

ARTICLES / ARTÍCULOS

Constructing love in writing: Attitude Patterns in five prize-winning essays based on Gabriela Mistral's poem *Ama*¹

Construyendo el amor en la escritura: Patrones de Actitud en cinco ensayos premiados basados en el poema *Ama* de Gabriela Mistral

 **ANDREA CAMPAÑA GARCÍA**

PhD in Philosophy, Art and Social Thought
Universidad de Santiago de Chile. Chile
andrea.campana@usach.cl

 **DIEGO MENDOZA GODOY**

Magíster en Lingüística Aplicada al Inglés como Lengua Extranjera
Instituto Profesional Duoc UC. Chile
d.mendoza@profesor.duoc.cl

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how five prize-winning essays written in response to Gabriela Mistral's poem *Ama* construct meanings of love, teaching, and teacher identity through the APPRAISAL system, with a specific focus on the ATTITUDE subsystem. Drawing on discourse analysis grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), 229 attitudinal instances were identified and categorized as Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. Findings reveal a marked predominance of positive evaluation, particularly within Appreciation, indicating that students primarily engage in valuing love, pedagogy, and human relationships as socially and existentially significant phenomena. Love is construed as an ethical, transformative, and sustaining force that shapes both personal experience and pedagogical practice. Positive Judgment portrays teachers as caring, committed, and morally responsible agents, while Affect resources highlight emotional depth, vulnerability, fulfillment, and inspiration associated with learning and teaching. Negative attitudinal meanings, though less frequent, stress the fragility of love and the challenges of emotionally disengaged educational contexts. As a whole, the attitudinal patterns align closely with Mistral's pedagogical philosophy, emphasizing compassion, ethical responsibility, and the recognition of beauty in everyday life. The study contributes to research on evaluative language and reflective writing by demonstrating how young writers mobilize interpersonal meaning-making to construct professional identity and reinterpret humanistic educational values.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), appraisal, attitude, Gabriela Mistral, teacher identity.

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina cómo cinco ensayos premiados, escritos en respuesta al poema *Ama* de Gabriela Mistral, construyen significados sobre el amor, la enseñanza y la identidad docente a través del sistema de VALORACIÓN, con un enfoque específico en el subsistema de ACTITUD. A partir del análisis del discurso sustentado en la Lingüística Sistemico-Funcional (LSF), se identificaron 229 instancias actitudinales, categorizadas en Afecto, Juicio y Apreciación. Los hallazgos revelan un marcado predominio de evaluaciones positivas, particularmente dentro de Apreciación, lo que indica que los estudiantes se enfocan principalmente en valorar el amor, la pedagogía y las relaciones humanas como fenómenos social y existencialmente significativos. El amor es conceptualizado como una fuerza ética, transformadora y sustentadora que configura tanto la experiencia personal como la práctica pedagógica. El Juicio positivo presenta a los docentes como agentes comprometidos, cuidadosos y moralmente responsables, mientras que los recursos de Afecto destacan la profundidad emocional, la vulnerabilidad, la realización personal y la inspiración asociadas al aprendizaje y la enseñanza. Los significados actitudinales negativos, aunque menos frecuentes, subrayan la fragilidad del amor y los desafíos de contextos educativos emocionalmente desvinculados. En conjunto, los patrones actitudinales se alinean estrechamente con la filosofía pedagógica mistraliana, enfatizando la compasión,

la responsabilidad ética y el reconocimiento de la belleza en la vida cotidiana. El estudio contribuye a la investigación sobre lenguaje evaluativo y escritura reflexiva al demostrar cómo los jóvenes escritores movilizan significados interpersonales para construir identidad profesional y reinterpretar valores educativos humanistas.

Palabras clave: Lingüística Sistémico-Funcional (LSF), valoración, actitud, Gabriela Mistral, identidad docente.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the poem *Ama*, Mistral (ca. 1919) invites readers to reflect on love not merely as an emotion, but as an ethical and living force capable of shaping human relationships, social responsibility, and pedagogical practice. As a poet, educator, and public intellectual, Mistral consistently placed love, care, and compassion at the core of her educational vision, an orientation evident in works such as *Lecturas para mujeres: destinadas a la enseñanza del lenguaje* (1924), her pedagogical essays selected by Scarpa *Magisterio y Niño* (1979), and the text edited by Warnken and Pfeiffer *Gabriela Mistral. Pasión de enseñar. Pensamiento pedagógico* (2017). Her reflections continue to matter in contemporary educational contexts, where affect, empathy, and the teacher–student bond are widely recognized as essential components of meaningful teaching and learning.

Building on Mistral's humanistic conception of love and education, contemporary teacher education increasingly recognizes reflective writing as a central practice through which students negotiate pedagogical beliefs and construct professional identity. Through reflection, students not only engage with educational values such as care, empathy, and responsibility, but also linguistically position themselves in relation to these concepts.

Within the university context, these reflective practices provide students with a necessary space to articulate personal beliefs, make sense of emerging pedagogical views, and shape their professional identities. Research suggests that reflective writing helps students engage more deeply with their experiences and position themselves in relation to core concepts such as care, responsibility, and learning (Björktomta & Tham, 2024; Farrell, 2016). Language stems from this process as a fundamental component, particularly the way writers make their choices in order to express their perspectives.

