

Emotion across the LSP curriculum: A modest proposal

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In November 2024, Apple released a Writing Tools suite that came equipped with the first set of Apple Intelligence features. Notably, this new suite gave users the option to change the tone of their text to ensure that messages are communicated in a friendly, professional, and concise manner. To emphasize these new features, Apple correspondingly launched a humorous ad demonstrating how AI saved a man from embarrassment. Titled “Change Your Tone”, the ad featured a man who was frustrated because someone had apparently stolen his pudding from the office pantry. Upon returning to his desk, he starts an email addressed to the “inconsiderate monster” who took it. But in the middle of his rant, he is inspired by a “Find your kindness” message on a teddy bear on his desk. With the assistance of the Apple Intelligence Writing Tool, he then revises his email to a friendlier tone. Shortly afterwards, a co-worker returns the pudding, complimenting his “beautiful words”, and he finally gets to enjoy his snack. I relate this anecdote for several reasons. First, given the office context, the email communication in the ad reminds us of the ongoing need to develop specialized skills with the right affective cadence in our writing. Equally important to note is how this message was communicated through a video commercial, thereby highlighting the multimodal nature of advertising. But also embedded somewhat tacitly in this commercial is the neoliberal-oriented message that Apple Intelligence can make you a better employee. In my own work on linguistic entrepreneurship (De Costa, Park & Wee, 2016, 2019, 2021) along with my colleagues Joseph Park and Lionel Wee, I have noted that language learners feel a moral obligation to learn additional languages in order to live up to societal expectations; they feel compelled to add more languages to their communicative repertoire in order to stay economically competitive. And while the point about neoliberal demands being placed upon individuals will be revisited later in this article, I want to reinforce my primary message: emotions matter; and for that very reason, I

maintain that emotions should become part of the language for specific purposes (LSP) landscape.

According to Gunnarsson (1997), the study of LSP was undertaken in a language-based functionalist theoretical framework, with emphasis on the general characteristics (lexicon, syntax, style) of different sublanguages. She observed that while earlier LSP research was language-based and product-oriented, later work – developed from an Anglo-American tradition – was more global and focused on text-based analysis of different genres. This development, in turn, resulted in a sprouting of ‘writing across the curriculum’ courses in English-speaking countries. While I do not dispute the inroads that work in LSP in general and ESP in particular have made, I would like to put forward the notion of ‘emotion across the curriculum’. In full disclosure, I am not a LSP scholar. Rather, as a critical applied linguist, my primary area of inquiry is emotion, identity and ideology in language learning and teaching. However, I am also the co-editor of *TESOL Quarterly* (an official journal of TESOL International) and the president of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL). The privilege of being a journal editor and president of a professional organization has afforded me the opportunity to examine trends across the broader field of applied linguistics to which LSP belongs. In addition, while LSP examines different sublanguages (e.g., medical, economic, legal and technical sublanguages), my own scholarship has mainly been in the domain of second language acquisition (SLA) and second language teacher education (SLTE); at my home institution, I am jointly appointed in two departments: the Department of Linguistics, Languages, & Cultures (my primary academic home) and the Department of Teacher Education (my secondary academic home). For this reason, the examples that I draw on and the work that I cite in this article appear mostly in the SLA and SLTE literature. Having said that, I have always been a strong proponent of transdisciplinary work (see De Costa, 2010), and it is in this spirit of promoting transdisciplinarity that I situate my argument.

As noted, communication is undeniably multimodal in nature, as illustrated in the Apple example discussed earlier. In keeping with this multimodal reality, it is not surprising that Mauranen (2022) recently and provocatively queried, “Where is spoken interaction in LSP?” As she astutely observed, universities are increasingly obsessed with their institutional rankings – further evidencing the neoliberal demands within education to which I alluded earlier. Such competitive rankings, Mauranen adds, have created

immense pressure on academics to publish in high-ranking international journals and this has resulted in deep investments by universities in the development of staff and student research writing skills. The casualty of such competitiveness appears to be the development of speaking (e.g., presentation) skills that have been relegated in importance. I invoke Mauranen to emphasize the emotional pressures encountered by academics and students in neoliberally-driven universities. Such pressures and their consequences warrant investigation in LSP.

In another recent *Ibérica* publication, and commenting on the recent AI explosion, Nesi (2024) lamented the impossibility of tracing the sources of the huge quantities of internet texts that language learning models (LLMs) such as Chat GPT draw on. Like it or not, generative AI (GAI) is here to stay, with Apple Intelligence being just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Of particular concern is the way that voluminous videos and other semiotic resources have inundated social media, workplaces, educational settings and a host of other public and private domains. A good case in point is the recent 2024 United States presidential elections. In the lead up to the elections, there was intense speculation about how the dark web was capitalizing on voter frustration with the Biden administration to skew election outcomes. And while we would like to think that voters act on bare facts, the truth is that voting (and this phenomenon is not exclusive to the US) is very much an affective affair because the electorate is often swayed by appeals to people's affect. Again, the LSP agenda could be expanded to focus on how GAI-generated political discourse impacts the emotions of voters. Such a line of inquiry would add to the growing body of research on GAI and emotions (e.g., Farangi et al. 2024).

