



Mirabbas IRISKULOV: “IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE WE SHALL DEVELOP UZBEK ENGLISH”

Some people dedicate their life to the profession they have chosen, to the particular field. Mentor and master of the English language, Abbas Iriskulov is a well-known person and professional not only in Uzbekistan State World languages University where he has been working for many years but among scholars and experts in and beyond the country. Being a specialist in linguistics he delivers lectures and has published dozens of articles in scholarly journals, written and edited numerous books, dictionaries and delivered many presentations at Republican and International conferences. He has been the guest of our editorial office and below you can enjoy reading a lot of interesting information about his activity, his observations and participation in key governmental initiatives on improving teaching of foreign languages in the country and some tips by him to his colleagues and future specialists in this field.

My way of life

First thing I'd like to say that I came to Tashkent Teacher Training Institute of Foreign Languages in 1957 as a first year student. It was long, long ago, as you see. I finished this institute with a positive diploma. Well, starting from 1985. I began participating at international conferences. I was a second year student when the first conference of writers of Asian and African countries was organized in the city of Tashkent. So, it was my first experience in working as an interpreter. After that, every year we had to work in all international conferences and other meetings with foreigners. After graduation of the Institute, I was delegated to India to work as an interpreter where I worked from 1962 to 1964. Two years of working in that country was a good experience for me, because I had to speak English from early morning till late at night.

After that I came back and worked as a teacher at the Institute of Foreign Languages. In 1967 I went to Moscow for my PhD and in 1971 I defended my dissertation there. Topic of my dissertation was Uzbek and English pronouns. This was the confrontational work. The topic was very interesting. My supervisor was Leonid Barhudarov. Then I came back to Tashkent and started working first as a teacher, senior teacher and associate professor, head of department, deputy dean, dean and vice rector. In 1991 I was appointed as director of Republican Language Learning Center. It was opened on the basis of a very important document on improving teaching foreign languages in Uzbekistan

Unique attention to teaching foreign languages

Some time ago I met a professor from New York University who came to our country to observe the elections. He said that he had visited many countries in the world but didn't know any other country where this much attention is given to learning foreign languages, especially English by the government. I totally agree with him. To my mind Uzbekistan is one of those countries in the world where very much attention is given to teaching, learning and assessing the foreign languages. I know for certain that in some countries foreign languages are still taught on the basis of outdated methodologies. The partnership and cooperation with British Council, US Embassy and other international organizations helped us considerably in improving foreign language acquisition and avoid the traditional ways of teaching, which made learning second languages vibrant and exciting one.

We are doing our best to achieve linguistic sophistication, pedagogical soundness and cultural sensitivity. The government organizations render constant support in this respect. Language is the mirror of ethnicity, their way of life, traditions. As an inseparable part of world community we want to be aware about other people's languages and their culture, their way of life.

When I said that we get support from the Government I mean the following: within six months two Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan were promulgated:

1. "On Measures for Further Improvement of Foreign Languages Learning System";
2. "On Measures to Improve the Activity of Uzbekistan State University of World Languages".

The main objective of these documents is to ensure the implementation of measures for the further development of teaching foreign languages, to upgrade and improve the quality of training of teachers of foreign languages for the educational Institutions of the country in accordance with international standards.

The Measures That Are Underway to Improve Teaching Foreign Languages

The above mentioned Decrees of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan envisage “to radically improve the system of teaching foreign languages to the young generation, training of specialists to be fluent in them, through the introduction of advanced teaching methods with the use of modern information-communicative technologies and based on this – create conditions and opportunities for their wider access to the achievements of world civilization and world information resources, international cooperation and communication”

There’s no doubt that mastering foreign languages, especially English is one of the keys to access the new period of globalization in all the spheres including education. May be it is the reason that has brought the world educators together. The proof for this is the integration of CEFR to the educational system of many countries including Uzbekistan. “The Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” is the most widely used set of foreign language education standards throughout the world. Today CEFR is considered to be a reliable instrument to compare the curricula, knowledge assessment.

Thus the reason that CEFR is integrated to our educational system is as follows:

1. to provide continuation and succession in teaching FL;
2. to improve teaching methodology, one cannot achieve the goals if he/she doesn’t know the details of it;
3. to give teachers a less prescriptive, but more flexible framework for teaching, thus creating more scope to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of each individual learner;
4. to reconsider the educational management;
5. to provide objective and authentic knowledge assessment thus internationalizing the validity and reliability of assessment.

There’s no doubt that teaching and assessment are two interdependent components of any educational program. Besides an objective knowledge assessment places strong, heavy demands on instructors’ professional skills, on their multidisciplinary understanding and critical thinking skills.

