Trust the researcher?
Autoethnography as a tool to study English teaching professionals

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Abstract

Autoethnography is a research paradigm that emphasizes the self. Though a common approach in social sciences, its application in the area of English language teaching and learning remain scarce. There are two types of autoethnography – analytic and evocative. While the former aims to maintain the rigor of traditional social science research, in that stories gleaned from the ethnographic study of self are explored in light of professional communities and theoretical frameworks, the latter champions the need to represent narratives as they are and focus on the vulnerability of the story-teller. Both these approaches have been scrutinized by each other's proponents - the analytic approach claimed to be an abstraction instead of free expression, and the evocative being too personal, hence less trustworthy and unscientific. To see the potential of either approaches as a tool to explore English teaching professionals' lives and narratives, I examine pertinent studies which used or resembled analytic or evocative autoethnography. Then, I use these two approaches to represent and examine my ongoing story of changing professional trajectories. I conclude with remarks on the relevance of these approaches from the points of view as an English language teacher, and that of a researcher.

1. Introduction

Autoethnography is a useful approach in the area of English language education because it parallels the postmodern notion of relativism and the multiplicity of personal identities (Burnier, 2006; Mirhosseini, 2016). Furthermore, ethnographic approaches, whether autoethnography or critical ethnography, are useful to examine contextually sensitive cultural nuances. In particular, researchers who utilize this paradigm are compelled to think more critically regarding the constructs of self, others, and the parameters from which these social entities operate (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; Mirhosseini, 2016). Despite its potential, autoethnography is an approach that has been employed scarcely, especially in the area of applied linguistics. Besides the scarcity of autoethnographic studies in English language teaching (ELT), another challenge stems from debates on the paradigm itself. Over the past decade or so, social scientists have been questioning the way in which autoethnography should be conducted. This is seen in the publication of an issue by the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography where social scientists sift through issues pertinent to this mode of inquiry. Their main contention was whether or not autoethnography should be analytical or evocative. In light of these issues, I will discuss some of the crucial characteristics of autoethnography and its relevant debates, describe published ELT studies conducted with the autoethnographic paradigm, and conduct both analytic and evocative autoethnography on recent changes in my own professional trajectory for the purpose of recommending an approach that would be suitable for ELT studies and professionals.

2. Autoethnography, Analytic and Evocative

Before discussing autoethnography, we will first examine narrative inquiry, which is a common research paradigm used by English teaching professionals to investigate self. Self-narratives are autobiographical as they represent a writer's personal perspectives and preferences. More than these, self-narratives also show topic choice, style, direction, and

conclusions (Chang, 2008). This also includes participants' exclusion of experiences which may not reflect the identity they wish to portray. Liu and Xu (2011) state that narrative inquiry falls within the realms of ethnography as it evaluates the cultural aspects of the parameters, identities of social entities, and their discourse practices. Autoethnography, on the other hand, "pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences." (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Another discerning characteristic is that ethnographic studies cover an extended time period, whereas time and space is more open ended. Some professions which serve as common interest groups for autoethnographic studies are educators, social workers, medical personnel, clergy, and counselors. From examining the relations, we are afforded a discourse space where there is enhanced cultural understandings and potential transformative experiences for self - the writer, and others - the readers. Moreover, autoethnographic considers the researcher's input regarding the participants' narratives - this makes sense-making visible, and thrusts it to the forefront so as to make the interpretation of data more transparent. Another similarity between narrative inquiry and autoethnography is how self can be represented in different forms. In narrative inquiry, this may be in the form of memoirs, which are descriptive, or as scholarly pieces, which are up for analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). For autoethnography, the two main types are evocative and analytic. Let us first consider evocative autoethnography. Evocative autoethnography is a "cognitive awareness", which includes the "emotional, bodily and spiritual reactions" (Ellis, 1997, p. 116). The purpose of evocative autoethnography is to deliver a narrative accessible to a larger and more varied audience, and not confine it to a select group of people (i.e. scholars or academics). This, according to Ellis (1997), would render the social sciences more useful as it enables 'silenced voices' to speak up for themselves. Evocative autoethnography stems from the belief that:

> [a]utoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning. Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate. Intimacy is a way of being, a mode of caring, and it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorizing. What are we giving to the people with whom we are intimate, if our higher purpose is to use our joint experiences to produce theoretical abstractions published on the pages of scholarly journals? (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433).

