

Discourse and Emotional Intelligence in EFL Communication: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Affective Language Strategies Among Iraqi University Learners

Dr. Abeer Khalaf Hussein Hameed

abeeriraq83@gmail.com

Asst.Lect. Muammer Kudama Younis

muammer.younis@gmail.com

Open Educational College, Nineveh

Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a fundamental variable in second and foreign language communication, influencing how speakers represent, perceive and negotiate meaning in real social interactions. The relationship between discourse analysis and emotional intelligence in English as a foreign language (EFL) context has been relatively under-investigated, particularly in Arab universities where emotional aspects of communication are often marginalized by the grammatical and lexical aspects of the language, because cultural, ideological and institutional power relations play a significant role in this under-investigation. This research hypothesizes that Iraqi EFL university students rely on a very limited and highly context-bound set of affective language strategies, which suggests a very restricted emotional discourse competence mediated by these power relations. The research explores how emotional intelligence is linguistically realized and enacted in the spoken and written communication of Iraqi EFL learners at the University of Mosul, and to this end, the study uses an eclectic analytical framework which combines Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis and Goleman's (1995)

model of emotional intelligence in addition to van Dijk's (2001) socio-cognitive approach. The findings of the study show that learners consistently use a narrow range of emotional discourse strategies, which are mainly characterized by suppression and avoidance, while more expressive and empathetic forms of emotional language are largely neglected, moreover, ideological pressures in classroom interaction and the prevailing cultural norms restrict the development of emotionally intelligent communication. Consequently, the results of the analysis support the initial hypotheses of the study.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, emotional intelligence, EFL communication, affective language strategies, Fairclough, Iraqi learners, discourse competence.

الخطاب والذكاء العاطفي في التواصل بالإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: تحليل نقدي للخطاب

لاستراتيجيات التعبير الوجداني لدى متعلمي الجامعات العراقية

د. عبير خلف حسين

م.م. معمر قدامه يونس

مديرية تربية نينوى/ الكلية التربوية المفتوحة

المخلص:

بات الذكاء العاطفي متغيرًا جوهريًا في التواصل باللغة الثانية واللغة الأجنبية، إذ يؤثر في طريقة تمثيل المتكلمين للمعنى وإدراكه والتفاوض حوله في سياقات التفاعل الاجتماعي الفعلي. وقد ظلت العلاقة بين تحليل الخطاب والذكاء العاطفي في سياق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية موضع دراسة محدودة نسبيًا، ولا سيما في الجامعات العربية التي كثيرًا ما تُهمَّش فيها الأبعاد العاطفية للتواصل لصالح الجوانب النحوية والمعجمية للغة، وذلك بفعل العلاقات الثقافية والأيدولوجية والمؤسسية للسلطة التي تؤدي دورًا محوريًا في استمرار هذا الإهمال. يفترض هذا البحث أن طلاب الجامعات العراقية الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يعتمدون على مجموعة ضيقة للغاية من استراتيجيات اللغة الوجدانية المرتبطة ارتباطًا وثيقًا بالسياق، مما يُشير إلى كفاءة خطابية عاطفية مقيّدة بشكل ملحوظ، تتوسط فيها علاقات السلطة آنفة الذكر. ويستكشف البحث الكيفية التي يتجلى بها الذكاء العاطفي لغويًا ويتجسد في التواصل الشفهي والكتابي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة الموصل؛ وتحقيقًا لهذه الغاية، يعتمد البحث إطارًا تحليليًا توفيقيًا يجمع بين النموذج الثلاثي الأبعاد لتحليل الخطاب النقدي عند

فيركلاف (١٩٩٢)، ونموذج الذكاء العاطفي عند جولمان (١٩٩٥)، فضلاً عن المقاربة السوسيو معرفية عند فان دايك (2001). وقد كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن المتعلمين يلجأون بصورة منتظمة إلى طيف ضيق من استراتيجيات الخطاب العاطفي، تتسم في مجملها بالكبت والتحاشي، في حين تُهمَّش إلى حد بعيد أشكال التعبير العاطفي الأكثر صراحةً والأوفر قدرةً على التعاطف. علاوة على ذلك، تُفقد الضغوط الأيديولوجية في التفاعل الصفي والأعراف الثقافية السائدة نموّ التواصل القائم على الذكاء العاطفي. وعليه، تدعم نتائج التحليل الفرضيات الأولية التي انطلق منها البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الذكاء العاطفي، التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، استراتيجيات التعبير الوجداني، المتعلمون العراقيون، الكفاءة التواصلية.

