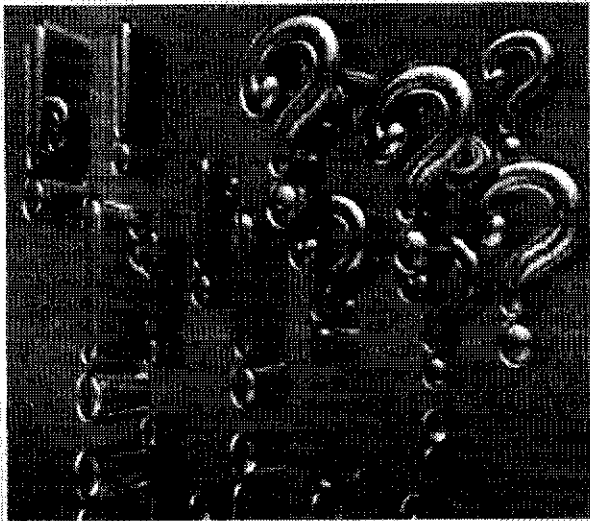


replace this relatively narrow definition of good research
to be continued

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in quantitative research, a minimum of 33 (Hatch and Lazarson 1991) is needed for the application of many relevant statistical techniques. And when quantitative research tries to find inexact generalities which are applicable across an amorphous body of samples, qualitative research tries to see what is particular to a given context or individual, without having pretension to its universality. In the words of Stephen J. Gould (1987), "...close observation of individual differences can be as powerful a method in science as the quantification of predictable behavior of a zillion identical atoms..." (cited in Tannen, 1989:35).

In qualitative research, a distinction is usually made between *emic* and *etic* perspectives to data collection. In the *emic* perspective, the researcher does not impose his/her interpretation on what the participants do or say; instead, he or she tries to find the participants' interpretation of how things are; in other words, the researcher attempts to gain an insider perspective of the event as it is experienced by the actors in a specific cultural/education context. The *etic* view, on the other

hand, is what is practiced in quantitative research. In this tradition, data is collected on an "objective basis", without any regard for what is happening in the mind of the subjects and what is going on in the context around them. The term objective was put in a quotation mark in the previous sentence, since followers of the qualitative paradigm believe that there is no objectivity in research, that the personal theories of the researcher, his/her life history, as well as his/her apprenticeship into the practice of research will determine what kind of topics he/she chooses for his/her project and how the data is collected and interpreted.

Two other terms are of importance in the discussion of qualitative research: grand theory and grounded theory. Grand theory is the general view theory which is applicable across a wide range of contexts, and can be regarded as the philosophical frame within which a researcher is operating. As an example of such a theory is the nature/nurture debate (whether change is the result of genetically determined blue prints or the result of experience and social interaction). Grounded theory is the local, practical theory which is the outcome of a qualitative study; it is different from theory in its mainstream sense since it makes no claims to generalizability.

Unfortunately, qualitative research has not yet found its proper place in our educational system; our dissertation committees at post graduate levels view qualitative projects with skepticism since from their viewpoint large samples and the use of numbers are the criteria which distinguish "good research" from sloppy data collection and reporting. However, respect for the individuality of learners who serve as the participants of our studies will one day

linked to the concept of critical pedagogy, which is treated in another section of the present article. Briefly, it deals with the socio-political forces which are at work in educational settings which result in social inequalities. It also deals with "the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001:543). More information about the political forces at work in language classes is provided in the sections dealing with critical pedagogy and linguistic imperialism in the present paper.

The post method condition is a more democratic approach to language teaching profession since it assigns a voice to practitioners and respects the type of knowledge they possess. In addition, it is a liberatory move which gives teachers more autonomy and confidence in the decisions they make in their classes.

Qualitative research

Another development, or change in orientation, can be discovered in the way research is promoted and conducted in language teaching. There is no doubt that language teaching professionals have become research-conscious, in such a way that in almost all teacher education programs some courses on research methodology is offered. However, the kind of research which was valued and practiced up to 1980s (and which is still valued and practiced in many parts of the world, including our own country) was of a quantitative nature, which relies on objective observation, recording, and the numerical analysis of data. The main interpretation tool in this research approach is statistics. The shift which is now gradually taking place in

language teaching is moving away from this narrow view of research toward a more subjective, qualitative mode.

