Autoethnography and critical ethnography

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Introduction

While ethnographic research is discussed more broadly in the previous chapter (see Wei, this volume), the focus of this chapter is on two specific approaches that have emerged more recently, and are less well represented in applied linguistics research, namely autoethnography and critical ethnography. Although ethnographic approaches to studying applied linguistics’ concerns can be seen to be on the rise, there is less evidence of studies that adopt either autoethnographic or critical perspectives (for more on ethnographic perspectives in applied linguistics research see Starfield, 2015a; Paltridge, Starfield, & Tardy, 2016).

In the current era of superdiversity and heightened mobility coupled with increased inequality (Blommaert, 2010), methodologies such as autoethnography and critical ethnography gain greater relevance as we seek to better ‘know’ ourselves and the many ‘others’ we live amongst. While differing in a number of respects, each approach shares in the critical goal of confronting ‘dominant forms of representation and power’ (Tierney, 1998, p. 66). Indeed, more recently, researchers such as Reed-Danahay (2017) have argued for a critical autoethnography to more explicitly link the autoethnographic and the critical projects.

Both approaches to ethnography challenge any remaining vestiges of earlier beliefs in the ‘objectivity and innocence’ (Adams, Ellis, & Holman Jones, 2017, p. 2) of ethnographers. Autoethnographers and critical ethnographers thus engage in the ‘rigorous self-reflection’ known as reflexivity enabling them to ‘identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life’ (p. 1). Postmodern/postcolonial conceptions of identity as multiple and unstable also challenge us to rethink the unified self of traditional ethnographic writing (Pennycook, 2005; Canagarajah, 2012).

Talmy’s (2013) claim that critical ethnography ‘has become an established approach to inquiry in applied linguistics, with studies that focus on issues such as racism, sexism, linguistic prejudice, homophobia, and identity politics’ (p. 1) may be somewhat overstating the case as the number of published critical ethnographic studies in leading journals would be relatively low. It is, however, somewhat better established in applied linguistics as an investigative approach than is autoethnography, having, for example, a separate entry in the Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics (Talmy, 2013).
In this chapter, I discuss each of these approaches in turn in terms of their central epistemologies, goals, and methods and provide illustrations of the deployment of these approaches in current applied linguistic research. I do however devote more space to the discussion of autoethnography, including ethical issues, as it is the less well known of the two approaches, with fewer published studies. In the discussion of critical ethnography, I examine some published studies that illustrate the affordances of critical ethnographic approaches to applied linguistic concerns. I conclude with a discussion of writing reflexive autoethnographic and critical ethnographic texts and of the potential contribution these approaches can make to our endeavours to better understand the complex relationships between individuals, language and society.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is frequently referred to as ‘an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)’ (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). For Chang (2008) it is ‘a qualitative research method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others’ (p. 56). Reed-Danahay (2017, p. 145) sees autoethnography as a ‘genre of writing that places the self of the researcher and/or narrator within a social context’. As with ethnography then, autoethnography refers both to the processes of research and the product (the text produced) (Ellis et al., 2011).

While recent times have seen an increase in ‘writings focusing on self . . . in the form of autobiography, memoir, journal, diary, personal essay, or letter’ (Chang (2008, p. 31), autoethnography is distinctive in that, while sharing the ‘storytelling’ function of the previously mentioned genres, it adopts, as those definitions show, a clear analytical framework, engaging in ‘cultural analysis and interpretation’ (Chang, p. 43). That said, autoethnographic writing is strongly driven by narratives of the self and of the self in relation to others. Readers interested in autoethnography should also consult Barkhuizen’s chapter on narrative inquiry in this volume. Chang reminds us that stories of the self are ‘never made in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants’ (p. 69).

As an emerging method, there are, however, several different versions of autoethnography; the boundaries with other forms of ‘self-writing’ are perhaps less clear than may be initially thought. Some proponents of autoethnography make strong claims for the richly detailed narratives of evocative autoethnography as constituting a superior form of knowledge to what they believe to be the reductive academic analyses or theorisations of more analytic approaches (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), whereas others call for a more analytical autoethnography that more explicitly grounds their accounts in cultural and social analysis (Anderson, 2006). Anderson (p. 378) puts forward five key features of analytic ethnography:

- the researcher is a complete member of the social world being studied;
- analytic reflexivity (to analyse data on self);
- narrative visibility of the researcher’s self;
- dialogue with informants beyond the self; and
- commitment to theoretical analysis.

