Applied Linguistics and Peacebuilding in Colombian English Teachers' Master's Theses: A Focus on Criticality

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Abstract

This article presents a review from a social and critical perspective of applied linguistics (AL) within English language teaching (ELT) and how it relates to the notion of education for peace in Colombia. The review involved a content analysis of 27 master's theses authored by English language teacher-researchers. The study was situated within the MA program in AL at a public university and focused on examining the interplay between the critical dimension of AL and education for peace in the schools where these teacher-researchers taught. For the authors of these theses, the classroom served as a social and political stage where they conducted their pedagogical and research initiatives reported in their theses. The selection of the 27 theses was based on the critical notion of peace as an issue relevant to the social and critical dimension of AL. The research question used for the review is: How do master's theses within the framework of critical AL written by English language teacher-researchers relate to education for peace? The review yielded valuable insights in the form of an emerging theme about the relevance of critical applied linguistics in local settings. It also demonstrated the key role language plays in education for peace in promoting conflict resolution and encouraging social awareness in local spaces.

Keywords: content analysis; critical applied linguistics; education for peace; English language teaching

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La lingüística aplicada y la construcción de paz en tesis de maestría de profesores de inglés colombianos: un énfasis en la criticidad

Resumen

Este artículo revisa una perspectiva social y crítica de la lingüística aplicada (LA) a la enseñanza del inglés en relación con la noción de educación para la paz en Colombia. Para tal fin, se realizó un análisis de contenido de 27 tesis de maestría de profesores-investigadores de inglés. Este estudio se enmarca dentro del programa de maestría en LA de una universidad pública en Colombia. Su tema central es la interacción entre la dimensión crítica de la LA y la educación para la paz en las escuelas de los autores de las tesis como escenarios sociales y políticos donde llevaron a cabo sus iniciativas pedagógicas y de investigación reportadas en sus tesis. La selección de las 27 tesis tuvo como base la noción crítica de paz como un tema relevante para la perspectiva social y crítica de la LA. La pregunta de investigación utilizada para la revisión es: ¿cómo se relacionan las tesis de maestría enmarcadas en la LA crítica escritas por profesores-investigadores de inglés con la educación para la paz? La revisión arrojó valiosas perspectivas encapsuladas en un tema emergente sobre la relevancia de la LA crítica en entornos locales. También se muestra el papel clave del lenguaje en la educación para la paz para promover la resolución de conflictos y fomentar la conciencia social en los espacios locales.

Palabras clave: análisis de contenido; educación para la paz; enseñanza del inglés; lingüística aplicada crítica

Introduction

The nexus between a critical emphasis of applied linguistics (hereafter AL) and peace in the Colombian English language teaching (hereafter ELT) milieu is genuine as it challenges orthodox language theoretical models to nurture reflexivity and action on social issues through language education and research in a graduate program. This critical stance moves language instruction beyond rigid, structuralist paradigms. It fosters violence-free agency for social rapport, highlights language as a humanizing force to bridge divides and encourage mutual respect, and emphasizes its potential as a vehicle for constructive, respectful, and empathetic communication to prevent violence. In turn, education for peace appears here to draw attention to its integration with critical perspectives of AL and language education to exert Colombian ELT stakeholders' transformative agency for building peace within and from educational settings.

When paired with research, language education becomes a means of resisting marginalization, denial, silence, and oblivion practices of centers of power (Rueda, 2013). It fosters a culture of peace in classrooms as well as other social settings outside schools. We have been concerned about those violent interactions and discourses that teachers and students must endure, and that have led to the appearance of subjectivities of fear, rootlessness, distrust, and precariousness (Rueda, 2013). Peace gains significance in English language education because, as Aldana *et al*. (2020) report, Colombian armed conflict has left consequences on victims and has impacted educational scenarios where members of the educational community have been likely to become victims and objects of violence and destruction. Aldana (2024) argues that education for peace creates opportunities within AL to ELT by problematizing language's constitutive role in peace-building. While the linguistic dimension of English remains intact, the instructional goals and methods of ELT can be reconfigured to promote peace. This perspective emphasizes that people should use English to communicate with one another in ways that are respectful and peaceful.

Our Concern

Our interest in learning about the critical dimension of AL arose at the time that we wanted to understand how language was complexly related to social and cultural factors other than language instruction in schools. It was also our interest to understand what ELT teacher-researchers had to propose about issues of language and power, such as conflicts that provoked deeper questions than merely solving instrumental problems. Our inspiration for this quest was Alastair Pennycook's seminal work *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction* (hereafter CALx) (Pennycook, 2001), in which he calls "an ostrich-like approach to applied linguistics" (p. 33) the approach that highlights how orthodox disciplines refuse to consider broader perspectives on language and its social and political dimensions. Pennycook retakes the discussion of the relation between language and power and the political domain that makes AL critical in a new edition of his same seminal work, which he titled "Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Re-Introduction" ten years later (Pennycook, 2001).

