TESOL Methods: Changing Tracks, Challenging Trends

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This article traces the major trends in TESOL methods in the past 15 years. It focuses on the TESOL profession's evolving perspectives on language teaching methods in terms of three perceptible shifts: (a) from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching, (b) from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy, and (c) from systemic discovery to critical discourse. It is evident that during this transitional period, the profession has witnessed a heightened awareness about communicative and task-based language teaching, about the limitations of the concept of method, about possible postmethod pedagogies that seek to address some of the limitations of method, about the complexity of teacher beliefs that inform the practice of everyday teaching, and about the vitality of the macrostructures—social, cultural, political, and historical—that shape the microstructures of the language classroom. This article deals briefly with the changes and challenges the trend-setting transition seems to be bringing about in the profession's collective thought and action.

In this state-of-the-art essay,[1] I trace the major trends in TESOL methods since the 1991 publication of the 25th anniversary issue of *TESOL Quarterly.* I shall, therefore, refer to two overlapping periods of time: before 1990 and after. To somewhat pre-empt my central thesis: If the first period is called a *period of awareness,* the second may be called a *period of awakening.* I focus on the nature and scope of the transition from awareness to awakening, along with the contributions and consequences associated with it. For the sake of synthesis, organization, and presentation,

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[1] A state-of-the-art essay is mostly a summary statement of instant history with all its attendant subjectivities. A subject like TESOL methods, with its multiple issues and multiple players, is bound to carry multiple perspectives. In putting together my understanding of the field, I received help from three anonymous reviewers and from the *TESOL Quarterly* editor. I am indebted to them. I have not accepted all their suggestions and, therefore, I'm responsible for any remaining errors in judgment. For a detailed treatment of some of the issues discussed in this article, see Kumaravadivelu (2006).

I frame this overarching transition in terms of three principal and perceptible shifts: (a) from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching, (b) from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy, and (c) from systemic discovery to critical discourse. By opting for a from-to frame of reference, I do not suggest that one concept has completely replaced the other; instead, I consider the transition as work in progress.

Before I proceed, a caveat and a clarification are in order. The caveat relates to the constraints on space. The editorial stipulation on length has necessitated a limited selection of the literature on TESOL methods and a limited focus on general goals and strategies rather than on specific objectives and tactics. The clarification pertains to a widely prevalent terminological ambiguity. In the practice of everyday teaching as well as in the professional literature, the term *method* is used indiscriminately to refer to what theorists propose and to what teachers practice. Clearly, they are not the same. Mindful of such a disparity, Mackey (1965) made a distinction four decades ago between *method analysis* and *teaching analysis.* The former refers to an analysis of methods conceptualized and constructed by experts, and the latter refers to an analysis of what practicing teachers actually do in the classroom. Method analysis can be done by reviewing the relevant literature, but teaching analysis can be done only by including a study of classroom input and interaction. This article is about method analysis, not teaching analysis.

FROM COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING TO TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

The 25th anniversary issue of *TESOL Quarterly* contains a state-of-the-art article devoted exclusively to *communicative language teaching* (CLT), thus highlighting the pre-eminent position it held during the 1980s. In it, Savignon (1991) notes that CLT is a broad approach that

> has become a term for methods and curricula that embrace both the goals and the processes of classroom learning, for teaching practice that views competence in terms of social interaction and looks to further language acquisition research to account for its development. (p. 263)

The phrase "competence in terms of social interaction" sums up the primary emphasis of CLT, whose theoretical principles were derived mainly from concepts oriented to language communication, particularly Austin's (1962) *speech act theory,* which explains how language users perform speech acts such as requesting, informing, apologizing, and so on, Halliday's (1973) *functional perspective,* which highlights meaning

potential, and Hymes' (1972) theory of *communicative competence*, which incorporates interactional and sociocultural norms.

According to American (e.g., Savignon, 1983), British (e.g., Breen & Candlin, 1980), and Canadian (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980) commentators, CLT was essentially concerned with the concepts of negotiation, interpretation, and expression. They and others point out that underscoring the creative, unpredictable, and purposeful use of language as communication were classroom practices largely woven around sharing information and negotiating meaning. This is true not only of oral communication but also of reading and writing. Information gap activities that have the potential to carry elements of unpredictability and freedom of choice were found to be useful. So were games, role plays, and drama techniques, all of which were supposed to help the learners get ready for so-called real world communication outside the classroom. These activities were supposed to promote grammatical accuracy as well as communicative fluency.

