

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Structural or communicative approach: A case study of English Language teaching in Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools

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This paper investigates the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) in Zimbabwe, using Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools as a case study. The study employed both the quantitative and the qualitative designs. A questionnaire and document analysis was used to gather data. The data gathered were also analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively through tables, thick descriptions and paraphrases. The study established that the structural approach and its associated methods and techniques were mainly used in the teaching of ESL, with communicative language teaching (CLT), which is recommended by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) O-Level English syllabus, playing second fiddle. The paper concludes that this could be due to ignorance, on the part of teachers, of the principles and advantages of CLT, or it could be a result of conservatism. The paper recommends that relevant authorities, such as universities, teachers' colleges and the responsible Ministry should vigorously strive to make English Language teachers have a paradigm shift towards full implementation of CLT.

**Key words:** Structural Approach, Communicative Approach, English as a Second Language (ESL), Linguistic Competence, Communicative Competence.

## INTRODUCTION

As communication skills lecturers at University level, the researchers' experience has been that first year undergraduate students in Zimbabwe show glaring shortcomings in what Widdowson (1991) calls language use, an understanding of which sentences or parts of sentences are appropriate in a particular context. First year undergraduate students in Zimbabwe evidently struggle to accomplish what Wilkins (1987) refers to as language functions such as greeting, criticizing, inviting, complaining, congratulating, requesting, arguing and disagreeing. The students' failure to achieve such basic language functions manifests itself not only as the students socialise among themselves and with their lecturers, but also in the students' oral and written assignments. In short, the students lack what Hymes (1972) in Brown (1987), Richards and Rodgers (1995), Mhundwa (1998), and Yule (1996), call communicative competence. This is despite the fact that the Zimbabwe School

Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) Ordinary Level English Language Syllabus (1122) (1996: 2) recommends an approach which is:

*...intended to provide pupils with the communication skills necessary for the different roles and situations in which they are likely to find themselves after leaving school...to make the learning of the English language more functional and purposeful...*

The syllabus is obviously referring to communicative language teaching (CLT), and it goes on to discourage teachers from having pupils learn structures in isolation. Prior to 1996, the syllabus, which had been inherited from the pre-independence era, was largely structural.

## Justification of study

It was the realization that first year undergraduate students lack what Lucantoni (2002:13) calls "the ability to use English effectively for purposes of practical

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communication in a variety of second language situations" that prompted the researchers to find out how English as a second language (ESL) was being taught at ordinary level (equivalent of General Certificate of Education) in Zimbabwe, using Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools as a case study. The researchers sought to investigate whether the traditional structural approach (Askes, 1978; Dubin and Olshtain, 1986; Widdowson 1991), with its emphasis on grammatical or linguistic competence, still has influence on English Language teaching in Zimbabwean secondary schools, or whether "the communicative approach which is in current fashion" (Widdowson, 1991: 160) and is recommended by the syllabus, was being implemented.

### Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What approach(es), method(s) and techniques dominate the teaching of English Language at secondary school level in Zimbabwe?
- ii. What reasons do the teachers give for the preferred approach(es), method(s) and techniques?

### RELATED LITERATURE

Literature focused on the structural approach to language teaching and related methods, and on the communicative approach or communicative language teaching (CLT).

#### The structural approach

Associated with American psychologists such as Bloomfield and Skinner, the structural approach is rooted in behaviorism (Richards and Rodgers, 1995), a theory which views language learning as learning a set of habits (Brown, 1987). In this approach, elements in a language are viewed as being linearly produced in a rule-governed way. Language samples can be exhaustively described at all levels, such as phonetic, phonemic and morphological. Linguistic levels are regarded as being pyramidally structured from phonemes to morphemes to phrases, clauses and sentences (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). The focus of language teaching in the Structural Approach is on speech (Askes, 1978, Richards and Rodgers, 1995). Another important tenet of the approach is that focus is on knowledge of language, with the 'doing' being subservient to knowing (Widdowson 1991). The belief is that "Language learning comes about by teaching learners to know the forms of the language as a medium and the meaning they incorporate" (Widdowson, 1991: 160). Focus, therefore, is on what Widdowson

(1996: 3) refers to as language usage, which is dependent on "a knowledge of the grammatical rules of the language being learned." Structural methods of language teaching include the grammar-translation method, the direct method, the oral approach or situational language teaching, and the audio lingual method.

