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Beyond Multilingual Advocacy: Subjectivity and Affect as Method

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This paper considers how Claire Kramsch's work on subjectivity and language learning contributes to a critique of *multilingual advocacy*, in which linguistics' efforts of social engagement tend to focus on sites of inequality characterized by structural linguistic difference ideologically attributed to racialized and minoritized communities. While much criticism has been raised against this tendency, this paper argues that Kramsch's focus on multilingualism as subjective experience not only offers a resource for undoing dominant language ideologies of the discipline, but also provides a concrete alternative basis for the field's social engagement, via the way it foregrounds the affective, material, and political realities of being a multilingual speaker. Drawing upon recent works in other disciplines that have been actively turning to affect as a way of rethinking hegemonic epistemologies, this paper suggests considering *affect as method*, which allows our affects, particularly those of discomfort, anxiety, and unease, to guide us in our engagement with injustices, inequalities, and oppressive relations that are deeply embedded within and shaped by our subjectivities.

INTRODUCTION

> We are fooling ourselves if we believe that students learn only what they are taught. While teachers are busy teaching them to communicate accurately, fluently, and appropriately, students are inventing for themselves other ways of being in their bodies and their imaginations. (Kramsch, 2009, p.4)

The quote above, from Claire Kramsch's 2009 *The Multilingual Subject*, plainly illustrates the book's point that being a learner of a language is a subjective experience—that is, learning a language is not simply a matter of acquiring abstract rules of grammar or skills at cultural adaptation, but creating new ways of being and alternative modes of experiencing the world. This insight not only has pedagogical implications, but significantly challenges how we understand the relationship between language and social transformation. The quote emphasizes the agency of language learners—and by extension, language users—in actively transforming the world, as well as themselves, through the mediation of language. And in doing so, it clarifies how such work of transformation is deeply embodied ("in their bodies"), and more specifically, affective ("and their imaginations"). In this way, it problematizes a dualistic view of linguistic theory and the world, in which social transformation is believed to be achievable by unidirectionally "applying" theory to "real world problems" of language that stand external to theory (Brumfit, 1997).

Taking this insight as the starting point, this paper aims to explore how Kramsch' work on subjectivity can help us overcome such a dualism, through a consideration of the place of

affect in linguistics' efforts to contribute to social transformation. In particular, the paper focuses on the enduring effects of the field's historical emphasis on *multilingual advocacy*—the tendency to focus on dissemination of expert knowledge of language, largely conceived in terms of structural linguistic varieties. While the framework of multilingual advocacy has historically made significant contributions to advancing the rights of marginalized and minoritized communities, it had the inadvertent outcome of limiting the field's imagination of possible points of social intervention to domains in which formal linguistic difference becomes salient, as well as reifying the hierarchical distinction between the researcher and researched. Even though recent work in language and social justice has offered much criticism of this framework, ideologies of language underlying multilingual advocacy still continue to condition the way language and social transformation are imagined in the field, as outlined below.

I suggest that Kramsch's work, with its emphasis on affect, subjectivity, and symbolic power as defining dimensions of language, offers important insights that allow us to move outside the persisting shadow of multilingual advocacy and dominant language ideologies of the field. Linking Kramsch's framework with recent work from other disciplines that seek to understand affect as a key for theorizing social transformation, I argue for the need to consider affect not simply as a topic for theorization, but as *method*—that is, embracing uneasy feelings of discomfort, frustration, and indignation as guides for both our theoretical understanding of language and the world, and our political engagement in society.

THE SHADOW OF MULTILINGUAL ADVOCACY

The adjacent disciplines of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology have a long history of social engagement. Many scholars of language in these fields have been actively intervening in problems of inequity and injustice, using their linguistic expertise to contest and transform problematic social and political conditions of society. Early examples include the group of linguists whose expert testimony in the Ann Arbor "Black English trial" in the 1970s was influential in demonstrating the failure of the school district to take into account the linguistic background of the African American children in its programs (Smitherman, 2004). Such efforts led to explicit declarations of researchers' ethical responsibility to the communities they study, for instance in the form of William Labov's "principle of debt incurred," which states that an investigator has a moral obligation to use the linguistic knowledge obtained through data from a community to benefit the community, and "principle of error correction," which urges the researcher to take active responsibility in rectifying any social misconceptions that can be corrected with their research (Labov, 1982, pp. 172-173).

