

EMOTIONS, WELLBEING AND WORK ROUTINE OF LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATORS IN TWO BRAZILIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

EMOÇÕES, BEM ESTAR E ROTINA DE TRABALHO DE FORMADORES DE PROFESSORES DE LÍNGUAS EM DUAS UNIVERSIDADES PÚBLICAS BRASILEIRAS

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ABSTRACT

In spite of growing scholarship addressing emotions in Applied Linguistics, little research has focused on emotional issues of language teacher educators. In this article, we present the results of a qualitative study investigating the perspectives of such educators (from two public universities in Brazil) regarding their work routines, wellbeing and quality of life in their workspaces. Data were generated through questionnaires and interviews with 18 and 13 participants, respectively. Results point to three major themes: a) how the university workspace is imagined, and what is often said/unsaid about it; b) time-based identities; and c) relations between agency, guilt and pleasure.

Keywords: emotions; wellbeing; routine; identities; teacher education.

RESUMO

Apesar do crescente número de pesquisas sobre emoções na Linguística Aplicada, poucas delas têm focado em questões relacionadas às emoções de formadores de professores de línguas. Neste artigo, apresentamos os resultados de um estudo qualitativo que investiga as perspectivas de tais formadores (em duas universidades públicas brasileiras) acerca de suas rotinas, bem estar e qualidade de vida em seus espaços de trabalho. O material empírico foi gerado através de questionários e entrevistas com 18 e 13 participantes, respectivamente. Os resultados apontam para três temas principais: a) como o espaço da universidade é imaginado, o que é geralmente dito/não dito sobre ele; b) identidades relacionadas ao tempo; e c) relações entre agência, culpa e prazer.

Palavras-chave: emoções; bem estar; rotina; identidades; formação de professores

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing interest in emotions within the field of Applied Linguistics from a number of perspectives (BARCELOS et al., 2022). While some emotional factors had already been addressed in earlier literature on language teaching, learning and acquisition (e.g. KRASHEN; TERRELL, 1998), much of this work had focused on how affective issues such as anxiety and motivation, for instance, impacted those who were in contact with a new language, whether it be in natural or classroom settings (e.g. LA FORGE, 1971).

As explained by Barcelos et al. (2022), studies on *language teacher* emotions, in particular, have started to gain attention since the 2010s. Barcelos et al. go on to elucidate that the literature on emotions in regards to language teachers has “pointed out the need to investigate and understand the kinds of emotions teachers [feel] towards their practice, students, colleagues and their educational contexts” (p. 2). According to Barcelos (2015), such need is better addressed when we look into the concept of language teacher emotions as intertwined with that of language teacher identities, since the two constructs complement one another.

The fact that language teacher emotions have been the subject of specific investigations in Applied Linguistics since the 2010s means that there are still issues that have been understudied and that deserve further consideration from an empirical standpoint. In Brazil, more specifically, we have observed that much work that has been done has focused on pre-service and in-service English language teachers (ARAGÃO, 2006), with fewer

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studies investigating emotional issues related to teacher educators. Moreover, we feel the need to address issues that pertain to the academic and work culture of language teacher educators in the country, with focus on issues such as wellbeing and work routine, which have received attention in other contexts and for similar populations (TALBOT; MERCER, 2018).

Therefore, in this article we present the results of a qualitative investigation that sought to understand the perspectives of language teacher educators in two public universities in Brazil regarding the following factors: a) their work routines, taking into account the period before, during and after the covid-19 pandemic (which, as explained later, started when the study was about to begin); b) their wellbeing and quality of life in their workspaces. Our study is based on critical understandings of emotions (BENESCH, 2012) and identity (NORTON, 2000), and we believe that the questions we address are important not only to understand how these teachers have felt and reacted to their work environments and contexts, but also as a starting point for us/them to reflect upon ways in which they can collectively change their realities.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Emotions

Although there has been a growth in studies addressing the concept of emotion in Applied Linguistics and other fields, it is safe to say that a conclusive, consensual definition of this term is far from a reality. It is common for different academics to conceptualize the term in distinct ways, and to discuss how it is closely related to other concepts, particularly *feelings*.

In our readings of these terms and of their various definitions, as well as in conversations with colleagues and amongst ourselves, we have come to agree with Gomes (2022) that they refer to different but intrinsically related constructs. In our understanding, which is based on the distinction proposed by the American Psychological Association (cf. APA Dictionary of Psychology), it is first important to clarify that not all feelings are emotions. For example, we have feelings such as hunger, thirst, cold, tiredness, and so on, which we experience but which are not emotional states.

To us, a possible conceptualization of feelings is that they are conscious manners in which we process the ways that we are affected by different bodies or by our own body. When we feel cold, for instance, a body that is exogenous to our own (e.g. the wind or rain) shapes our sense in that certain way. When we feel hunger, the lack of food that we go through within our own body leads us to experience that sensation. Thus, we feel emotions, but not all our feelings are related to emotions.

Our comprehension of *emotions*, more specifically, is informed by scholars (e.g. DAMÁSIO, 2018) who have dedicated extensive time and study to define them. Still, considering its complexity, we may say that our conceptualization of the term is still under construction, limited, and convoluted. In our view, emotions refer to dynamic and complex responses which we have to stimuli that are external and internal to our bodies. We say dynamic and complex because these responses involve neurological, psychological, hormonal and physical aspects. Based on authors such as Aragão (2022) and Maturana (1998), we also understand that our different emotions lead us to act in different ways. When we feel angry, for example, such emotion will impact our actions – for instance, the ways in which we talk to others.

