



AUTORES

Adolfo Tanzi Neto

 adolfofotanzi@letras.ufrj.br



Doutor em Linguística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica (PUC-SP). Professor no Programa de Pós-Graduação Interdisciplinar em Linguística Aplicada da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

Brian Morgan

 bmorgan@glendon.yorku.ca



Doutor em Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning pela University of Toronto. Senior Scholar, English Department, Centre for Research in Language and Culture Contact, Glendon College/York University.

Christine Siqueira Nicolaides

 cnicolaides@unisinos.br



Doutora em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Professora do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística Aplicada da Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS) e do Programa Interdisciplinar de Pós-Graduação em Linguística Aplicada da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

COMO CITAR

Tanzi Neto, A. T., Morgan, B., & Nicolaides, C. S. (2021). Social transformation through critical literacies: emerging priorities for contemporary Applied Linguistics. *Calidoscópico*, 19(4): 431-435. 10.4013/cld.2021.194.00

FLUXO DA SUBMISSÃO

Submissão: 03/01/2022

Aprovação: 04/01/2022

DISTRIBUÍDO SOB



Social transformation through critical literacies: emerging priorities for contemporary Applied Linguistics

More than 5 million lives have been lost around the globe so far due to the COVID-19 virus since the pandemic started in December 2019^[1]! This may even sound humdrum at this point, but as language educators and researchers, we could not start this text in any other way. Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an Irish philosopher, stated that “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” Regrettably, as Mattos (2020) has observed from the enunciative locus of Brazil, the (post) memory of historical folly continues to haunt us:

History repeats itself... back and forth like child’s play... The recent history of humanity is full of abominable events. If we look only at the last century, we can enumerate two world wars, the Holocaust, atomic bombs, the so-called Cold War, totalitarian governments and Military Dictatorships in Latin America, including Brazil, the Chernobyl atomic disaster, the Vietnam War, and genocidal policies in several countries of the world, among many other atrocious and traumatic events not only for those who participated in them but also for the following generations. We need to remember! (Mattos, 2019, p. 17)

As educators, it is our responsibility to remember and try to understand what could have been done differently to avoid such humanitarian disasters and find new ways on how to pursue

and find pathways to prepare ourselves for (post)pandemic times. As language specialists deeply invested in the social value of our work, however, we recognize the professional risk of language-centric reasoning by which we might exaggerate the impact and relevance of our expertise. Still, we would argue that language (especially dominant language practices conveyed through government and media) has played a major role in shaping our perceptions and (in)actions towards the deep crises we face. Language, on its side, plays a major role in this whole process of dealing with such challenges. It is through language that we consume news, we form our opinions and make decisions. It is through language that we survive from the day we are born till the day we die since it is through language that we interact and are affected, as much as we affect people around us. Spinoza, a philosopher from the XVIII century, who has challenged cognitive models in his time (Rocha in Merçon, 2009) enlightened us with the paramount importance of affect in the lives of human beings. What we refer to here is a concept of affect that is not restricted to felt emotions; we see affect as also a source of agency, a force that moves us towards and away from worldly phenomena, and an intensity that shapes our interactions with others. In other words, human actions are not only driven by rationality but also by the “potência of affect” (Morgan, Rocha, & Maciel, 2021)

Bearing in mind then how we are constantly affected by others and affecting others as well, it is relevant to

[1] Information accessed at <https://alab.org.br/> on Dec. 23, 2021.

reflect on how we form our opinions, concepts, and how we “read the world” based on all the information we are constantly in contact with. Often this information is intentionally misleading, produced by people in charge of the decisions that affect the lives of millions. This has especially been the case in Brazil during the COVID 19 pandemic. Having said that, as language educators and researchers we find it important to reveal courses of action to help citizens to make informed decisions. Decisions should be based on facts and science, but at the same time according to each one’s principles, and most important of all, based on critical thinking – not simply swallowing and processing information that may misguide people to paths that may end up harming not only themselves, but the communities they are inserted in.