A critical approach to AL frames language as a dynamic social and cultural phenomenon, encouraging us to prioritize the voices of teachers and learners as they navigate social and political issues within and beyond school contexts. In our roles as teacher educators and thesis advisors, we have observed that in recent years, many of our graduate students and advisees (i.e., teacher-researchers), have been proposing research and pedagogical topics in studies to add understanding to the relation between language and society. Furthermore, we felt it meaningful that the initiatives of some teacher-researchers, along with their research participants, have tackled instances of conflict and inequalities and portrayed language research as inquiry of political appeal.

The aforementioned ideas show us the usefulness of examining how some studies undertaken in educational settings such as ELT classrooms by our students/advisees have contributed to the transition from AL to CALx and how such transition can be exemplified by peace as either a notion or a practice, and education for peace as either a means or an end. Hence, a question that guides this article is: How do master's theses within the framework of CALx written by ELT teacher-researchers relate to education for peace?

Theoretical Considerations

Linguistics and the Restrictions of Its Denomination of "Applied"

The discussion in this section starts from an account of the role of linguistics in the appearance of AL as a (sub) discipline. After tracing the origin of AL, we call attention to how it has developed from an orthodox descriptive emphasis on the disciplinary conception of language as a study end, to a social and critical sort of unorthodox counter-disciplinary focus on the conception of language as a vehicle of social transformation. This review emphasizes the critical role of AL in addressing inequalities and injustices in Colombian society, where neglecting peace has often marginalized certain groups and sustained unjust practices. It also seeks to contribute to research that challenges the dominance of English, advocating for an egalitarian view of all languages and cultures to promote peaceable practices.

Viewed from an orthodox perspective, the administration of the knowledge resulting from linguistic studies to the language instructional practice situates linguistics as an independent science, AL as a (sub)discipline, and ELT as a subordinate activity. Quintero-Polo and Bonilla-Medina (2022) state that linguistics has unfolded as theoretical, descriptive, or applied. The theoretical emphasis provides foundational models for understanding language, informing the frameworks that underpin linguistic research. The descriptive emphasis documents and analyzes the structures and functions of various languages, offering a systematic view of language phenomena. The applied emphasis focuses on practical applications, particularly in language teaching, where linguistic knowledge supports instructional strategies and classroom problem-solving. However, this article considers such emphases to be less relevant when discussing human and social issues in ELT, as their technical, prescriptive, and product-oriented focus does not fully address the social sensitivities and responsibilities involved in language teaching. Instead, we emphasize knowledge that aligns with language teachers' needs and the public's interest in fostering equitable and socially responsive language education.

The foundational theories and institutional developments brought about by influential figures in the advancement of AL within the Eurocentric and Anglo world (Table 1) have defined an epistemological disciplinary dimension of AL. Language teachers and language programs around the world have felt they must replicate and impart such an epistemological disciplinary dimension, with little stress on the shifts in focus from structuralist and behavioral approaches to more transformational and sociocritical perspectives. With that in mind, we uphold a transition through qualitative research upon the multidimensionality of language mediating the addition of understanding of social and political issues within and beyond classrooms.

Table 1. *Milestones of AL in the Eurocentric and Anglo World*

Time reference	Representative actors and events		Key Contributions and Milestones
1916	Ferdinand de Saussure	General Course on Linguistics	A milestone in the beginning of modern linguistics. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* served as foundation for linguistic work in Europe
1921	Edward Sapir	Language	Influenced by Franz Boas (linguistic anthropology)
1933	Leonard Bloomfield	Language	had the most impacting effect on North American linguistics until the mid-1960s. His major contribution was what was known as American structural linguistics: the mind was a *tabula rasa* in initial language experiences
1937	John R. Firth	The Tongues of Men	Inspirator of the London School of Linguistics. Systemic linguistic approach to study language use in its situational context. Influenced Halliday's functional systemic linguistics

1938	Roman Jakobson	On the theory of phonological affinities among languages	Main representative of the Prague School of linguistics. Produced foundations for phonological and functional analysis. It significantly impacted Chomsky's theories.
Mid 1940s	World War II	Origin of linguistic programs to apply specific knowledge to the practice of foreign language teaching	Linguists turn their attention to the need of learning foreign languages quickly and effectively
1948	Charles C. Fries	Language Learning. A Quarterly Journal of Applied Linguistics at at the University of Michigan.	Founder of the at the University of Michigan's journal pioneering the term *applied linguistics*
1957	Noam Chomsky	Syntactic Structures	Started to question behavioral assumptions and habit-formation ideas related to language acquisition in the mid-1950s. His theories had a focus on syntax.
1959	Charles Ferguson	Creation of the Center of Applied Linguistics (CAL) & creation of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)	Founded the CAL in Washington D.C. The CAL, under the direction of Ferguson, created the TOEFL.
1964	AILA	Creation of the *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée (*International Association of Applied Linguistics (for its initials in English: AILA)	The AILA was created in France
1965	Noam Chomsky	First publication of "Aspects of the Theory of Syntax"	Challenged American structural linguistics but continued with de Saussure's *langue* and *parole* or the notions of competence and performance respectively. Proposed basic phrase-structure units, also called parts of speech for language analysis under principles of his generative theory.
1973	S. Pit Corder	Publication of "Introducing Applied Linguistics"	Was the first theoretical foundation of the discipline that focused on the teaching of L2.
1977	AAAL	Creation of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL)	The creation of the AAAL was intended to make a theoretical distinction between ELT and linguistics issues other than L2 teaching and to take the monopoly of applied linguistics from TESOL.
1980	Oxford University Press	Creation of the journal of Applied Linguistics - AL	The *AL* Journal assumes the functions of applied linguistics that *TESOL Quarterly* had before.
2001	Alastair Pennycook	Publication of "Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction"	With his "Four forms of the critical in applied linguistics" places applied linguistics in a postmodern scenario with the intention to challenge instrumental views of language as static and as a product.