During the 1980s, CLT became such a dominant force that it guided the form and function of almost all conceivable components of language pedagogy. A steady stream of scholarly books appeared with the label *communicative* unfailingly stamped on the cover. Thus, there were books on communicative competence (Savignon, 1983), communicative grammar (Leech & Svartvik, 1979), communicative syllabus (Yalden, 1983), communicative teaching (Littlewood, 1981), communicative methodology (Brumfit, 1984), communicative tasks (Nunan, 1989), communicative reading (Bowen, 1990), and communicative testing (Weir, 1990). To transfer the burgeoning CLT scholarship to the language classroom, scores of communicative textbooks were produced in various content and skill areas.

CLT was a principled response to the perceived failure of the audiolingual method, which was seen to focus exclusively and excessively on the manipulation of the linguistic structures of the target language. Researchers and teachers alike became increasingly skeptical about the audiolingual method's proclaimed goal of fostering communicative capability in the learner and about its presentation-practice-production sequence. The proponents of CLT sought to move classroom teaching away from a largely structural orientation that relied on a reified rendering of pattern practices and toward a largely communicative orientation that relied on a partial simulation of meaningful exchanges that take place outside the classroom. They also introduced innovative classroom activities (such as games, role plays, and scenarios) aimed at creating and sustaining learner motivation. The focus on the learner and the emphasis on communication made CLT highly popular among ESL teachers.

Subsequent research on the efficacy of CLT, however, cast serious

doubts about its authenticity, acceptability, and adaptability—three important factors of implementation about which the proponents of CLT have made rather bold claims. By *authenticity,* I am referring to the claim that CLT practice actually promotes serious engagement with meaningful negotiation, interpretation, and expression in the language classroom. It was believed that CLT classrooms reverberate with authentic communication that characterizes interaction in the outside world. But a communicative curriculum, however well conceived, cannot by itself guarantee meaningful communication in the classroom because communication "is what may or may not be achieved through classroom activity; it cannot be embodied in an abstract specification" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 130). Data-based, classroom-oriented investigations conducted in various contexts by various researchers such as Kumaravadivelu (1993a), Legutke and Thomas (1991), Nunan (1987), and Thornbury (1996) reveal that the so-called communicative classrooms they examined were anything but communicative. In the classes he studied, Nunan (1987) observed that form was more prominent than function, and grammatical accuracy activities dominated communicative fluency ones. He concluded, "There is growing evidence that, in communicative class, interactions may, in fact, not be very communicative after all" (p. 144). Legutke and Thomas (1991) were even more forthright:

> In spite of trendy jargon in textbooks and teachers' manuals, very little is actually communicated in the L2 classroom. The way it is structured does not seem to stimulate the wish of learners to say something, nor does it tap what they might have to say. (pp. 8–9)

Kumaravadivelu (1993a) analyzed lessons taught by teachers claiming to follow CLT, and confirmed these findings: "Even teachers who are committed to CLT can fail to create opportunities for genuine interaction in their classroom" (p. 113).

By *acceptability*, I mean the claim that CLT marks a revolutionary step in the annals of language teaching. This is not a widely accepted view, contrary to common perceptions. Several scholars (e.g., Howatt, 1987; Savignon, 1983; Swan, 1985; Widdowson, 2003) have observed that CLT does not represent any radical departure in language teaching. As Widdowson (2003) points out, the representation of CLT given in popular textbooks on TESOL methods such as Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Richards and Rodgers (2001) "as a quite radical break from traditional approaches" (p. 26) is not supported by evidence. For instance, Howatt (1987) connects several features of CLT to earlier methods such as direct method and audiolingual method. According to him, "CLT has adopted all the major principles of the 19th century

reform" (p. 25) in language teaching. Swan (1985) is even more emphatic:

> Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach unfortunately has most of the typical vices of an intellectual revolution: it over-generalizes valid but limited insights until they become virtually meaningless; it makes exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents the currents of thought it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with jargon. (p. 2)

In fact, a detailed analysis of the principles and practices of CLT would reveal that it too adhered to the same fundamental concepts of language teaching as the audiolingual method it sought to replace, namely, the linear and additive view of language learning, and the presentation-practice-production vision of language teaching. The claims of its distinctiveness are based more on communicative activities than on conceptual underpinnings (see Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

