

THE APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE

Of The Appreciative Paradigm



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“Every new paradigm changes even the very language in which we speak about some aspect of nature” (Kuhn)

“The power of appreciative language lies more in the authentic than in the beautiful” (Varona)

“Language begins the process of creating worlds” (Varona)

INTRODUCTION

In the global community of practitioners and scholars of the Appreciative Paradigm and Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry, there are many expressions that have become mantras that highlight the power of Appreciative Language. For example, *“Words create worlds”* (Barrett & Fry, 2005, p. 42; Gross, 2022). *“We live in the world our questions create”* (Barrett & Fry, 2005, p. 38). *“If we want to change ourselves and the world we live in, let's change our language”* (Varona, 2022).

When we say that “the words we use shape the world in which we live and which we aspire to create,” we are talking about the **transformative power of human language in all of its various forms and possibilities, but with a particular focus on oral and written verbal language**. This acknowledgment stems from our understanding that these diverse manifestations of human language influence how we feel, think, and operate. At the same time, we are also saying that the world we want to create hinges on the words we choose to use, thereby constituting a personal choice necessitating conscious and well-founded consideration. Implicit in this assertion is the notion that we must discern a language that is conducive to the creation of a better world. But what precisely is this language? For the community of scholars and practitioners within the Appreciative Paradigm, it is Appreciative Language, a linguistic framework that we have been employing and refining since the inception of Appreciative Inquiry by David Cooperrider in 1985.

That said, *what is Appreciative Language? Are we aware of its transformative power? Are we increasing or diminishing that power with what we say and how we say it in our roles as practitioners and scholars of the Appreciative Paradigm?* Appreciative Language is a deliberate form of communication, a conscious choice that requires consistency in its application. To achieve this, we must first discover and collaboratively create it

The aim of this essay is specifically to embark on the task of discovering and delving into the identity of **Appreciative Language: its origin, fundamental characteristics**, and how it is distinguished from the language of other paradigms in

the Social Sciences. To achieve this, and to contextualize the topic of Appreciative Language, I **firstly** provide a brief overview of the **new theoretical framework of the Appreciative Paradigm**. This framework enables us to comprehend the fundamental role of Appreciative Language in a holistic and organic manner. **Secondly, I demonstrate** how this new language has a unique way of discussing **human beings and the social and natural world in which they operate**, what **research** is and how it should be conducted, **how we understand social change** and enact it, **what we value in human beings and their behavior** in the social and natural world, and how we define **human language** and utilize it to enhance its potency. **Thirdly**, I explain the **theoretical and empirical foundations of the power of Appreciative Language**. And **fourthly**, I identify and briefly develop 15 of the **fundamental characteristics and forms** of Appreciative Language. This essay is merely the beginning of that is something that is on the point of emerging, something we all must contribute to creating.

I. THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM AND ITS COMPONENTS

In order to comprehensively and systematically understand the fundamental role of Appreciative Language, we must view it as a component of the **Appreciative Paradigm**.

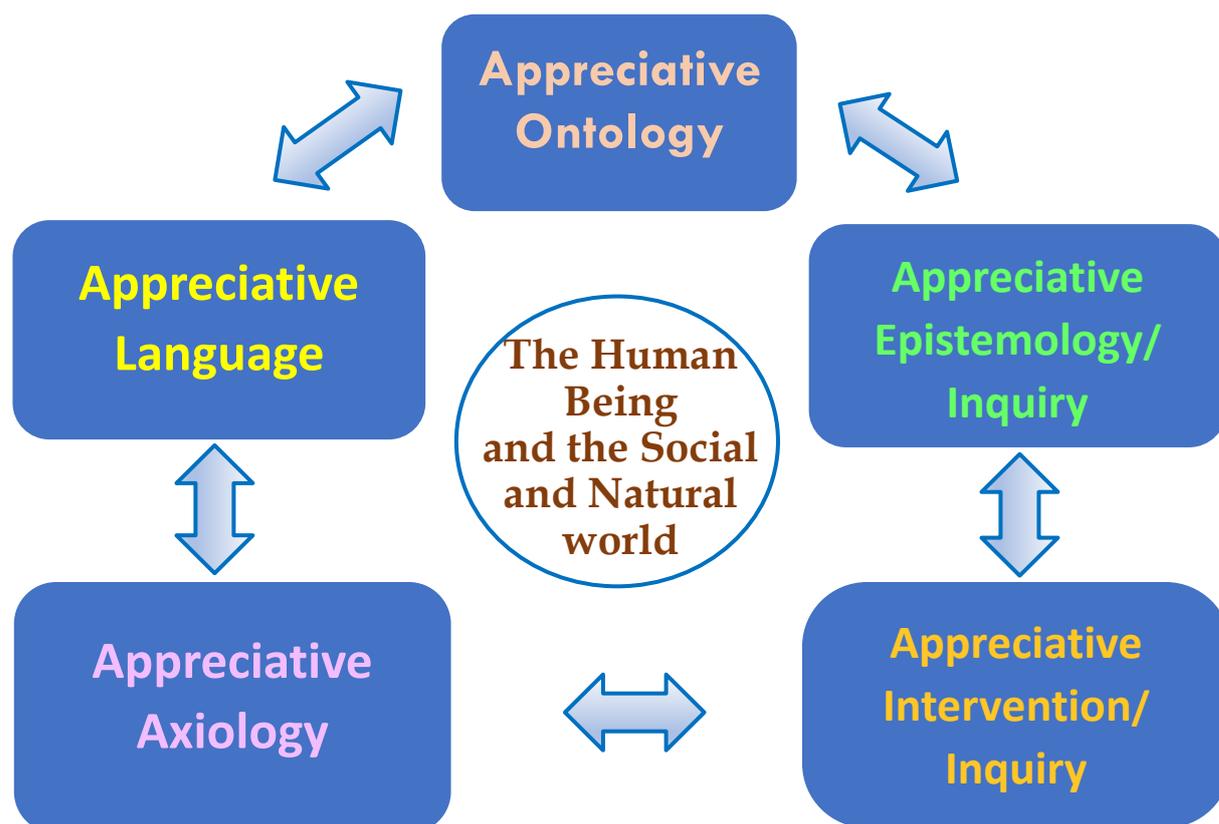
1. 1. What is the Appreciative Paradigm?

