

Elif Sezen SAMANCI*
Arda ARIKAN**

Postmodern Theory and Postmethod Condition: New Tasks and Roles for English Language Teachers

Abstract

This paper highlights the profound change that education is going through with the significant rise of postmodernism affecting every field. Similarly, the field of English Language Teaching is in constant transition with new approaches to and methods of teaching the content all of which refer to the “postmethod condition” in which teachers are considered to be freed from applying one single method or approach in their teaching. In such a space, they can experience and experiment with their own teaching methods, skills and knowledge as autonomous learners. The postmethod era, while reshaping the roles of teachers, reshapes all teacher education practices that are vital to the practice of English language teaching. Hence, this article discusses the dimensions of this new space by commenting on the roles attributed to teachers and teacher educators. First, there is a brief discussion of the evolving paradigm of postmodernism. Second, examples of new ways of teaching and teacher education are discussed in relation to postmodernism.

Key Words

Postmodernism, Postmethod, English Language Teaching, Task, Teacher education.

Postmodern Kuram ve Yöntem Sonrası Durum: İngiliz Dili Öğretmenleri için Yeni Görev ve Roller

Özet

Bu çalışmada postmodernizmin her alandaki önemli yükselişiyle, eğitim alanından geçen değişim gözle görülür şekilde iklimi altını çiziyor. İngiliz Dili Eğitimi alanı ortaya çıkan yeni yaklaşımlar ve yöntemlerle hızlı ve sürekli bir değişimindedir. Benzer bir şekilde, “metod sonrası durum” denilen bu değişim öğretmenlerin metodlardan ve yaklaşımlardan muaf olmasına yol açmış ve onların kendi metodlarını, özelliklerini, becerilerini ve bilgilerini yeni bir şekilde yaratmalarına öncülük etmiştir. Metod sonrası çağda, öğretmenleri yeniden eğitilirken, kaçınılmaz

* Hacettepe Üniversitesi.

** Hacettepe Üniversitesi.

olarak İngiliz Dili Eğitimi'nin önemli bir tamamlayıcısı olan öğretmen eğitimini de yeniden şekillendirir. Bu makale, kısaca öğretmenlerin ve öğretmenlerin deneyimlediği bu yeni soluk ve özgürlük anlayışından bahseder. İlk olarak, postmodernizmin gelişimine kısaca değinilmiştir. Ardından, İngilizce'yi postmodernizmle ikinci dil olarak öğretmenin yeni yollarının örnekleri mevcuttur.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Postmodernizm, Yöntem sonrası, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, Görev, Öğretmen Eğitimi.

1. Introduction

Postmodernism is a philosophical as well as an artistic movement in the advanced capitalist culture which has a particular effect in architecture and literature. As Sarup (1993) explains, the term postmodernism originated among artists and critics in New York in 1960s and was taken by European theorists such as Derrida and Barthes in 1970s. Influenced by the disillusionment induced by the Second World War, postmodernism influenced the new movements in society, economy and culture since the 1960s. From a cultural, intellectual, artistic state, postmodernism is known to be "lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, and interconnectedness or inter-referentiality" (Britannica, 2004).

After the rise of postmodernism in 1990s, the field of second/ foreign language teaching witnessed the emergence of new ideas and practices affected from postmodern philosophy and applications. Among these thoughts specific to English language teaching (ELT), two of the following are the most significant. First, there is serious need to go beyond the limitations of the concept of a teaching method such like the Grammar-Translation or the Direct Method, with a call to find alternative ways of designing effective teaching strategies rather than following a single method (Clarke, 1994; Kumaravedivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990). Second, there is serious need to go beyond the limitations of the transmission model of teacher education with a call to find an alternative way of creating a work force of efficient teaching professionals (Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2000; Woods, 1996). These two views, combined together, have formulated what we may call the postmethod condition which signaled a new era in the field of English language education which has started to include theory and practice of newer constructs and applications all of which are now called the postmethod pedagogy.

Teachers' dissatisfaction with following one single method in their teaching has led them to internalize the new perspective of English language teaching that emerged within what we may call postmodernism. Such a new space has brought a fundamental change in the perceptions of ELT professionals simply because, as expressed by Hutcheon (1989), the changes we experience "inevitably affect the nature of those disciplines that both reflect our society and help to shape it" (vii). Similarly, such changes in pedagogy are expressed by Roger (1969) as changes in our goals in education which are now leaning towards "the facilitation of change and learning" (152). Accordingly, this paper examines some changes that occurred along with

postmodernism in English language teacher education. In particular, it examines the new roles assigned to teachers in comparison to the traditional ones along with some task types associated with such changes.

