

A Decolonial-Emotional Framework for Language Teacher Education

Uma Abordagem Decolonial-Emocional para a Formação de Professores de Línguas

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Abstract. This study investigates how emotion can operate as a decolonial force in pre-service language teacher education and aims to develop a framework theorizing the relationship between emotion, reflection and decoloniality. Drawing on Maturana's biology of knowing and Walsh's notion of re-existence, we propose a Decolonial-Emotional Framework comprising three recursive movements: discomfort, reflexive awareness and re-existence. Data was collected through six critical-reflective rounds of conversation and reflective journals with one participant of a study. Narrative analysis focused on emotional narratives drawn out from the data. Results suggest that colonialities' hierarchies inscribe themselves emotionally in language teacher education, producing shame, fear and self-doubt. Through collective conversation, participants transformed discomfort from an individual burden into a shared epistemic event. Care and empathy enabled reflexive awareness that emotions are socially produced and can be transformed. Participants reconstructed emotional positions grounded in love, courage and solidarity, becoming agents of re-existence who created pedagogies affirming students lived realities. This framework contributes to Applied Linguistics by synthesizing the affective and decolonial turns, demonstrating emotion as a political

Resumo: Este estudo investiga como a emoção opera como força decolonial na formação inicial de professores de línguas e objetiva desenvolver uma abordagem que teoriza a relação entre emoção, reflexão e decolonialidade. Com base na biologia do conhecer de Maturana e na noção de re-existência de Walsh, propomos uma Abordagem Decolonial-Emocional composta por três movimentos recursivos: desconforto, consciência reflexiva e re-existência. Os dados foram coletados por meio de seis rodas de conversa crítico-reflexivas e diários reflexivos com uma participante de um estudo maior. A análise temática focou em narrativas emocionais destacadas dos agrupamentos temáticos. Os resultados sugerem que hierarquias das colonialidades se inscrevem emocionalmente na experiência de formação inicial da docente, produzindo vergonha, medo e questionamento. Por meio da conversa coletiva, a participante transformou o desconforto de um fardo individual para um evento epistêmico compartilhado. Cuidado e empatia possibilitaram a consciência reflexiva de que as emoções são socialmente produzidas e podem ser transformadas. A participante deslocou seu pensar e agir fundamentada em amor, coragem e solidariedade. Assim, vai se tornando agente de re-existência que projeta pedagogias afirmando suas realidades vividas. Esta abordagem contribui para a Linguística Aplicada ao articular as viradas afetiva e decolonial, demonstrando a emoção como

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energy essential to language teacher education.

energia epistêmica e política essencial à uma formação de professores de línguas.

Keywords: Language teacher education; Emotion; Decoloniality; Ethics of Care.

Palavras-chave: Formação de professores de línguas; Emoção; Decolonialidade; Reflexão; Ética do cuidado

Recebido em: 23/11/2025

Aceito em: 06/03/2026



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Introdução

Amid escalating political extremism and different crises worldwide, language teacher education must urgently address the ethical, emotional and political dimensions of teaching (Zembylas, 2018; 2021; Hisldorf-Rocha; Tilio, 2024; Aragão, 2025b). Yet instrumentalist paradigms continue to prioritize content transmission and measurable competencies over relational and emotional dimensions (Kubota, 2020; Martins, 2024; Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019; Aragão, 2022). Despite decades of critical scholarship, instrumentalist paradigms continue to marginalize the emotional and political dimensions of teaching (Aragão, 2025a). Within coloniality's epistemological hierarchies, emotion is subordinated to cognition and care to control (Martins, 2024). As decolonial and affective turns reshape the humanities (Ahmed, 2014; Pavlenko, 2013; Walsh, 2013; Zembylas, 2021), Brazilian applied linguistics have positioned emotion and care as central to transformative educational practices (Aragão, 2022; Aragão; Ferreira, 2024; Barcelos, 2023; Dantas, 2023; Martins, 2024; Martins; Aragão, 2025a/b).

Studies have contributed to an emerging research tradition that situates an ethics of care at the core of educational linguistics practice (Aragão, 2014, 2022, 2025b; Dantas, 2023; Martins, 2024; Aragão; Ferreira, 2024). Drawing on Maturana's (2001) biology of knowing, which grounds cognition in emotion, these scholars argue that reflecting on our emotions and the epistemic colonialities that constitute them can foster reflective shifts, strengthening our

ability to resist colonial ideologies while promoting more linguistic and epistemic justice (Aragão, 2010, 2023; Martins, 2024; Martins; Araújo, 2025a/b).

This article theorizes emotion as a decolonial force in language teacher education. By engaging emotion as a political and relational mode of knowing, we conceptualize language teacher education as relational becoming (Aragão, 2019, 2022; Martins, 2024). Drawing on Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation with pre-service English teachers in Bahia, Brazil, we propose a framework constituted through three movements: emotional discomfort, reflexive awareness and re-existence. As Martins (2024) argues, critical-reflective awareness involves both rational and emotional processes, requiring attention to how bodies and emotions shape knowledge within relationships of coexistence, conflict and domination.

This study is oriented by the following inquiries that emerged from our collaborative engagement: 1. How might emotions operate as decolonial forces when we create conversational spaces for pre-service teachers to reflect together? 2. What emotional movements characterize transformation as we learn to recognize and resist colonial patterns in language teaching? 3. How can a decolonial-emotional framework theorize the relationship between emotion, reflection, and care in language teacher education practice? These questions guide our analysis of how emotion, when engaged through ethics of care and critical reflection, enables the unlearning of colonial epistemologies and the co-construction of decolonial professional identities.

We argue that to recognize forms of domination and their epistemic colonialities require emotional reflection. The fundamental importance of emotional support in reflection has been emphasized previously (Aragão, 2014, 2022; Barcelos et al., 2022). Our central claim here is that a responsible language teacher education must cultivate pedagogical ecologies that legitimize emotion within an ethics of care³. Through this, we may position teachers as agents of re-existence capable of transforming themselves and their classrooms into relations grounded in solidarity, empathy, and hope (Walsh, 2013; Araújo, 2022; Martins; Araújo, 2025b). The paper proceeds by outlining the theoretical framework, then describing the methodology, followed by an analysis of a pre-service teacher's narrative inquiry through the three emotional movements suggested here. We conclude by discussing implications for language teacher education in times of social uncertainty and crisis.