1. Introduction

The ability to notice, interpret, manage and use emotions via language is probably one of the most important, yet least investigated, aspects of communicative competence in foreign language education, and as communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds is becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life in a more and more globalised world, the ability to use emotional intelligence through language becomes essential not only for effective interpersonal communication but also for academic and professional success. In this regard, language is not only a tool for information exchange but also a tool that mediates emotional experiences in a specific social and discursive context, attributes meaning to them, shares them with others, negotiates them and, sometimes, contests them.

Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), however, are more vulnerable than others in this regard, because their means of communication is at the same time prone to the rules and norms of their own culture and to the conventions of the English discourse. In many Arab EFL contexts, including Iraq, there has been a great emphasis on teaching grammar and vocabulary, while emotionally intelligent discourse has been ignored, consequently, learners' production is often grammatically correct, but emotionally empty. This type of discourse can

neither evoke sympathy nor reach the level of pragmatic fluency, which is necessary for real-life communication, therefore, it is limited in its ability to effectively communicate.

The University of Mosul, as one of Iraq's oldest and most respected educational institutions, offers a particularly poignant and productive context in which to investigate this phenomenon, where EFL learners are caught in the cross-fire of a range of institutional, cultural and ideological forces which have a profound effect on how they express, inhibit or realize emotional meaning in both spoken and written language. Although research into emotional intelligence in second language acquisition has grown, and CDA has been applied increasingly to educational contexts, the intersection of these two areas of investigation in the Iraqi EFL context is largely uncharted territory.

This study seeks to address this significant gap in the literature by providing the first systematic, CDA-informed examination of emotional intelligence as a discursively constructed and enacted phenomenon in the context of Iraqi EFL university students, and it is therefore hypothesised that these students utilise a limited, context-dependent range of affective language strategies, which signals a lack of emotional discourse competence that is shaped by cultural ideology, institutional power relations, and inadequate pedagogical support for affective expression. This study aims to investigate the patterns of discourse through which emotional intelligence is linguistically encoded and enacted in the oral and written communication of Iraqi EFL learners, and to identify the ideological and institutional forces that constrain or facilitate the development of emotionally intelligent discourse.

The study proposes the following research questions:

1. What affective language strategies do Iraqi EFL university learners employ in their oral and written discourse, and how are these strategies distributed in terms of frequency and function?

2. How do cultural ideology and institutional power dynamics, as revealed through CDA, shape the emotional discourse practices of Iraqi EFL learners?
3. To what extent does the distribution of affective language strategies in learner discourse reflect the dimensions of emotional intelligence as theorized by Goleman (1995)?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Emotional Intelligence: Conceptual Foundations

Emotional intelligence was first formally introduced into mainstream scientific discussion by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as a set of skills to recognize and regulate in the self and others emotions. Goleman (1995) later popularized the construct, and extended the range of the concept to a five-domain model, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, and this latter model has been the most influential for scholars working across psychology, communication, and language education. Based on Goleman, Bar-On (2006) introduced the distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competencies, which provides a more socially contextualized understanding of emotional intelligence that is more compatible with discourse-analytic approaches.