By *adaptability*, I mean the observation that the principles and practices of CLT can be adapted to suit various contexts of language teaching across the world and across time. Holliday (1994) suggests a plan for designing an *appropriate methodology,* a modified CLT that is sensitive to different sociocultural demands. Savignon (2001) identifies five components of a communicative curriculum for the 21st century and predicts confidently that CLT "will continue to be explored and adapted" (p. 27). Such optimistic observations have been repeatedly called into question by reports of uneasiness from different parts of the world. Consider the following: From India, Prabhu (1987) observes that the objectives advocated and the means adopted by CLT are so inappropriate for the Indian situation that he thought it necessary to propose and experiment with a new context-specific, task-based language pedagogy. From South Africa, Chick (1996) wonders whether the "choice of communicative language teaching as a goal was possibly a sort of naive ethnocentrism prompted by the thought that what is good for Europe or the USA had to be good for KwaZulu" (p. 22). From Pakistan, Shamim (1996) reports that her attempt to introduce CLT into her classroom met with resistance from her learners, leading her to realize that she was actually "creating psychological barriers to learning" (p. 109). From South Korea, Li (1998) declares that CLT has resulted in more difficulties than one can imagine. From China, Yu (2001) speaks of considerable resistance to CLT both from teachers and learners. From Japan, Sato (2002) reports practical difficulties in implementing CLT. From Thailand, Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) observe how, in spite of the Thai government's official endorsement, teachers and learners consider CLT inappropriate and

unworkable. These and other reports suggest that, in spite of the positive features mentioned earlier, CLT offers perhaps a classic case of a center-based pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, social, cultural, and political exigencies. The result has been a gradual erosion of its popularity, paving way for a renewed interest in task-based language teaching (TBLT), which, according to some, is just CLT by another name.[2]

What's in a Name? A Task Is a Task Is a Task

The trend away from CLT and toward TBLT is illustrated in part by the fact that *communicative,* the label that was ubiquitous in the titles of scholarly books and student textbooks published in the 1980s, has been gradually replaced by another, *task.* Within a decade, several research-based books have appeared on task-based language learning and teaching (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Crookes & Gass, 1993; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1998). In addition, there are specifically targeted textbooks that provide tasks for language learning (Gardner & Miller, 1996; Willis, 1996), tasks for language teaching (Johnson, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Parrott, 1993), tasks for teacher education (Tanner & Green, 1998), tasks for classroom observation (Wajnryb, 1992), and tasks for language awareness (Thornbury, 1997).

In spite of the increasing number of publications, a consensus definition of *task* continues to elude the profession. One finds in the literature a multiplicity of definitions, each highlighting certain aspects of TBLT (for a compilation, see Johnson, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 1993b). Nearly 20 years ago, Breen (1987) defined *task* broadly as "a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning—from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making" (p. 23). In a more recent work, Ellis (2003) synthesizes various definitions to derive a composite one:

> A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or

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[2] One of the reviewers, for instance, raises the following question: "Is TBLT simply an updated emphasis on CLT designed to generate sales of teaching materials?"

receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (p. 16)

Ellis has deftly crafted a definition that includes almost all the major points of contention in language pedagogy: attention to meaning, engagement with grammar, inclusion of pragmatic properties, use of authentic communication, importance of social interaction, integration of language skills, and the connection to psycholinguistic processes.

The definition also highlights differing perspectives that scholars bring to bear on TBLT, perspectives that offer a menu of options ranging from an explicit focus on form to an exclusive focus on function. Reflecting such a diversity, Long and Crookes (1992) present three different approaches to task-based syllabus design and instruction. In a similar vein, Skehan (1998) refers to two extremes of task orientation: structure-oriented tasks and communicatively oriented tasks. "They share the quality," he writes, "that they concentrate on one aspect of language performance at the expense of others. The structure-oriented approach emphasizes form to the detriment of meaning, while an extreme task-based approach focuses very much on meaning and not on form" (p. 121). He then stresses the need for a third approach in which "the central feature is a balance between form and meaning, and an alternation of attention between them" (p. 121). Long (1991; Long & Robinson, 1998) has consistently argued for a particular type of focus on form in which learners' attention is explicitly drawn to linguistic features if and when they are demanded by the communicative activities and the negotiation of meaning learners are engaged in.

