

# Postmethod Era and Glocalized Language Curriculum Development: A Fresh Burden on Language Teachers

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**Abstract**—The disappearance of method from academic discussions and the rise of the postmethod debate emanating from both the postmodernist philosophy and a globalized world have stirred a fresh round of discussion in academic circles in the field of the second language (L2) teaching profession. As a result of postmethod pedagogy, the teacher comes to the center of language learning and teaching and his/her beliefs, experiences and knowledge are greatly valued. Although postmethodists favor teacher autonomy, they do not favor the one-way flow of information inherent in a top-down syllabus, and provide a theoretical basis for the re-emergence of a learner-centered process syllabus and the negotiated contributions to syllabus development by both teachers and learners. Finally, although postmethod pedagogy favors a glocalized learner-centered curriculum, it is highly teacher-dependent since this is the postmethod teacher who can fulfill postmethod promises.

**Index Terms**—critical teacher education, curriculum development, glocalization, postmethod, postmodernism

## I. INTRODUCTION

The second language (L2) teaching profession has gone through a number of dramatic changes particularly during the final quarter of the twentieth century. Starting in the 1970s, teachers and researchers came to realize that no single research finding and no single method of language teaching would bring total success in teaching a second language especially as it was seen that certain learners seemed to be successful regardless of methods or techniques of teaching (Brown, 2007, p. 40). As a consequence of repeatedly articulated dissatisfaction with the limitations of the concept of *method*, and following the advent of a set of newer beliefs and assumptions surrounding (second/foreign) language teaching practices, the L2 profession was faced with an imperative need to construct a new concept (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). As such a conceptual shift took place: the disappearance of method from academic discussions and the rise of the postmethod debate (Akbari, 2008).

Having succinctly reviewed the main concerns of postmethod debate and its due philosophical foundations, the present study does its best to cast some light on the following questions: What impacts does postmethod pedagogy have on language teaching practices worldwide? What are its effects on language curriculum development? And last but not least, what are the criticisms leveled against postmethod curriculum?

## II. POSTMETHOD AND POSTMODERNISM

As acknowledged by Kumaravadivelu (2003b, 2006a), the source of inspiration for philosophizing postmethod is postmodernism. So before dealing with the postmethod pedagogy, it would be helpful to take a glance at the concept of *postmodernism* (Hashemi, 2011).

Postmodernism philosophy, which appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study including art, music, film, literature, architecture, and even technology, originated in France during the 1960s and 1970s and was greatly influenced by phenomenology (the scientific naturalism), existentialism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structuralism. These intellectual movements rejected the belief that the study of humanity could be modeled on (objectivity) or reduced to the physical science (reductionism); hence they avoided behaviorism and naturalism, and unlike hard sciences, they focus not merely on facts but on the meaning of facts for human subjects (Fahim & Pishghadam, 2009).

As the term *postmodernism* itself suggests, postmodernists wish to dissociate themselves from *modernism*, what is often referred to as the project of the *Enlightenment*. The modern scientific enterprise has its roots in the Enlightenment, which brought to the fore reason, rationality, the universal, idealism, objectivity, and the search for the truth (Lantolf, 1996). Briefly, the idea is that the Enlightenment, or modernism, while liberating us from the backwardness, superstition and prejudice of the middle ages, has subjected us to new oppressions. Especially, science and the idea of

Reason have led both to an intolerance of diversity and difference, and to a purely materialistic and instrumental view of nature, including man as the subject of the social sciences (Gregg, 2000).

Blackburn (1996) defines postmodernism as a reaction against a naive confidence in objective or scientific truth. It denies the idea of fixed meanings, or any correspondence between language and the world, or any fixed reality or truth or fact to be the object of enquiry (Hashemi, 2011). Postmodernists reject what they see as the modernist belief in epistemic absolutism, or foundationalism: the idea that there are universal, objective and infallible foundations for our knowledge. In other words, Postmodernism rejects the very idea of an objective reality external to the observer. The postmodernist sees reality as a social construction, the product of interactions between actors in a social setting. Hence such factors as social structure, class and power relations play an essential role in the creation of reality. This means that there can be a multiplicity of realities, none of which has any more legitimate claim than any other to being viewed as *the* reality. Thus, postmodernism is essentially *constructivist* (Gregg, 2000).