In this paper, I call this mode of social engagement *multilingual advocacy*. While this is not a newly coined term, it is typically used in an uncritical manner to refer to any active promotion of multilingualism and linguistic rights of minoritized language users (for instance, Davis & Howlett, 2022). In contrast, my bringing together of the terms *multilingual* and *advocacy* is more purposeful, as I seek to characterize and problematize linguistics' mode of social engagement as primarily consisting of linguists using their expert knowledge of linguistic structure to argue for the legitimacy of minoritized languages and varieties on behalf of their speakers. *Multilingualism* has traditionally served as an obvious juncture for linguistics' contribution to social justice. In modern societies, the dominance of ideologies that valorize monolingual standard varieties meant that multilingualism was a prominent site of inequality. As a field which located its expertise in the scientific analysis of diverse structural varieties of

language, linguistics thus saw itself as ideally positioned to challenge those inequalities. This also led to the relationship between the researcher and the community being conceptualized in terms of *advocacy*, which Cameron et al. (1993) define as "research *on* and *for* social subjects" (p. 83). Since the linguist's contribution to the community derived from their expert analytic skills in uncovering underlying structures or patterns of language use—which, within structural linguistics, was imagined to lie beyond the conscious reach of ordinary language users—it was inevitable that the linguist came to be positioned as an expert who dispenses their specialist knowledge for the benefit of the disenfranchised community.

The framework of multilingual advocacy has been subject to much criticism since those early days. In particular, limitations of imagining the researcher-community relation in terms of advocacy have been widely discussed. Cameron et al. (1993), for instance, pointed out that under the advocacy model, research subjects are never understood to be equal participants in knowledge production or social transformation. Bucholtz et al. (2016, 2018) similarly critiqued how patronizing viewpoints underlying the notions of advocacy and empowerment leave the unequal relations of institutional power untouched. This led them to instead propose the model of *accompaniment*, "an ongoing, negotiated social process of learning to talk and work together, in which all participants contribute different forms of expertise and understanding and from which they benefit in different ways" (2016, p. 27). This emphasis on rethinking the researcher-community relationship is also reflected in Cowal and Leung's framework of Activist Applied Linguistics, which they define as "doing applied linguistics *together with community partners* in order to make positive social change" (Cowal & Leung, 2020, p. 308, italics added). Therefore, now there is much more widespread awareness of the limitations of the advocacy framework, as well as explicit attention towards developing more equitable and collaborative relationships with communities in the work of language and social transformation.

Regarding the "multilingualism" part of multilingual advocacy, too, the field has moved significantly beyond a focus on systematicity of distinct language varieties as the basis for fighting for social justice. Recent studies on raciolinguistic ideologies have pointed out that liberal affirmation of linguistic diversity is ineffective without contesting deeper sociopolitical ideologies underlying social inequalities mediated through language (Lewis, 2018; Lo & Chun, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2023). Current work on language and social transformation, for example, actively draws from theories of decolonization and critical race theory to contest raciolinguistic ideologies (Anya, 2021; Charity Hudley et al., 2024; Motha, 2020; Shin, 2022; Veronelli, 2015). At the same time, the field as a whole is moving towards challenging views of language as a structured entity, as notions of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014) and assemblage (Pennycook, 2024) gain more influence as frameworks for understanding language. More importantly, several scholars have powerfully argued for the centrality of the perceiving subject (Inoue, 2006) in the reproduction of inequalities, challenging the very idea that linguistic difference produced by speaking subjects is the basis for their exclusion and marginalization (Lo & Chun, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Despite these advances, however, multilingual advocacy continues to serve as an important model for the discipline's social engagement. This can be seen through the kind of sites for intervention that linguists tend to choose for their efforts in social transformation. For instance, if we look through influential volumes on language and social justice, such as Avineri et al's (2019) *Language and Social Justice in Practice*, Piller's *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice* (2016), or Riley et al.'s (2024) *Language and Social Justice: Global Perspectives*, a majority of the projects represented there focus on communities typically perceived to be identifiable through their distinct variety of language, such as: minority language-speaking children in the

classroom; indigenous language communities facing endangerment; social groups stigmatized by harmful racial, cultural, or linguistic stereotypes; and people whose access to public services is limited due to their linguistic background. In other words, the site of intervention for linguists' project of social engagement is frequently a community that is racialized, ethnicized, or minoritized through language ideologies that present them as speaking or using language in a different way from the mainstream. This trend becomes clear when we consider how domains such as labor, social class, and political economy are rarely treated as relevant sites for language-based activism (Park, 2022a), despite the large body of critical research on these topics (Block, 2018; Chun, 2017, 2022; Holborow, 2015).

