14 Writing *in* English, Writing *and* English: Diaethnographic Scenes of Identity, Craft, Mentorship, and Advocacy

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Abstract / Resumen

This chapter, written as a diaethnographic narrative with commentaries bookending each "scene," features conversations between the two authors as they reflect upon their shared journeys as scholars and writers over a decade. The conversations discuss a series of issues related to language ownership, including what it means to claim our local varieties of English as part of a more significant movement to decolonize our views of English and reclaim multilingualism as part of scholarship. This chapter shares the authors' challenges and the ongoing advocacy efforts to have an actual "polyphony of the periphery" that enriches academic discourses worldwide. In that sense, this chapter challenges both authors and readers to move English (and other European languages, for that matter) away from colonial mindsets, to rethink our academic relationship with these languages, to consider the discourses we are inviting (and dismissing) via our language practices, and, finally, to (re)consider the pedagogical and scholarly implications of these contested relationships with English.

Este capítulo, escrito como una narrativa diaetnográfica con comentarios al final de cada escena, nos presenta una reflexión entre los dos autores alrededor de un trayecto compartido como académicos y escritores durante una década. Las conversaciones en este capítulo discuten una serie de cuestiones relacionadas con cómo nos adueñamos de las lenguas, incluyendo qué significa reclamar nuestras variedades locales de inglés como

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parte de un movimiento más amplio para descolonizar nuestras visiones del inglés y reclamar el multilingüismo como parte de la creación de conocimiento. Este capítulo comparte el desafío de los autores y los continuos esfuerzos de promoción que necesitamos para tener una verdadera "polifonía de la periferia" que enriquezca los discursos académicos en todo el mundo. En ese sentido, este capítulo nos desafía a alejar al inglés (y a otras lenguas europeas, por cierto) de mentalidades coloniales, nos invita a repensar nuestra relación académica con estas lenguas, los discursos que estamos invitando (y descartando), y a reconsiderar las implicaciones pedagógicas y académicas de estas relaciones controvertidas con el inglés.

Keywords / Palabras clave: academic writing; diaethnography; language ownership; decolonizing / escritura académica; diaetnografía; dominio del lenguaje; decolonización

Writing is storytelling, so it is fitting to look back at how this chapter began almost 10 years ago when Tatiana approached Raúl about joining the Literacies in Second Languages Project (Mora, 2015). That started a friendship, collegial, mentoring, and counseling relationship that included co-authoring conference papers and manuscripts (and lots of coffee), as well as questions about literature (Chiquito et al., 2019) and the English language (Mora et al., 2019). In the case of English, questions evolved about the meaning of second-language writing and how we contest the expectation to write our manuscripts in either American or British English or have a native speaker "validate" our writing.

This chapter uses duoethnography (Norris et al., 2012) or *dia*ethnography (Golovátina-Mora et al., 2021; Mora & Golovátina-Mora, 2024) to reflect on our past and future (Note: Joe Norris, one of the founders of duoethnographic research, agrees that diaethnography better fits the dialogic nature of this ethnographic approach to life and data (Norris, personal communication, 2019)). We collaborated on this chapter (Raúl in Norway, Tatiana in Colombia) using Zoom calls, Otter.ai transcription, and Google Docs. The following sections contain curated quotes from our conversations as "scenes" (Forber-Pratt, 2022) and scholarly literature to support our claims in the subsequent commentary at the end of each scene.

This chapter's threaded tapestry revises our histories and proposes a direction for English writing to avoid disenfranchising writers who negotiate multiple languages and identities and want their voices heard. Before we delve into our conversations, we find it fitting to share with our readers some of our departure points and the overlaps we have found over time. We have chosen the "seed of life" visualization to illustrate how our life paths have shaped our writing:

