



POSTMETHOD ENGLISH LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY AND ITS 21ST C UNDERSTANDING: A RETHINKING

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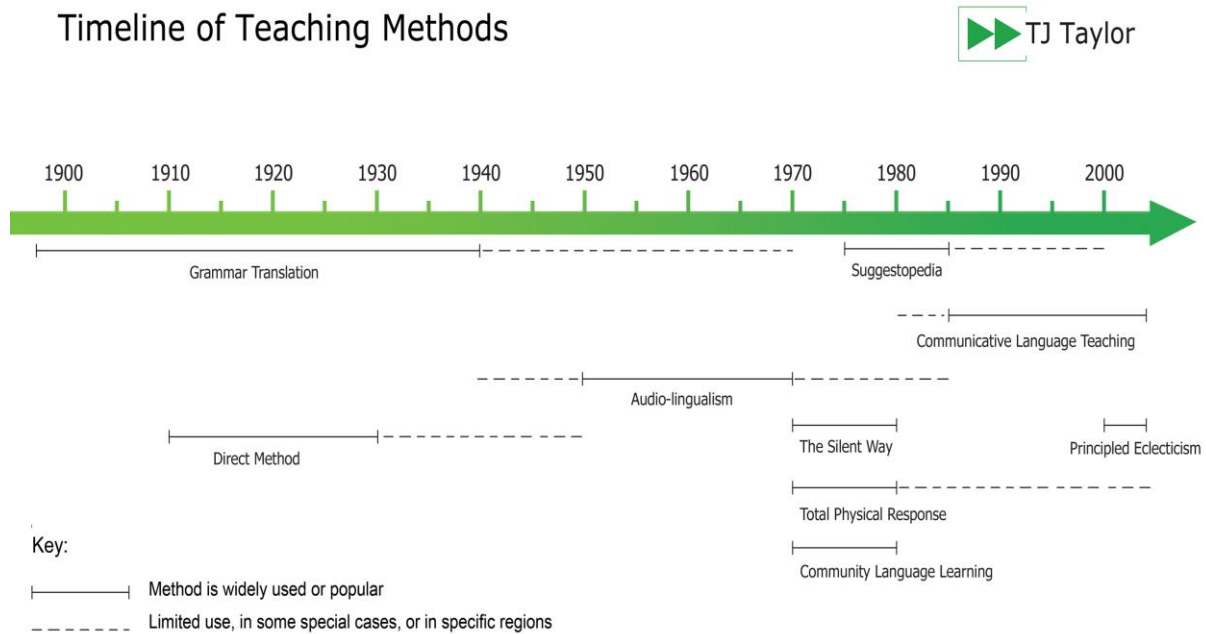
Abstract: English language education and the increasing demand of English as medium of instruction has proliferated the issues and challenges in language teaching, especially English in India and its rural ESL contexts. The problem is multifarious – its understanding, practices, translation, materials, methods, skills etc. at various levels. The revolutionary use of ICT in English language classrooms has expanded new possibilities in its pedagogy and development. In the context, the paper is triggered to have a justified and critical view on the development of English language teaching (ELT) from a ‘method era’ to ‘postmethod era’ following its adaptations. Adding to it, the new look of the postmethod pedagogy in the 21st c must be accepted with the changing needs of the time. Further, it tries to explore the present understanding revolving around ELT in the functional English language classrooms and multifaceted responsibilities of its shareholders.

Index Terms: pedagogy, ELT, method era, postmethod era

INTRODUCTION

The enormous expansion of English language in the past decades has resulted its teaching and learning in the global context. The goals of English language teaching and learning have changed over time with the new demands of social and global circumstances. New innovations, methodologies, and approaches to teaching English language have shown their own pluses and minuses. The so-called Classical Method that came to be known as Grammar Translation Method(GTM) of the nineteenth century virtually did nothing for the learner’s communicative ability in the target language. As quoted in Brown(2007), regarding GTM, it is “remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.6). Subsequently, the other methods, i.e. Direct Method, Audio-Lingualism, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and The Natural Approach were too found less contributory in communicative development of learners. The following timeline will help us glancing at chronological evolution of language teaching

methods. And Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT), being the successor of them, has been a remarkable and realizing landmark in the history of language teaching, especially English. Otherwise known as communicative approach (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), CLT embarked upon communicative competence of the learners. Unlike other approaches to language teaching that focused more on accuracy rather fluency, it rang the changes in English, as a second language, teaching and learning with a new taste to this day. CLT came of age with a communicative competence goal. Its means and ultimate goal of study is meaningful interaction (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).



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However, the recent advancements in information technology (IT) have infused CLT leading it in a new trend. It has empowered the 21st c language classrooms making it engaging and interesting with a variety of choices – the texts, the modes, the tests, the supplements, and opportunities. This century is, thus, referred to as the ‘postmethod era’ by scholars of the field (Kumaravadevelu, 2003; Brown, 2007 to name a few).