Paradigm is a theoretical/practical, systemic/organic conceptual term that has been coined in the fields of Social and Physical Sciences to **define the identity** of a new way of seeing/understanding, researching, changing, appraising, and speaking about the human being and the social and natural world. This is done to distinguish it from other paradigms. The **Appreciative Paradigm**, therefore, is a **novel way of perceiving and understanding (ontology), researching (epistemology/research), transforming (praxis/intervention/inquiry), appraising (Axiology), and speaking (language)** about human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world they inhabit. It has been adopted by a global community of scholars and practitioners because they find it more effective than other social paradigms, as evidenced by the practical and theoretical success in its development over the past 40 years (Varona, 2022).

1. 2. What are the components of the Appreciative Paradigm?

The components of the Appreciative Paradigm (**Figure 1**) include Appreciative Ontology, Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry, Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry, Appreciative Axiology, and Appreciative Language (Varona, 2022). The fundamental characteristics of each of these components of the Appreciative Paradigm are explored in the essay titled *The Appreciative Paradigm: From Methodology to Paradigm* (Varona, 2023).

Figure 1
COMPONENTS OF THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM



II. APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE FROM THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM AND DISTINGUISHING IT FROM THE LANGUAGE OF OTHER PARADIGMS AND THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

As Thomas Kuhn stated, *"Every new paradigm ... changes even ... the very language in which we speak about some aspect of nature"* (Hacking, 1962, loc. 465). Building on this Kuhnian assertion, we need to demonstrate that the distinctive identity of Appreciative Language within the Appreciative Paradigm does indeed differ from the language used in other paradigms in the Social Sciences. I believe that in the Appreciative Paradigm, there is a way of speaking that is distinct from that of other paradigms and theories of social change, as evident in the numerous publications on Appreciative Inquiry (books and articles). What is lacking is a

comprehensive treatise where this new language and its fundamental components are systematically presented.

The prevailing language in our culture and social systems is shaped by the traditional theories or models of social change, such as scientific and classical management theories, functionalism, critical theories, and so on (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008). The central focus of all these traditional theories is the negative, what does not work, and how to fix it in order to return to the status quo. It is precisely in reaction to this negative approach and language that Appreciative Language emerges (Cooperrider, 2021, p. 95). This distinction between Appreciative Language and the language of other theories of social change or paradigms in the Social Sciences is present both explicitly and implicitly **in all publications** since David Cooperrider first presented his doctoral dissertation in 1985. However, we lack a publication where these differences are systematically presented. One of the most compelling publications that illustrates, both theoretically and practically, how appreciative language differs and is more powerful than that of other models of social change is the book by Claudia Gross *Words Create Worlds: Cultivating a Conscious Life-Affirming Language* (Gross, 2022). In this book, Claudia demonstrates, with abundant examples, how the language we choose to define who we are and how we function in the companies, organizations, and businesses for which we work is influenced by the language of the military institution, the hierarchical conception of power, the metaphor that an organization must operate like a machine, and sexism, among other factors (Gross, 2022, pp. 62-76). While highlighting these examples, she also provides insights into how this language, which she refers to as **speakGreen**, can be replaced by a more inclusive language, which we call Appreciative Language.

Examining the impact of these languages on our conception of how we view ourselves and operate within organizations and teams is something we need to undertake to foster a critical and creative awareness of how we comprehend and employ Appreciative Language. We need but imagine how the language we choose to use would change if, instead of perceiving organizations as machines, we regarded them as families or living entities. We can thus conclude that *"If we wish to change how we perceive and function in the social and natural world we inhabit, we must change the language we choose."*

Next, I aim to demonstrate how the Appreciative Paradigm effectively possesses a new language that not only identifies it, but also sets it apart from the language used in other paradigms within the Social Sciences. We refer to this novel language as Appreciative Language, which articulates its distinct way of addressing, first, the nature of **the human being and the social and natural world**; second, the **concept of research** and how it is conducted; third, **our comprehension of social change** and how we carry it out; fourth, **what we value in human beings and their**

behavior in the social and natural world; and fifth, how we define **human language** and utilize it to enhance its potency.

