Editorial

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Emotion as pedagogy: why the emotion labor of L2 educators matters

1 Introduction

Since Arlie Hochschild first introduced the notion of *emotional labor* in 1983 in her pathbreaking book, *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feelings,* the stark reality that individuals have to respond to affective expectations of institutions placed upon them has not gone unnoticed. Many who work in the service industry for a wage have been able to relate to the tacit affective expectations of their employers. More importantly, these lofty expectations are not uncommon in increasingly neoliberally-oriented education systems.

Also relevant to understanding our lived classroom realities is the sibling construct of *feeling rules*; these rules often shape how one *should* feel and which emotions one *should* perform in a workplace context. Within educational settings, the enactment of feelings rules subsequently determines which emotions are permitted and which are sanctioned; teachers, for example, are expected to be empathetic, calm and kind, while feelings such as anxiety, anger and vulnerability (Zembylas 2007) are often frowned upon by schools as they contradict the social imaginary of what emotions teachers ought to express. Inevitably, teachers end up being emotional laborers who find themselves often having to reconcile tensions between expression of feelings – as dictated by professional circumstances – and their actual feelings. It is precisely this conundrum that constitutes the focus of this special issue.

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2 From emotional labor to emotion labor: a critical poststructural turn in applied linguistics

Fortunately, inroads into investigating the emotion labor of educators have been enlarged by a critical poststructural framing of emotion labor as it relates to second language teacher education. The critical applied linguist, Sarah Benesch (2012, 2017), has been instrumental in this regard, principally by departing from Hochschild's psychological perspective. First, Benesch elected to (re)name the construct *emotion labor* in order to avoid the feminist stigmas associated with the term 'emotional'. Second, she reconceptualized Hochschild's understanding of emotional labor by situating emotion labor beyond institutional demands to include macro-level sociocultural discourses and policies that influence forms of conduct in institutions. Finally, by adopting a poststructural and discursive theoretical stance, Benesch's understanding of teacher emotions stands in contrast to Hochschild's "modernist assumptions" of a "unitary authentic self whose essence remains unchanged across contexts" (Benesch 2017, 48). In other words, emotions (and correspondingly emotion labor) are not conceived as being static but as evolving over space and time – a point to which we will return later in this introduction. This last feature, that is the malleability of emotion labor, is significant because it affords language educators some wiggle room in negotiating the affective demands placed upon them. In fact, the ability to exercise one's agency is the focus of several papers in this special issue, and thus offers us hope within an educational landscape that is often perceived to be deterministic and unbending (for a detailed discussion of teacher emotions and agency, see Tao et al. 2024).

This special issue, which constitutes nine empirical studies and two commentaries, brings together leading L2 teacher emotion researchers who work in diverse educational settings that span from Argentina, Brazil, Iran, Japan, Macao (China), Mongolia, Qatar to the UAE, the U.K. and the U.S. Their international perspectives help us better understand how emotion labor is addressed by language educators across the globe, and more importantly, take into consideration how L2 teacher emotion research can be made relevant and applicable for frontline language teachers in diverse linguistic and socio-cultural settings (Yuan 2024, this issue), as the latter attempt to improve their pedagogical practices and pursue ongoing professional development.

Rather than summarizing each of the featured articles in this special issue – we of course invite you to read all the contributions – our goal in this introduction is to highlight several key issues that we view to be helpful takeaways for you. First, and as noted earlier, you will find that many of contributing authors align with Benesch's understanding of emotion labor. As a consequence, you will notice that a discussion

of power (or in many cases, power inequalities) is central as well as consistent with Benesch and Prior's (2023) call "to look at teachers' reactions to dominant discourses" (13) in different contexts. These discourses and their attendant effects often result in L2 teachers resigning from the profession (e.g., Acheson et al. 2016; Zhang and Zhang 2023), as many novice teachers are often unable to deal with the emotion labor demands of their work.