³ This article is linked to the project “Research Methodologies on Emotions in Language Teaching and Learning” (CNPq: 308716/2023-0), coordinated by the first author, who acknowledges CNPq for the research productivity fellowship (process 308716/2023-0), as well as to the research project entitled “English Language Teacher Education from a Decolonial and Systemic Perspective: Focusing on the Practicum and Initial Experiences in the Teaching Profession,” coordinated by the second author.

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework integrates four interconnected pillars that ground our discussion of emotion as a decolonial force in language teacher education. First, Maturana's *Biology of Cognition and Loving* provide our ontological foundation, positioning emotion as the very ground that makes rational action possible. This framework enables us to understand reflection as an inherently emotional practice. Second, decolonial thought (Mignolo; Walsh, 2018; Walsh, 2013) frames our political-epistemological commitment, revealing how coloniality shapes emotional regimes in language teaching, particularly the elevation of native speaker model and the devaluation of teachers from the Global South. Decolonial thought provides the concept of re-existence as transformative praxis.

Third, ethics of care (Aragão, 2019, 2022, 2025b; hooks, 2017) operationalizes our pedagogical approach, offering concrete relational practices through which decolonial-emotional transformation occurs. Care operates as decolonial emotioning by resisting neoliberal individualism and restoring collective responsibility. Fourth, critical reflection (Freire, 1996; Araújo, 2010, 2019; Martins, 2024) bridges individual emotional experience with collective political awareness. We reconceptualize reflection not as cognitive analysis but as emotional-relational practice that enables teachers to recognize and challenge colonial patterns. These four pillars converge in our conceptualization of Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs) as simultaneous method and pedagogy, the methodological site where decolonial-emotional transformation becomes pedagogically viable. The following sections elaborate each pillar before their integration in RRCs.

Emotion and Cognition: Maturana's *Biology of Loving*

The affective turn has repositioned emotion as central to meaning-making, relationality and identity in language teacher education (Pavlenko, 2013; Barcelos et al., 2022). Moving beyond the Cartesian divide, emotion is now theorized as a mode of knowing that orients bodies, discourses, culture and political practices. In Applied Linguistics, this reconceptualization has prompted re-examination of teacher identity, agency and cognition, showing how teachers' emotions ground their interpretation of pedagogical dilemmas and

negotiation of institutional relations (Benesch, 2017). As we mentioned previously, within Brazilian Applied Linguistics, Maturana's (2001) biology of knowing has provided epistemological grounding for a perspective of emotion research that has been named as the systemic approach (Barcelos et al., 2022). For Maturana, emotioning, the biological disposition that configures action, interrelates with knowing and languaging, human activities of coordinating actions and constituting worlds. In teacher education, this means reflection is always emotionally grounded, and transformation emerges from recognizing how emotional dispositions shape action and how one can engage responsibly with the consequences of knowing about the inter-relationships of emotion and action (Aragão, 2019, 2022). Acknowledging teachers' emotions thus engages in their relational and epistemic becoming. Yet theorizing emotion as a mode of knowing remains insufficient if we do not also address how colonial power structures which emotions are validated, which are pathologized and whose emotional knowledge counts. This is where decolonial thought becomes essential.

Decolonial Thought and Re-existence

Decolonial thinking challenges representational models that detach language from embodied and relational agents situated in their contexts of practice (Martins, 2024). Decolonizing education requires recognizing how we ourselves participate in hegemonic epistemologies through continuous engagement with Eurocentric theoretical preferences, native-speaker ideologies and linguistic hierarchies (Borelli, 2018; Kubota, 2020; Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019; Urzeda-Freitas et al., 2024). This recognition, often moved by estrangement and discomfort, may enable us to interrupt these legacies through critical vigilance and emotional awareness (Walsh, 2013; Martins; Araújo, 2025a/b).

Language teacher education must thus be conceived as decolonial-emotional practice, where awareness, emotion and relational action converge. Walsh's (2013) notion of re-existence provides a key to our framework. Re-existence is not survival within oppressive systems but the emotional and communal creation of alternative life projects. It is unlearning colonial emotional legacies while cultivating dignity, relationality and care. Decolonial education thus transforms how we feel, desire and relate. In language education, colonial power structures persist through English language hierarchies, the epistemics of native-speaker ideologies and neoliberal narratives (Kubota, 2020; Martins, Araújo, 2025a/b). These tend to shape both curricular content and emotional economies of teacher education (Zembylas, 2021). Re-

existence involves re-signifying these emotions from sources of subjugation to sources of agency, requiring pedagogical spaces grounded in solidarity (hooks, 2017; Freire, 1996; Walsh, 2013).

Through these lenses, the practicum can be re-imagined as a decolonial-emotional space where teachers may confront inherited colonial emotions like fear, inferiority, dependency and transform them into empathy, solidarity, courage and hope (Martins, 2024). Such transformation cannot occur through individual reflection alone, but it demands collective conversation and relational care. In Brazil, coloniality in language teacher education takes distinctive forms. On the one hand, native-speaker ideologies, whitened linguistic norms and Eurocentric epistemologies reproduce deficit discourses about local teachers and learners (Nascimento, 2020; Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019; Borelli, 2018). On the other hand, institutional curricula seldom acknowledge how emotion, reflection and action can form an indivisible triad shaping teachers' identities and pedagogical agency (Barcelos et al., 2022). The practicum becomes a locus of epistemic and emotional tension (Martins, 2024), exposing pre-service teachers to contradictions between university discourses of emancipation and the material realities of under-resourced public schools (Martins; Aragão, 2025b).