Firstly, **Appreciative Language** represents a new way of articulating the **essence of human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world they inhabit**. For instance, we define the human being and the surrounding social and natural environment as an **enigma** that we cannot fully understand, which is simultaneously awe-inspiring and disappointing in its actions. However, we recognize that it has a **positive potential or core** that necessitates exploration and development. Our perspective of human beings and social systems is defined as a **social, subjective construction in continual evolution**. We hold the belief that **meaning can be found in ordinary, extraordinary, and tragic moments** of human existence and social systems. We affirm that *"human beings and social and natural systems harbor boundless capabilities for creativity and commitment"* to construct a better future (**Appreciative Ontology**).

Secondly, **Appreciative Language** represents a **novel way of talking what research is and how to conduct it**. For instance, we say that, first, we research **what gives life to (animates) human beings and social and natural systems in ordinary, extraordinary, and tragic moments**. Second, our research has the **objective of revealing the emerging future**. Third, the truth we seek is **subjective, multifaceted, and specific**, and cannot be generalized. Fourth, our research challenges conventional methods of research in the Social Sciences, asserting that everyone can be an original theorist. Fifth, our research contends that **research and social change are simultaneous processes** (**Appreciative Epistemology/Inquiry**).

Thirdly, **Appreciative Language** offers a new way of **discussing how we understand social change and how we bring it about**. For instance, we talk about: First, **uncovering what gives life to and brings out the best in human beings and in social and natural systems** in extraordinary, everyday, and tragic moments. Second, **we instigate positive social change and the emerging future**. Third, we term the phases of the process as: Identify, Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Live. Fourth, the process is collaborative, inclusive, and co-creative. Fifth, the process is **gestaltic (total)**, meaning it encompasses emotion, reason, intuition, admiration, imagination, will, and commitment (**Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry**).

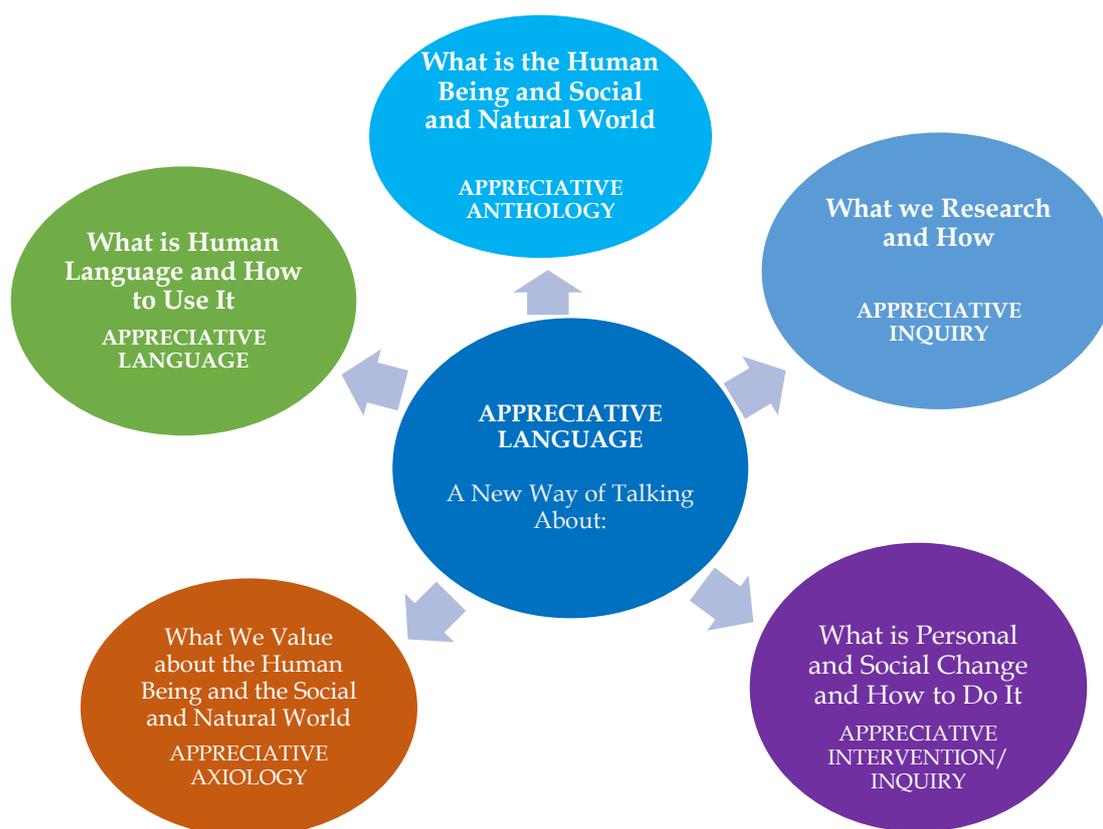
Fourth, **Appreciative Language** is a novel way of expressing what we value in human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world they inhabit. For instance, we emphasize the following points: firstly, we value everything that **happens to human beings and social systems in ordinary, extraordinary, and tragic moments**. Secondly, we appreciate the **positive potential** inherent in every human being and social system. Thirdly, we place value on **creating something new or better** when we discover that something is not working, rather than simply fixing it. Fourthly, we acknowledge the power of **focusing on the positive because it brings out the best** in human beings and social systems: their motivation, energy, and

creativity. Fifthly, we recognize the power of anticipating how we will act to achieve excellence in what we do (**Appreciative Axiology**).