This is not to discount the value and importance of the work that linguists have carried out in collaboration with racialized and minoritized communities. Neither does it suggest that those scholar-activists engage in such work without critical attention to raciolinguistic ideologies; on the contrary, it is clear that they are motivated precisely by the need to undo the effects of such raciolinguistic ideologies. However, this also means that paradoxically, in order to undo raciolinguistic ideologies, we constantly return to those sites of raciolinguistic ideologies, with the inadvertent result of reinscribing the boundary of linguistics so that the discipline remains centered on formal linguistic structures and bounded grammatical entities (Flubacher & Busch, 2022). In a way, this reflects how, in the historical process of establishing linguistics as a modern scientific discipline, the field relied on ideologies that view language as an abstract communicative code manifest through lexico-grammatical phenomena, as well as adopting dominant raciolinguistic ideologies that posit a natural convergence between linguistic and ethno-racial boundaries as an underlying premise for the discipline (Heller & McElhinny, 2017). Motha (2020) points out how such coupling of structuralist language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies allowed the field to present itself as a profitable discipline with practical applications for the world:

> Within applied linguistics, the notion of race produces a great deal of profit, allowing for the conceptualization of languages that are variously racialized and with a range of proximity to Whiteness; producing a demand for language teaching, consultancy services, teacher training, research, and teacher education; and increasing the desirability of employment and publishing in nation-states associated with Whiteness. Accent hierarchies and the notion of nativeness also work to continuously recreate an unevenness, which allows the generation of capital and supports the workings of racial capitalism within language teacher education. (p. 130)

The way in which the field's efforts at social transformation continues to gravitate towards structural linguistic differences and the ethnoracial categories they index also has implications for how the researcher-community relationship is conceptualized. As the key juncture for the discipline's social engagement largely remains aligned with the focus of linguistics on linguistic structure and varieties of language, moving away from the model of advocacy towards one of accompaniment requires undoing ideological conceptions of language that serve as the basis for the construction of academic authority. This means that truly equitable and collaborative work between the researcher and the community cannot be accomplished by benevolent relinquishing of institutional power by the researcher, but a dismantling of the very foundation of that power which is sustained by the field's dominant ideologies of language.

In other words, multilingual advocacy is deeply ingrained in the establishment of linguistics as a scientific study of language itself. This is why, despite the significant recent advancements in developing alternative models of language and social transformation, a

fundamental reflection on the field's engagement with social problems and social justice is still needed. This also means that, in order to move further ahead in the struggle to refuse and undo oppressive social relations, there is a need to actively question our assumptions about language. What is it that we are thinking of when we talk about language? How can we shift our thinking about language so that our research and projects of social engagement are guided toward a more equitable and liberating direction? This calls for a more radical decentering of language (Tupas, 2020)—letting go of the familiar grounds of linguistic analysis that provide us with a comforting sense of expertise, so that we can explore with an open mind how language can be said to be central to processes of social transformation.

Considering that language needs to be understood as subjective experience, one key element for such decentering of language would be *affect*. While affect is already a significant focus of research in recent theories of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology (Pavlenko, 2013), what I am calling for is not so much affect as a topic of research, but as an epistemological guide for discovering new pathways and practices for social transformation. In this paper, I promote affect as a method for upsetting the constraints that dominant ideologies of linguistics have placed on linguists' efforts at social engagement, and for finding alternative starting points for projects of language and social transformation that truly reflect the deep embeddedness of language in the struggles against oppressive, exclusionary, and destructive systems of power. Before I turn to a discussion of this proposal, I first start with an account of how Kramsch's work on subjectivity provides a useful basis for thinking of affect as method.