To this effect, evocative ethnography is written in a way that is unconventional, at least to the traditional social scientist. If you consider Ellis and Bochner (2006), or Holt (2003) you will discover that their narratives are represented as a 'creative non-fiction' (Wright, 2016), where dialogue with the self and/or others is presented. The excerpt below, from Ellis and Bochner's (2006) published article on evocative autoethnography, is the basic form that makes up the whole article:

> "I want ethnography to make a difference in the world and, where necessary, to change people," I say. "I believe autoethnography does that." (p. 439).

The other type of autoethnography is called analytical ethnography, which has also been referred to as auto-anthropology, auto-biographical ethnography or sociology, personal or self-narrative research and writing. Conceptualized by Anderson (2006), this autoethnographic approach looks at the intersection of narratives of the researcher with other participants. An analytic autoethnographic approach includes five key features, which are (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, referring to the immersed position of an ethnographer within the context under examination; (2) analytic reflexivity, which "involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants", entailing a "self-conscious

introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others." (p. 385); (3) narrative visibility, which, in traditional ethnography, may be lacking because an ethnographer would typically take on an invisible stance - maintaining an omniscient presence while being in the context and while narrating about the context. Anderson, however, postulates that since an ethnographer is living and experiencing the parameters of the context of study, there should be a 'textual visibility' that illustrates the ethnographer's 'personal engagement' through 'recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others', on top of 'changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork' (p. 384). Another key feature is having a (4) dialogue with informants beyond self, which involves becoming intimately knowledgeable of the context and the data, lest the researcher slips into indifference. Finally, (5) commitment to theoretical analysis refers to the larger goal of an ethnographic study, which is to see how issues found in the research site are pertinent to broader social phenomena, instead of merely representing an emic perspective of an individual or a social context.

Having described the types of autoethnography, we can notice that a difference between evocative and analytic autoethnography is that the former is concerned with the individual experience, while the latter is interested in the social world (Pillay, Naicker & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016). Though analytic autoethnography seems to fit the expectation for qualitative research, Vryan (2006) argues that some elements such as the inclusion of data with other informants of a research context (the fourth key feature) is not necessary and feasible, and is dependent on the specific objectives of an ethnographic project. Vryan continues to extend that an ethnographer's job is to provide "vital aspects of human experience that cannot be accessed using other available methods." (p. 407). Taking on a rigorous analytical stance would pose as a challenge to the notion of ethnography, as its essence is to have the self intimately in tune with the study site and not overshadowed by abstraction.

3. Quality in Autoethnographic Studies

To further the conversation on autoethnography, we need to also consider how institutionalized bodies view this research paradigm. We will begin from a broader perspective - by looking at what is expected of a qualitative study. In evaluating the quality of qualitative study, journals insist on researchers meeting certain expectations, which are largely based on the traditions of social science research. Take for instance, the journal of Computers and Education, which recently published an article addressing qualitative studies. Acknowledging the imbalance between quantitative and qualitative studies it publishes, the journal calls for qualitative studies to have a rigorous research approach where theory, methodology and analysis are aligned. Moreover, studies should critically examine data, which would subsequently encourage the problematization of existing theories (Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2016). When discussing guidelines on qualitative studies published by leading journals in applied linguistics (e.g. TESOL Quarterly, Language Learning, Modern Language Journal, etc.), there seems to be an expectation for ethnographic studies, including those which are reflexive, to examine how they fit with broader theoretical frameworks (Lazaraton, 2003). Chapelle and Duff (2003), who, on behalf of TESOL Quarterly, wrote guidelines for quantitative and qualitative studies in TESOL, also endorsed the expectation for a theoretical approach when conducting critical ethnography. This expectation for ethnographic studies to be grounded in theory, however, might restrict readers to other potentially insightful research paradigms (e.g. ethnography, conversation analysis) (Lazaraton, 2003). Furthermore, conventional criteria to judge the quality of qualitative studies may not be applicable to autoethnographies (Sparkes, 2000). Chapelle and Duff (2003) also warn that ethnographic studies, in particular the way it is presented and structured, may not fit the established norms of publications in the area of applied linguistics.

