BUILDING LANGUAGE FROM INTRA-ACTIONS IN ENGLISH CLASSES

CONSTRUÇÃO DA LINGUAGEM/LÍNGUA A PARTIR DE INTRA-AÇÕES EM AULAS DE INGLÊS

CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL LENGUAJE/LA LENGUA A PARTIR DE INTRAACCIONES EN CLASES DE INGLÉS

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ABSTRACT: In this article, we discuss events from a language education experience, drawing on a critical posthumanist perspective to frame our analysis. Our objective is to discuss how language, bodily performances, and other resources give(gave) rise to sense-making in a localized, situated space permeated by material-discursive practices. In the second semester of 2019, six students attended English classes taught by the first author at a private language school in Goiânia, the capital of Goiás, Brazil. The arguments presented in this piece are grounded in conceptions of language as sociomaterial practice. Accordingly, we seek not just to expand but to reconfigure understandings of language and what it involves, especially in the classroom, by disrupting the humanist and anthropocentric relationship between humans and language. This study is situated within postqualitative inquiry, which does not rely on methods, approaches, and procedures. Alternatively, this Deleuzoguattarian framework draws on concepts that flow through the inquiry, reshaping thought and action. While several apparatuses were involved in the generation of empirical material, this article highlights only a selection due to space constraints. We reference information from an initial questionnaire and present some field notes, but the core of our analysis centers on video-recorded classroom intra-actions, accompanied by movement-images that illustrate the agential cuts made for this piece. Our discussion underscores the importance of viewing language education in the classroom not merely as an exchange of verbal language, but as a complex interplay of embodied, relational, and affective material-discursive practices that shape sense-making.

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KEYWORDS: Critical posthumanism. Socio(discursive)material practices. Language education.

RESUMO: Discutimos aqui eventos de uma experiência de educação linguística, adotando uma perspectiva pós-humanista crítica. Nosso objetivo é discutir como a língua/linguagem, as performances corporais e outros recursos possibilita(ra)m a produção de sentido em um espaço localizado e situado, permeado por práticas material-discursivas. No segundo semestre de 2019, seis estudantes participaram de aulas de inglês ministradas pela primeira autora em uma escola de idiomas privada em Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil. Os argumentos apresentados estão ancorados em concepções de língua/linguagem como prática sociomaterial. Assim, buscamos não apenas expandir, mas reconfigurar compreensões sobre a língua e o que ela envolve, especialmente no contexto da sala de aula, ao romper com a relação humanista e antropocêntrica entre os seres humanos e a língua/linguagem. Este estudo está situado no âmbito da pesquisa pós-qualitativa, que não se baseia em métodos, abordagens ou procedimentos. Em vez disso, seu referencial deleuzo-guattariano mobiliza conceitos que atravessam o estudo, reformulando o pensamento e a ação. Embora diversos aparatos tenham contribuído com a geração do material empírico, este artigo destaca apenas uma seleção, devido às limitações de espaço. Mencionamos informações de um questionário inicial e apresentamos algumas anotações de campo, mas o foco de nossa análise está nas intra-ações em sala de aula registradas em vídeo, acompanhadas por imagens-movimento que ilustram os cortes agenciais realizados. Nossa discussão destaca a importância de compreender a educação linguística em sala de aula não apenas como trocas verbais, mas como um complexo jogo de práticas material-discursivas corporificadas, relacionais e afetivas que moldam a construção de sentidos.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Pós-humanismo Crítico. Práticas socio(discursivo)materiais. Educação linguística.

RESUMEN: Discutimos aquí eventos de una experiencia de educación lingüística, basándonos en una perspectiva posthumanista crítica. Nuestro objetivo es examinar cómo la lengua/el lenguaje, las performances corporales y otros recursos posibilita(ro)n la producción de sentido en un espacio localizado y situado, permeado por prácticas material-discursivas. En el segundo semestre de 2019, seis estudiantes asistieron a clases de inglés impartidas por la primera autora en una escuela de idiomas privada en Goiânia, Goiás, Brasil. Los argumentos presentados se fundamentan en concepciones de lengua/lenguaje como práctica sociomaterial. En este sentido, buscamos no solo ampliar, sino reconfigurar las comprensiones de lengua y lo que este implica, especialmente en el aula, al cuestionar la relación humanista y antropocéntrica entre los seres humanos y la lengua/el lenguaje. Este estudio se sitúa dentro de una investigación postcualitativa, la cual no se basa en métodos, enfoques ni procedimientos. Alternativamente, este marco deleuzo-guattariano se apoya en conceptos que atraviesan la investigación, reformulando el pensamiento y la acción. Si bien en la generación del material empírico intervinieron varios aparatos, este artículo destaca solo una selección debido a limitaciones de espacio. Mencionamos información de un cuestionario inicial y presentamos algunas notas de campo, pero nuestro análisis se centra en intra-acciones grabadas en video durante las clases, acompañadas por imágenes-movimiento que ilustran los cortes agenciales realizados. Nuestra discusión destaca la importancia de comprender la educación lingüística en el aula no solo como intercambios verbales, sino como un complejo juego de prácticas material-discursivas corporizadas, relacionales y afectivas que moldean la construcción de significados.
PALABRAS CLAVE: Poshumanismo crítico. Prácticas socio(discursivo)materiales. Educación lingüística.

