

【研究ノート】

Foreign Language Teaching Techniques for the Post-Modern Classroom

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ポストモダン クラスルームのための外国語教育法

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概要

ポストモダニズム的な教授法は、より対話的で学生を中心とし、出来る限り学生が理解することを助ける必要があると一般的に認識されている。過去30年の間、学習過程において生徒たちをより関わらせ、より深く長期にわたる理解を促進するため、指導者が使用するための一組のテクニックが開発されてきた。自己の権利によって、外国語教育はクラスルームでインタラクティブな方法に重点を置き、結果として言語学習に不可欠な能動学習を促進するためのタスク・ベースのテクニックのセットを多く持っている。言語クラス以外の科目を教える際に、これらのテクニックを多く適用できる幾つかの方法を本紙は提案する。

キーワード：対話的、ポストモダニズム、教授法

“I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discrete and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint.” –Hesiod [around 670 B.C.] (Sisyphus)

“What is wrong with kids these days?” is a mantra of the ages, and can be heard in the halls of academia today just as it was expressed by the father of Greek didactic poetry more than 2600 years ago. Yet somehow civilization has survived, and even thrived, despite the ninety generational transitions since Hesiod’s time. Currently, the elders’ concerns focus on the youths’ self-centered attitudes, short attention spans, and rude classroom behaviors, especially the use of electronic devices for non-learning purposes such as texting and playing games. Yet all of these can be fitted into Hesiod’s portrayal of the youth of his day as being playful, irresponsible, impolite and resistant to control.

The classroom of today is sometimes referred to as the “postmodern” classroom. Ideas of what this means usually rely on contrasting it to the “modern” classroom, and definitions of the two terms draw upon the discussions of modernism and postmodernism in other fields, such as art and literature. In a nutshell, modernism is a product of the Enlightenment and believes that a distinct self can use rational means to search out reality, which leads to truth and also fosters progress. In an educational setting this reality can be organized and passed on from teacher to student. Postmodernism questions whether we can actually “know”

anything, whether it is about ourselves, or reality, or the meaning of a piece of art, and postulates that we can only construct meanings ourselves. This makes the act of understanding, now, something which is relative, not only to the particular individual but also to the particular time. The straight line of progress is only an illusion: “the world is evolving but not necessarily progressing, values are culturally dependent rather than universal, and irregularity is more prevalent than the modern world view allows.” (O’Neil et al.)

In order to apply this to classroom practice, William Doll laid out a postmodern curriculum matrix that consists of richness, recursion, relation and rigor. Richness means keeping the curriculum open and emphasizing layers of meaning. Recursion means keeping the process of learning in mind. Relation means trying to understand the role cultural connections play in our interpretation of meaning. For Doll, relations between subject areas are also important. Rigor refers to the realization that because we cannot know things for certain, we need to deliberately seek out alternatives, relations and connections.

Wholesale application of postmodernist ideals to education would bring a tectonic shift in curriculum and classroom procedures. First, it means a shift away from a teacher-centered classroom where the instructor is the purveyor of knowledge and the student the assimilator of it, to a student-centered situation where students are encouraged to seek out understanding themselves. Second, it means emphasizing the importance of freedom because you can think what you want, not what the teacher tells you to think. Creativity is then important because students are being asked to create their own understanding. The relative nature of the postmodern viewpoint leads to the tolerance of diversity because understanding is derived from many sources, i.e. many people. Furthermore, the tolerance of diversity leads to the belief in the equality of those diverse factions.

Just as aspects of the modernist perspective have been attacked on political grounds, for example, accusations that the canon of English literature has been selected by and is imposed by a white, male, educated elite, aspects of the postmodernist perspective are also open to attack. Extreme versions of postmodernist curriculum teach that in terms of knowledge, there is no right or wrong. At best this is impractical in the real world, and at worst this is a kind of subversive, anarchist political agenda. (Delashmutt)