Theoretical perspectives, on the contrary, provide other guidelines to determine quality. A concept that is crucial in both narrative inquiry and autoethnography is subjectivity, which state that narrative participants are consciously making decisions regarding how they want to be represented. As such, the notion of reliability and validity of data needs to be conceived differently. For instance, when determining reliability, the story structure of a narrative is assessed for its consistency. Bell (2002) states that whether or not stories are believable is not important as "the inquiry goes beyond the specific stories to explore the assumption inherent in the shaping of those stories." Furthermore, "no matter how fictionalized, all stories rest on and illustrate the story structures a person holds. As such they provide a window into people's beliefs and experiences." (p. 209). On the other hand, validity is not made up of mere "acceptance or nonacceptance responses"; instead, it is concerned with the "likelihood or probability that the claim is so." (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 477). Some characteristics of validity include plausibility, credibility, or trustworthiness, which are all evaluations that readers themselves make.   Perhaps for the sake of practicality, we could refer to an eight-point framework for assessing quality of qualitative studies proposed by Tracy (2010). Her framework was built based on current scholarly discourse regarding the quality of qualitative research, and reflects the tenets of the autoethnographic paradigm (see Table 1). Nonetheless, Tracy does not look at her proposal as a means to an end; instead, she hopes that her proposed framework will instigate more dialogue among qualitative researchers. It is, after all, a principal essence of qualitative study to put forth a notion up for discussion to ensure relevance. In maintaining quality, Tracy also cites Fine (1993), who warns about ethnographers who attempt to portray the research process in an optimistic light by appearing "kind, friendly, honest, precise, candid, and fair" (Tracy, 2010, p. 849). Instead of creating an illusion as such, ethnographers and qualitative researchers should be critical and honest in order to maintain the 'goodness' of their work.

Table 1. Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (Tracy, 2010, p. 840)

Criteria for Quality	Various means, practices, and methods through which to achieve
Worthy Topic	*The topic of the research is* ● Relevant ● Timely ● Significant ● Interesting
Rich Rigor	*The study uses sufficient, abundance, appropriate, and complex* ● Theoretical constructs ● Data and time in the field ● Sample(s) ● Context(s) ● Data collection and analysis processes
Sincerity	*The study is characterized by* ● Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) ● Transparency about the methods and challenges
Credibility	*The research is marked by* ● Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual)

	knowledge, and showing rather than telling ● Triangulation or crystallization ● Multivocality ● Member reflections
Resonance	*The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through* ● Aesthetic, evocative representation ● Naturalistic generalizations ● Transferable findings
Significant contribution	*The research provides a significant contribution* ● Conceptually/theoretically ● Practically ● Morally ● Methodologically ● Heuristically
Ethical	*The research considers* ● Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) ● Situational and culturally specific ethics ● Relational ethics ● Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research)
Meaningful Coherence	*The study* ● Achieves what it purports to be about ● Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals ● Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other

4. The Debate: Analytic or Evocative Ethnography?

Though the self may influence the nature of a research, it has almost always been excluded for the purpose of establishing an objective purview (Burnier, 2006). Nevertheless, autoethnography aims to reign in the researcher as a valid entity to be studied. Scholars, such as Vryan (2006), argue that the value of autoethnography lies within its 'usefulness to others'. Nonetheless, how a piece of autoethnographic work is made useful to others appears to be the main point for contention. As seen in the previous section, while the appeal to the broader audience for analytic ethnography lies in the theorization and abstraction of personal experiences, evocative ethnography relies on the process of empathy of familiar emotions. Strictly relying on emotions contests the applicability of findings, as it relies heavily on personal subjectivity. It may also be challenging to see its immediate worth in light of established knowledge. In spite of these differences, Vyran argues that the proposal of distinguishing autoethnographies into two types - evocative and analytic - is unnecessary (2006). As Burnier (2006) points out, autoethnography should be "both personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical, and it is both descriptive and theoretical when it is done well." (p. 414). Unfortunately, it is to be expected that issues will persist, in that an analytic ethnography will always subordinate the self, while an evocative ethnography will always subordinate the theoretical underpinnings expected by traditional social scientists (Burnier, 2006).