2. Postmodernism, Postmethod condition, and the Teacher

Although some definitions of postmodernism are available, there is no specific definition of the term that is applicable to all fields. O'Farrell (1999) complains that proponents of postmodernism rarely agree over what the term postmodern actually means and "indeed, many would argue that this very lack of agreement is in itself one of the distinguishing features of the postmodern (p. 11).

Ward (2003) suggests that postmodernism is a set of concepts about what it means to live at present. The concepts and debates that Ward articulates as applicable to such analysis are about society, culture, and lifestyle all of which are now significantly different from what they were years ago because of the developments in mass media, the consumer society and information technology all of which have an impact on our understanding of more abstract matters, like meaning, identity and what constitutes reality. In short, usefulness of ageing styles is questioned and new approaches and new vocabularies are created in order to understand the present (p. 6).

As far as schooling is concerned, we have come to accept that an individual's lived experiences, background knowledge, and beliefs form the basis of their pedagogical performance in the classroom. The teacher is now considered a mediator in the classroom who will prepare the content to be delivered by determining what to teach. Hence, the teacher should take into account the needs of each student which has gained profound importance with the development of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) which, as a new style of teaching, has given utmost importance to the interaction amongst all members in the classroom. Similarly, teachers are now expected to be informed about the latest cultural events that they think students can be interested in such as singers, bands, new films, festivals, and web-based materials because these topics can have motivating effect for the students. In addition to these, during the lessons, creating a positive atmosphere that is conducive to learning is another role of the teacher because it is now articulated that while students learn the language skills, they should also have positive feelings during the lessons since it is believed that having a positive attitude is most likely to cause increased success. All in all, changes in what is expected from a teacher urge us to keep up with new trends and developments as teachers both because of educational as well as technological reasons.

We are now living in a technological era that is based on the Internet and the computer. New conditions make the teachers use technological advances to improve students' language skills. For the second item, postmodern teacher has the duty to be knowledgeable in computer skills that s/he can share the knowledge with the students. Language teaching websites, visual, audio, and text sources for the lessons are fundamental to the performance of the postmodern teacher. Teachers can create their own lessons by using these resources and can easily broadcast them on the Internet. It is vital for improving teachers' as well as students' development as autonomous learners to use the computer while learning a foreign language because both teachers and

students are consumers and producers in this new space of teaching and learning. Furthermore, with podcasts and videocasts currently used in ELT, students can listen to and watch online materials that are beneficial and relevant to their level while creating their own podcasts and videocasts by broadcasting them on numerous podcast sites. In the postmodern space, then, both teachers and students are producers of foreign language learning and teaching as much as the information available on the Internet is concerned.

Ward (2003) suggests that meaning is paramount in learning a language. Students and teachers should explicitly know about their roles in education simply because as they benefit from both real and virtual situations that appeal to them, teachers also try innovative techniques to teach vocabulary and other segments of a language. In the postmodern space of reality, that is virtual reality, reality has increasingly become constructed by means of non-alphabetical signs. According to Baudrillard, "The image bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (p. 170). Hence, even the traditional way of teaching a foreign language that was only meant to teach the alphabetical a couple decades ago is now to include a great variety of sign systems including traffic signs, national symbols, manufactured goods' emblems, street signs, avatars, and acronyms all of which are important to an individual to live in a society. As such, the teacher must incorporate such sign systems into their classrooms in order to prepare her students to real life contexts where they inevitably will encounter such signs.

In that sense, due to this grand space that postmodernism gives to individuals, they are not obliged to use or stick to a certain method. They can try anything that they think is useful for learning and teaching a foreign language in what is called, an eclectic manner which is a feature of postmodernism. From that perspective, anything can be experimented prior to or during the lessons as far as the idea makes sense to the teacher as well as when during a classroom meeting, students' suggestions are taken into account. Hence, teachers are invited to experiment with ideas and activities in an organic relationship with their students.