1 INTRODUCTION

For a long time, our work has been grounded in critical applied linguistics. In treating ethics and politics as an integral part of our praxes, we have addressed social issues and related them to our contexts of language (teacher) education. Specifically, by drawing on critical and decolonial perspectives, we have: problematized language, communication, ideologies, practices, planning, and curriculum; discussed issues of injustice, inequality, and discrimination; attempted to disrupt colonialities and hegemonic relations of power; and proposed forms of resistance and reexistence in/through language classes (Bastos *et al.*, 2021; Pessoa, 2013, 2014, 2018; Pessoa; Urzêda-Freitas, 2012, 2016, 2023; Rezende *et al.*, 2020; Sabota, 2018, 2025; Sabota; Frank, 2024; Sabota; Silveira; Sousa, 2025; Silva-Mello *et al.*, 2025; Silvestre; Sabota; Pereira, 2025; Sousa, 2017; Sousa; Lima-Neto, 2022; Urzêda-Freitas *et al.*, 2024, to name but a few).

Most recently, however, while she was a doctoral student, the first author and her adviser, the second author, started reading about and studying posthumanism together, a partnership which has resulted in some publications (Sousa; Pessoa, 2019, 2023a, 2023b); later, as a postdoctoral inquirer[1], the first author and the third author, her supervisor, teamed up to deepen their understanding of postqualitative inquiry (Sousa; Silva; Sabota, in development). Both frameworks work with contemporary critical thought, seeking not just to go beyond humanism and anthropocentrism but to deconstruct their ontoepistemological assumptions so that we can reconfigure how we see ourselves as human beings and our relations with the world (Barad, 2007; Sousa, 2022; St. Pierre, 2011, 2021). In our field, this implies looking at education and knowledge expansion differently, that is, seeing, thinking, doing, working with/on our praxes otherwise.

By problematizing humanist and colonial conceptions, insofar as we know that in ontoepistemological terms we are constituted by them on historical grounds, we intend not to erase or overcome them but rather oppose them, confront them, and fight against the control, oppression, discrimination, and violence that they engender. Therefore, like Daigle and Hayler (2023, p. 2), we see posthumanism as a critical apparatus "to dismantle the problematic features we have inherited from centuries of humanistic thinking emerging from, if not always directly, the European Enlightenment and the entwined projects of colonialism and the expansion of global capitalism."

For St. Pierre (2014, p. 1), the postqualitative perspective "marks a turn toward poststructural and posthuman inquiry." Rather than working with methods, approaches, and procedures, postqualitative inquiry attends to concepts, which should not be "applied" but reorient thinking (St. Pierre, 2019, 2025). Accordingly, there is no a priori design, as inquirers work from what is contingent, emergent, i.e., their studies will always be different, considering that they take shape from what comes into existence in the field[2]. In this sense, as the first author of this article explains in her doctoral dissertation, she just addressed the particularities of her study after the fact in order "to prevent the imposition of prescriptions that could constrain the emergence of generative movements within phenomena" (Sousa, 2022, p. 31).

Specifically, this inquiry follows Jackson and Mazzei's (2025, slide 10) recommendation that we should "be open to encounters ('shocks to thought') that engender the unthought" and try to "attune to how relational lines of thought respond to each other." Here, we thereby work from and with *ramifications of events*, attempting to extend "their implications to unusual and unforeseeable conclusions, carrying lines of sense farther than they are intended to reach" (Ramey, 2012, p. 173). Accordingly, in this endeavor we are interested in the unanticipated connections that meanings afford (MacLure, 2021).

The empirical material addressed here was generated in English language classes taught at a private language school[3], located in Goiânia, a capital in the Central West region of Brazil, throughout the second semester of 2019. Six students[4] and the teacher, who is also the first author of this article, participated in the study, with classes twice a week from August to December. In her work, Sousa (2022) concentrates on the sociomateriality of bodies and ideologies of language and language education. In this piece, however, we focus on events that were not included in the final version of her doctoral dissertation. Our objective is to discuss how language, bodily performances, and other resources give(gave) rise to sense-making in a localized, situated space permeated by material-discursive practices.

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[1] We use the terms *inquiry* and *inquirer* instead of *research* and *researcher*, as suggested by St. Pierre (2025). In the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2018), "[i]nquiry does not carry the trappings of the word *research*, which is tainted by a lingering positivism. *Inquiry* implies an open-endedness, uncertainty, ambiguity, praxis."

[2] This is not restricted to a classroom, for instance, as it encompasses assemblages of a particular spacetime that is interlaced with elements of the study proposed.

[3] In Brazil, English language education reflects deep social inequalities. In public schools, English is often taught with limited resources and has minimal impact, while private language institutes cater to wealthier students, connecting English with ideas of success and global opportunities. This leads to different expectations: in private settings, English learning is typically tied to market-oriented goals, proficiency exams, and aspirations of internationalization; in contrast, public school teachers often struggle to make English a meaningful and relevant practice for their students.

[4] All names mentioned are pseudonyms. Consent was obtained following IRB approval. CAAE: 99588718.8.0000.5083. Scientific Review: 3.383.404.

Although the generation of empirical material involved several apparatuses, given the limited space and the need for a more in-depth discussion, we bring into the fold just some of them here. Information from an initial questionnaire is mentioned, and some field notes are presented, but our analysis primarily focuses on intra-actions with the students who took part in this study (which were filmed, audio recorded, and transcribed), accompanied by movement-images[5] intended to provide a better picture of the agential cuts made for this article.

