



A Snippet of an Ongoing Narrative: A Non-linear, Fragmented, and Unorthodox Autoethnographic Conversation

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Abstract

In this unorthodox autoethnographic study, we present a dialog between us - two transnational scholars. Throughout the manuscript, we explore several issues, which instantaneously came out during our unstructured, simultaneous, and casual conversations. We first discuss how our dichotomous relationships based on respect as an advisee and an advisor; a mentee and a mentor; and a student and a teacher have transformed into a sincerity-based friendship over time owing to our shared interest in autoethnography. We then move on to a discussion of our beliefs/thoughts/emotions about “home” in accordance with our lived experiences as transnational scholars. We scrutinize how inhabiting, knowing about, and becoming in academia complicated our understanding of where, or more importantly, what “home” means for us. Afterwards, we talk about the affordances and challenges of autoethnographic discourse agreeing that it requires us to practice vulnerability in order for us and our readers to benefit from the therapeutic effect of autoethnography. Throughout the manuscript, we also discuss how using both singular and plural first-person voice provide us with the opportunity to maintain our individual voices in an interpersonal and collaborative relationship while achieving a multivocal tone. We hope that our discussion extends with our readers’ critique of, negotiation with, participation in, and/or resistance to our beliefs/thoughts/emotions as stated in our conversation.

Keywords: Transnational identity; Mentorship; Friendship; Autoethnography; Multivocality; Home

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Prologue

In this rather unorthodox autoethnographic dialog, we (Bedrettin and Ufuk) take the liberty to free-write about our “academic friendship” built on and around our advisee/advisor, mentee/mentor, and student/teacher relationships... Although we do not deny the existence of these labels in our collective narrative, we refrain from positioning each other dichotomously, and simply define our relationship as a friendship which is more nuanced, equity-based, and sincere. This friendship is built on respect and sincerity we feel towards each other as fellow applied linguists, educational researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and so on. Frankly speaking, I (Ufuk) personally feel that my level of respect to Bedrettin and his work is (and should be) higher than his respect to mine given that he is an older timer in academia, who has produced more work than me, and who gladly shared his

experiences with me to support my endeavors first as a doctoral candidate and later as an early career scholar. Yet, our relationship is built more on friendliness than respect.

I see Bedrettin as a friend rather than an advisor/mentor. It is perhaps because he has never imposed his older timer authority on me, and always trusted me in my (post)doctoral work. And I think I have never let him down seriously - at least to my knowledge... In addition to his substantial help with my dissertation, we have worked on multiple publication projects. In all stages of these projects, from designing the study to writing the paper, we brought to the table our time, efforts, knowledge, motivation, and beliefs/thoughts/emotions as equals. I believe we have learned so much from each other as “writing buddies.”

Similar to our academic friendship, we have built a close friendship in our private life. We help each other whenever we need a friend’s help. We give a ride to each other or pick up from the airport from time to time. For us, our long rides are a perfect opportunity to catch up academically, professionally, and personally. When I was a PhD student, we bought each other lunch (mostly he did, by the way, for obvious reasons). He helped me move into my apartment; I helped him move out of his. We exchanged furniture when we no longer needed them. Supporting each other as friends, in time, strengthened the bonds between us.

Interestingly, despite our close relationships, our interest in autoethnography grew almost separately from each other. Bedrettin had already published an autoethnographic paper in a renowned journal in our field. At the same time, I was introduced to and immediately fascinated by autoethnography while taking an introductory qualitative research course from another professor. By the time Bedrettin used autoethnography as a pedagogical tool in teacher education (Yazan, 2019a) while teaching a graduate course that I took, I had already started reading into autoethnography. Later, when I told him that I was planning to write an autoethnographic dissertation, he immediately stated his support. As my mentor, however, he cautioned me that I would be the first to do that in the university’s school of education, so it could be a challenge to persuade other professors to be in my dissertation committee. He also said that it could be difficult to find a job in the US with an autoethnographic dissertation. Nevertheless, I decided to write my dissertation in an autoethnographic format (Keleş, 2020).

