

ЭМПИРИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Becoming an English Teacher: A Historical-Cultural Study of the Interrelationship between Emotions and Pedagogical Practices inside the Classroom

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This study aims to investigate the inter-relationship between the emotions experienced by a novice English teacher and her actions during a period of one semester of observed activities. The emotions are understood as higher mental functions that emerge in sociocultural contexts. As cultural products, they can develop and transform. Emotions also work as an internal organizer of our actions. In order to achieve the goal proposed it is used as data generation instruments: (i) experience narrative; (ii) oral life history interview; (iii) class recording followed by viewing sessions; (iv) interview on emotions. The results suggest that the participant's emotions can be organized into four categories, related to her students, her practice, the pedagogical coordination, and to her own profession. The emotions experienced lead the teacher to do certain things that may or may not contribute to her professional development. The connotation of certain emotions in negative or positive depends on the context in which they emerge.

Keywords: Emotions; English teachers; Professional development; Historical-cultural psychology; Applied linguistics.

Культурно-исторический подход к исследованию взаимосвязи эмоций и педагогических практик в процессе профессионального становления учителя английского языка

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Данная работа посвящена исследованию взаимосвязи между эмоциями, испытываемыми начинающим учителем английского языка, и теми действиями, которые она совершала на протяжении одного семестра, когда проводилось исследование. Эмоции рассматриваются как высшие психические функции, рождающиеся в разнообразных социокультурных контекстах. Будучи производными той или иной культуры, они могут развиваться и трансформироваться. Эмоции также выступают внутренними организующими факторами действий человека. В качестве методов исследования были использованы: 1) личное описание опыта (нарратив); 2) устное интервью на тему истории жизни; 3) видеозапись урока с последующим просмотром и обсуждением; 4) интервью об эмоциях. По результатам исследования, эмоции, испытываемые учителем, были разделены на четыре категории: эмоции, связанные с учениками; эмоции, связанные с преподаванием; эмоции, касающиеся педагогического взаимодействия; эмоции, связанные с профессией. Под воздействием этих эмоций учитель совершал разные поступки, некоторые из которых могли способствовать ее профессиональному развитию, другие — нет. Наделение эмоций положительным или отрицательным смыслом зависит от того контекста, в котором они возникают.

Ключевые слова: эмоции, учитель английского, профессиональное развитие, культурно-историческая психология, прикладная лингвистика.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to study the emotions experienced by an English teacher in the process of initial education and her pedagogical practice inside the classroom. It is an Applied Linguistics (AL) research that seeks in Historical-Cultural Psychology the means to understand the phenomenon under investigation. In Psychology, emotions have been studied for a long time but only in recent years, the AL field started giving attention to the affective side of human development. Some of studies, such as Aragão [2; 3], Coelho [10], Ferreira [12], and Aragão & Cajazeira [1] study emotions through the theoretical framework of Humberto Maturana, and his biology of knowledge. In education, it is possible to mention different studies with different comprehension of the concept of emotion such as: discourse practices [29]; being processual and influenced by experience [24]; as a state of the being that modifies his/her actions [16] and; as answers that involve physiological, experiential, and behavioral activities [27].

I explain emotions, for the purpose of this paper, through a historical-cultural lens, as “higher mental functions, culturalized and subjected to development, transformation or new appearances” (p. 651) [17]. They should be regarded in relation to the way the influence and modify human behavior in determined context [27]. Thus, emotions are strictly related to the individual’s activity.

According to Vigotski [28], there is a direct relationship between behavior and emotion. The author mentions that “[e]very emotion is a calling or renouncement to action” (p. 139). They are “internal organizer of our reactions that tighten, excite, stimulate, or inhibit these or those reactions. Thus, the emotion keeps a role of internal organizer of our behavior” (p. 139) [28]. One should consider emotions as “a system of previous reactions, that communicate to the organism the immediate future of its behavior and organize the ways of this behavior” (p. 143).