This paper builds on Martins (2024), which examined practicum experiences of English teacher-education students in Bahia, Brazil, through emotion, critical reflection and decolonial thought. The current study extends Martins (2024) work in two ways. First, we develop a more comprehensive theoretical framework that explicitly integrates Maturana's biology of loving with decolonial thought and ethics of care. Second, we trace longitudinal emotional trajectories to theorize transformation as a recursive spiral rather than linear progression. Whereas Martins (2024) identified emotional patterns, we theorize the process through which those patterns transform. Building on Martin's (2024) data, in this article we conceptualize teacher learning as a decolonial recursive process comprising three movements: emotional discomfort, reflexive awareness and re-existence. This model positions emotion as a pedagogical and decolonial force driving teachers' critical consciousness and relational engagement with practice. Re-existence requires not only political commitment but also relational practices that sustain teachers through the difficult emotional work of problematizing colonial patterns. This is why emotional reflection becomes central to our framework.

Reflection as Emotional Practice

Reflection, traditionally conceived as an intellectual process, is grounded in emotion. For Maturana (2001), reflection arises from languaging experiences based on loving, the emotion that promotes social cohesion and conservation. Emotions coordinate our actions and define the flow of relations, systems and environments in which we live. Changes thus occur through interactions in the flow of relationships. Drawing on Maturana, Martins (2024) argues that critical reflection on emotions enables recognition that we are immersed in patriarchal and colonial cultures of control, submission and obedience which are cultures that generate fear and insecurity. Reflecting from the emotion of love offers new perspective on ourselves and our relationships and helps to develop critical awareness of our emotions.

Integrating reflection into a decolonial-emotional framework entails moving from cognitive to responsible-emotional, and from individual to collective. Reflective conversations become sites where emotion, power and knowledge converge, enabling teachers to reconstruct the emotional and epistemic conditions of their professional being. In Martins's (2024) study, this unfolded through Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs). It is based on critical conversations that student-teachers felt discomfort that led to awareness, awareness to empathy and empathy to action. In sum, this article conceives language teacher education as reflexive-emotional ecology, where emotion, decoloniality and reflection are inseparable. Emotion provides the energy and direction of reflection based on decoloniality as a responsible and caring process. Together, they form the Decolonial-Emotional Framework developed in subsequent sections. However, creating spaces for such reflective transformation requires more than conversation, it requires an ethics of care that makes emotional vulnerability possible and honors teachers' experiences as legitimate knowledge.

Ethics of Care as Decolonial Emotioning

The ethics of care (Aragão, 2019, 2022a/b, 2025; Araújo; Ferreira, 2024) offers an alternative to patriarchal models of language teacher education. Care operates as decolonial emotioning by resisting neoliberal individualism and restoring relational accountability through the agency of emotions in a community. In teacher education, care means acting with attention and respect toward others' learning and emotions, acknowledging that knowledge is based on

empathy and conversation rather than imposed through authority. This ethics resonates with Maturana and Verden-Zöller's (2004) biology of loving, which understands human coexistence as sustained through acceptance of the other, not domination. Maturana and Dávila (2009) argue that liberating conversation, the intertwining of language and emotion, triggers the process of becoming a teacher. Through conversation, we coordinate actions and emotions, becoming aware of patterns of suffering that permeate our relationships. Valuing our emotions helps us live and coexist in ways that honor our reflective autonomy as loving beings, which Maturana and Dávila (2009) describe as the biological and psychic foundation of ethical humanity.

Conversation rounds enable non-hierarchical valuing of diverse voices, experiences and subjectivities (Martins, 2024). Through interaction and collaboration, such welcoming conversations lead to transformation. We need to deepen our understanding of the ethics of care as an option for decolonial attitudes, with a view to seeking other pathways of living that exist outside of authoritarianism, submission, oppression and the centrality of hierarchical values (Aragão, 2019). We argue that it is through the creation of horizontal spaces for conversation that we will build actions that constitute horizontal dimensions and symmetry in relationships, mutual care, love and hope. These are spaces where we may expand our agencies (Martins; Araújo, 2025b). It is within this understanding that we ground Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation as both our research methodology and our pedagogical intervention.

Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation

Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs) represent here both methods and a pedagogy of care. Here, we root it in Freire's (1996) culture circles, RRCs reconfigure teacher education as emotional co-coordination rather than hierarchical instruction. Through narrative sharing and attentive listening, participants generate co-emotional knowledging and understanding arising from empathy and reciprocity (Martins, 2024; Araújo; Ferreira, 2024). Within RRCs, silence, laughter, and tears become epistemic events, embodied expressions of ethical encounter (Aragão, 2019). The circles operationalize care as research praxis, creating what hooks (2017) calls communities of resistance.

Critical-matristic pedagogies, emerging from Maturana's (2004) Biology of Loving and Latin American decolonial thought, reframe education as coexistence grounded in loving, mutual care, reciprocity and tenderness (Aragão, 2019; Dantas, 2023; Martins, 2024; Araújo, 2025b; Martins; Araújo, 2025b; Araújo; Ferreira, 2024; Sausmickt, 2025). Contrasting

patriarchal epistemologies of domination with matristic modes of living that values emotional transparency and relational ethics, this pedagogy aligns with feminist and decolonial ethics of care (Ciurria, 2019; hooks, 2017; Walsh, 2013). When teachers engage emotionally with others, they enact decolonial re-existence by creating life-affirming alternatives within oppressive systems. Critical-matristic pedagogy thus affirms that transformation arises from cultivating affective ecologies sustaining reflection, love and collective re-existence (Aragão, 2025b).

Methodology

This qualitative study employs narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) positioned within decolonial epistemologies (Walsh, 2013) and Maturana's (2001) biology of knowing (Aragão, 2007). Narrative inquiry enables examination of lived experience through stories, foregrounding relational and emotional dimensions of teacher learning. We understand research as a relational and emotional practice. In our study, observation interrelates with languaging and emotioning. Thus, understanding is always emotionally situated. We treat narratives not as data to be extracted but as living acts of knowing, emerging through relational encounters.

Context and Participants

This study draws from Martins's (2024) doctoral research at a public university in Bahia, Brazil. Participants included twenty pre-service and early-career English teachers, one teacher educator, and five supervising teachers. Six Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs) occurred across two phases: Phase 1 (April-July 2023) during the practicum, and Phase 2 (September-December 2023) with certified teachers actively teaching⁴. Participation was voluntary over one academic year. Ethical approval⁵ was granted and participants provided informed consent for anonymized participation.