In this sense, language becomes fundamental to understanding how such meanings are constructed. Consequently, this study adopts Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), drawing on the work of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), among others, as an analytical framework for examining how interpersonal meanings, emotions, and evaluative positions are encoded and negotiated in discourse.

Within SFL, the APPRAISAL system, developed by Martin and White (2005), describes the linguistic resources speakers and writers draw on “to approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticize, and with how they position their readers/ listeners to do likewise” (p. 1). The APPRAISAL system includes the subsystem of ATTITUDE, which is especially relevant for analyzing texts that engage with affective, ethical, and aesthetic meanings. Previous studies have applied the APPRAISAL system

to writer identity and evaluative meaning in academic writing (McKinley, 2018), evaluation in academic discourse contexts (Xu & Nesi, 2020), and evaluative language in assessment feedback on academic writing (Shrestha, 2022), discussing the value of this system for understanding how evaluative language shapes the interpersonal dimension of educational discourse.

This study examines five essays that won a national writing contest at a Chilean public university in 2025, all of which respond to Mistral's poem *Ama* and reflect on how they conceptualize pedagogy in communion with the concept of love. These essays were written by students in English teacher education programs and translation studies. The texts provide a unique opportunity to explore how novice writers use ATTITUDE resources to construct meanings of love, teaching, and teacher identity. By analyzing the distribution and qualitative functioning of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, key components of the APPRAISAL system, the study seeks to shed light on how students understand and evaluate Mistral's message, how they position themselves as future professionals, and how they conceptualize and envision the relevance of the emotional and ethical dimensions of education.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to describe and interpret the attitudinal patterns present in these five essays through the lens of the APPRAISAL system, specifically within the subsystem of ATTITUDE. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on evaluative language in educational discourse and highlights the crucial role of affective, ethical, and aesthetic meanings in the shaping and development of pedagogical identity.

Accordingly, this study is organized into four parts. First, the theoretical framework section reviews the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), discourse analysis, and the APPRAISAL system that serve as a basis for the analysis of evaluative meaning, as well as a bridge between this theory and Gabriela Mistral's influence. Second, the methodology section outlines the research design, corpus, analytical framework, procedure, trustworthiness and rigor, and ethical considerations used to identify and interpret ATTITUDE resources in the students' essays. Third, the results and discussion section presents the findings from the discourse analysis, detailing both the quantitative distribution of Appreciation, Judgment, and Affect and the qualitative patterns through which students construct meanings of love, teaching, and teacher identity, along with an interpretation of these patterns in relation to Gabriela Mistral's pedagogical philosophy. Finally, the conclusions section summarizes the key findings of the study, discusses its limitations, and provides directions for future research, highlighting the broader implications for understanding evaluative meaning-making and the development of professional identity in education.²

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1978), conceptualizes

² This paper was created with the assistance of ChatGPT for generating text, refining ideas, and aiding in the drafting process.

language as a social semiotic system through which speakers and writers negotiate meaning in context. In this framework, language simultaneously realizes three metafunctions: the ideational, which construes experience; the interpersonal, which enacts social relationships; and the textual, which organizes discourse into coherent messages. The present study is grounded in the interpersonal metafunction, as it focuses on how writers express attitudes to enact social relationships through the ATTITUDE subsystem of the APPRAISAL system, particularly the ways in which they use language to convey affective, ethical, and aesthetic meanings.

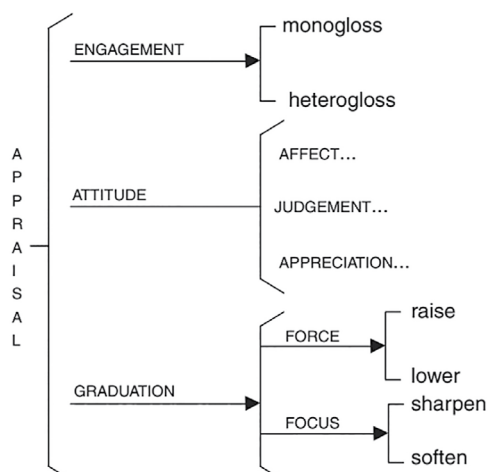
SFL has been widely applied to the analysis of academic, literary, and reflective texts because it provides a powerful lens for understanding how linguistic choices shape meaning in context (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Within this tradition, evaluative language has emerged as a central area of interest, given its role in expressing stance, emotion, value, and interpersonal alignment. This emphasis on evaluation is particularly relevant for studies that examine how writers articulate beliefs, interpret experiences, and construct identities in educational and reflective discourse.

2.2. Discourse Analysis

According to Fairclough (1995), discourse analysis is the “analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice” (p. 7). This type of analysis investigates how language constructs social reality by examining the relationship between linguistic choices and their contextual meanings. From this perspective, discourse is viewed not merely as text, but as a social practice through which individuals negotiate power, identity, and values. SFL provides the theoretical foundation for this type of analysis by connecting language structures with the functions they serve in communication. The APPRAISAL system extends this functional approach by offering a more detailed account of how evaluative meanings operate within discourse, allowing researchers to explore how writers and speakers take stances, express attitudes, and align with or against particular values and perspectives. In this sense, discourse analysis based on the APPRAISAL system moves beyond describing language forms to interpreting how interpersonal meanings are constructed, making it a particularly effective approach for examining reflective and pedagogical writing.