The emotions, as the other higher mental functions, are regulated by the brain, fact proved through psychophysiological studies [11]. This discovery, according to

the authors, invalidate the dichotomization of emotions in lower (of organic nature) and higher (of intellectual nature). Sanchez (p. 60) [23] defends that “emotions emerge in an embodied mind and a minded body, but ‘the mind’ is first social and then individual. The experience of individual emotions takes place while individuals are part of a social world.” The body, according to Clot (p. 88) [9], “is the organism added the language and the singular and social history”. According to her, each individual “has a different body because each of us present a social and subjective histories” (p. 89). A body, thus, would be “the organism affected by the sign” (p. 97) [25].

The phenomenon of emotions is an interrelationship between biological and social factors, experienced by the individual through the activity. In the context of teaching and learning, emotions arise in the discursive community that may be limited to school or expanded to larger entities that manage educational policies, for example.

It is in this activity, mediated by the emotions, in a dialectical relationship, that the individual identities are (re)constructed. The challenge of the study of identities lies in understanding the interaction between the individual and his social context [18].

2. Methods

2.1. Nature of research:

This research is aligned in a qualitative research paradigm. According to Richardson (p. 90) [22], qualitative research is characterized as “the attempt of a detailed understanding of the meanings and situational characteristics presented by the interviewees, rather than the production of quantitative measures of characteristics or behaviors.” Richards (p. 10) [21] lists a series of characteristics of this type of research: (i) the study of social actors in their everyday spheres; (ii) the search for an understanding of the meaning of their actions under their own perspective; (iii) focus on a small number of individuals, groups or environments; (iv) the use of a series of methods to cover different perspectives on the researched subject; (v) use of quantification only when relevant.

The researches in applied linguistics are, in their almost totality, qualitative [20], trying to understand problems, local and situated, related to the use of the language. According to the author, “the situationality and particularity of knowledge and the conditions of an ethical and political nature, and also those related to power in the production of language are the important focus, and not the search for great generalizations” (p. 17).

Another quality of applied research in contemporary linguistics is its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature. Moita Lopes (p. 19) [19] states that in order to account for the “complexity of the facts involved with language in the classroom, one began to argue in the direction of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework,” which would allow AL to “escape from pre-established visions and bring to light what is not easily understood or that escapes the research routes already drawn.”

One of the areas of occupation of AL is language teacher education, as in the context of the present research. Understanding the process of teacher education requires an understanding of this as a complex process that demands an inter/transdisciplinary attitude.

2.2. Context and participants:

This research was developed in an extension course on mother tongue and foreign languages of a federal university in southwestern Goiás, Brazil. The project serves the university and external communities, providing language teaching services at a modest price.

The course was created in 1996 and is situated in one of the campuses of the aforementioned university, located in the central region of the city. It has a secretarial room, where all the bureaucratic service is performed by a secretary and an administrative coordinator (position assumed by a Language and Arts professor). It also has a small space dedicated to the teachers, where they can store their materials and prepare their classes. The classrooms used by the course belong to the university. They are used at times when graduation is not using it, due to the fact that it has preference over extension projects.

In addition to providing quality language teaching to those who seek it, it also works as a teacher training center. The classes are taught by teachers selected through an interview and didactic test. Once selected, the teacher undergoes a pedagogical accompaniment before finally entering the classroom. This monitoring is carried out by a pedagogical coordinator, usually a teacher of the Languages and Arts course. The selected teachers go through a process of reading and discussing theoretical texts about the teaching and learning of foreign languages, for a period of observation of the lessons of veteran teachers and the elaboration of reports on the classes attended.

The participant of this research, Juliana, is a Languages and Arts student, who at the beginning of the data generation phase, was in the third term of the course. She was in the process of preparation to enter, for the first time, in the classroom as an English teacher. The re-

searcher accompanied the participant during this period of preparation and during her first semester of classes.

Juliana, before the decision to study Language and Arts, was attending the Law course, influenced by her boyfriend, who at the time, was also a student of such course. At the end of the first half of the course, she began to no longer identify herself with it, deciding, therefore, to transfer to Language and Arts.