THE POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGIC TRENDS IN ELT

a. English for social responsibilities in learners: With the advancement of knowledge and economy, the goal of English Language Teaching (ELT) has been changed, as quoted by Boraie (2013) from Penny Ur (2009), “to produce fully competent English-knowing bilinguals rather than imitation of native speakers”, and to view English as means of communication to learn content subjects, i.e. science and mathematics. “English educators have realized that many language learners know more than two languages” (Sun, 2014). She opines that it is not any more teaching second language simply, rather it has been replaced by teaching English for social responsibilities (TESR). The objective of the invention has been changed from communicative competence to social responsibilities – a part of life skills and social competency. No matter how fluent one is! The success of teaching cannot be measured from this rather how far one is aware of world issues, has social conscience, raises

cultural consciousness, maximizes learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and uses his /her communication skills for international relations, human welfare and environmental protection. The importance of teaching English has been shifted to producing responsible citizens, competent language users, and constructive social change agents in the postmethod era.

b. Principled eclecticism: In the words of Widdowson (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, pp. 30), “It is quite common to hear teachers say that they do not subscribe to any particular approach or method in their teaching but are ‘eclectic’. They, thereby, avoid commitment to any current fad that comes up on the whirligig of fashion.” No method of teaching is full-fledged and if one expects a method to be fit in his/her teaching, there happens no more creation and development. The then established methods of language teaching proved to have some lacunae thereby emerging, out of such a turmoil and muddle, principled eclecticism – an enlightened approach to teaching language in the twenty-first century. “In this newer mode of viewing the profession”, Brown (2007) writes, “teachers *are* researchers and are charged with the responsibility of reflecting on their own practice.” He adds on saying that the profession, perhaps, has reached its peak reasonably that the variety of language learners in multifarious contexts demands “an eclectic blend of tasks, each tailored for a specified group of learners studying for particular purposes in geographic, social, and political contexts.”

c. Understanding postmethod: Kumaravedivelu(2003) defines, ‘Postmethod pedagogy allows us to go beyond, and overcome the limitations of, method-based pedagogy’. Broadly, he uses the term *pedagogy* to include issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures and also a wide range of historio-politico-sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education. Postmethod need not imply the end of methods but rather an understanding of the limitations of the notion of method and a desire to transcend those limitations”, quoting Bell, Brown(2007) writes. There are three qualities of the postmethod condition Kumaravadivelu(2003) explores. The first looks for ‘an alternative to method, not an alternative method.’ The postmethod condition enables practitioners to generate location-specific, classroom-oriented innovative strategies. ‘Teacher’s autonomy’ helps develop a critical approach to teaching autonomously realizing, observing, analysing and evaluating own classroom practices with a view to developing it, the second observes. In its Executive Summary emphasizing autonomy, the NCF (2005, pp. vii) says, “...These include independence of thought and action, sensitivity to others’ well-being and feelings, learning to respond to new situations in a flexible and creative manner, predisposition towards participation in democratic processes, and the ability to work towards and contribute to economic processes and social change.” The autonomy here is not complete in itself but to some extent. “I should have some autonomy; I should not have my curriculum dictated to me,” emphasizes Nate Bowling, the 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year in a conversation with Bill Gates. The third attribute of the postmethod condition is ‘principled pragmatism’ which is based on pragmatics of pedagogy that focuses on shaping and reshaping classroom learning as a result of the second attribute.

d. Integrating IT in ELT for knowledge generation: In the very last decade of the 21st c, the proliferation in access of smart technology and multimedia gadgets has exploded knowledge in terms of flexibility and mobility (Boraie, 2013). She believes that the textbooks will disappear in a few years. Techno-literacy of this century

contributes significantly to the interaction inside and outside the classroom. It has opened possibilities to both the ends – the teachers and the learners. The use of internet, YouTube, Web 2.0 and further, e-books, free learning sites and various other websites have brought drastic change in controlling information, preparing lessons, curricular modification, pedagogical changes, evaluating classroom practices, self-paced learning resources, etc. The economic and proper use of IT can bring the classroom real-life easily, thereby engaging the hi-tech learners effectively. Appropriate integration of technology in classrooms encourages students to use language in many different ways (Sun, 2014). Information exchange has been the best idea through internet between different parts of the world staying back at home. Students benefit highly sharing study materials, clearing doubts, solving problems, creating new things, exploring opportunities... Underhill (n.d.) writes that networking, interest and support groups are the inherent part of the 21st c English classrooms. E-communication has made all these possible huge range of networking possibilities including special interest groups(SIGs), support groups, discussion and chat rooms, etc. Consequently, experience of many others is shared that enables us to create 'local knowledge' relating to our own needs. This, in turn, has enabled us to become a bit less dependent on the knowledge created by experts and authority. This way, to Underhill (n.d.), "we are able to participate in the generation of knowledge and knowledge itself becomes a process rather than a finished product."