This narrative inquiry focuses on two focal participants. Rafaela (Black woman, 22, third-year undergraduate) participated in all six RRCs, demonstrating the full transformation spiral with particular depth and longitudinal coherence. Ana (White woman, 24, recently

⁴ There were five participants in total in Phase 2: Ana, Laura, Rafaela, Sofia, and Som.

⁵ Approval from the Ethics Committee (approval number 5.445.841) has been granted for the second author's research project entitled 'English teacher education through a decolonial and systemic lens: focusing on the practicum and early experiences in the teaching profession'.

certified) participated in five RRCs; her trajectory illuminates re-existence's collective dimensions through her relationship with Rafaela. We selected them because their consistent participation enabled longitudinal analysis, their narratives together articulate all three emotional movements, their conversational interrelationship reveals transformation as dialogic rather than individual, and their different racial positionalities enabled analysis of how coloniality inscribes emotions differently. This strategic case selection (Patton, 2015) enables thick description while acknowledging all twenty participants informed the broader framework.

Data Generation

Data were generated over twelve months through multiple interconnected sources. Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs) formed the methodological core. Six sessions of 120 minutes each were audio-recorded and transcribed, yielding 12 hours of conversational data. Inspired by Maturana's (1997) ontology of conversation and ethics of care (Aragão, 2019; Walsh, 2013), RRCs enabled collaborative critical reflection about emotions and pedagogical experiences. While we worked intentionally to minimize hierarchical dynamics, we recognize that complete horizontality remains an aspiration, as hierarchies inevitably persist given institutional positioning and broader social structures. Our commitment was to make hierarchy an object of collective reflection and to actively redistribute epistemic authority by validating experiential knowledge alongside academic theory. Participants also wrote reflective narratives after each RRC and at key moments during their practicum, responding to prompts about emotional experiences and emerging awarenesses; written narratives were generated across all participants, with Rafaela contributing 12 and Ana contributing 11. The second author maintained detailed field notes after each RRC session, documenting conversational dynamics, nonverbal communication, emotional atmosphere, and emerging analytical insights. Finally, three 90-minute collaborative interpretation sessions (September 2023, December 2023, and March 2024) involved focal participants engaging with our emerging interpretations, co-constructing meanings, and contributing to theorizing the transformation spiral, embodying our commitment to research as co-emotional knowledging rather than extractive data collection.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative, collaborative process aligned with narrative inquiry principles and our decolonial-emotional framework (see Aragão, 2025; Martins, 2024), unfolding across six overlapping phases. We began with immersive reading of the data, conducting multiple close readings of transcripts, narratives and field notes to attend carefully to emotional language, metaphors of transformation and references to colonial or decolonial awareness. This was followed by systematic open coding, which identified recurrent patterns including "linguistic inadequacy," "shame about accent," "pride in resilience," "anger at institutional injustice," "hope through collective conversation," and "solidarity with students." In the third phase, these codes clustered into three broader movements: (1) discomfort as encountering coloniality, (2) reflexive awareness through collective reinterpretation and (3) re-existence as transformative action. The fourth phase involved theoretical coding, where we re-analyzed the three movements through Walsh's (2013) concept of re-existence and ethics of care and emotion scholarship, theorizing them as comprising a recursive spiral rather than linear stages.

Focal narrative selection in phase five involved longitudinal analysis of participants' trajectories, which revealed that Rafaela's case exemplified all three movements with richness and coherence, while Ana's trajectory showed particular depth in Movement 3's relational dimensions. Finally, collaborative interpretation from both authors confirmed participants' recognition of the three movements while revealing crucial insights about their recursive, non-linear nature. For instance, Rafaela noted that she experienced discomfort repeatedly even after achieving re-existence, but that later discomforts felt "more like growing pains than paralysis," an observation that fundamentally shaped our theorization of transformation as spiral. Throughout all phases, researcher reflexivity was integral particularly with how our own history of colonial emotional inscriptions inevitably shaped analytical attention.

The following section presents integrated analysis of Rafaela's and Ana's trajectories through the three emotional movements. We focus primarily on Rafaela's narrative. Ana's narrative becomes prominent in Movement 3, illuminating how relational re-existence is. We present integrated interpretation, empirical narrative and theoretical reflection intertwined, thus reflecting our epistemological positioning that observation and interpretation are inseparable, while marking empirical observations distinctly from theoretical interpretations.

Data analysis and discussion

As have pointed out, our analysis traces Rafaela's emotional trajectory through three recursive movements: discomfort, reflexive awareness and re-existence. The first movement, discomfort, arose as participants narrated experiences of linguistic insecurity, shame and self-doubt during teacher education. These feelings were linked to colonial hierarchies of language and knowledge, particularly native-speaker norms and Eurocentric pedagogical ideals. Before presenting each movement, we would like to clarify our analytical approach. We present Rafaela's narrative trajectory as primary evidence, with Ana's experience becoming prominent in Movement 3 where their conversational relationship illuminates re-existence's relational nature. Throughout, we mark empirical observations in their words and actions considering our theoretical interpretations through our decolonial-emotional framework. Therefore, we maintain their integration consistently with our epistemology that observation and interpretation are inseparable.

We conceptualize the three emotional movements as follows. First, discomfort operates as a politically charged emotional response to encountering contradictions between one's values and colonial/patriarchal institutional realities, signaling denaturalization of colonial norms. Secondly, reflexive awareness describes the emotional-cognitive state where experiences previously felt as personal inadequacy become reinterpreted through collective political frameworks via conversational coordination. Finally, re-existence names the transformation where teachers reconstruct professional identities and pedagogies from decolonial positions, manifesting as agency, hope grounded in critical awareness and commitment to alternative practices. We would like to emphasize that these are not discrete stages, but recursive movements navigated fluidly where participants spiral through them repeatedly at transformed levels of consciousness.