Another point for contention is the perception towards the approach in its entirety. Critiques, including experts of the qualitative paradigm, are still hesitant to consider autoethnography as a scientific method as it contravenes traditional approaches of research inquiry (Sparkes, 2000; Holt, 2003). Holt (2003), in his experience of publishing an autoethnographic study, found that through the course of his article being rejected (several times) before finally being accepted, reviewers were more skeptical towards the approach utilized, rather than the content of the study. Currently, only select journals seem receptive to studies utilizing an autoethnographic research paradigm. Holt (2003) recommends that researchers, especially social scientists, consider using the autoethnographic approach for research, and subsequently publish their findings in various journals as a strategy to bring recognition to this undervalued research tool. This may also address the issue of how autoethnographic studies should be evaluated.

5. Autoethnographic Studies of Language Teaching Professionals

As mentioned earlier, the common approach used in the autoethnography of teaching professionals is narrative inquiry. Narrative research can be conducted through the analysis of biographical data (e.g. life history interviews, reflective journals), or the analysis of discursive construction of small stories extracted through conversational data. Typically, narrative studies would involve a researcher, or researchers, analyzing autobiographical content generated by other social entities. On the other hand, autoethnography - an expansion of narrative study (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) - is a common approach employed in studying English teachers' self and professional identity, or other social entities pertinent to the teaching context. An important autoethnographic characteristic to note, though, is the emphasis placed on reflexivity. While reflective practices involve the analytical evaluation of theory and practices, focusing on reflection as a retrospective intellectual exercise, reflexive practice is said to encompass the instantaneous reflective spirit, which is the reflex response that is intuitive and subconscious, leading eventually to self-analysis and awareness (Cunliffe, 2016; Farrell, 2016). Reflexive practices aimed to address a challenge faced when engaged in reflection, that is, the uncritical stance due to the relegation of reflective practices as merely routine work that needs to be done to fulfill a course or professional requirement. Though minimal, published autoethnographic studies by English language educators saw the emergence of common themes, such as the questioning of the legitimacy of the professional self, perceiving a sense of belonging, confusion and frustration due to the inability to conform to hegemonic discourses (regarding language teaching and learning principles), and the agency enacted leading to an emancipatory experience In the next section, we will consider the few studies that used autoethnography as an approach, or narrative approaches resembling autoethnography wherein reflexivity was incorporated.

5.1 Canagarajah (2012)

Canagarajah viewed autoethnography as a platform where experiences and perspectives are 'socially constructed' and 'ideologically mediated', but not providing access to absolute truth. He viewed autoethnography as a method that could allow insights into the self - which is a "rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional approaches." (p. 260). Furthermore, Canagajarah had considered an analytic autoethnographic approach to be able to discuss issues pertaining to his professional identity in light of relevant theoretical frameworks. In his paper, Canagarajah revisited tensions he experienced throughout his career as an English educator, which had shaped his identity. In particular, he looked at his identity crises, and challenges faced in finding acceptance in a field, which at the time, was dominated by native-English speaking people. He analyzed his narratives through the framework of Community of Practice (CoP), and the Nexus of Membership, developed by

Wenger (1998). As a result, Canagarajah was able to see how his membership in different communities could serve him positively, in that he would have insider knowledge and experience regarding issues foreign to native English speaking professionals (such as the predicament that L2 learners face when learning English, or the cultural differences between teachers and learners of English from other cultural contexts, etc.). His main purpose is to note tensions within the field of ELT, and that these tensions do not necessarily need to be resolved. These tensions, on the other hand, may "lead to forms of negotiation that generate critical insights and in-between identities." (p. 261).

5.2 Park (2014)

Park conducted an autoethnographic study on data collected over the span of two years. Data came in the form of personal reflections (journal), field notes, and responses from semi-structured interview. Through these data, Park was able to narrate the lives of students enrolled in a TESOL certification program through analytic autoethnography. She explained that her purpose was not for readers to emotionally react to her narratives - a feature common to evocative autoethnography; instead, she aims to systematically show reflexivity between her students and herself. The analytical framework which Park utilized was the progressive/regressive method for analyzing the narratives. This method was proposed by Denzin (2001), which takes into account the understanding of issues found within a historical moment as a way to justify reasons for actions taken. With this, "the unique features of a subject's life are illuminated in the interactional episodes that are studied. The similarities and commonalities that the subject shares with others are also revealed." (p. 41). In her study, Park was able to examine her own narrative through the narratives of her students. What she found, through the personal challenges faced by her students and herself, represented a larger issue pertaining to the English language teaching and learning field, that is, the lack of a sense of CoP. Park voiced her concern about how TESOL programs were becoming mechanical, in that graduates of the program are never to be heard from again. Though friendships are formed during their studies, Park argues that these relations are not formed based on the shared aspiration to become TESOL professionals. This lack of professional reciprocation may eventually lead to a stagnant community - one that does not evolve or move forward. Park compares this to the discourse and phenomenon of McDonaldization, where there seems to be an urgency to produce results without really taking into account its value or consequences**.**

