RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRADITION AND TRANSITION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: THE BLEND OF THEORIES AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

English language teaching has undergone tremendous changes over the years. Change is the unchangeable law of nature. This article unravels the how English Language teaching trends have undergone transformations from its inception to post method era and explores the fundamental paradigm shift in the choice of methods, techniques, role of teachers, role of learners, role of technology and other forms of instructional materials. This paper builds on two different sources of information: at first major ideas are drawn from the theoretical literature and then combined with how I, as a student, teacher of different levels and teacher educator have conceptualized them from my experience in different sociocultural settings. This article first presents the dispute over the terms approach, method and techniques in reference to Anthony (1963) and (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and moves to the discussion of traditions of language pedagogy. The paradigm shift from traditional methods to the modern and finally to the more co-constructed postmethod era has been included with blend of my own personal experiences as a student, teacher and teacher educator. English language teaching tradition and transition in recent years are not proceeding separately; instead they are becoming integrated into more flexible and context sensitive approaches that ensure better learning outcomes.

Keywords: Tradition, Transition, language pedagogy, postmethod era, paradigm shift, Grammar Translation, Communicative language teaching

Introduction

In the late 1800s and 1900s language teaching was usually conceived in terms of methods. In seeking to improve teaching practices, teachers and researchers tried to find out the best method. However, method is an ambiguous concept in language teaching and has been used in different ways. Before discussing, different methods in different times, it is fundamental to give a cursory view on the concept of philosophical underpinning (approach), theoretical ideology (method) and the actual classroom strategies (techniques). These very concepts are first brought into fore by Edward Mason Anthony in 1963. He formulated a framework to describe various language teaching methods having three levels: approach, methods and techniques. The organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Anthony's framework was welcomed by language teaching communities

when it was introduced and it was seen as a useful way of classifying different teaching practices.

However, it did not clearly define the difference between approach, method and techniques and Kumaravadivelu (2006) reports that due to this ambiguity, there was widespread dissatisfaction with it. To address the lacunas, Richards and Rodgers (1986) expanded on Anthony's three level- framework choosing the terms approach, design and procedure. Their concept of approach has similar to Anthony's but their design and procedure were of broader scope than Anthony's method and techniques. Their design referred to all major practical implications in the classrooms such as such as syllabus design, types of activities to be used in the classroom. Procedure referred to as different behaviors, practices and techniques observed in the classroom. These new terms were intended to address limitations in Anthony's framework and also gave them specific criteria by which we could evaluate different methods. Richards and Rodger's (1986) framework has been further criticized by Kumaravadivelu (2006) for having an element of artificiality in its conception and elements of subjectivity in its operation. Similarly, Prabhu (1990) thought of a method as both classroom activities and theory that informs them.

The tradition and transition in language pedagogy further gets informed by three useful theoretical insights: the structural view, the functional view and the interactive view of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The first treats language as system of structurally related elements to code meaning (the classical method is guided by this view of language). Secondly, the functional view sees the language as a vehicle to express or accomplish certain functions. The third interactive view considers the language as a vehicle for creation and maintenance of social relations focusing on the patterns of moves, acts, negotiations and interaction in conversational exchanges. This view of language has been fairly dominant since 1980s. The subsequent section relates the discussion with traditional or classical pedagogy along with its theoretical backup and its gradual transition to modern and postmodern language pedagogy.

Paradigm shift in language pedagogy

The language teaching pendulum has swung away from grammar translation to the direct method, and then to alternative methods (Richards & Rogers, 2003). Such shifts from one method to another only "provide ample inferential evidence of [consecutive] lack of success" (Sheen, 1994, p. 127). The result of such frustration was the shift from teacher to learner (Freeman & Richards, 1993), from outside feeding theories to inside ones (Richards, 1996), from method-based top-down to teacher-based bottom-up approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 1987; Freeman & Richards, 1993). Historical accounts of the profession tend, therefore, to describe a succession of methods each of which is more or less discarded in due course as new method takes its place (Brown, 2002). The field of English language teaching has been one of the tradition and transition since its inception (Pica, 1997). In the past fifty years, English language teaching has gone through a whirlwind of transitions in its methodology from grammar translation to direct method, to audio lingualism and a host of variations. As the nature and context of language changes along with the advancement of technology and globalization, the shifts in the language pedagogy has been shaped accordingly. Traditional methods were once the innovations of their time, characterized by the attitudes and values of their creators who recommended that other educators abandon one method and choose another with unquestioning optimism (Clarke, 1982).