Source: Own creation

Table 1 outlines foundational theories and milestones in the development of AL, illustrating its evolution and ongoing impact on language teaching and research. A key contribution came from Ferdinand de Saussure's *General Course on Linguistics* (1916), which established the distinction between *langue* (language as a system) and *parole* (language in use). This structuralist framework laid the groundwork for systematic language analysis and significantly influenced the Prague and London schools. For example, Roman Jakobson of the Prague School advanced phonological and functional analysis, essential for understanding sound systems across languages. This work has informed both the teaching of pronunciation in language education and comparative phonological research, providing practical insights into phonetics for classroom applications. Similarly, John R. Firth's situational approach from the London School emphasized the importance of context in language use, directly impacting communicative language teaching methods, which focus on real-world language use.

Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) further revolutionized language theory by moving away from behaviorist views and introducing generative grammar, highlighting the cognitive aspects of language acquisition. This paradigm shift had significant implications for language teachers and researchers as it underscored the innate structures in language learning, leading to teaching methods that consider learners' mental processing abilities. S. Pit Corder's Introducing Applied Linguistics (1973) specifically directed this theoretical framework towards second language acquisition, offering educators tools to address learners' errors and understand them as part of a natural learning process rather than as failures. This approach has empowered teachers to create supportive learning environments that foster language development.

Through these contributions, AL has set the pace for enhancing language instruction. Linguistics has emerged as a discipline that has provided teachers and researchers with theoretical models for them to apply when solving linguistic problems (Widdowson, 2000 as cited by Davies & Elder, 2004). ELT has not been exempt from the influence of linguistic schools, which have established dominant paradigms for effective teaching (Grabe & Kaplan, 1992) but have failed to address real-world communicative needs.

In Colombia, a defining influence of orthodox linguistics on AL has been the elevated status of grammar in ELT research and pedagogical practices, particularly during the 1990s. Parker and Riley (2009) suggest that Chomsky's generative theory, which posits that humans can produce an infinite number of sentences using a finite set of well-defined rules, contributed to this emphasis. The existence of universally applicable language rules positioned grammar as central to learning any natural human language, thus elevating its status in ELT.

Colombian scholars Cárdenas (2006), Guerrero (2008), Quintero (2016), and Usma (2009) have explored the impact of grammatical theories on ELT, each highlighting a unique dimension. Cárdenas examines the curricular dimension, finding that grammar-focused instruction often overshadows communicative approaches in national curricula, potentially limiting students' real-life language skills. Guerrero critiques the policy dimension, arguing that Colombia's National Plan for Bilingualism prioritizes traditional grammar frameworks, which can restrict communicative competence by emphasizing form over use. Quintero addresses the identity dimension, noting that rigid grammar-based approaches often position pre-service teachers as rule transmitters rather than facilitators of meaningful communication. Finally, Usma explores the pedagogical dimension, suggesting that a focus on grammatical accuracy can exclude marginalized students who lack language resources, thus reinforcing social stratification. Collectively, these studies show that grammatical theories in Colombian ELT often reinforce traditional approaches that may limit learners' communicative capacities.

As the field evolves, a critical shift in the incorporation of AL in ELT has been unfolding, drawing on the perspectives of B. Kumaravadivelu, Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, Pierre Bourdieu, Suresh Canagarajah, Walter D. Mignolo, Catherine E. Walsh, and Alastair Pennycook. Kumaravadivelu's (2006) *postmethod pedagogy* emphasizes teacher autonomy, cultural relevance, and critical reflection, challenging prescriptive teaching models. Apple (2019) critiques educational systems for perpetuating inequalities and urges ELT educators to promote equity. Freire (2017) advocates for education as liberation, fostering critical consciousness in learners to address social justice. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of *language as symbolic power* highlights how ELT may reinforce social hierarchies, calling for equity-focused language teaching. Canagarajah's (2022) *translingual approach* celebrates linguistic diversity, promoting fluid language use that values learners' agency. Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) decolonial perspective critiques the dominance of colonial languages, advocating for multilingualism and context-sensitive approaches. Together, these scholars advocate for decoloniality, inclusivity, and social justice, establishing a transformative foundation for ELT.