At the beginning of the Languages and Arts course, Juliana became part of some research and extension projects, as well as the Interdisciplinary PIBID¹, which helped to build Juliana's identity. Today, she is participating in the University's English language extension course.

2.3. Research questions and data generation instruments:

The research questions that guide this study are: (i) which emotions are experienced by the participant during the preparation period to enter the classroom and during her first semester of classes?; (ii) how can these emotions be related to her practice inside the classroom?

To answer these questions, it is used as procedures and instruments for data generation: life histories, individual interviews, observation and video recording of classes followed by viewing sessions, and a final emotions interview [8]. By procedures, I mean the observation of classes, viewing sessions and transcription of interviews [7] and by instruments life histories, recorded audio interviews, recorded video lessons, and field notes.

3. Results

The data analysis suggests a range of emotions experienced by the participant that changes the way she behaves inside classroom and relates to the students and the social actors involved in the institution. These emotions are classified into four categories, as illustrated in table 01. Although divided in an attempt of a didactical scheme, the emotions are related to one another and influence their own appearance or extinction.

A first emotion observed, through data analysis, was anxiety and nervousness, as illustrated in extract 01:

(01) In the first day, I felt calm, because there was only one student. [...] But the day I was really nervous was the English 2 class because there were a lot of students, a lot of different people. There were people who didn't want to do activities in pairs. [...] It was a situation in which I got kind of nervous. (Viewing session 1)

The participant's nervousness shows in relation to the unknown of the classroom. Who are the students? How will they react? And also the amount of people in the classroom. Taking into account the proposal of Barcelos [4; 5] to understand the emotions as procedural,

¹ PIBID is a national program that intends to insert teacher education students in public schools to experience the reality of the educational context in Brazil.

interactive and active, we think about its transformation in the course of the teaching practice of the participant. The aspects mentioned will no longer be factors that will stimulate the appearance of emotions as Juliana becomes familiar with their classes.

The difficulties and setbacks encountered by a teacher may be experienced differently by her, depending on sociocultural factors, that is, causing different emotions in different people. In the excerpt above, we can see that Juliana says she was “calm” in the first class, due to the fact that she had only one student in the classroom. In the second class, which was the first in another class, the nervousness was bigger. However, we can see that this nervousness, which can also be characterized as anxiety, acts as a positive factor for the participant. Anxiety causes her to better prepare herself to meet the challenge:

(02) But, from the second class on, I got nervous before starting, but, I always think: “if the content is okay, I’ll get it. (Viewing session 1)

Juliana’s tranquility to face the challenge comes from lesson planning. In this specific case anxiety and nervousness, higher psychological functions, mediated the participant’s activity in her class preparation and performance. Clot [9] says affection has to do with “the work force, development of activity.” (p. 91) We can see this situation in excerpt 02 that emotion leads to an action. This action, in turn, leads to a transformation of action. Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between the two phenomena, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

(03) Relieved ((laughs)) because I managed to remember well. It was as planned, except for the part that the student left, even because I did not know if I was supposed to take a break. (Viewing Session 1)

Starting teaching as soon as the third period of the course has its pros and cons for the teacher in training. It is an activity that needs to have a very present mediation of the teacher trainer, who will provide the guidance that will enable the performance of the teaching activity. In this context, two vigotskian concepts are of importance: mediation and zone of proximal development.

The presence of the teacher education in this moment is of fundamental importance for the mediation of activities. This mediation would enable not only the development of the teacher, but also the emergence of emotions that would act as promoters of the teaching activity. However, the participant reports, in several moments, the non-existence of this mediation.

