The Characteristic of Postmodernism - Fragmentation and its impact on the process of English Language Learning: A Case Study

Andrew Philominraj, Juan Galleguillos, Andrea Fuentealba, Bruno Ramírez Muñoz

Universidad Católica del Maule
*Prof. Dr. Andrew Philominraj, Departamento de Idiomas, Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad Católica del, Maule, Avda. San Miguel # 3605, Talca-Chile
Email: andrew@ucm.cl

Abstract— *The teaching of a second language, especially English, seems to be on the raise given the importance of today´s globalized world. This article, an empirical study, was carried out through a survey with close-ended questions and text development, applied to two Chilean schools. The aim of the investigation was to recognize the fragmentation that occurs in the learners' process of acquiring English language, by measuring the use of words and integration of vocabulary, writing and the use of idioms. Theoretically it is assumed that postmodernism is a reality in today´s society, with its characteristics of individualism, fragmentation and atomization of knowledge. The results showed that among those surveyed, there is a lack of developed and applied vocabulary, as well as deficiencies in the idiomatic development, as a result of the atomization and fragmentation of knowledge.*

Keywords— *Culture, Education, English Language, Postmodernism and Fragmentation, Teaching and learning.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This article, an empirical study carried out in two schools in the Maule Region, aims to show how the characteristic of postmodern fragmentation has affected language and its communication processes, and has, thus, become an obstacle in learning a second language.

At first, there is the need to learn English as a state policy in which governments have tried to introduce the language through different school plans. Then there is the postmodernism, which brings us new elements for living in reality and in communicating fluently. In the case of language, changes can be perceived in terms of many abbreviations and symbols that can be used in digital, verbal and written communication, which can increase the difficulties in learning a new language.

II. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The need to learn English as a second language is increasing because it is the language for international communication (Harmer, 2000, Brown, 2007). English has reached a high level of importance since it is a governmental issue (Cameron, 2003). In Chile, English language is considered a tool that allows global communication as well as access to wider knowledge of information and technology, which will allow countries to meet the demands of a global society (Mineduc, 2012).

Even though English is a subject in the school curriculum, its importance was really noticed in Chile when there was a change in the way it was taught. The change, prompted by the Chilean Ministry of Education (Mineduc, 2004), went from a grammar-based approach to a more communicative one (Mineduc, 2004). In the 1990s, the emphasis was on the development of reading comprehension based on texts of increasing difficulty depending on the course or level evaluated (Villarroel, 1997). Teaching which focused on grammatical rules and behaviorist type of rote-repetitive tasks distanced itself from the classrooms (McBride, 2009). In its place, classes based on communicative activities took over, where the focus was placed on the expression of ideas rather than on the analysis of the formal aspects of the language (Bell, 2005, Larsen-Freeman, 2013, Richards & Rodgers, 2001, Zanón, 2007).

One of the contributions made by the Chilean Ministry of Education to promote English language teaching was the creation of the pioneering and exclusive 'English Open Doors' program (Mineduc, 2004). "English Open Doors", created in 2003, had the mission of improving students´ proficiency level of the language, which they began to learn from 5th to 12th grade, through the definition of national standards for learning English, professional teacher training development and classroom support for teachers all around the country.

However, in spite of establishing an English language program, it has been demonstrated that students of educational establishments in Chile, upon graduating from secondary school, have little mastery in the comprehension of the written language and basic levels of oral production, abilities that are part of the fundamental objectives of the English program in Chile (King, 2007).

With regard to the low results of competency in English language at secondary education, a number of theories have emerged that seek to respond to this difference. One of them argues that the problem is due, in part, to the poor use of methodological techniques in the classroom, noting that they are not adequate for the type of content that is intended to be taught (King, 2007). Other theories that seek to respond to the ineffectiveness of English programs in Chile, argues that the difficulties are due to lack of infrastructure and economic and human resources (Wagner, 2001).

Gaviria and Faustino (2006) reveal that Spanish is the language that predominates in the Chilean English classrooms, especially in public educational establishments, where the teachers and students communicate in L2 when consulted on short topics. In the Chilean context, the lack of resources for teaching English in the educational system is a well-known problem that has dragged on for years (Cancino, 2007). The Institution, Education First (EF), dedicated to international cooperation through the promotion of English language learning, has reported, through their study report, that Chile appears in position 45 among the 80 countries surveyed, ranking at an even lower level than the least developed countries (Education First, 2017).

