

The Pedagogical Maze: Retrospection on CLT in Hong Kong

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For years the English proficiency of general Hong Kong students is said to be continuously declining. There is a common belief that the execution of mother tongue education is a main factor for this phenomenon. However, rarely have people mentioned, discussed or thought of the relationship between the falling English proficiency and the prevalent teaching methodology. This paper questions the overuse of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Hong Kong context. It pinpoints the key principles and features of CLT and examines the reality of Hong Kong students against these principles and features. It concludes through the comparison that although CLT is in vogue and meets the general desires of learning a new language, it has some limitations to a context like Hong Kong. Reality shows that CLT does not match the Hong Kong context in many aspects; overuse of it can only cause detrimental effects and fail the intended aim of using it to develop the learner's communicative competence.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; Classroom Strategy; Language Competence; L2 Education

Introduction

The Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT thereafter) has been dominant and popular in the field of L2 education since the 1970s. Although other teaching methods like the grammar-translation method, the audio-lingual method cannot be said to have disappeared completely, they become lifeless residues under the shadow of CLT. A language course cannot be attractive without the label of communicative competence, which is the bright spot of CLT. Along with an increasing number of proponents and publications concerning the effectiveness of CLT, the circle of using it keeps expanding.

Hong Kong is no exception. For years, English teaching has been criticized for lacking innovative methodology. Biggs (1996: pp. 53-54) pointed out that many westerners believe Chinese learners resort to a surface approach to learning—sheer repetition and memorization without understanding the real meaning. For the purpose of educational reform, as back as to the early 1980s, the syllabus for English courses started to partly shift its emphasis to communicative use of the target language. While the learner was required to have some knowledge of the basic structure of the language, “meaningful use of what has been learned must also be built into the teaching” (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Committee, 1983: p. 14). “In other words, in the teaching of language, attention must be paid not only to the formal structure of language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) but also to how the language is used to achieve a range of communicative purposes” (ibid, p. 123).

Since then, the practice of English skills for communicative purposes has become a focus in classroom teaching and learning. Learners are expected to use the English they learn to fulfill various language functions such as asking for advice and

favoring, making a complaint, expressing gratitude and regret, paying a simple compliment. On the other hand, along with the increase of communicative activities, attention to linguistic knowledge like grammar and usage of words is reduced. The teaching of the essential rules of grammar is now far from complete. This change is evidenced by the abundant errors by the learners in proficiency tests at various levels. Many of the criticisms of the declining English standards are made precisely about the various kinds of errors.

In view of all this, the paper aims to examine the application of CLT in Hong Kong's English teaching. It will briefly highlight the feature and principles of the approach. Then it will discuss why it is not feasible to the Hong Kong context by examining the realities of Hong Kong against the features and principles of CLT. Some ramifications will be drawn on this basis.

About CLT

A retrospective look at the history of language teaching can tell us that CLT was developed mainly by British applied linguists in the 1960s as a revolution against grammar-based approaches. In brief, CLT advocates learning a language through communicative use. In contrast with the traditional approaches and methods, which stress linguistic competence, namely, the knowledge about the target language, CLT emphasizes the competence of using language for communication. Learning is regarded as a process of natural growth of language ability rather than doing isolated drills of language. As learners have their own active mechanisms for making sense of language input and constructing their own systems through receiving linguistic input, what teachers need to do is to help them oper-

ate these natural mechanisms by providing them with “triggers”. In lessons, teachers can facilitate the learner’s acquisition by assisting them to practice so that they can learn to use language actively for real communicative needs.

As CLT focuses on effective communication and fluency of language, language errors are by and large tolerable as long as they do not impede the flow of meaning. In reality, teachers may not correct students’ errors when communication is underway. They will hold up error correction until later, or simply ignore it if meaning can be communicated.

According to Mey (1998: p. 2032), CLT has some common features of practice that derive from its basic principles. First, classrooms are learner-oriented. Second, opportunities are provided through developing a wide repertoire of activities. Third, the teacher’s roles are multiple. Instead of imparting knowledge and skills (the learner is expected to internalize the knowledge of the target language through induction), he may act as animator, co-communicator or counselor in the classroom. Fourth, authentic materials are used in teaching.

