

A New Challenge in the Methodology of the Post-Method Era

Bahadır Cahit Tosun

bahadrtosun@gmail.com

Abstract

This study first seeks to provide background information as to the history of language teaching and the emergence of ‘best method’ concern, then as a second step it seeks to shed light on the post – method condition dwelling on its essentials. Ultimately, the question whether this new painful and argumentative transmission period is a prognostic of a great mistake of the past is aimed to be discussed.

Key Words: best method, framework, methodology, post method condition.

Özet

Bu çalışma ilk etapta dil öğretimi tarihi ve en iyi metot kaygısının ortaya çıkışı hakkında temel bilgi sağlamaya ve ardından ikinci adım olarak metot sonrası döneme bu dönemin en önemli yönleri üzerinde durarak ışık tutmaya çalışmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu sancılı ve tartışmalı geçiş döneminin geçmişin büyük bir hatasının belirtisi olup olmadığı sorusunun tartışılması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: en iyi metot, çatı, yöntembilim, metot sonrası dönem.

1. Introduction

Methodology in language teaching has been a challenging and drastically changing concept following the 1900s. Although each method was fervently applied in the period in which they were devised, all of them were replaced by another in succession, which could be grounded on two sensible reasons; the academic concern to renew or further the methodology in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) towards a better condition, or by some political reasons consistent with what Pennycook (1989) argues.

In terms of the first probable reason, quantitative research findings may be conceived as a facilitator. Especially during the last 25 years or so, to some extent, they gave a

tangible compass so far as to revoke a current method and invent another; even though statistical analyses were conflicting from time to time.

As for the second probable reason, it is relatively new. A conglomeration comprising a large body of methods are nowadays remembered to be a shame as a new trend. Indeed, today, we are on the verge of refusing a considerable period of our language teaching history irrespective of the millions of people who were taught through so – called obsolete methodology.

This study first seeks to provide background information as to the history of language teaching and the emergence of ‘best method’ concern, then as a second step it seeks to shed light on the post – method condition dwelling on its essentials. Ultimately, the question whether this new painful and argumentative transmission period is a prognostic of a great mistake of the past is aimed to be discussed.

2. Concept of Language Teaching Before 1900s

Until 1530 for French language and 1586 for English language there was no scientific study attempt as regards a skeleton for language (Widdowson, 2004). Gradually, when French, Italian and English became prominent as a result of the political changes in Europe of the sixteenth century, Latin lost its importance and its function as a live language. However, the study of classical Latin was selected as a model for language teaching from the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Therefore, it was essential that one who was intrigued by language teaching of a vernacular language opt for counting on intense grammar and then texts or dialogue forms just as it was with Latin (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

Yet, this model was not suitable for the younger school students and group teaching. However, the process maintained this way up until the end of the eighteenth century when partly a new model except for main aspects, grammar teaching was, codified under a new method ‘Grammar – Translation Method’. Now the old traditional texts were replaced by simple example sentences (Widdowson, 2004). Hereafter, there was a concrete tangible method to be followed in order to teach a language. Still, the focal point of this new set of rules for teaching languages was solely promoting reading and writing skills instead of oral competency.

3. Towards a Formula for All: Best Method

Following the foundation of Grammar – Translation Method, toward the mid – nineteenth century, the focus on oral proficiency made for the rejection of this method by masses of language teaching experts who were in pursuit of an innovation for a better formula (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

François Gouin, who came up with his *Series Method*, was the first to ignite a new flame for the pursuit of best method that was due to serve for all aspects of language teaching. This new search for the best method triggered by Gouin would be succeeded by multifaceted pursuits of method more than a century comprising, *Direct Method*, *Audio – Lingual Method*, *Cognitive Code Learning Method*, *Community Language Learning*, *Silent Way*, *Suggestopedia*, *Total Physical Response* and others (Brown, 2002).

Notwithstanding that we know the exact emergence periods of these aforementioned methods, some of them coincide with each other on the time table because the majority of these were devised on discrete territories of the world. As for the subject around which the quarrel of ensuing new methodology turned, 1970 indisputably appears to be a benchmark because during the period until 1967 all the quarrels about methodology was depending on the nature of language learning. However, from this date on the argument turned its destination to the argument whether grammar should be the central concern or an integrated portion in language teaching. Meanwhile, Communicative Language Teaching devised in the course of mid 70s became a great challenge to the explicit grammar teaching. To be more precise, it was rejecting an intense grammar teaching reducing it to a minimum level let alone accepting grammar teaching as a central reference. The focal point of this method was around subject matter, tasks, projects, semantic notions, and pragmatic functions (Celce – Mercia, 1991).

Above all the advocated methods the most groundbreaking method lasting so far appears to be Communicative Language Teaching, which has been followed by Task Based Language Teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Today, language teaching is again exposed to another transition period by the name of Post Method Condition (Pica, 1999). The fathers of this new stream, in a sense, contend that all the

methodology pursuit of language teaching history, tried to be monitored concisely in this part, was nothing but trying in vain.

