CONSTRUCTING A POSTMODERN PEDAGOGY TO TEACH FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO POSTMODERN LEARNERS OF 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: A new language is learned by many to gain access to other people, cultures and their ways of seeing things. Although the academic world is gearing up with profound changes in teaching and learning of languages, to meet the challenges of the diversified, shifting circumstances, only modern approaches to foreign language education are being widely followed by many institutions while its learners belong to the postmodern era. This brings in a discrepancy between the needs, and interests of the learners and the views held by the stakeholders of education.

This paper tries to analyze the existing method of teaching/learning a foreign language through conventional/modern methods and aims to discuss and answer if the modern pedagogy of teaching a foreign language can fulfill the aspirations of postmodern learners in the 21st century?

It is found and discussed through the study that the modern pedagogical approach to foreign language teaching/learning process has to be deconstructed to meet the aspirations, needs and wants of its postmodern learners and the society they thrive in. The study thus puts forward a few alternatives, innovative postmodern pedagogical methods like the Digital Native Methodology, Meta-Curriculum, Task Based Learning and Project Based Learning as plausible methods to be included in the postmodern classrooms of foreign languages.

Keywords: Modern pedagogy, postmodern pedagogy, postmodern learners, Meta-Curriculum, Task Based Learning, Project Based Learning.

INTRODUCTION

The world in the 21st century is getting more diverse day by day and in the shifting circumstances, education attempts to identify optimal parameters of teaching, learning and assessment. Language education has always been of prime importance as language is the vehicle of thought for communication and self-expression. With the linguistic world under constant transformation, either for a global role at work or for working in a multicultural environment at home, the ability to speak another language is inevitable to bridge the many gaps in communication and cultural aspects.

A new language is learned by many to gain access to other people, cultures and their way of seeing things. Globalization has paved way for technological advancements and communication developments have created a global society, which calls for 'Global citizens' with a broader range of skills and abilities to meet the upcoming challenges of 'accelerated change and uncertainty' (Chinnammai, 2005).

Although the academic world is gearing up with profound changes in teaching and learning of languages, with English being the global language of

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communication, the role of foreign languages and their teaching-learning process in the heterogeneous classrooms of a plurilingual, multicultural country like India needs to be analyzed and reflected upon.

While modern approaches to foreign language education are still being widely followed by many institutions, its learners belong to the postmodern era. This brings in a discrepancy between the needs, and interests of the learners and the views held by the stakeholders of education.

This paper tries to analyze the existing method of teaching/learning a foreign language through conventional/modern methods and also attempts to discuss and answer the following central questions of the study:

- What are the modern pedagogical approaches to foreign language education?
- Who is a postmodern learner and what are his aspirations in the 21st century?
- Can the modern pedagogy of teaching a foreign language fulfill the aspirations of postmodern learners in the 21st century?

In the light of the above discussions, the study aims to deconstruct the modern pedagogical approach to foreign language teaching/learning process and suggests alternative, innovative, postmodern pedagogical methods to meet the aspirations, needs and wants of its postmodern learners and the society they thrive in.

Modern Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching/Learning of Foreign Languages

Modern pedagogical methods were influenced by colonial aspirations of the colonizers. Hence meaning-making was absolutist in tone and attitude. During the age of colonization, the study of linguistics was undertaken as a colonial, western project. For instance, in the era of colonization, the colonizer made the meaning and framed the syllabuses through standard pronunciation of the native speakers. Modern pedagogical methods rely on linguistic, scientific and empirical studies to frame the modern curriculum, which was colonial and western in its make-up. In the garb of scientific study of language, euro-centric methods of learning were promoted. Modern methods of language learning delinked the relation between culture and language by stressing more on linguistics. Modern methods defined and standardized the aims and procedures of education based on 'communal pragmatism' rather than individual benefits. It highlighted the importance of "communal" behaviorism, constructivism and cognitive processing and made judgments on what is relevant and irrelevant, appropriate and inappropriate based on the fixed view of the world (Uzun, 2012). Modern methods urged people to learn and follow the common information, trends and criteria to survive the society and taught how one should learn a language and show case the particular things one has learned from it.