In the light of these changes in education with postmodernism, we can say that postmodernism depends on many cultural factors, lifestyles, and schooling contexts. Thus, institutions should reshape themselves to meet the needs of the postmodern society. In this context, Edwards and Usher (1994) offer some suggestions for shaping an appropriate postmodern education system which:

1. is more diverse in terms of goals, processes, organizational structures, curricula, methods, and agents,
2. no longer functions as a means of reproducing society as an instrument of large-scale social engineering,
3. is limitless both in time and space through loosening of boundaries,
4. rejects uniformity, standardized curricula, technicized teaching methods, and universal messages, rationality or morality,
5. enables greater participation in cultural diversity of learners (pp. 211-212).

A postmodern language teacher should be aware of these suggestions and determine her own unique way of teaching in the light of them. The role of the teacher

in the postmethod era is to facilitate learning by being a language resource and guide the students properly-according to the needs.

Teaching English has been associated with spreading cultural, economic, and religious values under the guise of universal ‘correctness.’ Phillipson (1992) describes this as “linguistic hegemony” (p. 73) and a postmodern approach to language learning challenges this hegemony by unearthing previous cultural and linguistic representations of teaching English as a value-laden process. The ‘linguistic imperialism’ debate highlights postmodern, postcolonial attempts to diversify English language learning. Postmodernism tries to make English Language Teaching free from the cultural and intellectual hegemony by reclaiming other narratives, especially those narrated by the disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded whose voices are rarely heard.

When student-centered learning and teaching is considered, involving students in their own learning and recognizing individual differences become a crucially important issue and in this, teachers play a significantly important role. For example, learning English through pop-culture items, comics, cartoons, movies, newly released popular series, and the Internet is something that postmodern celebration of the popular/mass culture brings to foreign language teaching which found voice in CLT. Similarly, collaboration, inter-personal and intra-personal responsibility in group work, social learning and group work are significant items of a postmodernist approach to education. Portfolios, journal keeping, self and peer assessment come forward with a focus on the learning process rather than the outcome.

It has been noted by postmodernists that the marginalized is superior or equal to the center. In our postmodern language teaching era, there is no single, accurate accent just as the proponents of English as an international language (EIL) suggest. English as an International Language which emerged with postmethod era suggests that English language is a global means of communication in numerous dialects; each dialect is acceptable as long as it is understandable. Postmodern language teachers are to tolerate these dialects of their students in the lessons. Correction of the pronunciation according to the refined, native-like language is not valid anymore.

In teacher education, understanding of the features of postmodernism and role of the teacher are vitally important in the sense of contributions of postmodernism to teacher education. Teacher educator, behaving like the postmodern teacher will be a model for the prospective teachers. Teacher educator will enable student teachers with necessary suggestions and ways-i.e. best ways to teach English- by making them rethink about the concepts, considering their own teaching practices critically. In many new teacher education certificate courses and institutes, there is not a final decision for the best method to teach English. Open-ended inquiry is another significant feature of postmodernist approach in teacher education. Student teachers discuss their thoughts and suggestions in each new subject or topic, before teacher educators starts to share their own ideas upon the subject or topic. At the end of the discussion, there is not a result about the best way to teach. There are only suggestions and some weak sides and strong sides of approaches or techniques. Next, rather than theoretical explanations, there are practices and examples from the experiences.

Establishing dialogues between teacher educators and student teachers is necessary for sharing experiences that enhance learning. Kumaravadivelu and Bean (1995) state that “recognizing prospective teachers’ voices and visions means legitimizing their knowledge and experience. In other words, the interaction between the teacher educator and the prospective teacher should become an organic as well as a dialogic relationship in the Bakhtinian sense (Kumaravadivelu and Bean, 1995). Today, this dialogue is often established through websites, emails, forums, and social network sites all of which bring together many teachers and teacher educators from all around the world. In these websites and social networks, professionals share their own experiences and make suggestions about any topic related to ELT in a friendly atmosphere. In teacher education programs, such mutual and professional dialogue is needed. Hence, both teacher educators as well as prospective teachers should encourage each other to participate in such dialogues both in the traditional teacher education programs as well as in the virtual world.