Without wanting to wade into political arguments, any educator with a perspective of a decade or more of experience in the classroom can recognize that, at the very least, the expectations of students’ concerning their learning experience have changed and are changing. Certainly, the students in the classroom today are quite different from those of fifty years ago. As far back as 1990, Phillip Kottak pointed out shifts in students’ classroom behavior, such as talking, reading and filing in and out of the classroom. Kottak observed that his current generation of student was the first to have been raised in front of a television, and he claimed that they were subjects of “teleconditioning”: “Television causes people to duplicate in many areas of their lives styles of behavior developed while watching television, and this fuels the culture of post-modernity.” (Kottak)

Concerning students who enter and leave the classroom at will, he was understanding:

I don’t think these ambulatory students mean to be disrespectful; rather, the rules and boundaries they recognize differ from those of students past. They are transferring a home-grown pattern of informality, including snack and bathroom breaks, from family (TV) room to classroom.

They perceive nothing unusual in acting the same way in front of a live speaker and fellow as they do when they watch television . . . they have decided to turn off the “set” or “change channels.” (Kottak)

As part of their map of the modern-postmodern divide, O’Neil and Pittman asked both teachers and their elementary school students to respond to categories in the social environment, and it is no surprise that for the category of “Media” the teachers responded with “Limited viewing” while the students responded with “Part of daily life, constant presence.” This is an update to Kottak’s teleconditioning and could be dubbed “mediaconditioning.” Rather than physically walking in and out of the classroom, students now move in and out of the class mentally via their electronic devices.

David Elkind went a step further to say that school mirrors society and the family and, therefore, must change as society and the family change. Most clearly we can see changes in the family structure and parenting. The nuclear family has given way to the postmodern family of various types, single parent, step parent, single-sex parent, and at the same time the emphasis on togetherness has given way to autonomy, the orientation of the family as child-centered has given way to parent-centered, and the experience of adult attention has yielded to independence.

Personally, I think one of the most useful concepts in understanding the postmodern is that of irregularity. Students see so many things in their life that are discordant with the social norms of the generations before that skepticism becomes normal. Even the other students in the immediate environs of the student sitting in the classroom are less regular than in the past, consisting of “residential students and commuters, recent high school graduates, [non-traditional students,] and returning professionals, native-born and international students. (Boyer 34) In addition, the electronic age has accelerated the disjunction between place and time. At just about any time, a person can communicate with another person, or group of persons, anywhere in the world. If you can check the weather both where you are and back home, keep up a chat with your brother who is thousands of miles away, comment on a picture posting on social media, AND be in a lecture of Medieval history, well, isn’t your life all that much richer? Not to make excuses for such behavior, but at the very least one can begin to see that students expect, are hungering for, a variety of activities leading to the “experience” of learning. It is intolerable for them, *inexcusable* that they should be expected to simply sit and listen and absorb information.

On a practical basis, then, what should instructors do, especially when teaching information-based subjects? In 1998 the Boyer Commission Report, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, laid out guidelines for “Reinventing Undergraduate Education,” and the report’s section titles are enlightening.

- I. Make Research-Based Learning the Standard
- II. Construct an Inquiry-Based Freshman Year
- III. Build on the Freshman Foundation
- IV. Remove Barriers to Interdisciplinary Education
- V. Link Communication Skills and Course Work

- VI. Use Information Technology Creatively
- VII. Culminate with a Capstone Experience
- VIII. Educate Graduate Students as Apprentice Teachers
- IX. Change Faculty Reward Systems
- X. Cultivate a Sense of Community (Boyer)

Sections I, II, III, and VII above address the importance of getting students involved in the process of learning. Actually, this is nothing new and revolutionary. It brings us full circle back to the ancient Chinese proverb:

Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand. (Quotations Page)

In this paper I would like to focus on what the field of foreign language teaching might be able to contribute to the ideas in Section V, linking communication skills and course work, and also to the last section, cultivating a sense of community.