As Barad (2007) argues, the term *interaction* presupposes a preexisting separation between entities, neglecting their constant transformative nature through their coconstitution. The author then proposes the concept of *intra-action*, which refers to

> *[…] the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.* That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction", which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements* (Barad, 2007, p. 33).

Following this understanding, as we move away from traditional conceptions of language as a closed system and/or a means of communication, we move toward its comprehension as sociomaterial practice (Sousa, 2022), drawing attention to the fact that not only sociodiscursive aspects but also material factors constitute it. This proposal, which frames language as emerging from intra-actions in English classes, urges us to explore the entanglements of humans, nonhumans, and space(time) in locus.

The reflections presented emerged as we looked critically at some of the empirical material that had been put together under the guise of *semiotic resources, negotiation,* and *alignment* in the classroom. By *semiotic resources*, we mean the various ways meaning is constructed – not only through words, but also through gestures, body positions, facial expressions, objects, and the spatial relationships between bodies. These elements are all connected and help create communication. *Negotiation* refers to the process by which people collaborate to build shared understanding. This process is not always smooth, as it involves navigating differences, misunderstandings, or tensions, and is shaped by both the people involved and the surrounding environment. *Alignment* concerns the ways in which material and nonmaterial entities relate to one another during intra-actions – whether through agreement, resistance, emotional connection, or distancing. These dynamics are expressed through speech, body language, tone, and other modes of communication.

In addition to initial and final considerations, this article has two other sections. In the first section, we discuss bodily performances as material-discursive practices, especially those enacted by the teacher; and in the second section, we focus on embodied language practices within a landscape of sense-making, turning our attention to the verbal and nonverbal communication of a particular student.

2 BODILY PERFORMANCES AS MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

As the first author was reviewing the empirical material generated for her doctoral dissertation, she noticed that her students and herself would often draw on semiotic resources (exceeding linguistic ones) to try to convey ideas, such as body movements, particularly hand gestures, so that some kind of alignment could be reached in communication. In the following cuts, we can see two occasions when the teacher relied on a hand gesture to indicate the past tense.

In the first cut, in order to work on particularities of pronunciation, she handed out symbols of sounds and asked the students to mention words they could associate with each sound.[6] While doing it, Mark and Elton had a slip of paper with the sound /ŋ/, and the following intra-action occurred[7]:

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[5] This is a concept that refers to *images in movement*, drawing attention to "the continuity of the movement which describes the figure" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 5).

[6] As Sousa (2022, p. 207) explains, when working on the phonemic chart with her students, her intention was to "promote their linguistic sensibility" (Menezes de Souza, 2019), "to show them the existence of different sounds."

[7] For the transcription, [ ] is used to indicate explanations, observations, translations, or phonemic transcriptions. **Bold** refers to emphasis added by the inquirers.

[1]

Mark: This [showing the sound /ŋ/].
Teacher: /ŋ/.
Mark and Elton: /ŋ/.
Teacher: Words that end in -ing, for example.
Elton: Singing, missing. [Mark nods his head and smiles]
Teacher: Yes!
Mark: I, I saw? [shakes his head] No, I saw, I s…, I saw? [tilts his head to the left, while looking at the teacher, indicating he is asking her if he is right]
Teacher: **I saw. [moving her hand backward over her shoulder to indicate the past]**
Mark: I saw this word, "I'm missing" [while watching a movie in English].
Teacher: Oh, yeah! [nods her head in agreement]

(Class 04, Aug. 15, 2019)

Movement-image 1: The teacher's hand gesture, indicating the past, while standing
Source: empirical material

At the time of the study, Mark was a 15-year-old high school student, and Elton was a 49-year-old geography teacher, which was the information they provided in the initial questionnaire. In cut 1, as Mark was recalling an event, he struggled with the past tense structure. In addition to offering verbal confirmation, the teacher then reinforced her indication of the past tense with a hand gesture. The same happened in cut 2, while the students were telling the teacher the language skills and linguistic aspects that they had chosen to work on their Language Learning Projects (LLPs) (activities in English that they would do at home, which should be based on their interests and preferences). Rubi, a 46-year-old accountant, was talking when the teacher relied again on a hand gesture to emphasize the past tense:

[2]

Teacher: Rubi, what did you choose [for your LLP]?
Rubi: **I choose…**
Teacher: **I chose…**
Rubi: **Chose. Choose?**

Teacher: **Chose. [moving her hand backward over her shoulder to indicate the past]**

Rubi: …chose listening and pronunciation. [the teacher writes the words *choose* and *chose* on the board and pronounces them to show the difference]

(Class 05, Aug. 20, 2019)

Movement-image 2: The teacher's hand gesture, indicating the past, while sitting
Source: empirical material

MacLure (2025) suggests that when we come across something that is very familiar to us, we should try to attune to it differently, to look for the overlooked. For us, this meant examining the mundanity of the English language classroom so that we could address aspects that are usually disregarded. In this section, we focus on nonverbal communication, particularly the teacher's body movements.

