

Critical Look at Post-method Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

According to Brown (2002), in the century during mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language teaching profession was mostly engaged in a search for an ideal method, applicable to a wide range of audiences and contexts. When such attempts failed, the concept of eclecticism was proposed, as a sign of discontent on the part of teachers, who found methods falling short of matching all language teaching contexts and situations. Eclecticism can be considered as a reaction to the prescriptive nature of methods, which predetermines the actual context of language before being even employed in a real teaching situation. According to Rivers (1968, cited in Akbari, 2008) eclecticism compensates for shortcomings of methods, on the condition that it is informed eclecticism. Eclecticism also suffers from some weak point like not being based on precise criteria in determining when to choose which method and thus according to Stern (1992, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 196), “the choice is left to the practitioner’s intuitive judgment, and is, therefore, too broad and too vague to be satisfactory as a theory in its own right.” According to Akbari (2008) what has ushered the advent of postmethod era can be considered as eclecticism, which he regards as a primitive form of postmethod or beyond method.

1. Why postmethod pedagogy?

Postmethod pedagogy was proposed as a reaction to the shortcomings of methods, and tried to compensate for such shortcomings. In general, the most important criticisms over the concept of methods can be considered as follows.

2. Methods Results in Colonialism

According to Kumaravadivelu (2003), what gives the concept of method its colonial flavor is that the method is a construct of marginality. He contends that marginality values what comes from the “colonial Self” and marginalizes what is related to subordinate Other. He asserts that marginality has four interrelated dimensions:

A) *Scholastic Dimension of Colonialism*

According to Kumaravadivelu (2003), methods have identifiable colonial characteristics due to the reason that they are based on theories, and theories are colonial in the sense that they neglect (marginalize) local science (knowledge) as redundant. Kumaravadivelu (2003) gives India as an example, in which despite the presence of numerous languages and thus being a multilingual country, and a long and rich experience in teaching and learning second languages, colonialism has shown no interest in India’s local knowledge.

B) *Linguistic Dimension of Colonialism*

From this perspective, after marginalizing the local knowledge, the local languages are also dispensed with as irrelevant and useless in teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. According to Kumaravadivelu (2003) this is what Philipson (1992) calls the monolingual tenet which holds that English is the only proper language to be used as a medium in teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language. Kumaravadivelu (2003) asserts that this monolingual tenet represents the very linguistic dimension of method as a colonial reality which results in the marginalization of local languages.

C) *Cultural Dimension of Colonialism*

Through presenting native speakers as cultural norms to be followed and imitated, and also through imposing on learners the thought patterns and cultural behaviors of the target society, prototypical methods introduced so far marginalize learners' cultures and identities as stigmatized to be prevented, if not suppressed. Methods do not value what learners bring with them as their identity and experience, and as Kumaravadivelu (2003) claims, both linguistic and cultural dimensions of colonialism mostly favor the native speakers of English to the detriment of other local languages and cultures. He also asserts that this overemphasis on the primacy of native speakers has been challenged by Philipson (1992) who terms this "the native speaker fallacy" which is reminiscent of the times when culture was considered as an indispensable part of language.

D) Economic Dimension

According to Robert Young (2001, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003), colonization is not engaged in transporting cultural values as its main goal, rather it focuses on trade and economic exploitation as its objectives, and that the cultural colonization is a by-product of such economic efforts. Kumaravadivelu (2003) claims that:

"Economy is the engine that drives the ELT industry. What constitutes to fuel the ELT economic engine is method as a construct of marginality with its monolingual tenet and native speaker tenet. These tenets make sure that the fountainhead of global employment opportunities for native speakers of English does not dry up any time soon"

From this viewpoint ELT industry serves English-speaking countries (mostly Britain) economically. Monolingualism as a marginalization tool, works beneficially in the hands of native speakers through authenticating the role of English as the only tenable medium of instruction. Such a perspective gives credit and value to materials produced only in English-speaking countries.