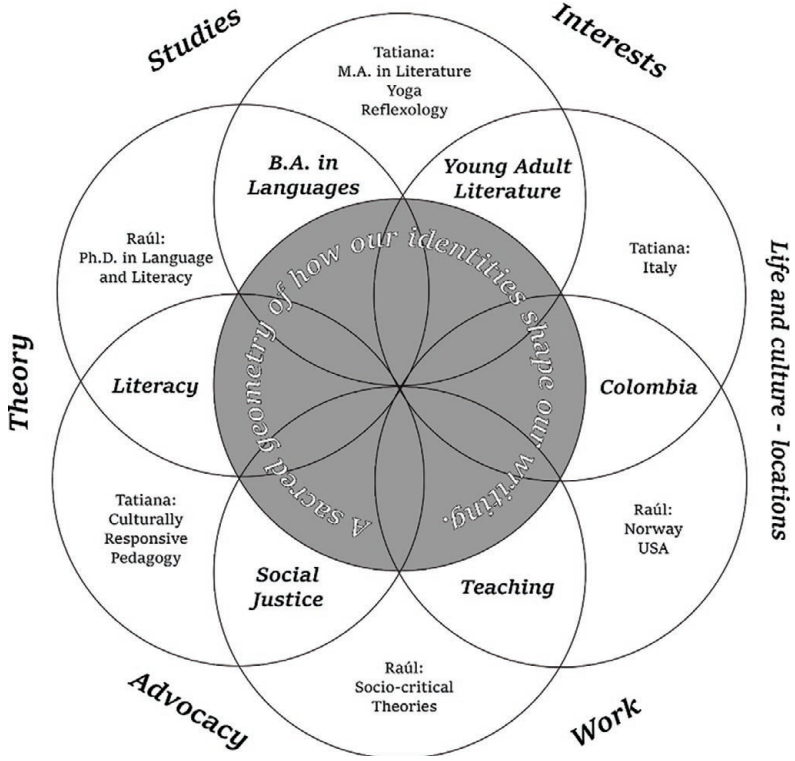

Figure 14.1. Our seed of writing (life).

Scene 1: Writing in English/Writing and English

Taty: I would like to ask a question. Is your English Colombian, American, or what?

Raúl: I like to think that it's *mine*. There is some Colombian English (Mora, 2022) because I learned it there and have used it there for most of my career and life. This makes it Colombian English because it is happening *there*. We do not speak British or American English in Colombia. When it hits the ground, it stops being American or British English unfiltered. But I also spent time in Central Illinois, learning a particular brand of academic English and picking up a series of patterns. My view of language changed. Over the past decade, I have advocated for a shift from English's foreignness (Mora, 2013).

Taty: Language changes all the time. Even when translated from Spanish to English, Colombian sayings have meaning. Now, talking about aspects of English and what English is, you were saying that you consider it your own.

Raúl: The way we treat languages is a problem. There are multiple ways to theorize that relationship with languages where you never bring people to them, no matter how much you teach them. Without delving into the complicated relationships languages have had with people subjugated to them by multiple circumstances (Said, 1993), certain framing is also preventing people from approaching them. We want our students to write in their native and second languages; however, we have created structures that make languages inaccessible (Flores, 2020). Our relationship with writing, especially academic or literary genres, which become foreign languages, is an issue.

Commentary

This section shows our concern about the imbalance regarding English varieties. We notice how some regional or national English varieties are more likely to be accepted into academic publications, which worries us (Amano et al., 2023; Flowerdew, 2019) because varieties seen as "outliers" may be rejected because they may be construed as not meeting those standards (Cushing, 2021; Hanauer et al., 2019; Lillis & Curry, 2015). We recognize that these biases may affect not only English-language writers but also people in the United States, Canada, and the English Caribbean islands (Byfield, 2021) whose first language does not meet those expectations (Baker-Bell, 2020; Smith, 2023). There are efforts we can make from the teacher education side, but we also think about the role regional journals that publish in English in areas such as TESOL play here. How flexible are their policies regarding English varieties? How do these rejection issues we point out here play out in the Pan-American publication structure? Breaking this imbalance needs a multi-pronged effort between teacher educators, researchers, and publishers.

Scene 2: *Who* is Writing … or Writing as Identity

Conversation 1: Becoming a Writer

Taty: Okay, another question. We must publish for promotion, but why did you start writing academic papers?

Raúl: I attended conferences as a teacher and was interested in presenting, writing, and publishing. Then my curiosity turned into going to graduate school because it seemed like a good idea if I wanted to stay an academic. I am curious about your take on writing, whether it is familiar or foreign, in your native language or the one you are learning.

Taty: In my writing, I first consider what I want to say and how I can express my feelings and perceptions. However, when *teaching* writing, it becomes a tool for critical thinking, not self-expression, self-reflection, or memory. Regarding my writing process, I must admit that I breathe writing because I have to do it every day, even if it's a sentence I paste on the wall to avoid forgetting something. After all, thoughts are important to me, whether for academic purposes or therapy. If I write in a notebook, I forget what I wrote in it. But a sticky note on my wall lets me see it every day.

Writing is not boring to me. Language is part of my identity; I do not let it stop me from expressing myself. Writing shapes your identity and cultural heritage, academically or not. I realize that academic writing can be foreign because each writing process is different. I feel that academic writing is sometimes external to everyone; for me, it's the mask I have to use to reproduce or explain something. As I mentor my students, such writing means discussing your writing topic and purpose with someone else.

