IMPACT OF POSTMODERNISM IN ELT

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ABSTRACT

In this changing world, it is possible to see the impact of postmodern way of thinking in all kinds of disciplines. Effects of postmodernism is also seen in the field of ELT. In that sense, the needs of the learners and teachers are in a rapid change. Therefore, this era has affected both language teachers and foreign/second language learners. This paper presents definition of postmodernism, postmodernism in education, postmodernism in ELT, task-based approach in language teaching and the period from method to postmethod in ELT.

Key words: Postmodernism, Postmodernism in Education, Postmodernism in ELT

1. Introduction

Enlightenment and modernity have been seen as synonymous for so many literary theorists throughout the history. It is the Age of Reason period that occurred in the 18th century, symbolized by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), and for all those modern thinkers, truth and reality can be discovered and known scientifically. Tenets of modernity were acceptable all the way until Jacques Derrida's postmodernist ideas challenged the modern minds' understanding of the reality and the truth that were subjective and seen as the formation of

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human minds for postmodernists. As the two world wars had decreased the society's faith in religion, the early roots of postmodernist ideas found way to come up in the early 1930s. Until postmodernism took over in the 1960s, modernism was a heavily influential movement between the first and second World Wars that questioned the tenets of modernity. In a way, it paved the way for the coming movement postmodernism.

Postmodernism's main features are as follows:

- A skepticism or rejection of grand metanarratives to explain reality
- The concept of the self as ever-changing
- No objective reality, but many subjective interpretations
- Truth as subjective and perspectival, dependent on cultural, social and personal influences
- No "one correct" concept of ultimate reality
- No metatheory to explain texts or reality
- No "one correct" interpretation of a text (Bressler, 2007, p.101).

Due to the motto of postmodernism "what is not changing is the change itself", not only literature but also art, media, science, politics and many other fields are affected and shaped continuously by the contemporary movement of postmodernism. From the early 1960s up to now, postmodern thinkers such as Jacques Derrida (1978), Michael Foucault (1980), Jean Francois Lyotard(1984) claim that there is no one definite truth and reality. Everybody's truth is formed by them according to their environment-cultural background. For postmodern thinkers in education, diversity is important as reality changes from person to person, and various factors determine it such as the person's social group.

Eagleton (1996) claims that dominant ideologies of the social power determine what literature and literary theory is. In this case, it can be understood that like religion, literature stands to govern people by the ideologies of the dominant powers. He believes that departments of literature at universities are under the influence of the current political power. He sees the situation at the universities not that brilliant as the students are given selected readings that are determined as literature by the social powers and as long as they express them with the expected language they get certificated as masters of literature. He questions whose literature it really is that being taught at schools. Therefore, he suggests cultural studies to be returned as it analyses all kinds of discourse.

With the rise of postmodern approaches and questioning of the objective truth and the reality, it is impossible not to notice the challenge to the enlightenment ideas in the education area. Education is in connection with the world and each other. For Edwards and Usher (1994) "education is itself going through profound change in terms of purposes, content and methods"(p.3). On the other hand, they also claim that educational theory and practice is based on main tenets of modernity. Therefore, postmodern way of thinking in education opposes the modernity's teacher-centered ideas. Edwards and Usher (1994) claim that education can no longer be determined by the historical or cultural truths or dedicated to the universal objective ideas. They add that education needs to be more diverse in terms of its aims, curricula, recipients, and methods. Authoritative voice of modernity needs to be replaced by various cultural contexts. Therefore, education is limitless and cannot be reality of any political approach. Standardized curricula, traditional teaching styles, universal truths and messages, and uniformity are not accepted any more in the postmodern world of education. Education in the postmodern period lets individualism and diversity in cultural

context. It is general loosening of boundaries. According to Slattery (2006, p.281), "curriculum in the postmodern idea becomes an aesthetic engagement and a search for deeper understanding that will lead to justice, compassion and ecologically sustainability where the boundaries between the center and the margin are blurred, and all students have access to the text".