Principles Applicable to Hong Kong

In Hong Kong English is a designated official language and has therefore been important to its residents. In general Hong Kong people have a strong desire of learning English well. Many people start to learn English as early as in kindergarten education. If properly applied, some principles of CLT can facilitate Hong Kong learners’ learning of English and are applicable to the Hong Kong context. They can brighten up classroom teaching if carefully used. First, more class time is given to students’ practice. As is known to all, practice makes perfect. Since language learning involves practice of linguistic skills and one cannot have good skills without a lot of practice, appropriate use of CLT will help the learner continuously improve his linguistic skills. Second, such practice will be done through interactive activities rather than through mechanical drills. This will turn language learning into a fun process, which contributes to creation of a lively learning atmosphere and may reduce the learner’s tension of contacting a new language and their acute anxiety about making errors. Besides, CLT reminds us of the use of authentic materials for teaching. In line with this, teachers can select materials from various resources. The more authentic the selected materials are, the more effective input students will get.

Language has many functions. For the same function, there might be different linguistic forms. A teacher can hardly teach all the forms that can be used for a certain function. If students can express ideas in their own words freely in classroom practice, then communication occurs. For example, to express an obligation of doing something, one may use such linguistic forms as *need to*, *should* and *ought to*. As long as a student chooses one such form, the communicative purposes can be reached. So, rather than cramming a particular linguistic form into students’ mind, which is often criticized as what a teacher does in traditional teaching, teachers should allow students to search for a form to convey their meaning in communicative practice activities. In this way, students won’t be reduced to passive learners. Besides, when people get familiar with communicative functions through communicative activities in class practice, they will not be timid or scared of using English in real communication.

Use of authentic materials can provide learners with quality

linguistic input so that they can learn good English and learn about English speakers’ ways of structuring information.

Limitations in Hong Kong

In spite of the applicability of some principles of CLT as discussed afore, it should not go unnoticed that some other principles do not fit the Hong Kong context. In fact the mismatches to be discussed precisely leads to the decline of general students’ English proficiency. In the following I will analyze some aspects of CLT that do not apply to the teaching of L2 English to Hong Kong learners.

Induction-Based Learning

As is known to all, CLT encourages learners to use the target language in communication, through which learners are expected to internalize the system of the target language through induction. To put it in a simpler and more straightforward way, learners are required to learn by themselves through exposure to the target language. It is believed that such inductive learning will bring about learners’ acquisition of the target language and make learning easy to take place. Under this principle, explicit teaching of grammatical rules and other linguistic knowledge ought not to be implemented; at least, it is not encouraged at all. Instead, authentic linguistic data should be provided to learners in the hope that they will become linguistic input, which helps learners assimilate the relevant linguistic knowledge through an implicit process of internalization which is said to be automatically realized.

It is clear that what CLT boils down to is the natural path one takes when learning a first language. This follows the one and same way a baby learns his mother tongue: in the learning process, people around him keep providing linguistic input by talking a lot. The baby keeps his ears on to the talks, trying to figure out the meaning carried by the messages. In this way the baby gradually comes to realize inductively the rules of stringing single words into phrases and then putting phrases into sentences. Such a process of internalization is burden-free because a baby’s mind is like a blank sheet of paper, which is loaded with nothing but what he receives from linguistic input. Besides, it is also pressure-free; a baby is by no means pressed by time, as no one stipulates a time limit for a baby to acquire a language.

Commonsense knowledge and common experience tell that it is unrealistic and even impossible for most L2 learners, particularly adult learners, to re-take this path to learn a second language. This is not only because of the existence of their L1 in mind, which is almost unavoidable and plays a certain role, either interfering or facilitating, when one processes L2 input, but also because of some other factors like learning motivation, linguistic environment, manners of people giving input and time constraint. Any classroom setting cannot be compared to an environment as natural and pressure-free as the one in which a young child learns his mother tongue. L2 learners are usually time-conscious. Hong Kong is such a case, where learners try to master the target language through school education within specified time rather than through using the language naturally and indispensably in daily life. For this reason learners have limited time to learn the target language. Under the time pressure, learning through induction is not time-efficient, as it takes too much time for learners to master the linguistic knowledge. Instead, deductive teaching turns out to be more time-efficient.