Modern era had a mass productive tendency based on consumption and focused only on different ways of teaching and transmitting the basics of a language for the learners to practice. With the teacher playing a pivotal role in the entire explicitly, intentional learning process, that followed a positivistic philosophy of knowledge-based approach to teaching/learning, the form based, declarative knowledge taught on the basis of grand theory and deductive, top-down approaches gave more significance to the inputs and was largely quantitative in outcomes too.

The general tendency of the 'modern approach' was to put together all learners in the same classroom and urge them to read and follow the same text and activity by following the same approach, method and techniques as prescribed by the textbooks and materials used. Although the era produced theoretical principles like 'Multiple Intelligence' and 'Differentiated Instructions', it existed merely in theory and was not applied in practice. Modern approaches completely ignored individual needs and interests of the learners and their reflections on learning a language and few methods like 'Grammar-Translation Method', 'Direct Method', 'Audio-Lingual Method' etc stand testimony to the modernist values that knowledge is unitary, stable and objective.

The modern methods considered the teacher as the source of information, transmitter of knowledge, bearer of correct forms/meanings and interpretations and as the manager of the entire teaching-learning process.

The syllabus, course books, texts/material were very much of modernist phenomenon and the learners were mere recipients of the transmitted knowledge, with no voice of their own.

A quick look at the current syllabus and textbooks used in India to teach any foreign language like German / French / Spanish will reveal the euro-centric pedagogical methods followed. The teaching of foreign language courses is largely based on the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for language teaching, learning and assessment. The course is divided into six levels starting from A1 to C1, classified as beginner, intermediate and advanced levels of learning a language. The textbooks are designed and developed by the respective target countries and the methodology advocated is the 'Communicative Language Teaching'. The CEFR itself says that it is intended "to overcome the barriers to communication among professionals working in the field of modern languages arising from the different educational systems in Europe". (CEFR, pg 1)

Following such a Euro-centric model in a plurilingual, multicultural country like India brings with it a plethora of confusions and uncertainty as to the role of foreign languages and the aspirations and needs of its learners. The following paragraphs discuss the postmodern era and the structure of its classrooms and learners along with their characteristics and aspirations to understand the mismatch between the learners' needs and the teaching process.

The Postmodern Pedagogy

According to Michael T. Breen "A postmodern perceptive does not resemble a set of pedagogic principles like the communicative approach to language teaching. In essence, postmodern thinking is not concerned with prescriptions for how we may act. It is more a coming together of diverse ideas which seek to interpret the human condition towards the end of the 20th century." (Breen, 1999)

Postmodern pedagogical methods are critical and ideologically open-ended. To a great extent, modern methods are absolutist in tone; on the other hand postmodern methods are creative. In the postmodern era, the idea of a transcendental or absolute meaning is considered as a philosophical fiction. The language learning in the postmodern pedagogy demands a decentered, post-structuralist approach to fulfill the aspirations of the global learners in the postmodern space.

The signifier does not reach the signified in this novel method of language learning. Postponement or deferral of meaning is created as the signifier yields other signifiers. In Derridean terms, there is only play of words in the postmodern context of meaning-making process. Meaning making remains an unending, creative process as it remains in a state of a flux.

In this context, one is also conscious of what Paul de Man said: "By considering language as a system of signs and of signification rather than as an established pattern of meanings, one displaces or even suspends the traditional barriers between literary and presumably non literary uses of language and liberates the corpus from the secular weight of textual canonization" (Paul de Man, 1982)

The innovative learning methodology demands no specific territory which accommodates a deconstructed fusion of the local, regional and global in the postmodern context. The postcolonial national space would aim at creating its own postmodern chapters of language studies. In the postmodern context, curriculum itself becomes self-reflexive. Meta theory and not the theory is the guiding force, implying that there are only suggestions involving contradictory and complimentary ways of learning/teaching that are made, but no final word on what is proposed as an absolutist curriculum/syllabus.