Long story short, this manuscript is about our friendship. Yes. But it is not simply that. It is also about how knowing, doing, and living autoethnography have helped us make sense out of our interpersonal relationships along with our mutual experiences in academia that go back as far as 2015 when Bedrettin (an early career assistant professor at the University of Alabama) and I (a doctoral student on a Fulbright grant at the University of Alabama) started negotiating my future PhD plans. We believe that our conversation below may shed light on how autoethnography may help our readers make meaning of their lived experiences (as advisees and advisors; mentees and mentors; newcomers and older timers; students and teachers; and most importantly as two academic friends). Doing so, they may introspect into and redefine their current interpersonal relationships so that they can anticipate and plan their future trajectories.

I (Bedrettin) also wanted to add to this wonderfully written prologue. In the title, we have all those adjectives to describe our conversation, but I wanted to unpack “autoethnographic,” especially the *ethno* dimension of such an approach. As you said in an earlier paper of yours, autoethnographers frequently refer to the morphological constituents of the term: *auto* (self), *ethno* (culture), and *graphy* (narration) to frame their autoethnographic work (Keleş, 2022a, 2022b). In other words, autoethnography is “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Similarly, to me, “the act of autoethnography writing is a concentrated and profound experience of identity negotiation” through self-narrative (Yazan, 2019b). In this narrative, we mostly focused on ourselves, which means that the *auto* component has been the main aspect of our autoethnographic component.

Although we don’t explicitly mention which cultures are being examined and critiqued in our conversation, I believe the reader will engage in a critical reflection about cultures/discourses that surround our experiences and identities, as they listen to us talk. For example, when we discuss our transnational identities and experiences, we’d be critiquing how dominant discourses of nation-states operate to construct and maintain the ideological and physical borders. We share how our identities do not fit within those borders.

I also wanted to direct attention to our multivocality individually and collectively in this manuscript. I’d like to apply multivocality to describe our writing at two levels. On one level, like Bakhtin (1986) argues, “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (p. 69). What Ufuk and I say here is a reflection or a snippet of our ongoing conversation with colleagues and friends and with each other. We don’t construct knowledge in isolation. On another level, again relying on Bakhtin, we negotiate and interrelate multiple voices or I-positions (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) as we construct and enact our identity in writing or narrative. Engaging in the following conversation, we select certain I-positions to foreground (and concomitantly not select others) in our narrative, which demonstrates multiple voices that make who we are as writers.

So, here comes our dialog... *Vira bismillah!* [Godspeed!]

Bedrettin: When we first started this written conversation, we didn't have a prologue, which is why I started like this: "I know we didn't provide any introduction to this conversation. The reader will find it a little odd to start reading like this but hang in there for a second please." Ufuk, we talked about a potential conversational piece, but we never went for it. I told you about Hossein's invitation to contribute to the *Applied Linguistics Inquiry* journal and we had a chat which again didn't materialize. I just heard from Hossein again and he's wondering if we could write an article for the inaugural issue of the journal. Without telling you (i.e. a Facebook message), I thought "why not start this and get it going as organically as possible." So here I am! Sitting on the balcony of my parents' house in Keşan, waiting for the upcoming meetings with colleagues in half an hour. I am wondering about what question can kindle a conversation between you and me. I know we talked about writing a piece on autoethnography (*critical autoethnography, well, every autoethnography should be critical and political already, right?*), but I am starting this without letting you know. I am aware you're grading your student papers and I'll see you in a few days in person. I think I'll start with a question on how we got interested in autoethnography. You know we have this urge in academic writing, going all the way back to the origins or the beginning of the story. I guess that's what I'm doing here. What do you think? Should we go ahead and write this piece? (*I know all this paragraph will go to waste if you disagree and writing this sentence might be a little nudge or pressure.*). I'll let Hossein (the editor of *Applied Linguistics Inquiry*) accordingly and learn about word count, timeline, and everything. As you write back, I'll keep the conversation going or feel free to do so by asking me questions. I think honest writing (see Casanave, 2017) is a key to connect with our reader.