Ellis and Bochner (2006) however argue for a more emotionally engaged, subjective form of autoethnography. The boundaries between these two strands may in fact blur in practice. Chang (2008) attempts to make sense of the variety of approaches to autoethnography by
arguing that autoethnography ‘should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation’ (p. 48).

Adams et al. (2017, pp. 3–4) list five purposes of autoethnography:

- autoethnographers speak against, or provide alternatives to, dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural scripts, stories, and stereotypes;
- articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience;
- show how researchers are implicated by their observations and conclusions and to encourage autoethnographers to write against harmful ethnographic accounts made by others – especially cultural ‘outsiders’ – who try to take advantage of, or irresponsibly regulate, other cultures;
- autoethnographers also describe moments of everyday experience that cannot be captured through more traditional research methods;
- create texts that are accessible to larger audiences, primarily audiences outside of academic settings.

In her influential article, ‘Arts of the contact zone’, Pratt (1991) defines autoethnographic texts as those

in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts.

(p. 35, emphasis in original)

Clearly, these latter-mentioned authors share Tierney’s view, namely that autoethnography entails a degree of resistance to dominant forms or representation. These views take us into the realm of critical autoethnography. It is here that intentions of critical ethnography and autoethnography coincide as they interrogate the production of injustice, race, gender, discrimination and related sources of inequality, though from different points of departure.

Chang (2008, p. 57) lists five potential ‘pitfalls’ that autoethnographers need to watch out for which this chapter attempts to address but which researchers should bear in mind:

- excessive focus on self in isolation from others;
- overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation;
- exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source;
- negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives;
- inappropriate application of the label ‘autoethnography’.

Autoethnography in applied linguistics

In this section, I discuss some recent examples of autoethnographic texts from within the broad field of applied linguistics that can be seen to meet Anderson’s (2006) criteria for analytic autoethnography as well as Pratt’s definition and that also adopt a postmodern lens.

Choi’s (2017) critical reflexive autoethnography responds to Pratt’s definition, offering multiple lenses through which we glimpse the diasporic worlds and language practices that a ‘multilingual subject’ in the global contact zones of the late 20th century and early 21st century inhabits and engages in. Her embrace of multimodality as she examines her adolescent
and young adult diaries, photographs and other artefacts (including scenes from Korean dramas which have fundamentally shaped her identity) adds an important dimension to our understanding of the complex realities that individuals negotiate as they shuttle between worlds that are simultaneously strange and familiar.

In his critical autoethnography of his development as a ‘TESOL professional’, Canagarajah (2012) argues that TESOL teachers in periphery locations can exercise agency and make their experience of marginalisation from the Western mainstream visible through autoethnographic narratives grounded in theory (see Hadley, this volume, for a detailed discussion of grounded theory method). In his account of his trajectory from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, to a position as a professor at a leading US university, he draws on the theory of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to articulate a critique of dominant TESOL practices based on his own story and the ways it enabled him to challenge these same practices.

In her autoethnographic account of becoming a speaker of Japanese, which is strongly influenced by postmodernist theories of identity, Simon-Maeda (2011) argues that ‘autoethnography can provide SLA and applied linguistics theorists with a unique insight into the multifaceted, socially mediated nature of language acquisition’ (p. 7). It is perhaps somewhat surprising then, that as a field, we have relatively few accounts that identify as autoethnographic. As I pointed out in Starfield (2013), while there has been an increase in narrative and reflective accounts of language learning in different contexts – such as, for example, how to write for academic journals – these tend to lack the reflexivity and the more theoretical grounding that autoethnography demands. Simon-Maeda, however, clearly locates her account of her own language learning within a discussion of the production, reproduction and maintenance of complex identity categories in Japanese society.

