INTERVIEW WITH ELAINE K. HORWITZ



Ana María Ortega Cebreros

University of Jaén
amortega@ujaen.es

Dr. Elaine K. Horwitz is a Professor of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, where she has been teaching along the years a wide variety of graduate and undergraduate courses on different aspects of Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Education. Among her previous academic appointments, she received at the end of the seventies a Title VII Fellowship funded by the US Government Office of Bilingual Education that qualified her to prepare, advise and supervise Bilingual Education teachers and allowed her to collaborate on a project to evaluate and develop bilingual assessment measures.

Elaine K. Horwitz has always been considered as a pioneer in the study of second language anxiety and in the study of learners' beliefs. Among her many contributions to the field we could highlight her book Language Anxiety: From Theory to Classroom Implications (Prentice Hall, 1991) co-edited with D. J. Young and two of her articles, "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety" and "The beliefs about Language Learning of Beginning University Foreign Language Students", both published in Modern Language Journal in the eighties. These seminal works have been followed by a big proliferation of research studies on language anxiety and learners' beliefs. She has seen some of her works published in highly prestigious international journals such as Foreign Language Annals, Review of Applied Linguistics, Language Learning, System, International Journal of Educational Research, TESOL Quarterly, The Canadian Modern Language Review and Studies in Second Language Acquisition.

Part of her academic writing is also related to her work as a teacher trainer, or even trainer of teacher trainers, a facet that she has consolidated after many years of teaching experience in Secondary school and University and that is about to become accessible to the general public through her book Becoming a Language Teacher: A Practical Guide to Second Language Acquisition and Teaching (Pearson-Allyn and Bacon, 2008).

A.O: First of all, I would like to thank Elaine K. Horwitz, Professor of Foreign Language Education at the University of Texas, for giving us today the opportunity to share some of her views on language learning and teaching with the GRETA readership.

E.H: It's a pleasure.

A.O: The first question of this interview is oriented more to the personal side of your academic record, Elaine, since I think that in this interview we could have an opportunity to discover the connection between your academic ideas and, maybe, your life experience. So, how do you think your life experience made you develop an interest in language anxiety and learners' beliefs? Are there any particular life experiences that you can spot connected to your research interests?

E.H: My first experience links to my more general interest in individual differences in language achievement. That's been my life long interest and, as a graduate student, I looked more at cognitive styles. Anxiety and beliefs about language learning came later, as a faculty member, after having had some more teaching experience. But my first experience was in what we called in the United States at that time Junior High -now it's Middle school. I was a seventh grader and that was a time in the United States

that people start learning a language and I was assigned to French. In fact, that was the only foreign language that you could study in the school at that time and now the predominant foreign language in United States is Spanish. I did end up taking later two years of Spanish in high school, but at the time in my middle school the only language that was available was French. And I tell the story to my students often to convince them that even if you are shy at one point in your life you don't have to be shy forever. As a seventh grader I was very, very shy. I was assigned to this French class, and the teacher at the time said that she was teaching Audiolingual Method, but I now as a professional know that what she was doing was Direct Method. She always spoke in French, but she was a glorious teacher, she was so expressive, she was so personable she used props and gestures and inflection in her voice, and I always understood what she had to say. And I just assumed that everybody in the class was understanding what she had to say because she was so expressive, and whatever she had to say was always perfectly clear to me. But as a very shy student, my eyes never left the teacher for the first semester of the class. Towards the second half of the class I finally got enough courage to look around a little bit in the class, and when I started to look around in the class I was shocked at what I learned. I learned that my experience of always understanding what the teacher had to say was not being shared by my comrades; they were all sitting there with blank faces and not knowing what the teacher was talking about. I was astonished because I always thought that what she had to say was perfectly clear. She worked so hard and was so expressive that I could not imagine anybody not understanding what she was saying in French. So I think it was from that moment that I actually began to ask the question which is the question that I have been passionate about throughout my career: why is it that some people learn languages fairly rapidly and some folks don't? I became doomed to being a language teacher because I started with a role that I had in many language classes, since then I became an intermediary between the teacher and the rest of the class because I was the one who understood what the teacher was saying, so the teacher would say something and the students would go "what has she said?", what has she said?", and I'd say "she said that".