Bell (2003) contends that the arguments against methods by postmethodologists can be enumerated as follows:

- 1- Methods are really very limited in that they deal only with the first lessons of mainly lower level courses. As a matter of fact, they criticize the unduly universal generalization of methods. Bell argues that such simplistic generalizations can be refuted easily, being aware that all methods have not being proposed to be generalized, when CLT has never claimed universality, it has been the most widely used method in the world.
- 2- The second criticism is that, because methods have not been prepared based on the classroom practices, they have never been realized in their purest forms in regard to their principles proposed by their originators. According to Richards (1990, cited in Bell, 2003), what is actually practiced as a method in the classroom, is the result of the interaction of many factors including the teacher, students, the material and activities. "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" (Bell, 2003, p. 329). This adaptation of method to the local and social context of the classroom answers to the particularity aspect of postmethod pedagogy, thus refutes the idea that this parameter is the characteristic of postmethod pedagogy and not the parameter presents in a new method.

According to Brown (2002) there are four reasons for the demise of methods:

- 1- Methods are prescriptive, i.e., they presume what context is, before even the method has been introduced to any context.
- 2- Methods are distinguishable from each other at the beginning levels, but gradually they lose their uniqueness and very much look like each other.
- 3- It has been discovered that methods are not empirically testable, given the 'artful' and 'intuitive' nature of language pedagogy.
- 4- Methods are tools for linguistic imperialism by the 'powerful center' to the disadvantage of the disempowered periphery.

3. Main Parameters and Characteristics of a Postmethod Pedagogy

In order to dispense with criticisms over the concept of method, Kumaravadivelu proposes the concept of postmethod pedagogy through three main parameters, i.e., practicality, particularity and possibility. According to the parameter of particularity, language teaching programs must be sensitive toward local contexts, with their particular group of teachers, involved in teaching particular learners, who have particular goals, learning in particular institutional context, and come from particular socio-cultural milieu.

Parameter of practicality considers the relationship between theory and practice. According to Weberian idea theory is the hallmark of West and marginalizes other types of local knowledge which might be discrete and never lead to a unified theory. Methods are accused of imposing such theories on teachers to be practiced. Such a view considers teachers only as ‘consumers of knowledge’ and theorists as ‘producers of knowledge.’ The parameter of practicality refutes this ‘marginalizing dichotomy’ by proposing a ‘personal theory of practice’ to be employed by teachers in their practices.

Finally, the parameter of possibility is derived from Freirian critical pedagogy, which brings into picture the role of learners’ cultural and social experiences to be included and valued in the learning environment in order to empower them in ‘appropriating’ English language to their own ‘values’ and ‘visions.’ Such a parameter would prevent the situation in which learners’ identities are startled and challenged as improper or deficient.

4. Macrostrategic Framework

Kamaravadivelu (2003) defines macrostrategic framework as consisting of both macrostrategies and microstrategies. He considers macrostrategies as:

“The guiding principles derived from theoretical, empirical, and experiential insights related to second/foreign language, learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is thus a general plan, a broad guideline based on which teachers will be able to generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques” (Kamaravadivelu, 2003, p.545).

According to (Kamaravadivelu, 2003, pp.545-546), macrostrategies are as follows:

1- *Maximize learning opportunities*: This macrostrategy is about teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers strike a balance between their role as managers of teaching and their role as mediators of learning.

2- *Minimize perceptual mismatches*: This macrostrategy is about recognizing potential mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation, and what to do about them.

3- *Facilitate negotiated interaction*: This macrostrategy is about ensuring meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate topic and talk, not just react and respond.

4- *Promote learner autonomy*: This macrostrategy is about helping learners learn to learn, and learn to liberate; and about equipping them with the means necessary to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning.

5- *Foster language awareness*: This macrostrategy is about creating general as well as critical language awareness; and about drawing learners’ attention to the formal and functional properties of the language.