Despite the divergence among different usages of postmodernism, one can find some commonalities centering on postmodernists. As Fahim and Pishghadam (2009, pp. 34-35) enumerate, postmodernists:

1. are constructivist. In their view, there are no real foundations of truth, for there is no truth, except what the group decides is truth. Postmodernism is preference and truth is a social construct to be eliminated. Truth and persons are given value only as the group values them.

2. are against absolutism. They value relativism. Knowledge is not stable and eternal as the history of science has shown us, it refers to probabilities rather than certainties, better rather than the best.

3. reject theories because theories are abundant, and no theory is considered more correct than any other. To them inquiry must be approached pragmatically.

4. question the notion of expertise. The idea that some people (experts) know more than others (non-experts) are not supported. They believe that interaction between the knower and non-knower is often best seen as dialog in which there is mutual influence than simple transmission of knowledge from one to other. In fact both are involved in an interactive process of knowledge creation. Dialog replaces monolog.

5. reject global decisions. Since reality is culture dependent, changing over time, as cultures do, and varies from community to community, knowledge is not universal. We are cautioned to be careful with generalization, because they can be deceiving. Therefore, Postmodernists are intolerant of truth and values unless they are considered local. Diversity is celebrated.

6. attack notions of reason and means-end thinking. Objectivism is replaced with subjectivism and this is the society's whims which rule scientific disciplines not physical laws.

7. use analytic strategy which is central to politics of postmodernism. They try to uncover the taken-for-granted relationship which has been hidden for a long time, to denaturalize the naturalized roles in the world and each society, and to analyze a text to find out the hidden and marginalized meanings of it. To them, no text is innocent, and every text betrays a fragment of power which should be surfaced.

On education, too, postmodernism had an impact as "postmodernists attacked notions of reason, means-end thinking, and theory teaching;" and this consequently caused "a major shift in our conception of inquiry" (Beck, 1993). Questioning the practice of problem posing in schools, Beck (1993) suggests that postmodernist education should help students develop cultural-political understanding through "democratic and dialogical emphasis of postmodernism, its questioning of the motives of authorities and its downplaying of the role of experts" (Beck, 1993). However, Beck (1993) calls for a kind of balance by cautioning that "we should not dismantle all structure and hope that something happens."

If postmodernism is the dominant spirit of the time and has influenced many fields of study, this question may come to mind: How has postmodernism affected the field of English language teaching both in theory and practice? To answer this question, we now delve briefly into the concept of postmethod pedagogy.

### III. POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

Postmodernism seems to have influenced TESOL through the guise of postmethodism from the 1990s when for the first time the concept of postmethod condition was officially introduced by Kumaravadivelu (1994). Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003b) exploring the nature of the traditional, top-down, modernist, and transmission-oriented methods of teaching that view learners as passive recipients of the teacher's methodology and defining the concept of method as a construct of "marginality" in the sense that it "valorizes everything associated with the colonial Self and marginalizes everything associated with the subaltern Other" (2003b) invites practitioners of all persuasions in the field to find a systematic, coherent, and relevant *alternative to method* rather than an *alternative method* (Hashemi, 2011).

In fact, he argues that any meaningful process of decolonization of ELT requires a fundamental shift from the concept of method to the concept of postmethod which entails a greater awareness of issues such as teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition, and a transform of disempowered periphery or merely classroom consumers into strategic teachers or strategic researchers reclaiming their teacher autonomy that empowers teachers to theorize from their own practice and practice what they have theorized. This bottom-up "pedagogic mediation" is the essence of what he, following Widdowson's (1990) notion of pragmatics of pedagogy which construes the immediate activity of teaching as the medium through which the relationship between theory and practice can be realized, calls "principled

pragmatism," a key element of postmethod pedagogy that is sensitive to language teachers' local needs, wants, and situations (Hashemi, 2011). As such, Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003a, 2006a) conceptualizes three parameters for postmethod pedagogy consisting of three parameters of *particularity*, *practicality*, and *possibility*.

The parameter of *particularity* is based on the belief that any language teaching program "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.538). At its core, the idea of pedagogic particularity is consistent with the hermeneutic perspective of *situational understanding*, which highlights the context-sensitive nature of language teaching and claims that a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations, and that it cannot be improved without a general improvement of those particular situations (Elliott, 1993, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 171).