A.O.: So, you were a translator!

E.H.: I was a translator. And I had that role in many of my language classes since then until I got into advanced language classes in French; and, later, in Spanish, I turned out to be one of the few people who understood what was going on and it was my job to tell the other students what was going on. So, I say in some seriousness that at that time I actually began working as a language teacher. I was getting a lot of experience for my future career, but I think, unlike many language teachers who have themselves been good language learners and assume that everybody else can learn rather easily, I have been aware since very early on in my life as a language learner that some people are having trouble. So that has informed and guided many other things I've done as a language teacher. And if you ask to connect that to anxiety and beliefs I think that there's a connection, maybe a little far-fetched, but, certainly, for those students to whom it did not come easy, or who sat there not knowing what the teacher was saying, that certainly must have been a source of anxiety. To see another student in the class who understood what was going on, while they did not understand what was going on, that certainly could've been a source of anxiety. And I think that in those school experiences, at least in the United States, people begin to establish their belief sets about language learning, beliefs that include "some people can learn a language and other people can't", and maybe the related belief "I can't".

A.O.: Very interesting. All right, I remember once you told me that you were one of Sandra Savignon's disciples. Just by the way you said it, I think I could notice that you felt really proud of that. How do you consider Sandra Savignon has influenced your academic work?

E.H.: Well, I was indeed Sandra Savignon's first doctoral student. That was a very special time in my life and I certainly credit Sandra for many things. I worked with her in the 1970s and that was the time when she was saying

"what we need to teach in language classes is communicative competence; we need to teach people to participate in conversation in the language". That was absolutely radical at the time, and even today I sometimes say to people that I am considered a radical in language teaching because I advocate that people actually speak in foreign language classes, not use the native language to discuss grammar in the language class. So, I would guess that I feel very strongly that language classes must be communicative. In order for classes to be communicative, people have to feel comfortable and I think that's where Sandra's research and my research kind of connect up. Sandra thought very carefully about the conditions and the activities that one must use in the class in order to get people to talk in class. She thought very sincerely and very thoughtfully about the classroom atmosphere and recognised, way before I did, that anxiety was a factor. I think what I did that was different was recognise that, even in a class with a good atmosphere, some people find talking in a foreign language stressful. I think the reason that some people find talking in a foreign language stressful, and this is something that I write about fairly consistently, is that they can't be themselves in their full humanity in the second language. They can't show how thoughtful they are, how humorous they are, how personable they are.

A.O.: Having a look at your CV, I have seen that you have performed different roles related to language teaching, for example, French and English teacher at secondary school, second language teacher at university, pre-service and in-service teacher trainer and, quite possibly, trainer of teacher trainers.

E.H.: That's what I do now. I'm a trainer of teacher trainers.

A.O.: Which of these roles do you find, or have you found, more difficult?

E.H.: They are difficult and not difficult in their own way. The most challenging of those roles, I think, is working in a supervisory way with in-service teachers or pre-service teachers. I ran for a long time at the University of Texas the undergraduate foreign language teacher training programme, and I would go out to the schools and I would watch the teachers teach and I would have conversations with them about what I saw in the classroom, establishing goals to improve their teaching. That's very emotionally demanding, you can't do that on automatic. You have to be there, talk to the person, share what they are saying, state what you want to say in a way that they would hear it rather than reject it or become defensive about it. That's the most challenging of what I do. But the challenge of my current job, as Director of the graduate programme in Foreign Language Education at the University of Texas and trainer of teacher trainers, is that I schedule myself often in ten minutes at the most and I have to be doing something very different at each moment: looking at a budget for a programme at one moment, talking with a master's student who is doing internship and wants some ideas about how to teach illiterate adults in Austin, looking at statistical analyses on a dissertation and maybe, even maybe, at one point, looking at my own data and trying to make sense of that.

A.O.: It's like too many things at the same time.