The grammar-translation method, which dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s, but "continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today" (Richards and Rodgers 1995: 4), entails the learning of grammatical rules of the target language and the presentation of vocabulary in the form of a bilingual list (Krashen, 1995). Typical of the structural approach, in the grammar-translation method, "long lists of words and a set of grammatical rules have to be memorized" (Yule, 1996: 193). Also, emphasis is on accuracy, and the basic unit of teaching and language practice is the sentence (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). A major learning activity in the method is translation from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1 (Krashen, 1995). Since focus is entirely on form rather than meaning, the method results in "very low amounts of acquired competence" (Krashen, 1995: 129). Another weakness of the method, which is also a major weakness of the structural approach, is that formal grammar "contributes little to the successful using of language" (Askes, 1978: 21).

In the direct method, also known as the natural approach (Askes, 1978), where all classroom language is the target language, rules of the language are learnt inductively, that is, through using the language (Askes, 1978). Although the method encourages "lots of active oral interactions, spontaneous use of the language" (Brown, 1987: 57), its focus on grammar and its insistence on accuracy and intolerance towards errors (Krashen, 1995), makes the method structural. As with other structural methods, students taught using this method "seem to have had frustrating experiences" (Yule, 1999: 153).

The oral approach or situational language teaching focuses on selection, grading and presenting of language structures, that is, vocabulary and grammar are controlled (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). Language is viewed as a set of structures related to situations. Main learning activities include repetition, substitution drills and memorization (Nunan, 1995). Accuracy in pronunciation and grammar are of paramount importance (Richards and Rodgers, 1995), that is, errors are not tolerated. A point to note is that although language taught under this method is situation based, it is not necessarily contextualized.

A typical structural method which has its roots in behaviorism (Richards and Rodgers, 1995), the audio lingual method is informed by a theory which views language as a system of rule governed structures which are hierarchically arranged (Nunan, 1995). Because language is viewed as habit formation, learning activities in this method include memorization of structure based

dialogues, repetition, substitution, transformation and translation drills (Krashen, 1995). Another feature of the method, according to Richards and Rodgers (1995), is non-contextualisation of the language used. Furthermore, emphasis is on linguistic competence and accuracy, as production is “expected to be error free” (Krashen, 1995: 129). Apart from the boredom associated with the method, its other major weakness is that, according to Yule (1999: 193), “isolated practice in drilling language patterns bears no resemblance to the interactional nature of actual language use”. Also, the method is teacher dominated (Nunan, 1995).

### **Communicative language teaching**

Next, the researchers focus on the communicative approach and explain some of its salient features. Partly as a reaction to the weaknesses of the structural, grammar-based methods described earlier, especially the situational language teaching which had risen to prominence, arose the communicative approach or communicative language teaching (CLT) (Richards and Rodgers, 1995; Lucantoni, 2002). The approach was partially a reaction against the artificiality of ‘pattern-practice’ and also against the belief that “consciously learning the grammar of a language will necessarily result in an ability to use the language” (Yule, 1999: 193).

CLT is based on a theory of language as a system of expression of meaning, the primary function of language being interaction and communication (Nunan, 1995). Mhundwa (1998) also stresses the importance of meaning in CLT, which is what motivates learners to master the target language. There is a subservience and subordination of form to function. The focus is on communicative competence rather than on linguistic or grammatical competence.

Another characteristic of CLT is that classroom communication is planned and presented in ways that stimulate real life situations (Mhundwa, 1998). Richards and Rodgers (1995) give examples of functional communicative activities as: giving and following directions, solving problems, using clues, conversations, dialogues, role plays and debates, all of which should not be memorized since, speech by its very nature, is spontaneous. Such communicative activities facilitate co-operation and group work is one of the techniques that stimulate natural language activity in discussion and conversation (Brumfit, 1984). There is need for students to interact more with each other than with the teacher because CLT is both learner-centred and experience-based.

Richards and Rodgers (1995) observe that in CLT, there should be no pre-specification of what language the students will use. Mhundwa (1998) sees the topic and communicative goals of students as the major determinants of CLT content. The content should therefore be determined by the speaker or writer (language learner

in relation to demands of a specific task (Brumfit, 1984).