The parameter of *practicality* refers to the relationship between theory and practice. If context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge has to emerge from teachers and their practice of everyday teaching, then they ought to be enabled to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. The idea that knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge shifts the postmethod pedagogy to a paradigm of praxis in which teachers are no longer consumers of knowledge produced by theorists, but they need to act upon the conditions they face in order to change them. A *theory of practice* is conceived when there is a union of action and thought, or more precisely, when there is action in thought and thought in action. The parameter of practicality, then, focuses on teachers' reflection and action, which are also based on their insights and intuition (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2003b).

The parameter of *possibility* owes much of its origin to the Freirean critical pedagogy that seeks to empower classroom participants so that they can critically reflect on the social and historical conditions contributing to create the cultural forms and interested knowledge they encounter in their lives (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b). The experiences participants bring to the pedagogical setting are shaped, not just by what they experience in the classroom, but also by a broader social, economic, and political environment in which they grow up. These experiences have the potential to alter classroom aims and activities in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners or curriculum designers or textbook producers. The parameter of possibility is also concerned with language ideology and learner identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 175).

In other words, in the new alternative called postmethod pedagogy the main features of a postmodernist philosophy are realized; that is to say (1) it is constructivist; (2) it is against absolutism, and it values relativism, so it does not look for a cure-all; (3) it does not look for another theory, but it tries to approach the whole process of language teaching/learning pragmatically, and as such it moves toward the paradigm of praxis; and to do this (4) it rejects global decisions and values culture-dependent, local norms.

#### IV. POSTMETHOD AND GLOBALIZATION

Globalization, according to Giddens (1990, cited in Block, 2004), is defined as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (p. 75). In language teaching, this has manifested itself in the way English is widely used as the international language or "the shared linguistic code" (Block & Cameron, 2002, p. 1) in international communication to the extent that as Richards (2008) points out "English is no longer viewed as the property of the English-speaking world but is an international commodity sometimes referred to as world Englishes, a deterritorialized English detached from its geographical and cultural origins" (p. 2). Although there is no doubt that we are living in a globalized world, thanks to technological innovations that are in fact "evaporating borders and distances" (Daly, 2009, p. 7), there is little agreement on the various aspects of the issue.

While debate over the merits and demerits of globalization and the extent it should be regarded as a homogenizing process continue to the third millennium, the advent of more individualistic and learner-centered approaches to learning, and the post-method rejection of the belief in one-size-fits-all method, has given rise to the need to localize the teaching materials in order to better suit the particular language needs and wants of each specific context. Localizing, as is conceptualized by McDonough and Shaw (2003), takes into account the international geography of English language teaching and the recognition that what may work in one particular setting may not necessarily do so in another context. Perhaps, it has been due to the same clash between globalization and localization in modern life that the reconciling neologism of *glocalization* has been introduced to the literature to advocate the slogan *think globally, act locally*. According to Weber (2009, cited in Gurko, 2011), glocalization is "a mix of global frameworks and local practices, and which greatly increases the potential for independent learning by merging worldwide knowledge and local knowledge" (p. 132). Yet, Moss (2008) believes that glocalization does not represent the intermediate or transitional idea or period between the local and the global level but rather as the use of global standards to describe the goals and consequently make local plans to achieve the global standards. Khondker (2004, p. 3) enumerates the following points as the main propositions of glocalization:

1. Diversity is the essence of social life;
2. Globalization does not erase all differences;
3. Autonomy of history and culture give a sense of uniqueness to the experiences of groups of people whether we define them as cultures, societies or nations;

4. Glocalization is the notion that removes the fear from many that globalization is like a tidal wave erasing all the differences.

5. Glocalization does not promise a world free from conflicts and tensions but a more historically grounded understanding of the complicated – yet, pragmatic view of the world.

As far as language curriculum development is concerned, Daly (2009) believes that:

...in this post-methods age, non-native speaker teachers are in the best position to act as mediators in the EFL profession to combine local knowledge and teaching strategies with CLT or other principles from SLA or Applied Linguistics. In this way, a more systematic (and hopefully less teacher-responsible) approach to FL teaching for exam-oriented contexts can be devised to better prepare EFL students for the needs of a globalized world. (p. 14)

Further, Daly (2009) refers to this glocalizing activity as “a post-methods principled pragmatics”, which is currently “cautious, tentative and hazy” and which “places a terrific burden on teachers” (p. 15). Hence, glocalizing is not an easy straightforward path to take and some requirements must be met to pave the way toward achieving it.

Considering all these promising vantage points, the question springing to mind is what type of language teachers are needed to actualize all these aspects of the glocalized postmethod pedagogy? The next section seeks to answer this question.

