

# The affective turn in Applied Linguistics: movements and intertwinings of the power of emotions in the field of language studies

*A virada afetiva na Linguística Aplicada: movimentos e entrelaçamentos do poder das emoções no campo dos estudos da linguagem*

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We live in times when emotions and affect can no longer be understood as peripheral elements of human experience, much less relegated to the field of individual subjectivity. Instead, they assert themselves as central and constitutive forces of action, language, learning, and social relationships. It is in this direction that the proposal of this thematic volume of *The ESpecialist* is situated, anchored in the so-called "affective turn" in Applied Linguistics (AL), to explore its theoretical, epistemological, and political unfoldings across different contexts of research, teaching, and professional development.

The affective turn represents a milestone of transition and expansion in how we conceive of subjects, pedagogical practices, and linguistic phenomena. More than a new field of investigation, it is a



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critical repositioning in response to the logocentric, rationalist, and dichotomous tradition that for centuries fragmented reason and emotion, body and mind, language and affect. In contrast, the studies gathered here show that there is no cognition without affect, nor language without emotion—and that every discursive practice is immersed in the affective relationships that constitute it.

This perspective demands a deep and critical revision of how we research, teach, and learn, involving not only methodological changes, but also ethical, epistemological, and political ones. It is not merely about incorporating affect as another category of analysis, but about repositioning the entire field of Applied Linguistics through attentive listening to the concrete experiences of subjects, especially those historically silenced or marginalized. This implies questioning traditional forms of knowledge production, which often rely on artificial analytical detachment, cold objectivity, and neutrality as academic values.

This repositioning has been supported by a convergence of theoretical frameworks, including Spinoza's philosophy (1966), Vygotsky's socio-historical psychology (1998, 2017), Clot's Activity Clinic (2006), Sawaia's studies on ethical-political suffering (2006), and the recent developments in critical, resistant, and interdisciplinary Applied Linguistics. It emphasizes the importance of addressing affect as a social and political practice that not only denounces violence, but also announces possible worlds. This is evident in the various themes addressed in the volume: remote teaching during the pandemic, gender-neutral language, school inclusion, symbolic violence against dissident bodies, writing as a cathartic practice, and far-right discourses that mobilize emotions to sustain antagonisms. In all these cases, affect is not just a backdrop but a constitutive element of the experiences described and analyzed.

The contributions gathered here, from different institutions, contexts, and voices, share the commitment to thinking of affect not merely as an isolated emotion, but as a force that organizes and energizes social and discursive practices. In accounts of *perezhivanie*, in interviews with teachers about ethical-political suffering, in learners' narratives on language development, and in reflections on teachers' power to act, we find a radical insistence: emotions matter. More than that—they are foundational to the human experience.

This affective turn also calls us to attentively listen to ethical-political suffering (Sawaia, 2006), understood not as mere subjective pain, but as an expression of the social contradictions experienced by individuals prevented from fully exercising their dignity and rights. Sawaia teaches

us that this suffering, rooted in structural injustices and exclusionary processes, should not be pathologized or silenced, but welcomed as a field of ethical-political analysis and action. It is through recognizing the marks inequality leaves on the lived experiences of subjects that we can open the possibility for reconstructing meaning and practice.

By illuminating the cracks between what is and what could be, ethical-political suffering carries within it the seed of transformation. It highlights the need to resignify experiences of pain and humiliation in favor of collective projects of *buen vivir* and justice. In this process, what Sawaia—drawing from Spinoza (2008, [1677])—calls *potency to act* emerges: a force built from the contradiction between suffering and the desire to overcome it, based on the belief that individuals, even when wounded, are capable of rising, building solidaristic bonds, and inventing new ways of existing.

Thus, affect, far from being just emotional states, becomes a social and political practice that challenges norms, exposes violence, and announces alternative worlds. The affective turn in Applied Linguistics, by incorporating these theoretical contributions, recognizes that language subjects are not merely speakers or learners, but beings marked by histories of pain and resistance, capable of reworking their *perezhivaniya* into transformative agency.

The decision to gather works rooted in concrete experiences, situated practices, and collective resistance is also a political stance. In a scenario of intensifying authoritarian, denialist, and violent discourses—especially in the fields of education, language, and human rights—speaking of affect is also a political act. It reveals the mechanisms that produce suffering and exclusion, but also opens paths for new ways of being together, constructing knowledge, and resisting.

The affective turn in Applied Linguistics, as outlined in this dossier, reveals itself as a dual movement. On the one hand, it shifts affect from a purely emotional or individual domain to its historical, social, and discursive dimensions. On the other, it initiates a transformation in how we conceive of research, teaching, and learning, demanding approaches more sensitive to the complexity of human experience. In this context, the indisciplinaryity that characterizes Applied Linguistics is not merely a methodological stance, but an ethical and aesthetic posture that challenges and destabilizes traditional hierarchies between knowledges, disciplines, and the affective dimensions of existence.

The affective turn in Applied Linguistics goes beyond a mere theoretical inflection; it affirms itself as a radical ethical-political project. In a global context marked by the rise of

neofascism, epistemicide, and structural violence—where language operates simultaneously as a tool of oppression and a trench of resistance—placing affect at the center of analysis constitutes an act of epistemological insurgency.

We understand that affect is not a mere subjective byproduct, but a material force that expands or contracts collective agency. As shown in the articles in this volume—be it the cathartic writing of personal narratives (Barbosa & Santos), the mobilizing anger of Black women (Wels & Esteves), or theatrical practices for social transformation (Melo & Tanzi Neto)—affect operates as a discursive, embodied practice capable of destabilizing oppressive orders.

This collection does not merely describe phenomena; it intervenes in them. By bringing to the forefront gender-neutral language as a site of contestation (Ribas), Bolsonaroism as a machine of reactive affects (Roman), and the inclusive classroom as a space of affective micropolitics (Clemente et al.), we make of AL a device for listening to the pains of the present—and for reinventing possible futures. Here, methodological indiscipline (Clot) and the Vygotskian epistemology of *perezhivanie* converge in a common imperative: to replace the logic of fragmentation with a convergence of knowledges where body, emotion, and language co-emerge.

Our commitment is clear: in times of systematic dehumanization, the affective turn rises as a political antidote. It calls us to transform pain into insurgency, vulnerability into alliance, and affect into concrete utopias—where language, far from being a tool of domination, becomes shared skin (Bonfante), a territory of rebellion, and a daily practice of freedom.

This volume is, therefore, a celebration of the possible encounters between language, emotion, and action. It is a call for pedagogical and investigative practices to embrace the complexity of the affective lives of subjects, recognizing that no teaching, research, or learning process is untouched by pain, desire, hope, or transformation. In each article, we rediscover the power of affect as a driving force for change and the creation of new possibilities for existence.

We thank the authors who accepted this collective invitation to think through the interweavings of language and emotion with rigor, sensitivity, and ethical commitment. May this volume inspire new reflections, practices, and affective insurgencies in our academic and educational lives.

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