Even though these definitions are important, we feel that more relevant than defining emotions is to conceive them as *relational*. What this means is that the ways in which we experience emotions are related to other bodies (people, natural elements, sounds) with which we come into contact. This does not imply that our emotions are *caused* by these other bodies, but that they are *shaped*, to a certain extent, by our *contact* with them (AHMED, 2004).

In addition, we believe that it is crucial to understand that emotions are connected to *power relations* and *discourses* in our social contexts (BENESCH, 2012; ZEMBYLAS, 2005). This means that the ways we feel are often shaped by dominant discourses in our societies. A good example is Oliveira and Oliveira's (2022) analysis that a students' apprehension towards a black teacher's emotions in their study was related to discourses of racism in Brazil.

To sum up, our understanding of emotions is influenced by different approaches to the term (BARCELOS et al. 2022). Our interest in power relations and discursive aspects, as well as our view that emotions are closely

tied to identities, lead us to align with what we view as a critical take on the subject (BENESCH, 2012). Still, as explained by Barcelos et al., many of the perspectives that have been put forth to investigate emotional factors in various disciplines “could be combined” (p. 3), and we believe that our comprehension of the concept attests to that.

1.2 Wellbeing

Recent literature has started to look into the notion of wellbeing in language teaching and learning (MACINTYRE et al. 2019). The importance of studies of such kind is related to the facts that “Teacher well-being has been shown to play a central role in the quality of teaching and student achievement” and that “the teaching profession is facing higher than average levels of occupational stress” (TALBOT; MERCER, 2018, p. 411).

As explained by MacIntyre et al. (2019), many of the studies that have addressed the concept of teacher wellbeing have been based on Positive Psychology (PP), which is “devoted to the scientific study of how people thrive,” with the primary aim of helping people “live happier, more fulfilling lives by focusing on what goes well in life” (p. 28). Studies based on PP have thus focused on frameworks that describe what it means to flourish, such as PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment).

Scholars who work with PP have looked into issues and contexts related to teacher wellbeing, and have pointed to factors that are part of teachers’ sense of flourishing. Some of these factors are common to teachers in general, such as student engagement and relationships with colleagues, whereas others are more specific to the language teaching profession, including comparisons with native speakers and native speaking teachers (TALBOT; MERCER, 2018). Therefore, scholars working based on a PP framework have made important contributions in relation to the understanding of language teacher wellbeing and to possibilities of advancement in that regard.

On the other hand, some of the interests and foci that these scholars have shown towards emotion and wellbeing differ from our own. For example, while PP tends to center on notions of positive versus negative emotions, we follow Benesch (2012) in avoiding such a distinction. To us, more important than categorizing emotions as either positive or negative is to see them as “shifting and interacting, in relationship to the social context in which they are felt and/or expressed” (p. 8). We thus understand wellbeing as a situated and social (rather than individual) concept, one that needs to engage with the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the historical, political, socio-cultural contexts of teachers and students in different educational settings.

Our goal in studying emotions, identities and wellbeing in language teacher education is to understand how attention to these concepts may help us better navigate the complex environments in which we work, in ways that are respectful to such complexity. By constructing dialogues with participants, as we do in this study, we hope to collaboratively identify issues that affect their wellbeing (and ours) within their/our work environments, so that we may attempt to promote “small and subtle shifts in perception or understanding” of these environments “that in themselves signal change and might cumulatively lead to further change” (BENESCH, 2012, p. 52).

1.3 Identity

The theory of *identity* adopted here is that proposed by Norton (2000). Therefore, identity refers to “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). Such concept is closely tied to those of *investment* and *imagined communities*, which are defined by the author and by others in the following ways:

- Investment: sociological construct that complements the psychological concept of motivation, mainly because it makes connections “between a learner’s desire and commitment to learn a language and their changing identities” (NORTON; TOOHEY, 2011, p. 420);
- Imagined communities: “groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (KANNO; NORTON, 2003, p. 241). These communities “include future relationships that exist only in the learner’s imagination as well as affiliations... that extend beyond local sets of relationships” (p. 242).

Although the concepts were initially conceived as aspects related to language learners, more specifically, we have extrapolated them to include the identities of teachers and teacher educators. This has allowed us to better

understand how our participants construct their own identities as teacher educators within their workspaces, and how they position themselves amidst the particularities of these contexts.

2. METHODS

As stated earlier, this is a qualitative, interpretative study. Our aim was not to achieve generalizable results, but to understand some of the particularities of the contexts that were part of the investigation, through the voices of our participants. It is thus important that we also present ourselves as scholars and members of the language teaching profession.

We, the three authors of this study (two women and one man), are perceived within Brazil as white individuals, even though such perception may vary when we are outside of the country. We see ourselves as cisgender, middle class individuals, who have navigated the university environment in different ways, at different time periods, and who have constructed a history of fondness and gratitude with this type of institution, particularly in regards to Brazilian public universities. Two of us work in at least one of the two institutions where the study took place. One of the authors has worked at one of the institutions (which we will call University 1) as a postgraduate affiliate professor since 2012, and has worked at the second institution (University 2) as a full-time, associate professor since 2017. Another one of us has been a full-time, tenured professor at University 1 since 2015. The third researcher was an undergraduate student at University 1 for five years, and has just finished a master's degree at another institution. Throughout our trajectories within the university system in Brazil, we have witnessed changes in government and leadership, which have reflected different perceptions regarding higher education as well as different practices in terms of funding, affirmative action, and the role of the university within society. As we will explain later, we believe this involvement with higher education as a whole, and with the universities that were part of the study, was an advantage to our interpretations of the data.