We are reminded of how the L2 classroom is not impervious to the harsh material realities that impinge on teachers. In de Olivera and Barcelos's paper (2024, this issue), for example, we learn of how their focal teacher participant, Maria, has to contend with the low status and devaluation of teaching in Brazil and the challenges posed by an authoritarian political regime that denigrates her pedagogical innovations, in favor of neoliberal discourses that value teacher efficiency and productivity over reflection and creativity. Together, the neoliberal and political demands ultimately take a toll on Maria's personal health. Relatedly, we learn about Silvia, Banegas's Argentinian focal teacher participant (Banegas 2024, this issue), who returns to the classroom after initially joining a teacher strike. Caught between a rock and a hard place, she faces criticism from opposing quarters, namely, her administrators, teacher union representatives, and fellow teachers. And while we may applaud Silvia's altruistic commitment to her students, we are made distinctly aware that her return to teaching is instrumentally motivated – she needs to work to support her family. Apt material reminders such as these underscore how L2 teachers' emotion labor is shaped by structural forces that reside beyond the classroom, prompting us to consider the importance of adopting an ecological perspective when exploring teachers' emotion labor (Lee and De Costa 2022).

Given that emotion labor is discursively constructed and mediated, how exactly can we negotiate it? The solution appears to lie in its discursive nature: because by default emotion labor is co-constructed and negotiated between different stakeholders, one path forward is to collaborate with others in order to surmount the pressures imposed by such labor. On a pedagogical and practical level, several papers in this special issue highlight the power of collaboration. In Song and Valentine's (2024, this issue) paper, we learn about how attempts by Valentine, a beginning ESL teacher in the US, to work with her content teacher colleagues were initially thwarted. However, through engaging in collaborative critical reflection with Song (a teacher educator), the former was able to gain professional legitimacy and subsequently advocate for her students. In another study, Hillman et al. (2024, this issue) illustrate how, through their collaborative reflection over many months, these professors at an American university branch campus in Qatar were able to resist neoliberal- and neocolonial-inflected institutional feeling rules and still honor their students. In a third study, Cinaglia et al. (2024, this issue), who inhabit multiple identities as teacher educators, teachers and graduate students in the US, explore

when it is appropriate to conceal their emotions, when to disclose them, or when to validate the emotions of the teachers they supervise. Like the other two studies (Song and Valentine; Hillman et al.), Cinaglia et al. demonstrate the power of *critical emotional reflexivity* – a skill that teacher educators need to develop among pre-service and in-service teachers.[1] Coincidentally, all three sets of authors also exhibit high degrees of emotional vulnerability as they talk openly about the emotion labor they endured in their respective collaborative autoethnographies. Importantly, these studies, alongside the other contributions to this special issue, all seem to suggest that the time is ripe to center *emotion as pedagogy* within L2 teacher education. Admittedly, nearly all the contributions posit the urgency of developing critical emotion literacy, with emotion labor understanding being a primary concern within this educational enterprise.

3 Emotion as pedagogy

As stated, L2 educators generally do have the ability to exercise their agency. In such circumstances, they are able to skillfully deploy the emotion labor confronting them to advance their respective teaching agendas. Put differently, teachers are generally able to manage their emotion labor "to align feeling rules with social and institutional expectations or to bypass and even defy them" (Benesch and Prior 2023, 3). However, for some teachers, bypassing oppressive feeling rules might not be an easy and available option. This is certainly the case in two of the studies: Nazari and Karimi (2024, this issue) and Zang et al. (2024, this issue). The power hierarchies that the teachers encounter in these two studies are quite different, however. In the former study, which is based in Iran, Nazari and Karimi report on how teachers' emotion labor needs to be understood as an outcome of inequitable power relations between department supervisors and English teachers who are recipients of such feedback. In the latter study, Zang et al. worked with two Chinese language teachers who were bound by traditional Confucian cultural beliefs that focused on maintaining harmonious social relationships and showing respect to elders. This cultural constraint, in turn, made it difficult for the Chinese teachers to engage in critical and equitable dialogue with their supervising mentor teacher.

