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# Contemporary perspectives on research about emotions in language teaching

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Research on emotions has been present in Applied Linguistics since the 70's. Early forms of concern for the affective domain in language learning and teaching can be traced back to studies about attitudes and motivation (GARDNER; LAMBERT, 1972) and methods and approaches (such as Suggestopedia and Community Language Learning). These methods were part of the Humanistic Language Learning movement, which took into account learners' affective dimension (see MOSKOVITZ, 1978). In the 80's, Krashen's affective filter hypothesis was the closest we could get of a look at the role of affect in language learning, as well as Bailey's (1983) study on learners' anxieties in language learning. Horwitz's studies on foreign language learning anxiety (HORWITZ; YOUNG, 1991) and Arnold's seminal book on affective variables (ARNOLD, 1999) in the early and late 90's, respectively, called our attention to the influence of affect

in learners' language learning processes. In the 2000's, students' emotions were still the focus of the studies; this time, aiming at multilingual learners and how they expressed emotions (DEWAELE, 2010; PAVLENKO, 2005, 2006) and at emotions of foreign language learners (SO; DOMINGUEZ, 2005; GARRET; YOUNG, 2009; IMAI, 2010). In Brazil, the first studies on emotions started to appear in early 2000's (ARAGÃO, 2005, 2007). In early 2010's, Pavlenko stated that we were beginning to experience "an affective turn" (PAVLENKO, 2013) or, according to Barcelos (2013, 2015), an "emotional turn" in Applied Linguistics.

Although teacher emotions had already been investigated in the field of Education much earlier than in Applied Linguistics (see NIAS, 1996; HARGREAVES, 1998; ZEMBYLAS, 2004; 2005, to cite just a few), studies on *language* teacher emotions started to appear only in early 2010's (COWIE, 2011; GOLOMBEK; DORAN, 2014). These earlier studies pointed out the need to investigate and understand the kinds of emotions teachers felt towards their practice, students, colleagues and their educational contexts. In mid-2010's, studies on teacher emotions began to flourish, perhaps, influenced by the increasing focus on Positive Psychology and Psychology for Language learning movement (GREGERSEN, 2013; MACINTYRE; GREGERSEN, 2012; MACINTYRE; GREGERSEN; MERCER, 2016). Many publications on language teacher emotions started to appear, for example: guest-edited issues of journals such as *Studies in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (one on affect: GABRYŚ-BARKER; PIECHURSKA-KUCIEL, 2012; and one on emotions: DEWAELE; LI, 2018); *The Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics* (DE COSTA; RAWAL, 2018); books (MARTINEZ-AGUDO, 2018; GKONOU; DEWAELE; KING, 2020); and this very special issue of the Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics. There is also a recent call for papers on a special issue of *System*<sup>1</sup>. In Brazil, the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the CLAFPL (*Latin-American Conference on Language Teacher Education*) held a symposium with the presentations of 20 papers on emotions in language teaching (most of them were on language teacher emotions of either pre-service or in-service teachers)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, we can say that the affective/emotional turn is really on the rise now, especially in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/system/about/call-for-papers#language-teacher-emotion-research-contemporary-developments-and-challenges>

<sup>2</sup> Barcelos, A.M.F. & Aragao, R. C. (2021). Emotions and Affect in Language Teaching. Symposium at the VIII CLAFPL. Online. Brazil. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LPoZiC0Cut4wCHm8V7OVG\\_xR0rBhmtNR/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LPoZiC0Cut4wCHm8V7OVG_xR0rBhmtNR/view)

investigation of language teacher emotions, for the most part<sup>3</sup>, with the exception of the studies which focus on students' foreign language anxiety and enjoyment (MACINTYRE; GREGERSEN, 2012; DEWAELE; DEWAELE, 2020; see also MACINTYRE; DEWAELE this issue), and boredom (DERAKSHSHAN; KRUK; MEHDIZADEH; PWALAK, 2021).

It is not surprising, then, that we have begun to see different approaches to research on emotions in language teaching and learning, as suggested by different authors such as Benesch (2017), White (2018) and Barcelos and Aragão (2018).

Benesch (2017) classifies studies on emotions into three approaches: biological, cognitive, and post-structuralist/discursive. According to her, the biological approach defines emotions as innate and shared by all human beings without considering issues of history and social identity elements such as race, social class, gender and ethnicity. The cognitive approach tries to understand emotions as they function within individual minds and how they influence people's well-being by aiming to improve their performance and learning process. The post-structuralist/discursive approach focuses on emotions as ways of promoting social justice and equality, and defines emotions as related to power, and as discursively and socially constructed.