The study was initially conceived in 2019, before the covid-19 pandemic. However, data generation only began during the pandemic, after a revision of the instruments (which was a consequence of the covid-19 outbreak). This information is important because it helps us to explain some of the methodological choices that were made, and also because it is crucial for the analysis of data. In what follows, we detail the contexts of investigation further, and present the participants, instruments and analytical tools that we used.

2.1 Settings

As stated above, the study was conducted in two contexts in Brazil (University 1 and University 2), both of which are federally-funded, public universities in the country. University 1 is located in the south of Brazil; University 2 is situated in the southeast region. Both of them have undergraduate and graduate programs in language teaching. At University 1, there are professors who teach 9 foreign languages (English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Polish, Spanish), and at University 2 there are professors of 11 foreign languages (all of the ones for University 1, and also Arabic and Russian). Both universities offer degrees in Portuguese and Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS, in the Brazilian Portuguese acronym).

At University 1, professors of foreign languages are divided into three departments: one of modern foreign languages, one of classic languages, and one of Portuguese (which includes Portuguese as a foreign language). At University 2, there is a similar division, with 2 departments of modern foreign languages: one of Romance languages and one of Anglo-German languages.

2.2 Participants

All professors in the modern foreign languages departments of both universities were contacted and asked to answer an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent out to all professors in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages at University 1 (n=34), and to all professors of the Anglo-German department at University 2 (n=14) who were effectively teaching at the time (for both contexts). This choice was motivated by the fact that two of the present researchers, as previously explained, work at the universities where the study was conducted, and thus we chose the departments to which we are affiliated for data collection. We also sent the questionnaire

out to professors at other departments who teach modern foreign languages and with whom we have a working relationship (n=5). These decisions enabled us to have deeper conversations with our participants (who are our peers), and to better understand their answers, which in turn allowed us to achieve more complex interpretations of our data. All invited professors work or have worked with teacher education, in their universities or elsewhere, at the undergraduate and/or graduate levels.

Of all invited professors, 18 responded to the initial questionnaire: 13 from University 1 and 5 from University 2, which, given the qualitative nature of the research and of the questionnaire itself, enabled us to generate a large set of questionnaire data. Of those 18 participants, 13 (10 from University 1 and 3 from University 2) agreed to participate in online, recorded interviews, which in turn helped us generate even richer data on their perspectives regarding their work routines, wellbeing and discussion of emotions and identity with students.

Participants who responded to the questionnaire were mostly women professors (n=16), and half of the respondents taught English (n=9). Languages that were taught by the other participants were German (n=2), Italian (n=1), Polish (n=1), and Spanish (n=5). The majority of the questionnaire respondents (n=13) had been working for over 10 years in higher education, and all of them stated that applied linguistics was one of their main areas of research interest. Other areas of interest reported by participants included education (n=7), theoretical linguistics (n=5), literature (n=3) and translation (n=2).

As for the interview stage, 11 participants were women, and 2 were men. The languages that were represented in the interview phase of the research were English (n=7), German (n=2), Polish (n=1) and Spanish (n=3). Eight respondents had taught for over 10 years in higher education, and research interests of participants included applied linguistics (n=13), education (n=5), theoretical linguistics (n=3), literature (n=3) and translation (n=1). Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their anonymity.

2.3 Instruments

The online questionnaire that was sent out and responded by participants contained 23 questions: 10 closed-ended and 13 open-ended. Three of the closed-ended questions focused on demographic data (language taught, main research interests, how long respondents had been in higher education), and six served as initial questions for themes that were addressed in the instrument, namely: 1) whether their work routines took longer than they wished; 2) whether they had time to engage in activities they found important for them outside of their work environment before the pandemic; 3) whether they had time to engage in such activities during the pandemic; 4) whether they reflect upon their wellbeing and quality of life when planning their classes; 5) whether they reflect upon their students' wellbeing and quality of life when planning their classes; and 6) whether students' emotions are something upon which they reflect. The final closed-ended question simply asked whether participants would be willing to be interviewed.

Five of the open-ended questions asked participants to elaborate on issues asked in closed-ended items. The other eight of these questions asked about the following factors: 1) how participants organize their time for personal activities (i.e., those that are not work related); 2) how such organization changed after the pandemic; 3) what activities they find important for their lives outside of their work environments; 4) how engaging in such activities reflects upon their teaching practices; 5) what factors impact their wellbeing and quality of life in their work settings; 6) which feelings they relate to their own processes of having learned the languages they taught; 7) which feelings they relate to their self-perceptions as bi/multilingual individuals (if such feelings exist); and 8) how they felt in responding to the questionnaire. For this article, we will focus mainly on factors 1 through 5, as well as factor 8. The other two issues (6 and 7 above) will be discussed in depth in further publications.

As previously stated, an initial version of the questionnaire had been designed in 2019, before the covid-19 outbreak. However, since the pandemic started before the beginning of data gathering, the questionnaire was modified to reflect some issues related to the health crisis which we, as a global society, were going through. Such restructuring of the questionnaire happened only in the second half of 2020, after we had better made sense of the complex nature of the disease and its consequences, which meant that the questionnaire was sent out and responded to in the first half of 2021. Still, we must make it clear that while the pandemic was addressed in the questionnaire and also in the interviews (as will be discussed later), our focus was not on solely understanding the

issues we investigated in light of the covid-19 crisis. In other words, we were interested in issues that had been part of participants' lives not only (or mainly) during the pandemic, but also before it started – and later on, with the interviews, as it was coming to a less strenuous period, after immunizations and the return of face to face classes.