Fifth, **Appreciative Language** is a new way of talking about the identity of human language and how to use it to enhance its power. For instance, we discuss the following aspects: firstly, **the words we use shape what we see, what we feel, and what we are**. Secondly, Appreciative Language generates **emotions, thoughts, and affirmative actions**. Thirdly, **narrative, metaphorical, and poetic language** communicates with greater depth, strength, and beauty than conceptual, expository, and logical language. Fourthly, when language is **personalized and inclusive**, it fosters commitment and action. Fifthly, **the power of language lies in the authenticity** of what we say rather than in what we say and how we say it.

Figure 2

APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE
OF THE APPRECIATIVE PARADIGM



III. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE POWER OF APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE

3. 1. Theoretical Foundations of the Power of Appreciative Language

Human language is the result of the linguistic capacity with which we are endowed, enabling us to create symbols for communication and construct our identity, as well as our perception of the physical and social world in which we exist. This linguistic capacity is undoubtedly the most intriguing component of the human being and it is pivotal in facilitating the development of humanity. Consequently, it has been the subject of study for many scientists and scholars who have proposed a variety of hypotheses and theories in an attempt to comprehend its complexity and power (Whorf, 1939/1956; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Wittgenstein, 1922; Echeverría, 1985; Saussure, 1991; Chomsky, 1998; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). It is important to note that the aim of this essay is not to provide a summary of these theories, but rather to focus on those most directly related to what we refer to as Appreciative Language.

The fundamental theoretical underpinnings of Appreciative Language, while not the only ones, lie in Social Construction Theory and how this rationale conceptualizes language. Firstly, a core tenet of Social Construction Theory regarding language posits that **humans construct their reality through the language they employ, specifically the words used in social and professional relationships** (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, pp. 16-17). I would add that this construction also occurs in the absence of direct relationships, such as when thinking or writing in isolation. Secondly, another principle of this theory, which is inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein's language theory, asserts that the meaning of words is embedded within shared systems of rules or conventions within the **"forms of life"** of each culture (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). These **"forms of life"** can shape a language that simultaneously constrains and enriches our worldview, epitomized by Wittgenstein's renowned phrase, **"the limits of my language mean the limits of my world"** (Wittgenstein, 1922, Proposition 5.6). Hence, each culture possesses its unique worldview shaped by the language it employs, simultaneously constraining and enriching its perspective. The third principle asserts that **through language, diverse forms of dialogue can be generated, leading to the co-construction of new and varied realities**. In other words, language is a choice, endowing humans with the power to select the language we use to communicate.

Language is, therefore, a **resource** that we have to generate various forms of dialogue that will set in motion a complex process of change in our way of thinking, feeling, and operating. The final outcome of this process depends on the intersection of numerous factors that are necessary for that change to become a reality. As the Spanish phrase says, *"del dicho al hecho hay un gran trecho"*, which would be equivalent to the English idiom "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip" or

more simply “easier said than done”. Therefore, for Social Construction Theory and the Appreciative Paradigm, the words we use make sense in a process that is influenced by a multitude of other elements (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 34), such as cultural, physical, emotional, educational, gender, age, and other factors. Certainly, language is the fundamental (most powerful) component in creating meaning, that is, in shaping our identity and how we perceive and construct the social and physical world in which we exist, but it is not the sole factor. Therefore, we must assert that **words alone do not “create the world in which we live” as emphasized in the Appreciative Paradigm and Social Construction Theory**. Some may argue that it is understood that “language alone does not create worlds” and that “something else” is needed. However, I believe we need to clarify what we mean by that “something else” to avoid potential misunderstandings.

The most compelling evidence at our disposal indicates that the **creation of distinct worlds** is not solely a result of the words we use. Instead, it stems from our daily experiences, where we observe how we feel and react differently despite using the same words. This is why Appreciative Language does not evoke **emotional, rational, and operational** responses uniformly, as there are other factors at play in each of us at the moment we hear the same words.

I therefore propose that instead of stating that *“language creates worlds,”* we should say *“Language begins the process of creating worlds.”* In doing so, we assert that language alone is insufficient to bring about such change. This approach opens the door to contemplating and highlighting the involvement of other elements, particularly the role of action, as actions should follow words. While we emphasize language as a catalyst for social change, *we have neglected to address the crucial aspect of the action that should accompany words, without which they are meaningless.* For the Appreciative Paradigm, social change arises when language and action converge, much like water emerges when one oxygen atom combines with two hydrogen atoms. We should delve deeper into this theme at the theoretical and practical levels within the community of scholars and practitioners of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry and the Appreciative Paradigm. The best two publications, that I know, on how to integrate language and action to generate positive change at the personal, group, and organizational levels are these two books of Laura Isanta: *“Apreciatividad en acción: Una guía práctica para la vida cotidiana. (Isanta, 2023)* and *“Apreciatividad: El arte de percibir lo valioso” (Isanta, 2018).*

3. 2. The Empirical Foundations of the Power of Appreciative Language

The power of Appreciative Language is solidly and consistently affirmed by empirical evidence, specifically rooted in personal, group, and community experiences, as well as observations collected in our practice of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry since its emergence on a global scale in 1985. Perhaps the most compelling empirical evidence we can currently present regarding the

transformative power of appreciative language is our own experience. When we speak positively about something, we feel motivated and energized to act in a positive manner. This experience is further substantiated by the testimonies of the majority of individuals who have participated in the process of an Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry at a personal, group, or organizational level. This evidence is documented in numerous publications, including books and articles, and shared testimonials in summits and appreciative gatherings held around the world and organized by the Cooperrider Center and IA Practitioner International Journal, as well as regionally in webinars facilitated by the Ibero-American Network of Practitioners and Scholars of the Appreciative Paradigm (RIPAPA) in the Ibero-American context, and in European initiatives like IDEIA, INSPIRING PARTNERS, as well as others.

