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TEACHING ASSISTANCE

This issue's TA column revisits the debate on appropriate teaching methods and advocates a post-method framework for English language teachers suited to their cultural preferences. The author grounded this impassioned presentation of opinions based on his teaching practicum experiences in Japan as well as his readings for undergraduate and graduate degrees in TESOL, Japanese, and applied linguistics.

Post-Method: What will it be and what does it mean for ELT?

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I was first introduced to English language teaching (ELT) methodology in 2014 while training to become a teacher at the University of Central Lancashire in a BA TESOL and Japanese Language program. At that time, we focused on the use of communicative methods of language pedagogy, such as present, practice, produce (PPP) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). I implemented these methods, mostly PPP, at my first teaching job in Japan at a language school (*eikaiwa*). I noticed, however, that Japanese English language practitioners at the same company seemed to use more of what I was taught as traditional methods, such as grammar translation (*yakudoku*) and audiolingualism. To delve deeper into ELT methodology, I enrolled in an MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics program and switched my practicum to a private English school. The methodology in use there seemed to be a blend of all the above methods. These experiences prompted me to write this opinion piece in response to the burning question: What will come after these methods?

Figure 1

Photograph of the author during a language teaching practicum

The post-method era in ELT

There are debates as to whether the post-method era is upon us and what post-method even is. As is commonplace with commenting on the possible end or change to something so well established and long-lasting, however, there does not seem to be a universal consensus on when and how post-method will come, and the form it will take. Will it be a radical overhaul or replacement of contemporary methodology, through the creation of context-sensitive methodology to match societal norms and expectations of target cultures (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2006, 2016)? Will it be making use and adapting already established methodology to better enable learner development (Bell, 2007, 2003; Cushing-Leubner and Bigelow, 2014)? Or, will post-method not come to fruition as established methods remain, and at most are slightly adapted to suit the pedagogical context where they are used (Richards and Rodgers, 2014.; Tomlinson, 2019; Ur, 2014, 2013; Waters, 2012)? Due to how broad this topic is, I shall focus on just two general viewpoints on the post-method spectrum, the view of principled eclecticism (i.e., using and combining elements from different established methodologies) and the need for a methodological revolution for new context-sensitive methodologies.

The view of principled eclecticism

If we start by taking Bell's (2003) view, where he makes the argument that we may already have entered this post-method era by suggesting post-methodology is simply the combination of contemporary methods and those of the last forty years (i.e., traditional, designer methods, etc) with the label of communicative language teaching (CLT), then we can assume this is simply a natural evolution of current pedagogy as the foundation is built upon already well established methodology and theory. Indeed, other literature such as Cushing-Leubner and Bigelow (2014), Tomlinson (2019) and Ur (2014) to varying degrees echo Bell's (2003) thoughts on what could be considered principled eclecticism, as the incorporation of various methods to better suit language learning development. This can be said to be already observable within contemporary EFL practice, even here in Japan where I currently teach. Within certain institutions, such as my own, there is the use of elements from multiple methods and approaches, rather than the reliance on a single method as it may limit pedagogy of different aspects of the English language (Prabhu, 1990). For example, many young learner classes are task-based or focus on implicit language learning, yet there is the incorporation of drilling, which is an element from the audiolingual method, and so is an explicit form of language learning.

Among advocates for principled eclecticism, there is also the post-method view where current approaches and methods can be strengthened or weakened to better suit pedagogical contexts. CLT, for instance, can take the form of 'weaker CLT' which incorporates elements from different methods into pedagogy, but still maintains the original overall methodology (in this case a CLT method) as the framework for lesson design (Loumbourdi, 2018). In brief, usage of single unaltered methods could oversimplify and conventionalise classroom pedagogy, leading to inflexibility and stagnation of language teaching development (Brown, 2000). However, making use of principled eclecticism, which coincides with Bell's (2003) conceptual view on post-methodology, as well as Loumbourdi's view of varying strengths of contemporary methodology, provide opportunities, "to pick and choose elements of multiple methods to increase student engagement, language use, and communicative capacity" (Cushing-Leubner and Bigelow, 2014:248). In summary, using methods and methodological elements from various sources based on the teacher's judgement and knowledge is necessary, as it allows the post-method teacher to make pedagogical decisions autonomously for specific educational contexts for the benefit of language learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

The need for a methodological revolution

It can be argued that Bell's (2007) concept of post-method though principled eclecticism, or Loumbourdi's suggestion of weak and strong forms of established approaches or methods, are not shared universally amongst all their peers, as they may not be radical enough to be considered as post-method. A way post-method conceptualisation could be viewed differently is the view to change contemporary methods and approaches altogether in favour of those which are more representative of the native EFL pedagogical contexts in which they are used. In other words, post-method is considered by some to be the extent in which contemporary or designer methods are unrepresentative of culture and context, and a true post-method era is when new and appropriate methodology or emerges (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). This view exists due to many of the contemporary and designer methods, if not all, having been developed within native English-speaking countries such as Britain, America, New Zealand and Australia (BANA) with native English-speaking teachers in mind and exported to non-

native speaking countries (Holliday, 1997). Thus, these methods can be argued to be culturally insensitive for many EFL teachers whose contexts and society differ to those of BANA, including Japan which has its own cultural beliefs on education, especially on language education from a classical humanistic standpoint (Crookes, 2010; Littlewood, 2000).

Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006, 2016), therefore, advocates radical reform of current methodology, and developed a principle of particularity to respond to the need for context sensitive pedagogy to achieve a post-method framework.

What post-method means for ELT in Japan and Asia

If we consider CLT to be the current standard for language teaching, the basis for this approach and the methods it encompasses, assumes language learning should be communicative and this is determined by communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, 2008; Loumbourdi, 2018). If we also assume Japan falls into the category of Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs) as defined by Beaumont and Chang (2011b: 291), then Japan and much of Asia's view of language teaching seemingly goes against CLT in favour of vigorous study, dedication to memorisation of grammar and vocabulary, (non-communicative) repetitive practice, and even silence in the classroom (Crookes, 2010; Harumi, 2011; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Sakui, 2004). This would seem to suggest non-native English language teachers need to move away from their educational norm of language teaching to a foreign one that does not fit with their cultural beliefs, and so would not achieve a post-method framework suited to English language teachers who are Japanese.

The way forward

I suggest that we may need to ask ourselves whether Japanese or other non-native language teachers should find ways to reconcile the principles of CLT with their own cultural expectations. Otherwise, we could do away with said principles to foster methods that are more culturally representative and appropriate for the target pedagogical context. The former has arguably been occurring for the last few decades, the latter could be the future of ELT. Or perhaps, principled eclecticism is the way forward to a true post-method era.

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