Ufuk: [*Two days later*] Sorry for the late reply, hocam. I have been juggling with the end-of-semester paperwork at Sabancı University (my soon-to-be-ex workplace) and the recruitment documents for Bahçeşehir (University). Reading the conversation starter of yours above... well hocam... I had complicated thoughts; frankly... There is so much to do and so little time to do... I remember we talked about this and we had a rough plan - that was so exciting! Since we both know that we both love to do autoethnography, I said to myself "Hell yeah! Why not?" but a couple of seconds later... I remembered that I did not have time for it! I don't have time for many things these days... Yet, I was so excited... Another meaningful project... I need to make time for it no matter what? [*to be continued*]

[*Three hours later*] I scribbled down the sentences above while waiting for my car to be serviced... Sometimes, I believe we forget that there is life - real life - personal life - family life outside academia... Each time I do something non-academic, my inner voice tells me that I am wasting my time. And yet, my car needs being serviced; my son needs taking out to the ice-cream vendor; my friends to be called; house to be cleaned, and all. And it is a pity that what phd gave me is this scar - the feeling of wasting time if not working on a paper, conference, course and whatsoever. (to be continued - again)

I had to meet the school director to talk about my leave. Now, I actually need to take a rest as today has been so exhausting, yet I could not because... [*to be continued - as always*]

[*After two hours*] In the midst of academic smog that surrounds me and penetrates in me as long as I breathe, talking to you hocam is an oasis in the desert. Because you understand what I go through mentally, socially, and emotionally, or to put it in another way; I have "you" to pour out what I have in "me" ... uncensored. Also, you experience similar thoughts, beliefs, and relationships as I do. Being at your parents' house... being in Keşan, Edirne, Turkey, Thrace... I have to ask you: Do you feel at home? Is Keşan your home? Where is "home?" Or let me put it more directly: Is academia your home?

For me, academia is sometimes home - and some other times it is what keeps me away from home? Perhaps, we should start by understanding that... to what extent academia is home for us... Us - being transnational individuals who are indebted to academia for their transnational identities in the first place...

Bedrettin: [*A few days later*] Wonderful to hear you're interested in writing this piece with me. I just emailed Hossein and let him know that we're working on a manuscript to submit to their inaugural issue. Cc'ed you as well.

Hearing from you, speaking with you, is always refreshing. İyi ki varsın! (*Ayrı yazılan 'ki' bu :) Ah, years of learning Turkish grammar.*)

Two days ago, I just scanned what you wrote. I didn't have the chance to write a response, but your question about home stuck with me. I was working on a different manuscript. Today, I just read your thoughts and reflections and started writing back.

Late reply is totally fine! So glad to hear you're finally transitioning to your new academic job. Best of luck in your transition! You'll do wonderfully at Bahcesehir! They're very lucky to have you. Yet, I can only imagine how much paperwork it requires when both leaving a university job and starting a new one!

Your writing made me think how much and often we forget that we're humans! We're humans first. Yes, we're also teachers, researchers, faculty, academics etc. [insert all the identities/roles here]. So including our stories, personal life in our writing is meaningful. Stories, honest, vulnerable ones humanize us (*thinking about Spry's (2011) "practiced vulnerability" here*). You're right, there's life beyond academia. There's a whole big life which we, for some reason, were trained to hide or allowed to mention in certain contexts or moments to a specific degree. Separation of the personal and the professional! Right? Autoethnography is an effort towards that direction, i.e. getting rid of that artificial, forced separation. So is research on identity in applied linguistics. Well, it depends on the lens you take, but understanding identity at the intersection of all different dimensions of self, all 'I' positions or voices (Bakhtin, 1986; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), we can open up spaces to humanize pedagogy and research.

As you can imagine, I left your question about 'home' to the end. I said much before I could get to it. Between paragraphs above, I've talked to friends in person and on the phone and they'd ask how I feel visiting Turkey after six years. Honestly, I don't think any place would feel home anymore to me. I knew Kesan wouldn't when I was flying over here. It's the nostalgized home, maybe. Some people, though, feel like home. Being around them, sharing experiences, being vulnerable around ... Finding people who are also not fitting in the nation-state border ideologies ... I find such people in academia too. So instead of specific places, lands, cultures, I think people, spaces, relationships, conversations might feel home.