5.3 Moloney and Wang (2016)

Perhaps it is also fitting if we considered studies on teachers of other languages. Despite the wealth of studies concerning the identity of English language teachers, Moloney and Wang reported that little attention has been given to the identity of Chinese teaching professionals. Though not labeled as an autoethnography, their study shared similar fundamental principles. The theoretical framework which they subscribed was narrative enquiry, where stories of both the narrators become meaningful through a process of interpretation and reinterpretation over time. Their study focused on the professional trajectories over the span of four years. Throughout this period, data was generated via personal reflective narratives, which were then exchanged with each other. After the researchers had read each other's narratives, they would then communicate with each other via online means for a collaborative analysis. In particular, they viewed and compared their professional trajectories to see shifts and tension between their personal identity with the larger CoP. What Moloney and Wang discovered was how focusing on the professional trajectory of one's self would allow them to see their position as independent and empowered teaching professionals. Even though they may be displaced by the larger CoP of Chinese teaching professionals, the narrative process which they were involved in helped them realize that they are capable of constructing 'independent trajectories'

as a way to decentralize the notion of CoP, and to legitimize themselves as valid and valuable teaching professionals.

Moloney and Wang's study is somewhat evocative as it places a heavy emphasis on the emotions they experienced in the fluid nature of education. Moreover, the paper focuses on the researchers' plight as disempowered language teaching professionals. This is one of the cornerstones of evocative autoethnography, where there is special interest in challenges affecting women, immigrants, or those from a minority group (Pillay, Naicker & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016). Nonetheless, the form of Moloney and Wang's study does not parallel the proposed presentation of an evocative autoethnography (Ellis, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2006), and there is a level of abstraction through the theorization of trajectories. Furthermore, they attempted an objective illusion through the use of third personal referrals. Perhaps this is the concern raised by Canagarajah (2012) and other scholars on quality of qualitative studies, in that narration needs to involve contextualized sense-making from a theoretical point of view, to have value to the academic community; while the presentation of an evocative study similar to that of Ellis and Bochner (2006) or Holt (2003) may deter from the expectations of scholars and journals in the area of English language teaching.

6. Autoethnographic Study of Shift in Professional Trajectory: My Experience

In this section, I present my own autoethnographic study on my journey from an applied linguistics lecturer to an English academic skills instructor. I will begin with an analytic examination, where I make sense of my transition from the notion of trajectories (Wenger, 1998). Autoethnographic data come from reflective journal entries that were written from August to December 2016. The reflections were dual entries. The first entry would focus on my thoughts and feelings about an upcoming lesson, or what I hoped to achieve through the lesson. The second entry, on the other hand, would focus on the evaluation of how I had done, and what I would do in a subsequent lesson, or what I need to improve (or change) in terms of my pedagogical belief or approach. The first entry was written whilst preparing for a lesson, while the subsequent entry was written over the span of two days where I would deliver the same lesson to four different groups. While most of the time I would write the second entry after the class was taught, there were times when I would write short memos while being in the class. In a week, I would write at least two entries because I met with each class twice. Throughout the 13-week semester, I was only able to write 8 entries. Though this may not be ideal, as a former teacher trainer, I know that record keeping such as maintaining a reflective journal may occasionally be disrupted, especially in times when teaching responsibilities take precedence.

As mentioned, I had recently experienced a shift in my professional identity. In my former workplace, I saw myself as a content specialist. I taught undergraduate level linguistics courses such as phonetics, semantics, and history of the English language. I was also teaching for the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) cluster, where I supervised fourth year TESOL undergraduates who were completing their pre-service teaching practicum. I also taught TESOL methodology and history of English language teaching. Though I mostly taught content-based classes, I would occasionally teach English skills classes, such as intercultural communication and first-year college writing, as well as advise and supervise fourth-year English majors in their final research studies. These skill-based courses gave me opportunities to test what I had taught in my other classes (e.g. TESOL methodology). After about eight years, I decided to relocate. This involved leaving for a new country. At my new workplace, I am teaching advanced research writing to postgraduate students. The main objectives of this course are to help students develop an awareness of the PhD thesis genre, as well as other pertinent language forms and functions used in this genre. My students come

from different disciplines, and each of them bring in their own theses to be developed throughout the semester.