**Ethical issues in autoethnography**

Autoethnography has been depicted as ‘researcher friendly’ (Chang, 2008) as it allows researchers ‘easy access to the primary data source from the beginning because the source is the researchers themselves’ (p. 52). In addition, autoethnographers are privileged with a ‘holistic and intimate perspective on their “familiar data”’ (p. 52) The understanding of the ‘self as subject’ should not, however, preclude a consideration of ethical issues that arise as in any research project. The self that is studied is part of a community of others who will inevitably be described in relation to the self. Consideration should therefore be given to issues of informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, and other matters that may arise in other strands of ethnographic research. Privacy concerns may be more urgent in autoethnography as the participants may be more easily identifiable due to their closeness to the author of the study. An institutional review board or other ethics review procedures should be consulted to determine what approval is required (see De Costa et al., this volume). Chang (2008, p. 68) stresses, however, that even if one’s research proposal is exempt from a formal review process, the researcher should ‘consider the code of confidentiality’ in all aspects of the study.

**Autoethnographic methods**

As Chang (2008) explains the familiar ethnographic research processes of data collection, data analysis/interpretation and report writing are carried out by autoethnographers:

- They collect field data by means of participation, observation, interview, and document review; verify data by triangulating sources and contents from multiple origins; analyse
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and interpret data to decipher the cultural meanings of events, behaviours, and thoughts; and write ethnography.

(p. 49)

The key difference is that their ‘primary data’ is their own personal experience, but they are expected to treat this ‘autobiographical data with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told’ (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Through this examination of the self in its cultural context, autoethnographers aim to gain a better understanding of both self and of others directly and indirectly connected to the self (Chang, 2008). Self-observation and self-reflection are two important strategies in autobiographical fieldwork.

Memory is, of course, a privileged source of data for autoethnographers (Chang, 2008) and, as Choi (2017) points out, when ‘written down as textual data it can be shaped and reshaped’ (p. 33). Data may take a variety of forms including, for example, Simon-Maeda’s (2011) photographs or Choi’s (2017) childhood diaries and the Korean videos she and her sisters watched. Simon-Maeda draws on photographs, field notes, other documents and transcripts of recorded interactions to paint a thick description of her learning of Japanese as a second language.

**Critical ethnography**

While ethnographic research is currently one of the major approaches to research on second language learning and teaching (Starfield, 2015a), critical ethnography, which arises from a concern with social change, is much less well represented in applied linguistics methods. Brodkey (1987) argues that ‘the goal of critical ethnography is always the same: to help create the possibility of transforming such institutions as schools’ (p. 67). Researchers who adopt a critical ethnographic approach adopt the methods of ethnography while explicitly examining the access of the group they are studying to ‘economic, political and cultural resources’ (Carspecken, 1996, p. 204). Talmy (2013) further identifies critical ethnographers’ commitment to ‘maintaining a critically reflexive stance toward the relationships between researcher, the researched, and knowledge production, representation, and dissemination’ (p. 1). As critical ethnographers clearly seek to understand and account for social and educational inequality, they frequently adopt macro-perspectives such as class, race, gender, sexual identity and postcolonialism to consider the more micro-level ethnographic data gathered by the researcher and to illustrate how these data may point to or ‘index’ discourses in the wider social context (see Paltridge et al., 2016). As such their work may illuminate complex issues that have previously been underexplored in applied linguistics.

Critical ethnography draws on the well-known methods of ethnography including sustained participant and non-participant observation (see Curdt-Christiansen, this volume), semi-structured in-depth interviews (see Rolland, Dewaele, & Costa, this volume), analysis of written texts (see Wang, this volume), archival research, document analysis (see Coxhead, this volume) and informal conversation (see Prior & Talmy, this volume). Critical ethnography shares ethnography’s interest in the meaning-making practices of members of particular groups and communities and their insider understandings of these practices, but at the same time it problematises constructs such as community and culture by arguing that these cannot be taken to be either homogenous or harmonious. Rather, they are ‘contact zones’ – sites of struggle and contestation, accommodation and resistance – ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world
today’ (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). Of particular interest to critical applied linguists is speakers and writers’ unequal access to linguistic resources, including their symbolic power, and the social and personal consequences of this inequity.

Criticism of critical ethnography primarily takes the view that its explicit commitment to social change and explicit theorisation are forms of partisanship that impact the validity of the research. Validity is, however, seen by some critical researchers as linked too closely to positivist paradigms and the concept of trustworthiness is preferred.