White (2018), on the other hand, distinguishes five approaches to the investigation of emotions: psychological (emphasis on emotions as tools to improve learning), socioconstructionist (based on sociocultural theory), interactive (emotions as sociocultural and discursive), neuropsychological (focused on positive and negative emotions) and dialogical (emotions as central to agency). Barcelos and Aragão (2018), who have reviewed a good number of thesis and dissertations in Brazil, acknowledge three theoretical frameworks that have been used to investigate emotions: poststructuralist theory, biology of knowing, and sociocultural theory.

We believe that many of these approaches could be combined since some of them refer to the same view of emotions. Thus, we propose the following classification of studies on emotions:

- (a) *A psychological approach* encompasses what Benesch has classified as biological and cognitive approach and White, as psychological. In this approach, emotions are related to improving

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<sup>3</sup> Studies on students' emotions are relatively few, at least in Brazil, compared to teacher emotions; for details see Barcelos & Aragão' review 2018)

learning (Satyro, in this volume, is an example of a study within this approach)

- (b) *A sociocultural approach* encompasses studies which have socio-cultural theory and Vygotsky's studies as its main theoretical references (Ramos, in this issue, is an example of that; also IMAI, 2010).
- (c) *A critical approach* encompasses what Benesch has called post-structuralist/discursive approach, and White, interactive and dialogical: the studies in this approach view emotions as political and related to power (Nagata in this issue is an example of this type of study).
- (d) *A systems approach* refers to studies based on the Biology of Knowing (ARAGÃO, 2011 and his paper in this issue are examples of that): this approach views emotions as bodily dispositions for doing, knowing and languaging in relational systems of dynamic recursive interactions.

This classification is our way of trying to give meaning and order to such variety and quantity of studies on language teacher emotions in Applied Linguistics at present. We understand they are a didactic organizational tool and, in practice, some approaches may be combined, depending on research purposes.

### Overview of the Special Issue

This very first special issue on emotions in language teaching and learning in a Brazilian journal contains ten articles, as illustrated in Table 1. Three major themes seem to permeate these papers, which have also been classified according to the aforementioned approaches to emotions.

Table 1 – Summary of the papers reported in this special issue of RBLA on emotions

Author / Title	Theme and approach	Focus of the study	Context/ participants	Data collection and analysis	Theoretical framework	Results
Satyro <i>Affectivity and agency in English teaching for Youth and Adult Education</i>	Theme 1 Psychological approach	Relationships between affectivity and the agency of English language teachers	Youth and Adult Education; municipal public schools, located on the outskirts of São Bernardo do Campo city (São Paulo, Brazil).  Two English language teachers	Video recording of English language classes; informal conversations in the field and semi-structured interviews  Content analysis	Affectivity and the articulation between agency and emotions.	There are differences between affectivity in the agency and affectivity as agency
Carneiro & Lima <i>Emotions in a Brazilian teacher's experience</i>	Theme 1 Critical approach	Emotions during Covid-19	Roundtable at a University Week of a college located in the interior region of Ceará State, Brazil  An English language teacher.	Data from recorded session of a roundtable  Discourse analysis	Dialogical perspective of language and the critical approach to the study of language teacher emotions	Predominance of the emotional distress in power relations, especially, with academic, pedagogical, and legislative discourses;  feelings of self-confidence during remote language teaching
Moraes Bezerra & Silveira <i>Reflections on Exploratory Practice</i>	Theme 3 Psychological approach	Interaction generated during one meeting of regular members of two groups of exploratory practitioners on a virtual platform Zoom.	University context  Professors, undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as English teachers (middle school, high school, private language courses)	Data from a recorded online session of the EP group  Thematic analysis	Exploratory Practice, (ALLWRIGHT, 1991, 2006, 2008),	The meeting provided emotional and social scaffolding helping members deal with strong emotions due to the pandemic.