It will considerably help the stakeholders to control the realization of the responsibilities of schools, secondary special and higher educational institutions in achieving overall reading, listening, writing and speaking interactions of language learners.

Thus, the objective of implementation of CEFR is to suggest ways to build language learners confidence in their ability to develop communicative competence which is the priority for teachers, government stakeholders and the parents of language learners.

It is very important to mention here that on the basis of the President's Decree ("On Measures to Improve the Activity of Uzbekistan State World Languages University" from May 23, 2013). Republican scientific and Practical Centre to Develop Innovative Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages attached to Uzbekistan State University of World Languages was set up.

It is this Centre which is responsible for the realization of the tasks put forward by the two Decrees.

Teaching foreign Languages at Educational Institutions Today

Some years ago teaching foreign languages was focused mostly on traditional approaches. The widespread methodology was based on consideration of language as a set of linguistic skills i.e. language learning involves only grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Though very often we come across to the opinion that there is no royal road in teaching foreign languages, some of the teachers reach good communicative competence in their classes while others do not. Those teachers who practice modern progressive methodology like communicative approach, skills integration, wide knowledgable integration of audio-video materials into the teaching process and implement modern system of knowledge assessment do come to the expected results. Besides the program, curricula must focus on the teaching of the culture of the nation whose language is taught and must foresee teaching the traditions, culture of the students that learn the foreign language. If it is done properly we may achieve true communicative competence since cultural adjustment is one of the key issues in cross-cultural communication. Cultural knowledge of trainees should be taken into account in developing tests to assess the students' proficiency because tests cannot be devoid of cultural content.

To achieve the tasks mentioned above the educational organizations have reconsidered State Educational Standards, new generation of course-books are developed, the educational Institutions are provided with necessary ICT. But if we do not train teachers in a proper way we shall not achieve what we want to achieve. The quality of language teaching depends on improvements in the quality of methods. Teachers must be considered rather as investigators of both their own classroom practices and those of the learners. Much of the effort to determine what constitutes effective teaching and learning is initiated by the teacher. (J-C. Richards. The Language Teaching Matrix.2005). The classroom management techniques come with experience.

They must know the ways of encouraging their students and be enthusiastic, creative and challenging. If our teachers meet these requirements we shall succeed in teaching foreign languages. Good knowledge of foreign languages especially English which is an international language is in the interest of cross-cultural understanding. Teaching language learners this skill-will decrease misunderstandings between the representatives of different ethnic groups which in its turn will foster greater tolerance for the uniqueness of human cultures and this may serve in its turn to preserve peace in the world.

The Perspectives of Teaching Foreign Languages in the Near Future

It was mentioned above that much has been done so far to improve teaching foreign language in Uzbekistan. Much attention is paid to modern approaches in teaching English and other languages. At educational Institutions teachers try to integrate four language skills, i.e. listening, reading, writing, speaking and three language aspects: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation which is said to be the natural way of language acquisition. We cannot speak about advanced ways of language learning if foreign language teaching programs, course-books or innovative multimedia packages do not contain sociocultural aspects. It is this approach that exposes foreign language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the target language.

We cannot but mention about the interference of the learners mother tongue into the system of the target language. English speakers are very well aware about Synglish, Chinglish, Japlish and so on which are the result of the influence of language structure and culture of the language learners, i.e. the indigenous, nativised forms of English which is the reflection of cultural and pragmatic norms of their speakers. There's no doubt that the Uzbek language and culture will also render influence to our English and in the very near future we shall become witness of it. Thus, we are expecting the emergence of new variety of English, i.e Uzbek English. In teacher education we'll have to take into account the varieties of English. Language learners will have to be aware of such non-native varieties. But in teaching English we'll have to keep to the native speaker standard, i.e. English spoken in Great Britain and USA.

Good knowledge of standard English and to be aware of world Englishes will provide effective communicative competence of learners.

At the end I'd like to appeal to my colleagues: I'd like all of you to do your best to meet the expectations of language learners, to motivate them, to teach them to effective communicative competence. In this way we shall be able to realize the goals envisaged by the two Decrees of the President of our country and meet the expectations of parents of language learners. Nil desperandum.

Thank you very much, Mirabbos Iriskulov. We are sure our readers will highly appreciate this interview as well as we do. We wish you health and happiness, master.

Have done a lot for science and for our society, as you see, our master is a person who you talk to and get new information and thoughts. We will be happy, if our interview here can be a good resume of many ideas.

By Saidaziz A'ZAMOV