E.H.: Exactly, it's too many, it's too many things too quickly and too abruptly. I can do all those things but I admit that there're days that it's challenging to go from one to the other.

A.O.: I can understand that. What kind of method do you encourage teachers to adopt in your methods course at University, or when you are training teachers in general, or even training teacher trainers?

E.H.: For all of those things I might be advocating something very different. I'm a strong believer that people start where they are and you can't move them a hundred years in history in a fifteen-week teaching practicum course. So, depending on where the student is, I am going to move them along. If they're very stuck in something like grammar translation, I might try to move them to Audio-lingual. Audio-lingual is certainly not the kind of language teaching that I personally would do or that I would advocate, but I think it's kind of a natural next step from Grammar Translation and, at least, it makes the

class oral, at least, it emphasizes oral language over written language, and I think that's the step forward for the teacher. With beginners I spend a lot of time on classroom management because if your class isn't running, it doesn't matter what kind of methodology you want to use, you don't get to use it. In my graduate classes and even in my undergraduate classes, I tend to have the philosophy that language teaching is done by professionals rather than technicians. What I mean by that is I don't advocate specific teaching practices by saying "you should teach that way." Although I do say that "you should teach orally" and "you should pay attention to your students' needs". Teaching orally and paying attention to student needs are fundamental to me. I say to my students that there are a lot of things in language teaching that teachers can use, and that you are the professional on the spot, you are the one who would know your students and their needs, their backgrounds, their strengths and their weaknesses, and you are going to know your teaching situation, so I think it's really kind of arrogant for me to tell you exactly what to do. I'm going to tell you that there are all these kinds of things here, and I am going to help decide which things would be best under your circumstances. We have a number of students in our programme from Taiwan and Korea. I sometimes say to them, and I'm joking but I'm half not joking, I say "why on earth would you come here from Korea to learn how to teach Koreans English? What do I know about teaching Koreans English? You know about that. All I know about is English and language teaching in general, so I'm going to tell you about English and language teaching in general and you are the one who is the expert on teaching in Korea and knowing what would work for your particular group of students and what probably wouldn't work. That's a place, maybe, where Sandra Savignon and I might be a little bit different. I recognise that I want to make my classes as oral as possible, but sometimes grammar is comforting to students. If you go into a total grammar translation situation, you do not want to start the first day and say "okay, now we're totally communicative". I think that you want to change gradually and start at a 10 or 20% communicative and move the students over, rather than scaring them with something that they're not used to and not expecting. On the other hand, we only have a few years to teach some language and we want to use those years efficiently.

A.O.: Let's focus a bit more on your research. Your main research areas are *foreign language anxiety* and *learners' beliefs*. Are they completely different research spaces?

E.H.: I didn't expect them to be and I wouldn't say that they are completely different but they're substantially different. When you start a tenure track university job in the United States, the phrase that people always say -and it's somewhat true- is "publish or perish", that you need to publish or you're not going to get tenure. In order to publish, the advice that people give is to pick a research area and pursue that area. People do not tell you to pick two research areas and pursue those areas. So when I started with anxiety and beliefs I expected them to merge. What I expected to find out was that anxious people had particularly perfectionistic beliefs about language learning: "you should never make a mistake", "you should always practice", that kind of thing. And that I would be able to use the beliefs to explain anxiety. It didn't happen that way. The beliefs that I studied turned out to be too pervasive. Too many people, both anxious people and non-anxious people, believe things like "you have to have foreign language aptitude to learn a language". About 45% of undergraduate students at my own university believe -this one is always astonishing to me- that if you spend an hour a day studying a foreign language you can become fluent in two years or less. I think that they are confused by the fact that we have a two-year foreign language requirement where you study about an hour a day and they just figure, at the end of their two-year foreign language requirement," why would we have a requirement if you wouldn't be fluent at the end of it?". In any case, the beliefs turned out to be more widespread than I anticipated that they would be, and they did not turn out to be very explanatory in terms of anxiety. So, I followed what most people would think would be bad advice for getting tenure but it turned out to work for me pursuing two research

programmes. It's kind of funny in the United States there're different language teaching communities. In the foreign language teaching community, including languages like Spanish, French, Arabic, German, Chinese, Japanese, whatever, I tend to be known for my research on foreign language anxiety and not too many people know about my research on beliefs. In the second language community, English as a Second Language, I tend to be known for my research on beliefs and people don't know too much about my work on anxiety. So, it's kind of funny, but when I know the community of a person I'm talking to I know what they'll know of my work, and what they might not know of my work.