Author / Title	Theme and approach	Focus of the study	Context/ participants	Data collection and analysis	Theoretical framework	Results
Ramos <i>Emotions, perezhivanie</i>	Theme 3 Sociocultural approach	Perezhivania and emotions experienced by a pre-service English teacher	University context Pre-service English teacher	Narratives of experience, oral interviews, observation, and recording of classes followed by viewing sessions  Content analysis	Sociocultural theory	Different emotions are experienced by the participant in the same class; mediation helps in the transforming role of emotions in teacher development
Oliveira & Turcato de Oliveira <i>Racialized emotions</i>	Theme 3 Critical approach	Emotions of black English teachers.	Public schools Black English teachers	Semi-structured interviews; written narratives  Content Analysis (Bardin, 2011)	Emotions and power relations; emotions and race (Ahmed, 2004, 2009; Bohler; Zembylas, 2003).	Teacher emotions are discursively constituted, influenced by the colonial heritage, producing emotional labor.
Tagata <i>In your shoes</i>	Theme 3 Critical approach	English lessons which discussed empathy in times of Covid-19 pandemic	Two English lessons on an art installation entitled <i>The Empathy Museum</i> . with undergraduate students	Autoethnographic research  Thematic analysis	Empathy, emotional and critical literacy theories (Bohler, 1997)	Importance of emotional and critical literacy theories for education concerned with political and social changes
Colombo Gomes <i>Musing over the role of emotions</i>	Theme 2 Psychological approach	Learners' emotions and their influence in students' exodus or permanence in their comfort zone	University context Undergraduate students as English language majors at a university in Brazil	Open-ended questionnaires, interviews, exploratory conversations, the teacher-researcher observation comments and diaries  Content analysis	Discursive competence (Canale; Swain, 1988); the concept of the comfort zone (Colombo-Gomes, 2004; 2006; 2018); emotions (Aragão, 2004; 2011; Barcelos, 2018; Maturana, 2002).	Emotions that promoted stagnation in the CZ: fear, anxiety, distress, discomfort, insecurity, uncertainty and embarrassment

Author / Title	Theme and approach	Focus of the study	Context/ participants	Data collection and analysis	Theoretical framework	Results
Dewaele & MacIntyre <i>Flow, Enjoyment and Anxiety</i>	Theme 2 Psychological approach	Differences in intensity of Foreign Language Enjoyment, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and proportion of time in a state of flow among LOTE students and English FL learners?	761 English FL learners and 825 FL learners of Languages Other Than English (LOTE).	Quantitative and qualitative data online questionnaire; FLE 5-point Likert scale; 8-item FLCA scale extracted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) scale.  Statistical analysis	Flow and anxiety, enjoyment (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014); Horwitz, 2017; Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2019)	LOTE group: higher levels of FLE and higher proportion of class time in a state of flow; lower levels of FLCA; and stronger emotional involvement
Aragão <i>A systemic view on emotion</i>	Theme Systems approach	Use of an assemblage of conceptual tools such as languaging, emotioning, conversation, reflection and orthogonal interactions to understand emotions.			Maturana's and Davilla's (2009) Matrix of Human Existence  Maturana (2001, 2004) and Maturana and Davila (2009).	The conceptual model may help researchers further understand and foster structured reflective spaces about emotions in language education.
Nicolaides & Seerig <i>We can't become robots</i>	Theme 2 Sociocultural approach	Emotions and literature	Public school  Ten public high school students.	Online interaction  Thematic analysis	Emotional scaffolding (Rosiek, 2003), Sociocultural Historical (Vygotsky, 1989), Multimodal narratives (Barkhuizen; Benson; Chik, 2014)	Constructive and negative emotions related to the remembrance of the experiences with literature



Looking at the different papers in this special issue, we have identified three different themes that offer interesting perspectives to the study of emotions. Altogether, the themes around these articles propose a holistic perspective to the study of Brazilian teachers as emotional, societally-constructed and agentive practitioners. In addition, the papers offer possibilities for emotional scaffolding and support for language teachers, learners and researchers alike. Some of the papers fit into one or more themes and approaches.

### **Theme 1: Brazilian language teachers as professionals and their emotions**

In this theme, we find articles that show the ways in which Brazilian teachers are dealing with the often-challenging teaching contexts and the difficult emotions linked to these conditions. These challenges include temporal events such as COVID-19 pandemic, but also trials that language teachers constantly deal with, such as tensions related to power relations, and to academic, pedagogical, and legislative discourse and racial injustice. The articles in this issue, however, also demonstrate the strong professional orientation of Brazilian teachers, their ability of expressing difficult emotions and understand them from a critical and societally aware perspective and effectively deal with them in collaboration with other teachers. They also illustrate well the ways in which language teacher professionalism is of an emotional nature and strongly anchored in teachers' sensitivity and wisdom related to emotional aspects of their work. Furthermore, the articles vividly illustrate the ways in which difficult emotions can be brought to the forefront and discussed in collaborative action and provide inspiration for other teachers dealing with similar issues in Brazil and, more broadly, in other countries. Within this theme we find some intersectional perspectives to teacher research with a focus on a more critical approach to emotions.