The field of foreign language teaching has undergone changes in the past 50 to 70 years that have been in some ways similar to the changes in intellectual and aesthetic areas outlined above, and, therefore, it has some interesting parallels to the modernist-postmodernist discussion. Because instruction of foreign language is based on developing skills, the transformations are to be seen most clearly in the methodologies applied to instruction: from the grammar-translation method, to the Direct Method, to the Audio-lingual method, to the post-method. The grammar-translation method consists of memorizing vocabulary and understanding and practicing grammar rules, with the goal of having students become adept at translating one language into another. This method reflected the modernist idea that a language can be organized, studied, and, therefore, knowable if only the students were to follow the path clearly and carefully laid out for them by the teacher. The Direct Method moved away from translation to learning languages through "oral communication skills [which] were built up in carefully graded progression organized around question-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes." (Brandl 2) In this way the teacher-student relationship is a bit more horizontal with the teacher modeling and drawing out while the student imitates and responds. In the 1950s and 1960s the Audiolingual Method built upon the Direct Method in that it continued to emphasize the importance of patterns and drills under the assumption that "as Rivers (1964) put it, foreign language learning is basically a mechanical process of habit formation and automatization." (Brandl 3)

Along with their strengths, all of these methods were criticized for having weaknesses as well. The grammar-translation method produced little in the way of proficiency; it was difficult to widely disseminate the Direct Method because of the necessity for the instructors to be native, or near native speakers; and the Audiolingual Method seemed to require the instructor to become a drillmaster while at the same time "the learners lacked engagement in meaningful language use and had only limited opportunities to use language creatively while interacting with their peers." (Brandl 4) Of course, there have been many other methodologies promulgated over this time: Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, the Silent Way

and Suggestopedia, to name a few, (Brandl 5) but the general approach to language teaching in the past two decades has been to step back and look at the ultimate goal, communicative competence, and then to seek out and apply whatever techniques might contribute to that goal. The common name for this is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It is “based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication.” (Brandl 5) Brandl continues:

CLT is not a method per se. That is to say, it is not a method in the sense by which content, a syllabus, and teaching routines are clearly identified. CLT has left its door wide open for a great variety of methods and techniques. There is not a single text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative. By and large it uses materials and utilizes methods that are appropriate to a given context of learning. (6)

Though there is not a clearly stated basic philosophy nor single methodology it is generally acknowledged that CLT adheres to certain qualities:

- a. It is activity or task based.
- b. Learners must interact to exchange information, or solve problems.
- c. Tasks should be as close to real-world situations as possible.
- d. Tasks should make use of inter-skills, such as between reading and listening .
- e. It is learner centered in the production of language and the role of creativity. (Wesche and Skehan 208)

It is these types of instructional methods that most closely align foreign language instruction with instruction in the postmodern classroom in other fields of study. If the postmodern curriculum is “supposed to be the overarching principle holding together the diversity of individuals engaged in the co-construction of knowledge skills, and dispositions,”(Biboc 148) then the task-based and student-centered approach of CLT fits this nicely.

The postmodern classroom literature is filled with advice to instructors on how to make learning more student centered—involve students in discussions, provide them with materials and examples that they can relate to, and present content in multiple formats. “Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, solving. Passivity dampens students’ motivation and curiosity.” (Davis 15) Perhaps it is much more obvious in a language classroom that a passive student is not going to learn very much. Therefore, language instructors, and especially those who could be described as proponents of communicative language instruction, have developed a plethora of techniques to keep students active in the classroom. Many of those techniques can be applied to the techniques already in practice in, for example, lecture classes, to add even more variety to the activities and to improve the communicative nature of those activities.

Before getting down to specific examples I would like to lay out an important guiding principle for the development of any skill: moving from easy to difficult. In one sense this means beginning with what the students already understand and can do effectively, or can master easily, and pushing them in ways that are more and more challenging. For example, if a student can ride a bicycle in a straight line, then you place

cones in the path so that he has to navigate around them, and then you place the cones ever closer together, making the turns sharper and more difficult. The situation is essentially the same in conceptual learning, and many of the tasks that are presented below are designed to draw upon strengths while moving forward.

I will begin with five standard interactive classroom techniques as described in the *Pedagogy in Action*: the SERC Portal for Educators web site, under their “Interactive Lectures” section, and then we will see how these might be enriched by some of activities of foreign language instruction.

Think-Pair-Share First introduced by Frank Lyman in the early 1980s, as the name implies, it has three steps: each student takes time to think by themselves about a question or inquisitive task that the teacher has proposed, they pair up with another student and discuss their ideas, then they share their ideas either with a larger group or with the class.