In SLA research, emotional intelligence has been mainly examined in terms of learner motivation, anxiety mitigation, and willingness to communicate. MacIntyre et al. (2019) show that positive psychology research in SLA reveals that emotionally intelligent language learners display significantly higher communicative spontaneity and pragmatic flexibility in classroom interaction, and Li (2020) also finds that emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of foreign language enjoyment and learning achievement, both of which are known to affect how learners construct their discourse. Together, these studies indicate that emotional intelligence is not a psychological state, but a

fundamentally discursive phenomenon that is performed through, and is indeed composed of, speakers' linguistic choices in real communicative contexts.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical and methodological framework which is used to examine how language is embedded in power and ideology. Fairclough (1992) argues for a three-dimensional model where discourse is studied at the same time as text, as discursive practice and as social practice because it looks at different levels of analysis. At the textual level, it looks at lexical features, grammatical features and patterns of transitivity, and at the level of discursive practice, it is concerned with how texts are produced, circulated and consumed, and particularly with the intertextual relationships through which meanings are reiterated, recontextualised or challenged. Moreover, at the level of social practice, discourse is embedded in larger ideological structures and power relations which determine who can say what, when and how.

Van Dijk's (2001) socio-cognitive approach to CDA extends Fairclough's model by positioning social cognition as an intermediary between discourse and society, which means that the collective beliefs, values and mental representations of individuals determine how they produce and interpret discourse, and this, in turn, is shaped by the social structures of a larger social system. For van Dijk, ideologies are realised and reproduced in the macro-structures of discourse, such as how topics are organised, what is taken for granted by presupposition, and what he calls the "ideological square", the way speakers systematically highlight positive features of the in-group and negative features of the out-group. When applied to EFL learner discourse, this approach can account for the ways institutional and cultural ideologies of emotion, gender and what is deemed "proper" academic behaviour shape

learners' use of language to express or suppress feelings, and, in other words, the socio-cognitive framework can illuminate how these implicit beliefs shape the emotional dimension of learners' language use, including which feelings are expressed, which are suppressed, and how they are framed in classroom communication.

Hussein (2024) uses Fairclough's three-dimensional model to study political speeches in public discourse, claiming that the model is applicable in Arab socio-cultural contexts, and the study indicates that ideological control is realised at the level of both lexis and grammar, giving rise to discursive effects that reflect and maintain existing power relations. The conclusion of this study is especially pertinent to the present study because it considers EFL learner discourse as being similarly constrained by institutional and ideological forces.

2.3 Affective Language and EFL Discourse

The study of affective language in EFL settings has become a topic of increasing interest in the last decade or so, and a number of researchers have investigated how emotions are encoded in learner language at the lexical, pragmatic and discursive levels. Pavlenko (2005) provides a seminal discussion of emotions in multilingual contexts that indicates that the experience and expression of emotion in a second/foreign language is qualitatively different from that in a first language because of differences in cultural scripts, embodied experience and metalinguistic awareness. For EFL learners, then, expressing emotion in the target language is a complex process of translation, adaptation and, at times, suppression of emotionally charged material.

Al-Hindawi et al. (2020) discuss the pragmatic aspect of emotional discourse in Iraqi settings and show that speakers usually use a limited number of affective phrases, which suggests that they feel they should not show emotions in formal contexts as expected culturally, and the

results are in line with previous studies of reticence and communicative inhibition in Arab educational settings. Bar-On (2006) proposes a taxonomy of emotional competences, which is similar to Goleman's framework and is also relevant for discourse analysis: emotional literacy (self-awareness, situational awareness, empathy, and emotional management).

Brackett (2019) and colleagues have developed the concept of emotional granularity, which refers to the extent to which an individual can identify and label his/her emotions. High emotional granularity has been found to be a key predictor of how well an individual communicates and how well s/he understands others, but for EFL learners, emotional granularity is constrained not only by psychological factors, but also by the range of vocabulary at his/her disposal in the target language, the pragmatic norms s/he has acquired, and the institutional contexts in which s/he communicates. By investigating these constraints from a CDA perspective, we can move away from individualistic explanations and view emotional discourse competence as shaped by the wider social and ideological structures that impact on language use.