e. Teachers' CPD in the interdisciplinary world: In the 21st c classrooms the roles and responsibilities have multiplied in the part of teacher. He is not just a classroom facilitator rather a producer and creator of productive classroom environment that enables the learners to be skilled for the century's workplace. "Teachers have the opportunities to co-teach, team-teach, and collaborate with other teachers from other disciplines" Sun (2014) adds. NCF (2005) reiterates, "the new emphasis is on the softening of subject boundaries so that children can get a taste of integrated knowledge and the joy of understanding." Continuing professional development (CPD) of the language teachers can only help him to stay updated and effective. It helps the teacher, NCFTE(2009) recommends, explore, reflect on and develop one's own practice. It helps to 'break intellectual isolation' by staying connected with the fellow practitioners. Sun(2014) claims that these are essential to make our students be effective users of English and responsible global citizens, and also to make us be reflective practitioners and critical social agents of the century's globalized English. Reflective practice and teacher learning is about, as Underhill (n.d.) means, questioning and exploring own teaching practices. It helps in developing portfolio of teachers in which they can record their own achievement and progress, their teaching beliefs and values including materials developed, feedback from peers and learners, test results, problems and difficulties faced and worked through, observation notes, plans and diary, etc. Portfolios help the teachers to shape their future action and to view their work critically and from multiple perspectives.

It is not denying the fact that our(Indian) pedagogic practices are imitative mostly since ages. We have not set our classrooms adapting our own indigenous techniques which would eventually ground the learning of the target language stronger. NEP (2020, pp 13) suggests for bilingual approach to teaching and learning a language and multilingual if so needed. It emphatically points "*...children pick up languages extremely quickly between the*

ages

of 2 and 8 and that multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards.” With a great support to previous education policies NEP-2020 furthers multilingual school curriculum promoting three-language formula as envisioned in earlier policies of education. Essentially, English is one of the three languages, however, indigenous and generative approaches to language learning and teaching is highly desired.

THE GENERATIVE TRENDS (*Deshi Paralinguistic Techniques*) IN ELT

a. Mass singing, rhyming and drilling: Mass singing and guided drilling has yielded improvements in learning critical areas of pronunciation specially. An experiment was done by the author in two Odia medium schools to see whether the effect is significant. The following are two objectives set -

1. To find out the causes of pronouncing English words with fricatives /f, v, z, ʃ, ʒ/ inaccurately;
2. To investigate the effect of the use of tongue twisters as a language game in pronouncing the words with fricatives /f, v, z, ʃ, ʒ/.

The investigator, before treating the participants, videotapes the production on the given task (pre-treatment task). He intervenes, then, in the process giving the basics of sounds for two days, exposes them to mouth and tongue exercises through minimal pairs like ‘fan’ and ‘van’ for two days, and uses tongue twister words and sentences for about four days. Another video recording of the students’ progress is done after the treatment using a similar and parallel task (post-treatment task). The movement of mouth organs like lips, jaws, tongue, teeth was recorded and observed. It was found that the students need to be exposed more to language drills and games like tongue twisters, rhymes, and other pronunciation exercises. The language teachers have a great role in the use of such language activities in the speaking exercises and reading classes. Listening activities must be prioritized to lead the learners to a better speaking environment. As we listen, so we pronounce. So, authentic listening materials must be practised for proper clarity in speech and intelligibility in speaking.

b. Teasing, imitating and mirroring: In my classrooms, students having issues with pronunciation of words with /f & v/, I try to use the teasing procedure and help them imitate how the lower lip comes in contact with upper teeth which consequently helps them pronounce accurately. Of course, learners find it funny, sometimes correlating teasing to their childhood naughtiness. However, guided practice with these techniques helps them greatly.

These approaches may not look indigenous to English language teaching but their ways and methods can be modified according to our own circumstances.

THE IMPLICATIONS

- a. The English teaching fraternity and curriculum developers will explore a new insight in teaching the language in the postmethod era with the CPD paradigm.
- b. The students and parents may be aware of new trends and developments in 21st c ELT well in advance.

- c. The practising teachers and curriculum designers will tailor their English language curriculum according to their socio-politico-economic circumstances.
- d. All the shareholders of English language education (ELE) will be well aware of the importance of techno-literacy and the use of ICT integrated pedagogy in the postmethod situation.
- e. The English language teachers and learners will play their new roles and responsibilities with the emerging trends in their respective societies.
- f. The *Deshi* Paralinguistic Techniques in ELT will help the practitioners surely with a greater effect.

CONCLUSION

As a language of mainstream in the postmodern era, English has expanded its circles. It is no more in the centre – the English speaking countries. We have seen the English language world here with the emerging trends in the field. The understanding of the postmethod developments in ELE arms us and paves the way with the new approaches and techniques for upcoming situation, thereby suiting to the new demands and trends. The technology-integrated literacy and pedagogy will certainly bring challenges; however, the critical understanding of the situation will resolve half of the problems in itself.

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