EDITORIAL

Dear *JALDA* reader,

The decision by the Ministry of Higher Education in Iran to revise and update the subjects for the MA and PhD courses in TESOL should pave the way towards a more comprehensive understanding of teaching English to speakers of other languages. The mainstream TESOL/Applied Linguistics has already undergone experiences and challenges to overcome its shortcomings. The limitations of Applied Linguistics have been very succinctly echoed in this statement of Corson's (1997, p. 167): "Indeed, just this perception that 'language teaching' is its central function, may have distorted the epistemological foundations of AL [Applied Linguistics] in general." Although Pennycook (2016), for reasons, cautiously uses the term "critical" (see below), his views (2008) of CALx (Critical Applied Linguistics) has had an impact on the broadening of our perspectives. For him, English language teaching should look for "an emergent approach to language use and education that seeks to connect the local condition of language to broader social formations, drawing connections between classrooms, conversations, textbooks, tests, or translations and issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology or discourse." This view has resulted in another phase in Pennycook's work which seems to reflect Corson's view of "language teaching": the English language teacher's *awareness* lies at the heart of "language teaching." Pennycook's view of a class in an MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics program is that it should make people attending the course question what they are involved in when teaching English. "You can't just get focused on grammar alone anymore and say: "I'm just an English teacher." There's no such thing as "just an English teacher", so what are we involved in? … I'd rather we had more aware teachers …." (2016, pp. 615 -616).

The Ministry's revision of both MA and PhD TESOL materials can be seen in line with the English language teacher's awareness: in MA TESOL the subject Applied Linguistics has been replaced with Linguistics in Language Teaching and new subjects are introduced alongside: Survey of Language Teaching in Iran, Culture and Identity in Language Teaching, and Islamic Education and Language Teaching. Also, Research Methods in Language Teaching has improved into Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods in Language Teaching. All this indicates that there is going to be a strong inclination in the Ministry towards an awareness of both linguistics as a broad field with new things to offer and context in TESOL in Iran. This is good news especially for those who have had a problem with the positivistic epistemological foundations of the mainstream Applied Linguistics. On the basis of a claim for scientificity, Applied Linguistics has had a mechanistic and reductionist view of language learning; according to Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000, p. 17), science "excludes notions of choice, freedom, individuality, and moral responsibility." The Ministry's plan should pave the way for a more "useful" TESOL for us in Iran. (I am using "usefulness" in the sense Backman and Palmer (2009) use it in language testing.) The usefulness is to result from the

English language teacher's awareness of how the issue should be tackled in specific contextual situations.

Awareness of context in social sciences and humanities should have significant consequences for us in TESOL. One of the consequences, for instance, is our need for tracing the history of TESOL in Iran (or any area and country), and the building of an archive, without which TESOL in Iran maybe being trapped in the vicious circle of doing experiments that do not relate to our situation in a useful way. According to my experience, our researchers and postgraduate students have been so busy dealing with scientific approaches to language teaching and the related imported concepts and constructs that we have rarely considered the history of TESOL in Iran and the real problems we may have here. Such an event seems to be a consequence of modernity especially in the Third World countries. Modernity, with its full confidence in science, could be defiant of what belonged to the past. Proponents of modernity might change a nation's orthography, for instance, so that their past might be left behind. The nation's history would become dim and lustreless then. A "primitive" people's culture might be vilified and eventually stormed and nullified by a modern culture because it intends to modernize the entire world including the primitives. (There are outstanding linguistic and anthropological studies in this area. (See Muhlhausler, 2015, for instance.) What may result from all this, as the world history shows, is the shattering of a culture without a certainty of replacing it with a new coherent one. To overcome such problems, movements with post-modern inclinations would turn to history to revive the past in a new version for a more successful future.

To relate it to TESOL, I would like to refer to my understanding of Fulcher and Davidson's *Language Testing and Assessment.* One of the outstanding characteristics of Fulcher and Davidson's work is that language testing for them is an all-embracing, effect-driven, ethical activity. These adjectives all imply that language testing is a societal issue. It is no longer an activity confined to school limits; stakeholders from different walks of life and different corners of society may be related to language testing and be affected by it. Thus it is effect-driven in a significant way: society is affected by it, because of which the test developers must take ethical issues into consideration, too, lest that the stakeholders' rights would be violated. For Fulcher and Davidson, as I understand them, therefore, language test making should rely on the outcome of two societal phenomena: conversation and dialogue among stakeholders and a study of archives of tests from schools and educational institutions, a dialogue with the past. To use an analogy, I would say that, as movements in linguistics, language test making acquires a diachronic nature; language testing in its strictly specialized sense which is usually based on language models and theories gives way to a world and society where teachers are not busy only with looking for the best tests for their classrooms based on the best theories.

Theories as closed clear-cut entities frozen at time have to draw back before the hustle and bustle of the messy real world.

The new courses introduced by the Ministry, Survey of Language Teaching in Iran, Culture and Identity in Language Teaching, and Islamic Education and Language Teaching, should make the infrastructure for developing research areas for a more realistic and more useful TESOL. What the nature of this TESOL would be is preferably unknown and, to me, that's the most interesting, the most Dionysian aspect of the endeavour! It seems to me to be like landing on an unknown planet full of wonders to us because researches would no longer commence with well-formulated imported theories and hypotheses to research language learners. Instead, archives, containing both strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian TESOL, would be formed and conversations and dialogues would take place among isolated and usually unidentified TESOL stakeholders for a more fruitful TESOL. This is the introduction of time and space into a discipline that is an outstanding example of science's abstractionism and reductionism: constructs, mostly psychological, formulated overseas are used as at least two research variables to see whether or not they affect one another on a cause-and-effect relationship! The Ministry's new subjects may put an end to the "whether or not" researches we have been busy with in our English departments. We need to enter untrodden ways in our own territories.