MULTILINGUALISM AS SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

As noted above, Kramsch's (2009) influential work approaches language not as structure or communicative system, but as subjective experience—something that is inseparable from the feelings, desires, hopes, aspirations, and pains that we experience as human beings living in a social world. For Kramsch, such affects are not simply epiphenomena or mere sensory reactions that emerge as a consequence of using language. Rather, they are the very basis for language as symbolic power (Kramsch, 2021)—how language performatively constructs social relations and material reality through the symbolic meanings it generates. In this way, her approach to affect aligns with recent approaches within linguistic anthropology and critical theory that treat affect not as an individual's inner psychological response to stimuli, but as discursively and socially constituted process of subjectivization (Ahmed, 2014; McElhinny, 2010; Park, 2020, 2021; Pritzker, 2020; Wilce, 2009; among others).

As a prominent figure of the field of applied linguistics, Kramsch does not shy away from speaking about multilingualism. However, her work departs significantly from an understanding of multilingualism as linguistic many-ness, instead situating multilingualism in the context of the diverse and distinct subjective experiences of learners. Through her study of language learners' memoirs and journals, for instance, Kramsch traces "heightened perceptions and emotions, awareness of one's body, feelings of loss or enhanced power, together with imagined identities, projected selves, idealizations or stereotypes of the other" (2009, p. 5), focusing on how language learners reify, shape, and transform the world around them through the mediation of their bodies and selves. In this process, learners may not necessarily attribute much importance to the analytic fact of linguistic many-ness. By redirecting the field's attention toward the "wager of multilingualism" (Kramsch, 2008, p. 331), or the complex material, ideological, and affective stakes of being a speaker who navigates a

social space of languages, Kramsch thus reframes multilingualism as a matter not of linguistic structure but subjectivity. And by emphasizing the intersection of language with symbolic power and highlighting the political and embodied dimension of affect and its centrality to our sense of being, her approach also clarifies how language serves as a constitutive force for social life and action. Kramsch's understanding of multilingualism as subjectivity, then, offers a highly contextualized view of agency that embraces the deep materiality and historicity of our engagement with the world around us.

Kramsch also reminds us that, in order to seriously consider the affect and subjectivity of language users and their role in social transformation, we need a fundamentally different way of investigating language. It requires "new ways of apprehending and accounting for experience—ways, one might say, that aim at understanding rather than explanation" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 5). For instance, Kramsch's work on subjectivity places much weight on language memoirs, life histories, autobiographical accounts, and literary works, in which language users narrativize their linguistic experiences. More importantly, Kramsch notes that "the subjective truths they reveal can only be accessed through alternative modes of inquiry that take into account their metaphoric and literary nature" (2009, p. 5), which calls for "a mode of analysis that is more akin to literary interpretation than to sociolinguistic analysis" (2012, p. 5). In other words, foregrounding affect and subjectivity in language and social transformation requires aligning with communities on a more visceral level, confronting their subjective experiences of language as embodied beings, with full attunement towards the material and ideological conditions that shape feelings, desires, and hopes (Ahmed, 2014).

In this way, Kramsch's perspective on language provides fertile ground for an integrated account of linguistic theory and social transformation, providing a very different basis for thinking of language and social transformation compared to the model of multilingual advocacy. Indeed, it resonates with recent critiques of multilingual advocacy that problematize its improper recognition of affect's role in social transformation. Bucholtz (2018), for instance, in considering the role of affect in the reproduction of racism, comments that "racism is fundamentally affective rather than rational, and thus it is not simply material self-interest that supports racism but affective investment in whiteness […] that compels white people to cling to white supremacy at all costs." This leads her to argue that "the liberal approach to sociolinguistic activism represented by the principle of error correction therefore fails not because it focuses on affects (or, more narrowly, 'attitudes') but because it tries to change affects with facts" (p. 352; see also Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Sah et al., 2025). Similarly, Pájaro (2025), in explaining how Whiteness in Argentina is an affective formation established through the history of oppression, exclusion, and erasure of non-white and indigenous bodies, argues that imagination of alternative futures is only possible through confronting such affects and feelings, urging us to: "Follow what is revealed by the haunting, the effect of the trauma that we can no longer see but feel" (p. 178). We may argue Kramsch's approach allows us to imagine possible ways in which we can translate these insights into practical strategies for social transformation, as it challenges us to develop a skepticism towards the power of positivistic analysis in bringing about social change (see also Kraft & Flubacher, 2020; Lewis, 2018), instead calling for a connection to communities that we work with on the level of affective and embodied experiences.