2.3. APPRAISAL System

The APPRAISAL system, introduced by Martin and White (2005), builds on the interpersonal metafunction by offering a comprehensive model of the linguistic resources speakers and writers use to evaluate, negotiate, and position themselves and others within discourse, thus providing valuable tools for discourse analysis focused on the expression of evaluation. The framework of this system is organized into three major subsystems. The first is ATTITUDE, which encompasses expressions of emotions, assessments of behavior, and evaluations of objects and abstract entities. The second is ENGAGEMENT, which addresses how writers acknowledge, align with, or distance themselves from other voices and positions. The third is GRADUATION, which captures how speakers modulate the intensity or degree of their evaluations. Figure 1 illustrates the three subsystems of the APPRAISAL system.



Note. From *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English* (p. 38), by J. Martin and P. White, 2005, Palgrave Macmillan. <http://doi.org/10.1057/9780230511910>.

Figure 1. The Three Subsystems of the APPRAISAL System.

The ATTITUDE subsystem, defined as the evaluation of “things, people’s character and their feelings” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 26), includes categories that help analysts distinguish the emotions, ethical assessments, and aesthetic evaluations present in discourse. Affect, which captures emotional responses, includes subtypes such as Inclination/Disinclination, which express desire or reluctance; Happiness/Unhappiness, which reflect positive or negative emotional states; Security/Insecurity, which convey feelings of confidence or anxiety; and Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction, which express fulfillment or frustration.

Judgment, the domain concerned with evaluating people’s behavior, is divided into Social Esteem and Social Sanction. Social Esteem includes evaluations of Normality (how typical or atypical someone is), Capacity (how capable or incapable they are), and Tenacity (how reliable or unreliable they appear). Social Sanction, on the other hand, involves assessments of a person’s adherence to moral or social rules, including Veracity (honesty versus dishonesty) and Propriety (ethical versus unethical behavior).

Finally, Appreciation concerns the evaluation of things, processes, texts, and abstract phenomena rather than human behavior. Within this domain, Reaction refers to the immediate affective response an entity provokes in the evaluator. This includes Impact, which captures the extent to which something attracts attention, excites, or impresses, and Quality, which assesses how pleasing, engaging, or aesthetically satisfying the entity is. Composition addresses the internal organization of the entity and how its parts relate to one another. Within this subtype, Balance evaluates whether the entity is perceived as coherent, harmonious, or well-proportioned, while Complexity assesses the degree of intricacy or detail involved. Finally, Valuation

concerns assessments about the broader social, cultural, or intellectual significance of the entity, evaluating its perceived worth or importance within a given context.

To facilitate a systematic overview of the ATTITUDE subsystem and its internal distinctions, Figure 2 summarizes the three ATTITUDE types and their corresponding subtypes as proposed within the APPRAISAL system. This figure serves as an analytical reference point for identifying and categorizing evaluative meanings in the data analyzed in this study.

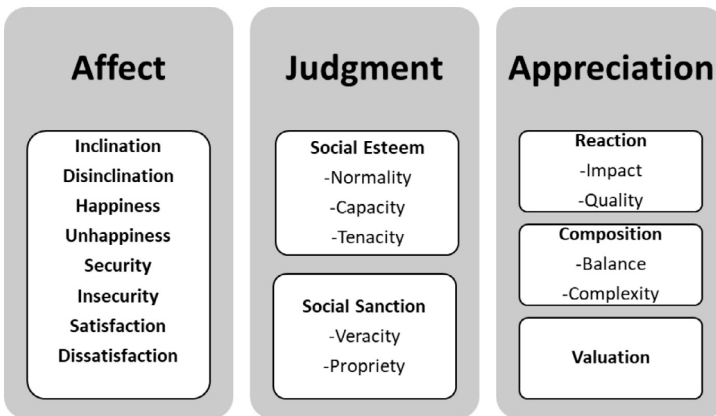


Figure 2. *Types and Subtypes of ATTITUDE.*

Previous research has shown that ATTITUDE is particularly important for the analysis of reflective and autobiographical writing because it reveals how writers construct emotional stances, moral evaluations, and meaningful interpretations of their experiences (Hood, 2010; McKinley, 2018). Recent studies further support the central role of attitudinal resources in students' written texts. Nguyen et al. (2024) found that EFL undergraduate writers predominantly use Appreciation within the ATTITUDE subsystem to convey an evaluative point of view in academic essays, demonstrating how evaluative language shapes meaning in student writing contexts. Valerdi Zárate (2023) showed that expressions of ATTITUDE contribute significantly to text effectiveness in undergraduate academic writing by enabling interpersonal positioning and evaluative engagement with subject matter. Additionally, Kim (2025) observed that evaluative and stance features, including attitudinal markers, play an important role in how student writers construct authorial voice and engage readers in argumentative texts. Research in Spanish-speaking contexts has also highlighted the role of evaluative language in discourse. González (2011), for example, examined the linguistic expression of ATTITUDE in opinion discourse through the APPRAISAL system, while Pinuer et al. (2021) analyzed evaluative meanings in Chilean historical discourse. These studies highlight the analytical value of ATTITUDE resources for understanding

how writers construct interpersonal meaning, evaluative positioning, and stance across different discourse contexts.