Carspecken (1996, pp. 87–89) lists six techniques that support trustworthiness in critical ethnographic accounts: using multiple recording devices and multiple observers, using a flexible observation schedule, practising prolonged engagement, using a vocabulary in the writing of field notes that is not overly coloured by the writer’s interpretation, using peer debriefing and member checking (sharing one’s field notes and interpretations with the group one is studying). Canagarajah (2012) reports sending his prepublication draft of his critical autoethnography, The geopolitics of writing, to his former colleagues in Sri Lanka and making significant changes based on their feedback.

Lather (1991) calls for research to demonstrate catalytic validity – that is, to demonstrate its contribution to social change and/or participant empowerment. The practice of reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Starfield, 2013 and below) also enhances the trustworthiness of the research.

Critical ethnographic studies in applied linguistics

As discussed earlier, critical ethnography acknowledges the complex relationships between social structures and human agency (Anderson, 1989). The applied linguistic studies discussed in this section are located in a range of educational contexts in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, identity and unequal power relations shape interactions.

In his critical ethnography of a Sri Lankan English for general purposes classroom (one of the earliest applied linguistics studies to adopt this approach), Canagarajah (1993), explores ‘the complexities of domination and resistance’ (p. 602) as they are enacted in a class he is teaching in a Tamil area at the height of the civil war. His sustained engagement with the students and collection of multiple sources of data, including interviews and the drawings made by students in the textbook, lead to a highly theorised attempt to locate sites of resistance to and acceptance of the domination of English. English is neither enthusiastically embraced nor comprehensively rejected by the students, who adopt a strategic attitude that is focussed on learning grammar to pass a high-stakes test, which, Canagarajah argues, effectively locks them into a marginalised position that ultimately thwarts their agency.

Goldstein (1997) carried out a critical ethnographic study of immigrant workers’ language practices at a Canadian factory that sought to understand why they were not taking up the English language courses on offer. Her methodology affords new insights into why workers may exercise agency in resisting English in the workplace. She observed bilingual workers’ interactions on the production line, at the T-shirt printing machines, in the warehouse, in the offices, in language classes, at breaks and at lunch over a two-year period. Her observations included details of the language choices made by the workers in these different contexts. The observational data, in combination with data from 39 audio-recorded ethnographic interviews, informed her understanding about language choices on the shop floor, which she was able to check with workers and employers. Class, gender and power relations both at work and in the broader society were seen to shape the options available as well as the choices that the largely female workforce made. Goldstein’s critical framework and commitment to transformation
enabled her to understand why it was that many factory workers were resistant to English language classes when it would have seemed obvious that learning English would improve their life chances. For many of the women, Portuguese was more important than English as it served as the language of friendship, community and opportunity.

Motha’s (2014) year-long critical feminist ethnography of four novice teachers in a North American school is embedded in a post-structural theoretical framework that interrogates race, whiteness and the meanings that attach to native-speaker English in linguistically and racially diverse classrooms. She studied the racial meanings that student and teacher identities and language acquire in a North American school context. Race, whiteness and the status of native-speaker teachers of English in linguistically and racially diverse classrooms are sensitive and complex issues that have been underexplored in applied linguistics. Her data were collected in a range of contexts and included classroom observation, interviews and regular ‘afternoon teas’ with the four novice teachers who participated in her research.

Chun (2016) discusses a critical ethnographic study that he carried out in an English for academic purposes (EAP) class in an intensive English program at a Canadian university over an 11-month period. His choice of a critical ethnographic approach that is explicitly informed by theory allows him to illustrate the ways in which social, political and historical contexts shape everyday communicative events in the classroom. The study examines racialised textbook representations of immigrant success stories that fail to challenge institutionalised social inequities and identities. In the course of his ethnography, Chun’s engagement at the site allowed for the research to evolve as new questions and issues emerged over time, allowing the development of a mutually supportive dialogic relationship between himself (as researcher) and the EAP teacher, in which, amongst other issues, they were able to openly discuss their experiences of being racially positioned in educational and other settings.