It is worth presenting the following question, posed by Núñez and Sweetser (2006, p. 441), to initiate this discussion: "How are our cultural [conceptions] of time constituted, and how are they related to our [conceptions] of space?" In this piece, we thereby seek to attend to notions of (space)time that have been taken for granted, especially in language education. The way we conceive time, past and future, for instance, is "influenced by the culture we grow up in and the languages we are exposed to" (Ogden, 2023, para. 3). In general, in Western countries, we see the future as in front of us and the past as behind us, a view which is corroborated by the teacher moving her hand backward, over her shoulder, to indicate the past, both in cuts/movement-images 1 and 2. As Ogden (2023, para. 4) explains, in cultures such as ours, time is normally perceived as linear, inasmuch as people "see themselves as continually moving towards the future because they cannot go back to the past."

The author adds that, "in some other cultures, however, the location of the past and the future are inverted. The Aymara, a South American Indigenous group of people living in the Andes, conceptualise the future as behind them and the past in front of them" (Ogden, 2023, para. 5). She also mentions "the Māori of New Zealand" (Ogden, 2023, para. 10), "speakers of Darij, an Arabic dialect spoken in Morocco" (para. 7), and "some Vietnamese speakers" (para. 7) as groups that share similar perspectives of time. Such conceptualization does not simply pertain to spatial orientation, for it is intertwined with the sociocultural values and worldviews of communities. Ogden (2023, para. 8) further states that

> […] the future doesn't always have to be behind or in front of us. There is evidence that some Mandarin speakers represent the future as down and the past as up. These differences suggest that there is no universal location for the past, present and future. Instead, people construct these representations based on their upbringing and surroundings.

For De la Fuente *et al.* (2014, p. 1682), "people […] conceptualize either the future or the past as in front of them to the extent that their culture (or subculture) is future oriented or past oriented." Therefore, as the authors elaborate, the time signaled as in front is the one to which people direct more attention; that is, non-Western communities, such as the Aymara, tend to be past-focused, while Western societies gravitate toward being more future-focused. In terms of language, they provide the following example: "In English, people can look 'forward' to their retirement or look 'back' on their childhood" (De la Fuente *et al.*, 2014, p. 1682).

For the Aymara, their ancestry and traditions are more than what is known and seen, and hence in front of them, but most importantly, they are their guides; consequently, their gestures indicate that the future is perceived as behind, for it is unknown, unseen (Núñez; Sweetser, 2006), and it should not thus be a concern that would hinder them from fully living the present. Daniel Munduruku (2017), an Indigenous Brazilian scholar, explains that his people do not even have the word *future* in their linguistic repertoire:

> In our understanding of time, there is only the past – the time of memory – and the *present*, the time of now. The word *future* was not invented by us because, as you know, *the future* doesn't exist. It is purely a speculation of the [Western] human mind, created to deceive us into accepting the condition of being eternally dependent on time. For [Brazilian] Indigenous peoples, language expresses a reality that is known, experienced, and shared, and all of this is only possible when we live in the *present*[8] (Munduruku, 2017, p. 2-3).

Unlike the Aymara and other Indigenous communities, our Western gestural indication of the past as behind reflects, to a certain extent, the way we see and treat our history, constantly trying to erase it, forget it, or "leave it behind." This is part of "a series of actions in society that try to cover up humanity's violent past by means of historical erasure" (Sousa, 2022, p. 142), a process of invisibilization nurtured and upheld by the colonial project that took place in countries like Brazil. At the same time, our Western view of the future is propelled by ideas like progress, development, advancement, modernization, production and consumption, wealth accumulation, and change (all co-opted by the neoliberal agenda), often at the expense of human and nonhuman others. Consequently, the future of the globalized world, the one that is "in front of us," is permeated by material-discursive practices that recurrently reinforce hegemonic power structures, oppression, exploitation, and inequality. These arguments are endorsed by Daniel Munduruku (2024, para. 9), who claims that such a "focus on the future alienates people from the more immediate need to build our own existence in the present. It is a mindset that educates people to be selfish, to compete, to conquer, and to colonize the other."

It is crucial to highlight that the teacher's gesture toward the back, when referring to the past, along with her speech iterating this idea, indicates how embodied cognition and bodily experiences and performances become entangled with multiple elements, which then construct our conceptual systems – in other words, semiotic realities are created from body-world intra-actions. For Canagarajah (2018b, p. 31), a spatial orientation thus "embeds communication in space and time, considering all resources as working together as an assemblage in shaping meaning." This underpins not just an understanding of how our conception of time is drawn from its relation to space (Núñez; Sweetser, 2006), but, from the localized and situated experience of the teacher, it also shows how spacetime, culture, language, cognition, and several other factors work together with the sociomateriality that constitutes and surrounds us to build the world as we know it.

Bearing in mind that "we make the world as we engage with it and, in the same process, make ourselves" (Daigle; Hayler, 2023, p. 3), we build on Sousa's (2022) argument that recognizing our ethical responsibility for how we act in and with the world makes it crucial to politicize language, as well as our semiotic practices and performances, and to critically engage with their effects, affects, and entanglements. The discussion that follows is therefore an attempt at assuming responsibility and accountability as "an ongoing

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[8] All quotes originally in Portuguese were translated into English by the authors.

responsiveness to the entanglements of self and other, here and there, now and then," as suggested by Barad (2007, p. 394). Daniel Munduruku (2017) helps us in this endeavor by urging us to reflect on how schools work as an ideological apparatus that has served to smother the richness and prevent the proliferation of different worldviews. His inquiry leads us to ponder: How may the teacher have contributed to it not necessarily through her words but especially through her nonverbal expression, particularly her bodily performances that functioned as material-discursive practices? How did her irreflective but iterated movement (re)produce a certain semiotic reality? These questions are relevant because, as Barad (2007, p. 453) asseverates, knowing is "an active and specific practice of engagement. To know is to become entangled." Thus, it matters what we know, how we know it, and what we do with such knowledge.