2.4. ATTITUDE in Reflective and Educational Writing

Reflective writing is a central component of teacher education programs and translation studies because it provides students with a space to ponder and interpret personal experiences, articulate emerging beliefs and points of view, and develop a sense of professional identity. Previous research highlights that evaluative language is fundamental for understanding how university students position themselves and others, and how they construct the values that guide their pedagogical thinking (de Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Farrell, 2016).

Within reflective texts, ATTITUDE resources help writers express their emotional responses, ethical stances, and evaluations of professional experiences. This aligns with observations by Coffin and Donohue (2012), who emphasize the importance of examining “the (often) implicit nature of evaluative meaning” (p. 67). It is precisely this evaluative work that is central to how students negotiate emotion, identity, and their interpretations of experience in their reflective writing, making ATTITUDE analysis a valuable framework for understanding how these writers position themselves and their developing professional values.

Reflective writing functions as a space where pre-service teachers negotiate tensions between idealized conceptions of teaching and the complexities of practice (Britzman, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Attitudinal meanings are central to this process, as they allow writers to reflect and articulate commitments, vulnerabilities, aspirations, and the ethical orientations that shape their professional development.

2.5. Gabriela Mistral, Pedagogy, and the Discourse of Love

Gabriela Mistral’s educational philosophy provides a solid foundation for interpreting the essays examined in this study. In addition to her internationally recognized poetic work, Mistral was deeply involved in educational reform, teacher preparation, and the affective life of schools. Works such as *Lecturas para mujeres: destinadas a la enseñanza del lenguaje* (1924), pedagogical essays including *...Y apartarse de la masa cuanto se pueda* (ca. 1936), and *Recados completos* (2023), edited by Diego del Pozo, stress Mistral’s constant preoccupation with care, affection, relational ethics, and the moral responsibilities inherent in teaching. Across these texts, she frames education not simply as an intellectual pursuit, but as an ethical practice rooted in human connection.

For Mistral, love, conceived as compassion, solidarity, and ethical responsibility, constitutes the foundation of pedagogical work. This view resonates with contemporary educational thought, especially approaches that place care and relationality at the center of teaching. Her poem *Ama* distills this philosophy into a poetic reflection on love as a sustaining force that gives meaning to life, creativity, and teaching. Through its emphasis on emotional depth and ethical commitment, the text may influence not only literary interpretation but also broader cultural understandings of vocation, nurturing, and education.

2.6. Connecting the APPRAISAL System with Gabriela Mistral's Influence

The combination of the APPRAISAL system and Mistral's pedagogical philosophy provides a productive lens for examining how students interpret *Ama* and construct their own meanings around love, teaching, and teacher identity. Through the framework of this system, it becomes possible to understand how linguistic choices reveal emotional, ethical, and meaningful perspectives that shape the writers' emerging professional identities.

ATTITUDE resources play a central role in this process. Through Affect, writers articulate their emotional responses to Mistral's poem; through Judgment, they evaluate teachers, students, and themselves as moral and professional actors; and through Appreciation, they ascribe value to teaching, learning, and love as abstract concepts. Together, these domains illuminate how students interpret Mistral's message and connect it to their own developing understandings of education and professional identity.

By analyzing these attitudinal patterns, the present study reveals how future professionals use evaluative language to articulate commitments, express vulnerabilities, and engage with the ethical dimensions of pedagogy. Integrating the APPRAISAL system, research on reflective writing, and Mistral's pedagogical vision thus provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for interpreting the evaluative meanings found in the five essays.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts discourse analysis grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically in the APPRAISAL system (Martin & White, 2005). Its primary aim is to identify and interpret ATTITUDE resources —Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation— in five reflective essays written by undergraduate students in English teacher education programs and translation studies from different Chilean universities. The analysis focuses on how evaluative meanings are constructed and on the ways these meanings contribute to representations of love, teaching, and teacher identity. Given the exploratory emphasis on meaning-making and linguistic patterning, discourse analysis is the most appropriate methodological approach. The study is exploratory in nature due to its small, purposefully selected corpus of five prize-winning essays and aims to provide an in-depth qualitative account of evaluative meaning-making rather than findings intended for statistical generalization.

3.2. Corpus

The corpus comprises five essays that won a national writing contest at a public university in Chile. Each essay responds reflectively to Gabriela Mistral's poem *Ama*. The texts share the following characteristics: they were written by undergraduate students in English teacher education programs and translation studies; they range

between 600 and 800 words in length; and they are reflective, autobiographical, and interpretive in nature. All contributions were submitted voluntarily as part of the competition. Selecting prize-winning essays ensured that the corpus exhibits linguistic complexity, thematic cohesion, and sustained engagement with Mistral's poem. No additional editing or correction was applied, so original linguistic choices were preserved.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The analysis follows the APPRAISAL system proposed by Martin and White (2005), focusing specifically on the ATTITUDE subsystem. ATTITUDE was operationalized through its three semantic regions: Affect concerns emotional responses; Judgment evaluates human behavior; and Appreciation addresses the evaluation of things, processes, states of affairs, and abstract phenomena.