A.O.: That's interesting!

E.H.: Now, abroad the English people know my work on anxiety, but in the United States they think of beliefs.

A.O.: Particularly in Europe, with all the trend on humanistic teaching and NLP, I think that people associate you with language anxiety more than with learners' beliefs.

E.H.: Right.

A.O.: What is it that makes foreign language classroom anxiety different from the anxiety experienced when studying other subjects?

E.H.: That's a really good question because most classes in most countries in the world evoke some amount of anxiety. The difference, I think, in language classes, is the personal nature of the communication. In language class we ask people to talk about themselves, to express their personal opinions. You can't step back and hide behind the subject matter and say something like "the hydrogen acts that way" or, you know, "it's this kind of chemical reaction that doesn't really have much to do with me". But in language class we say, you know, "what's the last book you read?" and "what do you think about it?", "what did you do over the weekend?", "tell me about your family", and people exposed to that kind of question tend to want to answer it truthfully, as they would in their first language, and they answer it as best they can, and the teacher comes back with them and says: "no, you have got to switch that subject and the verb", or "say that word again". And that says, I think, two things to the student, and I'm not saying that we shouldn't do that, since students have to have feedback on the comprehensibility of what they said: One thing it says to the student is that the teacher who just asked them a personal question really wasn't so interested in the content that they worked so hard to communicate, but they were really interested in whether the subject and the verb were where they were supposed to be. The second thing it does is frustrate the learner. I think often when you're studying other subjects and you offer a comment in class, you're not sure if you're right, you know, and so if the teacher says you're wrong or adds changes or corrects you, it's not a such a big deal. But if you enter a class in a foreign language class and the teacher says "what did you do over the weekend?", you and only you are the person who knows the answer to that question, and then the teacher comes back and corrects you.

A.O.: Do you think that foreign language classroom anxiety is very different from language anxiety in real-life communication?

E.H.: I'm not sure about that. I see people who are anxious in the classroom but are not anxious in the target language community, and I think that's interesting. That would teach us that we do something in the class that's more anxiety-provoking than the environment. But I have encountered the opposite. I've encountered people who are very comfortable in the class, and are anxious in the real world. I don't know if I've encountered a lot of people like that but, myself, I am a lot more anxious when I speak French, which I do rather well, than when I speak Spanish, which I do poorly. And I think it has to do with sort of investment. I spent a lot of time working on my French and I admit that I have not spent so much time learning Spanish. I make many more mistakes in Spanish, I'm barely comprehensible in Spanish, but I don't have the anxiety speaking it that I do when I speak French.

A.O.: Is anxiety necessarily negative? Different studies on general anxiety say that states of anxiety are in a way natural and useful for

human beings to adapt to their environment, to their habitat... So, when do you think anxiety starts to become a problem?