Regarding the **scientific evidence**, which is obtained using scientific research methods that lead to an explanation or theory, numerous publications confirm the efficacy of Appreciative Language, particularly in the field of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002) and in the practice of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry (Mandal, 2022; Varona, 2021). In her book *Words Create Worlds* (Gross, 2022, p. 200), Claudia Gross cites various scientific studies on how language activates the brain and how Appreciative Language can generate positive emotions, positive thoughts, and a desire to act positively.

IV. FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OR FORMS OF APPRECIATIVE LANGUAGE

In this section, I aim to provide a provisional and concise overview of some of the **characteristics and forms of language that differentiate Appreciative Language** in verbal (oral and written), non-verbal, and audiovisual contexts. I do so in order to keep the length of this essay manageable, as each of these characteristics and forms could easily be extensively explored in a chapter of a book dedicated to Appreciative Language. For the same reason, I have chosen to offer only a few examples to illustrate each of them, while also encouraging the reader to explore Claudia Gross's book (Gross, 2022), which serves as an excellent encyclopedia of examples illustrating Appreciative Language, to which she refers as *speakGreen*.

1. Appreciative Language is, first and foremost, **appreciative**, that is, it seeks to uncover what *gives life* to human existence and to social and natural systems in every day, extraordinary, and tragic instances.

To achieve this, the language it uses is the **appreciative inquiry and all the words and expressions that are indicative of what "gives life,"** such as **hope, commitment, fulfillment, service, well-being, and sharing, among others.** However, it does not reject words and expressions that refer to what "does not give life," such as disillusionment or hopelessness, and so on. Instead, it transforms them

into words that indicate what does give life. From the perspective of Social Construction Theory and the Appreciative Paradigm, focusing on negative language (on the problem) or positive language (on the better future we want to construct) is optional (Gergen & Gergen, 2004).

The appreciative inquiry is an alternative to traditional problem-focused questions in enabling organizational change. In the course of conducting interviews for his doctoral thesis, Cooperrider made a fascinating discovery: that questions framed positively generated more powerful and transformative reactions and responses for driving change (Cooperrider, 2021). Framing questions positively is a skill we can cultivate through practice when we consciously decide to eliminate questions that solicit responses about what does not work. For instance, instead of asking, "Why didn't you do this task well?" one could instead ask, "How could this task be done better?" (see Chapter 4 on the power of positive questioning in Varona, 2020). When every member of an organization, from the leaders to the employees, consistently follows this practice of asking positive questions, it fosters an organizational culture where satisfaction and fulfillment thrive, and the cycle of improvement knows no bounds.

Another fundamental principle underpinning the power of the appreciative question is that the type of questions we ask define the direction of the change we aim to achieve. Whitney and Schau (1998) illustrate this empirical and theoretical principle with the following example: A manager can inquire about the initial experiences of new employees in two different ways. First, by asking about the problems they encounter in their relationships with colleagues and in their work, and second, by inviting them to explore what contributes to collaboration and success in their workgroups. With the first type of question, the manager is sowing the seeds of problems and is likely to harvest problems. Conversely, with the second type of question, the manager is planting seeds of learning about collaboration and success in teamwork, and is more likely to reap solutions. This example underscores the heliotropic nature of appreciative inquiry, demonstrating that if the question is affirmative, action will also move in that same direction because "*we live in the world our questions create*" (Barrett & Fry, 2005).

2. Appreciative Language is creative, aiming to create a better world for both humans and the social and natural systems in which they exist.

Appreciative Language **encourages us to envision and create the future we desire**. As Aristotle once stated, "*a vivid image compels the entire body to follow*" (Sheikh, 1984, p. 5). Albert Einstein also stated, "*Imagination is more important than knowledge*". (Sheikh, 1984, p. 5). When engaging in Appreciative Intervention/ Inquiry and focusing on the positive images within the organization or team members, a rich narrative environment is created upon which we can build their future. In doing so, the crucial question arises: **What appreciative language must we**

employ to generate new ways of imagining? Primarily, we need to utilize all possible forms of **generative questions** – questions that spark curiosity and stimulate the imagination. For instance, “What values would you like your team to embody?” Additionally, we must carefully select words and expressions that serve as guides for the emerging future, such as **create, generate, visualize, future, hope, aspiration, possible, build, transform, change**, and so on. This Appreciative Language possesses the capacity to instigate a novel way of feeling, thinking, and acting, enabling the construction of better human beings and improved social and natural systems (Barrett & Fry, 2005).

3. Appreciative Language is collaborative, meaning it is an **inclusive, specific, and personalized** form of language communication that fosters commitment and action, while avoiding generalization.

For this reason, we use expressions such as *“I am going to be more creative”* or *“We are going to be more creative”*, as opposed to *“It is necessary to be more creative”*. By stating “I am going to be creative” instead of *“It is necessary to be more creative”*, we direct the message at ourselves and commit to the action. Conversely, when we say *“It is necessary to be more creative”*, the message is impersonal because it does not specify who the subject of the action is.

