

Foreword

Apresentação

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We live in perilous times. What three decades ago was hailed as the deregulation of global economic exchanges, the information technologies revolution, the democratization of the planet through social media and the internet, and the beneficial spread of English as the world's lingua franca, has morphed into outrageous forms of social and economic inequality, addictive and narcissistic forms of communication, shocking forms of corporate power and control, and stifling forms of epistemological imperialism. Under the uncertainties of the modernist world order, applied linguists around the world are starting to put into question the positivistic bases of their discipline and seeking in transdisciplinarity, complexity and other postmodernist theories possible answers to the uncertainties of the age.

One of the silver linings of the unsettling times we are living through is the increased clarity it provides on the intricate relationship of language, discourse, knowledge and power. What we experienced three decades ago in a confused and ominous way has now been recognized, named and analyzed by the critical applied linguistic community: the fallacies of structuralist and individualist perspectives on processes such as language learning and teaching ; the tensions between local and translocal/transhistorical forms of knowledge; the semiotic complexity of multimodal forms of communication; the need to reframe individual sociopragmatic failures as social and linguistic asymmetries; the need to warn against geographically marked initiatives such as English as a lingua franca masquerading as global solutions; and the ethical imperative to push back against the inequalities between and within the global North and the global South in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

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The theme of this special issue “Innovations and epistemological challenges in Applied Linguistics” “could not be more timely. Faithful to its reputation, the *Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics / Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada* is tackling these issues head on, from the micro environment of the classroom, to the sociopragmatics of communication in everyday life, to the macrocontext of academic writing in English as a lingua franca. In so doing, the contributors to this special issue have had to confront the fundamental dilemma of writing in English from a local perspective for a global readership whose system of thought is being shaped by this very lingua franca. The way they deal with this contradiction is in itself interesting. In each of these papers, albeit written in English, we see at work a uniquely Latin-American way of framing and re-framing problems to take account of the epistemological diversity of real life and of established power structures that cannot be contested directly. The Brazilian tradition of *gambiarra* (like the French *systeme D*) is to creatively improvise solutions through tactics that, like guerrilla warfare, thrive on unpredictability. *Gambiarra* enables social actors to seize the moment and invent ways of acting in the interstices of power. As Michel de Certeau points out in *The practice of everyday life* (1984), whereas in predictable environments individuals with initiative and agency can develop goals and strategies and plan ahead, social actors who don’t have a “proper locus” (p. 37) and are forced to live in precarious and unpredictable circumstances have to resort to tactics to survive. In literacy education, as Joel Windle explains (this issue), *gambiarra* is the Brazilian response to the notion of “design” proposed in the global North by the New London Group, that is based on stability, predictability and control.

The contributors all share a desire to open up the possibilities of interpretation of phenomena of language learning and language use studied by applied linguists. The first two contributors examine language learning and teaching in classrooms. Raquel Bambirra shows how motivation in second language acquisition is not a characteristic of learners alone but emerges from “motivational dynamics” that include teacher’s motivation as well. Maria Cristina Giorgi and Fabio Sampaio de Almeida discover in a teacher demonstration class a dialogue between the local interactional classroom discourse and translocal and transhistorical discourses that are performed and reproduced by all the participants. The next two contributors examine new ways of interpreting language use in everyday

life. Marilyn Mafra Klamt, studying the literature on sign language, finds a new dimension to signed exchanges, which she calls “visual sonority” or “perceptibility”. This dimension blurs the distinction between the auditory and the visual channels that have traditionally been kept separate in Applied Linguistics. Milene Mendes de Oliveira, revisiting the notion of sociopragmatic failure, comes to a similar conclusion as Bambirra, namely that what has been seen up to now as an individual learner’s failure is in fact a linguistic asymmetry of a structural, pragmatic, sociolinguistic and discourse related nature. The last two contributors examine critically and from a postmodernist perspective the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English for academic purposes. John Schmitz decries the authoritarian and even totalitarian ideology of ELF and its fetishistic aspects and argues for linguistic pluralism, libertarianism and openness to the cultural climate of postmodernism. Similarly, Joel Windle critiques the global claims of the multiliteracies movement whose notion of *design*, that connotes stability, visibility, predictability and regulation, is far from the reality of life in many parts of the globe.

The papers in this special issue draw on postmodern complexity theories to highlight the epistemological centrality of context, relationality, social construction and performativity in the study of language in Applied Linguistics. They are highly conscious of the workings of symbolic power, even if they don’t explicitly thematize its most nefarious manifestation, namely the takeover of politics by corporate and commercial interests and the branding of Applied Linguistics itself, that makes any resistance more difficult. But they offer concrete cases in which *gambiarra* can take root and where applied linguists can develop methodological tactics of resistance and new ways of framing the issues in the real world in which we live and in which language plays an increasingly important role. The publication of this special issue, that echoes the theme of the AILA World Congress held in Rio in July 2017, is a remarkable step in that direction.