*William Tagata* explores a lesson on empathy taught during Covid-19 pandemic. Through the lenses of emotional and critical literacy theories, the author uses autoethnography to explain how students were able to promote semiotics of empathy (BOHLER, 1997). The results point out the importance of emotional and critical literacy theories for education concerned with political and social changes.

*Layenne Humberto de Oliveira and Ana Cláudia Turcato de Oliveira* investigate how the emotions of black English teachers are racialized in different contexts in Brazil. Rooted in studies on emotions and power relations as well as on emotions and race, the authors use semi-structured interviews and analyze the written narratives of three black teachers. The case study shows that these

teachers' emotions are discursively constituted, and influenced the emotions of black English teachers, producing emotional labor.

*Karoline Zilah S. Carneiro and Samuel de C. Lima* analyze a report about a teacher's experience while participating in a roundtable discussion about English language teaching. Grounded in the dialogical perspective of language, the authors discuss the teacher's emotions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results shed light on the predominance of the emotional distress in power relations, especially, with academic, pedagogical, and legislative discourses, in contrast to the teacher's self-confidence in face of her work demand.

*Diego Satyro* draws from Paulo Freire's work to articulate links between agency and affectivity of two English language teachers from different public schools. Results from his study indicate that affectivity facilitates the teaching-learning process of the language and that teachers' agency is influenced by conflicting emotions.

## **Theme 2: Emotions as part of language learning**

The articles within this second theme add to the growing evidence of emotions forming the basis for any learning activity. The perspective of these articles is more on seeing emotions as a resource for learning. Some papers within this theme view emotions as affecting classroom participation and relationship with the language (Dewaele and MacIntyre; Nicolaidis and Seerig); others show even difficult emotions as possible resources (Colombo Gomes). In short, they offer a more complex perspective of emotions as resources for individuals and groups to learn together.

*Gysele Colombo Gomes* analyses the role of student-teachers' emotions for their participation in a project and classroom work. She identifies the complex ways in which different emotions and beliefs interact in four participants' decisions of either remaining in their comfort zone or leaving it. The study reveals the ways in which emotions emerge and are understood in interaction with students' previous beliefs and the current environment and shows how emotions can become a resource for participation and learning.

*Jean-Marc Dewaele and Peter MacIntyre* use a quantitative approach to investigate Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety related to time and flow of English-as-a-foreign language learners and learners of other languages. Their results point out that learners of other languages seem to have experienced more flow and more emotional involvement in their language learning.

*Christine Nicolaidis and Elisa Seerig* analyze multimodal narratives of the use of literature by ten public high school students. They indicate emotions as motivators for engagement and beneficial sources for language development. The study reveals links on literature and emotions in lessons of English as an Additional Language.

### **Theme 3: Supporting emotional processes in language learning and teaching**

The third theme in this special issue focuses on emotional scaffolding, which, along with the other two themes of this issue, can be considered a crucial component for language learning and teacher development. These articles demonstrate the ways in which teacher educators and teachers can help each other and their pupils in dealing with challenging circumstances and related emotions. They also suggest practical models to be applied in practice in teaching and learning in different contexts.

*Isabel Cristina Rangel Moraes Bezerra and Fernanda Vieira da Rocha Silveira* use Exploratory Practice to investigate the emotions experienced during Covid-19, in an online meeting with teachers, researchers and students. The results indicate that the meeting provided emotional and social scaffolding helping members deal with strong emotions during the pandemic.

*Fabiano Ramos* discusses how the *perezhivania* and emotions experienced by an English teacher in initial training can assist in professional development. Through mediation by a more experienced peer, her experienced emotions took on a transforming role in her teaching practice. This led the teacher to a better understanding and management of her practice.

In a theoretical reflective piece, based on the studies of Maturana and Davilla, *Rodrigo Aragão* proposes a conceptual model that helps understanding emotions. This conceptual model is essential in order to create reflective emotional supportive spaces for both learners and teachers to reflect on the role of emotions in their language teaching and learning processes.