To return to this paper's epigraph, the point of the quotation is not that uncooperative students fail to respond to teachers' efforts to teach them, but that the act of learning and using a language is already inherently an act of social transformation, via the bodies and selves that are shaped and reconfigured in the process. And those acts are not confined to the domain of what the discipline of linguistics may consider to be "linguistic," such as what constitutes

accurate, fluent, or socially appropriate communication, but may link to whatever domain that the learners' bodies and social imagination may be interacting with, the meanings of which are mediated through the affective and subjective qualities of their life experiences. The question becomes, then, not what are the social problems that the scientific study of language can help address and how to disseminate that knowledge produced through such study, but how to nurture, guide, and connect those already existing flows of affects and subjectivity towards more liberating goals. Being attuned to the affects and subjectivities of communities thus is more than a strategic move for refining our research agenda, but a way of approaching a fuller picture of what it means to be a language user as lived through by community members themselves.

Understanding language as subjective experience also reminds us of the plain but undertheorized fact that affect is not something that only belongs to research subjects. Kramsch's perspective makes clear that educators and researchers are no different from the communities they work with in that they, as language users and learners themselves, are semiotically constituted subjects who experience and engage with the world through their embodied being (Kramsch & Zhang, 2018). However, despite the proliferation of research on reflexive methods, teacher identity, and critical autoethnography, there has been little active effort to establish affect as a key for fundamentally undoing the binary of researcher-researched or teacher-learner. Focusing on the undercurrent of affect beneath every communicative act and its implications for social transformation allows us to notice more clearly the continuous flow of social interaction that ties us together as human beings as we jointly construct our world through our embodied action, and to denaturalize the hierarchical and exclusionary relations that only emerge as an outcome of such work of construction. Motha and Lin (2014) talk about how desire underlies not only the choices and practices of individual language learners, but also of teachers, institutions, communities, and researchers, arguing that no desire should be seen as inherently having more legitimacy and urgency, and we must work together to guide these desires in more liberating and equitable directions through "non-coercive rearrangement." Likewise, understanding language as subjective experience means that no one occupies a privileged position of surveying the flow of affect in the world, and that working toward a more just and desirable society requires collaboratively understanding and reshaping the processes of our subjectivization into different social positions.

Kramsch's perspective of subjectivity, then, offers several insights through which we can overcome the legacy of multilingual advocacy rooted in the founding ideologies of our discipline, including the rootedness of language in subjective experience, the potential of affectivity as a methodological basis for social transformation, and questioning of the researcher-researched binary through the social pervasiveness of subjectivity. In the following section, I turn towards a discussion of how these insights can be harnessed by approaching affect as method (Park, forthcoming).

AFFECT AS METHOD: BODIES BEFORE LANGUAGE

Affect as method derives from recent works in other disciplines that have been actively turning to affect as a way of rethinking hegemonic epistemologies and models of scientific inquiry. In particular, work in feminist cultural studies has explored the methodological potential of affect for uncovering potential spaces for social transformation (Åhäll, 2018; Ahmed, 2017; Chadwick, 2021; Hemmings, 2012). This body of work focuses on how affects such as

discomfort, unease, disgust, or longing can highlight moments when unspoken and taken-for-granted assumptions trigger feelings that "things don't seem right" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22). Such moments of "affective dissonance" (Hemmings, 2012) can, when properly attended to, lead to a deeper investigation of those unquestioned assumptions that are obscured under objectivist conceptions of social transformation, rejecting the perspective that treats affect as lying outside the rational realm of the political and theoretical. Åhäll (2018), for instance, notes "how affect generates feminist questions. It shows how an experience of affective dissonance can spark a feminist curiosity. And, by being curious about that which affectively stirred our curiosity in the first place, we might be able to identify political practices as affective meaning-making, as feelings of structure, as 'that-which-goes-without-saying'" (p. 45). In these works, then, affect as method (or "affect as methodology," as Åhäll [2018] names it) means actively allowing our affects, particularly those of discomfort, anxiety, and unease, to guide us in our engagement with injustices, inequalities, and oppressive relations that are deeply embedded and shaped by our subjectivities.[1]