E.H.: I think the perspective that you just explained is pretty dangerous in language teaching. I do a lot of presentations for language teachers and often some teachers say things like "well, isn't a little anxiety good?". There is research on facilitating and debilitating anxiety and some teachers at the workshop would say something to me like, "well, if my students aren't at least a little bit anxious, they're not going to work." Anxiety is one of the most widely studied variables in psychology and there's a well-known curvilinear relationship between anxiety and achievement. What that means is that, at low levels of anxiety, achievement does increase but when it (anxiety) continues to increase after that, a point comes when achievement decreases. Thus, at some point, people get too anxious and their performance decreases. So we're kind of interested in that point, the point at which performance decreases under anxiety. Well, the same studies find that the more complicated the task, the less anxiety people can tolerate before performance decreases. So that point comes relatively soon in a complicated task such as language learning. You've got to manipulate all these things simultaneously in learning and speaking a second language, so for that reason people can't tolerate much anxiety before their performance decreases. I would say that when we start talking about facilitating anxiety in a language classroom, in a way, what we're doing is giving teachers an excuse to make their students more anxious. I think that there's a lot of inherent anxiety in school, there is a lot of inherent anxiety in language learning, that students probably cannot tolerate much more anxiety before their performance is going to decrease. So, I sometimes answer that question about "shouldn't teachers want their students to be a little bit anxious so that they work harder?" in kind of a joking way. I say: "You know, when people like me talk to teachers, we're always creating more work for you. We're telling you that you have to have better communicative activities, we're telling you that you have to speak more in the language classroom, that you have to have task-based activities, or whatever the current thing is in language classes. Well, I'm here to tell you not to worry about increasing students' anxiety. There's enough anxiety in students already. Take that off of your list of things to do."

A.O.: What are the consequences of the problem of foreign language anxiety for the language learning process?

E.H.: Basically that people run away as quickly as they can. Most students in my country are exposed to, at least, two years of language teaching in their school experience, but very few people actually use the language. If they do learn some of the language, they would go out of their way not to use it. In the United States, we tend to have a belief that the only valuable knowledge of a foreign language is perfect fluency. So, if I tell anybody that I speak French and I get by in Spanish, the next question about the French is "are you fluent?". And if I say, "well, I don't know, there're some things I can say in English but I can't really say in French", people lose interest. So, people feel a little bit anxious about whatever language they've learnt in their classes, and they believe that what they can speak in the other language is worthless because is not truly fluent. So, I think that the ultimate result of anxiety is that people avoid language learning as much as possible.

A.O.: What can teachers do to diminish students' anxiety?

E.H.: Sometimes I think the best thing that teachers can do to diminish their students' anxiety is to diminish their own anxiety about using the language. I think many times teachers do things in the classroom that are designed to protect themselves, to hide the fact that they're not as comfortable with using their target language as they would like to be. So, what they do is focus on a few easily corrected errors that the teachers are aware of and they spend all their time correcting those errors rather than actually creating communication in the classroom. I think that it's important to be honest about communication in the classroom. I think that, as a language teacher, if you ask students to communicate in writing or orally

about something in the classroom, you have to be sincerely interested in what they have to say. I think the best antidote against anxiety in the classroom is to have the students actually want to talk to you in the target language. I know that we do group work, and I'm a fan of group work, but the teacher is the strongest speaker of the language in the classroom and the students need to have conversations with the teacher too and the students have to be convinced that you want to hear what they have to say. If students want to communicate something to you, because having you understand that is important to them, that would decrease anxiety to some extent because they will forget about themselves and start focusing on what they have to say. But we also have to recognise that there would be a small percentage of people who will be very anxious, no matter what we do.

A.O.: You have talked about the problem of language anxiety —maybe indirectly— among non-native language teachers. What would be your recommendation in that respect? Would you suggest that, maybe, teachers shouldn't be worried about making mistakes in the language class?