Thus far I have offered some possibilities for future LSP investigation, but my broader goal is to propose the cultivation of critical emotional literacy in LSP curricula, in keeping with my suggestion to introduce 'emotion across the curriculum'. This curricular shift can only occur if curricula are (re)designed to address the emotions of individuals. Admittedly, emotions have long been a key topic of investigation within SLA and SLTE (for a historical overview of the research on emotions in these two lines of inquiry see Barcelos & Aragão, 2018). Approaching emotions from a critical perspective, Sarah Benesch's (2012, 2017) adaptation of Arlie Hochschild's (2012 [1983]) sociological work on emotional labor¹ and its subsequent application to SLTE has been particularly helpful in helping SLTE scholars better understand how teachers respond to affective expectations placed

upon them by their neoliberally-governed institutions. Note these expectations are not very different from the expectations placed upon professionals in various workplace settings. As stated, the frustrated employee in the “Change Your Tone,” Apple commercial was expected to live up to institutional affective demands placed upon him – he was expected to be a better employee, one who demonstrates kindness and compassion to his office colleagues.

So what exactly do I hope will occur in LSP courses? I would like to make the bold proposition that *critical emotional reflexivity* (Zembylas, 2014) be incorporated into LSP courses so that individuals taking and teaching these courses will develop the (meta)ability to first identify the affective demands placed upon them, and then to come up with strategies on how to counter these demands. After all, LSP looks at how language is used in different domains and, by extension, in different institutional settings. For investigative purposes, some questions worth exploring include: What emotional behaviors are expected of individuals by the institutions in which they are situated? How are these expectations communicated to them? What are the costs and consequences of attempting to meet these emotional expectations? How do individuals respond to emotional demands placed upon them? Earlier this year, as part of a special journal issue on second language teacher emotion labor that I guest-edited, my co-editor, Mostafa Nazari, and I called for an *emotion as pedagogy* instructional approach to be developed in language education programs (De Costa & Nazari, 2024). Extending this initial pedagogical call, I recommend that emotion as a topic be introduced in LSP courses. Specifically, I would like to invite LSP instructors to think creatively about how to develop their own critical emotional reflexivity as well as that of their students. Doing this will constitute a key starting point to injecting ‘emotion across the curriculum’. As to which emotions are to be emphasized in the curriculum, this is where needs analysis – a hallmark of LSP course development (Trace et al., 2015) – comes in. The findings of an emotion-oriented needs analysis exercise will subsequently be used to help develop the other key aspects of a LSP curriculum, namely, goals and objectives; assessment; materials selection and development; teaching; and program evaluation.

Up to this juncture, I have made some curricular/pedagogical recommendations with respect to LSP courses. Methodologically, LSP scholars might be interested in exploring how exactly to conduct emotion-inflected LSP research. Fortunately, there has been a growing and steady

body of emotion research (e.g., Coffey & De Costa, 2023; De Costa, Li & Rawal, 2018; Driver & Prada, 2024; Hillman et al., 2023; Nazari & De Costa, 2024; Sah et al., forthcoming; Prior & Haneda, 2023) in SLA and SLTE to which I direct the readership. Importantly, this pipeline of work also investigates emotions and their attendant consequences from the perspectives of different stakeholders, such as learners, teachers, and administrators.

In terms of data that would need to be collected in order to carry out emotion research, Prior (2019) identified the following data sources to illuminate our understanding: audio and video recordings; written texts (e.g., diaries, course papers); and digital texts (emails, blogs, vlogs, text messages including emojis and emoticons). These sources ought to be used in conjunction with (a) established research methodologies such as Conversation Analysis (Prior & Kasper, 2016), multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & Bezemer, 2023) and autoethnography (Liu et al., 2021), and (b) established metalinguistic frameworks such as Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) to analyze emotion discourse.

I would like to close this forum piece by circling back to AI. In a recent publication, Kuteeva and Andersson (2024) explored the diversity and standards in writing for publication in the age of AI. Building on this study, LSP researchers might consider investigating the emotional responses of authors with respect to acceptance decisions made by editors whose journals may have different AI policies when it comes to writing for publication. The findings from such a study could then be ploughed back into LSP courses, and subsequently inform how such courses are designed, because students taking these courses are often being socialized into specialized academic discourse communities. In other words, many LSP students are also probably emerging scholars who plan to submit their work to journals in the near future. They would thus benefit from guidance on how to deal emotionally with the review decisions on their journal manuscripts. Importantly, a focus on student/author emotions in LSP courses would not be inconsistent with an upcoming special issue of the Journal of Second Language Writing (to be published in March 2026) that will focus on emotions in teaching second language writing. In closing, my call to center emotion in the LSP landscape might not be as far-fetched after all. Perhaps it is about time that contributors to the three leading LSP journals – *Ibérica*, *English for Specific Purposes*, and *JEAP* – consider joining the vibrant and significant line of research on emotions.

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NOTES

¹ Benesch elected to (re)name 'emotional labor' *emotion labor* to avoid the feminist stigmas associated with the term 'emotional'.

