



JALDA's Interview with Professor Behrooz Azabdaftari

Interview by Davoud Amini

*Associate Professor of TEFL, Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University, Tabriz, Iran
d.amini@azaruniv.ac.ir davoudamini2014@gmail.com*



Behrooz Azabdaftari

Behrooz Azabdaftari is Professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics at University of Tabriz. Born in 1938 in Tabriz, Iran, he received his BA in Language Education from Tehran Higher Education Institute in 1963 and his MA in English from University of Beirut in 1970. He was granted a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics by the University of Illinois, USA in 1980. During nearly 50 years of academic work, professor Azabdaftari has taught graduate courses at University of Tabriz, Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University and Islamic Azad University. With an interdisciplinary approach to language studies, Dr. Azabdaftari has regularly published on the cross lines of Applied Linguistics, Translation and Literature. By translating a few key works on Vygotsky's thought, he has had

a significant role in introducing Sociocultural Theory to Iranian community of language teaching researchers. He has also translated selected poetry from well-known Persian contemporary poets, including an excellent translation of Shahraiar's masterpiece of "Hayder Babaya Selam". He has joined an interview with Davoud Amini.

DA: ---- Dear professor Azabdaftari, I appreciate your kindness in accepting JALDA's invitation to take part in this interview.

BA: ---- The pleasure is mine. I hope the opportunity afforded to me will help me to elaborate my position on EFL/ESL teaching and learning, on contribution of the target literature to developing the student-learner's foreign language efficiency and also on translation studies from one language to another language.

DA: ---- Dear professor, you have lived the history of English Language Teaching here in Iran with more than five decades of involvement in research and education in this area. English Education has become an independent field of study now with hundreds of Ph.D. graduates every year from outstanding Iranian universities. How do you describe English Language Teaching as an academic discipline?

BA: ---- To answer your question, I may point out that the great task of a language teacher, no matter a foreign or the mother tongue, is to enjoy his profession of teaching the language considered in the best possible way. An honest teacher, I believe, is the one who does not spare giving his knowledge to the learner in the formal classroom situation. Language teaching, I tend to believe, is not a job; rather it is a profession which implies the spiritual commitment in the process of conducting his humanistic mission.

DA: ---- Your academic output, based on the whole array of your publications in applied linguistics, literature and translation witness to a cross-disciplinary perspective. As a language expert who has adopted an interdisciplinary approach to language studies, and with regard to the current tendency to specialize language-related studies, what is the central element in applied language studies that can contribute to the dynamics between linguistic, translation and literary studies?

BA: ---- The key word in these three domains – linguistics, literature, and translation – is language. When you have mastered the subtleties involved in phonology, clauses, sentences, speech functions, and lay-outs of discourse, you can put the gained knowledge to proper uses in teaching language, literature and translation studies, especially if your gained knowledge is subconscious, i.e., if you have acquired the target language system. It is worth noting that the mastery of language system will enhance the mental capability to cope with especial issues facing us in linguistic, literary and translation studies.

DA: ---- Our journal has partly been inspired by your publications on the role of literature in language teaching. How can literature be integrated into language teaching programs, in your opinion?

BA: ---- To me the first function of language is its use in speech communities in order to meet our communicative purposes. The second function of language is its use in literature and poetics. It should be noted that the language teacher's work is to teach, and the learner's work is to learn. The teacher cannot learn the target language for the learner. Rather, the teacher can help he student-learner develop his target language through intermixing his intensive teaching with the student's extensive reading of literary texts. Care should be taken that the texts selected should be at the proper level of the student's language proficiency. A great more benefit will ensue if the student, while engaged in reading literary texts, underlines the beautiful

expressions used by the original author and then copy them down in his notebook, and keep going back to them in order to refresh his memory, and finally use his choice sentences to express his own ideas, moods, and feeling.

Indeed, this method has been the spring-board of my own approach to penmanship in English language learning in the past decades.

DA: ---- JALDA aims to contribute to the development of Applied Literary Studies. How do you define Applied Literature?

BA: ---- To me, literature is a vicarious experience. When the student-learner is encouraged to read the relevant English short stories, novels, plays, etc. care should be taken the selected text be in concordance with his linguistic level of language development and in commensurate with his literary gusto. The gist of the argument is that the teacher's intensive language teaching in the classroom situation should be followed by the student's extensive reading outside the classroom.

DA: ---- What image do you have in your mind about the practice of English language teaching in Iran in 20 years from now? What will language classes look like?

BA: ---- The answer to this question is short and simple. The practice of a foreign (English) language teaching in Iranian educational system in the future depends on the educational policy adopted by the government in power. And this is anybody's guess.

DA: ---- Thank you, dear professor for taking part in this interview and sharing your invaluable insights with JALDA readers.