Adopting this insight, linguists may embrace affect as method to pay attention to moments of dissonance in our experiences as language users, as a strategy for identifying moments in our subjectivization which may foreshadow alternative ways of being in this world. Such affects, which are often overlooked, represent leaks in our subjectivization, thus serving as cracks through which we may start undoing oppressive and limiting subjectivities, and through which we can imagine alternative subjectivities that open up spaces for more just and equitable relationships (Park, forthcoming). Affect as method does not mean impulsively acting upon any feeling that emerges in us, but using it as a starting point for transformative action that is also premised upon liberating relationships. Indeed, affect as method warns against easy claims of solidarity based on elated feelings of oneness, which may overlook persisting dynamics of power that continue to operate underneath (Hemmings, 2012). For this reason, it requires a patient dwelling upon and non-coercive guiding of those affects (Motha & Lin, 2014)—listening on to sensations that disturb us, reflecting on stories that lie behind the feelings of others, pondering how intersecting emotions in society are tied to material and ideological conditions of the world, and redirecting those affects so that they can serve as foundations for undoing oppressive and unequal subjectivities.

Instead of treating affect as an unfortunate side effect of our humanity that clouds and interferes with clear and rational judgement, affect as method calls for recognizing the fundamental role it plays in our constitution as subjects. Instead of approaching affect as an object of study to be scrutinized through scientific and critical methods, it argues for embracing it as a foundation for our understanding and transformation of the world. Instead of considering affect as something that others (such as research participants, minoritized populations, or the hegemonic majority) have, it focuses on affect as a basic condition of all human beings so that we may overcome the unequal social positioning of subjects. In this sense, affect as method is not a "research methodology"; rather, it is an epistemic and political stance towards our embodied being and our material sociality that seeks to mobilize our feelings, hopes, and desires for transforming the world. The term "method" thus is meant to highlight the need to adopt such a stance in more systematic and committed ways.

[1] Hickey-Moody (2013) also introduces the notion of affect as method, but her use of the term refers to the pedagogical potential of affect in creating new meanings, bodily habits, and subjective orientations, particularly through the mediation of art. In this sense it differs from how the term is used by feminist researchers discussed above, for whom affect as method(ology) means dwelling on our affects as a way of generating questions for research.

For an example of what affect as method might look like in specific contexts, we may consider how discourses of English as a global language lead postcolonial speakers of English to adopt certain subjectivities of English. Those speakers often experience a range of affects, some of which are culturally dominant and highly naturalized. These may include a desire for English as a language of modern self-development, hopes of achieving socioeconomic advancement through acquisition of English, or anxieties about being a non-standard speaker of English (Park, 2021, 2022b). These affects, as shaped by colonial subjectivities, in turn reproduce relations of coloniality, through the bodies of postcolonial subjects that internalize such affects. However, their subjectivization is also never complete, in the sense that it does not totally determine how one feels and experiences the world. There is always an overflowing of affect, feelings, or emotions that go beyond the subjectivization, such that there are undercurrents of feelings that do not always align with dominant affects that the postcolonial subject is supposed to embody.

For instance, besides the desire and longing for English, the postcolonial English language learner may also experience a sense of weariness, frustration, or indignation about the fact that they are made to invest much time, money, and effort in learning the language, regardless of whether they enjoy it or not. While such affects are often dismissed as deviating from how postcolonial learners of English are supposed to feel, thus swept aside as indications of an individual's laziness, unresourcefulness, or irresponsibleness (Park, 2021), affect as method argues for taking a closer look at those feelings, asking why they emerge, what they say about the conditions of being a postcolonial subject, and what kind of alternative subjectivities they may point to. When such affects are recognized, confronted, and articulated, they start to serve as cracks in the concrete wall of our subjectivities, allowing for new ways of feeling and being in the world.

Affect as method helps us overcome the limitations of multilingual advocacy because it places bodies before language. It recognizes that inequalities and injustices of language are ultimately mediated and sustained by subjectivities of language; its practitioners seek to transform societal relations and structures by disrupting the very process through which subjectivities of language are formed. Through affect as method, we decenter language from the study of language, instead making the embodied affects of languaging subjects our key concern. This, in turn, allows us to go beyond the discipline's persistent focus on linguistic varieties and their concomitant cultural categories as the main juncture for our social engagement. Such decentering of language also allows us to go beyond advocacy, as it takes away the privileged position of researchers as language experts, instead turning our attention to our common, embodied subjectivity as language users, enlisting both researchers and communities in equal ways in the project of social transformation.