My autoethnographic analysis will be grounded in the framework of trajectories developed by Wenger (1998). Trajectories can be a mode to determine one's scope of belonging to a particular CoP. Furthermore, a trajectory is not bound to a specific locality or time. Instead, it is a coherent journey that is an amalgamation of one's history, present, and future. In discussing trajectories, Wenger (1998) proposes the following, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Trajectories

Trajectory Type	Description
Peripheral	Participation by necessity that does not lead to full commitment
Inbound	Newcomers committing to a community with the intention of being full participants; their current trajectory may be peripheral
Insider	Full participants who are still evolving because of new demands; a community experiences changes to meet the demands of the environment
Boundary	Participants who broker between communities
Outbound	Participants becoming independent, leading to the formation of new relationships with other communities; these relationships may distance participants from (dissimilar) communities

With Wenger's (1998) framework of trajectory, I examined changes I had experienced as an English teaching professional. In the following section, I recount meaningful incidents which shaped the way I perceive myself. Furthermore, similar to Canagarajah (2012), this study, as well as the paradigm that is employed, does not in any way attempt to represent the 'truth'. It instead aims to reflect a socially constructed representation that addresses the ideologies of the self.

6.1 Peripheral or Outbound? An Analytic Examination

This was my first time teaching students from different disciplines at the postgraduate level. I expected these students to be different from those whom I had taught in the past, because my former students were all undergraduates from the same department. Nonetheless, focusing on the differences may hinder me from helping these students, it may also impede me from bringing in knowledge gained from my previous teaching experience. I decided then that I would focus on the 'similarities' instead. In this case, it was that both my former and current students needed help to improve their English academic skills. Aside from wanting to offer language assistance, I also decided that I would like to foster a positive attitude towards their use of the English language. I wanted them to know that they are valid English users and speakers. This desire was partially driven by a book I was reading at that time. The book was by Park (2009) entitled *The Local Construction of a Global Language: Ideologies of English in South Korea.* This book gave a comprehensive overview of English, in particular its uses and how it was perceived in South Korea. There were some intriguing concepts which Park mentions that prompted me to ask questions about my purpose as an English teacher. For example, the ideology of necessitation. This ideology refers to how English is deemed indispensable (even if it really does not). This may hold true for my students, since they are

enrolled in an English international program, and are expected to complete requirements in a setting where English is the primary language. To be able to do so, I am sure my students realize that a certain level of proficiency is needed for them to be accepted by their academic circles. Nonetheless, even if they achieve high levels of English proficiency, they may never enjoy the status of a native English speaker. This may lead to an attitude of self-depreciation, where they will constantly look down on their English language abilities because of the perception that they will never get to the point of native-level competency. Coincidentally, a few weeks into the semester, a student asked if there will come a point where their English proficiency will not be seen as being in correlation with their race. This was a very sobering moment for me, as I saw how the tutorials and tasks had brought this student to the realization of a potential setback once he transitions into the working world.

Just as I thought I was providing help to these students, I soon came to know that the support that I was providing may not be adequate, or to some of my students, not suitable. This epiphany came when I was marking materials from my students' theses' introductory chapters, as well as their literature review chapters. In my assessment, I was only able to provide feedback on language use and the organization of information. This was because each student came from a different faculty and had a different research topic. After I had completed marking their work, I sat with each student and went over his/her work. During this one-on-one consultation, I found that some students were hesitant to accept my feedback. Those who took an issue with my advice mentioned that there is the possibility that I thought what they did was incorrect because I did not have any knowledge about what they do. This could be true in writing, as meaning could also affect how information is structured.