Movement 1: Discomfort

Rafaela identified how coloniality shapes English language teaching:

I believe that issues of coloniality greatly influence the English language classroom, for example. Teachers end up focusing mainly on Eurocentric grammar and speech patterns, and we forget that other countries like Nigeria and those in the Caribbean also speak English despite their accents being very different from British or American ones. So, I believe that these issues, such

as the way we speak, perhaps have a lot to do with the way we act. We say, 'Wow, you don't speak English properly, do you? I should improve'. Sometimes we even try to imitate them. (RRC 2 – Rafaela, emphasis added).

Rafaela's narrative reveals how coloniality produces linguistic insecurity through self-deprecating internal dialogue and the impulse to imitate "standard" English. Rafaela understood languages as material, hybrid, and socially embedded rather than abstract entities with fixed grammars (Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019). Her narrative demonstrates how coloniality of being produces the belief that "the way we say things matters more than what we say" (Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019, p. 20), thus affecting emotions and generating feelings of incapability ('You don't speak English properly'), perfectionism ('I should improve'), and the imperative to imitate. This reinforces the myth of the native speaker as sole representative of pure, uninfluenced language (Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019, p. 21). Rafaela connected guilt about accent to identity and colonial power:

Sometimes we pronounce all the phonemes correctly, but it comes out a little differently because of our accent, and we end up blaming ourselves. This is influenced not only by English language teaching, but also by the issue of identity and the colonial nature of power—the question of being: us not being able to be who we want to be. (RRC 2 – Rafaela)

This reflects how English language teaching elevates the language to "white language" status, privileging white North American accents in neoliberal markets (Nascimento, 2020). This homogeneous view of language silences learners and teachers, producing incapability, insecurity, and hopelessness while perpetuating Eurocentric colonial epistemology. Through the RRCs, Rafaela began reflecting critically on these dynamics. Rafaela's Reflective Journal revealed her distress about classroom conditions:

These issues left me feeling distressed because students deserve quality education. The classes are short, with little reflection on language. Even though they are in their third year and are adults (aged 25 and over), they were very shy about speaking English when introducing themselves. This shows how little they practice speaking and how stuck they are in mechanized teaching methods of copying and taking tests. (Rafaela's reflective journal – 05/02/23)

However, conversations at the university offered hope, though frustration remained strong (RRC 3 – Rafaela). These emotions emerged most intensely when confronting colonial and patriarchal legacies in teacher education and school hierarchies. Student-teachers experienced dual emotional flows between desire and inadequacy (Aragão, 2010, 2022)

represented through a contradictory type of conversation in wanting to teach well yet feeling unprepared or unworthy. Fear and anxiety accompanied classroom teaching and the pressure to "speak the language perfectly." Anguish and despair appeared when facing institutional hierarchies and deficit discourses about public-school teaching. Self-depreciation reflected internalized colonial and patriarchal values equating emotion with weakness and reason with professional legitimacy. Systemic issues such as lack of resources have probably compounded to these feelings.

This suggests how emotional regulation functions as disciplinary mechanism within teacher education (Benesch, 2017; Zembylas, 2018). Through conversational exploration in RRCs, participants began perceiving these feelings not as personal deficiencies but as historically produced affects sustained by the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2013; Mignolo; Walsh, 2018). Naming discomfort collectively transformed it from individual burden into shared epistemic event. As Boler (1999) argues, discomfort serves as pedagogical hinge, destabilizing certainty and initiating critical learning. While Movement 1 highlighted initial discomfort, this emotion did not simply resolve into awareness. Rather, discomfort persisted and recurred throughout teachers' trajectories, each new insight into coloniality generated new discomfort. What shifted was the relationship to discomfort, increasingly understood as pedagogical insight rather than personal failure.

Movement 2: Reflexive Awareness

The second movement, reflexive awareness, emerged as participants reinterpreted their emotional experiences through RRCs. Collective conversation enabled them to hear unique perspectives and learn together (hooks, 2017). This fostered reflections that helped identify both critical and decolonial teaching methods already in use and colonial practices that impacted emotions in learning and teaching. The dominant emotions of this movement were care, hope, empathy, belonging and ethical responsibility. In conversation circles, participants experienced acceptance and emotional safety and understanding as they recognized themselves in one another's stories, creating solidarity that countered isolation and self-blame. Loving fosters reflection without judgment and sustains mutual respect (Aragão, 2010, 2022). Reflecting from love, teachers developed trust and ethical awareness, enabling them to face colonial and patriarchal patterns without reproducing them.

These critical moments enabled teachers to envision alternatives to hegemonic discourses about English language teaching, imagining language learning through social issues like feminism, racism and stereotypes present in their contexts. Sharing and discussing materials presented alternative approaches that constituted a critical and decolonial movement (Cadilhe; Leroy, 2020; Martins, 2024). These offered opportunities to reflect on and deconstruct linguistic and hierarchical structures constituting as inter-relation of cognition and emotion. RRCs offered opportunities to question and rethink classroom actions while reflecting on teaching experiences. Based on shared textual and audiovisual resources, Martins (2024) discussed possibilities for teaching English from critical and decolonial perspectives, considering local demands and contexts where student teachers operated.

Through conversations, participants co-constructed an ethics of care (Aragão, 2022). Listening to one another's narratives fostered empathy and mutual recognition, transforming RRCs into affective communities. By sharing personal memories of fear and doubt, the researcher's vulnerabilities reinforced relational symmetry essential to coexistence in loving (Maturana, 2001). Hope and empathy became central forces of transformation. Participants expressed renewed belonging and courage to act differently, recognizing emotions as legitimate cognitive sources. Fear seemed to be transformed into connection and shame into a sort of responsible commitment. This reflexive awareness phase represented emotional reorientation from vulnerability to engagement, as teachers learned to engage emotions critically and ethically, transforming pedagogical identities through care, solidarity and love as epistemic acts.

Rafaela connected her motivation to decolonial thinking's call to "(re)think and (re)visit our pedagogical practices... learning to unlearn and learning to relearn" (Mignolo, 2008, cited in Silva, Zenha, & Oliveira, 2022, p. 399):

I think that was exactly what the research helped and motivated us to do the most. It gave us the opportunity to look at our practice, to think, rethink, and learn to relearn! (RRC 4 – Rafaela)

Her words reveal self-reflection and epistemological shifting, understanding teaching as ongoing practice continually reconstructed through experience, with the research practice enabling unlearning and re-signification necessary for a transformative pedagogy. Belonging and caring became conditions for reflection in a research-education space intentionally created as "attentive to our emotions, conversations, and cultures of teacher education." Here, the study participant grew conscious of colonialities' influence on feelings and actions, analyzing which

resources could support this process. Acceptance, mutual care and collective responsibility promote awareness.

