An Introduction on Post-Method Condition

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Abstract

The article briefly outlined the main schools and methods that made up the past and present landscape of language teaching. The purpose of this paper was to offer an introduction to teachings methods, generally, and post-method condition, specifically, for those who were beginning their studies in this field or whose knowledge of language teaching is tangential. Then it gave a brief overview of different teaching methods and, afterwards, elaborates on post-method condition. Throughout this paper, we will be covering three important characteristics of post method. First we concentrated on the concept of method which was rejected and substituted by another alternative definition. The second characteristic was teacher's autonomy which put different and new burdens on the shoulders of teachers. The final feature was sense of plausibility in which subjective evaluation of the teacher of himself is highly appreciated and backed.

Keywords: plausibility, post method teaching, teacher's autonomy

Introduction

Kumaravadivelu (1994, p. 10) states that "post-method is supposed to be an alternative to *method*". It enjoys a truly different atmosphere compared to other methods in language teaching. Basically, it rejects the assumptions, principles, rules of all previous methods. It established new rules and principles. Since 1994, the concept of post method has come into existence.

Current state of language teaching field

The English language teaching tradition has been subject to tremendous change, especially throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps more than any other discipline, this tradition has been practiced in language classrooms all around the world for centuries. While the teaching of Physics, for instance, has remained the same, this is hardly the case with language teaching. There are some milestones in the development of this language teaching, which we will briefly discuss.

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Throughout English teaching history, several times it has been claimed that only one method works for teaching English. The examples are numerous including Audiolingualism, Direct method, Grammar translation, Suggestopiedia, Community language learning, Task-based language learning, to name but a few.

The first traditional method was Grammar Translation method. There was no provision for the oral use of the languages under study; after all, both Latin and Greek were not being taught for oral communication but for the sake of their speakers' becoming "scholarly?" or creating an illusion of 'erudition.'

The outbreak of World War II heightened the need for Americans to become orally proficient in the languages of their allies and enemies alike. The Audio-lingual Method was based on linguistic and psychological theory and one of its main premises was the scientific descriptive analysis of a wide assortment of languages. On the other hand, conditioning and habit formation models of learning put forward by behaviorist psychologists were married with the pattern practices of the Audio-lingual Method. The following points sum up the characteristics of the method:

- Dependence on mimicry and memorization of set phrases.
- Teaching structural patterns by means of repetitive drills
- No grammatical explanation
- Learning vocabulary in context
- Use of tapes and visual aids
- Focus on pronunciation
- Immediate reinforcement of correct responses

At this point of time, two crucial changes occurred: first language teaching focus shifted from memorizing grammars and vocabularies to enabling students to be *use* the langue in the real context. Then, the Chomsky's model rejected behaviorists theory and language was learning was not considered only a matter of habit-formation.

At this juncture, we should say that Communicative Language Teaching is not a method; it is an approach, which transcends the boundaries of concrete methods and, concomitantly, techniques. It is a theoretical position about the nature of language and language learning and teaching.

This was a short analytical history mostly based on Brown, H. D. (2000). The most obvious problem of previous methods is that principles and theories behind these methods and approaches are not derived from classroom activities. Theorists prescribe them in isolation for teachers to follow, regardless of the specific context that learning and teaching is taken place.

History of post method

As a consequence of repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with the limitations of the concept of method and the transmission model of teacher education, the L2

profession is faced with an imperative need to construct a post method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

After a century of proliferation of methods and approaches in language teaching, we have what Kumaravadivelu (1994) coined, and later referred to by Brown (1997) and Richards and Rogers (2001) as 'the post-methods era' in which discussions on language teaching are engaged in without using the word *method or approach*. Nevertheless, the method concept in teaching is still a powerful one as evidenced in a number of new editions of publications widely adopted in MA methods survey courses and teacher training programs (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2001; cited in Zakeri, 2014)

The 1990s witnessed a rare congruence of refreshingly new ideas that can fundamentally restructure second/foreign language teaching and teacher education. Among them are two mutually informing currents of thought: one emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the concept of method with a call to end an alternative way of designing effective teaching strategies (Clarke, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990), and another emphasizes the need to go beyond the limitations of the transmission model of teacher education with a call to end an alternative way of creating efficient teaching professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Woods, 1996).