Finch (2006) claims that postmodernism in language learning challenges the traditional aspects in language teaching and its political power. Teacher-centered language classes, exposing western culture to the students, standardized evaluation, or native-like pronunciation are not the purposes of ELT anymore. Finch (2006) believes that postmodernism in ELT brings the death of the native speaker, the death of structuralism, the death of language imperialism, and the death of the teacher with itself. On the other hand, these pave the way for the birth of multi-lingual learning, the birth of integrated holistic learning approach, the birth of regional English, and the birth of student-centered learning environment. Finch (2006) makes a distinction between modern and postmodern ELT metanarratives and sees student-centered learning, considering individual differences, embracing globalism, presenting the target language through global cultural elements and pop-culture, using plurality of genres in text selections, regionalism, contextual learning, task-based learning, collaboration against competition, continuous assessment against normative measurement in language classes as the main features of postmodern approach.

2. Postmodernism in Education

As postmodern way of thinking affects all kinds of disciplines, it is impossible to deny the impact of postmodern thought on education. Changing of knowledge in a continual way just goes parallel with the change in the content and methods of education. However, throughout the history, main tenets of education are ideals of the Enlightenment such as the belief of discovering objective and rational truth. Edwards and Usher (1994, p.2) state that "educational theory and practice is founded on the discourse of modernity and its self-understandings have been forged by that discourse's basic and implicit assumptions." Aronowitz and Giroux (1997) believe that many educators support the modernist ideals for human development with their rationalist ideas. However, knowledge is defined by the white men in the modernist discourse, and then all the historical and cultural elements need to be challenged by the postmodernist educators. Aronowitz and Giroux (1997) add that postmodern criticism is crucial for educators as it questions the validness of Enlightenment ideals in education and examines if they really serve today's postmodern world.

Cobb (2002) claims that the Enlightenment put so much emphasis on education. From the beginning of the 19th century, universal schooling is provided in the United States and spread all over the world. The function of the public schools was acculturation. Cobb (2002) adds that the majority of the State's population was immigrants from different cultures and languages. The main aim of schooling was to turn these youngsters into proper citizens of the United States, and this American culture was an outcome of the Enlightenment; in other words, a British Protestant culture that cannot be perceived without understanding colonialism. This kind of thinking still continues in public schools and higher education. However, it lost its dominance. It is because economic reasons play a rather more important role in the purpose of education in this postmodern world.

Edwards and Usher (1994) add that it is not easy to fit education into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice is the fruit of the Enlightenment thought. On the other hand, Abbs (2003) reveals his thoughts towards postmodernism are in a dilemma with his words "I endorse some of the relativist philosophy while postulating some universals and I distrust the protective irony which marks its sensibility (p.5)." For Abbs (2003), there are three two-sided principles of educational activity which are being existential in nature, being a collaborative activity and being cultural that is constantly developing and extending. Knight (1995) expresses that although poststructuralist theorizing in education area has been embraced widely, still the main structures of schooling continues in the same way and rejects change. On the other hand, in what ways the schooling needs to be changed is also questioned. According to Edwards and Usher (2007), for some researchers, postmodern education theory is associated with lifelong learning; where for some others, it stands for more of a consumerist social order. Postmodern education has been one of the most discussed issues over the years. Abbs (2003) believes that postmodern thought faces us with the mass culture that needs to be criticized. If equality is valid for all cultural items, if all differences need to be united, and if there are no classifications, then we are out of any real concept of education.

For Edwards and Usher (2007), lifelong learning is a postmodern condition of education. Boundlessness and polycontextuality are the key concepts here; there is no need to limit learning, and it is open to diversity then. For Edwards and Usher (2007), education has been developed alongside Western and capitalist nation state as a modernist practice. The aim of modernist education is teaching particular standards of values. According to this discipline, being a rational and civilized person is in a direct proportion with the numbers of education a person gets. However, lifelong learning is a continuous apprentice which means that it is impossible to master in an absolute way and the need for research is limitless. Postmodern thought questions the ability of mastering in full terms. The productiveness of difference is celebrated.