It is very difficult to define qualitative research in a relatively simple, non-technical language; however, one can regard qualitative research as a kind of activity in which the researcher is trying to find the "local and immediate" meaning and significance of an action from the "actors point of view" (Davis, 1995:432). In other words, qualitative research tries to look at the world through the eyes of the people who are the focus of the research, and takes into account their history, their culture; their wishes... and many other personal and ethnic qualities which are ignored by quantitative researchers as redundant.

A terminological distinction may clarify the point. In qualitative research, which relies on numbers, statistics and concepts such as reliability, validity and generalizability, people who are the focus of the research are known as "subjects". The term subject will denote a sense of being under control, being of a lower or inferior quality, being the object of manipulation. In qualitative research, on the other hand, the people who take part in research are known as "participants", a more democratic term which assigns an equal value and role to those who are the focus of the research.

Qualitative research values the individual and celebrates the richness of personal lives, while quantitative research simplifies the lives of many through its use of statistical methods and analyses. As a result of these differing orientations, in qualitative research the investigator deals with a very limited number of participants, not more than a handful, while

professional theories are supposed to be more academic and intellectual. Personal theories, or teacher's theories, are those ideas which are based on the practical experiences of the teachers, based on their sense of what works/does not work in the class and what learning/teaching entails. Methods are based on professional theories, issued from centers of power (universities and colleges) since these are only the academics who are regarded as qualified to propose new ones. And personal theories, in spite of their appeal and relevance to what the teacher does in the class, are regarded to be of little or no use. As long as we have the method concept around (which can be viewed as a kind of academic theory itself), we have the unequal distribution of power between academics and practitioners, a situation in which teachers will always have to follow the direction (or may be the commands?) of academics who are the producers of professional theories, and who have little recognition or understanding of what actually takes place in an L2 class.

The post method condition is, in principle, a recognition of this situation, assigning more importance to teacher autonomy (Kumaravadivelu 2001). Teachers are encouraged to develop both "competence and confidence", so that they would be able to improve the efficiency of their practice and solve the practical problems they confront in their professional lives. It also assigns autonomy to the learners by equipping them with proper L2 learning strategies and investing in their learning styles (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

There are three basic principles involved in the post method concept (Kumaravadivelu, 2001): particularity, practicality and

possibility. The principle, or pedagogy of particularity means that any kind of learning or teaching is context-bound and situation-based, which means that there are no general methods which can be applied in an indiscriminate manner to all the contexts. It also involves the recognition and understanding of the particular life experiences (or lived experiences) of the learners, a recognition and respect for their life histories. This recognition is of particular importance since if an instructional program is designed without any understanding and respect for backgrounds and beliefs of the learners, then the result would be resistance and alienation on the part of the students. In other words, particularity is the guarantee that learners would be provided with relevant instructions.

The principle of practicality assigns language teachers more power and autonomy with regard to what they can do in the class. It rejects the distinction between professional and personal theories in favor of teachers, emphasizing reflective teaching and action research instead. In this view point, any sound teaching situation will promote "theory of practice", which does not aim at the generation of knowledge, but the improvement of practice. The distinction between thought and practice will become fuzzy since "there is action in thought and thought in action" (p.541). This respect for teachers' practical knowledge is what Prabu (1990) calls *sense of plausibility*, which means that through experience, teachers come to form their own personal theories about learning, teaching, learners, and what will be the best practical approach in a given teaching context.

The pedagogy of possibility is closely

Another distinction between the two (which was briefly mentioned above) is related to the presence/absence of a grammatical syllabus. In the focus on form perspective, it does not make sense to prepare a grammatical syllabus since teachers have to see which grammatical points cause problems for the learners in the class and treat that point there and then. In focus on the forms, however, grammatical points which must be covered are already selected and graded in the syllabus.

The question which arises here is related to which one of these two approaches to teaching grammar will prove more effective. The jury is still out in this regard and not a definite conclusion has been reached. But it seems that focus on the forms, which is in fact the old way grammar has been treated, is more effective in developing the L2 proficiency of the learners (Sheen 2003). In addition, research shows that when it comes to error correction, an overt, metalinguistic approach is more beneficial to the learners compared to less direct methods (Spada 1997).

