the communicative approach tends to ignore the importance of reading skill. The reading skill provides massive language input of the natural and non-superficial kind. In Indian contexts English is used by students primarily as a library language. It is a window to the scientific and technological progress that is taking place all over the world. Reading also contributes to the development of the student's personality. It is a communicative process which exercises a very wide range of mental skills. CLT should address itself to this important fact.

24. Communication sought to the detriment of literary appreciation: The paramount importance given to achieving communication in the classroom might result in the neglect of the appreciation of literature. Student's literary tastes may deteriorate. We might find teachers using superficial teaching/learning communicative materials, which may be interesting but without literary depth.

25. CLT emphasises colloquial language over more formal kinds of language: Colloquial language often dispenses with the formal features of grammar. It abounds in truncated and incomplete sentences, perhaps even grammatical errors, cliches and contradictions. It is usually disconnected, fraught with pauses and strategic linkers such as 'you see', 'you know', 'I mean', etc. When colloquial language is taken out of its proper context and presented to foreign language learners as a piece of authentic language they ought to emulate it may result in:
-lack of comprehension;
-misinterpretation of ideas/information;
-imbibing of colloquial language habits.

Good language has four basic qualities—simplicity, correctness, clarity, coherence. The aim of all English language teachers should be to teach learners simple but clear English which is contextually appropriate.

26. Mere concentration on linguistic performance might produce rigid and idealised models: Brumfit says:

...The problem is that—given the enormous range and variability of linguistic performance—it is difficult to concentrate on these aspects without producing a model which is rigid and idealised and ignores precisely the variable features to which we have recently become sensitive. Do we have to choose between the communicative insights of the present and the grammatical insights of the past? It is not uncommon to assume that we do, but such an assumption is surely simplistic (1985)

27. CLT oversimplifies language complements: CLT's structural versus functional dichotomy is an over simplification of an otherwise intricate system. Swan (1985) is of the opinion that language courses involve far too many components, and the relationship between them are also complex. It cannot be compartmentalised neatly into structures, functions, notions, etc. Language courses have to deal with all levels of learning, namely, phonological, vocabulary, structure and skills.
28. The success of teacher-student interaction depends on the teacher's personality/nature: One of CLT's prime focus of attention is on interaction between teacher and student. But the success of this interaction depends solely on the genial nature of the teacher. Students should like and feel comfortable with the teacher. Otherwise the relationship and interaction will be strained and artificial.

29. Classroom language can never replicate real-life language: There is an element of unreality in assuming that a classroom is like the outside world. Learning a language within the classroom is entirely different from using it outside the classroom, in real life contexts. In India the motivation for learning English is more 'instrumental' than 'integrative'. Therefore, language items will have to be selected, graded and drilled according to the purpose of study.

30. Lack of free access to audio-visual facilities: The teaching units in most CLT textbooks are to be taught with accompanying expensive audio-visual aids. In a poor country like India with its related socio-economic environment and financial constraints, such equipment is beyond the reach of the ordinary Indian teacher.

31. L1 interference: CLT permits the use of the mother tongue but excessive use of L1 in the classroom will result in:

- students beginning to feel that they have not 'really' understood any item of language until it has been explained in the mother tongue.
teachers resorting to direct, crude translation to facilitate comprehension and this kind of oversimplification may fail to observe the distinction between equivalence of form, semantic equivalence and pragmatic features.

students using the mother tongue in the classroom as a matter of course even when they are capable of expressing themselves in the target language.

students failing to realise the importance of using the target language in the class. (Atkinson 1987:426)