



English As Second Language Teaching Paradigm

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Abstract

ESL teachers are undergoing a phenomenon of rapid social and technological change. This inevitably affects the nature of teaching-learning process in ESL classrooms. We are living in the age of globalization, transnationalism, telecommunication and digital technology. Education in such a scenario aims at preparing individuals to be flexible, multi- skilled and dynamic problem solvers, and creative explorers of resources with the ability to interpret reality from multiple perspectives. Therefore, the traditional approaches to teaching English language have been replaced with modern approaches which are considered appropriate to the new generation of language learners in the postmodern learning environment influenced by ICT. Education in the postmodern era cannot be considered independent of historical, economic, technological and cultural factors, and institutions of higher learning must bear in mind the demands of the postmodern society. This paper intends to explore the postmodern trends in ESL Teaching and the changing role of the teacher in modern times.

Key Words: Modernism, postmodernism, ESL, ICT, Virtual reality, Task-based Teaching.

Introduction

Postmodernism is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines such as art, architecture, music, film, literature, communication and technology. The three major claims of postmodernism are Derrida's, "nothing outside the text," Foucault's, "power is knowledge," and Lyotard's, "incredulity toward meta narratives." These claims reflect the idea that there are more legitimate ways of looking at the world than the single use of universal reason which modernism relies upon. All definitions of postmodernism point at reliance on experience, questioning and embracing interpretation.

'Modern' societies depend on the idea that 'signifiers' always point to 'signifieds', and that reality resides in signifieds. On the contrary, in postmodernism, there are only signifiers. The notion of any stable reality disappears, and with it the idea of signifieds that signifiers point to also disappears.

According to Jean Baudrillard, in postmodern society, there are no originals, only copies or what he calls "simulacra." This notion is similar to Baudrillard's concept of virtual reality. Virtual reality is created by simulation, for which there is no original. In the context of ESL teaching, ICT helps to create virtual reality which acts as a springboard for

generating a variety of learning tasks for learners and to provide a multi-sensory approach to perception.

Postmodernism is also concerned with methods of organization of knowledge. In modernist societies, knowledge was equated with science, and was in contrast to narratives. Science was considered 'good' knowledge and narrative was regarded as irrational and primitive. A person used to gain knowledge through the process of education, in order to become 'knowledgeable' which in fact is the ideal behind liberal arts education. But in a postmodern society, knowledge becomes 'functional'. Not only does a person learn things just to 'know' them, but also to 'use' that knowledge. This is the reason why educational policies attach a great deal of emphasis on skills and training in modern digital society. In this way, in postmodern societies knowledge is closely linked with its utilitarian aspects, method of storage, arrangement and distribution of knowledge is also different in postmodern societies as compared with modern societies.

Objectives of the study:

This study has been conducted with the following objectives:

1. To find out the nature of the postmodern ESL scenario and the innovative ways of incorporating ICT with a view to exert powerful motivation and provide students with exciting new ways of learning.
2. To find out the changing role of the teacher in the modern, ICT-driven teaching-learning environment.

Research Design and Methodology

To fulfill the above objectives of the study, the researcher has explored various resources pertaining to ICT and ESL teaching. The researcher has examined and analyzed a few research studies in the related field. Efforts were primarily done to understand the nature of the teaching-learning process that takes place in the educational institutions. Opinions of students and teachers have been considered. In addition, various secondary sources in the form of articles in the professional, national, and international journals, books and websites have been used.

Review of literature

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionized the modes of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption in the modern digital society. Those who are specialized in ELT and ICT argue that postmodernism is best correlated with the emergence of ICT. Today, ICT has become a dominant force governing all aspects of our life. In postmodern societies, anything which is not able to be translated into a form recognizable and storable by a computer or anything that is not digitizable, is not considered 'knowledge'. In this paradigm, the opposite of "knowledge" is not "ignorance", as in the modernist paradigm, but rather "noise." In this context, it becomes necessary to observe some of the suggestions offered by Edwards and Usher (1994) regarding postmodern education system:

1. In the postmodern scenario, education needs to be diverse in terms of its goals as well as processes, participants and curriculum, methods of instruction and organizational structures.
2. Education does not merely function as a means of large-scale social engineering. Rather, it becomes limitless in terms of time and space.
3. No attempt shall be made to fit education into a stereotype mechanism of standardized curricula, age old teaching methods, and universal codes of rationality or morality.
4. Education should enable greater participation of culturally diverse learners in a variety of ways to promote self-learning.
5. Education in the postmodern world is characterized by a general 'decentering' and 'loosening' of boundaries.

Many arguments have been put forward in relation to the impact of ICT on the teaching and learning of English language. Some theorists believe that it would make students smarter and enhance the teaching and learning of English language, others present the argument that there is no certainty about its possibilities and outcome since many teachers are not yet familiar with the use of technology. Some teachers of English language hold the view that technology often remains limited to the simple task of writing assignments and browsing the internet for entertainment, while a few others suggest that this tendency, to certain extent, is due to ESL teachers' limited knowledge of the role played by ICT in English language instruction. This leads to an implication that the integration of ICT and ESL teaching has merits as well as challenges.

In recent decades, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) have been encouraged to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for the purposes of development of learners' communicative competence. ICT with its rich, boundless repertoire of web resources presents a radical new approach to providing linguistic input and encouraging students to acquire communicative competence in English language. ICT provides unlimited access to instructional videos, dictionaries, E-books, social networking sites, blogs etc. and the potential benefit across the globe is considerable. Hence, ICT has the potential to drastically modify the role of ESL teachers in modern classrooms.