One way to expand this critical reflection is through what we call in the Applied Linguistics field Critical Literacy(ies). In the Brazilian scenario we bring the voice of Sardinha (2018), who states that Critical Literacy “aims to prepare citizens who become agents in a fairer world by criticizing current political and social problems, by questioning inequalities, and by encouraging actions aimed at changes and solutions based on justice and equality. Such criticism takes place through reading, reflection and questioning of the messages of the different texts to which students/readers are exposed” (Sardinha, 2018, p. 1). Voices such as Sardinha’s are not often welcomed by government and education policy makers. Indeed, they are viewed as subverting what traditionalists believe to be an essentially apolitical, cognitive function (i.e., reading and writing) rather than what critical applied linguists describe as a fundamental social practice always implicated in relations of power and the collective futures they support. This high-stakes tension over texts reflects the current “literacy wars” (Duboc & Ferraz, 2020) taking place in Brazil, in which neoconservatives seek to reimpose policies in support of *literacia* and *alfabetização* — reflecting “back to basics” curricula (i.e., phonics instruction, rote learning) — in place of the openly ideological concept of *letramentos* and the types of reading for transformative agency, justice, and citizenship claimed by Sardinha, and perhaps most famously introduced to the world through the work of Paulo Freire. When we learn how to read the word and the world (cf. Freire) through a *letramentos* lens, for example, we recognize persistent illiteracy and inadequate public education as systematically tied to race/ racialization and poverty (see e.g. Juca & Mattos, 2021; Jorge, 2012; Nascimento & Windle, 2021; Tanzi Neto, 2020; 2021). Not by coincidence, these are the same conditions that characterize the Brazilian communities that have suffered the most during the current pandemic and through official language practices that have deflected responsibility from an effective, equitable response to the crisis.

While the key stakes and battle lines of a literacy war between Brazilian neoconservatives and social progressives are easily discerned, evidence of smaller “skirmishes” within the critical literacy movement are worth considering, particularly in the context of this special issue and its aspi-

rations for social transformation. As noted in an important, recent survey of literacies in Brazil (Monte Mór, Duboc, & Ferraz, 2021), the relationship between theory and practice — and between researchers and teachers — continues to generate tensions in the field. Is it a genuine partnership or instead a reinforced hierarchy, in which the scope of criticality developed by classroom teachers is subordinated to university-driven priorities (see e.g., consequential validity, Cummins, 2021), including the pressures of publication and how such pressures shape the circulation and development of theory? Immediate priorities and innovative concepts — neoliberalism, translanguaging, decoloniality, come to mind — can soon become saturated, over-extended and over-generalized to the point where they lose their explanatory value and relevance for classroom work. Yet, in a world in which teachers are overworked and underpaid, universities remain one of the few privileged sites in which critical, transformative possibilities can be developed, as clearly displayed in this special issue.

Given such tensions, what are the priorities and possibilities for critical literacy work, particularly for (additional) language teaching and language teacher education? Should we concentrate our efforts on the provision of pedagogical tools and techniques, (macro)strategies and post-methods (cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2012) or notions of curricular design that underpinned the pioneering multiliteracies work of the New London Group (NLG, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000)? Or, as NLG member, Alan Luke, has cautioned (Garcia, Luke, Seglem, 2018), do we need to recognize the contingent limitations of formalized models and their vulnerability to unprincipled appropriation. Witness, for example, the number of MBA programs in the world which promote “critical thinking” as an instrument for marketplace competition. Instead, as Luke recommends, critical literacy is best conceived as a form of identity work, requiring the development of dispositions, attitudes, ways of being and responding that are nimbler and more durable than specific applications. The latter option suggests prioritizing greater (self)reflexive understanding of *how* we read and the discursive/ideological factors that influence the meanings that we make in our textual encounters. This orientation to identity work involves a curricular shift towards “distancing practices” (Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005) and fostering ways to “read ourselves” (Menezes de Souza, 2011; Duboc & Ferraz, 2018) in our language work.

For the theme of this special issue, social transformation through critical literacies, a balance of both identity work and the provision of design may be most effective and relevant for our research and teaching. Careful balance also applies to the notion of literacy as a social practice, not separate from, but potentially aligned with or built upon cognitive and structural elements, lexicogrammatical proficiencies, forms of rote learning, or uses of L1 that might at first appear incompatible with critical work, but through local expertise, serve to advance the goals that define this special issue. And finally, a search for balance also applies

to the nature of our transdisciplinary theoretical investigations. To what extent are the field-external disciplines and constructs that inspire our imagination compatible with field-internal conditions and responsibilities? Indeed, the need to “read ourselves” in such encounters is crucial for the effective development of critical literacies that are both transdisciplinary and transnational, a particular strength of critical literacies in Brazil and the ongoing national and international projects that contribute to its evolution (Monte Mór, Duboc, & Ferraz, 2021). This spirit of transnational dialogue and innovation underlies the continuing global importance of Brazilian critical language work.