One important aspect of research in this kind of TESOL is having a sharp, observant eye towards related issues; the sharpness of the eye means overcoming the "sightlessness/unawareness" towards issues that might result from the very elements that are supposed to lead the researcher to truth. The claim for "just being an English teacher", as seen above, for instance, might be regarded as significant at its face value, but it leads to "sightlessness/unawareness" in the related area. According to this example, then, the presumptions and presuppositions that we have gained from even scientific domains can be a source of "sightlessness/hindrance" preventing us from seeing issues clearly. My academic experience of the recent years shows how CALx, with its realization mostly in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in our context, is being pushed from corners to gain a position here under the TESOL program, while it does not do what it might be able to do. Both Pennycook's and Widdowson's views of the problems with CALx reflect what we are doing with it in Iran. Answering questions in an interview, Pennycook reveals his problematization of CALx: "… I'm not saying at all that we shouldn't be doing critical work, but I'm worried about what the term critical comes to mean. So my question is: "What work does it now do?" And quoting Widdowson, Pennycook says, "by taking an *a priori* critical stance (rather than maintaining a critical distance—to use a different sense of the critical), CALx may impose its own views on the objects of inquiry, taking inappropriate and thus hypocritical stances on the social world because of the impossibility of choosing between different ethical and political concerns." Let us have an elaboration of these with an eye on Iran.

The first thing about CALx in Iran, as far as I can see, is that the Iranian applied linguistic research is so absorbed in mainstream scientific version of it that CALx research seems to be rare here; who dares to imagine questioning the centrality of, say, Standard English at school? Therefore, what most researchers do in the context of applied linguistics in Iran is, to use Geertz's (1983, p.6) words,

> … trying to explain the social phenomena [if there are any authentic ones because I think that we just imitate what we have imported from oversees] by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect …. Dispassion, generality, and empirical grounding are earmarks of any science worth the name, as is logical force. Those who take the determinative approach seek these elusive virtues by positing a radical distinction between description and evaluation and then confining themselves to the descriptive side of it ….

What well characterizes the dominant methodological orientation in the Iranian applied linguistics is being confined to the grand texture of cause and effect and to the descriptive role in explaining phenomena. The situation gets more attention catching against CALx when it is realized that most researches are quantitative and hence detached from the context of situation. (The significance of introducing new courses by the Ministry should be reminded here.) There are some claims for critical view in applied linguistics by critical discourse analysts in our context, but, to repeat Pennycook here, what work does *critical* now do for us? According to Pennycook's (2016, p. 614) experience from Australia, critical literacy does not work because *critical* gets worn out when there is a fixed critical curriculum, which is "critique of capital" in Australia, and everyone starts doing it in all state schools there! In the Iranian context CDA is generally confined to the analyses of political essays usually from western media to show how the biased selection of linguistic/textual elements by authors may distinguish *them* (non-Westerners) from *us* (Westerners), for instance, and justify their (Westerners') views and deeds towards us (non-Westerners). Even in its most advanced form CDA of this type approaches the topic with presuppositions and prefabricated tools and instruments for analysis which eventually may lead, to repeat Widdowson's words, to inappropriate stances on social world. What matters about it in the context of this piece of writing is that, to my view, the concept of "critical" at the heart of CDA creates a presupposition that eventually may put a restraint on the researcher's viewpoint of the issues. The restraint is there simply because the critical discourse analyst holds in advance that s/he (and only s/he) is armed with instruments that are there to disclose texts that maliciously hide problems such as inequalities, injustices, racism, patriarchal ill wills, politically tyrannical ideas, generic falsehoods, and any other negative phenomenon imaginable! The critical discourse analyst is, therefore, a highly suspicious skeptic that, through tackling the virtual world of texts, would like to set people's real world right! But one might ask: on what conditions should one decide

on the correctness and incorrectness of the issues? Pennycook's worries with CALx should make sense now! *Critique* may turn into a framework restricting the researcher from seeing issues from fresh angles.

The Ministry's new subjects for TESOL in Iran should provide us with an invaluable opportunity to experience new horizons in researching TESOL. Scientific attitude we all have been brought up with has led to an epistemology that does not seem adequate in today's world anymore. It is not adequate because it is reductionist in nature, it sees the social phenomena relating to one another solely on the basis of cause and effect relationship, it treats human beings as objects and it does not leave room for competing epistemologies. The new materials should be regarded as a platform to throw us into the unknown world of social world whose existence for us is a matter of interpretation rather than description. Science and critique in the sense we have learned and used them so far have turned into fixed standard curricula preventing us from experiencing an authentic life. To have new views of things, we may need, as Geertz (p. 6) quoting Wittgenstein argues, to make detours, to go by side roads fairly well away from the standard styles of demonstration. While one sees the straight highway before one, one should seek side roads off the highway to arrive at some conclusions about expression, power, identity, or justice "because it [the highway] is permanently closed." And side roads are everywhere, all over the world, with Englishes learned by people wishing to communicate with one another for different reasons and English teachers should see what they can do to help them in this regard.

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