Figure 14.2. Taty's wall.

Conversation 2: Recognizing Ourselves

Taty: We are the result of our ancestors and of our professors, too. We must consider this when writing. Because it helps create writing conditions

and know our roots. However, sometimes I wonder if English or our multiple languages prevent us from finding the words. That is, when language is distant because you feel that that specific language is not helping you represent what you want. So writing is our ancestors' polyphony, and we need to distance ourselves from them and shape our academic identity. This is something that culturally responsive pedagogy does: recognize where you come from and who you are because of others (Chiquito-Gómez, 2022).

Raúl: It is fascinating how our relationships with languages are both harmonious and contested. That reflects the writing process; sometimes, the contested relationship with language may even be with your mother tongue. I do not think you should label a language you were born into a foreign language because you may be more comfortable expressing yourself in another language.

Commentary

This scene encourages readers to consider how languages shape identity. Writers use more than just words and sentences in different languages. They trade emotions, culture, perceptions, and stereotypes. Multilingual writing necessitates considering diverse backgrounds, and enabling diverse knowledge access (Curry & Lillis, 2022; García & Li, 2014). Reflecting on this scene, we see two opposing but complementary writing perspectives arising. On the one hand, there needs to be a stronger push to support writing in multiple languages (Corcoran, 2019; Navarro et al., 2022) to avoid further discrimination against non-English speakers (Soler, 2021). On the other hand, we must also remain cautious not to chastise those who may choose to write in a second language (in this case, English) and not equate that to selling out to the colonizers. Colonizing views are sometimes less about language choices and more about what we say in those languages. We must combat misrepresentations that South means refusing other languages, which may play into the monoglossic views.

The invitation here is to defy monoglossic discourses about writing and embrace all language choices as spaces for resistance (Esquicha Medina, 2022) and agency (Zavala, 2011). Even if it is true that many people worldwide have been historically coerced into the languages they have learned, there is also the possibility of using those languages for resistance. How do we engage further with those forms of resistance in our academic writing? How can we instill that sense of resistance in writing instructional practices? These are questions for us all to consider.

Scene 3: *What* Is Writing … or Writing as Craft

Conversation 1: Understanding Writing and the Traditions that Build Our Writing

Taty: Academic writing has specific rules that we have to follow. So, we must always quote and cite. Yet, it's also valid to write differently. When discussing creative writing, we rarely see or understand that process. And that's how we must embody what we want to discuss. Because of our long collaboration, I know you use something like my wall: journals for writing, thoughts, and students. So, I would like to know, what strategies do you use? How do you "do" writing?

Raúl: Most of my writing is academic. I sometimes blog but write in a Gonzo-inspired pseudo-academic style (Thompson, 2007). However, I always think of writing, even academic, as storytelling: what story do I want to tell in my articles and chapters, not just report results? How do I write that story appropriately for academic genres? How do I style it for an article or a book chapter? How can I tailor an ethno/auto/duoethnographic project to fit, play, and disrupt norms? But also conveying that disruption doesn't come from ignorance but from extensive knowledge.

Figure 14.3. Raúl's journals.

Another factor in my writing style is how my colleagues have shaped it over the past two decades. I always quote 1 Giant Leap's "My Culture" (2002): "I am the sum total of my ancestors, I carry their DNA." Connecting with my ancestors inspired my writing. It is my academic family and the academic family trees I belong to. And at the same time, I've tried to create our academic family tree over the past decade with you and the rest of the folx at Literacies in Second Language Project (Mora, 2015).

Conversation 2: Questioning the Writing-Knowledge Relationship

Taty: When we talk about writing and its definition, we (as faculty members) are part of producing knowledge through writing while helping our students build that habit. There's a saying, which I don't remember, but it's something like, "If you don't write, you kind of die." Without publishing or writing, you are nothing in academia. We become machines or producers of knowledge that must be updated constantly, but we are not like machines. And the process of writing needs time. This is something universities and official institutions do not understand. Those institutions do not understand that writing needs time, thinking, and planning. We must organize our thoughts, decide who to write to, etc. Or, as I discussed yesterday with another colleague, that when you submit an article, it can be rejected because it is too specific. But why? Journals should welcome novel work, even projects that are more narrowly focused.