When we use specific language, we are inviting ourselves to use fresh and profound perspectives to see what we typically overlook and articulate it. When we name something, that is, when we put it into words, that is when we can truly say we understand it. For this reason, we assert that Appreciative Language transforms us. For instance, when providing feedback on a presentation, rather than stating *“the presentation was excellent”*, we say that *“the presentation was inspiring and challenging”*, *“the audiovisual resources helped visualize the theoretical concepts”*, *“the examples presented contributed to understanding the topic and how to apply it in real life”*.

In both Appreciative Investigation and Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry, the formulation of research and intervention topics must be done by specifying the objective we aim to achieve – the new knowledge we seek to create and the change we intend to bring about. Statements regarding what we aspire to be and build should be **inclusive, specific, and personalized**. For instance, we state, *“our mission is ...”* instead of *“the organization's mission is ...”*, thereby surpassing the impersonal language employed by traditional intervention and research.

4. Appreciative Language is provisional (not dogmatic or categorical) and thus refrains from generalization, as we tend to err when making sweeping statements. Given the limited number of things about which we can be entirely certain, Appreciative Language is a **provisional, fluctuating, and debatable** means of generating a **subjective view of reality**. It steers clear of words that imply

generalization, dogmatism, or absolute certainty. This is why terms like *“some” are used instead of “everyone” or “no one,”* and *“sometimes” is used rather than “always”*. Expressions such as *“in my opinion”* and *“from my point of view”* are also employed. Appreciative statements are, therefore, provisional in nature.

5. Appreciative Language is both authentic and empathetic. We say what we think, feel, and desire, respecting and accepting the truth of others as valid and subjective, as is our own. We express ourselves in an empathetic and appreciative manner, meaning we put ourselves in the position of others, acknowledging the positive potential within them. Consequently, we steer clear of negative opinions, recognizing their subjectivity and susceptibility to error.

Appreciative Language is **authentic**, meaning it is transparent and communicates thoughts and feelings without distorting them to make a favorable impression. It is a language that emerges from the inner standpoint where an individual operates consciously and unconsciously. The transformative power of Appreciative Language lies in its transparency. The impact of what we say and how we say it is contingent upon the transparency from which we operate when communicating. Transparency embodies authenticity and honesty, qualities that humans can detect intuitively and almost unconsciously.

I believe it is crucial to highlight this aspect of Appreciative Language to address a fairly widespread belief about how many perceive us when we speak using “appreciative language.” Many people consider that this language may seem disconnected from the reality they experience, leading them to view it as unreal and naive. The most effective way to respond is by amplifying its persuasive power through authentic and transparent communication. On the other hand, we should refrain from using words and expressions that we consciously know are exaggerations and arise not so much from authenticity but from other motives, such as the desire to make a favorable impression. This is how we can avoid the devaluation of Appreciative Language, as stated previously. To be appreciative, we must first be authentic and transparent, acknowledging that what is appreciative for me may not be the same for others. **The power of appreciative language lies not in its beauty but in its authenticity.**

6. Appreciative Language favors narrative language (storytelling), metaphorical expression, and poetry over conceptual, expository, and logical forms. It embodies metaphor, poetry, and storytelling (Barrett & Fry, 2005).

These forms of language enable communication with greater depth, strength, and beauty compared with conceptual and logical forms. They are more persuasive and powerful generators of **emotions, thoughts, and affirmative actions**. Moreover, Appreciative Language values the use of words that evoke emotions and spark passion more than rational language, which generates ideas and concepts.

Culturally, we have been conditioned to place a higher value on the content of what we say in a conversation than on authenticity and form. The depth of ideas and the authority with which we present them tend to be more highly regarded, leading us to prioritize what we say over how we say it. Once again, the conceptual aspect can become the primary focus of our communicative process at the expense of the emotional, leading us to appreciate expository and academic language more. This reality has, in most cases, become the status quo of our communicative practice – a practice that is specifically challenged by Appreciative Language.

Narrative language, specifically sharing stories, is possibly one of most highly prioritized forms of communication in Appreciative Language. Sharing stories is ingrained in the DNA of appreciative communication. Every appreciative interview, for instance, includes an invitation to recount the story of the experience we want to analyze, aiming to discover its positive core. We do this because we believe in the transformative power of narrative language. Sharing stories is a universal language that we need to reclaim in Ibero-American cultures. We have to practice the art of *“knowing how to tell a story to make the ordinary become magical”*.

Metaphorical language, which involves the use of anecdotes, metaphors, or parables, is another highly powerful form of communication that is accorded special importance by Appreciative Language. Metaphors, parables, and anecdotes are indirect forms of communication whose transformative power emerges when we apply them to our own experiences. The most adept communicators in human history employed metaphors to connect with and persuade their audiences regarding the values they wished to convey. Undoubtedly, the most obvious examples lie in the founders of the world's major religions.

Poetic language possesses an emotional and transformative power that we have all experienced when reading poetry. For example, who fails to feel moved when reading this verse by the poet Antonio Machado: *“Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar. Caminante, son tus huellas el camino ...”* (Wanderer, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking).