This led me to believe that I was on a peripheral trajectory. Being new, I thought I was bringing in relevant English instructions to my students. When I realized that a genre itself may not have universal meaning or application, it displaced my conception of academic discourse and the teaching of academic skills. I also saw the incongruence in how I presented class materials. While the class materials that were prepared appeared prescriptive, my beliefs were somewhat postmodern, where I emphasized meaning over form. This often led to students asking for a correct 'form' (e.g., if the literature review chapter should be separated from the introduction chapter). Some of them would rather have a sense of finality, or closure, over certain aspects of language use. In this light, I saw myself as having an outbound trajectory. One who was in conflict with normative practices. It needs to be noted that trajectories may be contested by social entities who may come from a different community. In my case, entities which contradicted my assumed trajectory were my current students and the teaching materials. This is common, as seen in other studies. For instance, in Liu and Xu's (2011) study, Hui, an English teacher in China was met with competing discourses when she was tasked to represent her CoP to attend a course introducing 'current' and 'liberal' language teaching methods. Or, in the study of Adamson and Muller (2017), their positions as teaching professionals were contested because of the lack of understanding of Japanese and the Japanese culture, and ominous fate of their jobs.

Despite the competing entities, I took what was assigned to me and did as expected. Similar to Hui, I took a game theory approach in deciding which would be the most practical and beneficial for myself as a teacher. Throughout the semester, I did make minor and cautious modifications wherever I thought necessary (e.g. introducing corpus tasks for more descriptive examples). Externally, this may cast me as having a peripheral, or an insider trajectory. But internally, I was inherently different. Perhaps as time progresses, I may be able to develop a boundary trajectory, where I could interchange perceptions and practices expected of the course and of my own, which were gleaned from my own teaching experience.

6.2 Not an Insider: An Evocative Examination

This section presents an evocative exploration of my autoethnography. In this section, I look at how I am perceived as a new recruit. While the main focus of this section is not of my classroom teaching, or the interaction with my students, it had an impact on how I planned my lessons and how I presented myself in class (as well as to the rest of my colleagues). I will begin by setting the background to the issue. About a month after starting at my new workplace. I was informed that a mentor had been assigned to me, and that during the semester, my mentor would be observing my classes. As a teacher trainer, this did not come as a surprise to me. Nonetheless, what bugged me was the reason given regarding this mentorship.

The following is a snippet of a conversation with one of the of associate directors regarding my placement in the mentorship program.

The mentor will observe you a couple times during this semester.

I see. What is expected during these observations.

Basically we are trying to see how you deliver the content, and how you get students engaged in the lesson, and how they interact with each other.

That sounds okay. Will I need to prepare anything for these observations?

You'll need to meet with your mentor and decide on an observation time. Just make sure that the class session observed is one that has a mix of you giving a lecture, and directing a classroom activity. We don't want to be sending the mentor to a class where you hardly speak.

I see, yeah that would be a waste of time for the mentor I suppose. Is there paperwork that I need to complete?

Yes, I'll get them to you through email. Do you have any more other questions? You're welcome to pop by my office anytime during the semester!

Hmm, yeah, I'm still not quite sure why I need to be under observation. I know you had mentioned the purpose in your email but I'm still a little confused. But I am not opposed to the idea of being observed!

Oh, well, your work experience comes mainly from teaching in an EFL context. This new environment may be completely different from what you're used to. We just want to make sure you acclimatize well.

I cannot help but feel as if my teaching experience was subject to suspicion because my professional experience was centered in an environment where English was a foreign language. As the semester progressed, this issue would come up, especially when an observation is looming close. The following is a conversation I had with my colleague.

I have another observation coming up again.

Oh, how is that coming along?

It's okay, I suppose. I still don't know what to think of it. My mentor is great. He made some good points about the previous class he observed. The feedback he gave was also very constructive.

That's great. Will this observation be the last one?

I hope so! I'm still a little hung up over why they have me in this program though.

It will be fine. I think you know what you're doing, based on how you talk about teaching.

Thanks. I know this may be a small issue for some, but for me this is big. I think this problem is interrelated with so many other issues that have to do with who I am. Look, I have been speaking English all my life. My family speaks English at home. Even so, claiming that English is my first language still comes with resistance or disbelief by others. This persistent doubt really annoys me. I remember at my former workplace, we would organize seminars for secondary school English teachers. You know, those seminars where we offer short courses

on language testing, or communicative pedagogy. We also sometimes organize weekend English camps for the students. Anyway, whenever we initiate a community outreach program, or if a school approaches us with a similar proposal, they always ask for a white person. Thankfully, my boss always tells them that if that is what they are looking for, then they will have to go to another institution since our teaching staff were mainly Asians. There are also questions regarding my students. Yes, a majority of them speaks English as their second language, with the exception of a few who have international schooling background. To be accepted into the program, they need to have a certain level of language proficiency. Everything that we do in class is conducted wholly in English, so are all the other extra-curricular activities held outside of class hours. Considering my personal and professional background, I don't see how I am someone who is not from an ESL environment!