In this sense, Daigle and Hayler (2023, p. 3) reiterate Haraway's (2016, p. 12) words that "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters […] what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions […]. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories." And they add, "And why does it matter? Because our ways of framing phenomena, experiences, and identities shape our mode of being in the world and our relating to others, humans and non-humans" (Daigle; Hayler, 2023, p. 3). These arguments justify the questions posed in the previous paragraph. Once we recognize that corporeal performances are enactments that affect others in the world, we realize that we might be contributing to or resisting the (re)production of certain material-discursive practices, which are always permeated by political forces. From this perspective, the teacher thus reinforced a particular Westernized worldview on multiple dimensions through her embodied practice. It is worth noting that, however, within a posthumanist framework, it would not be the subject or the pre-formed body that made the movement but the relational field itself that was moving – "the movement-moving [was] activating an environmentality that resonate[d] with everything in its path" (Manning, 2014, p. 172).

In some of her field notes, as an illustration of one of its implications, the teacher remarks on how this notably affected one of her students:

[3]

Interestingly, as a student who was always willing to help her classmates, Hellem would not just mention synonyms and try to explain things in different ways, but she would also use gestures in several different ways. **I noticed her moving her hand backward a couple of times today to signal the past tense** while correcting her classmates.

(Field notes, Nov. 19, 2019)

According to Hellem's answers in the initial questionnaire, she was a 14-year-old middle school student when she took part in the study. In cut 3, the teacher comments on the learner's gesture backward when referring to the past. We should then notice that students tend to reproduce our words, actions, and performances, particularly because they are in school, and especially in classrooms, which are environments that function as assemblagic machines working with specific temporalities, rhythms, and hierarchies (Bartosch; Hoydis, 2019; Snaza *et al.*, 2014). In this sense, as Jones (2025) reminds us, teachers are ethically bound to how they word the world.

As we conclude this section, we emphasize the importance of including movement and embodiment in inquiry (Camiré, 2024), as they create our semiotic realities alongside language.

3 EMBODIED LANGUAGE PRACTICES: A LANDSCAPE OF SENSE-MAKING

The following cut and movement-image originate from a class in which the students delivered speeches on their Language Learning Projects (LLPs). By the middle of the semester, they had already written the introduction for their mini-articles, presenting initial reflections on their language learning and their difficulties, and the theoretical background, discussing at least one skill and one language aspect regarding their learning, based on academic texts that they had read (which were suggested by the teacher according

to the specificities of each student). Their speeches were meant to summarize what they had already done as well as what they were planning to do as activities to develop their projects. The teacher told them that they could also talk about her corrections, what they thought of them, how they felt about them, and any other aspect related to their LLPs that they deemed important. As the final part of their mini-articles, they were expected to write a methodological section to describe what they had done, and an analytical section to reflect on all the activities carried out, while also presenting a conclusion to share their thoughts and feelings on developing their projects. In the next cut, Elton shares how the experience was for him while preparing to do the second part:

[4]

Elton: My project is relative my difficulties with [/wɪf/] listen [/ˈlɪstən/] and writing. But I think [/tɪŋk/] that [/dæt/] be wrong. Real, I think [/tɪŋk/], real, my difficult, *maior*, big [/bɪgi/]?

Teacher: Bigger difficulty.

Elton: Bigger difficulty is grammar. Oh! Oh! I don't know if was, *foi*? [the teacher nods] If was choose correct, and choose writing. But I read your advice, and I agree for all [/aʊ/]. I don't knew [/knju:/] the, for, that you, *fez*?

Teacher: Did.

Elton: Did the *correções*?

Teacher: Corrections, made the corrections.

Elton: Inside write, I knew [/knju:/] other form.

Teacher: I knew [/nju:/], [Elton].

Elton: *Oi*? [Sorry?]

Teacher: I knew [/nju:/].

Elton: I knew [/nju:/] other form. But was good for me.

Teacher: Did you understand my corrections?

Elton: Hmmm. Not 100% (*cem por cento* [a hundred per cent]). I need *rever*?

Teacher: Review.

Elton: Review next [/nest/] weekend. I need *reescrever*?

Teacher: Rewrite.

Elton: Rewrite? Hmmm. [It's so] simple. [laughter] *Tem hora que a gente não acredita* [Sometimes we can't believe it]. [laughter] Rewrite my test [text] and remember to incluse?

Teacher: To include?

Elton: *Lembrar de incluir*.

Teacher: Remember to include.

Elton: Remember to include the other two aspects: vocabulary and grammar. **I feel myself shame because I already, yet, writing articles.** And **I feel necessity improve my writing about this structure** [/ˈekstruːtʃər/] **[uses his hands to convey the idea of something closed], the article.** I don't know, like I and my partners will go work together, with my object – comic books. [Mark] *sugeriu...*?