Zembylas (2013) investigates emotional discourse within a critical pedagogy framework and shows how institutional power relations can silence emotions and how the ideologies inscribed in schooling dictate which emotional language is permitted, which shows how institutional power relations influence the deployment of affective language, further vindicating the applicability of a CDA-oriented approach to the exploration of emotional intelligence in EFL contexts. Taking this line of research further, the present study turns to the Iraqi university setting, where particular cultural, historical and institutional conditions lead to unique forms of emotional repression and articulation in learner discourse.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is qualitative in design, and the analytical model is descriptive–analytical because the research is qualitative in orientation, requiring an in–depth, context–sensitive analysis of the linguistic and discursive features of learner texts rather than a quantification of separate variables. The analytical model is eclectic in the sense that Fairclough's (1992) three–dimensional CDA framework is adopted as the main tool of analysis, while Goleman's (1995) five–domain model of emotional intelligence is used as a conceptual lens to interpret the affective dimensions of learner discourse; moreover, Van Dijk's (2001) socio–cognitive framework is used as a further layer of analysis to highlight the ideological forces at work in the data.

3.2 Corpus Description

The data of the present study are drawn from two sources of data collected from third– and fourth–year EFL undergraduates studying at the Department of English, College of Education/ University of Mosul in the academic year 2023–2024. The first data source includes 45 written reflective journal entries of a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 400 words, where students were asked to reflect on their experiences of communicating in English, the difficulties they experienced, moments of success, and their feelings about using the language, and the second data source includes transcripts of 20 semi–structured oral interviews with 20 students. Each interview lasted for about 15 to 20 minutes, and all interviews were audio–recorded with the participants' informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to the same procedures used to analyse the written texts. Altogether, the corpus consists of approximately 25,000 words, which is considered to be large enough and rich enough to be subjected to systematic qualitative analysis.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis is designed to operate on four interlocking levels, which reflect the eclectic framework that underpins this study, and it involves various aspects at each level. At the level of lexis, it involves the emotional vocabulary learners draw upon, the degree to which their emotional labelling is differentiated, the density of their emotional wording, and the presence or the striking absence of affectively charged language. At the level of grammar, it involves patterns of transitivity, modality choices, and the degree to which learners use first person forms to own or disown emotional experiences, because these elements are crucial in understanding how learners express themselves. At the level of discursive practice, it involves intertextual references, genre conventions, and the ways in which learners situate themselves in relation to institutional and cultural norms of communication, while also considering how these practices shape their emotional expression. Finally, at the ideological level, it involves the use of van Dijk's (1998) ideological square to track patterns of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, and the discursive strategies through which emotional suppression or expression is ideologically framed and justified, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between language, emotions, and ideology. The quotes aren't labeled and they have identifiers. (P1, P2) We selected them intentionally because they reflect our key arguments. We transcribed them exactly as spoken, and the language isn't altered. We didn't correct spelling or grammar, therefore this ensures authenticity.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Distribution of Affective Language Strategies

Examination of the corpus discloses a markedly uneven distribution of affective language strategies across Goleman's (1995) five domains of emotional intelligence. As Table 1 indicates, self-awareness-related

strategies are the most frequent, suggesting that learners overwhelmingly focus on introspective self-report, a discursive mode which is well supported within existing conventions of academic writing and is thus less ideologically restricted than more interpersonal forms of emotional expression, because Table 1 provides the frequency of affective language strategies across Goleman's (1995) five domains of emotional intelligence.

Table 1 : *Distribution of Affective Language Strategies by Emotional Intelligence Domain*

Emotional Intelligence Domain	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self-Awareness	82	34.2
Self-Regulation	63	26.3
Empathy	41	17.1
Social Skills	29	12.1
Motivation	25	10.4
Total	240	100

Note. Frequency counts are based on all identified affective language instances across the full corpus (N = 240). Instances were coded by two independent raters with an inter-rater reliability of $\kappa = .87$.

On the other hand, empathy-related strategies were used much less frequently (17.1%), and the ramification of this tendency is of paramount importance for the communicative and interpersonal aspects of EFL discourse competence. The following excerpt is from P7's written journal entry, which was the typical case where self-awareness strategies predominated over empathy-related strategies:

"I always feel nervous when I speak English in front of my teacher. I know I am not confident but I cannot change this feeling. My heart beats fast and I forget words."