Movement 3: Re-existence

The third movement, re-existence, represents the culmination of emotional and epistemic transformation. Having recognized colonial inscriptions of their feelings, participants reconstructed new emotional positions from which to teach, relate, and act. As student teachers participated in RRCs while interning, reflections occurred within a "dynamic, dialectical movement between doing and thinking about doing" (Freire, 1996, p. 38) adding feeling to this dialectic. This opened possibilities for recognizing emotions constituting trainee teachers' work, since teaching involves complex networks of cognitive, relational, and emotional resources. Rafaela described her fear confronting students' realities:

Then I got scared. I was afraid and didn't know whether to accept their reality or this other one. I talked to Ana about this; about how anxious I was about not knowing what to do. I asked her, 'Ana, what do you think I should do?' (RRC 1, Rafaela)

These narratives reveal how lack of experience with public school contexts, student realities, and teacher demands generates anguish, fear, and insecurity. These emotions could be consequences of the distance between university and school and the theory/practice dichotomy. Although Rafaela had attended public school, the teacher's perspective in which she was situated differed dramatically. Beginning teaching work in the practicum highlighted the complex emotional resources required in this profession, exposing how university-school disconnection affects pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers expressed a reality shock, with fear, nervousness, insecurity, anxiety, hopelessness and feelings of incapability, emotions common in practicum experiences (Aragão; Sousa, 2017; Borelli, 2018; Martins; Araújo, 2025b). Ana, for instance, felt like crying after hearing about a student who studied one shift and worked as a bricklayer's assistant the other, whose mother was a cleaner and stepfather a butcher, a life dramatically different from her own despite her less privileged background.

Aragão (2025) emphasizes the importance of closing the distance between teacher and student worlds through empathy and participation in one another's conversations and stories, creating harmonious co-emotion. As a student teacher, Ana could not discuss her feelings with colleagues or supervisors but found space in RRCs. She and Rafaela began reflecting on their

plans, considering students' realities: "I shared this with Rafaela. We talk a lot and exchange ideas about classes and groups. We were talking about Chimamanda's video and planning the class about jobs and profession" (RRC 1, Ana).

Rafaela nearly gave up during early practicum experiences, feeling helpless and uncertain. Conversations with Ana and RRCs sustained her engagement and fostered critical reflection. A pivotal moment occurred when she met a student's mother, who is a cleaner, in her own neighborhood, prompting her to reconsider what social realities were represented in her English classes. Ana explained: "She created a job interview form to give to her students so she could learn about the professions they or their parents had" (RRC 1, Ana). This experience prompted Rafaela to question whether language education should reflect students lived realities or continue reproducing hegemonic ideologies valorizing elite professions (doctors, lawyers). This moment of epistemic rupture reimagined the classroom as a space where local knowledges and community experiences could challenge colonial hierarchies. Rafaela reflected:

Then I thought... if I were to bring those [local] professions into the classroom, I wondered whether the students would struggle or feel hesitant to talk about them. But I also questioned myself: would it really make sense to present professions such as doctors or lawyers, since those didn't reflect their reality either? (RRC 1 – Rafaela)

Her reflection reveals tensions between hegemonic curriculum ideals and students' sociocultural realities. As Maturana (2001) argues, love is essential to human development. Love constitutes a domain where we recognize the other as legitimate being in coexistence. In teacher education, this recognition is epistemological and political, challenging colonial logics that separate reason from emotion, knowledge from experience, university from school. Our formative processes, classroom relationships, and interactions with students and mentor teachers are crucial spaces where emotional-rational interweaving occurs.

Ana and Rafaela exemplified recognizing the other in coexistence. By seeking alternative vocabularies and pedagogical paths reflecting students lived realities, they legitimized marginalized knowledges and identities within English language classrooms. From this perspective, emotions are constitutive of pedagogical action and ethical responsibility. Teacher education grounded in emotional awareness fosters decolonial practices resisting hierarchical relations of knowing and being. Recognizing the other as legitimate is both an affective gesture and a decolonial act. We believe this may open possibilities for a more circular and transformative learning process.

Ana and Rafaela's domains of action shifted toward decolonial stance. Through reflective activity on Chimamanda Adichie's talk 'The Danger of a Single Story', they critically examined knowledges brought into classrooms and questioned "truths" embedded in pedagogical choices. This problematization happened particularly when addressing professions in English teaching. These discussions fostered identity shifts, enabling critical self-examination and reimagining of their roles as English teachers (Martins, 2024). They reflected on practices' meanings, while constituting teacher identities and making conscious decisions about the educators they aspired to become.

Even within the constraints of colonial practicum structures, they sought ways to resignify their praxis. Their movement toward self-awareness and transformation illustrates the potential of reflective and emotionally engaged teacher education to nurture decolonial ways of being in teaching. Rafaela described emerging collaboration in lesson planning and addressing classroom interactions. Martins (2024) interprets these accounts as early expressions of decolonial collaborative praxis. Through this she could be able to challenge the competitive, individualistic and instrumental orientations dominating teacher education. Their experiences suggest alternative modes of teacher education structured around shared responsibility and mutual respect rather than individual performance, cultivating less isolating experiences of becoming a teacher.

Maturana (2001) notes that childhood's collaboration, mutual respect and acceptance give way to socialization into competition and domination, a cultural shift reverberating through teacher education systems. From a decolonial perspective, this signals persistence of colonial logics privileging control, hierarchy and submission over relationality, reciprocity and care (Walsh, 2013; hooks, 2017). Ana and Rafaela's narratives suggest collaboration as resistance. This can be considered as the inter-relation of an emotional and epistemic practice reclaiming teacher-learners' relational dimension. Their mutual support reduced emotional solitude while generating deeper learning through shared reflection and collective agency. We believe that collaboration thus becomes a decolonial act. This takes place by affirming coexistence, interdependence, and learning with and through others (Walsh, 2013; hooks, 2017). Their collaborative practices emerged as emotions of resistance, mitigating practicum solitude while expanding possibilities for learning through relationality as other studies have also suggested (Aragão, 2019, 2022; Borelli, 2018; Aragão, 2025). This tends to displace what it means to teach, to learn and to become a teacher.