Another feature of CLT is that it discourages over-correction of language errors by the teacher as it distracts from the message (Brumfit, 1984). This is a view shared by Brown (1987), who believes in the absence or infrequency of error correction so that language learners are not discouraged in their endeavour to communicate. Corder in Richards (1974) goes to the extent of viewing errors as being useful to both the teacher and the learner. To the teacher, errors determine how far the learner has progressed towards the language learning. To the learner, errors are evidence of learning.

In CLT, the teacher assumes the role of facilitator, guide, participant, resource organizer, resource himself, learner, needs analyst and counselor. Covert rather than overt teaching is the norm (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). During the performance of an activity, students should not normally be aware of intervention by the teacher as teacher but as a communicator (Brumfit, 1984). This emphasizes the role of the teacher as a participant. Yet, another important aspect of CLT is its advocacy for the judicious use of the learners’ native language in the learning of the target language. The use of translation and code-switching where learners need or benefit from it is permissible (Richards and Rodgers, 1995).

CLT treats language in context rather than as isolated units of meaning. Classroom activities are aimed at the situational and contextualized use of particular language (Piepho in Candlin, 1981). In light of this, Allen and Spada in Jordan (1983) call for the provision of rich highly contextualized linguistic input to language learners. CLT, therefore, discourages drills and rote learning, which by their nature are not normally contextualized.

As for teaching materials in CLT, Richards and Rodgers (1995) advocate the use of realia, that is, authentic materials drawn from real life. These could include magazines, advertisements, newspapers, maps, pictures, graphs, charts and objects. It is around that realia that communicative activities can be built. Nunan (1995) refers to these as task-based materials that play the primary role of promoting communicative language use.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

The study employed the survey method so as to enable the researchers to establish the prevailing approach to the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Both the qualitative and the quantitative techniques were employed through the use of the questionnaire and document analysis.

### **Population, sample and sampling procedure**

The target population for the study was male and female teachers who were trained at various secondary teachers’ colleges and universities, to teach English Language. Their minimum qualifications were either a Certificate in Education (CE), a Diploma in

**Table 1.** Summary of results from questionnaire.

| Items on questionnaire   | Response | Number | Common reason(s)   |
|--|----------|--------|--|
| Repetition, memorization, drills and substitution should be central techniques.  | Yes      | 24     | Such techniques result in accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. These are tried and tested techniques. Pupils do not seem to enjoy them.  |
|  | No       | 6      |  |
|  | Unsure   | 0      |  |
| Definition and explanation of language structures and learning of grammar rules should be prominent features of language teaching. | Yes      | 30     | These will result in language mastery.   |
|  | No       | 0      |  |
|  | Unsure   | 0      |  |
| Language should always be taught in context.   | Yes      | 4      | Contextualization aids understanding. In life language is used in context. Pupils can understand structures out of context. Our own teachers did not always contextualize language teaching. |
|  | No       | 23     |  |
|  | Unsure   | 3      |  |
| Accuracy is more important than fluency.   | Yes      | 27     | The final examination tests accuracy. Accuracy does not translate into ability.  |
|  | No       | 3      |  |
| Communicative competence is more important than linguistic/grammatical competence.   | Yes      | 6      | The whole aim of language learning is ability to communicate. It is linguistic competence which results in communicative competence.   |
|  | No       | 22     |  |
| The teacher should be a central figure in the English Language lesson.   | Yes      | 29     | If the teacher does not take a leading role pupils may not learn. The teacher knows what pupils should do. Learning is for pupils, not for the teacher.                                      |
|  | No       | 1      |  |
|  | Unsure   | 0      |  |
| Pupils' language errors should not be tolerated and so they should be swiftly corrected.   | Yes      | 30     | The final examination does not tolerate errors. Errors show lack of mastery of target language   |
|  | No       | 0      |  |
|  | Unsure   | 0      |  |
| Code-switching and use of learners' L1 should be allowed in L2 learning.   | Yes      | 3      | These may assist the learners in expressing themselves. This may result in inter-lingual errors. There is no room for code-switching and use of learners' L1 in the final examination.       |
|  | No       | 26     |  |
|  | Unsure   | 1      |  |
| Language teaching should largely focus on language functions.  | Yes      | 3      | Language functions encourage real-life language use. It's difficult to teach all language functions.   |
|  | No       | 26     |  |
|  | Unsure   | 1      |  |