7. Appreciative Language is reformulating, meaning it can transform a negative perception of reality into a positive one through the process of **appreciatively listening to the negative to reformulate it**, and thus see it as an opportunity to generate affirmative ways of feeling, thinking, and acting. In my opinion, the reformulating power of Appreciative Language is one of its most distinctive components. For a long time, theorists and practitioners of the Appreciative Paradigm and Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry were rightfully criticized for seemingly ignoring the negative and what does not work by focusing solely on the positive. Now, thanks to the concept and practice of **reformulating the negative into the positive**, we have overcome that limitation. However, I believe

there is a need for a more profound exploration of this reformulating component of Appreciative Language, both in theory and practice.

When we use Appreciative Language to reformulate a negative statement or assertion, we are enhancing the transformative power of Appreciative Language. By changing the words, we can alter how we perceive reality, how we think, feel, and act. There are numerous instances of positively reformulating the negative, and to illustrate, I propose the following example. If an employee is listing all the negatives about a supervisor, after listening appreciatively, we can ask, *“Now, I'd like you to describe the qualities you would like your supervisor to have”*. The response to this question represents an appreciative reformulation, using words that generate a positive view and emotions, such as: **“I would like them to be kinder”**, **“I would like them to acknowledge my good work”**, **“I would like them to ask if I have any suggestions on how to improve the job”**. The best strategy I know for this is that proposed by Claudia Gross in her book, *Words Create Worlds*, where she advocates deliberately reformulating how we usually say things into how we could say them with Appreciative Language (Gross, 2022, p. 14).

Figure 3
Fundamental Characteristics and Forms
of Appreciative Language



8. Appreciative Language is proactive, meaning it applies the anticipatory principle of the appreciative paradigm. In doing so, it seeks to anticipate the most effective language to use in each situation before speaking or writing. This proactive approach takes into consideration, foremost, the condition of the individual or individuals with whom communication will occur, as well as the physical and social context in which it will take place. However, its primary focus is on anticipating how to elicit a positive response from the positive core of the person that emerges throughout the course of the conversation. This is one of the central components of Appreciative Language, defining its identity and originality and setting it apart from other forms of communication.

9. Appreciative Language, as a constituent part of human language, is **evolving and dynamic**, undergoing a continuous process of mutation, which is part of its DNA. This characteristic serves as an invitation for both scholars and practitioners to consistently create and integrate new ways of speaking that align with the identity and originality of Appreciative Language. Every time we speak or write, we should ask: Are these words I'm using the most powerful in conveying what I intend, or are there others? Engaging in the language game involves swapping words and observing how it alters our communication. Appreciative Language embraces any word or expression that emerges in the local or global culture with transformative appreciative power. Furthermore, Appreciative Language assimilates the most original and powerful elements of scientific theories on language after scrutinizing them and it is in constant pursuit of emerging forms of language.

10. Appreciative Language is pluralistic, meaning it is **open to all possibilities for nuance and use of human language**. Therefore, it emphasizes the use of all the nuanced options that human language provides to define the diversity of the reality of who we are and the social and natural world in which we live. We must therefore steer clear of words and expressions that deny the existence of a range of possibilities when defining or assessing human activity. For instance, **polarizing language**, which reduces the possibilities of seeing and defining reality to two extremes, such as with the use of "*good and bad*", distorts the reality that it can also be "*very good*" or "*very bad*", "*exceptionally good*" or "*exceptionally bad*," and so on. We cannot polarize language, as might be perceived when Claudia Gross (2021) contrasts speaking in terms of "*red*" and "*green*" in her book *Words Create Worlds* to masterfully illustrate the power of language and how the language we choose is optional. Perhaps the metaphor of color and its variations is the most apt for understanding the range of possibilities and options inherent in Appreciative Language.

11. Appreciative Language is graphic and visual, as it believes in the power of visualization to comprehend theoretical and conceptual aspects in a gestalt manner and to stimulate creativity. Appreciative Language thus incorporates **visual language, iconic language, graphics, visual models, images, photos, and mathematical formulae**. All of these visual and graphic languages complement and enhance each other. Therefore, the more we utilize them to communicate our ideas, the more effective and transformative our communication will be. It is important to acknowledge that graphic and visual language have been successfully incorporated by practitioners of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry since its inception, as demonstrated by numerous publications by various authors (books and articles) and prominently featured in the AI Practitioner International Journal:

<https://aipractitioner.com/>. An excellent example of the creation and use of graphics in Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry is found in the workshops regularly conducted by Heather Leavitt Martinez, a visual practitioner and trainer, through the **Center for AI Appreciative Inquiry** <https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/event/appreciative-inquiry-visuals-meeting-design>

12. Appreciative Language is corporal. The human body serves as an organic communication system with multiple channels, constantly generating and receiving messages. Among these non-verbal channels are the gaze, facial expressions, gestures, movements, shapes and dimensions, skin color, and so on. For the Appreciative Paradigm, discovering the positive core in the non-verbal language of individuals within a social system is crucial for understanding the person and the social system. From there, assistance can be provided to help them uncover what gives meaning to their lives and construct a better future that is yet to emerge.