Teacher: Suggested.

Elton: ...suggested work with digital comic books. [...] I know, acknowledge *é entender*? [is it understand?]

Teacher: Understand.

Elton: Understand with [if] I will go work with my partners. **I don't acknowledge. I feel blocked. [...] It's very strange because I work with fanzines, comic books. I read in my time free. I used two [fanzines] in my schools, but here I blocked [clenches his fists, pulls them closer to his body and shakes his fists]**, and **I think... [opens his arms to express he is disconcerted] [laughter] I don't understand *como*?**

Teacher: How.

Elton: *Como isto será, isto ocorrerá*?

Teacher: How it will be.

Elton: **How it will be** this *parceria*?

Teacher: Partnership.

Elton: Partnership, my partners. […] I have *resolver*?

Teacher: To solve.

Elton: I have to solve work: physic comic books or digital.

Teacher: Or both. You can use both. […]

Elton: I feel *motivado*.

Teacher: Motivated.

Elton: **I feel motivated before writing the first** [/fɪst/] **version** [/ˈvesɪən/] **LLP [puffs out his cheeks and raises his arms while shaking them, then lowers them, looks down, while his facial expressions show discomfort].** Oh, before [mumbles something]… Before the writing *mesmo com*?

Teacher: Even with.

Elton: **Even with the basic wrong, wrongs, I feel motivated.**

Teacher: Yeah, even though you made mistakes, you were motivated.

(Class 18, Oct. 03, 2019)

Movement-image 3: Elton using his hands to convey the idea of structure
Source: empirical material

It is not possible to clearly see it, because the images are partially covered by the teacher's laptop, but Elton made the same movements with both his hands. In the first image, he seeks to convey the idea of structure, as something delimited, closed; in the second one, he clenches his fists and pulls them closer to indicate that his bodymind goes blank in the English course; in the third image, Elton opens his arms to show he is disconcerted, for he is unsure of how the activities should be done; and in the last one, among other gestures, he puffs out his cheeks and raises his arms to indicate that the experience causes him some discomfort. His communication through several semiotic resources, including his language repertoires and nonverbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, body posture or position, tone of voice, etc.), demonstrates the complexity of language construction in the classroom.

This cut invites us to consider how relations of power materialize through language norms, bodily performances, and gender dynamics (Pennycook, 2018) – for instance, the extended speaking turn taken by a male student. The privileging of standard English, the valorization of verbal articulation over affective or gestural expression, and the hierarchical positioning of teacher and student are not neutral pedagogical features. Rather, they are part of a broader sociomaterial entanglement in which certain ways of knowing and being are authorized, while others are overlooked or silenced (St. Pierre, 2025). Attending to these dynamics, even briefly, allows us to reimagine language classrooms not merely as sites of instruction, but as spaces where power circulates, is resisted, and occasionally bends toward more ethical possibilities. In relation to cut 4, we recognize that phonemic transcription can reinforce standard language norms and, in doing so, risks privileging standard English over other varieties. However, in this case, phonemic transcription is used to illustrate the specific pronunciation challenges Elton faced, which sometimes led to problems with intelligibility in the classroom (Sousa, 2022). By highlighting these moments, the transcription helps contextualize the episode for the reader and underscores Elton's resourcefulness in relying on gestures and other communicative strategies to make himself understood. Rather than enforcing a normative standard, the transcription aims to document the linguistic realities of the intra-action and the adaptive strategies employed within it.

Elton's gestures – layered, expressive, and full of affect – reveal a deeper narrative unfolding in the classroom: one not only about learning English, but about negotiating identity, effort, and vulnerability within institutional spaces. His bodily expressions convey much more than the difficulty of the task; they embody the experience of being a language learner, where meaning often exceeds the bounds of verbal language (Canagarajah, 2018a). His emotional labor prompts a crucial pedagogical question: how much of this rich, expressive moment – this embodied struggle to make meaning – remains with the learner? What happens to that energy, those semiotic attempts to be understood, once the moment has passed? Such questions elicit a broader reflection on the temporality and fragility of language learning. Communication often unfolds in bursts – ephemeral, messy, and deeply contextual. Supporting learners in retaining and reflecting on these moments may require us to treat them not as peripheral, but as central elements in language learning. Instead of viewing gestures, emotions, and confusion as mere byproducts of learning, we might embrace them as meaningful signs of cognitive and emotional engagement that can be built upon (Sabota, 2025).

In the words of Bucholtz and Hall (2016, p. 174, as cited in Pennycook, 2018, p. 67), "the body has often been conceived as 'secondary to language rather than as the sine qua non of language'," and that implies a neglect of, among other aspects, nonverbal communication and sensory domains. This viewpoint diminishes the role of the body in communication as well as the diversity of embodiments that people occupy. When the body is present, it is instrumentalized in the sense that it is seen as a tool, instead of a crucial sociomaterial element that entangles with others so it can produce language.