3. Task-Based Language Learning

Leaver and Willis (2004) praise Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) by stating that TBLT has been used at nearly all government institutions that teach foreign languages since the 1980s. Mentioning the changes that postmodernism helped bringing to language teaching, it is impossible to ignore TBLT because it combines and promotes many postmodern features of language teaching theory and practice including collaboration (border-crossing), autonomy (de-colonization), student-centeredness (decentralization), and negotiation of meaning (deconstruction). In addition, tasks involve the students in their learning (self-referencing), and in doing so, promote decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, and responsibility for learning (decentralization). Furthermore, TBLT has become associated with the development of learning strategies, which are essential parts of autonomous learning. Finally, as Finch (2006) articulates, TBLT enables form and performance to be combined (border-crossing) in a Form-Focused Interaction Approach.

A major field of research in TBLT has been concerned with the categorization of tasks and the construction of valid sequences of tasks according to linguistic, affective, and cognitive goals (Candlin, 1987; Willis, 1996). Table 1 shows the classification of language learning tasks according to communicative complexity (one-way and two-way) and task types. In fact, as can be seen in this table, both postmodernism and TBLT go hand in hand in projecting a set of theoretical and practical applications that are common to both entities, showing that the two are inseparable.

Table 1:
A Classification of Task-Types (Finch, 2004: pp. 97-98)

Task Types	Static (one-way)	Dynamic (two-way)
Discovery	word search Internet-based language puzzles matching activities	interactive dictionary activities (pairs, groups). language trivia games/puzzles group matching games
Experience	memory games review activities (one-way) simple lexis activities questionnaires (one-way)	brainstorming review activities (two-way) interviews questionnaires (two-way) storytelling
Guided	classroom English structural activities (drills) comprehension activities dictation activities	Everyday English discovery activities group-project work drama role-play
Shared	pair- and group- work information gap simple dialogues language games	pair- and group-work problem-solving opinion-gaps and jigsaws pyramid activities role-plays and simulations error correction peer assessment discussions and surveys
Independent	homework self-study (books, internet) self-assessment	independent projects writing to an e-mail buddy web-quests

A postmodern language teacher should be aware of the suggestions given in Table 2 while determining her own unique way of teaching. The role of the teacher in the postmethod era is rather different from that of a traditional teacher which is outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2:
Differences between Traditional Teacher and Postmodern Teacher
(Adapted from Finch, 2004)

Traditional Teacher	Postmodern Teacher
leads competition, aggression, division between the students encourages individualism (the winner takes all) mutually exclusive goals attainment (MEGA) (Kohn, 1992)	encourages collaboration, inter-personal and intra-personal studies gives students responsibility through group work gives importance to social learning, team work, and decentralization
makes the students study English through its highest works, that is, through literature has strict boundaries restricts genres	teaches through pop-culture, cartoons, comics, movies, the Internet uses eclecticism
sees language learning independent from emotions	recognizes the affective and social filters sees language learning as social, unpredictable, emotional, and cultural
has standardized testing procedures such as mid-terms and finals gives importance to the result rather than the process and progress	applies classroom-based performance assessment utilizes continuous assessment through portfolios, journals, self/ peer assessment focuses on the learning process
uses structural and propositional syllabus thinks that there are absolute grammatical rules and correct ways of writing	uses process, task-based/ project-based syllabi applies complex, dynamic learning with self-reflexiveness and self-reference
believes in the teacher-centered and teacher-controlled learning autocratic instruction	believes in student-centered learning involves students in their learning recognizes individual differences
teaches the same thing to everyone at the same time is seen as the fountain of knowledge transfers knowledge to the empty brains uses the grammar-translation method	gives importance to the needs, learning styles, learning preferences, and proficiency levels chooses the appropriate student at the appropriate time is seen as the facilitator of learning uses task-based and project-based learning/teaching or eclecticism
utilizes the coursebook and some predetermined activities aims to develop writing	utilizes number of sources and activities including coursebooks, interactive CDs, the Internet, online activities can find new ideas and activities during the lessons and prepare activities during the lessons spontaneously.

Table 2 shows teachers' new role gained by the developments and changes that postmodernism has brought. Seeing the chart, one may think that the freedom that postmodernism gives to teachers are limitless. However, that is not the case, for

postmodern teachers should know where and how far to go within this freedom. As long as the lesson is effective and useful for the students for improving their language skills, teachers can use their freedom that postmodernism gives to them.