Commentary

This section revisits our need to disrupt the sometimes violent uses of academic language (Bourdieu, 1991) to move past a monolingual, monoglossic knowledge production process (Cho, 2024). Monolingual, monoglossic practices are causing a loss of knowledge (Lüdi, 2015) and fail to recognize that quite a few scholars worldwide use multiple languages in their scholarly efforts (Hynninen & Kuteeva, 2020). However, the conversation goes beyond the language of production: we also need to talk about issues of access. For instance, what should our academic communities do so that underrepresented audiences (e.g., minoritized scholars, school teachers, etc.) can both gain access to the knowledge we are producing while being able to share their local knowledge?

Another question is whether articles (paywalled or open access) should be the only verifiable form of knowledge dissemination or if we should think of ways to use multimodal texts to make research more readily available and

communicable. This necessarily entails working together as a community to raise awareness of the writing process among those making administrative and political decisions about writing (Salager-Meyer et al., 2016). Discussing the demands for high productivity, and how it can result in unethical behavior, is essential. As a collective, we must rethink what we mean by writing and what we teach young people about research, scholarship, and knowledge if our only concern is meeting quotas in high-impact journals.

Scene 4: *How* Is Writing … or Writing as Mentorship

Conversation 1: Writing as Modeling

Raúl: When we consider writing for publication, the biggest challenge is engaging young learners, researchers, and scholars better. As we consider the meaning of writing, it is important to ask: What is writing to *you*? We don't ask that question. We train people to write, and we tell them *how* to write. We tell them how we write. We talk to them about the structure and process of writing. I do that; I teach about outlining and brainstorming. But one of our problems is that we need to talk about *what* writing is, *who* writing is, and *why* writing is. We typically do not have those conversations with beginning writers.

Taty: How often do we model writing for students? How often do we demonstrate the writing process? Writing takes time; you need to write, but how do we model that process? When do they see us write? Considering academic writing norms and technical conventions, how often do students observe us as teachers writing? How often do we explain why we write academic papers? In my opinion, we should have students and peers read our writing.

Raúl: You brought up a very important thing about modeling. And it's the question of how often they see us writing. In writing and helping others, that is essential. I have always said that there is a part of teaching about moral authority in the sense that I cannot ask you to do what I'm not doing. I cannot ask you to write or read if you don't see me writing or reading. I can only train scholars if I'm in the process of being a scholar and evolving as a scholar because, at some point, students will hold you accountable.

Taty: Even with small class tasks, we give them writing assignments but do not show them that we have done the assignment, too. That's part of that modeling in action: showing them that writing is not impossible. And we've been putting scholarly writing on such a pedestal that it's impossible to achieve. If we show them that we are there with them in that process of

struggling, submitting, and navigating the review process, then it's something different, something relatable.

Conversation 2: Embracing the Struggles of the First Draft as Growth

Raúl: We sometimes struggle getting our students to write, but what are we doing to be part of that process to help them write better? Students need guidance on thought processes and writing. But there are some things that you cannot do vicariously. Helping others requires some of your work. You need the lived experience of writing and participating in those writing communities. In those writing communities, you learn to accept that the first draft will always be messy and ugly. And that takes time—that takes *a long time*—to come to terms with and feel comfortable sharing drafts.

Taty: If we're trying to decolonize language, who are we writing for? What are we writing about? And who are we bringing to the table? We put writing on a pedestal. And then, if we're not being honest with ourselves, that is when writing becomes difficult, distant, and a struggle. Students often say vocabulary or structures make writing difficult. That's a shield. What they lack is reflecting upon and enacting identity or representation of who they are or what they write about.

Raúl: As Bourdieu suggested, I have always thought struggle is part of learning (Jenkins, 2014). But as much as it is something innate to humanity, writing is also very foreign. There is a part of it that has been with us from the beginning, and there is a part of it that we have been creating and making up as we go.

Taty: I remember how Ong (1982) describes how we went from orality to writing. There's a part where a philosopher says that writing is fake because we're not being ourselves, and we can be ourselves speaking. Writing became mechanical to count animals, seeds, and other things. That caught my attention. Then through the ages, writing has transformed humanity because without writing, I mean, what was that saying—*verba volant, scripta manent* (words fly, the written remains)? So, if writing and those things we write are fake, then what is humanity? I'm curious if I'm being transparent with that. But it's ironic because then what we read is not real either.