Our analysis of responses to the questionnaire (which will be detailed later) served as input for the construction of the interview guide. Such guide contained 7 questions, four of which asked participants to further elaborate on matters we had observed in questionnaire answers, mainly issues pertaining to time, as well as reflections upon participants' practices and self-perceptions at work. The other three questions in the guide asked about the notion of pressure at work, participants' weekends and free time (including holidays), and whether they would like to add anything or ask us anything at the end of the interview.

The interviews, which were semi-structured and took place in Brazilian Portuguese, lasted between 34 and 94 minutes. They all took place in the first half of 2022, at a time when our universities were starting to go back to face to face classes, but still with some skepticism on the part of faculty members and students. Therefore, we decided to conduct the interviews online, with one or two of the present researchers participating in them (depending on our time schedules). The fact that our participants were colleagues meant that the interviews were mostly casual and friendly, and were thus conceived as conversations. This meant that it was common for participants themselves to sometimes ask us questions regarding our subject and our work lives (even when not asked to do so), and that at times we felt some of the questions had already been answered before we posed them. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

2.4 Data analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed first individually by each of the present researchers, and then collectively as a group. Rather than analyzing each question individually, our goal was to find themes that we felt were salient/important in the data. After initial individual readings and categorizations, we met regularly to narrow down themes and agree on those that seemed to best represent our readings and interpretations of the empirical material.

Our interpretations of the questionnaire data were presented at a major Latin American conference on teacher education in 2021, at a special interest group meeting led by two of the most well-known researchers on emotions in Applied Linguistics in the region. The feedback we received from participants was taken into consideration in our final interpretations of the questionnaire responses, and also for the development of the interview guide.

The interviews were analyzed in a similar fashion: first with individual readings by the present authors, and then with recurrent collective discussions to fine-tune our interpretations, which were also guided by the search for salient themes. Once again, as in the case of questionnaires, we were able to present our initial analysis to scholars who work with emotions and applied linguistics in our context, this time at a major Brazilian conference in the field of applied linguistics, in 2022. Such presentation – which also took place in a meeting of a special interest group on emotions and language teacher education – served for us to receive feedback and further reflect upon our interpretations of the interviews.

Before presenting our results, two notes must be made. The first is regarding the transcriptions of the interviews, which were done by one of the present researchers and three research assistants. Because our focus when transcribing was on the content of the interviews, rather than on structural features, we decided to edit linguistic surface aspects and to apply strategies that would facilitate reading (DÖRNYEI, 2003). This meant that we transcribed the material using writing conventions, such as sentences and punctuation marks. Moreover, we translated transcriptions presented here into English.

The second note we wish to make is that the fact that the development of the research took place gradually from 2019 to 2023 meant that we were able to look at the data and at our study gradually as the pandemic unfolded. This, we feel, enabled us to address pandemic-related issues, as well as other aspects of our data, in a more nuanced manner.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we bring an analytical account of our data. We begin by addressing responses to the questionnaire and the ways in which we interpreted them. This is then followed by an in-depth appreciation

of the interview conversations we had with participants, in which we explore the main themes that emerged in our readings and discussions of the transcripts. The quotes we have included throughout our analysis are from participants who responded to the questionnaire *and* were also part of the interview phase of our study.

3.1 Questionnaire data

Our recurrent readings of questionnaire responses led us to three main issues that are within the scope of the preset study: a) an understanding that at least some professors seemed to associate perceptions of their own identities to time-related issues; b) the notion that a lot of participants' duties and work were taking place on a last minute basis, especially during the pandemic; and c) the need to address feelings of imposture (by students and by participants themselves) in the language classroom (KRAMSCH, 2012). Other issues also emerged (such as different perceptions of what it means to be a bi/multi/translingual individual), but they are not within the reach of this article, and will be addressed in future accounts of our data.

In regards to the first of the three issues presented above (*identities and time-related issues*), what called our attention was that some participants seemed to associate the ways in which they were perceiving and feeling about themselves to the time they had for each activity and to specific identities that they performed. This seemed to be the case for nine participants, but such association was stronger for three of them. The examples below show this type of perception:

"There is no clear separation between the time to work and the time to not work. I do things when possible. This is bad, because my existence is an existence within work, and I constantly ask myself: can I be something else other than a professor, an academic?"

(Maju)

"I feel exhausted. Frustrated in apparently not corresponding to the expectations of students and colleagues. Worried about my routine as a mother, daughter, spouse, friend, etc." (Magnolia)

"Although I enjoy my work very much, I feel the packed routine as a professor many times stops me from doing other activities/things I'd like, especially in terms of spending more time with family and friends, and having more leisure moments..."

(Celeste)

The second issue (*last minute work/demands*) refers to the notion that unplanned activities which are due immediately (or within a very short period of time) are constantly asked of professors and end up taking much of their work and personal time. This was particularly evident for us in the answers given by 7 participants, and some illustrations of this type of response are shown below:

"At the moment, at home, I do not separate [personal and work time] well, I just do each thing when I can."

(Ella)

"Sometimes, there is an attempt to separate moments, but last minute demands come up (a meeting, a document to write, a non-routine activity which needs to be done), and what is personal is left aside."