Developing a critique of conventional discussions of language learning motivation, Piller and Takahashi (2006) study the complex discourses shaping young Japanese women’s desire to learn English in Australia and how this desire is inextricably imbricated with discourses of sexual desire, such as finding a white, English-speaking boyfriend, which are supported by popular media and the language teaching market. Their critical ethnographic study of five Japanese women highlights both the limits of the women’s agentive choices and their positioning by broader pervasive discourses conflating language learning, desire and sexuality.

Through my year-long study of a first-year sociology class (Starfield, 2011), I show how examining seemingly innocuous texts like an essay title page within a critical ethnographic framework reveal both students’ acceptance of the identities ascribed by apartheid South Africa that limit their opportunities for success and their resistance to the discourses that shape the available identities.

Talmy’s (2009) two-and-a-half year long critical ethnography of high school English as a second language (ESL) classrooms used a critical discourse analytic framework to investigate the ‘stigma’ associated with being labelled ‘ESL’. His investigation of social relations between long-term, (Generation 1.5) ESL students and recent newcomers (considered ‘fresh off the boat’) points to the ways in which the micro-politics of classroom interaction index broader social theoretical categories such as assimilationism, xenophobia and the prestige afforded to native-speaker English, thus limiting the identity options available to students as well as their future possibilities of success in school.

Applied linguistics researchers who see their role as encouraging social change may thus be interested in critical ethnography as they seek to understand language learning and language use in terms of how issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, identity, unequal power relations and so forth play out in everyday discourse in classrooms and workplaces.
Writing autoethnography and critical ethnography

This section examines the significance of the autoethnographic and critical ethnographic text. As Richardson (1994) has argued, writing in postmodern qualitative research constitutes in and of itself a method of inquiry and a way of knowing, offering researchers potentially more freedom to experiment with voice, style and textual forms.

What has become known as the ‘linguistic’ or ‘textual’ turn in ethnographic research (see Starfield, 2015a) has problematised ‘realist’ accounts of observed ‘reality’ or ‘culture’, thus interrogating both the researcher’s role and authority, and undermining, to an extent, the ‘authority’ of the writer. As noted earlier, reflexivity on the part of the researcher is a central feature of both approaches, resulting in the researcher becoming ‘a highly visible social actor within the written text’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 384). Macbeth (2001) identifies two modes of reflexivity – positional and textual – both of which are relevant to critical and autoethnography. Positional reflexivity ‘takes up the analyst’s (uncertain) position and positioning in the world he or she studies and is often expressed with a vigilance for unseen, privileged, or, worse, exploitative relationships between analyst and the world’ (p. 38). Textual reflexivity directly addresses ‘the work of writing representation’ (p. 41) calling into question the traditional social sciences’ portrayal of ‘the disembodied voice of the modern analytic text’ (p. 42).

Gergen and Gergen (2002) further claim that in autoethnography ‘using oneself as an ethnographic exemplar’ frees the writer ‘from the traditional conventions of writing. One’s unique voicing – complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness – is honored’ (p. 14). Richardson (1994) does, however, point out that writing reflexively about the self requires perhaps greater attention to rigour than conventional academic writing.

Autoethnographic texts are usually written in the first person and draw on features of storytelling such as dialogue and emotion, using a strategy known as ‘showing’ to draw in the reader, but they also invoke history, social structure and culture through the strategy of ‘telling’ (Ellis et al., 2011). Authors may choose the degree to which they wish to write a more evocative or more analytic account or challenge dominant research genres in relation to the perceived audience and publication venue (see Canagarajah, 2012 for a discussion of his choice of mode and genre in an autoethnographic account of his development as a TESOL professional).

One of the challenges of writing autoethnography is how to orchestrate the relationship between the conceptual framing and the narrative component. Simon-Maeda (2011) chose a tripartite structure for her autoethnography of learning Japanese consisting of a fairly short theoretical introduction to key concepts such as postmodern theories of identity and their critique of SLA followed by a more chronologically structured narrative account of her life and language learning in Japan over many years and a conclusion linking theory and her personal account.

Writers of autoethnography are concerned to write in ways that engage their readers in texts that are academically rigorous but also harness the power of narrative (Chang, 2008). Simon-Maeda (2011) writes that she ‘hope[s] to leave readers with new insights on language acquisition and an appreciation of autoethnography’s potential to help them imagine their own lives as second and additional language speakers’ (p. 135).