Analytical procedures drew on established APPRAISAL methods (Hood, 2010). Each sentence was examined to determine whether it realized an attitudinal meaning and, where applicable, to identify its ATTITUDE type and polarity. A coding sheet was developed to systematize the analysis. For every instance the coders recorded: Location in the text, ATTITUDE type (Affect / Judgment / Appreciation), polarity (+/-), subtype (e.g., Happiness, Capacity, Valuation), and a brief justification for the coding decision. This systematic approach supports both quantitative frequencies of attitudinal resources and qualitative interpretation of their discourse functions.

Following the nomenclature proposed by Martin and White (2005), abbreviated coding labels for attitudinal subtypes and polarity were adopted in the discussion of the results in order to maintain theoretical and methodological consistency. Positive and negative realizations were represented by the symbols (+) and (-), respectively. Affect resources were categorized as +des / -des (inclination/disinclination represented through the coding label des for desire), +hap / -hap (happiness/unhappiness), +sec / -sec (security/insecurity), and +sat / -sat (satisfaction/dissatisfaction). Judgment resources included +norm / -norm (normality), +cap / -cap (capacity), +ten / -ten (tenacity), +ver / -ver (veracity), and +prop / -prop (propriety), while Appreciation resources comprised +reac / -reac (reaction), +comp / -comp (composition), and +val / -val (valuation).

The analysis was intentionally limited to the ATTITUDE subsystem because it most directly addresses the study's objective of examining how students construct evaluative meanings concerning love, teaching, and teacher identity. Since ATTITUDE encompasses emotional (Affect), ethical (Judgment), and aesthetic (Appreciation) evaluations, it provides the most appropriate analytical framework for examining the interpersonal meanings constructed in the essays. While the ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION subsystems offer complementary perspectives on dialogic positioning and the graduation of evaluative force, respectively, they fall beyond the scope of this exploratory study and may be addressed in future research.

3.4. Procedure

The analysis proceeded in four sequential stages:

1. Familiarization with the corpus: Each essay was read multiple times to grasp overall structure, thematic progression, and stance toward Mistral's poem.
2. Coding of ATTITUDE: Using Martin and White's (2005) categories, attitudinal expressions were identified and coded. Interpretive decisions were grounded in contextual meaning rather than isolated lexical items, consistent with APPRAISAL principles.
3. Tabulation of ATTITUDE resources: Each coded instance was entered into tables to produce frequency counts for each ATTITUDE type, distribution patterns across essays, and polarity comparisons (positive versus negative).
4. Interpretation of discursive patterns: The final stage involved mapping recurrent attitudinal themes, evaluative positioning toward love and teaching, strategies of identity construction, and links between attitudinal patterns and Mistral's pedagogical philosophy.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Rigor

Several strategies were employed to enhance trustworthiness and analytical rigor. Coding decisions were documented with justifications to ensure transparency in interpretive moves, following recommendations for discourse-analytic transparency (Hyland, 2012). All codes were theoretically grounded in ATTITUDE categories, and coding and interpretation were conducted iteratively. Initial coding was reviewed and revised through multiple passes to maximize internal consistency. Inter-coder reliability was established to ensure consistency in coding, and methodological rigor was further maintained through careful cross-checking and adherence to APPRAISAL literature (Martin & White, 2005).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The essays were written voluntarily for a public contest and made available by the participants for academic use by the hosting institution. No identifying information about the student authors is included in the analysis. The study focuses exclusively on linguistic patterns and evaluative resources; it does not evaluate or make claims about individual beliefs or personal circumstances beyond what is publicly available in the submitted texts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the ATTITUDE analysis of the five prize-winning essays written in response to Gabriela Mistral's poem *Ama*. The results are organized into three components: (1) the overall distribution of ATTITUDE resources; (2) qualitative patterns within Appreciation, Judgment, and Affect; and (3) a discussion connecting these patterns to Mistral's pedagogical philosophy to illuminate how students construct meanings around love, teaching, and teacher identity.

4.1. Overall Distribution of ATTITUDE Resources

The overall distribution of ATTITUDE resources across the corpus is summarized in four tables. Table I presents the distribution of Appreciation, which is the most frequent attitudinal category, showing how students value love, pedagogical acts, and everyday experiences through Reactions and Valuations.

Table I. *Distribution of Appreciation Resources by Essay.*

Appreciation	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4	Essay 5	TOTAL
(+) Reaction: Impact	0	0	2	0	0	2
(+) Reaction: Quality	3	6	3	2	3	17
(+) Valuation	19	12	24	14	11	80
(-) Valuation	5	4	8	1	3	21

Table II displays the distribution of Affect across the five essays, revealing how students express emotions such as Inclination, Happiness, Unhappiness, Security, Insecurity, and Satisfaction in their reflections on love and teaching.