Table 1. Contd.

|   |        |    |  |
|---|--------|----|--|
| L2 learners should achieve native-speaker- like pronunciation.                              | Yes    | 22 | This shows evidence of mastery of the target language.   |
|   | No     | 5  | Understandable pronunciation should be acceptable.   |
|   | Unsure | 3  | -  |
| Group work should be a central technique in language teaching.                              | Yes    | 10 | Group work encourages language use through communication.<br>Group work promotes learner participation.                            |
|   | No     | 19 | Group work wastes valuable learning time.<br>Group work is difficult to monitor.<br>Some pupils may not participate in group work. |
|   | Unsure | 1  | -  |
| The teacher should determine the language for pupils to use in the English Language Lesson. | Yes    | 30 | Learners cannot determine the language to learn.<br>The teacher knows what language is good for pupils.                            |
|   | No     | 0  |  |
|   | Unsure | 0  |  |

Education (Dip Ed), and/ or degree in English. All of the teachers were currently teaching English Language in secondary schools in the Masvingo urban and peri- urban zone. Out of the fifteen secondary schools in and around Masvingo city, ten were purposively sampled so as to include urban day, urban boarding, mission boarding, private boarding, and peri-urban day secondary schools. From the selected schools, a total of 30 teachers of English Language were purposively sampled on the basis of them being trained teachers of English with at least 2 years post-training teaching experience. 3 teachers were selected from each of the ten 10 schools, to complete a semi-structured questionnaire. 30 selected teachers were also requested to avail their scheme- cum plan books for analysis by the researchers. The researchers focused on lesson objectives, planned teacher pupil activities and the accompanying learning aids.

#### Data collection techniques

##### Questionnaire

A semi- structured questionnaire was distributed in the 10 selected schools, to the 30 English Language teachers. The questionnaire sought information about the teachers' preferences for either the structural or the communicative

approach to the teaching of English Language. Items on the questionnaire required the respondent to indicate with either a 'yes' or 'no' or 'unsure', whether the stated aspects and techniques, from both the structural and communicative approach were central to his or her teaching of English Language. Items focused on, among others, rote learning and drilling, contextual teaching of items, grammatical and communicative competence, group techniques, and the teacher's roles. Each item sought the respondent's reasons for the choice, thereby affording the respondents an opportunity to justify their preferred techniques.

##### Document analysis

The documents analysed were thirty (30) scheme-cum plan books (scheme books combined with plan books). These documents provided further insights into the preferred approach to English Language teaching by teachers, by focusing on lesson objectives, teacher- pupil activities, and learning aids.

##### Data analysis

Data analysis began as soon as the questionnaire was returned and documents were availed. Due to the relatively

large amounts of data collected, data were grouped according to the collection instruments used, that is, the questionnaire and document analysis. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, through tables and descriptions, respectively. The patterns which emerged from the questionnaire and document analysis made it possible for the researchers to establish the prevailing approach to English Language teaching in Masvingo urban and peri- urban secondary schools

## RESULTS

Data gathered are presented here. The data from the questionnaire is presented first and thereafter, from document analysis. Table 1 gives a summary of the results from questionnaire.

##### Document analysis

An analysis of thirty scheme-cum plan books (scheme books combined with plan books) revealed that teachers' objectives focus on definition