Explicit, concise and systematic explanation of key points can help learners get a quick grasp of the minimally required linguistic knowledge. With the help of such knowledge learners can start to practice language skills for communicative purposes. In the process of practice learners can consolidate their language awareness through deduction, consequently fulfilling the purpose of mastering the target language. Otherwise they are simply left in dark, often in a vain attempt of summarizing the rules of language, ending with frustration and little progress. It is true that deductive learning requires less autonomous thinking; but with teachers' guidance learners can quickly have a command of the teaching content and start their practice to consolidate what they assimilate. School education is precisely characteristic of deductive learning, in which teachers' guidance plays a significant role to the effect that learners acquire necessary knowledge in the quickest and most economical way. Just think how much linguistic data learners need and how much time it takes them to go through all these data before they can summarize a grammar rule inductively by themselves. If inductive learning works effectively, what's the use of having so many teachers? Why don't the government education department and schools simply provide learners with age-appropriate authentic materials so that they can learn from the materials at their own pace?

Neglect of Error

Moreover, CLT is featured with its tolerance of errors. Fluency always overshadows accuracy. "Errors of form are tolerated during fluency-based activities and are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 132). In theory, learning a language is primarily for the purpose of verbal communication through the use of the language; therefore, tolerance of errors can facilitate trial use of the target language for communication and is good for learners' practice of skills.

However, precisely on this point, CLT runs counter to the reality of Hong Kong, where English is needed for academic studies and examinations. Because of this reality, the ability of producing correct English is of utmost importance and accuracy takes top priority. It can never be overemphasized that these examinations are critical and vital to Hong Kong students, because the students' performance in the examinations will directly and immediately affect their chance of getting a place in tertiary education as well as a decent job upon graduation. Also for this reason tolerance of errors does not contribute to the students' improvement of accuracy.

Nowadays in Hong Kong, low degree of accuracy is often criticized by society as a typical weakness of Hong Kong general students' English proficiency. Errors are often used as hard evidence to prove the declining competence of using English. Not only do students often make errors when they use English to express themselves, but also some teachers are unable to offer error correction effectively and explanation of errors clearly. They are weak in accuracy because in classroom settings, focus is placed on learning tasks and activities rather than on linguistic forms. Moreover, oral productive competence is strongly emphasized over or at the expense of writing competence, which requires a more rigorous knowledge about linguistic forms. It is commonsense that when students have oral practice or carry out tasks, errors cannot be easily caught. Even if they are felt, they cannot be remembered completely or are

even forgotten in the end. As long as the overall meaning is communicated and understood in oral interaction, the purpose of learning is regarded as having been achieved. As a result of neglecting errors, learners' language awareness is decreased; their sensitiveness to errors is weakened and their skills of detecting and correcting errors are reduced, if not totally lost. All this is certainly detrimental to any examination of their ability and performance, for accuracy is no doubt one of the main criteria of judgment in language testing.

Emphasis of Global Meaning

Emphasis on global meaning rather than specific meaning is another factor which is unfavorable to Hong Kong students' learning of English. According to CLT, communication is considered to be successful once the learners catch the gist of language messages. In consequence, learning is regarded as satisfactory as long as learners' overall understanding proves correct and acceptable. However, the subtle semantic differences which are usually expressed through various linguistic forms may escape the learners' attention and comprehension. This is proved by many Hong Kong students' weak ability of interpreting individual sentences and distinguishing the closeness of meaning.

It is out of question that any sentence appears within a certain context. It is argued that "meaning is paramount" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: p. 67). It suffices to know the gist of a text or a speech even if language learners cannot fully understand the whole. For example, in the context of students' writing a personal profile, the overall meaning of such a sentence *After I completed my HKCEE, I went to England for my A-levels to get a chance to experience western culture* can be well understood. However, the linguistic form *my A-levels* is not a standard one and ought to be changed to *A-level exams*; the infinitive phrase *to get a chance to experience western culture* is not parallel and in conflict with the prepositional phrase *for my A-level exams* in terms of showing the purpose of *going to England*; so it ought to be separated as another sentence like *This is also a chance to experience western culture*. This example demonstrates that although global meaning is the ultimate goal of understanding, overemphasis of it may not brush up learners' micro-skills of language and result in a risk of ignoring the specific sentence structures. When learners feel themselves able to understand the general meaning, they will tend to ignore those complex segments of language which are new or unfamiliar to them owing to the low frequency of appearance or culture-specific different way of structuring information. But if specific meaning is emphasized and learners are often reminded of paying attention to specific meaning, then learners will spend time studying different language structures and specific meanings of such structures. Language awareness of this type will ultimately add to their repertoire of knowledge about the target language which can help them see through various structures of language and perceive the delicate meanings carried by such structures.