While postmodernism in education is being discussed among the writers Edwards and Usher (1994) and some others, practice –based informal learning at work is celebrated by Beckett and Hager (2005) and they list seven postmodern trends which feature main aspects of contemporary work activities:

- a celebration of change and crisis
- a loss of confidence in and incredulity towards existing narratives and institutions
- an emphasis on difference, diversity, and fragmentation of identity
- a focus on the particular and the local
- a recognition of the political and social dimensions of knowledge
- overcoming dualism – organic rather than binary logic
- a major focus on the power of discourse. (p.155)

Modernist view supports managing change and crisis in such a stable way but it is the opposite for the postmodern view. Crisis and sudden changes are not seen as problems but as opportunities to be renewed. The main concern of postmodernism is not claiming truths. Weakening of the voices of authorities, loss of identity, diversity, and difference are celebrated. Unlike modernist tendency for universality, the particular and the local are rewarded by postmodernism. Modernist view believes in the objective truths and knowledge;

whereas, for postmodernism, knowledge is culturally and socially shaped and subjective. Postmodernism rejects the separation of human thought and dualism and believes in the power of discourse as the meaning is constructed (Beckett and Hager, 2005).

For Slattery (2006), impact of postmodernism on politics and social issues directly affected schooling at the beginning of 2000s. Postmodern worldview brings the idea that people are interdependent. It brings new ideas to the curriculum for contemporary schooling, and it enables people to understand the current issues in education area and society. It is not possible to rely on the past methods to find out the solutions for the schooling problems of this new millennium. Slattery (2006) states that "postmodernism offers the best theoretical paradigm for exploring curriculum development (p.22)." However, it does not mean that everything should be accepted unconditionally about this philosophy as the philosophy needs to be problematized.

Integrating multiculturalism into school syllabus is generally accepted as a tenet of the postmodern era. Bridges (1991, p.3) states that "what troubles us about multiculturalism is its inevitable association with the agenda of postmodernism." For Slattery (2006), it is obvious that the postmodern curriculum deconstructs the conventional views about race, gender, identity, ethnicity, and culture. Slattery (2006) believes that multicultural subjects are not included in modern schooling syllabus as they are debatable and seen as a threat. However, individual differences in learning is recognized and celebrated in curriculum development in this postmodern period. Nieto (2009) indicates that multicultural and bilingual education are developed as a reaction to racist and ethnocentric views as well as discrimination of languages in schooling. Nieto (2009, p.44) remarks the three main purposes of multicultural education as:

- Tackling inequality and promoting access to an equal education.
- Raising the achievement of all students and providing them with an equitable and high-quality education.
- Giving students an apprenticeship in the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society.

In 21st century, it is a must to be able to give each student an equal right for education. Postmodern theory needs to be followed in education area to satisfy the society's needs of respect to diversity. While the current issues in education are being followed, it is not difficult to notice that the voices of meta narratives are being reduced day by day.

3. Postmodernism in English Language Teaching

In recent years, it is possible to see the impact of postmodernism obviously in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). With the integration of postmodern approach into ELT, previous linguistic and cultural referencesare challenged in a way. Finch (2006) states that "postmodern TEFL theory presents English as a lingua franca with regional variations – a global language in which there are no native speakers, no standard pronunciations or grammars, and no target culture" (pp.241-242).

As cultures and languages are strongly bounded, in today's world, it is crucial to support language minority students in every aspect. Nieto (2009) emphasizes the essential role of linguistic diversity in multicultural education. Bilingual and multicultural approaches in education seek ways to involve and support these students as their cultures, identities, races,