(Celeste)

Finally, the notion of imposture was reported by 6 professors, most of whom revealed such emotions when asked about how they felt about their learning process of the language they currently teach at their universities. Although the question could be interpreted as if it were in reference to the past, these professors also referred to having such sensations in the present. Moreover, one professor discussed imposture in terms of her own academic production, which we interpreted as a reference to research, presentations and publications. The examples below illustrate this issue of imposture:

“I always feel that there is a lot that I still need to learn about the language I teach [Spanish] for me to be a good professor.”

(Milena)

“... the sensation of being an impostor does not go away so easily, it seems like a shadow that comes up time and again.”

(Maju)

“... I feel inadequate because I wish I was producing more.”

(Laura)

Two factors are particularly important in relation to the examples we have presented from questionnaire responses. The first is that the questionnaire was answered in 2021, at a time when the pandemic was very much present in our everyday lives. Thus, we thought that it was possible that the first two issues we identified in the data (i.e., feelings of identity being closely related to perceptions of time and last minute work being a constant in professors' lives) could be more related to the COVID-19 period than to participants' overall perceptions about their work. We therefore felt the need to address these issues further in the interview – and our results in this regard are presented in the next section.

Second, we are aware that the answers regarding the third issue we identified (notions of imposture) have much to do with the question that was asked about participants' feelings towards their processes as language learners. Still, the fact that some of the professors talked about this sensation as still present in their lives led to our understanding that this is an issue that needed/needs to be addressed. In this case, we felt that in the interview we could ask about how professors work with their students in regards to emotion-related issues (if at all).

3.2 Interview data

As stated earlier, our interview questions were mainly based on what we observed in questionnaire responses. This means that we asked participants specifically about our interpretations of the questionnaire answers (outlined above), in an attempt to understand whether our readings made sense to them. Additionally, we included more general questions, pertaining to pressure at work, weekends and free time and other issues that they wanted to discuss.

As it turns out, and as expected, our conversations led both to deeper understandings of the themes we had encountered in the questionnaire and to other issues that seemed important for us to address. In the present analysis, we focus our attention to three of the most salient themes that emerged in the data. These themes were: a) *discursive constructions of the university space*; b) *time-based identities*; and c) *agency, guilt and pleasure*. In all three of them, especially the third, we felt that there were (might be) subthemes, but we tried to construct relations between topics that emerged as much as possible, so as to create a broader understanding of the data.

Each one of these categories is presented below. Before moving on, it is important to state that one major theme that we encountered (namely, that of the specific effects of the pandemic upon professors' work routine and emotions) is not addressed specifically in this text, since we feel that this particular factor deserves an independent analysis in and of itself. We intend to present such analysis in a future article.

Theme 1. Discursive constructions of/within the university space: the imagined, the said and the unsaid

The first theme that we feel must be discussed is how participants actually understand the university space, and how they conceptualize such space in/through their discourses. Not only was this the most prevalent theme we encountered in the data, but it was also the one that helped us understand their responses to the interview as a whole. This means that such conceptualizations of the university were key for us to understand other topics that were discussed and the relations between them.

It is important to make a note about the concept of space. We use it not as a general term, but in a similar way to that proposed by Canagarajah (2018), who differentiates the notion of *place* from that of *space*. For Canagarajah, while place refers to a physical, geographical, bounded entity that is usually well recognizable, space is socially

conceived and closely connected to the notion of time. For us, this means that spaces are discursively constructed, based on people's trajectories, relations, experiences, beliefs, identities and emotions. Moreover, a certain place may constitute a number of different spaces, depending on the ways in which individuals conceptualize them.

All of the participants in our study presented conceptualizations of the university space in their discourses – and by university, we do not mean only the ones where they actually work, but the academic environment of higher education as a whole. In these discursive constructions, we found that the professors often address how the university is/was *imagined*, what is often *said* about them, and what is generally left *unsaid*, but needs to be made visible.

Six professors in particular addressed the notion of the university as an imagined space. For four of them, in particular, there is an imagined aura, dream, privilege and passion that are projected to higher education institutions. The examples below illustrate that view:

“To enter the university was to fulfill a dream of mine that combined business with pleasure. In other words, I wanted a profession in which I could have stability to do certain things, and at the same time I have always liked doing what I do, which is to teach, and read and read... When we dream, this imagined community thing is always prettier.”

(Virginia)

Liz: *“...sometimes we find other educators... who work in regular schools, both private and public. They sometimes say ‘Oh, no, you guys are at another level, because you have another salary, you have different things, you don't count.’ So I think there's something like that in society among teachers.”*

Eduardo: *“A university aura, right?”*

Liz: *“Yes, yes.”*

(Liz)

“I am very passionate about this. I've worked in the private sector, of course, but it's the public university that makes my heart beat faster, and I defend it tooth and nail... not for myself but for what my role represents.”

(Janaína)

In other moments of participants' discourses, however, we see these imagined constructions being contrasted to conceptualizations of the university as a space of not only prestige and high status, but also of competition (both self-imposed and external), individuality and self-doubt, as exemplified below:

“... the academic world is very competitive, it's all about comparing, and then you realize ‘Oh, everyone is doing a live event online, and I am not.’ ‘Oh, everyone is doing this and that, writing an article, traveling to do this, and I am not.’ ... And that affects you because, see, everyone enters with a need to position themselves, to construct an identity of ‘I am good at this, this class is mine’...”