It is in this spirit, celebrating three decades of the existence of the Brazilian Association of Applied Linguistics (ALAB), that the journal *Calidoscópico* publishes this special issue dedicated to *social transformation through critical literacies*. This issue presents articles with strong connections between specific and contingent literacy practices and the social outcomes they seek to advance or mediate through their conceptual and curricular implementation. The articles in this issue include research-based (or research-informed) discussion of the theoretical and transdisciplinary resources required to bring about change or mitigate/subvert specific forms of oppression. Before commenting on each of the articles presented in this special issue, though, it is important to describe a little about ALAB’s influence in terms of implementation and promotion of Applied Linguistics in Brazil. ALAB[1] was founded on July 26, 1990, with the objective of (re)constructing a dynamic academic-scientific and investigative locus of studies and reflections in the Applied Linguistics area. Applied Linguistics is understood here as an area of research concerned with situated language contexts and practices and the development of studies that vary from (additional) language learning to other diverse settings such as workplaces and schools, and within families, communities, and the broader society. It is not Linguistics *Applied*, as famously argued by Henry Widdowson (2000). Applied Linguistics has established its own theories and domains of expertise with a keen eye towards the dialogic relationship between language and society.

The first article of this issue exemplifies the dialogical, socially engaged focus of critical applied linguistics. In their paper, Liberali (PUCSP) and Tanzi Neto (UFRJ) discuss the production of democratic social spaces through an engaged multiliteracy project (Digitmed Program/Brazil) for agency transformation in Brazil. The project promotes critical-collaborative interventions with private and public schools (at municipal and state levels) in a university-school-community partnership that investigates the human development of its participants through agency and engaged multiliteracies.

“In a world in which teachers are overworked and underpaid, universities remain one of the few privileged sites in which critical, transformative possibilities can be developed, as clearly displayed in this special issue”

In the second article, Saito (UFBA) reflects upon how Critical *Trans*-literacies related to Colonialities of Power and Knowledge and Being can be addressed in a teaching certificate course. The author shows that as teachers engage in their own teaching-research processes, mediational tools (e.g., digital media and textbooks) can be productively used to provoke movements of thought and teaching-research innovation with the idea of deterritorializing and reterritorializing Eurocentric paradigms of modernity and rationality. In the third article of this issue, Beato-Canato (UFPR), Brahin (UFPR) and Jordão (UFPR/CNPq) seek to understand how the publication of memes on social networks has contributed to the construction of a narrative that discredits the *Patrono* of Brazilian education, Paulo Freire. In the light of the Bakhtin Circle’s theory of dialogism, the authors analyze memes about Paulo Freire that have been created and circulated by the Escola Sem Partido movement, which has been at the center of polarizing conflicts in our society.

The next article in the issue is by Rechetnicou (IFSertãoPE) and Vieira (UnB) and takes place at a rural school. In the paper, the authors discuss a critical literacy practice reflecting upon the possibilities and potentialities of critical reading by black women writers in an Elementary Education Center located in Ceilândia-Federal District (DF). Based on critical discourse analysis, gender and (de)coloniality, this ethnographic and collaborative research study analyzes the representation of a reading and debate circle. In the following contribution to the special issue, Nicolaides (UNISINOS), Braga (UFMG) and Vargas (Colégio de Aplicação João XXIII/UFJF) seek to understand the development of critical literacy for pre-service English language teachers. In their study, they adopt an approach that encourages greater awareness of language education related to the development of sociocultural autonomy and the critical use of technology. To do so, the authors created a self-reflection instrument to implement a pedagogical practice aimed at critical reflection; the instrument was created for thirty language students. In the sixth article, Aguiar (PUCSP/IFES) proposes a conceptual alignment between the theories of Critical Literacy and Critical Collaboration. The author discusses the origins of both theories and reflects upon how educational work based on these perspectives can contribute to the formation of critical and active citizens who seek social transformation.

In the seventh contribution to the special issue, Fonseca (UFOP) and Sol (UFOP) investigate representations of teaching and learning English from a critical perspective with special focus on its effects on the identity constitution of learners. The data collected through written and visual narratives from a Federal Network of Basic Technical and

Technological Education in a city in the region of *Inconfidentes*, involved ten high school students. The following article by Ahmed (York University), Morgan (Glendon College/York University) and Maciel (UEMS/CNPq) explores the potency of affect and emotionality of texts through the lens of Critical Affective Literacy (CAL). Utilizing a duo/trioethnography for their study, the authors discuss how this research methodology contributes to CAL principles and aspirations. In the last article, Fuzer (UFMS), Boer (UFN) and Nilson (UPF) develop ecological understanding and linguistic consciousness raising of Biology codes and concepts in the context of a high school and based on the reading of an important work of Brazilian literature. In the final contribution

to the special issue, Ifa (UFAL) and Ono (UFMS) interview Walkyria Monte Mór (USP), an important Brazilian scholar and language teacher educator, who has been a leading voice in the development of critical literacies.