In addition to the scholars mentioned above, we would like to highlight an emerging approach to AL and ELT that concurs with alternative agendas, principally inspired by the work of Alastair Pennycook. His book Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction (2001) challenges traditional, instrumental views of language, advocating for a critical perspective that addresses social and political dimensions of language use. This view is especially relevant for teachers and researchers interested in language as a tool for empowerment and social justice, encouraging pedagogical practices that promote equality and cultural awareness in the classroom.

One of Pennycook's points about CALx is that there are four forms of the critical in AL: critical thinking, social relevance, emancipatory modernism, and problematizing practice (Pennycook, 2001). These forms offer diverse lenses through which language education can be examined, each contributing uniquely to the broader critical discourse within AL:

Critical thinking fosters analytical skills and challenges assumptions, helping learners question dominant language ideologies. Social relevance links language education to real-world issues like inequality, showing students how language shapes and reflects societal norms. Emancipatory modernism emphasizes empowerment, using language education as a tool for social justice and to uplift marginalized groups. Problematizing practice encourages critical reflection on accepted teaching norms, examining cultural and political influences on language pedagogy. All four of these forms deepen the critical scope of AL by connecting language education with social critique, justice, and transformation. They enable educators to address the broader implications of language use and pedagogy, making CALx a powerful framework for examining and challenging social inequities through language education.

They have also inspired our discussion in this review and similar research agendas that consider those views of language valuable local practices linked to the global world, serving as the means for contesting predefined goals and orthodox theoretical models by detaching from views and practices that instrumentalize language as a fixed and static product. Since CALx is related to the intersection of different critically oriented domains—critical discourse analysis, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy (Pennycook, 2017)—ways of conducting scholarly inquiry about social, cultural, ideological, and political issues find in it a sound framework to add understanding to the role that language plays in society.

As one example of issues addressed in CALx is the inadequacy of orthodox theoretical models that foster the idea that language education should be a neutral setting of knowledge transmission in which everyone who learns to speak English has a chance to succeed (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009). Models like those are inadequate because not only do they perpetuate the hegemony of the English language around the world (Phillipson, 1992) while jeopardizing local cultures and languages but also induce "static forms of Othering in applied linguistics [that] consider diversity is a superficial covering over essential human similarities" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 165). These models are also ineffective because they fail to reconcile different representations of reality (Widdowson, 2000 as cited by Davies & Elder, 2004) by excluding cultures other than the Euro and Anglo North American ones.

Thence, we deem worth highlighting one aspect of AL regarding our concern. It is that relying on CALx implies looking at linguistics and related disciplines as sources to inform decision-making and action-taking. Thus, this article intends to show some Colombian ELT teacher-researchers' growth as initiators of alternative local agendas within the framework of CALx to study multidimensional language related phenomena. The alternative local agendas conceive language education knowledge as subjective and political, and language education research as transformative initiatives. Such is the case of studies that challenge social asymmetries that lead to conflicts in and outside of language classrooms. The Colombian ELT milieu can be considered part of that situation; the mediation of language appears here playing a key role in education for peace to promote conflict resolution and encourage social awareness in local spaces in Colombia.

Understanding Conflict Resolution within Education for Peace

We have learned that education for peace aims to go beyond the mere absence of violence, addressing deeper issues of social injustice and promoting a peaceful coexistence among diverse individuals. Rather than eliminating all conflict, it emphasizes conflict resolution as a constructive process, using language as a tool to foster respectful and peaceable communication. By tapping into language's peace-making potential, CALx encourages practices that challenge structural and symbolic violence, helping individuals to navigate conflicts without harm and to dismantle underlying patterns of coded violence.

The delineation of governmental programs and projects grouped under the concept of education for peace often show peace as either abolishing war or resolving the causes of conflicts that can lead to war. The former resulting from a negative perspective and the latter resulting from a positive stance about peace. That being so, our agreement

with the positive stance and that peace education benefits from pacific conflict resolution and that it calls for a coherent pedagogical dimension turns as the focus on this section of the article.

The conflict within Colombia has unfolded as a form of war mainly based on the use of weapons for the elimination of the Other and that established a culture of violence from the 1960s to present day. It has had as main actors the State, guerrilla groups, drug trafficking cartels, paramilitary groups, and criminal gangs. Nonetheless, a light of hope for the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace happened when representatives of both the Colombian State and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) signed the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace (*Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera),* also known as the Theater Colón Agreement, in Bogotá on November 24, 2016.

The signing of the Theater Colón Agreement entailed the commencement of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition (*Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición*). This system is made up of The Commission for the Clarification of Truth (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad*), together with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz),* and the Unit for the Search for Disappeared Persons in the framework of the Armed Conflict (*Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas*). All these three components of the system have reported information of utmost importance; for instance, in June, 2022, The *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad* presented its final report to the whole country (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, 2022). This report has implied the involvement of institutions of all kinds, including the educational ones. The report also implied the challenge of achieving the goal of cultural transformation by means of proposals for seeing the Other as an equal, learning to trust and relate to the environment, how to learn to dialogue to be able to reconcile, and to resolve conflicts with others through dialogue and respect. Thence, education arises as an optimal driver for peace, and English language education based on CALx fits such a purpose.