In spite of the changing status of methods and approaches in language teaching, the study of past and present teaching methods continues to form a significant component in teacher preparation programs because 1) it provides teachers with a view of how language teaching has evolved as a field; 2) teachers can adapt methods and approaches as sources of well-used practice rather than prescriptions to suit their own teaching contexts and needs; and 3) they can provide teachers (especially novice teachers) with basic teaching skills with which they can expand their own teaching repertoire (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The notion of method

The concept of method is severely under-questioned in postmethod (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) pedagogy. In the first place, it might be a good idea to get a clear-cut definition of the concept of method. Larsen Freeman and Martin Anderson (2002, p. 100) define method "a coherent set of links between the actions of a teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions. The actions are the techniques and the thoughts are the principles". So we comprehend that the teacher's actions in a classroom are guided, limited, controlled and finally monitored by a set of principles. As Freeman (2002) states, principles are thoughts which guide teacher's actions; now the questions is whose thoughts are they and how are they formed? Kumaravadivelu (1994) outlines that conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct knowledge-oriented theories of pedagogy to be actualized by practitioners. These thoughts are artificially imported into the classroom; thoughts which are not derived from classroom experience. This is where post-method condition established by Kumaravadivelu asserts its groundbreaking thoughts. "First and foremost, it [post-method condition] signifies a

search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 40).

As quoted above, Kumaravadivelu totally rejects the concept of method and is looking for its alternative. Like Kumaravadivelu and Clarke, Nunan, 1991; Pennycook, 1989; Richards, 1989) agree that there are certain shortcomings with method. Contrary to the claim that method is dead in post-method eyes, some consider the term method to remain an apt description of what teachers do in classrooms (Bell, 2003).

Bell (2003) asserts that supporters of particular designer methods ascribe the failure to realize methods to a lack of understanding of their basic tenets. At the same time, L2 teaching professionals know that what is realized as method in the classroom emerges over time as a result of the interaction among the teacher, the students, and the materials and activities (Richards, 1990). Bell (2003) maintains that this notion of the social construction of method in millions of different classrooms suggests that what is called method is often an a posteriori rationalization of many similar teaching practices rather than an a priori set of prescriptions emanating from one source. However as Richards and Rodgers (2002) put it, methods typically prescribe teacher's what to teach and how to teach. This prescriptivism seems to ignore the uniqueness of the situation which teachers face it. Apparently, it seems a valid counter-evidence that method is artificial (Brown, 2000). Having accepted the argument that the method is derived from interactions in class, we encounter another problem; the fact that they are all generalized up to a universal context. I mean how did the so-called "professional TESOLers" (Bell, 2003) or scholar conclude that this is a method that can employed throughout the world.

Brown (2002) thinks that methods are not based on empirical study as they are too "artful and intuitive" (cited in Can, 2012, p. 10). And finally Richards (2002) asserts that teachers have to accept on faith the theory underlying method. As a result we come up with another key question that "is a method really practical and propitious in a local/specific context?" it seems that we should abide by someone's thoughts and procedures in our classroom.

Teacher's autonomy

The second advantage of post-method which we are going to scrutinize is teacher's autonomy. Post-method significantly highlights the role of the teacher in the classroom. Freeman states the conventional concept of method "overlooks the fund of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching which the teachers already have by virtue of their lives as students" (1991, pp. 34-35; cited in Kumaravadivelu, 1994). However, Richards (1991) and Wallace (1991) mention two important features of teacher's autonomy in postmethod condition: first it recognizes the teachers' potential to know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously; besides, it also promotes the ability of teachers to know how to develop a reflective approach to their own teaching, how to analyze and evaluate their own teaching practice, how to initiate change in their classroom, and how to monitor the effects of such changes (cited in Kumaravadivelu,

1994). These features act like a base for Kumaravadivelu to establish and elaborate on this attribute of post method. He claims that "promoting teacher autonomy means enabling and empowering teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they have theorized" (p. 52). In post method condition the teacher is somewhat at the center learning and teaching process. He is the *one* whose thoughts are followed in the classroom. Nilüfer Can holds that (2012, p. 1): "due to the fact the post method in alternative to method, rather than an alternative method, it does not have the limitations of method."

She further states the value given to teachers should be appreciated because it is the teachers who know their learners and the classroom context best. Post-method teachers are encouraged to develop and create their own methods as they gain experience based on their classroom context and knowledge of other methods and approaches. As a result, the constructed method reflects teachers' beliefs, values and experiences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In this sense, post-method teachers are autonomous, analysts, strategic researchers and decision-makers (Can, 2012). Unlike method-oriented class in which the teacher's only responsibly was to be faithful to the underlying thoughts and principles of a method, in post method classes the teacher implements his own thoughts, use their experience and more prominently he builds up a method which abides by their specific context.