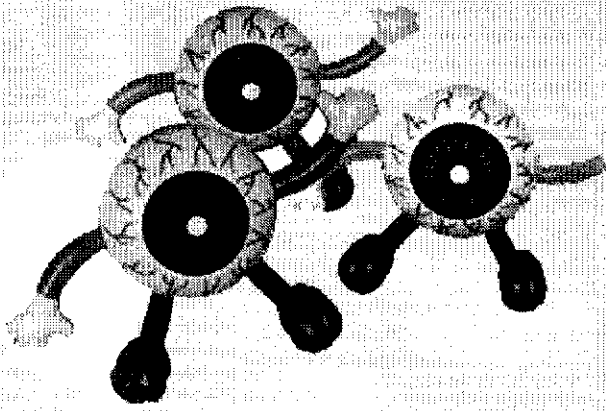
Focus on form seems to be another fashionable trend which has been proposed in the spirit of communicative objectives and comprehensible input mentality. In reality, however, it is very unlikely to survive due to its trivial treatment of one of the most important aspects of language, i.e. grammar. One should bear in mind that grammar is the junction where all the other aspects of language (phonology, morphology, semantics) intersect, and any improper handling of it will have negative consequences for the linguistic development of learners. Moreover, the fact that there is

not a predetermined syllabus in focus on form means that students will be at the mercy of the mistakes of their peers to pick up important grammatical aspects of their L2.

The post method period

Another change which has become a topic of debate in the professional literature in the course of the recent years is the post method controversy. According to the supporters of this view (Pennycook 1989; Prabu 1990; Kumaravadivelu 2001) the concept of method is a rather theoretical invention which is detached from what takes place in the class, and as a result, of little use to the practitioners. One can even go so far as claiming that the concept of method has been a myth which has never existed in reality. In the words of Clarke (1983) "the term method is a label without substance" (p.109), since there is little consensus as to which methods existed when, there is little agreement to the nature and the components of methods, and methods have seldom reflected the reality of what is happening in the classroom.

In addition, method invention and method advocacy have been one of the ways by means of which middle class academics have tried to reinforce their grip on the profession and achieve their political aspirations (Pennycook, 1989). A relevant distinction here is the one made between professional theories and personal theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Professional theories, or theorists' theories, are those which are proposed by academics and are supposed to be general and capable of serving as a basis for what happens in the classroom. Such theories form the foundations for many papers which are published in professional journals since



by the teacher. In other words, there is no a priori syllabus for teaching grammar in the classroom.

A key aspect of focus on form, which was originally proposed by Long (1983) is its unplanned nature. That is, the teacher will not go to the class with the intention of teaching simple present to his students, for example. He will treat simple present in his class only when he realizes that students have serious communicative problems with this tense.

Focus on form is usually contrasted with “focus on formS”, which is attention to the form in a predetermined, planned-ahead fashion. In the focus on forms approach, the teacher knows in advance what grammatical points must be emphasized in the class and these points have already been integrated into his/her lesson plan or the syllabus which is going to be taught.

There are some points of difference between focus on form and focus on forms. The description of the two preferences offered above may convey the false impression that the focus on the *form vs. forms* distinction is the same as inductive/deductive teaching. The analogy is false since in the inductive/deductive approach to teaching grammar, the teaching points are all already established and well-rehearsed. That is, the teacher knows what grammatical points he/she must teach, and the difference here will be in the preference of the teacher regarding moving from example to the rule (the inductive approach) or rule to examples (deductive approach). The main distinction between focus on the form/forms movements, however, is related to whether the treatment of grammar is preplanned (focus on the forms) or incidental (focus on the form) (see Nassaji, 1999)

Focus on form

Grammar has always been a central aspect of most language teaching methods. In other words, many methods have been defined based on the stance they have adopted with regard to how grammar is viewed and treated in language classes. Terms such as inductive/deductive, accuracy vs. fluency, contextualization, and form have been among the key concepts which have distinguished one method from the others (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

The “focus on form” movement, or perspective, is the revival of this concern with grammar. The term “focus on form” refers to the treatment of grammar in unrehearsed, communicative situations in an unplanned manner (Sheen 2003). In simple words, the followers of focus on form believe that grammar should be addressed in the classroom only in cases when it causes problems of communication, and this treatment is not determined in advanced by the teacher; teachers will decide to focus on a grammatical/formal aspect of the language when it poses a communicative challenge to the learners. If students can communicate effectively in spite of slight grammatical errors, then there will be no grammatical explanation or correction