6- *Activate intuitive heuristics*: This macrostrategy is about providing rich textual data so that learners can infer and internalize the underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use; and about helping them in the process of their grammar construction.

7- *Contextualize linguistic input*: This macrostrategy is about how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, social, and cultural contexts.

8- *Integrate language skills*: This macrostrategy is about holistic integration of language skills traditionally separated and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and about understanding the role of language across the curriculum.

9- *Ensure social relevance*: This macrostrategy is about the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which learning and teaching take place.

10- *Raise cultural consciousness*: This macrostrategy emphasizes the need to treat learners as cultural informants so that they are encouraged to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge, on their subjectivity and identity.

5. Who Is a Postmethod Teacher?

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the postmethod teacher is an autonomous teacher. Teacher autonomy is central and crucial in defining what postmethod pedagogy is. According to Freeman (1991, cited in Kumaravadivelu,

2006), method-based pedagogy does not value the experiences and knowledge that teachers already possess through being teachers and also learners. Postmethod pedagogy takes into consideration teachers' knowledge about not only how to teach, but also how to be autonomous within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula and textbooks, it also provides opportunity to have a reflective approach for teachers, so that they can evaluate and analyze their own teaching and to be in control of the changes they create in the classroom, and to monitor such changes. Such abilities can be only acquired by teachers who are enthusiastic in undertaking the autonomy of their teaching.

6. Who Is a Postmethod Learner?

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006) post method pedagogy takes into account two views of learner autonomy; a narrow view and a broad view. The narrow view tries to help learners gain the ability to learn to learn, when the broad view tries to help learners gain the capacity to learn to liberate as well. The narrow view holds that learners must take charge of their own learning and taking charge of one's learning according to Holec (1981, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 176) means to have and to hold responsibility:

- (a) for determining learning objectives,
- (b) for defining contents and progressions,
- (c) for selecting methods and techniques to be used,
- (d) for monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and finally,
- (e) for evaluating what has been acquired.

Liberatory autonomy according to Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 178), can be promoted by language teachers through:

- 1- Encouraging learners to assume, with the help of their teachers, the role of mini-ethnographers so that they can investigate and understand how, for instance, language as ideology serves vested interests;
- 2- Asking them to reflect on their developing identities by writing diaries or journal entries about issues that engage their sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world;
- 3- Helping them in the formation of learning communities where they develop into unified, socially cohesive, mutually supportive groups seeking self-awareness and self-improvement; and
- 4- Providing opportunities for them to explore the unlimited possibilities offered by online services on the World Wide Web, and bringing back to the class their own topics and materials for discussion, and their own perspectives on those topics.

7. Shortcomings of Postmethod Pedagogy

- 1- According to Akbari (2008), a postmethod pedagogy necessitates the existence of infrastructures, required in a proper teacher education, as well as taking into consideration the limits faced by teachers in their actual practices in the classroom. One can claim why trouble inventing the wheel again, and impose on us the burden of practicing a new phenomenon when the former concept of method will be useful through amendments.
- 2- According to Bell (2007), who carried out a research about the teachers' beliefs about methods, few teachers agree with postmethodologists in dispensing with methods altogether, and rather teachers consider methods as effective in providing them with practical solutions to the problems they face in particular (satisfying the particularity parameter) teaching contexts. Bell's (2007) findings are in keeping with that of Block (2001, cited in Bell, 2007, p. 135) that "while method has been discredited at an etic level (that is, in the thinking and nomenclature of scholars) it certainly retains a great deal of vitality at the grass-roots, emic level (that is, it is still part of the nomenclature of lay people and teachers)."
- 3- Although it is acceptable that postmethod pedagogy does away with some of the shortcomings of the concept of method, which involves "knowledge-oriented" theories of pedagogy by "theorizers" through proposing a "classroom-oriented" theories of practice, there needs to be a method on which practitioners exercise particularity, practicality and possibility parameters. By proposing macrostrategies, postmethod pedagogy

paved the way for the inclusion of theories as the base for its practices, thus most of the criticisms it poses against the concept of method is also germane to the post pedagogy as well.