The postmethod paradigm after 1990s advocated that no method is golden method. The whole concept of separate methods is no longer a central issue in language teaching practice (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). The ELT professionals came to realize that no approach, method, technique can be ideal. Actually, all approaches, methods, techniques are context specific. They can be very effective, depending on a particular context, place, students, purpose, etc. It is the context which determines how teaching and

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learning should take place. Stern (1985) supporting the post method paradim states that our "century old obsession" and our prolonged preoccupation with method have been increasingly unproductive and misguided. We vainly searched for the ultimate method because no single method is best for everyone, as there are important variations in the teaching context that influence what is best (Prabhu, 1990).

Traditional methodologies

The early days of learning and teaching includes three traditional methods practiced dominantly in the past and exist even today. This section explores the essence of grammar translation method, audio lingual method and the direct method. Past language teaching is associated with the -Age of Methods (Rogers, 2000, p.1). The English language teaching has formally and dominantly employed grammar translation method as the major approach. This classical method language teaching fundamentally is grounded on the structural theorists who treat language as a system of structurally related elements to code meaning. The grammar–translation method is a method of teaching foreign languages derived from the classical (sometimes called traditional) method of teaching Greek and Latin in 16th century. It became the major method for the target language teaching in the 19th century (GT paradigm) where translation was used to understand and grammatical usage in the target language by providing meaning (mother tongue based translation) (Machida, 2011). Translation in foreign language learning process promotes understanding. The Grammar-Translation method has been considered useful for students in second language acquisition in that it enriches one's vocabulary, increases the number of figures of speech one can use, develops the ability of interpretation, and through the imitation of the best writers it makes us able to produce similarly good texts, because translation forces us to notice such details as would escape the attention of a simple reader (Mart, 2013). Duff (1996) argues that "translation develops three qualities essential to all language learning; accuracy, clarity and flexibility. It trains the learner to search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity)". These qualities are important factors in foreign language learning process as they will contribute to better understanding (p.7).

However, with its focus on learning grammar rules and vocabulary and deductive L2 learning, the methodology used inauthentic artificial translation from the learner's first language to the target language. This approach tended to exclude listening and speaking activities. It also induced to a false impression that fixed words to words translation is possible between the L1 and L2. The arrival of natural method movement towards the end of 19th century challenged the value of translation and efficiency of formal grammar study (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985).

The audio-lingual method was developed in the United States around World War II when governments realized that they needed more people who could conduct conversations fluently in a variety of languages, work as interpreters, code-room assistants, and translators (Freeman, 2000). However, since foreign language instruction in that country was heavily focused on reading instruction, no textbooks, other materials or courses existed at the time, so new methods and materials had to be devised. For example, the U.S. Army Specialized Training Program created intensive programs based on the techniques Leonard Bloomfield and other linguists devised for Native American languages, where students interacted intensively with native speakers and a linguist in guided conversations designed to decode its basic grammar and learn the vocabulary (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Audio lingual language teaching method treats language as a kind of human habit. The final purpose is to train the students in the target language and let them have the ability to use it to communicate with the native speakers. It is guided by the structuralist paradigm and later was criticized by the rationalist like Chomsky.

The direct method of teaching was developed as a response to the Grammar-Translation method. It sought to immerse the learner in the same way as when a first language is

learnt. All teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and only useful 'everyday' language is taught. The Direct Method, teach L2 in L21, disfavored use of L1 (translation) to facilitate learning in FL classes. Instead, class hours were devoted to teacher-student interactions in FL to increase FL use. The "input before output" approach also placed listening prior to speaking, emphasizing an oral-aural approach at the early stage of FL teaching (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). The weakness in the Direct Method is its assumption that a second language can be learnt in exactly the same way as a first, when in fact the conditions under which a second language is learnt are very different (British Council, ND).