The text displays a relatively high degree of intrapersonal emotional awareness, as the learner is able to identify and label both physical and psychological symptoms of communicative anxiety with a fair degree of accuracy, but the discourse is almost exclusively self-centred. There is no attempt to orient to the interlocutor, to use mitigating pragmatic strategies, or to recast the emotional experience in more socially oriented terms, and grammatically, the subjects of all the main clauses are first-person singular, producing a strongly self-oriented pattern of transitivity that is typical of self-awareness-dominant emotional discourse.

4.2 Ideological Constraints on Emotional Discourse

Ideological analysis of the corpus indicates that there are at least three different ideological formations that systematically constrain learners' use of affective language. The first may be called an ideology of academic emotional neutrality, a discourse norm that sees the explicit expression of emotion as inappropriate in formal academic communication, which is supported by a number of institutional practices, such as syllabus design, assessment criteria and teacher feedback, that implicitly or explicitly discourage the use of affective language and valorize impersonal, objective and propositional forms of expression.

The second ideology is concealment of emotions, and in Iraqi culture, expressing emotions publicly is perceived as weakness and shameful. Expressing emotions in public is also considered impolite, therefore, this has implications for students' attitudes toward emotional language use. Students have learned this ideology and reproduced it through their own discourse, thus, the following excerpt taken from the interviews (P12) illustrates how students reproduce this ideology in their speech by mirroring their culture.

"In our culture we do not say how we feel too much. It is not polite. When I write in English also I think it is better to not show my emotions because the teacher will think I am not serious student."

We see in this extract the interpenetration of cultural and institutional ideologies in the learner's discourse, as the student makes an explicit link between cultural norms of emotional restraint and expectations of academic propriety, and the modal construction "it is better to not" indexes a normative judgment and serves as an ideological justification for the suppression of emotional display. This justification is founded on an appeal to institutional authority (the teacher will think), because it reflects van Dijk's (2001) idea of ideological legitimation through recourse to social consensus and institutional sanction.

The third ideological formation that emerges from the corpus relates to gender norms, as depicted in Table 2, where male and female learners exhibit different patterns of affective language use strategies, specifically because female learners report higher frequencies of empathy and social skills strategies, while male learners employ self-regulation and motivational strategies more often.

Table 2 : Gender Differences in Affective Language Strategy Distribution

Emotional Intelligence Domain	Male (n=22)	Female (n=23)	Total
Self-Awareness	38	44	82
Self-Regulation	39	24	63
Empathy	14	27	41
Social Skills	10	19	29
Motivation	16	9	25
Total	117	123	240

Note. Figures represent raw frequency counts of affective language instances per domain, disaggregated by participant gender.

These gender-based patterns of affective language use are also in line with the broader sociocultural norms that dictate the proper emotional behavior of men and women in the Iraqi context, and the higher frequency of empathetic and socially oriented emotional language among female learners can be seen as a reflection of the sociocultural connection of femininity with interpersonal sensitivity. Similarly, the greater use of self-regulation and motivational strategies by male learners can be linked to the cultural value placed on emotional control and achievement in masculine identities. Overall, these findings suggest that emotional discourse is fundamentally ideologically driven and lend support to the call for a CDA-based framework for examining the social dimensions of emotional intelligence in EFL communication.

4.3 Lexical Dimensions of Emotional Granularity

On the lexis level, the analysis showed that learners exhibited a very low level of emotional granularity in their discourse, and a small set of general emotional words (feeling, nervous, happy, sad, afraid, comfortable) accounted for most of all affective vocabulary used. This is in line with Brackett's (2019) conceptualization of emotional granularity as an aspect of emotional intelligence that is reflected directly in speakers' lexical choices, because the near-absence of more fine-grained emotion words (e.g. apprehensive, exhilarated, ambivalent, disconcerted) points to a clear gap in learners' affective vocabulary in English, which is at the same time a cause and a consequence of their restricted emotional discourse competence.

The frequency distribution of the top 10 most frequent affective lexical items in the corpus is reported in Table 3, and as shown in the table, the distribution reveals the learners' concentration of emotional expression on a small range of general affective lexical items.