You made me think actually and articulate what I think about academia, to some extent. Academia isn't a homogeneous entity, although we tend to frame it that way. Academia this, academia that. We're academia. We make it up and out, in every possible sense. We invent it, construct it, reconstruct it, maintain it, change it. We're in it, why don't we try to change it the way it 'should' be. Well, when there's 'should,' there's ideology involved. We also keep forgetting we researchers have ideologies. We assign value, utility, and power to certain types or ways of being, becoming, doing in academia. Within the imagined borders of 'international academia,' I've found people, spaces, conversations, and relationships which feel home indeed. Also, like you said, academia is the reason we became transnationals and when we realize we are transnationals, with all its benefits and struggles, it's always a challenge to truly 'fit in' a place or call somewhere 'home' again (*well, what does fitting in mean anyways? I gotta stop questioning every possible word or concept, right?*). Maybe we should question the concept of home which has traditionally been attached to a physical place and led to lots of troubles and tribulations across centuries. Oh well, I'll pause here, but I've been meaning to share these two pieces of advice (*in an unsolicited way, though* :) which I stumbled upon when I was writing on autoethnography recently and they resonated with me. Muncey (2010) calls them "two important mantras" and goes on to explain: "[F]irst, 'writers are people who write' – not special people with hidden magical powers but people who take up a pen, or sit down at a keyboard, and write; arguably the rest is practice and having something to say" (p. 57). (*Do I have something to say? I've been practicing for a while and am willing to keep doing so.*) "The second important refrain is 'don't explain and don't complain'. This means setting down the words or drawing the picture without a constant evaluator in your head" (p. 57). That second one is a tough one, indeed! It'll take some time to ignore that evaluator to be able to write freely. We must have constructed that evaluator over the years, through our training and 'feedback' on our writing. I don't mean to say that the training and feedback we received weren't educative, though.

Interesting note here. The first and the only photo you and I took was on this day (June 29) in 2020, exactly two years ago, when I was packing to move from Tuscaloosa, Alabama to San Antonio, Texas. I bumped into that photo while I was writing the paragraph above when it popped up on my Google photos. How serendipitous? (*Am I trying to assign extra value to this writing by bringing in coincidences?*) [I'll pause here to hear from you.]

Ufuk: [Next day, while drinking his morning coffee] Wow! You said so much! So, I think my response will be long as well - accordingly. First of all, let me respond to your "concern" about assigning meaning to every single word we utter. Well, hocam... This conversation requires us to be hypersensitive, right? After all, we are not talking about our holiday plans, or a hobby you took up recently, or a movie we went to last night... We are talking about hardcore stuff... So, I guess, it is OK to overthink, well, as much as it is OK to write freely, right? As long as we enjoy it... I am perfectly fine with assigning additional meaning to "anything." What are "double quotation marks" for, huh?

Another point to consider is why we shy away from giving "unsolicited" advice? Although it is something people may frown upon in the US, it is considered a sign of valuing the person you are talking to in Turkey. In the States, it is like: "Who are you to - or how dare you - teach me a lesson? Are you any better than me? What makes you think that I need your advice?" In Turkey, it is more or less something like: "I had this problem about this and that. I value you so much that I do not want you to go through anything similar to that even if it is not very likely that you will. Yet, if you do, this is the solution - or at least it worked for me. Consider it if you have to." So, hocam, it is OK to give me unsolicited advice. At the end of the day, we share similar cultural blueprints. If you give me a piece of advice, I know that you do so because I am valued not that I am weak.

You know why I embrace my transnational identity so much? Well, hocam, it offers me so many alternatives to choose from. Political correctness... Do I like it? Certainly do. Personal space? I definitely need it from time to time... These are not the concepts I grew up with when I was a child. Yet, here I am. I believe political correctness is the right action to do - well most of the time... especially when I meet someone for the first time. Personal space? Just as I like spending time with people

I love and respect, taking a break and having some private space keeps my mind in my head. And I love it when people respect that!

You see, hocam, I grew up in a rather large family with close relationships with my relatives. So I can say that my community's well-being was more important than whether each member had personal space or not. We did not have to be politically correct, as well because we had these feudal bonds that entitled us to speak directly at each other - well of course keeping our respect for the elders. However, when I first learned about political correctness, it fascinated me - people you have just got to know are being very nice to you. Great!