We hope that in this special issue dedicated to ALAB, readers are inspired to reflect on innovative alternatives to face the challenges that await us in these uncertain post-pandemic times. We would argue that language plays a key role in reinforcing the status quo, as well as the potential to transform it. These realities and opportunities demand from us, as language educators and researchers, a careful and profound reflection on the many lessons of the past and their implications for a brighter and more equitable future.

REFERÊNCIAS

- COPE, B.; KALANTZIS, M. (eds.). 2000. *Multiliteracies: literacy learning and the design of social futures*. New York, Routledge. 350 p.
- CUMMINS, J. 2021. *Educating multilingual learners: a critical analysis of theoretical concepts*. Bristol, UK, Multilingual Matters. 464 p.
- DUBOC, A. P. M.; FERRAZ, D. M. 2018. Reading ourselves: placing critical literacies in contemporary language education. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, **18**(2):227–254. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398201812277>
- DUBOC, A. P. M.; FERRAZ, D. M. 2020. What's behind a literacy war? A discursive and political analysis of the neoconservative Brazilian literacy policy. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, **15**(4):436-457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2020.1800714>
- GARCIA, A.; LUKE, A.; SEGLEM, R. 2018. Looking at the Next 20 Years of multiliteracies: a discussion with Allan Luke. *Theory Into Practice*, **57**(1):72-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1390330>
- JORGE, M. 2012. Critical literacy, foreign language teaching and the education about race relations in Brazil. *The Latin Americanist*, **56**(4):79-90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1557-203X.2012.01178.x>
- JUCÁ, L. C. V.; MATTOS, A. M. A. 2021. Education in Brazil: a discussion of current problems and a call to action. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, **21**(2):311-332. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398202117982>
- KUMARAVADIVELU, B. 2012. *Language teacher education for a global society: a modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis. 168 p.
- MATTOS, A. 2020. História, Memória e pós-memória no Brasil de hoje. *Revista X*, **15**(4):15-20. <https://doi.org/10.5380/rvx.v15i4.76141>
- MENEZES DE SOUZA, L. M. T. 2011. Para uma redefinição de letramento crítico: conflito e produção de significação. In: R. F. MACIEL; V. A. Araujo (orgs.), *Formação de professores de línguas*. Vianelo-Jundiá-SP, Brasil: Paco Editorial, p. 128-140.
- MERÇON, J. 2009. *Aprendizado Ético-Afetivo - uma leitura Spinozana da Educação*. Campinas: Editora Alínea, 167 p..
- MONTE MÓR, W.; DUBOC, A. P.; FERRAZ, D. 2021. Critical literacies made in Brazil. In: J. Z. Pandya; R. A. MORA; J. H. ALFORD; N. A. GOLDEN; R. S. DE ROOCK (eds.), *The Handbook of Critical Literacies*. New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, p. 133-142. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003023425-15>
- MORGAN, B.; RAMANATHAN, V. 2005. Critical literacies and language education: global and local perspectives. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, **25**:151-169. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190505000085>
- MORGAN, B.; ROCHA, C. H.; MACIEL, R. F. 2021. Literacies in times of crisis: a trioethnography on affective and transgressive practices. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, **21**(2):333-369. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-6398202118068>
- NASCIMENTO, G. S.; WINDLE, J. 2021. The nexus of race and class in ELT: from interaction orders to orders of being. *Applied Linguistics*, **42**(3):473–491.

- NEW LONDON GROUP. 1996. A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, **66**(1):60-92. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.17370n-67v22j160u>
- SARDINHA, P. M. M. Letramento crítico: uma abordagem crítico-social dos textos. *Linguagens & Cidadania*, v. 20, jan./dez., 2018. Access at: <https://periodicos.ufsm.br/LeC/article/view/32421/pdf> on Dec. 23, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5902/1516849232421>
- TANZI NETO, A.; LIBERALI, F.; DAFERMOS, M. (eds.). 2020. *Revisiting Vygotsky for social change: bringing together theory and practice*. Peter Lang, NY. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b16730>
- TANZI NETO, A. (org.) 2021. *Linguística Aplicada de Resistência. Transgressões, Discursos e Política*. Pontes Editores. Campinas. 394 p.
- WIDDOWSON, H. G. 2000. On the limitations of linguistics applied. *Applied Linguistics*, **21**(1):3-25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/21.1.3>