Table 3 :*Frequency of the Ten Most Common Affective Lexical Items in the Corpus*

Affective Lexical Item	Frequency	Percentage of Total Affective Lexis (%)
Nervous / nervous about	48	11.3
Feel / feeling	45	10.6
Happy / happiness	38	8.9
Afraid / fear	31	7.3
Comfortable / uncomfortable	27	6.4
Sad / sadness	24	5.6
Worried / worry	22	5.2
Confident / confidence	19	4.5
Excited / excitement	17	4.0
Frustrated / frustration	14	3.3
Total (top 10)	285	67.1

Note. Frequencies are based on all affective lexical items identified in the corpus (N = 425 total instances). Percentage column reflects proportion relative to total affective lexical item count.

The fact that 67.1% of all affective words in the corpus are tied up in just ten general terms is a very powerful index of the learners' discourse competence, which reveals a predisposition to rely on a restricted set of emotionally neutral, pragmatically "safe" expressions that, while not entailing a risk of being misunderstood or transgressing the norms of social interaction, sacrifice the subtlety and interpersonal force that distinguish emotionally intelligent discourse. This is in line with

Pavlenko's (2005) description of emotional lexical attrition in foreign language use, and with more general CDA-based findings that ideologically constrained discourse tends to coalesce around a small set of socially sanctioned lexical items.

4.4 Discursive Practice and Institutional Positioning

At the level of discursive practice, the results suggest that learners tend to reproduce closely the norms of institutional genres that marginalize emotional content, which includes reflective journal entries, a context in which personal feelings are often expected to be expressed more freely. Instead, many learners deploy a quasi-academic discourse marked by impersonal structures, widespread use of passive voice, and an emphasis on propositional over emotional content, because they have internalized the institutional ethos that assumes academic writing is objectively and emotionally neutral by definition. Moreover, they reproduce these values in genres that are, in principle, more amenable to affective expression.

In contrast, the oral interview data exhibited a relatively wider range of emotion-related language, although still far from as richly and variedly affective as we would expect in informal first-language interaction. The interview situation, as a social context, actually legitimized affective expression in a way that the institutional context of academic writing did not, because by providing a discursive space for the explicit reflection of emotion, albeit temporary, it allowed for this expression. This conclusion provides further evidence for Fairclough's (1992) notion that the moulding of discourse is not only determined by relatively stable ideological structures, but also by the immediate interactional and situational context of particular communicative events.

5. Conclusion

This study has probed the ways in which emotional intelligence is linguistically encoded and enacted in the spoken and written

communication of Iraqi EFL university learners at the University of Mosul through an eclectic analytical framework that consists of Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional CDA model, Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence framework and van Dijk's (2001) socio-cognitive approach, and it was found that these learners resort to a limited, context-bound range of affective language strategies, with discourse related to self-awareness being the most preferred and empathy and social skills strategies being the least frequently used.

The ideological analysis suggests that the restricted repertoire of affective language strategies is not simply a matter of individual psychological variables or linguistic limitations per se, but a product of the systemic effect of three interlocking ideological formations: the academic norm of emotional neutrality, the cultural ideology of emotional restraint, and gendered discourse scripts that assign different patterns of emotional expression to male and female learners, and these ideological forces are continually reinforced and legitimized by institutional discourse practices that construct overt emotional expression as incompatible with academic seriousness and social acceptability.

The lexical analysis also shows a striking lack of emotional granularity, with most emotion words being drawn from a restricted set of general, pragmatically safe words, and this implies that developing emotional discourse competence in EFL contexts will involve not only exposing learners to a wider range of affective lexis, but also designing pedagogical interventions that address and overcome the ideological limitations that impinge on emotionally intelligent communication.

The results of the study support the hypotheses suggested in the beginning. The eclectic framework, which is composed of Fairclough's CDA model, Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence, and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, has proven to be powerful, practical, and analytically fruitful in the analysis of affective discourse in EFL settings.

Future research may further this study by using the same framework to analyze affective discourse in other Arab EFL settings, and may also use longitudinal designs to see how emotional discourse competence develops over time, and examine the impact of explicitly EI-oriented pedagogical interventions on learners' use of affective language.

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