Now I have new options: I can choose to be and act like an individual or behave like an organic part of the group. Thanks to transnationalism, there are more colors and shades on my pallet. And it is not limited to the Western ways of life...

Ubuntu, for instance. Well, I am fascinated by it. It looks a lot like “imece” in Anatolia. *I help you now because I know that you will gladly be helping me when I need it.* None of the words in English explains it... collaboration? Maybe... cohabitation? Well maybe... cooperation? Yeah, why not? But still... imece is more than that? It is sacred, communal... it is the “co” itself and yet more than that... Ubuntu? I am sure there is a whole bunch of significance behind the sentiment of the word... although I do not fully understand it, I appreciate ubuntu because I know imece and I know how individualism may detriment human relationships. What I mean is that being a transnational, I can cherry-pick the customs that I am exposed to... I can drop some habits that used to feel so natural to me... I can fuse things together... Great, isn't it?

Going back to academia... Your response to my question whether academia was “home” for you, made me ponder even deeper. Initially, I asked you the question because I oftentimes feel estranged from my family members in that they have no idea what I actually do for a living. My mother, after I came back from the US, asked me how my job was any different than a teacher's. Well... It is not, huh? On the other hand, being a teacher and an academician are a totally different line of work. Yet, I was unable to explain the difference since my lexicon did not have any simple words to compare the complexities of both jobs. After I came back from the US, I told my mother that I was now a doctor. The second I uttered the word “doctor,” I regretted it. She was petrified as I had never worked at a hospital.

Sometimes, I believe my wife does not really understand my job either. And honestly, I do not think that she is interested in it. Of course, she knows that I am an assistant professor, I work at a private university's ELT department, and I conduct some research. However, she knows nothing about my research interests, the courses I offer, how many papers I have published so far. She is not interested in listening and honestly, I do not feel like telling her about the details. So, when I am with her, I am a totally different person. I downgrade my job to being a “lecturer” only - I am like one of those professors whom she took courses with when she was a student at university. For my mother, I am someone between a teacher and a university rector - as she hears the word “rector” quite often on the news. With my friends from outside of academia, I do not talk about translanguaging, pedagogy of the oppressed, second language socialization, or anything that fascinates me as a scholar. If I feel the urge to tell them something about my job, I have to start from the basics. “Well, there is this guy, Pablo Freire, who wrote “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1972). He was an educator with some ‘leftist’ ideas and ‘Catholic’ faith. He said...” Now what? If I explain to my friend who Freire is and how his work informs mine... and then what. So what? Not that I do not value my family and friends... I just do not think they are invested in listening to some “boring” details of my intellectual, academic, professional, idealist, critical, problematic, emotional and so on life.

An academician's home is their heart and mind, I guess (!?!?). If you do not share a home, how can you be a family? That is, hocam, what has been bothering me for a while. In order to be - and keep being - a real family, we have to co-exist in “our” home both mentally and emotionally. Yet, with some of my friends, my family members, and even some of my colleagues, I do not feel that we are sharing a home. The problem is... I oftentimes find myself inhabiting their home - not the other way around. And when I am at their home, I feel comfortable only as much as a guest can get.

When the fact that I have been transforming into someone else, the gap between my be(com)ing a transnational person and my monocultural family members drifts me away from home. For them, defining home is easy. The only country they have lived in so far... To me, home is not a physical space anymore. It is more like a network of relationships, each of which requires me to assume, construct, and enact a different identity. Among the many identities I have, the loneliest one is my academic identity.

Bedrettin: [About a week later] It'd be only fair to the reader to share (to help them contextualize the writing here) that I'm writing this response from the US. Since the last time I worked on this paper, I had a four-hour drive with you from my hometown to the airport, had Covid in San Antonio, finished summer class, and had a Zoom meeting with you about our ongoing research project. And one of those projects is this current paper or writing. I think both of us agree that we can't name this writing we've been engaged in for the last two months. I don't want Hossein, the founding editor of the journal, to think that this conversation here is less than academic writing. I tend to be the harshest critique of myself and my work. (*Gotta remind myself of Muncey's (2010) mantras again*) However, we want to wrap this conversation up soon so that we can submit the manuscript to the editor which is due in a few days.