**Table 2.** Key verbs used to formulate objectives.

| Verbs     | Usage  |
|-----------|--|
| Define    | -e.g. verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, synonyms, antonyms, countable and uncountable, proper nouns, mass nouns, simple, complex and compound sentences, relative pronouns, prefixes and suffixes, regular and irregular verbs, etc<br>-manner, character, attitude, reaction, mood, and feelings as applied to register or oral communication.<br>-a topic sentence, developer, and terminator. |
| Change    | -e.g. verbs into the simple past, the past participle, the present continuous etc.<br>-sentences from direct to indirect speech and vice versa.<br>-adjectives into the comparative and the superlative form.<br>-nouns into their plural form.  |
| Form      | -e.g. words using given prefixes and suffixes.<br>-adjectives from nouns.<br>-adverbs from adjectives<br>-different tenses from given regular and irregular verbs.   |
| Use       | -e.g. different parts of speech correctly in sentences.<br>-learnt vocabulary items correctly in sentences.  |
| Select    | -e.g. correct spellings from given lists.<br>-correct word forms to fill in blank spaces in sentences.<br>-correct words from pairs of homophones.<br>-correct prepositions in sentences.<br>-relevant points from a read passage.   |
| Give      | -e.g. synonyms and antonyms of given words.<br>-meanings of selected words and phrases from a read passage.  |
| Identify  | -e.g. someone's manner character, attitude, mood, feelings, and likely reaction in given situations.   |
| Answer    | -e.g. lower order and higher order comprehension questions.  |
| Join      | -e.g. words, clauses, and sentences.   |
| Punctuate | -e.g. phrases and sentences correctly.   |
| Pronounce | -selected words correctly.   |
| Fill in   | -blank spaces with correct words and phrases.  |

definition and explanation of language structures and their formation, and identification and use in sentences. The objectives also focus on changing verbs, nouns and adjectives from one part of speech to another. Table 2 shows some of the key verbs used to formulate objectives sampled from the thirty scheme-cum plan books.

The objectives also showed that the language structures are taught in isolation, that is, they are not contextualized. Furthermore, the teaching of language structures is usually at word level and phrase level and

never goes beyond sentence level. In addition, the objectives portrayed that though the teaching of comprehension and vocabulary are passage based therefore contextualized, sometimes vocabulary items are taught in isolation, for example, synonyms and antonyms.

The lesson activities identified showed that teachers play very active roles in the English language lessons. The following is a sample of teacher roles stated in the scheme- cum plans:

- i. Defining language structures for pupils and explaining grammatical rules
- ii. Explaining meanings of words and phrases from passages
- iii. Correcting pupils' individual and common grammatical errors, pronunciation mistakes, spelling errors and others as they occur
- iv. Leading in pattern practice through drills
- v. Acting as models for pupils to imitate
- vi. Calling out selected words (spellings) to pupils
- vii. Reading a passages aloud to pupils
- viii. Provision of the language to be learnt

The lesson activities also revealed that pupils' roles range from passive, through responsive, to active roles. Pupils' activities identified from the scheme books/ plan books include:

- i. Listening to the teacher's definitions of language structures and explanations of grammar rules
- ii. Imitating the teacher or repeating what he or she has said
- iii. Memorizing grammar rules
- iv. Taking part in pattern drills
- v. Responding to oral questions
- vi. Silent and loud reading
- vii. Individual writing
- viii. Memorizing dialogues

As for learning aids, the scheme books/ plan books showed a glaring lack of meaningful learning aids, with textbooks and the chalkboard often indicated as learning aids in most cases. In some cases the scheme books/ plan books did not even have a column for learning aids.

## DISCUSSION

It is evident from the information shown in the tables that English Language teachers in Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools prefer the structural approach to the communicative approach in their teaching. The fact that 24 out of the 30 teachers who completed the questionnaire believed that repetition, memorization, dialogues, drills, and substitution should be central techniques point to the teachers' belief in structural approach based methods such as the grammar-translation method, situational language teaching and audiolingualism (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). The main reason given by the teachers for believing that repetition, memorization and related activities should take centre stage is that the activities will result in grammatical accuracy, which is the primary goal of the structural approach (Widdowson, 1991). Results from document analysis show that the teachers actually adopt Structural Approach based learner activities such as listening to the teacher, repetition and memorization.

All the 30 teachers believed that defining language structures and learning of grammar rules is of paramount importance. The main reason advanced was that this will result in learners mastering the language. This belief is put into practice, as the majority of lesson objectives in the teachers' scheme cum plans (see results from document analysis) actually focus on definition and explanation of language structures, their formation, identification, and transformation from one part of speech to another. Focus is therefore on form rather than meaning, which is a major characteristic of structuralism informed methods (Richards and Rodgers, 1995; Krashen, 1995). It is not surprising, therefore, that only 6 out of the 30 teachers who participated in the study believed that communicative competence is more important than linguistic competence, with 22 apparently believing that linguistic competence is more important, the main reason being that linguistic competence will result in communicative competence, a view rejected by Yule (1999: 193) who asserts that "isolated practice in drilling language patterns bears no resemblance to the interactional nature of actual language use".

