



## Book Review



### AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES IN ELT

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES, PEDAGOGIES,  
AND PRACTICES

Edited by  
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**Autoethnography in ELT: Transnational identities, pedagogies, and practices**, by Bedrettin Yazan, Suresh Canagarajah and Rashi Jain, New York, Routledge, 2021, 261 pp., \$149.39 (Hardcover), ISBN-13: 978-0367428587

This edited volume is a valuable addition to ELT literature. It argues coherently that through the telling of personal stories, by way of autoethnography, formerly marginalized ELT professionals not only can claim their voices in the academia, but also adopt a more accepting and productive pedagogical stance in language teaching toward their learners' diverse backgrounds, Englishes, and accents. Guided by major works on autoethnography (e.g., Canagarajah, 2012; Chang, 2008), this book provides thought-provoking narratives and analyses that can further sensitize readers to the diverse transnational trajectories of ELT professionals, their evolving subjectivities in different contexts, and the ongoing

negotiations of power relations surrounding the teaching site.

One significant feature of this edited collection is its authorship. Over half of its authors are junior scholars, i.e., 13 out of 23 being PhD candidates. Additionally, five chapters are co-authored. As such, this collection showcases a new trend in TESOL scholarship, not only to represent knowledge narratively, but also to foreground multiple emic views of ELT professionals' still expanding transnational territories.

The book has five sections. The preface rationalizes the use of autoethnography as a method in ELT research. Part I has five chapters (1-5) on *Traversing Liminal Spaces in Communities, Cultures, and Languages*. Part 2 has four chapters (6-9) on *Traversing Liminal Spaces in Academic Research*. Part 3 has four chapters on *Traversing Liminal Spaces in Pedagogy* (10-13). Last is an index.

Each chapter taps into the creative potential of autoethnographic research and contributing new knowledge about ELT in unique ways. Chapter 1 tells about Lieb, an Irish English teacher's experience of alienation in transnational education and work environments, which was alleviated when she began teaching dance fitness in Japan for a US-based company. Chapter 2 recounts Krulatz's journey with languages (Polish, English, German), language learning and teaching, and her gradual shift away from a monolingual mindset to bilingualism and multilingualism in Poland and USA. Chapter 3 presents a poetic autoethnography of Liao, a Taiwanese teacher's four distinct phases with writing poems in English from initial disbelief to later embrace, highlighting the impact of poetry writing on her recognition of her backgrounds and identities as both learning and teaching resources. Chapter 4 features Kayser's critical autoethnography, which critiques monolingual schooling practices in Ghana and the USA on the one hand, and on the other hand, calls language professionals to nurture emergent bilinguals. Chapter 5 uses autoethno-drama to recount a Taiwanese American Ku's relocation in Taiwan as an English teacher and his reflections on negotiating his own transnational identity. Chapter 6 presents Jain's recount of and reflections on her linguistic, educational and professional trajectories across India and the USA. It



provides an explanation of her preferred self-identification as a transnational, translingual, and “pracademic” scholar, who seeks to merge her practice with research. Chapter 7 shares a critical autoethnography of Ajšić, who recorded and reflected on his transnational experiences and translingual subjectivity associated with living and working as an applied linguist in Bosnia, the USA, and UAE. Chapter 8 provides an autoethnography by a teacher (Ethan) and a student (Leo), who co-explored critically their experiences of moving to the USA in pursuit of their similar American dreams and the lessons they have learned from being “Nepantleras” or dwellers of some in-between space. Chapter 9 presents a collective autoethnography by four researchers, Jin, Babic, Mairitsch, and Mercer. It explores ecologically their national and transnational identities in relation to their languages and research. In Chapter 10, Malina, an Indian, recounts vividly and reflects coherently on her educational and work experiences in several countries, including Japan where she was born and raised but was always treated as an outsider. It highlights the importance of a language teacher and teacher educator embracing a transnational identity. Chapter 11 presents Han, Haneda, and Madany’s respective journeys with their language, cultural and educational backgrounds and how these journeys inform their critical stances in teaching and advising. Chapter 12 is an autoethnography by Lypka and Bangun, who recount and reflect on their pursuit of equity in their research and teaching practices, emphasizing the positive roles played by Participatory Response Inquiry (PMI) and digital storytelling. Chapter 13 presents a visual collective autoethnography by four Asian ELT professionals (*Abas, Bose, Park, and Takahashi*) who reflect on their journeys with transnational literacy and critical events. Together, these stories feature the authors’ educational experiences, life trajectories, and evolving subjectivities along the theme of border-crossing.

The book is overall engaging and inspiring. It pushes the boundaries of knowledge in ELT by positioning what would traditionally be labeled as “non-native speakers of English” teachers as forerunners and tellers of both self- and profession-enriching stories. These are stories that foreground the personal agency of these EFL professionals who embrace the storyline of transnational identification to address their ontological crisis within the profession. For its storied view of selves, the book offers rich insight into the ELT profession like no other. Therefore, I have no reservation recommending it to professionals and students in TESOL and applied linguistics alike, and whoever have been involved in or hope to start English language teaching as their career one day. Language teacher trainers may also use this book as a catalyst to guide student teachers to reflect on their own experiences and beliefs. Additionally, I hope the book may inspire some Asian TEFLers, myself included, to begin their own autoethnographic explorations of language learning and teaching in Asia, and if possible, co-explore such journeys with their colleagues or students, who have not crossed national boundaries. Doing so will minimize perpetuating unproductive ways of language teaching and being. To cite one of the authors Ajšić, we all have to “stop combing our hair calmly as our academic village burns in the neoliberal fire.” Autoethnography in ELT does not offer a cure, but a good place to start.

### References

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