Introduction

The present article intends to look briefly at some of the developments and changes which have been reported in the professional journals. A quick look at article titles in the professional literature will show that the type of foreign/second language teaching being talked about these days is somehow different from that of the past in terms of topics of interest and the degree of sophistication shown by the writers of these journals. New horizons are now being explored, and language teaching is no longer viewed as just a matter of technique and technology. Foreign language teaching has become a little messy due to the fact that it has distanced itself from a purely technicist approach (Halliday, 1998) in which teaching is viewed to be a matter of techniques and application and has become more ecological in taking into account "the totality of the lives of the various participants involved, [regarding language teaching] not as one subpart of their lives which can be examined in isolation" (Tudor, 2003:4). It seems that on the whole the profession is getting closer and closer to its educational/social roots and moving away from the linguistic debates which have plagued language teaching for more than two centuries (Howatt, 1984). By looking at the journal articles, one will notice that a more humanitarian interpretation of the learner, the teacher, and the whole educational process is being offered.

There are a number of caveats, however, regarding the present article and its title. The first point is related to the term recent. By recent, the author has taken a rather liberal stance and has considered the last twenty years of development as relatively "recent" in the history of language teaching. This open

interpretation of the term will go back to the fact that many of these changes and developments have not been adequately presented in our teacher training programs and many of our practitioners and even sometimes academics are not adequately familiar with some of the new concepts. The second point which must be taken into account while reading this article is that some of the concepts which are labeled as new are in fact just the recreation of the old concepts. In other words, it seems that in language teaching, we professionals do not have a good collective memory and the result is that we rediscover the wheel from time to time. Some of the views are reincarnation of the old debates with which the profession has been struggling. In the words of Kelly (1969) "nobody really knows what is new or old in present-day language teaching procedures. There has been a vague feeling that modern experts have spent their time in rediscovering what other men have forgotten" (p.ix). In other words, the "total corpus of ideas accessible to language teachers has not changed basically in [the last] 2000 years" (Kelly, 1969:363).

The developments which are presented in this article at first may sound random and unconnected, but at the end of the present paper the author tries to show that all of these changes may culminate in what can be called a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) which in a simple language is equal to a total theoretical change in perspective. The article will look at the following issues: Form focused instruction, the post method debate, qualitative research, linguistic imperialism, critical pedagogy, reflective teaching, and the development of a new view of applied linguistics.



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING; A BRIEF REVIEW

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مقاله‌ی حاضر که به بحث تحولات و دیدگاه‌های جدید در آموزش زبان طی ۲۰ سال گذشته پرداخته است، در دو بخش ارائه می‌شود. بخش اول به آموزش صورت محور و تحولاتی که در این زمینه مطرح است، می‌پردازد و در ادامه پساروش و تئوری‌های گوناگون درباره‌ی آن مطرح می‌شود و در آخر به تحقیق کیفی می‌پردازد. بخش دوم را در شماره‌ی بعدی مطالعه خواهید کرد.

چکیده

آموزش زبان انگلیسی در سال‌های اخیر تحولات چشمگیری را شاهد بوده است. با وجود این، بسیاری از این تحولات برای معلمان ایرانی ناشناخته‌اند و هنوز راهی به بحث‌های عملی یا نظری کشور نیافته‌اند. در این مقاله سعی شده است، برخی از این تغییرات مورد بررسی قرار بگیرند. مقولات مطرح شده عبارتند از: آموزش صورت محور، بحث پساروش، امپریالیسم زبانی و آموزش انتقادی، تدریس تفکری، دیدگاه جدید زبان‌شناسی کاربردی و تحقیق کیفی. کلید واژه‌ها: آموزش صورت محور، بحث پساروش، تحقیق کیفی، امپریالیسم زبانی، آموزش انتقادی، تدریس تفکری، زبان‌شناسی کاربردی.

Abstract

Foreign language teaching has witnessed some positive changes in the course of the last two decades, specially during 1990s. Some of these changes, however, have not been well represented in our country, and many language teachers are not aware of the latest debates and developments in the ELT profession. The present article is a selection of some of these developments, dealing with form focused instruction, the post method debate, qualitative research, linguistic imperialism, critical pedagogy, reflective teaching, and the development of a new view of applied linguistics.

Key Words: Iranian EFL situation, focus on form, post method, qualitative research, linguistic imperialism, reflective teaching, applied linguistics, critical pedagogy.