Big Class Size and Unreal Peer Communication

In a CLT classroom, students' grammatical awareness comes from the roles of the interlocutors (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: p. 130). Therefore, peer interaction is both the basis of in-class practice and a channel through which to get linguistic input. However, if peers are of the same proficiency level, then none

can obtain quality linguistic input. In Krashen's term (1985), in such cases learners cannot be exposed to input that is just beyond their current level, namely, the level of the input is not at $i + 1$. So with a relatively low English standard, Hong Kong students may lack the basic language foundation to give appropriate language expressions in peer communication. In simulative activities, if all participants are weak in English, who can get the ball of learning to roll and what benefits can they all get?

In order to ensure sufficient communication practice, students in CLT classrooms often carry out activities in small groups, which makes it possible that the time allotted to each student for learning to negotiate meaning is maximized (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: p. 132). However, in Hong Kong, the class size is normally very large—with about 40 students in a class. Supposing that students are divided into groups of four, there are still 10 groups. With so many groups of people having discussion at their own pace or undertaking different types of activity simultaneously, it is natural a lot of noise will be produced, which is usually mistaken as a symbol of the teacher's poor classroom management.

Even if students are cooperative in minimizing the noise, it is doubtful whether a teacher can take care of 10 groups of students interacting at the same time. Usually a teacher can facilitate completion of the practice tasks only with a few groups; therefore the teachers can hardly give effective guidance to all the students. Without the teacher's timely feedback, it is questionable whether students can improve their language skills from the assigned tasks or assimilate useful linguistic input from each other. Very likely those who cannot receive the teacher's help cannot learn much from such practice.

Granted that there is no problem of noise and discipline and students absolutely need no help, class time is another factor to consider the feasibility of application of CLT. How long will it take for all the groups to make a report or presentation on what they do in groups? How can a teacher cater to every individual learner's needs and rectify his misconceptions and errors reflected through his use of the target language in these activities? English teachers of Hong Kong usually have a tight schedule to follow, and hence CLT may not be a wise choice for them because a student-centered communicative activity often requires quite a lot of time. Despite large groups of students, Hong Kong teachers want to maximize the students' learning effects. Besides they want to ensure completion of lesson.

Teachers' Insufficient Cultural and Linguistic Experience

It is an educational tenet that a teacher should have sufficient subject-matter knowledge and skills before he embarks on the teaching profession. As a Chinese saying goes, you ought to have a full bucket of water if you want to share half with others. This is particularly true of English teaching. As is stated by Breen and Candlin (1980), for teachers of CLT "the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts" (p. 99). To fulfill this role, the teacher must reach a benchmark level of English proficiency so that he has depth of knowledge in the subject and knows how to teach it as a subject and help his learners use the target language for communication. Otherwise, either the teacher would feel his ability falling short of his wishes in class or the learners feel

themselves unable to express as much as they would like. For this reason, "in recent years, ... concerns about the subject-matter knowledge of L2 teachers, both NS (native-speaker) and NNS (non-native speaker), have grown, especially in relation to the teaching of English" (Andrews, 2003: p. 82).

In contrast to these requirements, the general Hong Kong schoolteachers' academic and professional knowledge as well as life experience may not be rich enough to make them capable of using CLT for the purpose of teaching. Quite some initial teachers start teaching without even a basic working knowledge of the systems of the target language. After years of formal implementation of CLT, they are in fact products of this approach. Like their learners, they do not have much need for using the target language in daily communication including the workplace, because the majority of them are of Chinese ethnic background and Hong Kong is basically a Chinese dominant society with Chinese cultural customs as the mainstream culture. Their communicative beliefs and patterns could not be torn off from their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such being the case, the teachers cannot play the role of facilitator as effectively as expected. Research shows repeatedly that general Hong Kong teachers' English proficiency nowadays needs to be upgraded (Andrews, 2003; Education Commission, 1995; Falvey & Coniam, 2000).

In fact, it is believed by some people that linguistic knowledge is in the narrow autonomous meaning of communicative competence (Nazari, 2007). Littlewood (1981), a pioneer of CLT, contended, "The teacher's overall purpose is to prepare the learner for later communicative activity by providing him with the *necessary linguistic forms and the necessary links between forms and meanings*" (p. 16, emphasis is mine.). Before teachers meet the benchmark proficiency level, effective guidance to the learners in communication can only remain "the castles in the air".