Canagarajah (2018a), however, opposes this stance by elaborating on how verbal and nonverbal resources work together as assemblages in communicative activities. In cut 4 and movement-image 3, there are examples of several resources, besides linguistic ones, on which Elton relied so he could express his ideas. In order to expand our perspective, Canagarajah (2018a) then proposes looking at semiotic resources as part of spatial repertoires embedded in situated environments. In keeping with this notion, "the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories" are deployed according to the particularities of each place and situation (Pennycook; Otsuji, 2015, p. 83, as cited in Canagarajah, 2018a, p. 275). Students become immersed and absorbed in the space of the classroom, and there "experience, perception, feeling – all of these are movements, and each of them contributes" to their language learning (Manning, 2014, p. 166). As a geography teacher, Elton is likely accustomed to using nonverbal cues in the classroom, but it is not certain that this background alone explains his gestural expressiveness as a student in his English classes. His use of gestures might also reflect broader cultural patterns, particularly within a Western context where such forms of communication are often assumed to be shared and understood. Moreover, some of his physical expressions – such as puffing out his cheeks or clenching his fists – could suggest influences beyond his teaching experience, potentially linked to gendered forms of communication. Rather than attributing his gestural behavior solely to his role as a teacher, it may thus be more accurate to view it as shaped by an interplay of cultural, professional, and possibly gendered factors.

Further, schools – and especially classrooms, the space where learners spend most of their time – have affordances that contribute to generating thinking and meaning in particular ways. Such understanding thus supports the performative character of space

(Barad, 2007; Canagarajah, 2018a), where "shared experiences, dynamic [intra-actions,] and bodily engagements" intertwine with processes of extended cognition and distributed language (Finnegan, 2015, p. 19, as cited in Pennycook, 2018, p.71). Canagarajah (2018b, p. 36-37) adds that "spatial repertoires, [including] all possible semioticized resources, may not be brought already to the activity by the individual but assembled in situ, and in collaboration with others, in the manner of distributed practice." Here we see, therefore, instances of bodily performances interlaced with spatial practices working to construct language (Scheifer, 2015).

An enduring educational practice that accompanies teachers in the classroom is their tendency to unreflectively try to fit students' language repertoires into predefined linguistic expectations rooted in standard language norms. The focus ends up being placed on what they lack (a lack that must be overcome) rather than on what they have to offer. Conversely, Jordão (2019) suggests that instead of looking at students' productions from the perspective of failure or lack, we should consider their creativity and intelligence as they dynamically adapt to communicative events so that some kind of understanding can be reached. In cut 4, as Elton "engage[d] in a variety of social practices with linguistic implications" (Pennycook, 2018, p. 132), some of which were discussed above, emplacing himself in a strategic, responsive, and creative manner (Canagarajah, 2018a), his multiple attempts to align with his interlocutor indicate that he was communicatively successful.

As one can observe in cut 4 and movement-image 3, at the same time the student talked and gesticulated: "I feel necessity improve my writing about this structure [uses his hands to convey the idea of something closed], the article"; "but here I blocked [clenches his fists, pulls them closer to his body and shakes his fists]"; "I think… [opens his arms to express he is disconcerted] […] I don't understand […] how it will be this […] partnership"; "I feel motivated before writing the first version LLP [puffs out his cheeks and raises his arms while shaking them, then lowers them, looks down, while his facial expressions show discomfort]." This exemplifies how thinking takes place through bodily movements, insofar as his hand and arm gestures facilitated his cognitive and communicative processes (Canagarajah, 2018a). In addition, from what he shared with the group, we can sense how exhausted he might have felt at that moment, and how challenging it was for him to make the effort to express himself. His entire body is thus engaged in the process of thinking and speaking, as he tries to "solve his problem" while also attempting to explain to the teacher what is happening. It is almost as if we can see multiple layers of concern intertwining as he conveys his message.

Here it is possible to observe language as shaped by sociomaterial elements that emerge in and through activity, as suggested by Canagarajah (2018a). In line with the arguments presented so far, Jackson and Mazzei (2025) maintain that a move from representation to performance implies a comprehension that language does not represent meaning (which is a static, reflective view) but rather makes meaning and ultimately worlds. Instead of the idea of *meaning-making* ("what does it mean?"), which is more fixed and derives from positionality, evincing representation, the authors suggest *sense-making* ("how does it work?"; "what is being sensed?"), which for them is more performative, connecting with thought in motion, as it entangles with language to make worlds, create realities, and bring life forward. They draw on Foucault (1983) to argue that since we are condemned to meaning, since we need to make sense of things, we should then turn the power onto it. This might be achieved by fostering discussions like the one presented here, redefining the objectives of our inquiry projects, and teaching in ways that acknowledge often-overlooked elements, such as those foregrounded in this article. In keeping with such a proposal, language should then be seen and treated as contingent, emergent, relational, and responsive to encounters (Jackson; Mazzei, 2025). As one can see, the authors' ideas played a central role in shaping this inquiry, driving us to seek to attune to semiotic relations that may "rouse the mind to new connections" and problematizations (Deleuze, 1994, as cited in MacLure, 2021, p. 503).

As Bartosch and Hoydis (2019, p. 7) address how humanism pervades education, they shed light on "eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idea(l)s of subject formation, critical distancing, and affective discipline." Together with traditional conceptions of language, in the case of Elton's semiotic production, these perspectives would then disregard part of his language repertoires (if/when considered, they would be seen as deficient) and his nonverbal communication (since that is not seen as "acceptable/adequate" language (Pennycook, 2018)) in the communicative event. This assessment would transpire as a consequence of the mind/body dichotomy, intrarelated and extended to other binaries, which in turn create the aforesaid critical distancing, such as rational/irrational, interior/exterior, objective/subjective, thus valuing the former over the latter when it comes to language. From this perspective, the subject is broken into parts, which are hierarchized when looking at their language production, instead of seeing their assemblagic (trans)formation in locus. In relation to affective discipline, mentioned by the authors, we should take into account

the disciplining of bodies, as the humanist classroom historically works to regiment, censor, and control students' performances (Blommaert; Makoe, 2012). In the language classroom, this is usually done through the disregard of the role that their embodied practices play in the communicative process.