But how then can we rethink and reconfigure inequitable power relations at the workplace? The contributors in this special issue provide ample viable suggestions. These include:

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1 According to Zembylas (2014), critical emotional reflexivity refers to the reflexive processes that help to "legitimize or delegitimize certain teaching practices" and also determine whether practices should be reproduced or interrupted (p. 211).

- conducting professional development courses that are structured around feedback provision (Nazari & Karimi)
- considering L2 teachers' perspectives toward emotion labor in relation to their collaboration with teacher educators, with the goal of creating more hospitable work spaces (Cinaglia et al.)
- introducing specific training concerning collaboration between ESL teachers with content teachers (Song & Valentine)
- creating spaces and support for discussion of teacher emotions and emotional labor (de Oliveira & Barcelos)
- having open dialogues on emotions and language use in ESL classrooms (Hopkyns and Dovchin)
- holding informal staff gatherings to boost trust (Banegas)

As noted, trust is vitally important in creating an emotionally safe space, especially if teachers are going to mobilize emotion labor in meaningful and constructive ways. Yin et al. (2017) operationalized trust in colleagues as "teacher's willingness to be vulnerable to his or her colleagues based on the confidence that the colleague is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (129). One way to establish such trust is to take a leap of faith and to make oneself vulnerable, as evidenced by several contributors to this special issue (Cinaglia et al.; Hillman et al.; Song and Valentine) who adopted a collaborative autoethnographic approach to investigate emotion labor.

4 Investigating emotion labor

As insightful as autoethnography might be in exploring how L2 educators wrestle with emotion labor, one also needs to realize that not everyone would be comfortable with high levels of self disclosure in the investigative process. A methodological alternative is through engaging in narrative inquiry. Two studies in this special issue adopted this approach: Banegas (2024) and Nazari and Karimi (2024). While Banegas drew on Barkhuizen's (2016) narrative inquiry method to create short stories out of the series of interviews that he conducted with his participant, Nazari and Karimi drew on Barkhuizen and Wette's (2008) narrative frame methodology as part of their data collection process. Not included in this special issue, but a methodology nevertheless worth exploring, is action research (Burns 2010). In a recent study based in Iran, Nazari et al. (2024) examined how four Iranian English language teachers used emotion labor as professional development work during their participation in an action research project. Analyses of their data, which included interviews, reflective journals, classroom observations and post-class discussions, revealed that

the teachers (not the authors, that is, Nazari et al. themselves) used action research as a mechanism for minimizing the gap between their internal feelings and external expectations. Crucially, the focal teachers developed the identity of a teacher–researcher by using the affordances emotion labor provided. Moving forward, we recommend that more applied linguists embrace action research in their investigation of L2 teacher emotions as part of a larger ongoing movement within applied linguistics to bridge the researcher-practitioner gap (De Costa et al. 2022).

On a different methodological level, it would be interesting to see more emotion labor work being done with teachers of languages other than English. Admittedly, both of Benesch's (2012, 2017) books focused on English teachers. And this is also the case with the majority of the empirical studies in this special issue. Two notable exceptions are Zang et al. (2024), who worked with Chinese teachers in the US, and King et al. (2024), who worked with teachers of five modern languages (French, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Russian) in the UK. The field would also benefit immensely if the highly portable construct of emotion labor was applied to new teacher populations. Fortunately, we are already seeing how emotion labor has been used to understand the experiences of volunteer heritage language teachers (e.g., Afreen and Norton 2024). Like Miller (2024, this issue) we also look forward to the construct being applied to understanding the emotion labor of administrators. To date, the only administrator-focused study emotion labor research we are aware of is Liyanage's (2023) investigation of the emotion labor of two higher education administrators in Kiribati who were shamed linguistically by their wider community because they elected to use English. Finally, given that we live in a technology saturated world, it would undoubtedly be helpful if more emotion labor work examined how technology has impacted the emotion labor of L2 educators. One fascinating case in point is a recent study by Nejadghanbar et al. (2024), who investigated the emotion labor of 15 Iranian teachers who felt intense pressure to promote themselves on Instagram in order to raise their professional visibility. The authors described the great amount of vulnerability experienced by these teachers. Future work might want to explore teacher vulnerability in light of greater mediatization within education, as well as growing expectations to incorporate use of generative AI in their instruction.