(Ella)

“I think that this space [the university] is one of much individuality, much status, of many ideas of epistemic privilege... ‘I am here to occupy an academic space, a discipline.’ And this high level of productivity, individuality, competitiveness, self-judgment, judgment of the other, that is the process that we live in the university...”

(Maju)

For us, the construction of the university as a dream space is in the realm of the *imagination*, as specifically stated by Virginia, even if for some this dream may become materialized. The notion of competitiveness, individuality and insecurity, on the other hand, pertains to what is often *said* about higher education institutions, both inside and outside university spaces (BLOCH, 2012). The idea of competition within academia, in particular, is discussed beyond higher education environments, especially in discourses (e.g., news articles, social media posts, etc.) that aim at ranking institutions, professors, journals and so on (FINARDI, 2022). In fact, the contrasting notions of the university presented in participants' accounts are not surprising, as we are aware that many colleagues and ourselves have often been faced with such conflictive understandings.

There are factors related to the university space, however, that are more subtle, latent, not as widely discussed, either inside or outside higher education institutions. These factors are thus in the realm of what we call the *unsaid* (based on GEE, 2011). For Gee, the *unsaid* is related to what is not being stated overtly, “but is still assumed to be known or inferable” (p. 195). We extrapolate this notion here to conceive of the *unsaid* not only as what is not being put forth explicitly, but also as what is often naturalized, incorporated into people’s perceptions of their practices, and invisibilized.

In our analysis, the *unsaid* is related to a number of dimensions. One of them refers to the academic practices that have become increasingly taken for granted in our participants’ (and our own) work. These activities are often part of administrative roles that are not included in official discourses of Brazilian higher education, since these discourses often conceive of the professor’s profession as consisting of three pillars: teaching, research and social outreach (*extensão* in Brazilian Portuguese). The following quotes illustrate this understanding:

“...we have that division upon which the university is based... which is teaching/research/outreach, but normally people forget a fourth one, which is administrative issues, administrative work, which does not follow our work routine.”

(Janaína)

“...we can’t concentrate on teaching, research and outreach. They are the pillars of the university. Right, on paper, yes. But we have a number of other things to do.”

(Celeste)

There are other dimensions of the *unsaid* that we feel are perhaps even more subtle and naturalized, in ways that we simply accept them as given. These dimensions include notions related to communication, relationships, technology/social media, free time and last minute work that comes up and intersects with participants’ routines. Some examples of these issues are presented below:

“[about receiving a message with a call for a meeting] ‘Tomorrow at 2, we have a meeting.’ I’m like: ‘Oh my God! Do you think I am living for work?’... We already have a plan, right? So these things that are very fast, these fast processes, I’m totally against them.”

(Celeste)

“Maybe because of our program here, right? Because we have classes in the morning and at night, but we have work in the afternoon. We have meetings, we have projects, we have advisees. So the impression I get is that you start at 7:30 in the morning and you stop at 11 p.m.”

(Janaína)

“It’s an email asking for something that needs to be done for yesterday... or a WhatsApp discussion to solve a problem, and suddenly you are having a meeting through WhatsApp that you didn’t expect, right? Or you disconnect from the phone, from the email, and concentrate on what you have to do, and when you come back you have a ton of information that you have to process.”

(Maju)

“[about vacation time] ...this doesn’t mean that things will effectively stop, because we leave [for vacation], but many activities, many sectors of the university... will continue working. Many things, decisions, sometimes they need to ask, to consult us in some way. And these things end up crossing us...”

(Gilson)

In our view, the practices and activities exemplified above are often introduced into participants’ work in ways that “distract” them or get them “offtrack,” as reported by Janaína when trying to explain these moments. In addition, such incorporation often seems to occur in an uncomfortable manner; but as time progresses such discomfort becomes assimilated, as well as the practices themselves. The discreet ways in which this happens, as

well as the fact that professors often do not discuss these issues openly (at least in our experience) lead us to think of these practices as part of what we have termed the *unsaid* in discursive constructions of the university.

Finally, what also often seems to be unsaid are the emotions that are related to the experiences outlined above. For all of the interviewees, it seems that the constructions of the university aura and dream, on the one hand, and the individualistic academic environment coupled with the high amount of unexpected, naturalized practices, on the other, cause feelings of anxiety, self-pressure, and imposture. The accounts below exemplify that:

“...this destabilizes your identity, which is there, well-constructed, consolidated, but not for yourself. For you it’s not. You have that appearance, but even you sometimes do not feel... because we are made of insecurities, right?”

(Ella)

“There seems to be this insecurity, that your work can never be better than mine, because I have so much more experience than you, and then all this insecurity exists... So there is a whole competition there.”

(Milena)

“...in the beginning, this lack of definition and these administrative issues, also during the pandemic, left me very angry. Now I don’t feel this anger anymore, I’ve let go, you know? I’ve given up.”

(Gilson)

One note we must make before moving on is that some of these emotions, as expressed by Gilson above, are imbricated with the pandemic period in which the interviews took place. However, as also pointed out in Gilson’s account, the administrative issues to which participants alluded pertained not only to the COVID-19 health crisis, but to the university space as a whole. Some of them may have been exacerbated during the pandemic, but COVID-19 does not account for all of them.

Theme 2. Time-based identities

As stated earlier, we inferred from questionnaire responses that at least some professors associated perceptions of their identities to time-related issues. We asked interview participants to discuss this understanding with us, by asking them whether they felt such interpretation made sense. Nine of our participants explicitly stated that they agreed with our perspective, and that they felt it applied to them personally, as exemplified below:

“This idea of lack of time that constitutes us, it makes a lot of sense to me... My most precious good is time. It is what I lacked and needed, so I have to save it. This is what I arranged with my therapist, that I had to reconstruct my relationship with time, and it’s very difficult.”