The notion of education for peace has raised the means-or-end dichotomy whose main goal has been to attain a culture of peace. Jenkins (2019) states that scholarly inquiry and pedagogical practices *about* and *for* ceasing violence in all its forms contribute to making a transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. Such a view leads us to think of education for peace as a practice of cultural transformation in response to conflict and violence upheavals that transcends mere instruction.

Initiatives for education for peace in Colombia extend well beyond schools, encompassing contributions from social movements, violence prevention programs, historical memory preservation efforts, and government-led civic education initiatives. For example, the *Escuelas de Paz* (Schools of Peace) program engages communities in workshops that teach conflict resolution and promote social cohesion, particularly in regions affected by armed conflict. Additionally, social movements like *Movice* (National Movement of Victims of State Crimes) work to preserve historical memory by documenting stories of victims, fostering awareness, and promoting restorative justice. These initiatives collectively aim to build a culture of peace by addressing the roots of violence and fostering civic responsibility across all areas of society.

In addition to the above-referred initiatives, we believe it is worth highlighting the mission of fostering true capacities for action in favor of peace assigned to schools in Colombia. Law 1732 (Congreso de Colombia, 2014) and Regulatory Decree 1038 (Ministry of Education, 2015), both better known as Peace Cathedra (*Cátedra de la Paz*), demand from the study plans of schools and universities to educate people capable of going beyond social structures and imaginaries to critically analyze the social reality and to transform those aspects that could relate to violence.

We reckon worth pointing out that under principles of freedom, education extends to all dimensions of human life: its social dynamics and daily practices. It implies that what and how children learn has social, cultural, and political consequences and what and how teachers teach influences learning results and uses. Therefore, one dimension of education *for* the values of peace is a learner-centered pedagogy that professes freedom and criticality to reflect and act in the face of injustice and violence. Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Freire, 2017), to name but one example, has inspired learner-centered initiatives with cognitive, reflective, affective, and agentive features.

We believe that the practice of critical language teaching and research in the Colombian ELT milieu can be a way to problematize conflict and to contribute to add understanding to the concept of peace. It implies that language be a vehicle for social transformation and a mediator of collaboration, growth in empathy, and recognition of the Other. Furthermore, the problematization of everyday life conflicts and the search for non-violent possibilities for their management encompasses being aware and becoming active whenever violence arises.

A Framework for Content Analysis in MA Theses

The study used a qualitative and descriptive design (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) and content analysis (hereafter CA) as an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and illustrative in intent (Mayring, 2000). Furthermore, the study considered some CA criteria (see Table 2) (Krippendorff, 2004) to examine MA theses as available texts written by ELT teacher-researchers as a graduation requisite for their MA in AL. The contents emerged from those theses as data rich enough to stimulate our interpretation.

The context for the study was the MA program in AL of a public university in Bogotá and the ELT teacher-researchers' schools as social and political scenarios where they conducted their pedagogical and research initiatives reported in their theses. Regarding the unit of analysis in the data, we paid attention to how ELT teacher-researchers, who engaged with CALx frameworks, addressed issues related to peacebuilding within their MA theses. To make decisions on what theses to consider for our study, we centered on those theses that contained salient features of alternative views of language for ELT that entailed multifaceted initiatives to contest violence, problematize conflict, and propose initiatives for peacebuilding in Colombia. With the above ideas in mind, a summary of a CA framework came to light for us to select 27 MA theses written by MA graduates following the criteria in Table 2 below:

Table 2. *Framework for the Content Analysis of MA Theses*

CA Guiding Criteria	
What constitutes data in the CA project?	Contents relate to salient features on the interplay between CALx and Education for peace emerging from MA theses in a from-to frame of reference (i.e., 2001 to 2022).
What is the issue that the study seeks to answer by examining the data?	How do master's theses within the framework of CALx written by ELT teacher-researchers relate to education for peace?
What is the academic context where data takes place for the CA?	The MA program in AL and the schools as social and political scenarios.
What is the unit of analysis looked in the data?	ELT teacher-researchers' engagement with CALx frameworks, i.e., alternative views of language, language education, and language research that entailed initiatives to contest violence and problematize conflict for peacebuilding in Colombia.

Source: Own creation

To complement the aforesaid framework, we selected 27 theses out of 130 from 2001 onward because this year coincides with the beginning of new millennium or 21st Century, the appearance of Pennycook's *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction,* and because the theses started to be available from the online catalogue and the online repository of the university library.

Findings

Emerging Theme: The Critical Dimension of Applied Linguistics to ELT Enacting Education for Peace in Local Settings

This theme highlights a critical dimension within AL in the MA program theses from 2001 onward featuring a socially and critically aware approach. The thesis authors showed a stronger commitment to exploring language education's role in addressing social issues. Some experiences examined collective, socially relevant practices, integrating community concerns and critical thinking into language classrooms (Pennycook, 2008). Theses from this period reflect efforts to understand and challenge aggression, violence, and other societal issues through collaborative

learning, narratives, and peer interaction, promoting students' roles as active, socially aware participants. This features in AL practices represents a foundational move towards education for peace, as illustrated in Table 3, where the theses demonstrate a deeper engagement with CALx and education for peace in Colombia.