Only 4 of the respondents agreed that language should always be taught in context, giving the reason that it aids meaning and that in life language is used in context, while 23 believed in teaching English Language out of context, which is consistent with the structural approach (Nunan, 1995). The major reason given by teachers for believing in teaching English out of context was that their own teachers successfully taught them that way, suggesting that one of the reasons why teachers stuck to the structural approach is conservatism. The lesson objectives and the teacher-pupil activities shown under the results from document analysis show that indeed most of the language teaching done in Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools is not contextualised and the teaching focuses on the word, the phrase and mostly the sentence level. Richards and Rodgers (1995) observe that in the grammar-translation method the basic unit of teaching and language practice is the sentence.

Item 4 on the table shows that 27 of the 30 teachers regarded accuracy as more important than fluency, the main reason given being that the examination tests accuracy more. Only 3 rejected this view, rightly arguing that accuracy does not automatically translate into fluency. The fact that the majority believed accuracy is more important than fluency suggests the dominance of the structural approach, which could be attributed to what Nkosana (1998) calls the examination wash back effect.

All the 30 teachers agreed that pupils' language errors should not be tolerated and so they should be swiftly corrected. This is consistent with their belief, that accuracy is more important than fluency. The two main reasons given for this negative attitude towards errors were that errors are evidence of lack of accuracy, and that the 'O' Level English examination does not tolerate errors. This attitude of the teachers towards errors

provides further evidence of their preference of the Structural Approach to English Language teaching. In the oral approach or situational language teaching, which was informed by the structural approach, accuracy in pronunciation and grammar are of paramount importance (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). Results from document analysis show that one of the recurring teachers' roles was correcting pupils' common mistakes. The teachers' obsession with accuracy is also further proved by the fact that in Item 10, 22 out of the 30 teachers believed that L1 learners should achieve native speaker-like pronunciation, saying inaccurate pronunciation is a weakness. One of the major teachers' activities, as shown under results from document analysis, was reading passages aloud as pupils listened. The aim was obviously for pupils to imitate the teachers' accurate pronunciation, in keeping with the structural approach (Nunan, 1995).

As many as twenty nine (29) of the respondents believed that the teacher should play a central role in the English Language lesson. The main reason given was that the teacher knows what pupils should do and if he plays a passive role, no learning will take place. According to Richards and Rodgers (1995: 56), this teacher dominance in a language lesson is synonymous with audiolingualism and situational language teaching (structural methods) in which "the teacher models the target language, controls the direction and pace of learning and monitors and corrects the learners' performance." Results from document analysis also show that the teachers perform a myriad of roles, indicating that they put their belief in teacher dominance into practice.

Item 9 on the table reveals that only 3 of the 30 respondents believed that language teaching should largely focus on language functions, while 26 responded with a 'No', arguing that it is difficult to teach all language functions. This implies non- adoption of communicative language teaching, obviously in preference of structural methods.

Results from the questionnaire also show that only 3 out of the 30 respondents thought code switching and the use of the learners' L1 should be allowed in L2 (English) lessons, while 26 thought otherwise, giving the reason that the final examination gives pupils no room for code switching and using the L1, and that inter lingual errors may result. The teachers' rejection of code switching and use of the students' native language is consistent with the structural approach informed audiolingualism (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983 In: Richards and Rodgers, 1995).

Only ten (10) of the respondents were in favor of group work as a central technique, while nineteen (19) rejected it, arguing that it wastes time and that more able pupils may dominate group discussions, resulting in the less able not learning. This preference of non- group techniques implies a rejection of CLT, which advocates group work as a central technique which encourages

communication.

Item 12 from the questionnaire shows that all the thirty (30) respondents believed that the teacher should determine the language for pupils to use in the English Language lesson. This is consistent with audiolingualism, a structural method in which the teacher is expected to specify the language that students are to use (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983 in Richards and Rodgers, 1995).