Before I continue reflecting on my transnational identity and what it matters to me as a teacher educator, researcher, and university faculty, I'd like to summarize our discussion about this very writing when we met last week. Initially, I thought this title might capture what we're trying to accomplish here: "A snippet of an ongoing conversation" but I'm totally fine if you'd like to go ahead and revise it as you wish. I think you suggested a revision which I couldn't recall right now. Also, we didn't have a traditional introduction paragraph for this paper, nor a conclusion, both of which I believe we should add when we're done talking or when there's a good stopping point for both of us.

When I first suggest we write this conversational piece, I had just finished a manuscript on autoethnography and gotten excited about doing something to nudge the academic writing conventions a little. I think there's something in autoethnography that inspires the reader to write or at least engage in a deep reflection. I can tell my earlier writing at the top of this paper seems to be coming from a deeper reflection than now. I feel like I should've have completed the whole paper when I was in that zone of reflective depth sitting on my parents' balcony watching the mulberry tree branches dancing with the breeze of Mediterranean Turkey, making it difficult for the crows to take another bite from the mulberries.

Why is our conversation supposed to be important to the readership of *Applied Linguistics Inquiry*? Well, I know I don't have to rationalize or justify everything I say. But we need to articulate the purpose of this paper, right? I think one of my writing goals is to exercise and "practice vulnerability" (Spry, 2011) and to unmask the distanced voice of the applied linguistics researcher. I remember Ellis and Bochner's (2006) description of vulnerable author which is "a feeling and vulnerable actor" (p. 441), as a complete opposite of "I" as "a disembodied authorial academic voice that argues and tries to persuade" (p. 441). Perhaps, it's something I expected the applied linguistics researcher to sound like or it's my attempt to establish a relationship with the reader or I'm tired of writing in that 'scientific' third person voice, concealing my true self behind the words which are supposedly mine. Isn't it contradictory? Isn't it unfair to the reader to poke my head a little from the authorial window, but expect them to make sense of what I say?

Additionally, I think I actually wanted to share a snippet from our ongoing conversation on being a transnational individual/researcher in applied linguistics who is trying to do autoethnographic research by swimming against the current at times. We've been talking about such issues for a while as we have conducted research. We've had a lot of collaborative reflective, critical conversations around identity, being, belonging, in a new sociopolitical context. I honestly wonder what conversations my colleagues are having in different contexts across the world. I'd like to hear or read what they say which doesn't get in their published papers or which gets lost within the academic writing conventions. That's also probably why I started to write such a paper.

Plus, what Ahmed et al. (2021) said about the collective "we" voice in research and importance of "transparent, dialogic voices":

most scholarly publications with multiple authors appear as one voice speaking in triumphal consensus and unfolding in predictable patterns that enhance the validity of the ultimate truths claimed. Yet, it is interesting to reflect on the hidden deliberations and silences that may arise when multiple authors are involved, and when power differentials between senior/junior contributors or gendered and racialized collaborators shape the final work. (p. 540)

Ahmed et al. (2021) are discussing their voice in their trio-ethnography, and I wanted us to try this voice out and practice transparent and dialogic writing with you since we're interested in creating similar autoethnographic voices in our scholarship. Do you think such a goal is something we're accomplishing in this paper? How do you feel about our dialogic writing here?

Ufuk: [Several hours later] Hocam, "A snippet of an ongoing narrative" is a perfect title for our dialog here. Maybe, adding a subheading would make it clearer for those who read it. So, how about "A snippet of an ongoing narrative: A non-linear, fragmented, and unorthodox autoethnographic conversation?" This way, we could prepare our readers for a collective "stream of consciousness¹." You know how much I like using this "literary" technique - writing intermittently in short fragments without following traditional written discourses which have an introduction, development, and a conclusion. I mean... why bother organizing our beliefs, thoughts, and emotions in a logical order when we want to focus on the complexities and chaotic fabric of our thinking/feeling processes? Let us unleash our inner voice as is. After all, this is our life, not a fiction, huh?