## V. POSTMETHOD AND CRITICAL LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

Postmethod pedagogy puts the teacher at the center of language learning and teaching and values his/her beliefs, experiences and knowledge. The value given to teachers should be appreciated because it is the teachers who know their learners and the classroom context best. Teachers are considered as great sources as a result of their experience in the past as students, past experience of teaching, knowledge of one or more methods gained throughout their training as teachers, knowledge of other teachers' actions and opinions and their experience as parents or caretakers (Prabhu, 1990, as cited in Can, 2012). Therefore, postmethod teachers are encouraged to develop and create their own methods as they gain experience based on their classroom context and knowledge of other methods and approaches. In this sense, postmethod teachers are autonomous, analysts, strategic researchers and decision-makers. Such teachers are also reflective as they observe their teaching, evaluate the results, identify problems, find solutions, and try new techniques (Can, 2012). Based on this, there is a movement in which teachers feel compelled to dissociate themselves from a top-down process and associate themselves with a bottom-up process as teachers “theorize what they practice or practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 37). In brief, “postmethod pedagogy recognizes teachers' prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula and textbooks” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 178).

However, one might ask how we may accomplish this type of teacher autonomy? Training in the techniques and procedures of a specific method is probably essential for novice teachers entering teaching because it provides them with the confidence they will need to face learners and it provides techniques and strategies for presenting lessons (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.250). As Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.251) rightly claim, an approach or a predetermined method with its associated activities, principles, and techniques may be an essential starting point for an inexperienced teacher, but it should be seen only as that since in most cases, novice teachers are far from fulfilling postmethod promises.

If we are to render teachers who can act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints, we need to challenge existing narrow view of teacher training and even teacher education programs and move toward a limitless quest for *critical language teacher education* (Hawkins & Norton, 2009). Rooted in the work of Paolo Freire, the concept of “critical” is especially salient for postmethod language teachers. Since language, culture, and identity are integrally related, language teachers are in a key position to address educational inequality, both because of the particular learners they serve, many of whom may be marginalized members of the wider community, and because of the subject matter they teach - language - which can itself serve to both empower and marginalize (Hawkins & Norton, 2009).

Language teachers often serve as social mediators and informants in the new language. They play a key role in the construction of the learners' views of their understandings of unfamiliar belief systems, values and practices, and their negotiations of new social relationships. Critical language teachers make transparent the complex relationships between majority and minority speakers and cultural groups, and between diverse speakers of the majority language, thus having the potential to disrupt potentially harmful and oppressive relations of power (Hawkins & Norton, 2009).

Although language is the primary medium used to teach any subject matter, for language teachers it is both the medium and the content. Because language (or discourse) is the tool through which representations and meanings are constructed and negotiated, and a primary means through which ideologies are transmitted, language itself is not neutral, but is shot through with meanings, intentions and assumptions. Rather than having learners simply internalize such meanings as normal and right, critical language teachers work with their students to deconstruct language, texts, and discourses, in order to investigate whose interests they serve and what messages are both explicitly and implicitly conveyed (Hawkins & Norton, 2009).

## VI. POSTMETHOD AND LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Although postmethodists favor teacher autonomy and say that teachers should decide on their own way of teaching, they do not favor the one-way flow of information inherent in a top-down syllabus, and the lack of interaction and consultation with the learner. Calling them *dishonest ELT*, Rogers (2010) argues that top-down syllabuses, which are written by experts and then distorted and delivered to learners by language teachers, indeed regards learners as passive acceptors of language leading to cultural imposition, teacher: learner dichotomy, and *not enough learning*. In fact, simply the imposition of any type of top-down syllabus exerts an external agenda on learners and does not regard their own interests; in other words, it is external to learners rather internal, as such this kind of syllabus by itself does not serve the postmethod purpose(s).

Furthermore, as Breen and Littlejohn (2000) observed, “a pedagogy that does not directly call upon students’ capacities to make decisions conveys to them that either they are not allowed to or that they are incapable of doing so; or it may convey that the more overt struggle to interpret and plan is not part of ‘proper’ learning” (p. 21). Hence, to do away with a predetermined set of body of knowledge to be covered in a top-down, transmission-based syllabus, postmethod pedagogy allows learners a role in pedagogic decision making by treating them as active and autonomous players too. To fulfill this, postmethod pedagogy takes into account two views of learner autonomy, a narrow view and a broad view (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). The narrow view seeks to develop in the learner a capacity to learn to learn whereas the broad view goes beyond that to include a capacity to learn to liberate as well. That is why postmethod pedagogy seeks to make the most use of learner investment and learner interest by giving them, to the extent feasible, a meaningful role in pedagogic decision making.