(Neide)

“How can I get away from this neoliberal, capitalist thing?... That we always need to think that we must be productive, be productive, right? So I keep thinking about that, I think it’s an issue that also affects our health. Because I don’t know if everybody’s like that. I think many people are OK with doing everything at the same time, you know? But not me.”

(Lana)

“There’s this hegemonic interpretation that we’re late, that we need to compensate. So everybody’s late, everybody needs to compensate. And we just keep going and going, and we’re not thinking... I don’t know if this affects me as a professor. I think it affects me as an individual. I work with desires, plans, in a more limited way, based on what we can do presently... I know of colleagues who work 16 hours a day, but then they just work, you see? I don’t want this in my life.”

(Gilson)

For us, statements like the ones presented above not only confirmed our initial questionnaire interpretations of identities being perceived in time-related manners. They also showed some participants' perceptions of the notion of time as closely related to understandings of society and work. In the comprehensions presented above (and shared by many participants), time is commodified by our current neoliberal, capitalist ways of living, in such a manner that it brings the perception that we are always late, and never have time. For the participants, we need to find possibilities to reconstruct such relationships, so that these perceptions may be challenged.

On the other hand, some participants challenged our interpretation of time-based identities. For these professors, identities are so complex and fluid that it is difficult to differentiate one's roles depending on the time assigned to each one of them. The examples below illustrate this view:

"I don't think so... I can't think of myself as less of a mother, even when there are some moments, some periods, let's say, that I spend less time with [child]... [reporting on study she conducted] you can feel 100% [foreign nationality] and 100% Brazilian at the same time... One identity doesn't push the other."

(Liz)

"I don't know if it makes sense to me, because, independently of having more or less time with [child], more or less time with my parents, or working, I cannot really separate them."

(Magnolia)

Based on the accounts presented thus far, we have the perception that two understandings of identity seem to have been evoked by participants. One of them refers to the fluid, multi-faceted, complex nature of how we think of ourselves and how we are perceived by others (as discussed by Liz and Magnolia above). The other is more related to the practices to which we devote our time, which makes reference to Norton's concept of investment. Although these two notions are not in conflict, the statements made by interviewed professors show that they may be at certain times. A good example of this contrastive nature of the understandings is perhaps best evidenced by Milena's account. For Milena, as for Magnolia and Liz, our interpretation of identities being based on perceptions of time did not seem to make sense. However, when asked about things she enjoys in her routine, Milena got emotional (she wanted to cry) and stated the following:

"...I'm sorry, I got emotional. But what I really like is when my kids hug me. It's been rare, you know, we've had little time."

(Milena)

As stated above, we interpreted Milena's emotional moment as a good example of the contrast between the understanding of identities as always complex and multi-faceted (which we share), and the perception that sometimes we do not have time to perform activities related to these identities (e.g., hugging one's children), so as to enact the self-identifications that are important for us.

What became evident for us, based on the accounts presented in this section, is that when professors are able to interrogate how they/we have been addressing the notion of time in relation to the identities they/we embrace and project onto them/ourselves, they/we may be able to better grapple with the pressures of the university space.

Theme 3. Agency, guilt and pleasure

The notion of agency seemed particularly strong for us in the discourses of participants, particularly 11 of them. The way we categorized agency in this article was based on moments in which professors stated that they had possibilities to act upon difficulties they face within the university space, so as to manage their time, demands, and mental health. The following are instances of this type of discourse:

"It's up to me to stop working. Otherwise we work 24/7. There's always work to do, demands to meet, right?"

(Laura)

“...I have realized that if I didn't organize this [time], I wouldn't be able to manage things, you know? So I started to create a 6-hour routine, turning everything off, going to my yoga class, walking, because it's so much pressure we've been through, right?”

(Lana)

Nonetheless, the agency that may be exercised by participants often comes with much struggle, mainly in terms of having to find the space to exert this powerful possibility. Moreover, such agency is contradicted many times with a sense of guilt that is experienced by the interviewed professors. Such emotions are exemplified below:

“But I'm guilty, because I am the one who has to learn to say no, to take on what I can do with pleasure, with satisfaction, you see? And I know that this is up to me many times, many times.”

(Lana)

“Sometimes I think it's my own fault for not knowing how to distribute or, or manage my own time.”

(Liz)

“[about the pandemic more specifically] It's our fault, our fault as technology users. I've authorized the phone to have more importance during my day. I've authorized the computer to have more hours of my time.”

(Janaina)

“So, like, learning to say no, because we aren't able to say no to many things, without guilt, in order to dedicate your work time to things that are important for your research, for your stuff.”

(Ella)

This tension between agency and guilt seemed interesting for us in many aspects. What is perhaps most relevant is that agency is related to power, and having to exert that power upon one's own schedule and work routine is often entangled in the discursive constructions of the university space, as discussed previously. In a work environment that is part of one's long-lasting dreams, and that fosters (even if perhaps subtly) competition, individuality and neoliberal-type productivity, it is difficult for one to exercise agency without thinking about the possible consequences (even backlashes) of that agency. Ella's comment above illustrates that tension well.