E.H.: Sure. I would recommend that, but that's easy to recommend and hard to accomplish. First of all, we have to recognise that a month, two months, three months, before somebody is a non-native teacher, they are a non-native learner. And they have been in a classroom and somebody's been pointing out their errors. So it's very hard to recognise that your language isn't perfect and at the same time, accept your language ability and use that ability in the classroom. Of course, as a professional, you should also do whatever you can do to improve your language ability. And that's why I said in the previous question that I think one of the things that would help teachers decrease the anxiety in the classroom would be to decrease their own anxiety. If, as a learner, you learned that it was terrible if you made mistakes, the natural tendency would be to pass that fear of mistakes on to your students. I suggest that you say to your students something like "I don't speak like a native speaker, and I'm probably never going to speak like a native speaker, but I speak really well and I can do many things in the language; so, I'm going to speak the language often in class". If you don't do that, you're subscribing to the myth I talked about earlier that, unless you're perfect in the language, unless you're absolutely fluent, it's not valuable to speak some of the language. Many people suggest that our goal as language teachers, whether we stated it or not, has been a monolingual native speaker. That's our goal. And that's a crazy goal. None of our students can possibly ever grow up to be monolingual native speakers. Students in the US won't be monolingual because they speak English already and they're not going to be native speakers of whatever languages they are studying. My colleague in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Texas, Carl Blyth, who is a socio-linguist, thinks a better goal for language learners would be those people who are functioning bilinguals within a given society. They're not taken for monolinguals. We know that they're not native speakers but they have important roles in the culture where they use the language of that country. We know that they're not native speakers, but it doesn't matter. I think that that is something that teachers should think about. Teachers probably have this in their mind, that they want to sound like native speakers. Well, there're so many different types of native speakers. You take native speakers and you take them out of the country for a long time and they don't sound like native speakers anymore. Teachers need to learn to value the language proficiency that they have rather than to punish themselves for the language proficiency that they don't have. I sometimes say in workshops with teachers "do you give your students permission to make mistakes in class?" And they say "of course we know that if we corrected every mistake, our students would go crazy; of course we give them permission to make mistakes." And then I say "do you give yourselves permission?". They go "well, ..." I think that we, as language teachers, need to give ourselves the same permission that we give to our students, permission to be less than perfect in the target language. Teachers might want to read two of my articles: one is the article on teacher anxiety and the other is the one with T. Gregersen; she's the first author on perfectionism and foreign language anxiety. I

think that many of us who are language teachers tend to be a bit perfectionistic and maybe we can overcome that a bit.

A.O.: Did you ever expect that your 1986 article in *Modern Language Journal* would ever have such a big and long effect on research? Do you still try to keep track of all the research that is being done using your research instruments, that is to say, the FLCAS[1] or the BALLI[2]?

E.H.: I want to note that my husband is the second author on it and Joanne Cope Powell is the third author. We knew we were doing something important when we were writing it. I'm supposed to be modest and say "no, we were surprised", but we thought we were doing something important and we certainly hoped that it would have a big effect. I try to keep in touch with people who are doing research. I have a big computer file of people who have been given permission to use the instruments and I ask people to contact me with results. I don't know how much, what percent I have or what percent I don't have, but I try to keep up with them. I don't know whether this will be appropriate, but there tends to be, I think, a common misinterpretation of that 1986 article.

A.O.: In what sense?

E.H.: In Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), we argue that foreign language anxiety is similar to three other kinds of anxiety: test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. That has been misinterpreted, I think, to say that we argue that foreign language anxiety is made up of test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. We think that we were giving other kinds of anxieties as examples and analogies of foreign language anxiety. We did not think that we were offering a model of foreign language anxiety, but other people have interpreted that article in that way. So, I often get requests from people who say "which items are communication apprehension?; which are test anxiety?". And I say that I'm not able to do that. Those were things that we thought about when we wrote the scale, but the scale was not based on the idea that there is an equation like "test anxiety plus communication apprehension plus fear of negative evaluation equals foreign language anxiety". In fact, we think that what we argued was that there was something so unique and special about foreign language learning that it had to have its own anxiety.

A.O.: I think this is a very useful clarification for the readers interested in your work. Are the FLCAS and the BALLI instruments only useful as research instruments, or can they also have a pedagogical use?

E.H.: When we did the FLCAS and then I did the BALLI, I understood that they could have pedagogical uses, that teachers could talk to their students about foreign language anxiety, and particularly about beliefs about language learning (the BALLI). In language classes we're always looking for things to talk about and we tend to talk about political issues, at least in my country, whereas we ignore something that all the people in the class are currently experiencing, which is language learning. So, you could use the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory as a discussion starter. We could talk about whether it is true that children are better language learners than adults are, and, if you're an adult right now, whether you have the possibility of learning a second language. Teachers could use the FLCAS to bring up the subject of anxiety. Yes, I do think that they have pedagogical uses.

A.O.: So, when they are used pedagogically, what would you suggest: that they are used as anonymous questionnaires or as non-anonymous questionnaires?

