

EDITORIAL

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Dear *JALDA* Reader,

“Disciplines, disciplines, disciplines!” That’s the view a student on the verge of entering university may conventionally have of tertiary studies in a context such as Iran and on his/her entrance the view is usually reinforced by the academicians that have been brought up according to the segregationist view that disciplines have borders that shouldn’t be trespassed. Not only do natural sciences stand apart from humanities and social sciences, but also within the latter fields, philosophy, for instance, would not welcome the principles upon which literary studies are based, or, even, English language education may not show an interest in findings about language in literary studies. (These are the experiences one may come across simply in the context of Iranian academic circles.) The “distrust” between disciplines in our academic contexts is in a sense a reminder of the criticism Matthew Arnold articulated against the distinction between physical science and literature in a lecture in 1883, the time when the modern “world,” from an intellectual perspective, was experiencing complicated situations resulting, in this connection, from the insistence on the role of physical science to reach Truth. Arnold’s concern is that literature is excluded and hence undermined. Literature, for Arnold, is a solution for social conflict, while the very insistence on the authenticity of physical science and superficiality of literature is a call to conflict. And literature for Arnold is not simply belles-lettres but “the best that has been thought and said in the world” (2006, p. 1417). He employs culture as the umbrella concept for the best that has been thought and said in the world. Conflicts could be avoided because the free movement in the vast domain of culture results in knowledge of ourselves and the world by means of what is regarded as the best thought and said in the world.

The valorisation of “culture” by Arnold may bring to one’s mind what has been experienced in more recent academic circles under the “cultural turn,” which occurred after the “linguistic turn.” According to Bachmann-Medick (2016, p. 22), it was the linguistic turn that sparked the cultural turn.

The linguistic turn began with the understanding of the linguistic dependency and antecedency of texts and representations as fundamental epistemological conditions and transferred this to the other human sciences One of the turn’s essential characteristics is its strict departure from positivism, which, well into the 1960s, attributed

knowledge of reality to quantifiable data. By contrast, the linguistic turn assumes that it is impossible to access an “authentic” reality. Language cannot be used to describe an underlying reality that is independent of it. In other words, instead of describing reality, language constitutes it: all knowledge of reality is cast in linguistic statements and there is no reality that is not informed or shaped linguistically.

She refers to this phenomenon as the filter of linguisticity.

From this, according to Bachmann-Medick (p. 23), emerges the view that reality is man-made and that the use of symbols to create meaning takes place in a context of power relations that should be accounted for. The operationalization of such a view demands to liberate linguistics empowered by the turn “from its one-sided fixation on the structure of language (*langue*) and by increasingly focusing on the unexamined topics of speech event, current speech, communication and performance (*parole*).” The offshoots of such a turn are introduced as the “cultural turns” by Bachmann-Medick (2016) and there are outstanding figures in English language education, such as van Lier (2004) and Kumaravadivelu (2012), whose findings should liberate English language education from the dogma experienced in the positivistic approaches that usually finish up at the segregationist’s disciplinary position. New research areas are discovered in the field when the cultural turns after the linguistic turn are the cause for new concepts and perspectives. Kumaravadivelu’s concept of *globalism* is an endeavour to place English language education in the broader context of the twenty-first century world, which, for him, is marked by rapid radical changes and transformations affecting peoples’ lives in ways like never before.

While an implication of such a perspective would be reviewing our traditional approaches to English language education, what one may experience in the Iranian academic context is not so encouraging. There are experiences of new postgraduate students’ knowledge of the issues which seem to be just entities frozen in time. The main expectation of these students is usually becoming English teachers capable to adjust themselves mechanically to the expectations of the language schools in town! (This can be regarded as a realization of our belief in the segregationist sense of discipline.) No doubt knowledge of teaching methods, such as those invented according to the expertise in the 70s and 80s, for instance, can be regarded as tools in a teacher’s workshop, but they seem rather outdated in the frenzy of rapid changes the world is experiencing. Today’s need in knowledge, from a rather Arnoldian perspective, is not mechanical knowledge; what is needed is getting closer to people and study them within the context of culture and context of situation, elements which are not regarded as stable anymore and without which any study would be a decontextualized event meaningless to the proponents of cultural turns. An interesting point in this topic is that in Arnold’s view of culture our knowledge of culture should result in knowledge of ourselves and of the world. In the same vein, Kumaravadivelu should take the first step in the

formulation of his model for language teacher education towards determining a sense of Self, the concept of “teacher identity” in his model. And if for Arnold literature is the best that has been thought and said in the world, the concept “disciplinarity” in English language education should change and give way to “interdisciplinarity”, “transdisciplinarity”, or any term or concept that would bring in the complexities of the world to the field.

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