and languages are so much valuable in 21st century's postmodern thinking. For a better education of language minority students, Nieto (2009) suggests all educators to know about how languages are learned, meaning of bilingualism and celebrate native language literacy. Brutt-Griffler (2002, p.viii) states that "World English has emerged because its users have changed the language as they have spread it." This concept underlines the fact that non-native speakers of English, including educators, spread and create their kind of English, and World Englishes occur. Brown (2007) states that focusing on the difference between native and nonnative English teachers is an important discussion in the last decade. Researchers such as Medgyes (1994), Higgins (2003), McArthur (2001), Cook (1999) and Liu (1999) claim that varieties of English are acceptable now and nonnative English teachers have advantages over native English-speaking teachers. Brown (2007) adds that finding out the difference between native and nonnative speakers becomes less relevant any more. The importance is on the proficiency level of the person who uses the language. For Brutt-Griffler (2002), the reason that English has become a world language is connected with ELT for the last two centuries. It has been discussed that without ELT and its context, it would not be possible for English to be a world language. Brutt- Griffler (2002) adds that as ELT is one major factor of the spread and change of the language, the language teachers' role in shaping World English is overwhelming, and one important issue that is World English usage is not dominated by the native content any more. Kachru (2005), McKay (2002) and Kachru&Nelson (1996) also emphasize the importance world Englishes.

Foreign/second language teacher education also comes up as an important issue in this as ELT field is under the heavy influence of postmodern thinking. For Johnson (2009), there are three possible future challenges for language teachers' education. The first one is the content and activities of L2 teacher education need to be designed according to where L2 teachers live. The social and cultural backgrounds of them need to be taken into consideration while preparing the education programme as L2 teachers will create an appropriate learning environment for their own L2 students. The main purpose of learning and teaching is not to speak English like a native speaker. The second one is being able to accept existence of a strong relationship between teacher development and L2 student learning. Teacher professional development paves the way for students' success. As long as the teachers learn as a part of their ongoing progress, students get more from their teachers. The awareness of this relationship is essential for the ones in education area for the benefit of L2 students. The third challenge for L2 teacher education is to train teachers using research methods to explore their professions and become intellectual thinkers that question the oppressive voice of authorities such as standardized assessment and curriculum. Therefore, L2 teachers need to be transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) to be able to create an appropriate classroom atmosphere for their L2 students.

4. Task-based Approach in Language Teaching

From 1970s, educators started to question the main purposes of the L2 classes. Some of them observed that even if the students' knowledge of linguistic structure are good enough in the class, they cannot communicate and use the language properly outside the class. Therefore, the linguistic knowledge of the students is not enough to let them produce and use the target language in an accurate and fluent way. In this respect, many scholars have believed that the

ability to communicate is more important than linguistic competence, and in the late 1970s, these studies made contribution to a Communicative Approach from a linguistic structure-centered approach. The main purpose of the Communicative Language Teaching is making the communicative competence as the major aim of language teaching (2000,Larsen-Freeman).

Task-based approach makes communication the center of the teaching and learning process just like Communicative Language Teaching. Finch (2006, p.239) states that "tasks thus combine (or encourage) many of the postmodern features of TEFL theory and practice: collaboration, autonomy, student-centeredness, and negotiation of meaning."Task-based planning is distinguished as pre-task and within-task planning. Rehearsal and strategic planning are division of pre-task planning. Rehearsal part gives learners a chance to carry out the task before the main one and strategic planning informs the learners about the content of the task to prepare them perform the task. That means students need to reach to the real task materials in pre-task planning stage. Within-task planning is divided as pressured and unpressured according to the task performance. Learners result in planned language use in an unpressured task performance whereas they result in unplanned language use in a pressured task (Ellis, 2005).

A task-based approach provides students an environment for language use. While learners doing the tasks, they have a chance to communicate and it helps them to acquire new phrases.

5. From Method to Postmethod

Brown (2007) states that structural/behavioral, generative/cognitive, and constructivist need to be seen as descriptions of second language acquisition in a historical order. In early 1900s till 1950s, schools of thought were structural linguistics and behavioral Psychology. Description, observative performance, scientific method, empiricism and reinforcement can be seen as the main themes. From 1960s till 1980s, schools of thought were generative linguistics and cognitive Psychology. Generative linguistics, universal grammar, and competence can be seen as the main themes of these schools. From 1980s to 2000s, constructivism is the school of thought, and main themes can be listed as interactive discourse, sociocultural variables, cooperative, and discovery learning.