It is precisely because a task can be treated through multiple methodological means, Kumaravadivelu (1993b) argues, that TBLT is not linked to any one particular method. He reckons that it is beneficial to look at task for what it is: a curricular content rather than a methodological construct. In other words, different methods can be employed to carry out language learning tasks that seek different learning outcomes. Using a three-part classification of language teaching methods, he points out that there can very well be language-centered tasks, learner-centered tasks, and learning-centered tasks. *Language-centered tasks* are those that draw the learner's attention primarily to linguistic forms. Tasks presented in Fotos and Ellis (1991) and in Fotos (1993), which they appropriately call *grammar tasks,* come under this category. *Learner-centered tasks* are those that direct the learner's attention to formal as well as functional properties. Tasks for the communicative classroom suggested by Nunan (1989) illustrate this type. *Learning-centered tasks* are those that engage the learner mainly in the negotiation, interpretation, and expression of meaning, without any explicit focus on form. Problem-solving tasks suggested by Prabhu (1987) are learning centered.

In spite of its methodological disconnect, TBLT has been considered an offshoot of CLT (Nunan, 2004; Savignon, 1991; Willis, 1996). As an anonymous reviewer correctly points out, the reason for this impression is that the initial work on language-learning tasks coincided with the development of CLT (e.g., Candlin & Murphy, 1987). Regardless of its origin, TBLT has clearly blurred the boundaries of major methods. These and other developments have led Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1997) to wonder "whether it makes any sense to talk about CLT at all" (p. 148). They recognize that "the development of language teaching theory has arrived at a postmethod condition, which requires a reconsideration of some of the metaphors used to describe methodological issues" (p. 148), and that it has provided "a coherent enough framework for teachers to make it unnecessary to use higher-order terms such as CLT" (p. 149). In making these remarks, they were prompted by a shift that has been fast unfolding.

FROM METHOD-BASED PEDAGOGY TO POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

The best way to understand the ongoing shift from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy is to start with two groundbreaking papers published in *TESOL Quarterly:* Pennycook (1989) and Prabhu (1990). Pennycook was persuasive in his argument that the concept of method "reflects a particular view of the world and is articulated in the interests of unequal power relationships" (pp. 589–590), and that it "has diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching" (p. 597). Equally persuasive was Prabhu, who argued that there is no best method and that what really matters is the need for teachers to learn "to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning—with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them" (p. 172). He called the resulting pedagogic intuition a teacher's *sense of plausibility.* The challenge facing the profession, he noted, is not how to design a new method but how to devise a new way "to help activate and develop teachers' varied senses of plausibility" (p. 175).

In short, Pennycook sought to put an end to the profession's innocence about the neutrality of *method,* while Prabhu sought to put an end to its infatuation with the search for the best method. But they were not the only ones to raise serious doubts about the concept of method. Quite a few others expressed similar doubts, most notably Allwright (1991), Brown (2002), Clarke (1983), Jarvis (1991), Nunan, (1989), Richards (1990), and Stern (1985). It was even declared, rather provocatively, that

method is dead (Allwright, 1991; Brown, 2002). These scholars are prominent among those instrumental in nudging the TESOL profession toward a realization that the concept of method has only a limited and limiting impact on language learning and teaching, that method should no longer be considered a valuable or a viable construct, and that what is needed is not an alternative method but an alternative to method. This growing realization coupled with a resolve to respond has created what has been called the *postmethod condition* (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

Among several attempts that have been or are being made to provide the practicing teacher with a compass for navigating the uncharted waters of the postmethod condition, three stand out.[3] Stern's (a) *three-dimensional framework,* (b) Allwright's *exploratory practice framework,* and (c) Kumaravadivelu's *macrostrategic framework.* These frameworks, developed more or less at the same time, present wide-ranging plans for constructing a postmethod pedagogy. Even though I present these as examples of postmethod perspectives, it should be remembered that Stern and Allwright do not invoke the label *postmethod.* A common thread, however, runs through the three frameworks: the authors' disappointment with and a desire to transcend the constraining concept of method.

Postmethod Perspectives

Published posthumously in 1992, Stern's framework consists of strategies and techniques. He uses *strategy* to refer to broad "intentional action" and *technique* to refer to specific "practical action" (p. 277). Strategies operate at the policy level, and techniques at the procedural level. He emphasizes that strategies "are not simply another term for what used to be called methods" (p. 277). His framework has three dimensions: (a) the L1-L2 connection, concerning the use of the first language in learning the second, (b) the code-communication dilemma, concerning the structure-message relationship, and (c) the explicit-implicit option, concerning the basic approach to language learning.