Table 3. *MA Theses Illustrating the Critical Dimension of AL in Favor of Education for Peace*

Authors	Thesis Title	Relation to Critical Applied Linguistics	Relation to Education for Peace in Colombia
Aguirre. D, (2012)	Bullying through critical literacy practices	Utilizes critical literacy practices to analyze and address social issues, challenging power dynamics and promoting social justice and equity.	Addresses the issue of bullying, which can disrupt peace within schools and communities, highlighting the importance of addressing such conflicts.
Bello, I. (2011)	Analyzing students' discourses as citizens in the EFL classroom	Examines students' discourses to uncover power structures and ideologies, promoting critical awareness and agency in civic engagement.	Explores how language education can empower students to engage as active citizens, contributing to a democratic and peaceful society.
Calderón, D. (2020)	Of native-speakerism and Colombian English Teachers' life experiences	Critically analyzes native-speakerism and its implications, advocating for inclusive language policies and practices that promote social equality and justice.	Examines issues of identity and discrimination, which can impact social harmony, emphasizing the importance of inclusive language education.
Cañón .M, (2012)	Social awareness about forced displacement in an EFL classroom	Utilizes education to raise awareness and understanding of social issues, fostering critical perspectives and empathy towards marginalized communities.	Addresses a significant social issue (forced displacement), highlighting the role of education in promoting awareness and understanding of such issues.
Cárdenas, M.L. (2018)	EFL eleventh graders' decision-making via critical literacy practices: a study of their social agency	Engages students in critical literacy practices to develop their agency and capacity to challenge social injustices, promoting active participation in social change.	Empowers students to make informed decisions through critical literacy, contributing to their agency in promoting peace and social justice.
Contreras, A. C. (2016).	Inquiring within the students' community context as a means of conflict resolution	Engages in critical inquiry to analyze and address conflicts, fostering dialogue and reconciliation through understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences.	Utilizes inquiry to address conflicts within students' communities, promoting understanding and reconciliation as part of peacebuilding efforts.
Diaz, A.M. (2006)	Fostering a culture of peace in a public school in Bogota: The authoring cycle as a curriculum framework	Utilizes curriculum design to promote critical reflection and action towards peacebuilding, fostering inclusive and participatory learning environments.	Focuses on implementing a curriculum framework to cultivate a culture of peace within a school environment, emphasizing the importance of peaceful coexistence.
Duarte, C.A. (2021)	Looking beyond the essentialization of culture through EL teachers' voices	Critically examines cultural essentialism and its impact on language education, advocating for inclusive practices that promote intercultural understanding and respect.	Challenges essentialized views of culture, promoting understanding and respect for cultural diversity, essential for peacebuilding in multicultural societies.
Estacio, A.M. (2017)	A Decolonial Perspective of the Native and Non-native Dichotomy in English Textbooks	Challenges colonial ideologies and power structures in language education, advocating for decolonized pedagogies that empower marginalized communities and promote social equity.	Critically examines power dynamics in language education, advocating for decolonial perspectives that promote equity and social justice, crucial for peace.
Forero, A.J. (2020)	The Discourse of Standard English: An Exercise of Disciplinary Power in International Scholarships?	Critically analyzes the discourse of standard English and its implications for social hierarchies, advocating for inclusive language policies and practices that promote social equality and justice.	Explores how language ideologies can perpetuate inequality, advocating for inclusive language practices that promote social equality and peace.
León, A.Y. (2016)	EFL Ninth Graders' Positionings about Bullying in their Communities through Written Life Stories in a Public School in Bogotá	Utilizes narrative approaches to address social issues such as bullying, fostering empathy and understanding among students to promote peaceful conflict resolution.	Addresses the issue of bullying within communities, promoting awareness and dialogue as means of resolving conflicts peacefully.