A Postmodern perspective helps analyze our own teaching/learning process, the current classroom practices, the situations in which we teach and its effects on the progress of our learners. It does not resemble a set of pedagogic principles like the Communication Language Teaching (CLT) but rather concerns more with the convergence of diverse ideas.

The Post modern pedagogy values 'Performity' and has fragmented and multiple identities supporting 'Multivocality'. It is characterized by uncertainty and a constant flux where reality is a relative concept. Alternative realities and simulated realities are plausible and playing, feeling and learning by doing are its

crux. It's a place where established conventions governing texts and discourses are critically evaluated and new conventions are explored.

The Postmodern Classroom

The Postmodern classroom is more diverse and has inherent pluralism and need for inclusivity in it. It has 'mixed-ability' or 'multi-level' learners in the same class and the pluralism of learners' own familial, cultural and linguistic identities become resources to be explicitly valued and mined. Attitudes and viewpoints of learners along with their personal, previous experiences become the focal and starting point of the content and procedures of lessons and learning.

The curriculum is inclusive of the interests, preferences and aspirations of every learner in the classroom and entails cultural action for multicultural understandings. This learner centric approach focuses only on learners and their interpretations of experiences, the using of their first language to grapple with a new language to understand the nuances of another culture and reflects on the past and present experiences of its learners.

The Postmodern Learners

The learners of today grow up with technology, and are called the 'Net-Gen'/ 'Digital-Gen' learners. As 'Digital natives', who are 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet, they are spending their entire day interacting in this ubiquitous environment. The postmodern learners are used to phones in the pocket, the instantaneity of hypertext and instant messaging. (Prensky, 2001)

The deconstruction of Postmodernism has resulted in 'Anyone-Anywhere-Anytime-Anything' learning which is also more prudent and practical in evolving times. In the democratized society of digital interactivity, postmodern learners are expected to know the difference between data, information and knowledge. They must develop information literacy skills and the ways and strategies to access and acquire the colossal of information available rather than being spoon-fed.

The learner is encouraged to find personal meaning from the learning, and they create their own space, their own niche. It is critical to teach them how to live and learn in an open system, open to ambiguity and serendipitous development. There are constant disruptions and fragmentation of old systems and expectations and learners and teachers become partners in learning in a contemporary context.

Postmodern pedagogy ensures learner autonomy by shifting the focus from Teacher-centric Approach to a Learner-centric Approach. Unlike modern learners, postmodern learners are encouraged to become co-creators of meaning in the postmodern learning environment.

However, the postcolonial demands of the hybrid learners stresses on the importance of including the sensibilities of the local culture within the broader spectrum of learning a foreign language in the postmodern context. Indigenous or local culture of the postmodern learners situated in postcolonial nations is vibrant in nature with a curious mix of the global and the local.

The elitist notion of imposing rigid grammar rules over the colonized nations are undermined with newer, interesting language learning methods. The learners collaborate with one another and use various problem-solving techniques to understand and create the meaning for their learning. The learner groups are dynamic and self organizing learning community by nature who actively participate and realize a recurrent sense of achievement in their progress.

This paradigm shift in language study reflects the demands of the postmodern global space. The learners in the postmodern era are hyper real learners and are located across the world. Hence the traditional methods will not meet the aspirations of the postmodern learners. The postmodern hyper real learners move from being dependent learners to self-directed learners. They bring in more life experience with them and are aware of their needs and wants and they want to learn only what is relevant to them. These learners are more problem centered than subject centered and are more intrinsically motivated. (Knowles, 1980)

More than the core curriculum, these learners must also master the 4C's – Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication and Collaboration. Effective application of these skills in a technology infused life and workplace requires teaching them in a technology-infused learning environment also.