Each dimension consists of two strategies plotted at two ends of a continuum. The first dimension refers to intralingual-crosslingual strategies that remain within the target language (L2) and target culture (C2) as the frame of reference for teaching. The *intralingual strategy* adheres to the policy of coordinate bilingualism, where the two language systems are kept completely separate from each other, while the *crosslingual strategy* believes in compound bilingualism, where the L2 is acquired and

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[3] Other initial proposals include Rivers (1992) and Brown (1994, 2002), both of whom suggest a set of broad principles for interactive language teaching.

known through the use of the L1. The second involves explicit focus on the formal properties of language, that is, grammar, vocabulary, and notions on the one hand, and message-oriented, interaction-based communicative properties on the other. The third concerns the key issue of whether learning an L2 is a conscious intellectual exercise or an unconscious intuitive one. Stern uses familiar words, explicit and implicit, to refer to the two strategies. His framework, thus, deals directly with major contentious dichotomous issues that have marked the pendulum swing in language teaching methods.

Allwright's exploratory practice (EP) is premised on a philosophy that is stated in three fundamental tenets: (a) the quality of life in the language classroom is much more important than instructional efficiency, (b) ensuring our understanding of the quality of classroom life is far more essential than developing ever "improved" teaching methods, and (c) understanding such a quality of life is a social, not an asocial matter (Allwright, 2000, 2003; Allwright & Bailey, 1991). From these fundamental tenets, Allwright derives seven broad principles of language teaching: (a) put quality of life first, (b) work primarily to understand language classroom life, (c) involve everybody, (d) work to bring people together, (e) work also for mutual development, (f) integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice, and (g) make the work a continuous enterprise.

These broad principles inform specific practices. According to Allwright and Lenzuen (1997) and Allwright (2000), EP involves a series of basic steps including (a) identifying a puzzle, that is, finding something puzzling in a teaching and learning situation; (b) reflecting on the puzzle, that is, thinking about the puzzle to understand it without actually taking any action; (c) monitoring, that is, paying attention to the phenomenon that is puzzling to understand it better; (d) taking direct action, that is, generating additional data from the classroom; (e) considering the outcomes reached so far, and deciding what to do next, which involves determining whether there is sufficient justification to move on or whether more reflection and more data are needed; (f) moving on, which means deciding to choose from several options to move toward transforming the current system; and (g) going public, that is, sharing the benefits of exploration with others through presentations or publications. Thus, the central focus of EP is local practice.

Kumaravadivelu's (1992, 1994, 2001, 2003) macrostrategic framework is based on the hypothesis that language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous, and therefore,

> we cannot prepare teachers to tackle so many unpredictable needs, wants and situations; we can only help them develop a capacity to generate varied and

> situation-specific ideas within a general framework that makes sense in terms of current pedagogical and theoretical knowledge. (1992, p. 41)

A product of the postmethod condition, his framework is shaped by three operating principles: particularity, practicality, and possibility. *Particularity* seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities. *Practicality* seeks to rupture the reified role relationship between theorizers and practitioners by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize. *Possibility* seeks to tap the sociopolitical consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom so that it can also function as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation (see Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

The construction of a context-sensitive postmethod pedagogy that is informed by the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility entails a network of ten macrostrategies derived from the current theoretical, practical, and experiential knowledge base. They are (a) maximize learning opportunities, (b) facilitate negotiated interaction, (c) minimize perceptual mismatches, (d) activate intuitive heuristics, (e) foster language awareness, (f) contextualize linguistic input, (g) integrate language skills, (h) promote learner autonomy, (i) ensure social relevance, and (j) raise cultural consciousness. Using these macrostrategies as guidelines, practicing teachers can design their own microstrategies or classroom activities. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies. It is claimed that by exploring and extending macrostrategies to meet the challenges of changing contexts of teaching, by designing appropriate microstrategies to maximize learning potential in the classroom, and by monitoring their teaching acts, teachers will eventually be able to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant theory of practice (see Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

The three frameworks represent initial attempts to respond, in a principled way, to a felt need to transcend the limitations of the concept of method. They seek to lay the foundation for the construction of postmethod pedagogies. They merely offer certain operating principles pointing the way. Any actual postmethod pedagogy has to be constructed by teachers themselves by taking into consideration linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities. The importance of addressing pedagogic particularities has been strengthened by yet another shift in the field.