(04) No ↑. Yeah, we had to do the lesson plan ↑ (+) and send it to the coordinator. And then he would give the feedback ↑, bu:::t, and I started doing it at the beginning but I had 4 classes, it was a lot. I had to do three lesson plans ↑, because (+)> two of them were repeated, right. The content

was the same. But after a while, I saw that I was not going to be able to do all of them with an A in advance, because the first class of the week I gave was Monday, and the last was Saturday. So I did not have a day to take and do all the classes of the week. I was doing it during the week. I could not do everything at once. And then, when I sent them I never received feedback ↑, then I stopped sending. (Viewing Session 3)

In excerpt 04, the participant reports that she did not receive a feedback on the planning of classes that she sent for her pedagogical coordination. The frustration caused by this feeling of neglect on the part of the institution, materialized in the figure of the coordinator, modifies the Juliana’s actions. She was struggling to write and send the lesson plans but now she stopped doing it, as you can also notice in excerpt 05:

(05) That made me stress too much... having to do that, rushing to do that, and then I saw that there was no feedback, so I said, oh, I’m not going to do it. And even after a while, I was not doing the lesson plan in that model required anymore. (Viewing Session 3)

Golombek and Klager [13] call the attention to the need of introducing and mediating new tools or signs to support the qualitative transformation of the mental activity of novice teachers.

Besides the insecurity that this fact can bring to the teacher in process of education, there is also the question of the stress that this activity brings to Juliana. According to her, she had a great stress load to do the advance planning for the submission to the coordination. However, this stress could not be shown in her teaching practice or in her relationship with the institution, which is in a position of higher hierarchy. This practice confirms the understanding of teaching as an emotional labor, which, in the words of Tsang [26], refers to professions that require the handling of emotions and their expression in order to construct a specific image.

The pedagogical meetings, which took place every fifteen days, revolved around the discussion of grammar teaching, as illustrated in excerpt 06:

(06) Our meetings were being very (+) we were seeing grammar (+) in the pedagogical meetings. And, it was being very tiring ((laughs)) and nothing productive. On Saturday afternoon, you were already tired. Wow, it was very tiring. Even at the last pedagogical meeting, what happened was to speak of proof, the order of the exercises first, grammar, vocabulary, then the most difficult things. Eh, well, even we spoke, this had to have been the first pedagogical meeting. It was very useful to us. (Viewing Session 3)

The “In training language teachers”, according to Juliana, needed information related to classroom management. Without this mediation of the teacher educator, the teachers of the extension project were lost, according to the participant.

Another moment that functions as a growth point [15] to Juliana is her perception of students’ attitudes toward the subject:

(07) But, I realized (...) I realized that even the students themselves (+) do not give much importance, they leave it aside, they do not struggle. (Viewing Session 3)

The authors define “growth points” as moments of dialectical instances in which an individual can arrive at terms of development, starting from the contradiction generated by that specific moment. These contradictions generate instability or cognitive-emotional dissonance. However, with responsive mediation, these growth points can create conditions for professional development [15].

Juliana realizes that students do not value the English language subject. However, she states that she was able to do her part, showing an emotion related to her fulfilled duty. This causes her to reflect and think more about her own classes, in order to captivate her students. This is a concern that goes beyond Juliana’s classroom. Many teachers have the same complaint about students and education authorities. The English language is set aside in relation to other disciplines. The teacher feels uncomfortable. It may even be possible to say that she is frustrated with the situation.

(08) Because the students do not take it seriously (...) I want to change the activities, because in the first two months I had no idea what to do. (...) Then, in the second two months, I already did different. I prepared some activities for them to do. (viewing session 3)

This frustration concerning students’ behavior leads Juliana to think about changes in the style of activities and her class in order to improve their engagement in the classroom. He mentions that in the first two months of activities, she had no idea what to do. However, this anxiety and the feeling of not knowing what to do – as mentioned previously – makes the teacher develop a reflexive side that will aid in her academic development.

Fear of exposure is a very present emotion in the teacher’s practice. Juliana says that at the beginning of her teaching career, she was very concerned about her image. She would “be ashamed” if she was not able to answer students’ questions:

(09) I’ve always (+) told you, so I kept thinking about myself a lot. Because you’re exposed there, you’re in front of the students. And I worried, at first, mainly, I was very worried about myself. With what I was going to say, if I was going to be embarrassed, if I was not going to know how

to answer something. And then I started to get rid of it and worry more about the students, how to teach them. I worry about their learning. (Interview on emotions)

This preoccupation with her image gave place to a preoccupation with students’ learning. This transformation in the teacher’s practice and emotions corroborates the characterization of emotions as procedural and context dependent.