The Postmodern Teachers

The modern role of a conventional teacher as an authoritarian has been replaced by the postmodern role of the teacher as a facilitator. The teacher is seen as a commentator on experiences, ideas and proposals of learners and as a facilitator of the research process. As a Co-Creator of discourses, simulations and experiences, the teacher places the trust in the learners' capacities and makes them aware of their own purpose, difficulties and achievements. Since the postmodern approach to foreign language education looks from the learners' point of view, the role of teacher plays only a secondary role in the process. As such, the skills and the efficiency of the teacher do not come to the limelight, as learning is dependent on the receptiveness of the individual learners.

It is also seen that in this Net-Era, most of the teachers are 'Digital immigrants' while their learners are 'Digital Natives'. For these teachers to teach the natives, to speak in the digital language, also requires rethinking teaching methods and personally equipping oneself for effective process.

The Postmodern Approach to Language Teaching/Learning

From the above discussions on modern and post modern era and its characteristics, it is apparent that we are living in a state of flux and change is the only constant in this accelerating environment. As Edwards & Usher state, "Education is itself going through profound changes in terms of purposes, content and methods" and "a way of looking at education differently" is the need of the hour. (Edwards & Usher, 1994)

It is also well established that a one-size-fits-all approach to foreign language teaching will not meet the demands of the postmodern era and no one method or approach can meet the needs of its learners. An eclectic approach to teaching/ learning, co-constructed by the facilitators and the learners as per their aspirations and expectations would bring in more clarity to the entire teaching/learning process.

Since postmodernism believes in plurality or multiplicity of meanings, a few methods/approaches as suggested below could be examined for newer, open-ended process of teaching/learning a foreign language.

'Digital Native' Methodology

Digital Native Methodology include 'Gamification', 'simulation' and multimedia, web-based teaching and learning activities. As 'Netizens', who are citizens of the 'Net', our teaching methodology should also focus on digital citizenship, enabling the learners to explore their E-Community and society therein. (Adeoye, 2015). With the 'Cyberspace' being their second family, our Netizens thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. So integrating Web 2.0 applications in the curriculum and designing an array of tasks based on games/simulations/web quest will help these hyper real learners to 'learn new ways to do the conventional activities'.

Meta-Curriculum

Lester defines meta-curriculum as "which is concerned with the creative, critical activity of map making rather than with the content of any specific map" (Lester, 1996).

This model of constructing a map for ourselves is holistic and creative by itself and sees learners as unique individuals who judge by fitness for purpose using inductive reasoning.

According to Lester, the Meta-curriculum is "concerned with fundamental processes such as enquiring, reflecting, evaluating, and creating, enabling the individual to continuously develop abilities which enable content-learning appropriate to purpose and context. It is also reflexive as the self-managed, self-

evaluated learning processes are capable of being applied to themselves to generate an upward spiral of meta-learning, as well as facilitating development of situational knowledge and ability." (Lester, 1996)

The Meta-curriculum is comprised of learning skills and strategies selected on the basis of their value in helping students to acquire the curriculum content being taught and to develop the capacity to think and learn independently. (Ackerman & Perkins, quoted in Jacobs, 1989)

As postmodern learning is a creative act, inventing, modifying or recreating varied methods to suit the situation in hand facilitates learning experiences towards a meaningful aim. Newer learning strategies and potential to create newer knowledge are heightened and become an integral aspect of the postmodern class.

Meta-Curriculum in the Foreign Language Classroom

Meta-Curriculum fosters thinking skills and symbolic skills, familiar and innovative skills, and teaching through practicing and through structuring. Case studies, concept mapping, higher order reading skills, writing tactics using Journals / E-Journals etc can be used in language classrooms to nurture these skills in the students. By introducing thought provoking, connecting to real life content for the learners through the meta-curriculum will make learning more understandable and articulate.