4. Impeachment of Ten Decades

There exists a current debate that began resting on the challenges of Pennycook (1989), and Prabhu (1990). While Pennycook (1989) was giving an end to the legitimized objectivity claims, Prabhu brought the case further and put an end to the pursuit of best method by proclaiming that there is no best method. What Pennycook defended was that all the method concerns of the field were partially serving for a linguistic imperialism controlling and directing the periphery (1989) while Prabhu's contention was that a) different methods are best for discrete teaching contexts. b) the exhaustive methods are partially valid. C) the perception of good and bad methods is misguided (1990). Then, an impeachment of method concept was followed by a body of scholars. Henceforth, the majority of the scholars in the field were after 'an alternative to method' instead of 'an alternative method' which brought about the post – method condition (Kumaravadivelu 2006). Of all the attempts carried out by some scholars for this new pursuit, three have managed to stand as far as Kumaravadivelu (2006) is concerned with the case; Stern's *three – dimensional framework* (1992), Allwright's *explanatory practice* (2000, 2003) and Kumaravadivelu's *macrostrategic framework* (1992, 1994, 2001, 2003). Different from the obsolete method applications, new pedagogy is said to be more flexible since it takes 'the macro structures – social, cultural, historical and political – that shape the micro structures' of the classroom ambiance into consideration (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 59).

The arguments submitted heretofore amounts to one fact that directly or indirectly the forefathers of this new approach of language teaching impeach the past 100 years with their claims of opening a new horizon to this field. In other words, the new solution claims of Stern (1992), Allwright (2000, 2003) and Kumaravadivelu (1992, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2006) put aside, what Pennycook (1989), Prabhu (1990) and Stern (1992) contended was nothing but impeaching the past 100 years with its scholarly attempts and studies that shaped this period.

In the next part we will try to accentuate two underlying factors of this situation which may have been disregarded and which may help us attain a new projection.

5. Shelters for Post – Method Condition: Globalization and Post – Modernism

Post modernism as a bringing of globalization have shown that English on the one hand has gradually become a lingua – franca (Richards, J. C., Platt, J. and Platt H., 1992) and there is a widening scale of Englishes in use through various territories of the world (Ashworth, 1985) on the other. Either situation was an upshot of the emergence of multicultural education although ‘there is no consensus on what multicultural education is, how it should be implemented, and what outcomes should be expected from it. Indeed, even the term ‘multicultural education’ is not universally used or understood’ (Cerroni – Long, 1999: 6). This has led to some changes in the attitudes of postmodern teachers claiming that the time of packaged solutions of methods for language teaching is over. They have thought that it is high time we embarked on a new journey towards a new pursuit that can do away with so –called obsolete method concept (Richards and Rogers, 2001).

This drastic and challenging situation in language teaching methodology is in fact on account of the impacts of two main events lying beneath globalization; British imperialism followed in the nineteenth century and the scientific superiority of the U.S.A and Britain throughout the twentieth century. As a result of this many local forms of English beside even new concepts such as English as an Intra – national Language (EiIL) enacted (Ashworth, 1985). Therefore, the new global world witnessed and is still witnessing a new, cosmopolitan and multicultural English teaching environment which requires its new resolution for a wide range of diverse learner environments.

Frankly speaking, the argument of methodology submitted in the previous part directly rests on two well known concepts; globalization and postmodernism. Or rather, post – method condition is a newly born infant of globalization and its ultimate product postmodernism. Put differently, a systematic reflection of postmodernism to language teaching finds its name as post – method condition.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to synthesize the information in order to provide a sound ground that would navigate us to determine whether the post method condition with all its arguments is a proof of a gigantic vanity or not.

Discrete from the earlier forms of methodological pursuits, post – method condition is leaning its back to a more substantial event, maybe a phenomenon; globalization. In this sense, as a transmission period, post – method condition is up to an unprecedented obscurity. First, unlike the method concept, post – method condition is not trying to create a new waving for a current subject as language teaching, instead, it is a mimesis of what is waving on the globe for the time being. Therefore, unlike past occurrences it is far distant from controlling what it postulates to do but it is subject to prospects of our near future.

Second, creating a ground for a new course does and should not mean to assault to the accumulations of the past. If the claims pertaining to the forefathers of post – method condition are accepted declaring that methods are all defunct, how is it possible to account for millions of people who were taught foreign languages through these methods? To the contrary, it would be a more becoming idea to assess each historical occurrence in terms of the conditions of their period.

As is in the past, these new challenges may be right on their sides with their claim of devising the ultimate form to teach languages. Still, as every ultimate claim lasts solely until the next, this new trend may be exposed to replacement of another which also possesses the liability to have the very identity of so – called obsolete methodology. In other words, the next step of this new trend would be formed in the hands of those who can stand the argument on its head and recall obsolete methods back.

Ultimately, whereas methods are not paid acceptance by the majority of post – method condition scholars, it would not be a wise approach to disregard them totally merely for providing a sound ground for the new bringing of the present occurrences. It is always quite possible that these current obsolete minor characters can be the major ones in the post – post method condition again.

References

- Ashworth, M. (1985). *Beyond Methodology: Second Language Teaching and the Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2002). English Language Teaching in the “Post – Method” Era: Toward Better Diagnosis, Treatment and Assessment In J. Richards and W. A. Renandya (ed.) *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celce – Mercia, M. (1991). Grammar Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, (3), 92 – 133.
- Cerroni – Long, L. E. (1999). ‘Multiculturalism, Education and the state: Anthropological Perspectives’. Eastern Michigan University, CLT – 99/CONF.601/CPL – 7.
From Site: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001161/116101Eo.pdf>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). TESOL Methods: Changing Tracks, Challenging Trends. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40, (1), 10 – 25.
- Pennycook, A. (1989). The Concept of Method, Interested Knowledge, and the Politics of Language Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23, (4), 14 – 43.
- Pica, T. (199). Tradition and transition in English language teaching methodology. *System* 28, 1, (18).
- Prabu, N. S. (1990). There Is No Best Method – Why? *TESOL Quarterly* , 24, (2)
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J. and Platt H. (1992). *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Essex: Longman House.
- Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Widdowson, H. D. (2004). *A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.