Years ago, I read it somewhere, perhaps in a book by a feminist literary critic that Western written academic discourse was very similar to fictional prose in that they were both phallogentric and followed a conventional plot: introduction (exposition); development (rising action, climax, and falling action); and conclusion (resolution). These were highly similar to the five steps of the masculine pleasure: desire (or lust should we say), arousal, ejaculation, relief, and relaxation. This author also noted that while pen was a symbolic representation of penis, women would rely on their lips - their oral skills to tell a

¹ Stream of consciousness is a literary narrative technique by which the writer aims at expressing the character's thoughts through direct quotations of the mind instead of creating meaningful statements using cohesive devices. Similar to inner monologues and the spoken word, this technique may be applied exclusively throughout a whole book or section of a book, or intermittently in short fragments (Bowling, 1950).

story. For women, pleasure would be more fragmented and repetitive yet contextual... So... If we regard this as a conversation rather than a traditional “text,” it is safe to take up a fragmented and repetitive yet contextual style despite the fact that we both identify as cismales. Just like women had to educate themselves in male ways for male gaze, we can try something opposite, huh? This paper does not have a linear organization, but it is as it is - we depend on our stream of consciousness, the words slipping through our lips, and sound unorganized and fragmented yet meaningful in context.

For the “we” language, it totally makes sense. I mean, given that you were/are my dissertation advisor, an old(er)timer, and more importantly, my mentor, using one voice would most probably lead to the silencing of my voice. For instance... let’s say that I have a more pro-feminist approach to academia than you... please tell me if you disagree... Perhaps, you would never bring forward the “penis vs. lips” metaphor above. But here we are. I can freely express “my” own beliefs/thoughts/emotions in ways that I find suitable. You, on the other hand, hocom, may not agree with me. Nevertheless, we are still “friends, huh? ... no hurt feelings? We still maintain our relationships intact as a mentor and a mentee; as a teacher and a student, as an advisor and an advisee; and so on. In this conversation of “ours,” I keep my voice fearless of what you will say. We do not have to agree, huh? Or at least, we are able to agree to disagree. I am happy to have you (t)here - this way.

Although some of your scholarship is built on identity theories, you know, I am not a big fan of the word “identity” as you know I find it rather broad, quite post-structuralist, and fairly blurred. Unlike many other advisors, you never questioned why I refrained from the concept of identity in my own work. You always respected that I am more invested in critical approaches and view language learning as a process of socialization. We have never discussed this before... I know you pay extra attention to not step on anybody’s toes, yet you had every right to do so since I was your advisee, mentee, and student. I think modesty is part of your “identity” ... LOL :) ... And I believe it is this modesty that helps me feel relaxed in this conversation of “ours.” I think what keeps our bonds strong even long after I completed my dissertation is the healthy “we” relationship that we have maintained successfully. When we disagree, I respect your “I” and vice versa. When we are together, we serve as complements to each other’s beliefs/thoughts/emotions.

At this point, we have to tell our readers that, as autoethnographers, you and I agree that opting for first person voice helps us to diverge “radically from the analytic, third-person spectator voice of traditional social science prose” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 82). Unlike traditional social scientists who write in third person voice to distance themselves from their readers (Adams et al., 2015), we refrain from assuming a ‘God’s eye’ omniscient view in this conversation and write in first person voice in a dialogic tone.

As for the question why our conversation is supposed to be important to the readership of *Applied Linguistics Inquiry*... Agreeing that “practicing vulnerability” is one important reason for us both, I will also add that I find this joint autoethnography therapeutic in the sense that sharing “the intimacies of my world” (Sparkes, 1996, p. 467) with you in this dialog helps me better articulate my life challenges, which would otherwise be left as unspoken anxieties, hollowness, and ambiguities. When I write to you (or speak to you for that matter), I remember that I am not alone in this. There is at least someone out there who listens, who knows, who appreciates, who supports me and my scholarship. Also, when we write, we want our script to make sense. Writing about unwanted feelings/thoughts/beliefs is, therefore, a means of making sense of them (Ellis et al., 2011). As autoethnographers, we are both aware that practicing vulnerability is not easy, yet without acknowledging and articulating the fragility of our narratives, it would be almost impossible to heal our souls, recover from our wounds, and boost our immunity (Keleş, 2023a). Once we are brave enough to relive and narrate some unpleasant experiences, which cause emotional distress, we can enjoy the positive therapeutic effect of autoethnography.