Results from document analysis show that the teachers rely heavily on the textbook as a source of material and the chalkboard as a learning aid. This is in keeping with the structural approach rather than CLT, which advocates the use of realia (Nunan 1995; Richards and Rodgers, 1995).

Lesson objectives identified in the scheme books/ plan books analysed also revealed that though the teaching of comprehension and to some extent vocabulary is text-based and hence contextualized, the teaching- learning activities showed that the main techniques are oral question and answer sessions followed by pupil answering questions individually in writing, rather than pupils' working together on comprehension tasks that promote meaningful communication. This point towards a structural approach to comprehension teaching. What is more, the selection of lists of vocabulary items for definition and explanation is a major tenet defining structural methods such as Situational Language Teaching (Nunan, 1995; Richards and Rodgers, 1995; Yule, 1999). Another point noted from the objectives was that sometimes vocabulary items were taught in isolation, for example synonyms and antonyms.

The lesson objectives and learning activities identified revealed that in the teaching of register, teachers contrived real life situations on which questions were based. This is in keeping with CLT. However, merely asking pupils how they or someone would react to the situations and merely matching given situations to appropriate responses does not constitute real communication and authentic language use. Also, asking pupils to define manner, character, attitude and reaction then come up with words to describe someone's manner, character, attitude and reaction to given situations are dry and lifeless activities associated with the Structural Approach. This is despite the fact that the ZIMSEC 'O' Level English Syllabus (1122) (1996:7) clearly states:

"Role play is an ideal way to teach register. Pupils must be given practice speaking in a variety of situations."

The lesson objectives further revealed that the 'teaching' of composition writing is largely structural as evidenced by the teachers' definition and explanation of terms such as 'discourse markers', 'factual', 'narrative', 'descriptive', 'discursive', 'expository', 'formal letter', 'informal letter', 'report', 'article', and others. Although some of the composition topics identified reflected real life situations, others did not. These include, 'If I were a dog', 'Life in space', 'A day in the life of a motor car' and



'If I were a tree'.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has established that although the ZIMSEC 'O' Level English Language syllabus advocates the communicative approach to the teaching of English Language, teachers in Zimbabwe as represented by those teaching English in Masvingo urban and peri-urban secondary schools - prefer the Structural Approach and related methods. Results from both the questionnaire and the document analysis employed in this study have revealed the dominance of the Structural Approach. Evidence includes focus on grammatical structures and linguistic competence, proliferation of repetition, memorization and substitution techniques, non-contextualisation of language teaching, non-tolerance of errors, preoccupation with accuracy, and teacher-dominated lessons. Although results from the questionnaire indicate that at least some of the teachers believe that communicative activities promote realistic English Language learning, in practice they resort to structural methods, if the lesson objectives and learning activities identified in the scheme books/ plan books are anything to go by.

One possible explanation for this dominance of the Structural Approach over CLT could be that the teachers lack knowledge of what CLT really is. This raises doubts whether teachers' colleges and universities are doing enough in sensitizing would-be English teachers on CLT. Another reason, which is implied from results from the questionnaire, is that the teachers are conservative and so are unwilling to experiment with new methods which are different from those with which they themselves were taught English Language.

In light of the findings of this research, we make the following recommendations:

1. Universities and teachers colleges should prioritise CLT in their English syllabi, so as to avert the existing scenario whereby the teachers they train revert to the traditional structural approach with its host of weaknesses emanating from the behaviorist theory of language teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 1995; Nunan, 1995; Yule, 1993).
2. Through regional education offices, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture should, through monitoring, ensure that teachers implement CLT as stipulated in the syllabus.
3. The Ministry could also mount workshops for teachers of English, where teachers should be sensitized or re-sensitized to the concept of CLT. This could result in a paradigm shift from structural methods to CLT, which focuses on language in real-life situations, places emphases on meaning, discourages teacher-dominance and encourages use of learning aids from the real world, among other advantages.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researchers would like to acknowledge that though the sample taken from the Masvingo urban and peri-urban cluster is made up of qualitatively different schools, it could be too small to be adequately representative of the situation obtaining in the whole country. Nevertheless, the sample offers some useful insights. Also, the study could have been broadened by including in the sample junior secondary teachers and those who teach the A-Level General Paper (English).

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