Question of the Day These are short activities at the beginning of a class to get students thinking about the day’s topic before it is introduced. These can be in the form of a question, but they can also be tasks such as labeling or annotating a diagram, timeline or map, graphing data, or analyzing an abstract or brief passage.

One-minute Write Students are asked to produce a written response in a short time, usually during or at the end of a class.

Concept Test These are conceptual questions asked during or at the end of the class to assess student understanding.

Skeleton Notes These are handouts of lecture notes or power point slides with information deliberately missing. Students have to fill in the missing bits as the class progresses.

Next I will introduce some of the techniques used in foreign language instruction.

Spoken Techniques

Pair work The most ubiquitous communicative technique in the language classroom is to have students working in groups of two, where they sit near each other and engage in some kind of interaction. Pair work can be useful in tandem with many different kinds of techniques, as we shall see. The obvious advantage of pair work is that it is interactive. Why would interaction be important? First, students turn their attention away from the instructor for a period of time, so it is another method for adding student-centered material to the class. Also, there is the possibility that the interaction will produce a richer learning environment because, well, two heads are better than one. It is also social. Most students enjoy interacting with fellow students if for no other reason than that it adds a communal dimension to an all-too-often solitary classroom situation.

One variation of pair work is to have students move around the classroom to seek out a new partner, **roving pair work**, in order to continue on with or to complete different parts of the activity. Another variation is to stage an organized rotation of partners, or **rotation pair work**.

Examples of Pair Work Tasks

Listen and answer questions Student A has a passage and Student B some questions. Student A reads the passage and Student B listens for the answers. Then Student A hides the passage and answers as Student B asks A the questions again.

Create a graph Student A has information in a table (or a completed graph) and reads the information as Student B, who only has an empty graph, plots the information on the graph.

Same or different? Students A and B have similar pictures, graphs, charts, maps, etc., but some of the information is different. They have to describe the information in their material and the two of them have to identify the differences. Then they need to decide which of the two materials, A's or B's, matches the information table the teacher displays.

Here's the answer. What's the question? Student A has questions and their answers. Student A reads only the answers. Student B has no materials to look at but has to think about and then say the question that leads to the answer he heard.

Pictures of a process that are scrambled First, the student is to put the pictures back in order by numbering them. Then Student A describes each picture in the order that he has placed them and Student B listens and checks to see if his ordering is the same as Student A's.

Examples of Small Group Tasks

Reorder a scrambled passage Some information that needs to be in a particular order is scrambled by placing bits of the information on cards and randomizing them. A group of two to four students stands up around a desk and has to lay the cards out on a desk in the correct order.

Discussions Discussion in pairs is usually effective only when the question or task is relatively simple. For more complicated undertakings, groups of three or four students may roust out more ideas.

Think of as many ___ as you can Similarly to discussions, tasks which challenge students to "think of as many ___ as you can" usually get more fruitful results from small groups than from pairs or from students working on their own.

Written Techniques

Asking students to do a task on a piece of paper by themselves is certainly student-centered, but it is not interactive. Whenever possible, such tasks, once completed, should be turned into interactive activities as the examples below will illustrate. The initial written task is probably most useful as a chance to allow the students to think something through in preparation for the interactive portion. This is the basis of the Think-Pair-Share format, but the examples here will show that the "Think" portion can be a little more structured, for example in the form of a written task, and this structure then carries over to the "Pair" portion. In addition, interacting with another student exposes each student to another student's ideas and thereby enriches their own ideas. Lastly, interacting with another student about the material that has just been covered in written form is a way to get the student to unknowingly repeat the material, and repetition tends to aid long-term memory.

Cloze exercises have portions of a text which have been deliberately and, hopefully, purposefully deleted. Students are to fill in the missing word or words to complete the text. If a list of words or phrases that should be used is provided, this is an **objective cloze exercise**, and if a list is not provided and the student has to come up with the answer himself, this is a **subjective close exercise**. In a **listening cloze exercise** Student A has the full text and reads it while Student B has a cloze copy and listens and fills in the

blanks. A variation on this is a **blind listening cloze exercise** where Student A has a cloze copy where the blanks are indicated, but the answers are also included. Student A reads the text, saying “blank” where there are blanks. Student B has no materials to look at but listens and tries to determine and then say the necessary information to fill in the blanks.