Malaver C.M. (2007)	Analyzing students' critical thinking skills in the process of solving problems through peer interaction	Engages students in problem-solving activities to develop critical thinking skills and promote active participation in addressing societal issues, essential for peacebuilding efforts.	Develops critical thinking skills among students, empowering them to address societal issues and conflicts constructively, contributing to peacebuilding.
Martinez, D. C. (2009)	Using Inquiry to Foster students' reflection on Social Issues	Engages students in inquiry-based learning to critically explore social issues, fostering empathy and critical consciousness as essential components of peaceful coexistence.	Utilizes inquiry to encourage reflection on social issues, fostering understanding and empathy among students, crucial for promoting peaceful coexistence.
Monguí, S. (2007)	Exploring Children's Narratives in the Search for Cultural Reconciliation in Schools	Utilizes narrative inquiry to explore children's narratives and promote cultural reconciliation, fostering understanding and empathy as essential components of peacebuilding.	Investigates the role of children's narratives in promoting cultural reconciliation, emphasizing the importance of storytelling in fostering understanding and peace.
Moreno, A. (2015)	EFL Learning and analysis of social issues: the use of songs and critical thinking	Integrates critical thinking and empathy into language learning activities, empowering students to critically engage with social issues and promote understanding and peace.	Utilizes language learning activities to explore social issues, fostering critical thinking and empathy among students, essential for peacebuilding efforts.
Ortiz, L.C. (2022)	Understanding the Discourse of Inclusive Education at the Higher level of Education	Critically analyzes discourse on inclusive education, advocating for transformative educational practices that promote equity and inclusion as essential components of peacebuilding.	Examines discourse around inclusive education, advocating for educational practices that promote equity and inclusion, crucial for building a peaceful society.
Porras, D.F. (2020)	Unveiling teachers' beliefs about inclusion and discovering factors that facilitate and hinder language work with hearing-impaired students	Engages in critical inquiry to uncover factors affecting inclusive language education, promoting awareness and advocacy for inclusive practices that foster understanding and peace.	Investigates factors influencing inclusive language education, promoting awareness and understanding of diverse learning needs, essential for promoting peace.
Quevedo, Y. C. P. (2008)	Children's narratives: A mirror of their social sensitivity	Utilizes children's narratives to foster social sensitivity and empathy, promoting understanding and peaceful interactions among individuals.	Highlights the role of children's narratives in reflecting social sensitivity, emphasizing the importance of empathy and understanding in promoting peaceful coexistence.
Ramírez, M.L. (2016)	Fostering Conflict Resolution Skills through Collaborative Oral Tasks in an EFL Classroom	Utilizes collaborative oral tasks to develop conflict resolution skills, promoting dialogue and understanding as essential components of peaceful conflict resolution.	Promotes conflict resolution skills among students, empowering them to resolve conflicts peacefully, contributing to the creation of a peaceful learning environment.
Rojas, C. (2014)	Revealing Students voice through the discussion of controversial issues in the EFL class	Encourages student voice and dialogue on controversial issues, promoting critical engagement and understanding as essential components of peaceful coexistence.	Empowers students to express their opinions and perspectives on controversial issues, fostering dialogue and understanding, essential for promoting peace and tolerance.
Rubiano, P.A. (2019)	EFL Eighth-Graders' Negotiation Capacities in a Peaceful Classroom Environment	Develops negotiation capacities among students to resolve conflicts peacefully, promoting understanding and empathy as essential components of peaceful classroom dynamics.	Focuses on developing negotiation skills among students, promoting peaceful conflict resolution strategies, essential for creating a harmonious classroom environment.
Ruiz, M. (2012).	Social awareness about displacement in an EFL classroom.	The thesis likely emphasizes how language education can empower students to understand and articulate their experiences and those of others. This empowerment is a key goal of critical applied linguistics, which seeks to use language education as a tool for social change and justice.	By discussing displacement, the thesis contributes to building a culture of peace within the classroom. It helps students recognize the impact of conflict on individuals and communities and encourages them to think critically about solutions and ways to support displaced persons.

Sierra, J.A. (2021)	Of Gendered Subjectivities amidst Sex segregated Schooling	Critically analyzes gendered subjectivities in education, advocating for transformative practices that challenge gender norms and promote gender equality as essential components of peacebuilding.	Examines gender dynamics in education, advocating for inclusive practices that challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality, essential for fostering peace and justice.
Silva, K.L. (2020)	Exploring learners' (re) construction of linguistic identities: An analysis of discursive practices of positioning	Engages in critical analysis of learners' linguistic identities, advocating for inclusive language practices that promote linguistic diversity and understanding as essential components of peacebuilding.	Investigates the construction of linguistic identities among learners, promoting understanding and respect for diverse linguistic backgrounds, crucial for peaceful coexistence.
Suárez. D.L. (2021)	The Colombian Deaf Community and the Discourse of Language as a Human Right: Problematizing an Inclusion Exclusion Dichotomy	Engages in critical inquiry to challenge exclusionary practices and promote linguistic rights within the deaf community, advocating for inclusive policies and practices that foster understanding and peace.	Addresses issues of inclusion/exclusion within the deaf community, advocating for linguistic rights and inclusive practices that promote equal opportunities, essential for peace.
Valcarcel, A. (2014)	Inquiry as a way to generate inclusive learning environments in efl contexts	Integrates inquiry-based approaches to create inclusive learning environments that promote participation and engagement, fostering understanding and peace as essential components of learning.	Utilizes inquiry to create inclusive learning environments, promoting participation and engagement among students, crucial for fostering understanding and peace.
West, K.H. (2020)	Colombian indigenous university students' experiences learning English	Engages in critical examination of indigenous students' experiences in English language education, advocating for culturally responsive pedagogies that promote inclusivity and respect for indigenous cultures as essential components of peacebuilding.	Explores the experiences of indigenous students in English language education, advocating for culturally responsive pedagogies that promote inclusivity and respect for indigenous cultures, essential for peacebuilding efforts.