Rafaela's emotions shifted from critical awareness to action grounded in hope, courage, love, solidarity and gratitude. These emotions became actions of responsibility and political energies that sustain participants' transformation of professional lives and practices. Hope emerged as a particularly vital emotion that worked in leading to continuous action in critical language teaching and sustaining commitment to a transformative educational practice. Courage and ethical responsibility arose as teachers confronted institutional injustices and acted from renewed purpose, re-signifying previously unprofessional feelings marked by sadness and compassion as vital sources of knowledge and connection.

Rafaela connected decolonial pedagogy to courage. Referencing the idea that decolonial pedagogical intentions involve "critical pedagogy (non-neutral and transgressive), conversational, transformative, and one that values the voices of social and cultural subjects" (Silva, Zenha, & Oliveira, 2022, p. 399). She argued that engaging in decolonial praxis requires courage and willingness to question taken for granted assumptions and act otherwise. Such stance reflects "the courage of teachers who go beyond the basics (...) those who truly dedicate themselves, plan, think, and rethink their practices", what she calls "an exercise in courage" (RRC 4, Rafaela). This underscores how emotional dimensions become central to a decolonial pedagogical action.

Rafaela's reflection evokes Freire's (1996) understanding of love as "an act of courage, not of fear; it is commitment to others", a conversational and transformative force binding educators to liberation. This resonates with Maturana's (2001) view of love as central to human development. For Rafaela, love and courage emerge as intertwined forms of commitment motivating engagement with decolonial pedagogical practices. Rafaela reported widened recognition of difference: "Experiencing other contexts made me observe how different worlds and perspectives are" (RRC 4, Rafaela), evidencing growing ethical awareness turning into action.

Rafaela began noticing social and cultural differences that, while visible, often remain "unnoticed" or "ignored" by teachers due to structural and affective factors imposed by limited time, lack of confidence, or uncertainty in addressing social issues. "Experiencing other [private] teaching contexts made me live and observe how different worlds and perspectives can be" (RRC 4 – Rafaela), revealing expanding critical awareness of how teaching contexts are socially and economically situated. This resonated with Ana's earlier "reality shock" encountering students' lived experiences. Such moments suggest initial movement toward decolonial consciousness, inviting teachers to reconsider their positionalities and

sociohistorical conditions shaping learners' realities (Martins, 2024). Ana and Rafaela's re-planning of lessons to reflect students' lived worlds with jobs in their community rather than hegemonic scripts that embodied love as coexistence and responsibility toward learners' realities.

Ana and Rafaela's narratives illustrate interaction's power in shaping meaning. Teacher education requires understanding how ideals, interactions, and practices are forged within social relations systematically privilege some over others, reproducing unequal power relations. Rafaela echoed this in reflections on the diversity of worlds during RRCs, emphasizing different dreams and perspectives of students across learning contexts and highlighting the importance of teachers developing strategies to incorporate antiracist and decolonial perspectives into English language lessons.

In public schools attended predominantly by Black students from peripheral areas, the teacher's role extends beyond language instruction to nurturing students' capacity to dream. This in turn may become an affirmation that learning English matters and can open future possibilities and different world alternatives. In contrast, private language institutes serve students who actively plan travels and business ventures abroad, where English is shaped by privilege and access rather than aspiration. These contrasting contexts expose how colonialities operate through educational structures, shaping not only linguistic practices but also imaginaries of who is entitled to dream. For Rafaela, these reflections underscore the need for pedagogical strategies promoting antiracist and decolonial education regardless of teaching context (RRC 4, Rafaela). This stance echoes Freire's (1987) notion of love as courage and commitment to others' right to hope, aligning with decolonial affective pedagogies that view dreaming as political, transformative act of resistance.

Rafaela worked to reframe her conceptions of language teaching, emphasizing "the importance of a context that allows teaching beyond the language itself" and "the need for strategies that foster antiracist educational practices." (RCC4, Rafaela). Critical and decolonial perspectives in language education must be integral to teaching practice, moving beyond narrow focus on linguistic forms (e.g., 'verb to be') to promote social awareness and transformation among all involved in English language learning. Rafaela and Ana designed activities provoking reflection on colonialities' persistence. Rafaela wrote: "I brought a literary text from Guyana... we carried out activities about African countries where English is spoken and that were colonized by England. We discussed Nigeria, and I shared Chimamanda's video about the danger of a single story" (Rafaela's Reflective Journal, June 19, 2023). Ana focused

on oral activities and linguistic self-esteem: "I've been trying to help them realize that English can be part of our everyday lives and that they can speak English. It's about promoting linguistic self-esteem in them" (Ana's Reflective Journal, May 3, 2023).

Language teaching cannot be reduced to instrumental transmission of linguistic structures. It produces relational behaviors, ways of being and ways of inhabiting the world. English language teaching should engage practices that contribute to critically conscious citizens' formation and reimagining subjectivities historically shaped by colonial hierarchies. This research-education project envisions decolonial pedagogical paths moving beyond linguistic proficiency to nurture social, personal and professional identities grounded in critical reflection and transformative praxis (Martins, 2024). The discussions proved intellectually and emotionally generative, producing meaningful consequences for participants' development as teachers by awakening desires and initiating movements toward professional identity transformation. Emerging narratives show they began interrogating hegemonic colonial legacies and incorporated critical reflections on language's role in their classrooms. These practices opened spaces of resistance to normalized and colonial assumptions.