Sense of plausibility

The third characteristic feature of the post method condition is principled pragmatism (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Kumaravadivelu argues that principled pragmatism is different from eclecticism which has long been advocated to overcome the limitations of any given method.

Hammerly (1991) states that, the proponents of eclecticism aim to promote "the careful, principled combination of sound ideas from sound sources into a harmonious whole that yields the best results" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994. p. 60). But there are well-reasoned counter-arguments regarding eclecticism. The most conspicuous one is that this apparently sound combination of ideas may turn into an unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Although eclecticism sound to be a desirable way to remedy the drawbacks of method, but concurrently it is perilous. Choosing different principles and blending them together in an advantageous manner demands high proficiency and field-related experience. Even if the teacher is highly proficient, there are no objective criteria to rely on. Majority of techniques and principles have underlying psychological and scientific thoughts. They may not be visible, but they assert their influence.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) outlines that one of the ways in which teachers can follow principled pragmatism is by developing what Prabhu (1990) calls, *a sense of plausibility*. Teachers' sense of plausibility is their "*subjective understanding of the teaching they do*. This subjective understanding may arise from their own experience as learners and teachers and through professional education and peer consultation; in addition, because

teachers' sense of plausibility is not linked to the concept of method, an important concern is "not whether it implies a good or bad method, but more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

It seems that the second and third features of post method are interrelated. The sense plausibility again is another vital responsibility for the teacher. As Clarke (1994, cited in Can, 2012, p. 3) puts it: "within this framework [post method] teachers play a pivotal role in language classes and the exponential increase and eagerness in taking teachers into account as the focal point of education is manifest in the strikingly increasing number of journal articles dealing with language teacher education" (cited in Khatib, 2012). On the contrary, Akbari (2008) addresses the problem of high work load for the post method teachers (cited in Khatib, 2012). Similarly Khatib (2012) mentions a central problem which is a "very fact requires that a teacher be a critical and a reflective practitioner." Much care should be taken into account that teachers are not the same in their abilities. Not every single teacher is competent and confident enough to be autonomous and draw upon his or her 'sense of plausibility'. And certainly not all the teachers have the time, resources, or the willingness to shoulder the cumbersome responsibilities put upon a post method teacher. This is a true argument which cannot be ignored or even answered easily. As far as teachers' confidence and abilities are concerned, teacher education can prove helpful.

There is a tendency in the literature to name the post method condition as CLT (communicative language learning). Bygate (2001, Cited in Khatib 2012) argue that "communicative language teaching was explicitly a post-method approach to language teaching in which principles underlying the use of different classroom procedures were of paramount importance, rather than a package of teaching materials" (cited in Khatib, 2012). Similarly, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1997) note that the "need for guiding principles [in CLT] is, in fact, not inconsistent with the postmethod perspective" (p. 149). Bell (2003) claims that post method pedagogy can therefore be seen as both an attempt to understand the paradigm shift that L2 education has gone through in the past 40 years and an attempt to unify practices in a more holistic way . Post methodology, therefore, rather than going beyond method, may be understood as a synthesis of various methods under the umbrella of CLT , or what Liu(1995) calls a "method redefining condition" (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell, 1997; cited in Bell, 2003).

Conclusion

As mentioned above in the introduction, three fundamental characteristics were the focal point of our paper: method's notion, teacher's autonomy and sense of plausibility. All were briefly discussed, but the essential point is that post method is an influential turning point in the realm of language teaching. Despite all the well-founded counter-arguments against post method pedagogy, it seems to compensate for the downside of methods. Appreciation and scrupulous attention on specific culture and context of learning and teaching, by itself, is of paramount prominence. Another key concept is that there is no

restrictive set of principles and techniques for the teacher in the framework of a particular method. It allows the instructor to develop his own approach and techniques with respect to the setting in which he is performing. This leads to the autonomy of the teacher. Feeling independent from fixed *unrealistic* assumptions, the teacher has the opportunity to apply his own principled rules. Although this kind of teacher and teaching environment sounds a bit ideal, we can look forward to desirable outcome if appropriate teacher education infrastructure is prepared.

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