Transition to modern methodology

The period from the 1970s through the 1980s witnessed a major paradigm shift in language teaching. The quest for alternative to grammar based approaches and methods led to different directions. Language pedagogy influenced by "communicative movement" (Richards & Rodgers, 2003, p. 71) sought to move the focus away from grammar as the core component of language to language as communication. Perhaps the majority of language teachers today when asked to identify the methodology they employ in their classrooms, mention communicative as the methodology of choice. The earlier view of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence, process of habit formation (Richards, 2006). The most of the traditional methods were teacher centered and rigid in nature. They were criticized for not being able to produce the communicatively competent learners in the target language. In the recent years, the most substantive transition in English teaching has taken place through a collection of practices, materials and beliefs about teaching and learning that is known by communicative methodology (Pica, 1997). This approach represents a philosophy of teaching that is based on communicative language use. It emphasizes notional functional concepts and communicative competence rather than grammatical structures as central to teaching. This

method is based on three theories of learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001): Activities that involve communication promote learning (communication principle), activities that involve the completion of tasks promote learning (task principle), and learners must be engaged in meaningful and authentic language use for learning to place (meaningfulness principle). Communicative language teaching continues in the range of coursebooks and other teaching resources based on the principles of CLT. In addition it has influenced many other teaching approaches.

This era is also termed as the era of alternative approaches and methods. In addition to, communicative language teaching as the core approach, other alternative forms of language pedagogy developed. The alternative approaches such as Total Physical Response (Asher, 1977), Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972), Counseling- Learning (Curran, 1976), Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978), Multiple Intelligence (Gardener, 1993) did not succeed in attracting the support of mainstream language teaching. Though they focused on important dimensions of the teaching and learning process, at present, they are little more than historical interests (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The Lexical Approach, Competency based Language Teaching, The Natural Approach, Whole Learning, and Neurolinguistic Programming are still insightful because they offer very influential theories to guide whole discipline.

Transition to post methodology

Modern Methodological trend was guided by positivist and post positivist paradigm. The methodologies practiced were prescriptive and imposing in nature. The whole field of pedagogy was ruled by Meta narratives of pedagogy without choice for the alternatives. The paradigm shift from method based pedagogy to research based pedagogy fundamentally restructured second/foreign language teaching and teacher education during 1990s. The new paradigms such as multilingualism, critical pedagogy, translanguaging came into practice as the emerging concepts. It gave rise to mutually informing currents of thought: One emphasizes the need to

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go beyond the limitations of the concept of method with a call to find 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 Žfind an alternative way of creating efficient teaching professionals (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Woods, 1996). The result has been a greater awareness of issues such as teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition. These works can therefore be seen as heralding the development of what might be called a postmethod pedagogy.

A postmethod pedagogy is to look at it three-dimensionally as pedagogy of particularity, practicality, and possibility Kumaravadivelu (2001). As pedagogy of particularity, postmethod pedagogy rejects the advocacy of a predetermined set of generic principles and procedures aimed at realizing a predetermined set of generic aims and objectives. Instead, it seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. All pedagogy all politics is local. To ignore is to ignore lived experiences.

As pedagogy of practicality, postmethod pedagogy rejects the artificial dichotomy between theorists who have been assigned the role of producers of knowledge and teachers who have been assigned the role of consumers of knowledge. Instead, it seeks to rupture such a reified role relationship by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. As pedagogy of possibility, postmethod pedagogy rejects the narrow view of language education that confines itself to the linguistic functional elements that obtain inside the classroom. Any pedagogy is implicated in relation of power and domination and the students are encouraged to question the status quo.

My experience as a student

As a student in different levels, I have experienced the myriad of methodological transitions. When I was a primary level student in a government school of very rural part of Western Terai, I got introduced with English in grade four where teachers purely used traditional method. They provided discrete vocabulary with their meanings in Nepali (eg. Is means CHHA or HO) and asked to memorize it by heart. We were always asked to imitate, repeat and memorize the things; the louder the better. Very interestingly, the teacher translated the target language text into Nepali not in learners mother tongue where 39 out of 40 were Tharu native speakers. This trend seems to have adopted the essence of standard language as the medium of instruction. The same trend was prevailed even the lower secondary and secondary level education. The teacher with the academic qualification of intermediate in commerce (I. Com) led our English class. They rarely used the target language in the class. Only readymade chunks were produced to carry out the essential classroom activities. Teacher centered top down approach ignoring the learner autonomy has been the core of language pedagogy. These kinds of pedagogy in one hand developed the essential reading skill, pronunciation skill and skill to appreciate target language literature but produced the learners without skills of communication.