As an English professional who was granted mobility because of experiences and skills gained from extensive teaching, and being involved in matters pertinent to language education (such as curriculum development and evaluation), I imagined that I would have the privileges of an insider. However, the need to verify my skills because of my prior experiences in an EFL setting made me feel as if I only had a peripheral trajectory, and had to prove myself as being able to cope with the demands of being in a context where English is the predominant mode of communication. This made me realize the 'borderline' situation I was in - while I may possess pedagogical skills and knowledge that aligned with my current workplace, they were borne and honed in a 'dubious' context. Hence, I was yet to be granted full membership. The borderline always appears somewhat paradoxical, as purported by Alsup (2006), but it may eventually lead to a growth in a teacher's professional and personal identities (see Aldenmyr, 2013). For me, it meant that I had to be more aware of a certain level of linguistic pride present in my current environment. And to be accepted, I will need to conform to its linguistic ideologies, and perhaps its repertoire. It was once said in the area of English language teaching, native speakers will always maintain a ghost-like presence (Cook, 1999). I think this is a very relevant challenge faced by those in the English language arena, especially for teachers from the outer circles who find employment in countries of the inner circles.

7. Concluding Remarks

Using autoethnography to explore my trajectories was liberating, especially as I reflected on the multiplicity of my identities as an English teacher. Through this approach, I could give a voice to experiences that I would typically tone down or silence, since autoethnography acknowledges the explicit impressions of emotions. This opportunity is crucial, especially for teaching professionals who sense that they are being marginalized. As suggested by Adamson and Muller (2017), their collaborative autoethnography was able to give them a third space where they could bridge other spaces where their identities are situated. Similarly, this exercise enabled me to create a discourse space where I can validate my own identities (as an English speaker, an English teaching professional and researcher) and my own subjectivities. As such, I see autoethnography as a relevant tool which is particularly useful for teachers who are engaged in reflexive practices. Furthermore, when disseminated, autoethnography may also bring to the forefront nuances of cultural contexts which otherwise may be hidden by traditional social science research paradigms. This could be beneficial for other teachers (and researchers), as it validates similar experiences, or creates an awareness of the complex issues faced by English teaching professionals worldwide.

However, as a researcher, I observed some challenges with regards to an autoethnographic approach. While working from an analytic perspective, I was continuously restrained by the need to relate what I had experienced with broader theories. In other words, the need to abstract was, at times, a hindrance to coherently pen down my thoughts. The

evocative approach, on the other hand, allowed me to express myself freely. Nonetheless, I was not comfortable by simply ending my story without any form of abstraction (as seen in the previous section). As a researcher, I still had to bring about vital theoretical points which I want readers to notice. Another challenge lies in the determination of relevant stories. I was cautious in selecting which narrative to examine. This, though, may be perceived as cherry picking, especially since transparency and comprehensiveness are quality determinants for qualitative studies. Another challenge arising from being cautious is the smoothing over of character quirks. Nonetheless, being too forthcoming may also (unintentionally) smear the character of other social entities. This is discussed by Tracy (2010) as relational ethics, where there needs to be mutual respect between social entities, even if there are disputes between them. Hence, to protect the privacy of others represented in an autoethnography, entries may at times be stretched or clipped. Taking into account these issues, I see value in analytic autoethnography. First, from a growth perspective, analytic autoethnography supports a dialogic relationship between personal experiences with broader theoretical constructs. This not only encourages teacher professionalism, but contributes to the development of the CoP. Second, it positions teachers as critical and systematic thinkers, and not as one who is insular or removed from the beliefs and practices of the CoP because of the emphasis on the experience of the self. Finally, from an ethical perspective, analytic autoethnography may be more successful in ensuring the confidentiality of participants being examined. This, I believe, is crucial though it may render personal stories less colorful.

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