Finally, I mention one last emotional moment for Juliana. According to her, it happened on the occasion of teachers’ day when she got a gift from one of her students. It was a moment of great emotional load for her, for her did not think of herself as a teacher until that moment.

(10) J: When I got gift from teachers’ day. ((laughs))

E: How did you feel?

J: I was surprised because I was not expecting it, because, maybe I did not think of myself as a teacher. So, it did not even occur to me that anyone could (+) remember me, give me something for that, for that reason. (Viewing session 4)

It is possible to summarize the emotions experienced by Juliana in four categories related: i) to the students; ii) to the institution (in the figure of the coordination); iii) to her own image and; iv) to the profession.

When we observe the chart with Juliana’s emotions, it is possible to notice a predominance of emotions that, at a first sight, might be considered as negative. But, when considered through the lens of this research, they lead to actions that contribute to the development of the participant’s pedagogical practice. It is relevant to mention that it is not in every context that this relationship happens.

The lack of assistance from the pedagogical coordination as well as the relationship with the students causes Juliana to develop anxiety, frustration and anger. These emotions play a role of mediation of the participant’s practice, making it assume positions that will have direct relation with the process of identity construction. Juliana, who at the time of the beginning of this research was studying the third period of the literature course, had not yet had any contact with pedagogical disciplines in the field of applied linguistics. The selection to act as an extension project scholar, in which she works as an English teacher, consists of writing an essay in English and presenting a fifteen minutes micro-class in English. Thus, he did not have any type of pedagogical training prior to his performance.

English language teaching books and websites have been a safe haven for the participant by providing classroom models and activities that can be replicated in their classes so that they can feel more comfortable in their classroom and pass, Also, this sense of comfort for your students. This search for information, investment in his own training shows a maturation of Juliana, who approaches a presupposed identity for an English-speaking teacher, to develop a critical-reflective professional role.

Aragão and Cajazeira [1], following a theoretical framework based on the studies of the biologist Humberto Maturana, proposes that “changes in emotions lead us to other actions which, interpellated by language in the reflexive process, help us to deal differently with our identities and our teaching/learning environments.” (p. 121) The analysis of the data of the participant in question is in line with this proposition, showing how emotions are intrinsically related to the domain of practice and, thus, to the process of (re) constructing identities within the classroom.

4. Conclusion

The experience of emotions during the period of the research shows a direct relation with the identities (re) constructed by Juliana. They play the role of mediating the participant’s action in the classroom. It is possible to affirm that emotions such as anxiety, sadness and anger are frequent in the teacher’s practice. These emotions, related to her own teaching practice, her relationship with the students and the pedagogical coordination of the course, lead Juliana to reflect on her role as an English teacher.

The students’ perception of the teacher plays an important role in their practice. At various times, Juliana claims to be concerned about how the students will view the classroom. This belief that demonstrating a certain image in the classroom will influence the way students

react in their presence generates new emotions that, in turn, mediate new actions, generating new identities.

As the teaching activity is being developed, Juliana is creating new concerns, linked to the emotions she experiences. The restlessness with its image gives rise to the interest for the learning of its students, investing more in the preparation of its classes, in order to contribute to this process of teaching and learning.

The search for an understanding of the domain of teacher affectivity is a complex moment in which the number of teachers leaving the classroom increases due to health problems related to their emotions. Finally, it is important to mention that the understanding generated by this work is located in the context of Juliana’s work, thus justifying the need for new studies such as this in different professional contexts, such as the public school, private language courses and courses of teacher education.

The data of Juliana corroborate with the conception of emotions as higher psychological functions that arise from the interaction of the individual with his community of practice and that guide the action of the individual [14].

In order to better understand the education process of language teachers it is important to investigate the inter-relationship between emotions and other aspects that have important influences in such process: i) the inter-relationship between emotions and the process of (re)construction of professional identities; (ii) the emotions of the teacher educator concerning the national politics on teacher education courses; (iii) emotions and teacher health in context of initial teacher education.

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