The pedagogic trend during my college level was slightly different from the earlier one. The medium of delivery was target language but still the prescriptive top down approach where the teachers stood them at center of knowledge source. The methods were guided by communicative approach but with very chances for learner's autonomy. The contents were taught using lecture cum discussion method. They shifted from the positivist paradigm to post positivist paradigm.

I experienced a drastic change in pedagogy in my latest experience as a student in M. Phil study. The learners are given certain degree of learner's autonomy. As Helot (1988) claims learning become autonomous when learners take charge of their own learning. The teachers do not implement the single methodology and are rigid in the use of technique and language; rather they switch from technique to another as the situation demands. They are found translanguaging in the class and

provide the students an agency. The essence of postmodern pedagogy where they create the situation for constructing context –sensitive multiple realities is practiced in the classroom. The issues such as multilingualism, critical pedagogy, technology based language learning, translanguaging have been given justice. We have taken the agency of our learning as we receive set of cognitive, meta cognitive and effective techniques for successful learning. The latest experience as a student about the methodology reveals that the teachers much more informed by the postmodern concept of teaching and learning.

My experience as a teacher and language educator

One day, I asked my B. Ed. students, "Which is the best method for teaching English?" They quickly responded in a single voice that the communicative method (CM) is the best method. I remained silent for a while looking around the class. All the students had the same answer. Even the students who did not respond seemed to agree in the same matter. Similarly, when I went to different district for practice teaching and research work, I asked the same question to some English teachers there. They also answered that CM is the best method. They all seem to have been guided by the grand discrete theories as advocated by modernists.

Like them, I had the same understanding when I was a student, and before familiarizing myself with the concept of postmodernism and postmethod pedagogy in ELT. When I started teaching 15 years ago, I was also entirely infused in the principles of communicative language teaching, as the field of pedagogy was led by methodologists and experts. What they told was followed strictly by the teachers and students. The teaching learning activities which followed certain methods strictly would be counted as the good teaching. I was also the part of that trend before I read Prabhu (1990) and Kumaravadivelu, (2001), Bell (2003). They helped to reshape my preoccupied notion about methods. My sense of understanding got modified that no approach or method or technique, can be best or worst in its own right. It is the context which makes it effective or ineffective. None of them is

universal. Now, practice of teaching profession is assimilated with what Brown (1994) claims: "no method can guarantee success, because every learner is unique, teacher is unique and every learner-teacher relationship is unique" (p. 15).

No single method can suffice to fulfill all the needs and expectations of all the learners at all times. In our classroom context, it is more complex. It is difficult to meet all the widely differing expectations held by individual students and too difficult to ensure that everyone learns by a single method, I have found heterogeneous learners in terms of levels, competence, age, academic background, family background, economic background, mother tongue, personality, sex, language aptitude, learning style, culture, geography which in turn is a big challenge to teach ELT effectively and successfully by a single method. Therefore, I practice eclecticism incorporating different approaches, methods, and techniques suitable for my class.

Conclusions

An approach to language pedagogy is not just a set of static principles "set in stone" (Brown, 2002). It is in fact dynamic composite of energies within the teacher that challenges continued experience in teaching and learning. The teachers have changed their principles and strategies in line with the paradigm shift in philosophy, educational psychology and research. Brown (1994) says that different philosophical theories have appeared and disappeared in history, so have language teaching methods 'waxed' and 'waned' in popularity. Similarly, Harmer (2008, p. 48) writes: "Both abstract theory and practical techniques have been debated, have gone in and out of fashion, and have influenced what was and is included in classrooms and teaching materials". The traditional methods discussed in this article are not dead yet rather combined with the current trends informed by the research. The current trend of language teaching methodology is the blend of what we practiced in the past and what we are currently doing. The previous informs and the subsequent guides the current.

The current transition in English teaching methodology exists because of two closely linked in wider field of language studies: broad scope and diversity of English language for participation in emerging global community and growing body of research related to instructional issues (Pica, 1997). Even very prescriptive and rigid methods in the past are implemented differently. Factors such as educational and professional background of the teachers play critical role in the way in which a method is employed. Even the traditional techniques such as dictation, recitation, drill, dialogue are employed in the current trends. The important dimensions of learning and teaching process are better served by activities, materials, instructional practices that integrate traditional methodologies and modern methodologies in creative and principled way.

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