Affect, indeed, must be seen as an always already present condition for social transformation. No revolutionary social movement becomes successful owing to the rational or logical appeal of its demands alone; it must be driven by affects—explosive imaginations of a new world, staunch refusal of unjust social orders, passionate solidarity that unites, and so on. Drawing on Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Hickey-Moody (2013) points out the pervasiveness of affect in the way we relate to the world, suggesting any transformation of society will necessarily have to grapple with it: "to comprehend something in thought, a person must have a previous emotional relationship to the subject [...]—a prejudice against it, or fondness for it, based on an initial imagining, or first feeling" (p. 84). In other words, affect is a prevalent condition for embodied social engagement.

In identifying moments in our subjectivization where a sense of unease or discomfort foreshadows alternative ways of being in this world, then, there is no privileged space for the

scholar of language. It is clear that for language researchers, the use of affect as method to critically interrogate their own subjectivities as language experts is important. For instance, one might reflect on what affects motivated them to be interested in studying language as an academic topic to begin with, and such reflection may lead to how they embrace certain affects (such as vigorous anger about unequal treatment of language varieties in the education system) but unconsciously overlook others (such as discomfort in articulating one's ideas in non-standard varieties). This may enable one to confront contradictions and tensions that arise due to the multiple subjective positions that one occupies, and how they ultimately may contribute to unequal relations of privilege.

However, affect as method does not treat such work of reflection as something uniquely available for researchers of language, or something that researchers should show communities how to do. Instead, it understands affect as already being used by communities as a method for transforming the world. In this sense, affect as method is not a novel theoretical invention; it is always already present in transformative movements across the world. Communities struggling against violence and oppression are already using affect as method—indeed, one might say that such dwelling on and guiding of affect is the very essence of such struggles, for organizing such movements is often really about stringing together smaller moments of unease, frustration, and indignation towards networked social action (Adsit et al., 2015; Polletta, 2006).

Those of us who are interested in transforming the world through language, then, would have much to learn by observing, understanding, and aligning with how affect as method indigenously takes place across many sites of social struggle. Researchers of language can join in such struggles as co-participants—not necessarily as experts, but as subjects who also struggle against oppressive subjectivities in their own way, grappling with their affects as a key for overcoming their subjectivities and building alliances with those communities. It is "a collective and continuous movement towards another place; […] listening rather than speaking and knowing, learning rather than teaching" (Deumert, 2021, p. 103).

This, in fact, can be a productive way through which we may get to the heart of what constitutes language in the subjective realities of being a language user. Many researchers are discovering that communities engaged in collective struggle often identify the significance of language for social transformation through embracing and cultivating the feelings and affects they experience in their lives. For instance, Deumert (2021) discusses a language ideology that is embraced in many anti-colonial struggles around the world, that language can be redrafted to reimagine and rebuild a new world. She notes that "to experience language as alienating, lacking, oppressive and limiting appears to be a common experience" under colonialism (p. 104), and many revolutionary movements against colonial oppression seek to craft a new language that can break the chains of subjugation and allow for the possibility of "creating new worlds, *ad infinitum*" (p. 122). What often provides a starting point for such reimagination of language is affect. Deumert discusses how for many communities, from the black situationists and surrealists working against French colonialism, to South African students contesting legacies of apartheid, their struggle centered on creation of a "political-affective situation" (p. 114) in which anti-colonial rage, frustration, and inspiration were actively articulated, fomented, and transformed into a new language that dismantles existing relations of oppression.

Similarly, Silva and Lee's (2024) work on the *favela* communities in Brazil tells the story of how residents and activists fight against and transform dire conditions of racialized prejudice and state-endorsed violence by finding ways of cultivating, articulating, and sharing one particular affect—hope. One major way through which hope is enacted by the community

and activists is through language. For instance, activists metapragmatically develop and promote a register of *papo reto* (straight talk), which cuts through the bureaucratic artifice of state discourse, uncovers exclusionary othering that the polite speech of the elite obfuscates, and states in plain terms a refusal to acquiesce to a politics of dominance and oppression. But this is not a strategy the activists learn from expert researchers of language; rather, it is a "practical method of hope whereby activists and residents reorient knowledge" (p. 89), confronting and redirecting affects of despair, frustration, and indignation to guide them towards a performative enactment of hope.