Learners' Lack of Real Needs and Prevalence of Instrumental Motivation

Among all the blocking factors the most serious one can be nothing other than the general learners' lack of needs for using their target language. Many a time is this evidenced by research (Education Commission, 1995; Luk & Lin, 2007; Littlewood & Liu, 1996). The lack of needs together with the dominant Chinese culture in society yields a typical utilitarian motivation.

It is generally agreed that motivation plays a significant role in determining success in L2 learning. Different types of motivation may result in different attitudes toward using the target language. Normally two types of motivation are mentioned to distinguish learners' specific desires to learn a new language: people with *instrumental motivation* want to learn a language because it is good for some practical goals like getting a job, reading foreign newspaper, passing an examination; people with *integrative motivation* want to learn a new language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it.

Beyond all question general Hong Kong learners have instrumental motivation in learning English. Since Hong Kong is by nature a Chinese society, learners do not have much real need for using the target language. Instead they need to use the language for some practical purposes such as passing examinations, applying for a job, reading business and official documents, newspaper. In most cases their use of English is limited.

Moreover, English is not much required in their oral communication.

Lack of real need makes it difficult for Hong Kong learners to acquire high fluency; in turn insufficient fluency often triggers a paradoxical sentiment: learners may have a strong desire to practice speaking. On this point, CLT seems to be able to satisfy this very desire. But when they are frequently engaged in the simple simulative communicative tasks in the classroom, they will likely become bored at the conversational approach to learning English. On the other hand, lack of real communicative needs and boredom with practice of little-needed and hard-to-obtain oral proficiency leads them to an even stronger desire to effectively and accurately use English to achieve their practical purposes. It is found that in Hong Kong, "students wish to have more opportunities to develop their fluency in using everyday English... However, their desire to participate in active communication in English is accompanied by an equally strong desire to have their mistakes corrected by the teacher" (Littlewood & Liu, 1996: p. 8). "Students consider writing to be the most important of the four language skills for academic success. Apart from speaking, however, writing was also the skill in which students were rated lowest in proficiency" (*ibid*, p. 47).

Dilemma in Assessment

One ramification related to the light emphasis on errors and heavy emphasis on meaning is the difficulty of assessment. Communicative competence is best embodied by one's productive skills. In this sense, writing and speaking are often two windows through which to see one's communicative abilities. In most proficiency tests, if not all, judgment of one's performance in these two aspects is by and large subjective rather than objective. This is because there can hardly be any objective criteria to be set up for such assessment. In most cases, even if a test assessor can understand what is meant in a piece of writing or a speech, he cannot simply award a good mark purely because the writing or speech can communicate meaning and makes sense to him. Language errors are never be treated leniently under the condition of language testing although they are tolerable in classroom practice and even in real use. Therefore, an ironical thing happens: on the one hand, students seldom drill on language forms in classroom teaching, and they are told not to worry about language errors in communicative activities while they are encouraged to practice the target language in everyday lessons; on the other hand, when tests come, their language errors become a drag of their test results even if they make their meanings understood and complete the communicative tasks.

Then, the assessment of CLT is not based on communicative competence as such. This phenomenon confuses people and makes them cast doubt on the discrepancy between the principles of CLT and the reality of assessment. One question that requires a convincing answer is why students can get meaning across in communication but are still graded as poor users of English? This is also a source of difficulties for language test assessors. In face of a student's written essay or an oral speech that is judged to be meaningful, understandable but full of errors of linguistic forms, they would feel it a tough job to decide whether it should be passed as is, because it is controversial. Those who focus on meaning would tend to think it acceptable because it can fulfill the purpose of communication; those who attach attention to form would regard it as unacceptable be-

cause it reflects the test taker's shaky foundation in the required linguistic knowledge and weak command of the basic skills of using the target language. With reference to this point, people often wonder how to resolve the direct and apparent contradiction, namely, focus on meaning and tolerance of errors. It seems to be a perennial headache.