Postmodern Approach to Language Learning

A postmodern approach to English language learning puts the previous linguistic and cultural representations and their political associations to an acid test. Many 'modern' meta narratives adopted by ESL teachers and which have become implicit in their practices, such as textbooks, teacher-direction and control, standardized tests etc. are in fact cultural and man-made and based upon various 'hidden agendas' derived from the Enlightenment view of reality. Harrison (1990) therefore observes, "what we do in the language classroom is affected by who we are, what views we hold, and the societies we are part of". The multiplicity of factors and influences in ESL scenario is itself a manifestation of the postmodern notions of systems theory and complexity theory. According to these theories, a system (e.g. a language learner) interacts with other

systems at the same level, and at higher or lower levels (e.g. parents, peers, media, web etc.) and will interact dynamically with them and develop in the process. This interaction results in a meaningful formation of perceptions, attitudes, learning needs, preferences and cognitive styles.

Postmodern Teaching Paradigm

Postman (1995) notes that "among the 'new' ideas now current in several places is the organization of learning experiences around themes. This is a progressive idea, pointing as it does to the need for providing meaning in education". This 'theme-based' approach can be equated with project-based teaching in ELT, which in turn can be viewed as an extension of Task-based Language Teaching. This provides a suitable ground for application of 'postmodernism' in ESL teaching and learning.

With a view to ensure collaborative learning and thereby develop communicative competence in English language, providing communicative learning tasks to the students becomes utmost necessary in postmodern pedagogy. As Ellis (2003) observes, "tasks can be seen as tools for constructing collaborative acts". The learning tasks help the learners:

1. To use new language structures and items in meaningful and realistic situations through collaboration with other learners
2. To engage themselves in more independent use of structures that they have internalized through various learning tasks
3. To use the structures in real-life situations and thereby develop communicative competence.

A task-based approach combines and promotes many postmodern features of ESL theory and practice: 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) and promote autonomous learning. Formative self-assessment helps learners set goals, assess their achievements, and reflect on their needs (self-reflexiveness). Finally, task-based approach enables form and performance to be combined (border-crossing) in a Form-Focused Interaction (FFI) approach (Finch,2006), in which students learn English language by using it meaningfully in the classroom. Proper progression of learning tasks allows students to acquire new language through static, experiential tasks (controlled language), and gradually introduces them to more challenging, complex, autonomous tasks (unpredictable language).

Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in the postmodern scenario is to facilitate learning by being a 'guide on the side' and providing resource and guidance (linguistic, cognitive and social) wherever necessary. Such an approach demonstrates the postmodern sciences of Chaos and Complexity, a concept with various implications for the language classroom: "It is

useful to regard the classroom as a complex adaptive system" (Van Lier 1996) in which "languages go through periods of chaos and order as do other living systems." Their creative growth occurs at the border between these two. (Larsen-Freeman 1997).

Van Lier (1996) aptly observes:

"The educational context, with the classroom at its center, is viewed as a complex system in which events do not occur in linear causal fashion, but in which a multitude of forces interact in complex, self-organizing ways, and create changes and patterns that are part predictable, part unpredictable."

A task-based approach to language learning focuses on holistic learning and develops individual (intrapersonal) as well as group (interpersonal) responsibility, promoting critical, informed problem-solving goals that the postmodern education system intends to achieve. Breen(1999) argues that "the classroom group needs to be a dynamic self-organizing learning community". The postmodern pedagogy regards experience as a starting point and the focus of attention. Classroom learning experience is built upon learner and teacher experiences. The focus is on doing things and interpreting the experience.

As against the modernist perspective in which education is nothing but the reproduction of existing practices, in postmodern pedagogy, the major objective for learners is to acquire new ways of articulating experiences and ideas.

With regard to the role of the teacher, Breen(1999)observes:

"Rather than being a transmitter of knowledge, either directly, or knowledge as commodified in the pages of the course book, the teacher is re-construed as a 'cultural worker', not only forming and maintaining the classroom culture, but also facilitating a research process resembling that of linguistic and cultural anthropology. Through engagement in language- based activity, the learners become researchers of the language themselves..."

In this way, postmodernism in ELT expects the teacher to be a facilitator or 'guide on the side' so as to enable the learners to 'learn how to learn'.

Conclusions

Postmodern ESL theory presents English as a global language in which there are no native speakers, no standard pronunciations or grammar, and no target culture (de-colonization, diversification, and regionalization). Western-oriented practices (and politics) of language teaching are being reinterpreted in the light of indigenous learning needs and socio-political factors, and more effective and socially desirable collaborative studying models (decentralization) are emphasized. 'Learning to learn' is seen as a life-long process, in which language is used as a means of learning language (self-reference).

We can provide a dynamic approach to language learning by shifting the responsibility for learning to the learner, by focusing on the acquisition of interaction skills and social skills in a group context, and by providing opportunity to learn through self-directed learning tasks and "through an awareness of how we use language, how language uses us, and what measures are available to clarify our knowledge of the world we make (Postman 1995).

As O'Farrell (1999) concludes: "If education can be a machine for social conformity, it can also be a machine for the investigation of new horizons and new possibilities. The proliferation of 'difference' and uncertainty in the postmodern world, far from being a problem, is a constant invitation to imagine the unimaginable."

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