FROM SYSTEMIC DISCOVERY TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE

During the 1990s, the TESOL profession took a decidedly critical turn. It is probably one of the last academic disciplines in the field of humanities and social sciences to go critical. Simply put, the critical turn is about connecting the word with the world. It is about recognizing language as ideology, not just as system. It is about extending the educational space to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of language use, not just limiting it to the phonological, syntactic, and pragmatic domains of language usage. It is about realizing that language learning and teaching is more than learning and teaching language. It is about creating the cultural forms and interested knowledge that give meaning to the lived experiences of teachers and learners.

Slow to start, the profession acted fast. Within a decade, the flagship journal of the profession, *TESOL Quarterly,* has brought out five special volumes on themes that are, in one way or another, connected to critical pedagogy: language and identity (Norton, 1997), critical approaches to TESOL (Pennycook, 1999), language in development (Markee, 2002), gender and language education (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004), and race and TESOL (Kubota & Lin, in press). Various aspects of pedagogic operations including teaching for academic purposes (Benesch, 2001), testing techniques (Shohamy, 2001), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) and classroom interaction (Kumaravadivelu, 1999) have been explored from critical pedagogic perspectives.[4] For a detailed treatment of applying critical pedagogy in TESOL, see Canagarajah (2005b), Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005, chapter 12), Morgan and Ramanathan (2005), and Norton and Toohey (2004). In fact, the volume of work in this area is considered to have reached a critical enough mass to propose a new subfield called *critical applied linguistics* (Pennycook, 2001).

From a methodological point of view, critical pedagogy has been prompting new ways of looking at classroom practices. Auerbach (1995) has showed us how participatory pedagogy can bring together learners, teachers, and community activists in mutually beneficial, collaborative projects. Morgan (1998) has demonstrated how even in teaching units of language as system, such as phonological and grammatical features, the values of critical practice and community development can be profitably used. Based on a critical ethnographic study of Sri Lankan classrooms, Canagarajah (1999) has revealed creative classroom strategies employed by teachers and students in periphery communities. His holistic method-ological approach not only "involves a reflexivity on the discourses and

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[4] For instance, this anniversary issue carries contributions on teacher development, language acquisition, and language testing in which the authors refer to the impact of critical pedagogy.

strategies students bring with them" (p. 186) but also productively exploits students' own linguistic and cultural resources. In a similar vein, finding the use of the learner's L1 and L2 very useful in her Hong Kong classrooms, Lin (1999) has designed critical practices that "connect with students and help them transform their attitudes, dispositions, skills, and self-image—their habitus or social world" (p. 410). Benesch (2001) has suggested ways and means of linking the linguistic text and sociopolitical context as well as the academic content with the larger community for the purpose of turning classroom input and interaction into effective instruments of transformation. Kubota (2004) has advocated a critical multicultural approach that "can potentially provide learners with opportunities to understand and explore a multiplicity of expressions and interpretations" (p. 48).

Perhaps as a spin-off of the critical turn, a new horizon of explorations has opened up in hitherto neglected topics that have a significant impact on classroom methodological practices—topics such as learner identity, teacher beliefs, teaching values, and local knowledge. We have learned how

> it is only by understanding the histories and lived experiences of language learners that the language teacher can create conditions that will facilitate social interaction both in the classroom and in the wider community, and help learners claim the right to speak. (Norton, 2000, p. 142)

We have learned how the structure of teachers' beliefs, assumptions, and background knowledge play a crucial role in their classroom decision-making process (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Woods, 1996), how "language teaching and learning are shot through with values, and that language teaching is a profoundly value-laden activity" imbued with moral meaning (Johnston, 2003, p. 1), how a systematic exploration of knowledge production in periphery communities can yield hitherto untapped resources about different pedagogical cultures and educational traditions (Canagarajah, 2005a), and how the exploration of local realities can reveal the deep division between English as a global language and vernacular languages that informs curricular and methodological decisions teachers and students make (Ramanathan, 2005).

CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

The three shifts—from communicative language teaching to task-based language teaching, from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy, and from systemic discovery to critical discourse—constitute the major transition in TESOL methods during the past 15 years. This

transition is still unfolding, opening up opportunities as well as challenges. The shift from CLT to TBLT has resulted in, and has benefited from, a body of empirical research in L2 acquisition to such an extent that TBLT is considered more psycholinguistically oriented compared to CLT, which is more sociolinguistically oriented. A volume edited by Crookes and Gass (1993) addresses acquisition-related issues such as task complexity, task sequencing, task performance, and task evaluation. Another collection edited by Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) takes up the same issues but with deeper psycholinguistic understanding and with more rigorous investigative procedures. A 387-page comprehensive work by Ellis (2003) reveals the richness of the current knowledge base in TBLT.