On the other hand, we feel it is necessary to add another element to this relation between agency and guilt. That element is a sense of *pleasure* in doing what we, professors, do. Lana's comment above, where she highlighted such a sense of satisfaction, is one that led us to inquire in our data about that type of feeling. In such inquiry, we found that six of our participants discuss issues of pleasure explicitly, even when not asked specifically about satisfaction at the university. This is exemplified in the accounts below:

“I prefer my job at [university], I love [university]. I really like what we do. Because it was my dream, actually, right?... I really like the work itself.”

(Virginia)

“...our profession is really good... in spite of all the difficulties... I think my profession as a professor is fantastic. It allows you to have contact with intelligent people... with many others, students, colleagues, it enables you to participate in events, be creative, grow intellectually, travel.”

(Luigi)

“I think, for example, that teaching is something that... gives me a lot of pleasure. Research, I like research, I like doing what I do here much more than what I did before.”

(Liz)

It is particularly interesting to observe in the accounts above, and in fact in all of the other moments when participants talked about pleasure, that these pleasures are attached to activities that are mainly associated with professors' roles: teaching, research, and advising. They do not refer, at any moment, to the activities that – in Janáina's words, as previously presented – “distract” professors from their main duties; i.e. activities that get them “off track” and that generally go unstated in discourses about academia. This, in our view, points again to our understanding about the need for us to address tensions between what is *imagined*, *said* and *unsaid* about university spaces, as presented earlier.

What is also important in discussing these moments of pleasure is that our agency may be directed towards them, as stated by Lana, which in turn may balance – or at least ease – feelings of guilt that might be associated with being able to make choices within the university space. For us, then, being able to highlight these pleasures and to bring them to the fore of our perceptions of what we do and who we are as professors is something that we need to strive to achieve.

FINAL REMARKS

The results presented in this article are one part of a larger investigation that has sought to understand issues related to emotions and identities of language professionals. Our focus here was to discuss major themes that have emerged from our readings of participants's responses, so as to build a broad understanding of the data we have gathered.

As it turns out, such data point to three major issues that are important for participants' wellbeing and routines: discursive constructions of the university space; time-based identities; and agency, guilt and pleasure. As we reflect upon each of them, we begin to see possible implications of the discussions we have raised, even if such implications may still be tentative or surface-level.

In regards to discursive constructions of higher education, we feel that our study points to a need to make visible, explicit, what is generally unsaid about the university space. The fact that certain types of practices, in particular, are often not discussed and become naturalized seems to be a major issue that affects participants' wellbeing. One example of this in our current practices illustrates such need. During the writing of this paper, one colleague of two of the present authors was in a coordination position, and decided that s/he needed to list all of the activities that s/he was having to account for, so as to make us (his/her co-workers) *see* what his/her demands were and how they were affecting his/her physical and mental health. The list was part of a message where this colleague was also asking us to help him/her in these activities. We feel that this act of bringing visibility to these duties, which were not perceived by some of us, was a way of bringing to the realm of the *said* what is often *unsaid*, and the message sent by the colleague seems to have had positive results in terms of collaborative work (this colleague was actually one of the participants of our study, but we have decided not to say which participant, even by pseudonym, in order to avoid disclosing identifiable information).

We also feel that notions such as competition, individuality and unlimited productivity may be more widely discussed within academic circles. As members of the academic community ourselves, we know that there is more to the culture of academia than these aspects. We are parts of groups of professors (at local, national and international levels) who work well together, socialize, and strive to establish healthy relationships, and we believe that this type of practice may be encouraged even further when we are able to discuss how issues related to competition and individualism affect us. We actually have similar feelings about time-based identities. For us, being able to identify and interrogate the effects that a culture of “always being late” has upon us is one step in trying to organize our time in ways that benefit our wellbeing.

Finally, we feel that we need to dissociate guilt from the agency that we feel we have (or may have) within the university space. Being able to guide such agency based on what brings us satisfaction – in balance with other activities that we may have to do and that are less pleasant – is important for us to feel less pressured into always doing what we do not want or like. Again, bringing such agency, pleasure and guilt to the realm of the *said* is a major step in that direction, and may enrich previous discussions on the contradictory feelings of professors within academia (e.g., BLOCH, 2012).

As we close this article, we must address a few final issues. The main one is that this study involved language professors, but we did not discuss how professionals in this particular field may differ from professors

in other areas in terms of emotions and wellbeing. The specific focus we had upon language professors was important because we ourselves are academics in language studies, but we still feel the need to look more closely at how this particular group may have certain particularities in terms of how they experience the university space. We hope to be able to address these matters in future analyses.

In addition, we believe that the notion of pleasure needs to be given more specific attention in future investigations. As we look back into our instruments, we feel we could have paid closer attention to this notion, and perhaps other insights about satisfaction among language professors could have been more evident.

Still, we hope that the analyses we have presented in this article may contribute to larger understandings of language educators' emotions, and to emotions as a whole in the field of Applied Linguistics. We are particularly encouraged by the fact that many of our participants specifically mentioned how the simple fact of having the conversations we promoted with them (i.e., the interviews) was already an important step for us as a group to tackle our own emotional issues within the university. We encourage and invite other scholars to bring new insights into the matters we have attempted to address here.

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

All three authors participated in the planning and writing of the present article. The research instruments were constructed collaboratively – and later applied – by all authors. In addition, all authors participated in the analysis of empirical material. Eduardo Henrique Diniz de Figueiredo wrote the first version of the manuscript. Denise Kluge and Helena Stürmer then added/edited parts of the manuscript they felt were necessary.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None declared.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data for this research are not public.

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