We cannot stress enough how much we are entangled in an affective fabric in the classroom – as we affect and are affected by others. Daigle (2020) maintains that, for example, in this space, we are in the presence of others, we share the same space, soundscapes, and smellscapes, we perceive the movement of bodies, and we encounter nonhuman others. Therefore, in the classroom, we have several embodied experiences that might lead to different physiological responses. In other words, language education is permeated by sensory-affective encounters. This is shown by Elton when he shares his emotions, feelings, and sensations: "I feel myself shame because I already, yet, writing articles" – embarrassment over not being able to write as well as he wished; "I don't acknowledge [understand]. I feel blocked. […] It's very strange because I work with fanzines, comic books. I read in my time free. I used two [fanzines] in my schools, but here I blocked" – anxiety over his ability to make progress on the project; "I think... [opens his arms to express he is disconcerted] […] I don't understand […] how it will be this […] partnership" – concern about struggling to follow the activities; "I feel motivated before writing the first version LLP […]. Before the writing […] [e]ven with the basic wrong, wrongs, I feel motivated" – dismay at the fact that before writing his article he felt more motivated. Manning (2014) draws our attention to the fact that the subject is in-formed by their experiences, in the sense that relation and sensation co-compose them. For this reason, we should pay heed to the relations created and affects entailed in the classroom. In response to negative emotions, feelings, and sensations shared by her students, like the ones displayed in cut 4, Sousa (2022, p. 163) identified important attitudes for teachers to adopt that should, by and large, help learners:

> […] respecting their different language learning trajectories; valuing what they [know] and [do]; listening with care; being attentive to their needs and particularities; being open to their creative ideas; assisting them in overcoming difficulties and fears; boosting their confidence; and supporting their personal projects.

She shares in her doctoral dissertation that despite Elton's insecurities, over time he was able to focus on his potential, and that he developed an excellent project. In keeping with the arguments previously presented, MacLure (2023, p. 216) claims that we should try

> […] to think about how things like affect and movement, and sensation and atmosphere, and excitement and stuff all come together in what one might call an event of language. So again, it's trying to get past that idea that it's all about words and sentences, and even semantics conventionally, and trying to get at a more – I guess you could say synesthetic notion of language, as involving all the senses. […] [I]t's about feeling and sensing as much as it is about understanding and making sense in that literal sense.

This viewpoint encompasses the embodied activity of expressing oneself, taking into account that in the classroom teachers and students traverse a landscape of sense-making, which involves not just language but also several other elements.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This discussion reflects how we have been invested in challenging naturalized and oversimplified understandings of how language works in the classroom and discussing the potential of imagining and intra-acting with it differently. Drawing inspiration from posthumanism and other frameworks that share similar premises, we have been particularly interested in how the ideas that they propose open up new possibilities for reviewing and "rearranging pedagogic practices in a number of ways" (Bartosch; Hoydis, 2019, p. 13). For Camiré (2024, slide 57), for example, "material-performative pedagogies can help us appreciate existence as material, relational, and immanent, thereby challenging the *ontological monopoly* of humanism/positivism."

In political terms, in this article, as suggested by Jackson and Mazzei (2025), we tried to attune ourselves differently so as to make something else possible, actively participating in, engaging with, and intervening in the world. However, at the same time, by addressing communication from a sociospatial perspective (Canagarajah, 2018a), with a focus on embodied performances, we sought to show how a landscape of sense-making, in a classroom shaped by material-discursive dynamics, was constructed in situated and localized ways. Further, we could notice how alignment in communication demands that those intra-acting be flexible, adaptable, sensitive, and willing to engage with their interlocutors in semiotic events.

This discussion provided several examples of how bodily performances, especially those involved in nonverbal communication, are interlaced with material-discursive practices, creating our world as we know it. In addition, we could see the importance of considering embodied language practices in language learning, since the conception of linguistic repertoire as an isolated domain was disrupted, especially by looking at the intra-action of bodies in the classroom as a vibrant, generative, and agentive landscape of sense-making. Finally, stimulated by the reflections that this article entailed, we encourage others to also defamiliarize their mental habits to better "comprehend the manner, function, impacts, and limits of our thinking" (Braidotti, 2019, as cited in Daigle; Hayler, 2023, p. 4).

Looking forward, we offer a series of provocations for language educators interested in posthumanist frameworks: How might classrooms be reimagined not as spaces for individual achievement, but as ecologies of bodies, affects, artifacts, and discourses? In what ways can teachers become more attuned to nonverbal, affective, and material expressions of learning, rather than prioritizing verbal output alone? How might recognizing students' bodily performances and material engagements transform our understandings of participation, error, and success in language education? These questions aim to open space for experimentation, hesitation, displacement, and becoming within the language classroom. In doing so, we hope to support the ongoing shift toward pedagogical practices that are more ethical, responsive, and attuned to the complexity of life in all its forms.

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