But still, vexing questions remain to be resolved. I highlight two major ones. The first pertains to the relationship between form and meaning and its attendant issue of how the learner's attention resources are allocated. Calling the allocation of attention "the pivotal point" in L2 learning and teaching, Schmidt (2001) argues that it "largely *determines* the course of language development" (p. 11, italics added). The crux of the problem facing TBLT is how to make sure that learners focus their attention on grammatical forms while expressing their intended meaning. Doughty and Williams (1998) note that a crucial methodological choice

> is whether to take a proactive or reactive stance to focus on form. That is to say, a proactive approach would entail selecting in *advance* an aspect of the target to focus on, whereas a reactive stance would require that the teacher notice and be prepared to handle various learning difficulties as they arise. (p. 198, italics in original)

but at present, "there is no definitive research upon which to base a choice of one over the other, rather, it seems likely that both approaches are effective, depending upon the classroom circumstances" (p. 211).

That brings up yet another concern: the issue of context. As mentioned earlier, one of the central claims of CLT as well as TBLT is that it can be contextualized to meet various learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations. It should be remembered that advocates of both CLT and TBLT have been using the term *context* mainly to refer to linguistic and pragmatic features of language and language use. They seldom include the broader social, cultural, political, and historical particularities. Ellis (2003) articulates this problem rather briskly:

> Task-based teaching is an Anglo-American creation. Irrespective of whether it is psycholinguistically justified, it must be considered in terms of social and cultural impact it has on consumers, especially in non-western contexts, and

also in terms of whether the language practices it espouses are "transformative," i.e. enable learners to achieve control over their lives. (p. 331)

He further asserts that

a critical perspective on task-based teaching raises important questions. It forces us to go beyond the psycholinguistic rationale for task-based instruction in order to examine the social, cultural, political, and historical factors that contextualize teaching, and influence how it takes place. (p. 333)

The inadequacy of CLT and TBLT in addressing such broader contextual issues has led some to call for a *context approach* to language teaching (e.g., Bax, 2003; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004).

The shift from CLT to TBLT may be described as an internal shift within the boundaries of a method-based pedagogy. The shift from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy, however, is seen as much more fundamental because it seeks to provide an alternative to method rather than an alternative method. There are, however, dissenting voices. Liu (1995) has argued that postmethod is not an alternative to method but only an addition to method. Likewise, Larsen-Freeman (2005) has questioned the concept of postmethod saying that "Kumaravadivelu's macro-microstrategies constitute a method" (p. 24). While declaring that method and postmethod are so compatible that they "can together liberate our practices," Bell (2003) laments that "by deconstructing methods, postmethod pedagogy has tended to cut teachers off from their sense of plausibility, their passion and involvement" (p. 333). This observation is rather puzzling because it was only during the heyday of CLT that we found that "in our efforts to improve language teaching, we have overlooked the language teacher" (Savignon, 1991, p. 272). Postmethod pedagogy, on the contrary, can be considered to put a premium on the teacher's sense of plausibility.

Because of its unfailing focus on the teacher, postmethod pedagogy has been described as "a compelling idea that emphasises greater judgment from teachers in each context and a better match between the means and the ends" (Crabbe, 2003, p. 16). It encourages the teacher "to engage in a carefully crafted process of diagnosis, treatment, and assessment" (Brown, 2002, p. 13). It also provides one possible way to be responsive to the lived experiences of learners and teachers, and to the local exigencies of learning and teaching. It "opens up new opportunities for the expertise of language teachers in periphery contexts to be recognized and valued" and "makes it more feasible for teachers to acknowledge and work with the diversity of the learners in their classrooms, guided by local assessments of students' strategies for learning rather than by global directives from remote authorities" (Block &

Cameroon, 2002b, p.10). The emphasis on local knowledge and local teachers, however, represents a problematic aspect of postmethod pedagogy because it is premised on a transformative teacher education program that does not merely lead to "the easy reproduction of any ready-made package or knowledge but, rather, the continued recreation of personal meaning" on the part of teachers (Diamond, 1993, p. 56). The profession has just started focusing on such a challenging teacher education program (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).[5]