Matching exercises are alternatives to multiple choice questions. One type of matching task is to **put together the two halves of a sentence**, but they can also be **matching a word with its definition** or **matching a word with its description**, or **matching a word with its antonym**. Words or descriptions can also be matched with pictures, graphs, charts, maps, chemical formulas, etc. These can be adapted to pair work if Student B only has access to the first or second half of the answers and Student A reads the other half while Student B says the portion that matches.

Find and correct the mistakes A text is prepared containing incorrect information at certain intervals. Students have to identify the incorrect information and correct it. This can be done individually as a written exercise, or in pairs where Student A reads the text as it is and Student B, who is not looking at the text, listens, interrupts when he hears incorrect information, and provides the correction.

Place vocabulary in boxes Boxes are placed surrounding a picture, chart, etc. with lines leading to different things in the material. These boxes and lines indicate things which have to be identified by placing words in the boxes.

Categories A long list of words is provided as well as some categories. Students have to place the words in the appropriate categories. This can be done individually as a written exercise, or adapted to pair

Table 1

	Think-Pair-Share	Question of the Day	One Minute Write	Concept Test	Skeleton Notes
Pairs					
Listen and answer questions	S			W	W
Create a graph	S	W		W	W
Same or different?	S				
Here's the answer. What's the question?	S	S or W		W	W
Pictures of a process that are scrambled	S				W
Small Groups					
Reorder a scrambled passage	S				W
Discussions	S				
Think of as many ___ as you can	S	S or W	W		
Written					
Cloze exercises	W → S	W		W	W
Matching exercises	W → S	W		W	W
Find and correct the mistakes	W → S	W		W	
Place vocabulary in boxes	W → S	W		W	W
Categories	W → S	W		W	W

work where Student A reads the words and Student B, who is not looking at the words but is looking at the categories, listens and says the appropriate category that the word should be placed in.

How can these tasks be adopted or adapted for use with the SERC techniques? Table 1 suggests which tasks might be appropriate for which technique. It is also indicated whether the task should be a spoken one (S) or a written one (W) or both.

As you can see, with the exception of the One Minute Write technique, which by its nature is set in its format, most of the tasks are adaptable to most of the techniques. Some of this may be a bit surprising. For example, ordinarily people would think of Skeleton Notes as a cloze exercise: you outline your lecture and delete parts of it that the students then need to fill in. However, here you can see that there are many more possibilities for activities for your students to engage in while listening to the lecture, such as filling in a graph, answering questions, or categorizing information, rather than simply filling in blanks. Matching exercises are not so different from cloze exercises in this context, but at the very least they can lend some variety to the day's endeavors.

Any deep consideration of pedagogical philosophy must have at its very core the question, "Why should a person go to school when they can go to the library and learn themselves?" The simple answer to this is that virtually no one would succeed in teaching themselves on their own. Why won't we teach ourselves even though we can? It is probably because we need guidance, we need structure, and, unfortunately, most of us need incentives and coercion in order to learn. Incentives and coercion are intended to provide, or at the very least bolster motivation. However, the best source of motivation is inspiration, and by this I mean its dictionary definition, "something that makes someone want to do something or that gives someone an idea about what to do or create." (*Merriam-Webster*) It is this kind of inspiration that should be the goal of the interactive classroom. The activities should be attractive so that the students want to do them. They should also make it clearer to the students what is important to learn and why it is important. Lastly, the activities should guide the students toward wanting to learn on their own and being able to do so. This is the crux of the constructivist approach to teaching: students are acting on their own as much as possible, and the teachers are "mediators of student and environments, not simply givers of information and managers of behavior." (Brooks 102)

Hesiod complained that youth were "impatient of restraint," but if that restraint is on their intellectual curiosity and creativity, then they have a right to be annoyed. As he said, we depend upon them, and, therefore, we need to work with them in helping them create their own future.

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