- 4- According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) approaches are different from methods in the level of flexibility they have in prescribing their practices. Approaches are must more flexible and can be adapted and interpreted by particular teachers for particular students with particular goals, and in particular situations. Postmethod pedagogy refutes them alike, and condemns them as not being flexible through its parameter of particularity.
- 5- According to Bell (2003, p. 332), yet in the rush to bury methods, postmethod pedagogy has obscured the positive aspects of method.
- 6- According to Akbari (2008), postmethod pedagogy has ignored the social and professional limitations teachers face in their day-to-day negotiation of identities of their practices because of the pedagogical and ideological barriers. Pedagogical barriers impose on prospective teachers a prescribed, preselected, and presequenced body of knowledge. Ideological barriers are formed due to the marginalization and self-marginalization of teachers' knowledge and experience that does not have the opportunity to be included as visible and acceptable in the discourse community.

8. The Illusion of Postmethod Era and Postmethod Methods

Kumaravadivelu (1994, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003), asserts that the concepts of postmethod must be considered as an alternative to method, and not an alternative method. He asserts that any attempt geared at introducing a new method is bound to be a failure, due to the reason that it necessarily suffers from the drawbacks and criticisms presented so far about the shortcomings of methods. He proposes an alternative to method which he calls a postmethod pedagogy. Bell (2003) on the other hand accuses postmethodologists of being hypocritical in refuting the concept of method, when their own attempts represent a call for the need of new methods.

As an objection to Kumaravadivelu's assertions, it can be claimed that a new method can be considered as a postmethod method, not because it is proposed after the harsh attacks over methods, rather because it does its best to meet the challenges set against former introduced prototypical methods. It is believed that postmethod era should not be viewed as a watertight proposal to be taken for granted, to the detriment of systematic attempts to teach languages through methods. Through dispensing with criticisms presented so far by advocates of postmethod pedagogy, it is possible to propose new methods, which not only take advantage of the new findings in linguistics, learning theories, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and other pertinent sources, but also is much more tenable and justifiable in the face of full-blown criticisms coming from the postmethod vanguard. According to Bell (2003), methods work in a top-down manner compared to the bottom-up pattern of postmethod pedagogy, so if they work hand-in-hand each compensate for the negative aspects of the other. "For its part, postmethod has quite rightly warned of the dangers of notions of one-size-fits-all in methods. Yet in the rush to bury methods, postmethod pedagogy has obscured the positive aspects of method" (Bell, 2003, p. 332). Finally, Bell (2003) concludes that methods lead to 'methodological coherence, and post method deconstruct the 'totalizing tendency' of methods by considering the vagaries of local necessities, and that methods and postmethod together can 'liberate' our practices. Tosun (2009) contends that although the majority of postmethodologists, refrain from the concept of method, it is not wise to disregard them totally, and that it is possible that in the future the obsolete concept of method comes back in a post-post method condition.

9. Final Remarks

When the search for an ideal method failed, and eclecticism was refuted because of not being based on sound criteria, the concept of post pedagogy was proposed as an alternative to the concept of method and not as an alternative method. Postmethod pedagogy was proposed in order to compensate for the shortcomings of the concept of method, such as being colonial, being limited to lower level courses, being detached from classroom practices, being prescriptive, and being tools for linguistic imperialism. A postmethod teacher is someone who is autonomous and monitors his/her own insertion of change within the classroom, and a postmethod learner gains the ability to learn to learn and also to learn to liberate. Shortcomings of postmethod pedagogy are that it requires infrastructures for its implementation, teachers are still faithful to the concept of methods, it is afflicted by weaknesses pertinent to the concept of method, because of still being based on theories, it exaggerates the inflexibility of methods and neglects the positive aspects of methods. New methods can be proposed by considering the postmethod criticisms and obviating them to be more effective and practical.

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