Brown (2007) adds that before 20th century, language teaching had been practiced in traditional ways. The classical method, in other words Grammar Translation Method, was very popular. In this method, teacher is the main authority in the class. The teacher gives the grammar rules to the learners and wants them to memorize them. It is a teacher- centered method. There is very little student to student interaction in the class. Literary language is seen superior to daily language. Speaking and listening skills are not considered as important as reading and writing skills (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Brown (2007) states that Audio-lingual Method is seen revolutionary in 1940s and 1950s. It can be seen as a rejection of Grammar Translation Method. Audio-lingual method is oral-based. Learners are directed to use the target language communicatively. Vocabulary and grammar rule are presented in the dialogues. Everyday language is attached importance by the teachers. Student- to – student interaction through the dialogues happens with the help of teacher's direction (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Cognitive psychology increased its popularity in 1960s. Bartlett and Burton (2007) state that with the works of some European psychologists, the interest in cognitive psychology was maintained. Starting from the early 1970s, the connection between theoretical disciplines and teaching methodology has been continued to show itself. With constructivism, interpersonal relationships, the value of group work and cooperative strategies has become interested (Brown, 2007). Bartlett and Burton (2007, p.124) claim that "Constructivism is predicated on the idea that people make their own sense of things in a unique way. It attaches great importance to the individualized nature of learners' conceptions." In the same era, in 1970s linguists began to question interactive process of language acquisition. Nature of communication was searched deeply. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach focusing on communicative process in language learning. Self-esteem, learning together, developing strategies, and communicating spontaneously are attached importance in that approach (Brown, 2007). Larsen- Freeman (2000) underlines that communicative competence, interdependence of language and communication are celebrated in Communicative Language Teaching. The main aim is to make students communicate in the target language. Brown (2007) points out that every learner, teacher, the relationship between them, and also context is unique. As a teacher, the task is to understand this uniqueness and choose an enlightened and eclectic approach that based on principles of second language learning and teaching in the language classes. Also researchers such as Bell (2003) and Kumaravadivelu (2001) suggest that teachers may select various techniques in their language classes.

Since 1970s, teachers' ideas about methods changed in second language teaching. There is not only one single method to bring success in foreign language classes any more. With this postmethod condition in language teaching, diversity in language teaching methods is celebrated (Brown, 2007).Teachers have the opportunity to find the most effective way in their language classes to have success anymore in this new approach. Kumaravadivelu (2001) states that with postmethod condition, notion of authority and old beliefs about the best teaching methods are questioned. For Kumaravadivelu (2006), the postmethod condition forces teachers to revise both pedagogical and ideological perspectives of teaching in their language classes. Kumaravadivelu (2006) adds both learners and teachers are allowed to be active and autonomous in postmethod pedagogoy.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) adds that content-based, task-based, and participatory approaches also make communication central. Finch (2006) believes Task-Based language teaching makes foreign language teaching process more meaningful and offers a postmodern approach. Postmodern TEFL theory is needed to be seen as an appropriate approach for language learning and teaching in the 21st century as it represents the death of the native speaker, structuralism, imperialism, and the teacher. Postmodern TEFL theory celebrates social learning, teamwork, self-access learning, postcolonialism, task-based and project-based learning, classroom-based assessment, group learning environments, regional Englishes, student-centered learning, and studying both regional and global cultures through the target language (Finch, 2006).

For Kumaravadivelu (2006), with postmethod condition there is not only one best method in language classes any more and it is in teachers' hands to decide the most efficient variety of methods in their classes according to their learners' needs.

6. Conclusion

Since the second half of 1900s, postmodern way of thinking takes its place in many fields such as art, music and education. As we live in the 21st century, it is impossible to deny the impact of postmodernist approach in the field of ELT. Researchers such as, Finch (2006), Edwards and Usher (1994, 2007), Slattery (2006), and Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006), emphasize the respectable place of postmodern approaches in education.

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