Source: Own creation

These theses cover various aspects of CALx, emphasizing critical perspectives, empowerment, and social transformation within language education. In addition, the table highlights how each thesis relates to education for peace in Colombia, including promoting critical thinking, social awareness, conflict resolution skills, cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and empathy, all of which are essential for building a peaceful society. For instance, Aguirre's (2012) thesis addresses the necessity of promoting awareness about the consequences of bullying in school children, fostering peaceful conflict resolution. Aguirre conceives of peace as an "introspective process of self-reflection that allows the students to be aware of the problems and give some solutions through the dialogue. It creates social change when students use their voice to transform inside and the world around" (p. 97). His study reports on his students' consideration of their peers' views through negotiation, interaction, and collaboration to support healthy interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, Ruiz's thesis (2012) explores social justice as equity in action. The author conceives of peace as a space in which participants are invited to become resilient agents of transformation and hope within the community, especially when "students communicate to others the facts and opinions they came out about forced displacement and the way they could contribute to transform the reality of people that are in the situation" (p. 21). She also explores peace as an internal experience wherein "resilience allows participants to engage in the process of reading and sharing their life experiences, as a way to liberate themselves from the painful remembrances of the past" (p. 21). Inner peace here aligns with a positive conception of peace.

In the same train of thought, the approach that Moreno (2015) presents in relation to peace can be defined as "recognition of others as social and cultural being with: beliefs, values, ideals and concerns" (p. 19). For the author, the English classroom becomes a valuable setting for argumentation where students take responsibilities as individuals and social beings, following Lewis (1993) regarding language as a primary resource for personal self-definition and a way to understand people. This approach looks at language as a social means.

Another illustration is a qualitative and exploratory study reported in the thesis by Rojas (2014) whose main objective is to encourage students to express their thoughts in relation with three controversial issues: racism, women in media, and stereotypes. Her approach aligns with Johnson and Johnson (2003) in claiming that those topics, ideologies, behaviors, practices, and lifestyles on which society has not found consensus are controversial issues, having no easy answers or solutions. Her study contemplates literacy practices for constructing a sense of others, i.e., the ability to be an intelligent reader of another person`s story, and the promotion of human rights to achieve better social relations and, consequently, peace.

Table 3 also reflects a holistic and critical view of peace, violence, and conflict within Colombian language education. These theses emphasize education for peace as an active engagement with social issues, integrating conflict resolution, empathy, and critical thinking to promote understanding among students. For instance, projects on bullying (Aguirre, 2012) and forced displacement (Cañón, 2012) address how conflict and violence impact learning environments, aiming to build social awareness and empathy. These studies position language not just as a communicative tool but as a means of addressing social injustices.

Additionally, structural violence—such as exclusionary practices based on gender or linguistic identity—is critically examined, as seen in theses addressing gendered subjectivities (Sierra, 2021) and indigenous linguistic experiences (West, 2020). These works advocate for inclusive practices that counteract social inequalities, using education as a platform for peace-building by challenging stereotypes and fostering equity. Overall, these MA theses illustrate how language education can confront both direct and symbolic violence, fostering a culture of peace that is sensitive to the social realities of Colombian communities.

Conclusion and Implications

This review addressed how ELT teacher-researchers, working with CALx frameworks, engage with issues related to peacebuilding in their MA theses and embrace alternative research agendas in AL and insights to both CALx and education for peace. The review served to illustrate areas where ELT teacher-researchers' voices can account for their reflexivity and agency on education for peace issues in local settings. It also reveals that that the pedagogical and research approaches with a critical spirit proposed and discussed in the MA program in AL from where the reviewed theses emerged, positively impacted the decisions and actions of their authors. Further research on the interplay between CALx to ELT and education for peace should consider the outcomes reported in these theses to qualify both the topics and activities of the MA program academic spaces even more.

In the same train of thought, a potential impact of an ongoing research practice on the interplay between CALs and education for peace is the continued empowerment of teachers as active agents of locally embodied peacebuilding if, for instance, a narrative approach is implemented. It could be instrumental in examining the lived experiences, values, and practices of ELT curriculum actors, emphasizing their roles as human peacebuilders. Central to this is the need to revisit and question normalized forms of violence embedded in educational practices, which opens the way for transformative appraisals and reappraisals that inform political and didactic decisions toward peace.

Future studies should also recognize that peace education is not solely a content area (i.e., discussing about peace), but a practice embedded in the ways educators and students interact (i.e., peacefully). Integrating peace as a dimension of ELT thus involves deliberate choices in curriculum design and pedagogical approaches that reshape language education to prioritize empathy, respect, and constructive engagement in communication.

In future research, the voices of ELT teachers and researchers, as human peacebuilders, can also account for the role that language plays in developing critical consciousness, challenging dominant discourses, empowering marginalized voices, and fostering empathy and understanding among learners to achieve positive transformations and ensure peaceful classrooms and a peaceful Colombian society.

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