Task-Based Language Teaching

The Inadequacy of the pre-existing meta-narrative – 'the propositional syllabus' as described by Breen in the product to process paradigm shift, led to the emergence of "Tasks" as a unit of analysis. (Breen, 1999)

"Tasks became the central pedagogical tool for the language teacher as well as a basic unit for language syllabus design and research" (Williams & Burden as quoted by Finch, 2010)

According to Ellis, tasks help learners to collaborate with each other to learn and use new language structures. It helps them to internalize the structures and use them independently in more complex tasks. (Ellis, 2003)

This Task-Based approach promotes the prime features of postmodernism like de-colonization (learner autonomy), border crossing (collaboration), decentralization (student centeredness) and deconstruction (negotiation of meaning). Task-based learning promotes decision-making, problem-solving and critical thinking skills which are associated with the strategies for lifelong learning.

Task based language teaching finally encompasses form and performance in a 'Form-Focused interaction' approach, thus enabling the learners to learn the grammar by using it meaningfully in the classroom.

Task Based Learning in the Foreign Language Classroom

While various types of tasks like the discovery tasks (interactive word searches / dictionary activities), experience tasks (memory games, brainstorming, storytelling), shared tasks (drills, role-plays and dramas) and independent tasks (homework, web-quests, independent projects) are advocated, an extension of these tasks can grow into projects, which can promote and result in effective and meaningful foreign language education.

Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning (PBL) enables learners to achieve a deeper knowledge through active engagement and exploration of real-world challenges and problems. From a simple assignment to a complex, multiphase task, projects elicit collaboration among learners. Projects can take on a myriad range of forms based on the teacher, learner and the situation and includes research, negotiated learning and problem solving skills.

Teaching of culture is as important as the teaching of the four language skills, i.e. speaking, reading, writing and listening. Understanding how the target society's perspectives influence the practices and products of that culture, connects learners to the language and communicating in the target language by comparing and contrasting the native culture with the target culture brings in the voice of the individuals too.

A concrete time line with a focus on the content and skill mastery based on the language niveau and age of the learners that calls for an engaging presentation of results through applied learning makes project based instruction a constructive alternative for foreign language teaching/learning in the postmodern era.

Project Based Learning in Foreign Language Classrooms

Simple projects like role-plays, scrap book making, poster making on cultural aspects can be thought of for beginner level foreign language classes. Integrating technology with language learning also offers more options like developing wiki pages, websites and apps for collaborative language learning.

An amalgamation of web 2.0 applications with tandem learning can also bring learners across the globe together to share and learn from each other's experiences. These not only boost the communication skill of the learners, it also creates a platform for them to identify and implement various strategies for learning and successful completion of the projects.

Thus learning in the postmodern era is constructive, intensive, spontaneous, timeless and random. By adopting an eclectic approach to teaching and learning foreign languages, learners like experimental scientists are created a platform for

- questioning/reflecting/testing of hypotheses,
- hunting evidences and
- confirming/ inventing results or findings.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up the post modern condition in our context we finally try to address the seminal existential concern proposed by Fredric Jameson: "… supposing that in the decades since the emergence of the great modern styles society itself has begun to fragment in this way, each group coming to speak a curious private language of its own, each profession developing its private code or idiolect and finally each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else? But then in that case, the very possibility of any linguistic norm in terms of which one could ridicule private languages and idiosyncratic styles would vanish, and we would have nothing but stylistic diversity and heterogeneity." (Jameson, 2013)

"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." (O'Farrell as quoted by Finch, 2010)

As summed up above by O'Farrell, postmodern pedagogy is designed to meet the demands of the multi-cultural, hybrid learners across the globe. There is no one right method or approach to teach/learn a foreign language and sky is the limit for exploring various options to make the teaching/learning process complimentary to the objectives of the stakeholders.

By not depending on any fixed curricula or material for teaching/learning a foreign language, if the autonomy could be instilled in the learners, reconsidering the multiple interests and abilities of individuals in the classroom by implementing differentiated instructions, lifelong learning and multiple intelligence to meet the needs and aspirations of the learners would bring in the paradigm shift in bringing out the voice of the learners too. The learners acquire new voices and new ways of articulating experiences and ideas and infusing the ability to express native culture while appreciating the target culture will make the teaching/learning process very fruitful.

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