The idea of a transformative teacher education program dovetails nicely with the ongoing shift from systemic discovery to critical discourse. The emphasis on critical discourse has, however, met with skepticism in certain quarters. For instance, the subject does not even find a place in Kaplan's (2002) encyclopedic volume *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. It's chief editor writes:

> The editorial group spent quite a bit of time debating whether critical (applied) linguistics/critical pedagogy/critical discourse analysis should be included; on the grounds that critical applied linguistics rejects all theories of language, expresses "skepticism towards all metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984) and rejects traditional applied linguistics as an enterprise because it has allegedly never been neutral and has, rather, been hegemonic (Rampton, 1997), the editorial group decided not to include the cluster of "critical" activities. (Kaplan, 2002, pp. v–vi)

Taking a slightly different view, Widdowson (2003) observes that the fundamental assumption governing critical pedagogy, namely, social justice, is something that "everybody, overtly and in principle, would espouse" (p. 14). Therefore, he does not see the need "to give it the label 'critical' and put it on polemical display" (p. 14). Although one can readily disapprove of any polemical display, one sees no harm in giving critical pedagogy, as Shakespeare's Duke Theseus would say, *a local habitation and a name.*

Yet another skepticism pertains to the investigative methods followed by the practitioners of critical discourse analysis, and, by extension, critical pedagogy (Toolan, 1997; Widdowson, 1998). Toolan suggests that critical discourse analysts should be more critical in their argumentation by following robust research design and by providing stronger evidence. Dubbing (drubbing?) critical linguistics as "linguistics with a conscience and a cause," Widdowson (1998, p. 136) questions its "less rigorous operation" (p. 137) that involves "a kind of ad hoc bricolage which takes from theory whatever comes usefully to hand" (p. 137). Undoubtedly, these deserved admonitions demand serious attention. The criticism about research in critical pedagogy could, in fact, be extended to

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[5] For more details, see Johnson, this issue.

research in TESOL in general and TESOL methods in particular, warranting the search for robust research design. We should at the same time remember, however, that language teaching, not unlike anthropology, is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Searching for meaning, particularly at the initial stages of pedagogic exploration, runs the risk of becoming a speculative exercise. And today's speculative exercise may lead to tomorrow's specialized knowledge. Along with Candlin (1998)

> I make no apology for this commitment to speculation. While it is natural to speculate at the outset of enterprises, it is also important to continue to do so, especially when we are some way along the route, if only to check our compasses, as it were, and resight some of our objectives. (p. 229)

While the chances provided and the challenges posed by the three changing tracks in TESOL methods will keep us all busy for some time to come, there are other developments on the horizon that confront us. We have just started investigating the inevitable impact that the emerging processes of globalization (Block & Cameron, 2002a) and the renewed forces of imperialism (Edge, in press) will have on language teaching practices. But, that's another story.

THE END AS THE BEGINNING

"We've come a long way"—declared Brown (1991, p. 257) as he concluded his essay for the 25th anniversary issue of *TESOL Quarterly*. He was actually referring to the progress the TESOL profession was making during the 1970s and 80s in achieving desired goals such as shifting its focus from product-oriented teaching to process-oriented teaching, and from a rigid curriculum to a more flexible one. Even those modest shifts, according to him, had created a new state of awareness in the profession. Considering the more significant trend-setting shifts that have marked the 1990s, we can claim with some justification that we have now reached a much higher level of awareness. We might even say, with a good measure of poetic license, that we have moved from a state of awareness toward a state of awakening. We have been awakened to the necessity of making methods-based pedagogies more sensitive to local exigencies, awakened to the opportunity afforded by postmethod pedagogies to help practicing teachers develop their own theory of practice, awakened to the multiplicity of learner identities, awakened to the complexity of teacher beliefs, and awakened to the vitality of macrostructures—social, cultural, political, and historical—that shape and reshape the microstructures of our pedagogic enterprise.

We've certainly come a long way in identifying and understanding some of the central issues that will orient the future course of action. Although we can be proud of what has been accomplished, this is no time for complacency. What is clear is the laudable transition from awareness to awakening. What is not clear is how this awakening has actually changed the practice of everyday teaching and teacher preparation. Admirable intentions need to be translated into attainable goals, which, in turn, need to be supported by actionable plans. I hope that the person who will be writing a state-of-the-art essay for the golden jubilee volume of *TESOL Quarterly* in 2016 will be able to narrate a possible transition from awakening to attainment. After all, the end of all awakening must be the beginning of attainment.

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