Finally, recalling the third parameter of postmethod pedagogy, i.e. parameter of *possibility*, which is inspired by Freirean critical pedagogy, postmethodologists claim they can achieve this cause through the democratization of the classroom by providing their learners with an appropriate syllabus covering their both linguistic and social needs.

What is interesting about these views in terms of the discussion favored by the authors is that they both reintroduce the learners as key participants in the learning process along with teachers, and provide a theoretical basis for the re-emergence of a learner-centered process syllabus and the negotiated contributions to syllabus development by both teachers and learners as favored by Breen (1987). This means that syllabus in the postmethod pedagogy is much more than a *road map* of a course, given to teachers and delivered to learners. It becomes a social *interaction* involving not only *asking* learners their views and trying to incorporate them, but a whole process of teacher:learner *negotiation* and renegotiation of the syllabus throughout the course of lessons, thus reflecting the ideas promoted by Freire (Hall, 1997). Emphasizing social interaction, the postmethod negotiated syllabus does its best to interconnect the *whats* and *hows* of syllabus (What a syllabus is, and how a syllabus should be developed). As a result, the postmethod pedagogy turns into a “pedagogy *with* the learner, not *for* the learner” developed through the syllabus (Hall, 1997).

Such a view of the negotiated syllabus incorporates a solid foundation for both linguistic development and social empowerment. Constructed by the group, it should resolve who does what, with whom, with what resources, when, how, and for what learning purposes (Breen, 1987). However, it remains somewhat theoretical. How can it be put in to practice?

The key party to the implementation of the negotiation process in postmethod syllabus is the language teacher. On the one hand, postmethod teachers should not be seen simply as *deliverers* of a fixed syllabus, but should be valued as reflective professionals who frame and re-frame problems and test out their interpretations and solutions through the process of action research. On the other hand, to come up with the particulars of the new context, they need to conduct needs analysis to defy a high-constraint centralized educational system. However, to further delineate the critical aspect of the postmethod pedagogy, i.e. parameter of *possibility*, they are bound to go beyond a limited notion of student success as fulfilling content class requirements since language teaching/learning exceeds the walls of the classroom. The postmethod language teacher needs to help students to articulate and formalize their resistance, and to participate more democratically as members of an academic community and in the larger society. As such, the postmethod teacher needs to run the alternative to needs analysis, i.e. critical needs analysis, otherwise known as *Rights Analysis*, as an approach to examining target situations since as Benesch (2001, p.58) argues, needs analysis is simply used to study the linguistic and cognitive challenges ESL/EFL students face.

*Rights* highlight various players exercising power for different ends. Rights, unlike needs, are political and negotiable. Rights analysis does not assume that students are entitled to certain rights or that they should engage in particular types of activities to claim rights but that the possibility for engagement exists. Rather, it assumes that each academic situation offers its own opportunities for negotiation, depending on local conditions and on the current political climate both inside and outside the educational institution (Benesch, 2001, p. 58). In fact, a critical approach to the data would lead to a search for solutions to ESL/EFL students’ linguistic, cognitive and social problems.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Even though the authors highly favor postmethod pedagogy with its promising revelations, they cannot turn a blind eye to the practicality side of the postmethod coin. It is true that the postmethod argument has academically put an end to method discussions and the search for the good method; however, as Bell (2003) mentions, its practical counterpart, that is, methodology, is still a valid concept and very much alive for many teachers since as Akbari (2008) argues the problems that political ideologies and the academic world could not solve - problems of injustice, marginalization and

representation, voice and inclusion, effective design and delivery of instructional materials - are now assigned to the lone postmethod practitioner.

To conclude, although postmethod pedagogy favors a glocalized learner-centered curriculum, it is, however, highly teacher-dependent since this is the postmethod teacher who can fulfill postmethod promises. How many critical practitioners are already available in each context? How can we render more critical teachers? How much are they going to be paid? Concerning the contextual constraints, either low or high, imposed on postmethod teachers, how much room for maneuverability do such teachers have? In order not to ignore the realities of teaching and language teachers, we do need to make fundamental changes in our teacher education programs, mainly moving them toward critical teacher education programs, to cope with the many demands made by postmethod pedagogy.

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