The therapeutic effect of autoethnography... So, what is it to do with the readers? Well, first of all, writing about a phenomenon, an experience, or an incident means that we articulate it by describing it in detail, defining it using our own experiences, and/or explaining it with examples (Keleş, 2023b). When our readers go over our manuscript, they may be able to make sense of similar experiences they go through by comparing them with ours (Ellis et al., 2011). They may also feel that they are not alone. As a result, reading into our conversation may allow the readers to engage with us on academic, professional, and more importantly humanized and humanizing levels and may help them make sense of their own - or we can at least hope for that.

HERE I WANT TO SHOUT OUTLOUD:

Hey! If you feel that going into academia has distanced you from your family members, you are not alone...

Hey! If you find it difficult to explain what you do for a living to your friends, we are with you...

Hey! If you have sacrificed more than others could ever imagine... only to become a scholar/researcher... Well, welcome to the club!

Hey! If you are confused about where home is, we feel you... You are home with us...

Hocam, although there is so much to talk about in this “free style” text, we may think of finishing it for the sake of our readers. What do you say? If you would like to add more, I am more than willing to continue. But... I think we do not have much space left. I would like to remind you that we were planning to add a prologue and an epilogue depending on the journal’s readership. So, how do you think we should proceed?

Bedrettin: [*The next morning*] I totally agree we should wrap up and let the editor and reviewers take a look at this writing. However, couple of brief notes I feel like I need to make: first, yes, I wouldn’t think of the feminist critique of the traditional ‘scientific’ writing conventions! I’ve always appreciated your background in gender studies which has been the leading theoretical lens in our earlier collaborations as well. Second, the adjective ‘therapeutic’ to describe the doing, writing, and reading of autoethnography is a great one. Can’t agree more! I think you mentioned that when we were discussing this paper last week. Third, the “we” voice in qualitative research, when not dialogic, (*which I’m still finding myself use with colleagues; not that I’ve completely transformed my collaborative ‘we’ voice to a dialogic one in my entire writing endeavors*) has this pressure to find ways to converge everyone’s ideas/perspectives/worldviews. This pressure, at times and perhaps in a lot of times, makes it really difficult to collaborate in a research writing experience in a true academic sense in which every team member would be pushing each other’s thinking. I’m not saying that all team members should be dissenting from each other at all times, but there tends to be less space for divergence in academic collaborations or (*gotta rephrase a little*) there tends to be less space for it to be reflected in the written products or reports of the collaborative academic research. I can keep talking about this matter for a while, but another pressure, i.e., traditional article word count, is reminding me that I’m running out of space.

Epilogue

Ufuk asked me (Bedrettin) to write the epilogue. I said I’d try my best. What I’ll do is share what I feel about this writing at the moment, now that we’re closing or wrapping it up. Every time I do similar kind of writing, I have the feelings of gratitude and vulnerability. First of all, I’m grateful to Hossein for giving us the space or the reason to start writing. And I’m grateful to Ufuk for being my sounding board, writing buddy, critical friend, and agreeing to let me engage in this experience, with him, which like he said, has been a therapeutic one. I feel vulnerable which I know we said we’re actually doing this writing to practice it, but we’re at the same time opening ourselves up for public scrutiny and I wonder how our writing is going to be taken by the reader. Are we going to be able to reach out to the reader as powerfully and intimately as we hoped for? Is what we’re discussing here going to resonate with the reader? In an autoethnographic sense, our goal is to strike a chord in the reader. It was like therapy to converse in such a critical fashion with Ufuk, but we don’t want this conversation to be our conversation only. We want the reader to respond, chime in, and find something to comment on. (*Well... Yes, yes... For sure... That’s an invitation. Yes. That’s right!*) We want it to be like therapy for the reader, too. I know explicitly saying that isn’t going to guarantee the feeling reaching across the reader, but like we said earlier, we’re practicing vulnerability.

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