E.H.: I don't know. I would probably say that the teacher should use her or his judgement with those particular issues. I can't imagine people asking their students "put your name on" and then grading them, but what if you handed out the anxiety questionnaire? You could say "those people who want me to know about their anxiety score can put their name on it and turn it in and then we can talk about that". When I started doing the anxiety research, one unexpected finding was that the participants in the study would write on the questionnaires things like "it's about time somebody was finally thinking about this!". So, if students put their

name on the FLCAS, it would be a way for them to communicate they were anxious and for teachers to find out about it and hopefully do something to help alleviate students' anxieties.

A.O.: Like a way of saying "look, I'm the one who is having this problem."

E.H.: I'm the one, I'm the one. Exactly. I have been criticised —I think inappropriately— for saying that everybody is anxious about language learning. If you read my papers, you will see that I consistently say only about a third of students are anxious and then, of those third, most of them are only moderately or somewhat anxious, not very, very anxious. But it is important for us to find out about those students who are very, very anxious and also about those students who are only somewhat anxious. We can help much more easily if we know who the anxious students are.

A.O.: Do you still use the BALLI with your students? Have you noticed any evolution over time in their beliefs about language learning?

E.H.: Yeah, yeah. That's true. I do. I don't use the BALLI systematically with my students but I have —for 25 years now— taught a basic graduate course in second language acquisition, and I can tell from the discussion that I have in there that there's been a great change in people's incoming thoughts about language teaching. When I started teaching the class in 1980, most, if not all, my students thought that the big issue in learning a second language was overcoming the influence of interference from their first language. I still have students who believe that, but when they believe that now, they know that there are other issues as well. So, I think the field is clearly evolving and that changes are evolving. Conceptions in the field are getting communicated to our new teachers. And I think that's a wonderful thing!

A.O.: That's a positive sign.

E.H.: Yes. When I started here in 1980 I had an undergraduate student who refused to do an assignment I gave in a methods class, which was to create an oral lesson. He said to me "there's no reason for anyone in Texas to actually speak German." Now I think it was pretty unusual in 1980 but people maybe agreed with him at some level. The teachers that we get today all want to and expect that their job is to help students learn how to speak the language.

A.O.: Why is it useful to know about learners' beliefs about language learning?

E.H.: Because we need to know how they approach language learning and how they think about it. We, as language teachers, believe things like "don't speak a language by translating from the first language", but sometimes we never bother to tell the students that and they think that what you do when you speak another language is translate, so you give them something to do and they're busy translating and you're busy thinking they're not translating and then you say, "ok, time" and they say "what do you mean time?; I have only translated, you know, half of it; I've got 50% more to translate." And you say "well, why are you translating?" I think that we need to know what we're all thinking and where we're starting. If you believe that speaking a language is not translating, you've got to tell your students that. Maybe in Spain students are much more sophisticated than students here, but you sure have to tell American students "your job here is not to translate, your job is to learn how to think in the language".

A.O.: One of your important works in the field of teacher training is *Becoming a language teacher*, a book that is about to be published". Could you give us a description of it?

E.H.: In this book, the chapters begin with asking the new teacher to think about his or her experience as a language learner and then I give some information about the particular topics. For instance, if it's listening comprehension, I talk about what we know —or think we know— about listening comprehension today and offer a number of listening comprehension activities. Then, at the end, there're questions and planning exercises to help the teacher decide how to teach listening in their own particular situation. So, instead of saying "this is what you should do to teach listening comprehension", I say "here are all these possible things; now, think about your potential students and their particular needs; here are some questions to ask yourself in order

to create listening instruction in your particular situation". Each chapter also includes a Teaching Checklist to remind the new teacher about things to think about when they are actually planning their lessons. I tried very hard to keep a good balance between the practical and the theoretical in language teaching and to address the issues that new teachers want to know about.

A.O.: Ok, thank you very much for everything, Elaine. Thank you for devoting so much of your work time to us, and for all those insightful ideas about language anxiety and learners' beliefs, which I'm sure will be very helpful and useful for language teachers.

E.H.: You are very welcome.

Notes

[1] Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986).

[2] Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1988).

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