Table II. *Distribution of Affect Resources by Essay.*

Affect	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4	Essay 5	TOTAL
Inclination	2	1	2	3	13	21
Happiness	2	6	3	1	6	18
Unhappiness	0	0	3	0	1	4
Security	0	0	1	0	0	1
Insecurity	2	2	1	0	0	5
Satisfaction	2	0	1	1	1	5

Table III provides the distribution of Judgment resources, outlining how students evaluate behaviors and moral qualities, particularly Capacity, Tenacity, and Propriety, when discussing teachers, themselves, and others.

Table III. *Distribution of Judgment Resources by Essay.*

Judgment	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4	Essay 5	TOTAL
(+) Social Esteem: Capacity	2	4	0	0	4	10
(-) Social Esteem: Capacity	4	1	0	1	0	6
(+) Social Esteem: Tenacity	2	2	3	1	6	14
(-) Social Esteem: Tenacity	1	0	1	2	1	5
(+) Social Sanction: Propriety	2	3	0	0	0	5
(-) Social Sanction: Propriety	0	2	0	1	1	4

Finally, Table IV offers a summary of all ATTITUDE instances by type and polarity, demonstrating that Appreciation predominates in the corpus, followed by Judgment and Affect, and that positive evaluations significantly outweigh negative ones.

Table IV. *Summary of ATTITUDE Instances by Type and Polarity*

ATTITUDE Type	Total Instances	Positive	Negative
Appreciation	120	99	21
Judgment	55	29	26
Affect	54	45	9

Across the corpus, a total of 229 ATTITUDE instances were identified. The results indicate that:

- Appreciation is the most frequent ATTITUDE type, accounting for approximately 53%.
- Judgment is the second most common, at around 24%.
- Affect ranks third, representing roughly 23%.

This distribution is consistent with the reflective nature of the essays. Students devote substantial linguistic resources to the evaluation of abstract concepts such as love, teaching, and personal growth, which explains the predominance of Appreciation. By contrast, Judgment and Affect occur less frequently, typically emerging in passages that emphasize ethical positioning, self-assessment, or moments of personal vulnerability. Taken together, these patterns indicate that reflective writing in the corpus privileges the evaluation of ideas and values over the explicit articulation of emotions or moral assessments.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis of Attitudinal Patterns

This qualitative analysis examines how students use Appreciation, Judgment, and Affect to convey aesthetic, ethical, and emotional meanings in their reflections on love, teaching, and teacher identity. The following subsections illustrate how these attitudinal resources function within the essays to interpret Mistral's poem and construct professional and personal perspectives.

4.2.1. Appreciation Analysis

A total of 120 Appreciation instances were identified, the majority positive.

4.2.1.1. Love as a Transformative Principle

Positive Appreciation emerges prominently, showing how students elevate love from a personal emotion to a universal ethical and pedagogical force. Rather than portraying love as merely sentimental or interpersonal, as sometimes perceived in academic

and educational settings, the writers construct it as a foundational principle that sustains human flourishing, ethical action, and teaching practice. Through positive Appreciation, love is depicted as profound, sustaining, and indispensable for human existence.

Essay 5 illustrates this perspective when the student declares, “For me love is the pinnacle of human experience” (+val), positioning love as essential to life itself. Similarly, Essay 3 states that love is “the most profound gift” (+val), recognizing its meaningfulness. Essay 1 affirms, “Love is the first and the last lesson that everyone... need[s] to learn” (+val), framing love as a guiding principle for life and learning. These expressions reflect that Mistral’s emphasis on love is atemporal and, moreover, functions as a moral and existential axis, shaping care, justice, and responsibility in both human and educational domains.

4.2.1.2. Teaching as an Ethical and Emotional Vocation

Students consistently frame teaching as a morally charged and emotionally meaningful profession, capable of transformation. Through positive Appreciation, the classroom is portrayed not merely as a physical space but as a relational environment characterized by care, connection, and purpose.

Essay 4 emphasizes this perspective stating that “True teaching is not merely the transfer of knowledge but an act of the heart” (+val), highlighting the ethical and emotional dimensions of pedagogy. Essay 2 echoes this sentiment, describing a classroom as “four walls... filled with emotions, and Love” (+val), transforming the educational space into one defined by relational warmth. Essay 1 notes, “a simple activity... can become important if you do it with love” (+val), suggesting that the value of teaching arises from the intention and care behind it. These examples align with Mistral’s philosophy of education as an ethical vocation grounded in love, empathy, and relational connection. Mistral’s understanding of the pedagogical act is one whose direction is horizontal, where teacher and student share an emotional space.

4.2.1.3. Aesthetic Appreciation of Everyday Moments

Positive Appreciation also extends to everyday experiences, which students interpret through the lens of love. The educational setting, then, is not only restricted to the classroom walls but to a global classroom where ordinary moments are transformed into sites of emotional resonance and ethical insight, reflecting a sensitivity to subtle, intimate details of life.