Raúl: And the answer is we make it real by doing it. By making adjustments, you learn to navigate the process and tell the story. We start to see this as part of us, especially in a genre full of norms, tricks, and codes. That is the big challenge when I teach. I have taken academic writing courses that are very technical. I took composition courses in college a long time ago, which

were very technical. Then, when I confronted the reality of writing, some foundational things helped. However, those classes only covered the technical aspects of writing so that they could have told me more about the process. To teach students to write, you cannot just say, "These are the rules. This is the process." Let's also talk about what happens and how much you stumble. We always talk about writing drafts. And there is nothing more intimidating than writing a draft. And especially for novice writers—in the sense of, "When do I show you a draft?"—the answer is, "Whenever you have something that remotely resembles a draft."

There's something I always tell students: There is nothing prettier than a published manuscript. But it does not explain how the authors got there. More academics are saying, "That is not how you got there, and the final version is far from mine. A far cry from the first draft." I mean, with very few exceptions, not many people can say, "Oh, yeah, I can write a fully publishable manuscript in one sitting." The list is very short. I only know one person because I spoke to their publishing house editor. And the editor themself told me that. Everybody else has to go through multiple drafts. But we have yet to tell students that. So, we discuss first drafts. And how often do we show students an early draft of our work with all its typos, imprecisions, and blemishes? Not often enough.

Commentary

This section further reflects on what it means to introduce students to academic writing. As Raúl has argued elsewhere (Mora et al., 2023), there is too much emphasis on the mechanical aspects of academic writing and not enough on the social elements that comprise academic writing. Modeling is another critical element here, in terms of the mentor texts and examples (Gallagher, 2023) instructors provide and how they see themselves as writing role models (Cremin & Oliver, 2017).

However, this section also raises another issue: how to start rethinking academic writing and writing instructional practices. Although some things are worth preserving, it is vital to question how academic writing has traditionally been a positivist and historically male affair that has excluded women (Chaudhury & Colla, 2021). So, things such as attention to detail and elaboration in academic texts are worth keeping. Other things, including the orthodoxy of styles, which sometimes may stifle creativity and ingenuity in writing (Urtasun & Domínguez, 2020), are worth revisiting and updating, so we can create texts that better reflect our work and our personalities and intersectionalities (Valis, 2019). In other words, writers need to see patterns

in the topic and the writing style, while making room to step back and not follow that standard norm.

Coda: Toppling Academic Writing from Its Pedestal … Our Ongoing Advocacy

This chapter, set as part of an ongoing conversation that Raúl and Tatiana have had over a decade and a shifting relationship from teacher-student to one of collegiality and mutual mentorship, reflects on what writing means for those of us writing in multiple languages, especially if one of them is English. In the diaethnographic moments that make this chapter, Raúl and Tatiana raised questions about the conversations we need to have to make academic writing more accessible to our students and novice scholars (Álvarez & Colombo, 2023). There is a need to have extended conversations inside our teacher education and graduate programs about why writing is essential, as Tatiana reminds us:

> Going back to first or second grade, I don't remember a teacher telling me, "Listen, writing is important because of this." Nothing at all. Even going back to when I started teaching in schools, I do not remember even saying to my students, "Writing is important," or asking, "Why is writing important for you?" But I do remember asking them to interpret, for example, drawings, or to tell me why this writing or this text is important for you.

As we think about ways to disrupt traditional understandings of writing for publication, we also need to think about how, by pushing for the formulaic elements of style and the need to "look" scholarly (Flores, 2020), we have sacrificed issues of meaning and voice. Raúl adds here,

> One of the things that sometimes worries me is the relationship that we are establishing with a text. For example, when I work with undergrads, master's students, and even doctoral students, the first time they approach writing their theses and dissertations, there is so much distance between the idea they want to propose and themselves.

This chapter invites us to rethink our relationship with English, which is, for different reasons, the primary language (yet not the only language) that becomes the conduit for our scholarship. In general, academic writers should remember that, at its core, we are telling a story about our research (Hyland,

2008). Telling these stories means balancing the existing polyphony in the texts, where we mix participants, data, and our voices as researchers or scholars, and how we find a space for this polyphony to soar and tell a story that can make a difference. As we (Raúl and Tatiana) write this, we are challenged as scholars and mentors of students (and sometimes colleagues) to rethink how we introduce them to the foundational elements of academic writing and the different languages they write in, including and beyond English. How can mentors help mentees find ways to tell the stories they truly want to tell, balancing style, rigor, integrity, and their identities? How will our academic communities help them find writing as something closer to them, an activity they truly own, and not a form of drudgery on their path to graduation or promotion? How will we help them find their voice across languages and genres? We leave you with these questions we are still trying to answer in our research, teaching, and scholarship, so you can join this extended conversation with this chapter as a point of reference.

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