5 The need for theoretical diversity

Over 20 years ago, Michalinos Zembylas (2003) astutely observed that teacher emotions involve "matters of personal (private) dispositions or psychological qualities" as well as their "social and political experiences that are constructed by how one's work [in this case teaching] is organized and led" (p. 216). Put differently,

teacher emotions bear psychological and sociopolitical dimensions. In the interim, the field has witnessed an explosion in interest in L2 teacher emotions, driven in part by colleagues who work in the realm of positive psychology (e.g., Macintyre et al. 2019) and critical applied linguistics (e.g., Benesch 2012). While most of the articles in this special issue tilt towards the sociopolitical, we are pleased to see the field overall can be enriched by valuable insights from positive psychology. One notable case is the contribution by King et al. (2024, this issue) who illustrate how emotional labor research can support understandings of teachers' well-being and also be valuable in designing effective interventions to help teachers manage their emotions effectively. Extending Hochschild's (1983) emotion-coping mechanisms of *surface acting* (i.e., inauthentic or fake verbal and nonverbal displays of emotions that are deemed appropriate for a certain job) and *deep acting* (i.e., a genuine attempt to feel the appropriate or desired emotions), King et al. provide an expanded view of view emotional labor through a psychological lens by drawing on insights from emotion regulation research; they do this to better understand the various ways people perform emotional labor beyond the techniques of surface and deep acting (Grandey and Melloy 2017).

L2 emotion labor research can also be enhanced by adjacent constructs within applied linguistics. One example is the framing of emotion labor through a translanguaging lens, as evidenced in the article by Hopkyns and Dovchin (2024, this issue). Specifically, they highlight how translanguaging within the classroom generated feelings of guilt and anxiety within their Mongolian teacher participant because such mixing of languages went against her school's policies. Relatedly, another teacher participant from the UAE reported her desire to rely less on Arabic, lest her legitimacy as an English teacher be questioned. Such emotions of anxiety, embarrassment, guilt and shame are not uncommon among 'non-native' English teachers (see Song 2016), and often stir concerns over identity, belonging, and authenticity.

More recently, the field has also seen a more explicit engagement with race and racism, with some applied linguists such as De Costa et al. (2021) pointing out that 'non-nativeness' is often used as a euphemism for 'non-Whiteness' within L2 education. Encouragingly, race has started to be problematized within the emotion labor body of research, as evidenced by Stevenson's (2023) powerful autoethnographic account of the microaggressions and emotion labor endured by him as a Black English language teaching professional in the United States. We hope that in the future, L2 emotion labor researchers will continue to engage with issues of marginalization and inequity, in tandem with contemporary calls to decolonize higher education in general and English language teaching in particular (De Costa et al. 2024).

6 Conclusion

In a relatively short span of time, emotion labor has gained much traction among applied linguists who have elected to focus on the emotions of L2 educators. As we peer into the near future, we do not anticipate any let up in this vibrant line of inquiry. This unabated interest could stem from the fact that we live in undoubtedly precarious times. Precarity, of course, can take different forms, depending on where we are situated as educators. For some, it might mean having to negotiate an oppressive educational system that values high stakes testing; for others, it could take the form of draconian measures to silence dissenting voices that would otherwise speak up against bigotry. These discomforting truths nevertheless make it all the more important for L2 educators to embrace *pedagogies of discomfort* (Boler and Zembylas 2003; see also Porto and Zembylas 2024) that may inevitably elevate the levels of emotion labor of language teaching professionals. For this very reason, we need to press on with such important and relevant research that centers the emotion labor of L2 educators. Our special issue is a modest and valiant attempt at enacting a pedagogy of emotion that encompasses hope for all involved in learning and teaching languages.

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