### **Implications and future directions**

Looking at the contributions in this volume, we can see that most of the studies emphasize the impact that emotions have on language learning. The papers seem to be balanced referring to the kinds of participants: we have had five papers focusing on language teachers (three on in-service, one on pre-service teachers, and a theoretical one talking about both pre and in service teachers); and five papers focusing on language students or the language classroom. Given that emotions

are also contextual and political, we suggest that further studies could investigate the emotions of the supervisors, coordinators, principals and colleagues in the school environment, since previous studies have detected teacher emotions related to these (FERREIRA, 2017; COWIE, 2011). Only one of the studies in this issue have included ethnographic data (*Ramos, this issue*). Barcelos and Aragão (2018) review of studies about language teacher emotions in Brazil during the last decade (2007-2017) revealed that very few studies included ethnographic data from teachers in the classroom, particularly with in-service teachers. Thus, we suggest that future studies on language teacher emotions in Brazil could add ethnographic data.

The diverse papers in this issue present four implications to our understanding of emotions. First, the studies reveal the presence of both negative and positive-evaluated emotions by the research participants, indicating that positivity and negativity cannot be evaluated a priori, but rather after emotion has moved action and vice-versa. Secondly, the papers here have confirmed what the literature (ARAGÃO, 2011; BARCELOS; RUOHOTIE-LYHTY, 2018; BARCELOS; ARAGÃO, 2018; SONG, 2016; ZEMBYLAS, 2005) on emotion has stated: that emotions are movement, transformation and change, and that in our lives as human beings, and as teachers and students, “good” and “bad” emotions live in co-existence. Thirdly, conflicting emotions serve as emotional energy for moving teaching and learning systems. In other words, conflicting emotions are part of a critical process of change and of the transformative power of emotions.

Fourthly, in most of the studies we could notice this movement of emotions as *emotioning* (see MATURANA, 1998). As the Latin origin of the word *emotions* suggests, it means energy in movement: they are constantly flowing and moving, and sometimes, even overlapping. This has implications for the research methodology we use. For one, we could ask: what other methods, besides the most commonly ones, could be used to understand this dynamic and changing nature of emotions? We might have to look for ways to capture the dynamicity of the changeable nature of emotions over time and how they are connected to actions. Could this changing nature demand the use of more process-oriented methodologies? Ethnographic work could help us understand not only the language classroom or individual emotions, but also what happens within the educational environment and other educational agents such as supervisors, coordinators, principals and colleagues, for example. Furthermore, when we consider critical approaches, how do certain emotions such as grief, anger, sadness, or even (revolutionary) love, can be harnessed to resist and change systems of

power and language policies that tend to oppress the profession (especially in Brazil nowadays)? How can we respond to the challenges put forward by the pandemic in language education? We believe further research on research methodologies on emotions in language education could help answering some of the questions above.

Most of the studies in this special issue suggest that a teacher education model which considers the promotion of reflection, based on the cognition-language-emotions relationship being central, may lead to positive transformation, as already pointed out by Barcelos and Aragão (2018). This transformative power of emotions is emphasized in the studies presented in this issue suggesting the higher emotional labour as a consequence of unequal power relations and inequalities of race, gender, class present in our societies. Thus, we see a demand for: (a) structured emotional support in initial and continuing education, as well as that of basic education classrooms, especially given the post-pandemic contexts; and (b) a space for reflective work on the role of emotions in language teaching/learning, as suggested by Aragão in this volume. As it seems that emotions are still not part of a language teacher education curricula, at least in Brazil, we suggest that further research on language teacher education and language teaching/learning could focus on how this emotional dimension of teacher and learner cognition is recognized and enacted in the curricula in Brazil and abroad. Finally, we had some studies which focused on the pandemic, suggesting that it was a period of intense emotionality for teachers and students. Future studies can continue to investigate the relationship between emotions and technology in the post-pandemic world, as well as the kinds of emotions teachers and students feel coming back to in-person classes.

In conclusion, within the present emotional or affective turn, we hope to see more studies that focus on language student emotions, teacher educator emotions, the relationship between emotions and other concepts (such as beliefs, motivation, identities, among others), their centrality in students' learning and on language teachers' processes of learning teaching and decision-making processes in class within the many educational and technological changes. In addition, we also need studies on teacher emotions from different parts of the world, about different foreign languages, which investigate the influence of political decisions and unequal contexts on language teacher and student emotions. This Special Issue is a venue that has resonated the voices of Brazilian teachers and students of languages other than English. We hope it will be followed by more research on this topic and the acknowledgement of emotions as an inherent and essential part of language learning and teaching.

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