Essay 3 evokes “a home-cooked dinner, the laugh of a child, raindrops sliding down a window” (+reac > quality), showing how familiar experiences can symbolize warmth and human connection. Essay 4 highlights “feeling the sun in your face for the first time after several days living under rain” (+reac > quality), capturing the renewal and emotional intensity of simple experiences. These depictions demonstrate a heightened awareness of the ordinary, resonating with Mistral’s celebration of tenderness and her departure from confined pedagogical spaces, opening the educational experience to the sacredness of everyday life. Students thus portray love not only as an ethical principle but also as a lens for perceiving and inhabiting the world beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

4.2.1.4. Challenges to Love and Pedagogical Meaning

Negative Appreciation emerges when love or life is construed as diminished, fragile, or threatened in its absence. These moments highlight the students' awareness that love is not automatically given but is vulnerable to loss, fear, and emotional constraint and, therefore, needs to be cared for.

In Essay 3, the writer states that "Without love, our existence collapses into absurdity and loses its meaning" (–val), construing life without love as existentially empty. Similarly, Essay 4 notes that "Without love, life risks becoming just empty and disconnected" (–val), reinforcing the idea that love sustains meaningful human connection. Essay 5 also acknowledges the ambivalent weight of love, describing it as "the most beautiful thing a person has but at the same time it can be very hostile" (+/–val), recognizing both its value and its emotional risk. These instances of negative or mixed Appreciation do not reject love; rather, they intensify its importance by portraying it as essential, fragile, and demanding deliberate commitment.

4.2.2. Judgment Analysis

A total of 55 Judgment instances were identified, most of which were positive.

4.2.2.1. Commitment, Care, and Perseverance

Positive Judgment appears frequently, revealing how students evaluate teachers, learners, and relationships through ethical and moral frameworks. Essay 5 illustrates this with, "We both have decided to stay... we are going to heal" (+ten), framing perseverance and mutual care as moral courage. Essay 2 highlights teachers' devotion: "Every word they spoke carried passion" (+ten), portraying commitment that surpasses professional obligation. Essay 1 emphasizes the transformative role of teachers: "A teacher who teaches with love... shows a new way to see the world" (+ten). These evaluations resonate with Mistral's belief that teaching demands dedication, ethical responsibility, and emotional bravery.

4.2.2.2. Emotional Detachment and Society's Failure

Negative Judgment critiques pedagogical practices, emotional habits, and social norms that fail to nurture love or connection. Essay 1 criticizes impersonal teaching: "A teacher who just gives information... students don't really get the knowledge" (–cap). Essay 4 laments defensive emotional habits: "We protect ourselves behind walls of fear" (–ten). Essay 5 identifies society's failure: "Nobody ever told us how to love" (–prop). Collectively, these examples show how students recognize ethical and relational shortcomings, aligning with Mistral's advocacy for pedagogy grounded in care, empathy, and relational openness.

4.2.3. Affect Analysis

A total of 54 Affect instances were identified, mostly positive.

4.2.3.1. Joy, Fulfillment, and Inspiration

Students express pleasure, desire, gratitude, and emotional warmth when reflecting on love, teaching, and human relationships. Essay 5 exemplifies this: “I waited for you. I wanted you... aching to be seen” (+des), showing the stakes of emotional vulnerability. Essay 2 illustrates recognition and affirmation: “I have felt Love in those eyes, eyes that remind me I am valued” (+sat). Essay 1 emphasizes emotional resonance in ordinary moments: “Those moments were small but they felt really special” (+hap). As follows from the analysis and quotations selected, Affect is central to the students’ understanding of teaching, positioning emotional openness as foundational to education and, therefore, echoing Mistral’s conviction that authentic pedagogy must be rooted in feelings and emotions as much as in knowledge. Students recapture the interweaving of these two elements as constitutive of meaningful teaching.

4.2.3.2. Fear, Loss, and Emotional Pain

Negative Affect reflects emotional fragility and the risks of love and relational engagement. Essay 3 highlights the pain of unreciprocated love: “There is constant suffering in not feeling loved” (–hap). Essay 1 emphasizes fear of failure: “Students are afraid of making mistakes... afraid of failing” (–sec). Essay 5 illustrates internal tension: “Sometimes it might suffocate your own feelings” (–hap). These examples emphasize that love, teaching, and human connection are inseparable from vulnerability, reinforcing Mistral’s view that authentic engagement requires emotional courage.

4.3. Interpretive Discussion: Attitudinal Meanings and the Construction of Pedagogical Identity in Light of Mistral’s Vision

The attitudinal patterns across the essays reveal a multilayered understanding of love, teaching, and teacher identity, shaped not only by Appreciation but also by Judgment and Affect. These three types within the ATTITUDE subsystem show how students articulate ethical commitments, emotional experiences, and meaningful perspectives that resonate with, and often reinterpret, Mistral’s pedagogical philosophy.

4.3.1. Love as the Ethical and Affective Foundation of Pedagogy

Positive Appreciation overwhelmingly dominates the corpus, especially in the form of Valuation, indicating that students conceptualize love as a central principle for both human life and teaching. Their evaluations present love as transformative, nourishing, and morally grounding. At the same time, students use Affect to express the emotionality of love, its joy, fulfillment, longing, and vulnerability, positioning it as an affective force that shapes relationships and learning. Instances of negative Affect (e.g., Unhappiness and Insecurity) highlight the risks that come along with caring deeply, suggesting that vulnerability is an integral part of authentic engagement. These attitudinal meanings parallel Mistral’s perspective on love in that it is not merely a feeling but a moral and emotional base that sustains ethical action, personal growth, and educational practice.