Interrogating privilege: reflections of a second language educator (Vandrick, 2009) is a critical autoethnography that demonstrates positional reflexivity in that the author examines the privilege accorded to her by her social class location and whiteness as she grows up with her missionary parents in postcolonial India. As she becomes a language educator, she considers how this privileged location has shaped and continues to shape both her world and her
work. At the same time, her account is textually reflexive through her adoption of a hybrid format for her book. She produces a text that is consciously structured as unlike a ‘typical’ academic work but has an ‘embodied’ author who is ‘present’ in her text.

As indicated earlier, critical ethnographers will make their theoretical orientations explicit in their written accounts of their research and their analytic framework. Writers of critical ethnographies are aware that they are members of a powerful social group that selects and mediates the talk and identities of the research participants in the act of writing (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton & Richardson, 1992). It follows that there can be no ‘transparent accounts’ of such research (Brodkey, 1987); that is, accounts that do not fully consider both the researcher’s participation in the research process and their active construction of the written text. Motha (2014) writes that her choice of the term ‘critical’ is ‘to separate [my] efforts from the neutrality-seeking tendencies’ of naturalistic ethnography in the hope of ‘encouraging methodological experimentation that creates space for participant voice and authorship’ (p. 154).

Conclusion

Chang (2008) and Adams et al. (2017) note the social sciences’ ever-increasing interest in studies of the self, and Chang identifies autoethnography’s role in promoting ‘cross-cultural understanding in a culturally diverse society’ (p. 57) – sentiments which dovetail well with the goals of many working in applied linguistic fields.

While critical ethnography explicitly seeks to raise readers’ awareness of a need for social change, autoethnography (as described in this chapter) may share this goal inasmuch as it seeks to consciously ‘refine theoretical understandings of social processes’ in its written accounts (Anderson, 2006, p. 387). Certainly, the critically oriented applied linguistic autoethnographies discussed earlier would identify with this goal. Critical ethnographies may, however, differ in terms of the representation of the researcher self, which may remain fairly underexamined.

Applied linguistics as a field remains largely resistant to the use of more personal voice and alternative formats, with many leading journals committed to publishing ‘objective’, impersonal, quantitatively oriented research reports. In a recent book chapter, I reflect on the removal of the first person from an authoritative encyclopaedia in the field (Starfield, 2015b). Similarly, Pennycook (2005) referred to applied linguistics as ‘a constant catch up discipline . . . somewhat backward in its understanding of reflexivity’ needing perhaps to give more consideration to researcher reflexivity to ‘push forward our thinking . . . in important ways’ (p. 299).

Noting their relative paucity, Paltridge (2014) identifies narrative and autoethnographic accounts of applied linguists’ motivations for doing research as beneficial to the field and calls for ‘many more stories of this kind . . . which explore what motivated researchers’ interest in the research they are engaged in, how their approach to research has changed over the years and if it has, why this has happened’ (p. 101). Similarly, in a review of Adams, Jones and Ellis (2014), Paiz (2016) calls for the field of second language writing to embrace autoethnography as a legitimate ‘alternative methodology to mainstream qualitative research approaches’ that can promote a ‘critical and reflexive examination of the L2 writing practices of the multilingual researchers that populate our field’ (p. 29).

One of the challenges facing researchers who go down this path will be the publication options available to them, that is, the extent to which the field embraces autoethnography and critical ethnography as research methods.

Autoethnography in applied linguistics to date would appear to be more critical in its intent, thus building a bridge more clearly to critical ethnography. Quite how these newer and
somewhat blurred genres will evolve in future applied linguistics research remains an open question. PhD students and junior scholars should not be deterred from embarking on reflexive ethnographically oriented studies. Current understandings of language as social and local practice lend themselves to critical and autoethnographic study. Maeda and Choi’s autoethnographic monographs are exemplary in this regard, as is Canagarajah’s (2002) *The geopolitics of writing*. Effort will need to be put in to establishing which journals are more receptive to critical and autoethnographic studies. More established scholars should feel encouraged to take greater risks and embrace the challenges and potential for transformation of these methods of research. For those who seek to better comprehend language learning and teaching under conditions of extreme diversity and inequality, each of the two methods discussed in this chapter offer exciting routes to new understandings.

References