Difficulties of Implementing CLT in Other EFL Contexts

In fact, Hong Kong is not alone in terms of the unsuitability of CLT. Concerns about the difficulties of using CLT have long been raised outside of Hong Kong. Burnaby and Sun (1989) contended that CLT was not effective in mainland China owing to various restraints such as big class size, the influence of traditional teaching methods, and shortage of resources. Besides, the general teachers' low competence in oral English was also mentioned as a main factor of the unsuitability of CLT. Another study about CLT in China was conducted by Anderson (1993). She mentioned some blocking factors such as insufficient number of qualified teachers, mismatch between CLT's goals and the students' expectations, difficulties in evaluating students' performance. Valdes and Jhones (1991) made a study of CLT in Cuba and pointed out that teachers' low English proficiency and difficulties in designing courses to meet the students' real needs blocked smooth use of CLT, resulting frustration to all concerned. Grabe and Mahon (1983) reported that students' deficiencies in language skills made them reluctant to participate in open discussions. Their little exposure to English aggravated the unsmooth use of CLT. Li (1998) discussed the difficulties of using CLT in South Korea. According to his study, blocking factors are multi-fold such as teachers' reluctance, students' lack of motivation for developing communicative competence, more importantly, "CLT's inadequate account of EFL teaching and lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments" (p. 694). Even in the North American context, CLT is fraught with controversy because "many a curricula innovation has been undone by failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation" (Savignon, 1991: p. 266). Rao's (2002) qualitative research revealed that the students' lack of real opportunities of using English and accuracy-oriented proficiency tests made the students more inclined toward linguistic knowledge and skills (i.e., non-communicative classroom activities) than communicative competence. Bax (2003, 2005) contended that each context has its own features. For this reason, teachers must "consider all the local factors in his or her own context, alongside the requirements of syllabi and course books, before determining the best way to teach the lessons" (Bax, 2005: p. 90). In his opinion, the dominance of CLT has caused the neglect of the crucial aspect of language pedagogy, namely, the context in which a teaching method is used and plays a role. Because of this, CLT should not continue to be used as the central paradigm in language teaching. In its place should be a context approach which considers local specific situations and conditions.

All the above research shows that the problems and difficulties caused by the application of CLT have long been noticed elsewhere in the world. It is worth pointing out that most criticisms come from those areas where English is not a main and frequent language for regular residents. This is particularly important because Hong Kong is likewise such a place, where people need to learn English because of its official status and

potential interests but have no frequent and adequate daily use.

Conclusion

It should be known that a teaching method is chosen for use not because it is of professional or theoretical popularity but because it allows teachers and students to cope with the realities of the environment more efficiently. CLT was introduced into Hong Kong as an educational reform that aims to change the traditional Chinese learning approach, which is typically described as “memorizing what is understood” and “understanding through memorization” (Gu, 2003: pp. 74-75). As memorization is believed not to be a good way of brushing up the learner’s competence of using the target language effectively in communication, CLT has been used in the hope that it can improve the teaching of English and lead Hong Kong learners to a good command of the language, which in turn will help to keep Hong Kong prosper as an international city.

Nearly three decades have passed; but the hoped-for improvement has not yet been in sight. Instead criticism keeps pouring from society about the general declining proficiency standard of Hong Kong students. In consideration of all the efforts, money and time invested throughout the period, people with wisdom and vision cannot but think and ask why. The emerging trend of reflection is reported by mass media recently.¹ Such an introspectional review of the past three decades’ adoption of CLT in the Hong Kong context, though a bit late, is a fortunate thing in that it will benefit all the people concerned by increasing the public awareness based on the real experience with CLT. The author hopes that more serious introspection will be made by more people so that a more suitable and effective methodological change in English teaching will take place in the long interests of Hong Kong.

In all fairness, some principles of CLT are generally true and constructive to Hong Kong. The key point of adapting it to Hong Kong is to sinicise it so that it integrates with the culture-governed learning strategies of Hong Kong students as well as the realities of Hong Kong. As a former British colony, Hong Kong used to de-sinicise things including language education (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). The process of the de-sinicisation often blinds people to the characteristics of Chinese society. It is time now to re-sinicise in a judicious manner so that CLT can merge into the Hong Kong language classrooms, display its built-in effectiveness and truly contribute to Hong Kong’s English teaching.

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¹An academic conference was held at the University of Hong Kong recently. Some speakers mentioned the unsatisfactory results of using CLT in Hong Kong and proposed directing more attention to the students’ ability of using correct linguistic forms through systematic teaching of English grammar. See *Ta Kung Pao*, April 15, 2008.