Up until now, our approach to uncovering the positive core in human beings and social systems, as well as what gives meaning to their lives in everyday, extraordinary, and tragic circumstances, has been predominantly based on oral and written verbal language. The question we need to ponder is, **how can non-verbal body language assist us in discovering the positive core of human beings and social systems to construct a better future?** Being appreciative entails the ability to interpret these body language cues to uncover what others are experiencing and to generate empathy and behaviors that can aid them in finding meaning in their lives. There are numerous examples of how we can be appreciative using body language. Each culture has its own, providing us with empirical evidence of the cultural diversity that exists regarding body language and how it can convey deeper sentiments that words may fail to express – such as the way in which we greet each other, whether through a handshake or a bow, how we cry, hug, and so on.

One of the most powerful forms of body language is dance, which is being successfully employed to evoke appreciative emotions, as demonstrated by Felipe

Losada and Gittith Sánchez in their article *Biodanza en el desarrollo de equipos de alto desempeño: Encarnando el paradigma apreciativo* (Pavez & Varona, 2021).

13. Appreciative Language is music and song. Music and song are integral components of appreciative language. Music is arguably one of the most potent tools we have to evoke emotions that help us to *“discover what gives life in the everyday, extraordinary, and tragic moments of our lives”*. According to Alberto Iglesias, a Spanish composer and poet, *“At the limit of the word is where the music is. If I were to say that poetry is on the border of the beyond, music is in the beyond”* (Iglesias, A., 2023). What a marvelous way to use metaphor to define the transformative power of the language of music! Music is a creative-intuitive language that serves as an alternative to logical-linguistic language. For example, who does not feel moved when hearing the line from the Violeta poem *Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto ...* or *Cambia todo cambia ...* by Mercedes Sosa? Or in the case of Nino Bravo's song *Libre* when he says, *“Free like the sun when it rises, like the wind ... and I will finally know what freedom is”*. It is in these moments, when music and poetry converge, that we are convinced that the words we use and how we use them are fundamental in communication. They significantly influence the emotional and transformative impact of our message. Therefore, incorporating music and song into the process of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry is something we must continue to encourage and simultaneously explore to deepen our understanding of its transformative power in shaping our feelings, thoughts, and actions. Music and song awaken not only emotions, but also values and action.

14. Appreciative Language is Silence. From the appreciative paradigm, we view silence as an invitation to discover and appreciate what gives meaning to the moment we are experiencing and to anticipate how we will act from this point in the situation in which we find ourselves. Silence is another form of human language that possesses a very significant communicative power, but one that we have not sufficiently explored in Western cultures. In these cultures, silence in a meeting or conversation is often perceived as uncomfortable and something to be avoided, rather than as an opportunity to delve deeper into what we are hearing. As Appreciative Language, silence encourages us to listen, contemplate the inner perspective from which we are operating, and empathize with others. Silence is a valuable space for appreciation, discovery, creation, feeling, emotion, gratitude, celebration, and envisioning the future that is yet to emerge. Therefore, we need to foster it more in our appreciative encounters and Appreciative Interventions/Inquiry.

15. Appreciative Language is Action

While we emphasize language as a catalyst for social change, *we have neglected to address the crucial aspect of the action that should accompany words, without which they are meaningless*. For the Appreciative Paradigm, social change arises when language and action converge, much like water emerges when one oxygen atom combines

with two hydrogen atoms. We should delve deeper into this theme at the theoretical and practical levels within the community of scholars and practitioners of Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry and the Appreciative Paradigm. I therefore propose that instead of stating that *“language creates worlds,”* we should say *“Language begins the process of creating worlds.”* In doing so, we assert that language alone is insufficient to bring about such change. This approach opens the door to contemplating and highlighting the involvement of other elements, particularly the role of action, as actions should follow words. We need to explore further how to integrate **Appreciative Language and Action** to generate positive change at the personal, group, and organizational levels.

CONCLUSION

I hope to have achieved the objectives of this essay and initiated the task of discovering and delving into the identity of Appreciative Language. To do this and to contextualize the theme of Appreciative Language: **First**, I have provided a brief overview of the **new theoretical framework of what the Appreciative Paradigm is**. This framework allows us to gain an organic understanding that the Appreciative Paradigm does indeed have an original language that is distinct from other paradigms in the Social Sciences, which we refer to as **Appreciative Language**. **Second**, I have demonstrated how this new language has its own way of talking about **human beings and the social and natural world which they inhabit, what research is** and how we conduct it, **how we comprehend social change** and carry it out, what we value in human beings and their behavior in the social and natural world, and how we define human language and use it to enhance its power. **Third**, I have explained the **theoretical and empirical foundations of the power of Appreciative Language**. **Fourth**, I have briefly identified and expanded upon 15 of the **fundamental characteristics** of Appreciative Language.

I would like to clarify that I am presenting Appreciative Language as one option of many, not as the only one and by no means the best. However, I do present it as the language option I have chosen and believe in, based on the personal empirical evidence I have gathered since incorporating it into my personal and professional life. This choice is also supported by theoretical and empirical evidence found in all publications on Appreciative Inquiry globally, authored by a large number of contributors since its inception.

Our challenge as academics and practitioners of the Appreciative Paradigm and Appreciative Intervention/Inquiry is to narrate how we perceive ourselves and the social and natural world which we inhabit in a manner that is distinct and more captivating than other paradigms and models of personal and social change, with the ultimate goal of creating better human beings and a better social and natural world. I am aware that what I present in this essay falls far short of what is possible. Delving into the power of Appreciative Language is a task that falls upon all of us, so I have faith that others can undertake it more effectively.

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