Different studies show a variety of non-favorable elements as reasons for not achieving the desired learning of the English language in Chile. These reasons are part of postmodernism, wherein the lives of the individuals, especially the lives of the students surveyed, find themselves immersed in decenteredness. A fragmented society makes the search for knowledge be fragmented as well, by making the set of knowledge unviable and more precisely as in this study, the learning of the English language.

III. POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is present in society as a whole (Follari, 2010). Some authors argue that postmodernism is a stage of late capitalism, as the case of Habermas (Frais, 2008) or as the one proposed by Giddens (Redon Pantoja, 2011,) who states that this period is like "late modernism". Other authors openly state that postmodernism is a reality that is already set in society, thus Vattimo (2000) recognizes that postmodernism is a different way of being in the world (Hernandez, 2009).

Lyotard (1991) poses this new scenario, where great stories are changed into micro-stories; where, in truth, what is small is what is really concrete in the reality. He clearly states that we are in the postmodern age; "disbelief is regarded as postmodernism in relation to meta-narratives "(Urra, 2010).

Postmodernism is a reality that has permeated all social structures by provoking a cultural change. In these days, ways of becoming family are varied, from the traditional family supported by the structure of father, mother and children, to other ways of becoming family, couples united without any legal or religious bond, gay and lesbian couples who consider themselves a family. Referring to the different types of families, Max Charlesworth (1996) states that there are about twelve types of families, in addition to an unstructured structure, where what is fundamental is postmodern values of equality and moral autonomy (León Correa, 2010).

Furthermore, political organizations have also suffered from the onslaught of postmodernism. It is enough to see the number of militants registered especially young militants who are duly registered in official political party lists. Something similar is happening with churches, where it can be observed that more and more members are elderly people. It is possible to list many institutions that do not represent the social subjects, but even so, persist on going about their daily activities, looking for ways to articulate new roles within society or ways of attracting more members to their ranks or ways to be more credible within society. González Carvajal (1991) states that the transition from Prometheus being a modern hero to being a postmodern Narcissus is a characteristic of postmodernism, characterized by a search for personal satisfactions and individualistic character. That is why the postmodern society is evidenced in its institutions, fundamentally because of its fragmentation or weakening.

3.1. Postmodernism and knowledge transfer

There is a complex problem regarding knowledge transfer because it allows the cultural survival of a social group in an identity of cohesion and integration. However, a postmodern society is by definition fragmented (Sosa Sanchez, 2008). Therefore, the transfer of knowledge to younger generations is also fragmented; that is to say, a discussion between quality and quantity emerges, or, in other words, between coverage and opportunities, which could mean that in the effort to cover the entire educational demand, at any level, quality might not be considered, or more complex yet, the opportunities that the subject or individual will have in the acquisition of new knowledge or knowledge period (Lyotard, 1991), needed to relate and interact in everyday life.

The fragmentation of society is characterized by the rise of social groups joined together by highly concrete

specific demands, which, upon fulfillment, get dissolved quickly (Follari, 2010). There is also a backtracking of oneself and no matter the reality of the individual or the others, these two fronts are given by fragmentation, which can also hold true in the reality of society in terms of the self-imposed division between those who have economic means and those who do not. Social class today is not just a sociological reality, but a contingent reality as well, and which, according to each individual´s needs will be accommodated in one context or the other, or in a determined fragment. In the same way, social segregation occurs through the market, that is to say, based on the market access that each individual has.

Postmodern culture poses challenges on knowledge transfer and on the knowledge of society as a whole, especially when it comes to introducing a new language, different from the native one, because fragmentation and individualism collaborate in secluding themselves and not open up to any possibilities of other scenarios.

IV.   METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This article is an empirical study that provides knowledge from a survey carried out on fourteen 12th grade students from two different high schools in the city of Constitution, Chile, a private subsidized one, and a municipal one.

The general objective of the survey is to recognize the fragmentation that the students possess in the acquisition of knowledge, measured through the use and integration of vocabulary, writing and the use of idioms, when answering the survey. Furthermore, a description will be given on how postmodernism, in its fragmentation characteristic, influences the loss of or the changes into the formal language when writing and explaining ideas and situations.

The application of the English language knowledge and their competence will be observed through a translation exercise taken up by the students and then an analysis of the information collected will be formulated to arrive at a consensus. This analysis is reflected in a table showcasing achieved outcomes (see Table 1), or those not achieved; idioms and apostrophes used as well as a bar graph showing the percentages reached (see Fig 1) by the respondents in the different tabulation categories.