4. Conclusion

We can see postmodernism as a fluid space in which teacher educators allow prospective teachers and teachers allow their students to develop their capacities to the fullest. Changes in ELT, which occurred along with the growth and spread of postmodernist applications especially in 1990s, show that foreign language education will continue be effected from postmodern theory with new views upon teachers', students' and researchers' roles. As such, instead of being omniscient entities in the classroom, the teachers have become agents with their own flaws, beliefs, autonomies, cultures, and backgrounds all of which assign them the role of a mediator in the classroom who energize their students in classrooms to experience by relying on their own eyes and minds. This situation also improves students' autonomy and self-confidence for they struggle to learn by newer learning strategies such as searching, group or pair work and individually/ cooperatively created electronic portfolios or blogs in contrast to traditional ways of learning that are fashioned specifically for individuals. However, such an approach to learning and teaching does not come without its flaws. Both the theoretician as well as the practitioner must have developed a sensible amount of knowledge of theory and practice so that newer models are selected and then put into practice. Hence, the responsibility of the teacher has become even heavier for him or her to handle in contrast to the past forms of theory and practice which saw the practitioner as a vehicle carrying to pre-packed knowledge pieces to the foreign language classroom. As such, in order to keep up with the new techniques and approaches such as TBLT, a postmodern teacher should give importance to continuous professional development that is known as a part of lifelong learning. As Kumaravedivelu and Bean (1995) state, teachers should be in collaboration and in dialogue with teacher educators and other teachers. Like postmodernism itself, the debates, discussions, and studies about postmodernism in education are open-ended and subjective. New studies are to appear with this process of change in a progressive manner although postmodernism has a negative attitude to progress by and large.

Kumaravedivelu (2003) mentions and explains some postmethod principles and strategies which are significant for this paper to make the concepts more concrete. First of all, in the paper, need analysis and its importance are mentioned. Similarly, according to Kumaravedivelu (2006: 207) determining learning purpose is one of the language teacher's most important tasks. This strategy should be applied by postmodern teachers before they start their lesson by questionnaires or talking to the students. Secondly, raising cultural consciousness is another important strategy. Traditionally, one of the goals of the culture teaching was to help the learner gain an understanding of first language speakers from a cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspective (Stern, 1992). Recent explorations by L2 educationists seek to expand the horizon of culture learning and teaching to include the development of socio-cultural knowledge through additional language learners of English. In other words the L2 learner is treated as a cultural informant (Kumaravedivelu, 2003: 268-270). Similarly, in the paper, the rising

importance of teaching and learning cultures is stressed. Thirdly, in postmodern language teaching promoting learner autonomy is another important strategy. Kumaravedivelu (2006: 206) believes language learning to be an essentially autonomous activity. He urges language teachers to help learners learn how to learn and to equip them with the metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies. In this way, it can be said that good language learners are those who have good language learning strategies and autonomy. Postmodern teacher make the students use their own capacities and enjoy their own studies with the assistance of the language teacher. Fourthly, Chomsky (1970) argued that one cannot learn the entire grammatical structure of a language through explanation and instruction beyond the rudimentary level, for the reason that no teacher/lecturer possesses enough explicit knowledge about language structure to provide adequate explanation and instruction. The teacher can tap on learners' grammatical abilities by designing classroom activities "to give free range to the creative principles that humans bring to the process of language learning...[and] create a rich linguistic environment for the intuitive heuristics that the normal human being automatically possesses" (Chomsky, 1970: p. 108). Hence, teachers' being an assistant and a mediator in the classroom instead of repeating the explicit grammar rules, teachers' using new techniques and activities to make the lesson effective are important strategies in postmodern education.

The importance of negotiation and interaction is stressed by Kumaravedivelu (2006) as an important strategy. Negotiated interaction means that the learner should be actively involved in interaction "as a textual activity, interaction as an interpersonal activity and interaction as an ideational activity" (Kumaravedivelu, 2006: 202). Similarly, in postmodern language teaching, it is stated in this paper that learners' abilities are stretched through interaction with teachers or more knowledgeable peers. The last strategy is based on the belief that the teacher should have the ability to maximize the learning opportunities and modify the lessons continually according to the students' needs, interests, and situations. Hence, postmodern teacher has both the space as well as the power to complete these tasks although her responsibility is growing within the advanced capitalist culture demanding more and more from her on a daily basis.

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