4.3.2. Teacher Identity as an Ethical and Emotional Vocation

Students also construct teacher identity through intertwined patterns of Judgment, Affect, and Appreciation. Positive Judgment highlights teachers' moral qualities such as perseverance, dedication, empathy, and resilience, portraying teaching as an ethical vocation that demands emotional strength and moral responsibility. These perspectives align closely with Mistral's belief that teaching is much more than covering contents and conveying information. For Mistral, it is a calling rooted in care and ethical commitment.

Simultaneously, Appreciation of pedagogical acts reinforces the intrinsic value of teaching as a relational and goal-oriented endeavor. The classroom becomes a space where emotional connection, attentiveness, and mutual respect shape and support the learning process. Positive Affect reinforces this vision by portraying moments of joy, gratitude, and emotional affirmation as essential to the educational experience. These attitudinal patterns suggest that students view teaching not as a technical and mechanical activity but as a profession grounded in emotional authenticity, ethical engagement, and relational attentiveness.

4.3.3. Revisiting Mistral's Vision in Contemporary Terms

The essays also demonstrate an interest in recovering Mistral's philosophy of education by reinterpreting her ideas for modern contexts. In this particular sense, Mistral's ideas and points of view become relevant to today's audiences who find meaning in her ability to incorporate emotions into educational approaches. Through Appreciation, students frame love as expansive and inclusive, extending beyond interpersonal relationships to encompass everyday experiences, social life, and pedagogical practice. Through Judgment, they critique emotionally detached teaching, unempathetic social norms, and moral failures that hinder connection or care. Through Affect, they portray the emotional challenges and rewards inherent in learning, loving, and teaching.

By combining these attitudinal resources, students articulate a contemporary pedagogical vision that remains faithful to Mistral's ethical and emotional framework while grounding it in their own lived experiences. This connection that they have established with Mistral's thoughts and educational visions shows that love, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility continue to shape how students understand the role of teachers and their contribution to human development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how five prize-winning essays written in response to Gabriela Mistral's poem *Ama* construct meanings of love, teaching, and teacher identity through the APPRAISAL system, focusing on the ATTITUDE subsystem. Analysis of 229 ATTITUDE instances revealed a predominance of Appreciation, disclosing the relevance of evaluative meanings in students' reflections on pedagogical and interpersonal life. Positive Appreciation, particularly Valuation, demonstrated that students consistently

conceptualize love as a transformative, ethical, and existential component that sheds light on both personal experience and teaching practice. Love was frequently depicted as nourishing, profound, and indispensable, reflecting Mistral's pedagogical philosophy, which emphasizes care, moral responsibility, and the recognition of beauty in everyday life. Negative Appreciation highlighted the fragility of love and teaching, emphasizing that relational and ethical engagement requires constant attention and cultivation.

Judgment and Affect complemented these findings by showing that students evaluate teaching through ethical responsibility, emotional engagement, and relational commitment. Together, the three ATTITUDE categories reveal that students perceive teaching as inseparable from moral responsibility, emotional investment, and relational attentiveness, closely aligning with Mistral's vision of education as an ethical, human-centered endeavor.

Three central insights emerge from these patterns. First, love functions as a foundational principle for life and pedagogy, sustaining ethical, relational, and existential dimensions. Second, teacher identity is constructed by taking moral and emotional stands, with attention to relational care, empathy, and ethical engagement. Third, students reinterpret Mistral's ideals, applying them to contemporary contexts while maintaining their emotional, ethical, and aesthetic essence. They were able to transform their ordinary experiences and personal reflections into meaningful pedagogical and human narratives.

At the same time, the study has limitations that suggest directions for future research. The corpus is small and restricted to five prize-winning essays, which may reflect particularly skilled writers rather than the broader student population. The focus on the ATTITUDE subsystem, while informative, excludes ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION, which could provide further insight into how students negotiate other voices, modulate intensity, and construct interpersonal positioning. In addition, the reflective and contest-selected nature of the essays may have amplified positive evaluations and underrepresented more critical or ambivalent perspectives. Future research could expand the corpus, incorporate additional APPRAISAL subsystems, and adopt a longitudinal perspective to examine how students develop and transform their conceptualizations of love, teaching, and ethical engagement over the course of their professional formation.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that students respond to Mistral's poem *Ama* by constructing a vision of teaching and life grounded in love, ethical responsibility, and emotional authenticity, echoing Mistral's pedagogical stance and philosophy. Beyond this contribution, the findings also demonstrate the analytical value of the APPRAISAL system, particularly the ATTITUDE subsystem, for discourse analysis by showing how evaluative language systematically constructs interpersonal meanings in reflective writing. The study extends the application of APPRAISAL to reflective essays written by pre-service teachers and translation students in the Chilean context, illustrating how emotional, ethical, and aesthetic evaluations contribute to the construction of teacher identity and pedagogical meaning-making. These findings confirm the enduring relevance of Mistral's pedagogical principles while providing a foundation for future research on teacher identity, reflective writing, and evaluative language.

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