Silva and Lee recount how witnessing such local orientations to affect as method, particularly in the wake of the assassination of activist, politician, and scholar Marielle Franco, led them to shift from a project comparing multiple sites around the world in which moments of hope emerge as a response to globalizing inequalities (a study which would have privileged their perspective as globally operating researchers), towards one of "gauging a 'method of hope' among *faveladas/os*" (p. 15), foregrounding instead the community's "uncanny engagement with temporality along with their principled ways of narrating sociolinguistic inequalities […] that refused to give in to despair by engaging with hope as a form of practical reason" (p. 16).

More recently, studies in Garrido Sardà and Pérez-Milans (2025) jointly explore how various communities around the world work towards social transformation through an orientation towards the future, in which they collectively prefigure the social relations and material conditions they desire. Their focus is on projects of *commoning*—"voluntary contributions that demand self-organisation, peer-governance and ownership of the conditions needed for life and its reproduction," which get "produced in ongoing interaction, negotiation and decision-making in a community" (p. 13). Again, commoning, with its emphasis on communal alternatives to capitalist logic and prefiguring of the future, exemplifies how communities engage with affects of hope, trust, desire, and solidarity to create new modes of communicative and social action. Garrido Sardà and Pérez-Milans (2025) link such work of commoning with linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2018; Williams, Deumert, & Milani, 2022), arguing that it provides "a focus on the possibilities to re-shape language as an arena for negotiating difference, challenging power imbalances and prefiguring a better way of living" (p. 11). What such studies from a decolonial and Southern perspective repeatedly reveal is that "the starting point for any concerns of language and multilingualism should not be the assumedly pre-given distinct languages and speech communities but rather the (ever changing) needs, desires and aspirations of speakers involved in multiple, sometimes contradicting, life worlds, language ideologies, and communicative practices" (Flubacher & Busch, 2022, p. 557).

These examples serve as perfect illustrations of how decentering language through affect as method by no means implies abandoning language as a juncture for understanding and organizing movements of social transformation; on the contrary, it offers a powerful way for us to get to the lived and experienced meanings of language that we need to grasp in order to undo deep-rooted disciplinary ideologies that reproduce hegemonic relations of power. Affect as method, therefore, simultaneously unsettles dominant ideologies of language that constitute the discipline of linguistics, and dismantles artificial hierarchies of authority posited between the researcher and community. Affect as method asks us to think: By clinging on to institutional and colonial ideologies of language that reify the authority of our discipline, are we actually working against revolutionary movements in the world? Or, by placing bodies before language, are we allowing affect to align us with communities that are discovering the innate relevance of language in their struggle to transform the world?

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I discussed how Claire Kramsch's focus on subjectivity provides a basis for overcoming dominant ideologies of language underlying the legacies of multilingual advocacy that constrain the discipline's efforts of social transformation. For this discussion, I proposed considering affect as method—embracing and mobilizing affect as a guide for our engagement with injustices, inequalities, and oppressive relations in the world. By recognizing both the essence of language as subjective experience and the constitution of language scholars as subjects, affect as method confronts how unequal relations of power are rooted in our subjectivization, and seeks to interrupt that ongoing process so that we can imagine more just, equitable, and liberating ways of becoming.

Referring to the interpretive approach to language that she recommends, Kramsch (2012) says:

> This mode of analysis eschews both the facile narcissism of researchers' self-disclosure and the positivistic stance taken by social scientists who discard all subjectivity in their search for objectivity. By exploring the personal, political, social, and cultural conditions of possibility of their own research questions, researchers objectivate their own participation in the research project and give new meaning to the notion of subjectivity in applied linguistics. (p. 5)

Affect as method, in other words, aims to transform such conditions of possibility as they are rooted in our subjectivities. This, of course, is not an easy task. Affect as method involves more than mere "reflexivity"—which can easily be used as a facade for reifying one's positionality as a rational, well-meaning, and open-minded individual. Instead, it asks us to actively confront and embrace feelings that make us uncomfortable, uneasy, and troubled, and to consider what they tell us about the way we stand as subjects in a relation of power. How, as socially embodied beings, are we very much a part of the social conditions that we seek to transform? Affect as method is simultaneously a reminder and a guide for this process, but it is definitely not a shortcut; for what it suggests is nothing short of a rethinking of our epistemologies of justice, a bold decentering of language, and an unwavering commitment to relinquishing any privileged position we occupy as students and users of language. Yet, the fact that subjectivity lies at the heart of our social and material conditions of life means that there is no other way than taking small steps towards practicing affect as method in our research, activism, and everyday life.

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