4.1. Basis of the survey

The survey consists of three topics: writing an idea, writing an action and writing the translation to a sentence with the help of a dictionary included in the survey. Its tabulation will be carried out through a table with categories defined by the objectives stated.

4.2. Analysis

Three categories were used to analyze the survey: writing, use of apostrophes and idioms. In addition, the translation from Spanish to English was also added.

Writing is meant as an aid that monitors the capacity of the respondent to comprehend the question and to answer correctly and intelligibly. Idioms are the respondent´s own words or that which belongs to a particular register or by a specific sector of the society, but incorrect with reference to the lexicon. Finally, apostrophes are an arbitrary decision, reducing the word length, not forgetting that in Spanish there is no such modality.

As for the first question asked: to explain an idea; 50% of respondents were successful in writing, making the idea understandable. However, the use of language is very synthetic, the vocabulary students use to express themselves are poor in terms of using the precise and detailed lexicon, finally they end up giving general and vague ideas of what is a "carrete", for example. Furthermore, they revealed a lack of writing skills to fully explain the idea asked for and only one respondent gave an additional meaning as an alternative to the idea consulted upon, it was the description of an object where thread is wound (Thread spool or reel).

In the second question, about description, 57.1% showed that they are not able to describe their arrival to school because they muddle up their insights as to how they felt going to school with the recurring act of heading to school every morning. Therefore, they cannot describe what is asked: 'to just write about their arrival to school every morning'.

As far as the translation from Spanish to English, 100% of students surveyed did a literal translation, (i.e.) verbatim or word for word, without decoding the language and they also apply a minimum amount of syntactic rules. (See Table 1).

Table.1: Outcomes Achieved

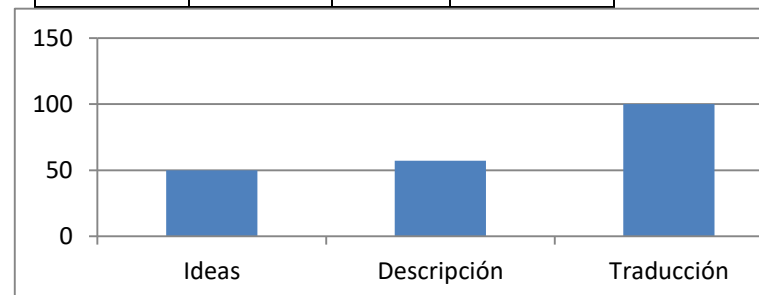|	Writing (not achieved)	Idioms	Apostrophes
Idea	50%	2	0
Description	57,1%	0	1
Translation	100%	0	0

Fig.1: Outcomes not achieved

V. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

At first, it can be stated that the students surveyed are unable to write their idea accurately, their production is a sort of vague idea, without delving adequately into the description of the concept, to make it more understandable. This could be explained by pointing out the fact that they lack sufficient vocabulary interrelated with other knowledge taught in school.

It can be observed, as a way of concluding question 2, which more than 57.1% of the respondents cannot describe their arrival to school correctly, but rather give explanations about their feelings of how they felt when they arrived to the establishment. They did not describe the physical space in which they were situated, nor did they relate it to time, the time they arrived or the conditions in which they arrived. This could be explained from the standpoint of the characteristics of postmodernism, which highly emphasizes individualistic factors, unrelated to others, with the other one being the spatial, the temporal or the individual.

The third survey question shows that the respondents do not know how to translate a sentence from Spanish to English, but rather make a literal translation. This can be explained by the fact that students have been subjected to poor teaching-learning processes or because they fail to integrate the knowledge acquired to a specific situation through the use of the language.

In general, it can be stated that this survey points to elements that indicate the fact that postmodernism has permeated the structures of language. With regard to the synthesis they perform to explain ideas or to describe situations, i.e. the atomization of discourse is quite evident in each of the formative stages of an individual, perhaps helped out by social networks, which limit the abundant use of language and vocabulary.

It is necessary to deepen studies that can account for the loss of language in favor of atomization, which can in turn, prevent the adequate learning of the English language even when considering the synthesis of the English language. This by all means, requires broader knowledge and mastery of expression of ideas, description, writing and everything that has to do with a vernacular language in order to attain a new language, such as English.

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