The Spiral of Decolonial-Emotional Transformation

These three emotional movements discussed in this paper form a recursive spiral of transformation (Aragão, 2007, 2022) that indicates how emotion may operate as a decolonial force in language teacher education. The process begins in discomfort which is embedded in an emotional recognition of colonial entanglement. Then it unfolds into reflexive awareness through care, conversation and empathy. Afterwards it culminates in re-existence, where new emotional-ethical dispositions sustain praxis. In this study, RRCs' conversational design and the researcher's relational presence played a central role in this process. The methodology itself became a pedagogy that resides within a critical-matristic ecology of knowing where emotion, reflection and decoloniality intertwined. This suggests to us how emotion operates as epistemic and political energy, reflection as ethical-emotional praxis and re-existence as decolonial and relational becoming.

Through this process, participants not only produced new knowledge, but became different kinds of knowers. This may have led to an understanding that to feel is to know, to care is to act, and to exist is to co-exist. These findings affirm the paper's central claim that

emotion constitutes a decolonial force capable of reshaping the epistemic and political horizons of language teacher education.

Concluding Remarks: Implications and Future Directions

The three emotional movements discussed in this paper form a recursive spiral of transformation (Aragão, 2007, 2022) that indicates how emotion may operate as a decolonial force in language teacher education. This spiral structure reveals how emotion circulates through people and communities, generating empathy, solidarity and transformation. This Decolonial-Emotional framework offers both theoretical contribution and practical ideas for reimagining language teacher education in times of crisis.

This study investigated how emotions operate as decolonial forces in pre-service language teacher education, tracing emotional-epistemic movements that characterize transformation from colonial patterns toward decolonial re-existence. Our findings reveal a recursive spiral of transformation comprising three movements: discomfort as encountering coloniality, reflexive awareness through collective reinterpretation and re-existence as transformative action. This Decolonial-Emotional Framework, grounded in Maturana's (2001) biology of knowing, Walsh's (2013) concept of re-existence, and ethics of care, demonstrates how emotion operates simultaneously in different interconnected layers systemically.

Rafaela's narrative, alongside Ana's, suggests to us how colonial hierarchies inscribe themselves emotionally in shame about accents, fear of linguistic inadequacy, guilt about not meeting native-speaker ideals (Nascimento, 2020; Mastrella-de-Andrade; Pessoa, 2019). Yet through Critical-Reflective Rounds of Conversation (RRCs), these same emotions became catalysts for critical consciousness and transformation. Understanding teachers' emotions thus helps us contest single stories about teaching, learning, and what it means to become a teacher, while provoking movements of resistance and re-signification (Martins, 2024). In other words, this Decolonial-Emotional framework offers both theoretical contribution and practical ideas for reimagining language teacher education in times of crisis.

Implementation of this framework requires institutional commitment across multiple dimensions. Curricular integration demands embedding emotion-focused reflection throughout teacher education programs rather than treating it as supplementary (Barcelos et al., 2022). Practicum seminars can incorporate RRCs where pre-service teachers collectively examine

emotional experiences, identifying colonial and patriarchal patterns in their feelings and pedagogical choices (Martins, 2024). Course content should explicitly address how native-speaker ideologies and deficit discourses produce emotional harm while integrating resources highlighting translanguaging as alternatives (Hilsdorf-Rocha; Tilio, 2024).

Practicum structures must be redesigned. Current models often reproduce colonial hierarchies between university and school, theory and practice (Borelli, 2018; Martins; Aragão, 2025). A decolonial-emotional approach demands sustained immersion in school contexts, teacher supervision prioritizing conversational reflection over evaluative judgment, and collaborative placements fostering solidarity essential to re-existence (Aragão, 2019; Martins, 2024). Teacher educator professional development must address ethics of care, emotional reflexivity and decolonial pedagogies (hooks, 2017; Walsh, 2013; Urzeda-Freitas et al., 2024).

Future research could adapt RRCs across diverse contexts, languages, regions and educational levels to explore how emotion operates as decolonial force in varied settings. Longitudinal studies tracking teachers beyond pre-service education could illuminate how decolonial-emotional dispositions evolve under institutional pressures (Barcelos et al., 2022). Research examining teacher educators' own emotional journeys would address how those who prepare teachers experience similar transformative movements. Comparative studies across languages, regions and educational levels would deepen understanding of how coloniality and emotion intersect variably, while attention to intersectionality of race, gender, class and sexual orientation could critically problematize how these shape emotional trajectories differently.

This framework advances scholarship at the intersection of the affective turn and decolonial turn in Applied Linguistics (Pavlenko, 2013; Walsh, 2013; Zembylas, 2021; Hilsdorf-Rocha; Tilio, 2024). By theorizing emotion as simultaneously biological, social and political, we bridge Maturana's biology of knowing with Walsh's re-existence, demonstrating their productive synthesis. The three-movement spiral offers conceptual architecture applicable beyond language education to other contexts where epistemic colonial legacies persist (Mignolo; Walsh, 2018).

This study examined one geographic context and one language, focused on two focal participants from twenty and captured transformation during initial teacher education without long-term follow-up. Questions remain about sustaining decolonial-emotional pedagogies within neoliberal institutional constraints. These limitations indicate fertile ground for future studies. Our threefold contribution synthesizes emotion, decoloniality and reflection into a coherent framework advancing Applied Linguistics and demonstrates RRCs as methodology

enacting ethics of care (Aragão, 2022; Aragão; Ferreira, 2024) for reimagining teacher education honoring relationality, emotions and collective transformation. By positioning emotion as a decolonial force (Martins, 2024), this framework reveals how coloniality operates not only through structures and discourses but through feelings that discipline bodies and limit possibilities (Ahmed, 2004).

Amid escalating authoritarianism and attacks on democratic education, language teacher education faces urgent ethical imperatives (Zembylas, 2021). This study demonstrates that emotion is not a private feeling or professional weakness but a political and relational mode of knowing capable of reshaping educational practices toward social justice. When teachers learn to reflect from love (Maturana, 2001), recognize vulnerability as strength and cultivate care as political practice, they become agents of re-existence capable of transforming classrooms into spaces where marginalized students can dream, belong and thrive. The recursive spiral of discomfort, reflexive awareness and re-existence offers a path forward that centers the emotional, relational and political dimensions of teaching as inseparable from the epistemic and ethical work of education. In times of crisis, emotion becomes the very foundation for building more just, caring and transformative educational futures.

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