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# Tensions, Characteristics, and Methods Surrounding Critical Autoethnographic Narrative: A Dialogic Review of Bedrettin Yazan's Autoethnography in Language Education

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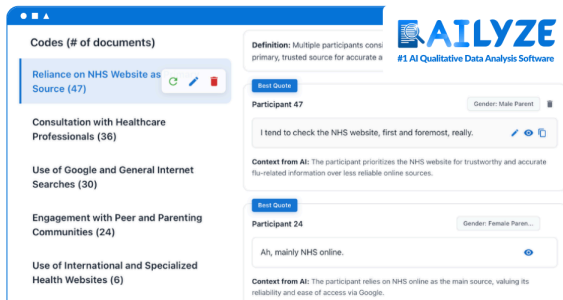
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### Abstract

In this book review, the authors critically explore Bedrettin Yazan's Autoethnography in Language Education, which addresses theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions of autoethnography in applied linguistics and teacher education. Organized as a reconstructed scholarly dialogue between a doctoral advisor - Ufuk, and a doctoral researcher - Meryem, the review systematically outlines the book's central arguments, chapter structure, and contributions to qualitative research. Attention is given to Yazan's positioning of autoethnography as an onto-ethico-epistemological stance, his engagement with debates surrounding legitimacy and rigor, and his discussion of reflexivity, identity, and emotional labor in research. The review also highlights the book's practical guidance on autoethnographic data generation, analysis, and representation, as well as its relevance for language teachers and teacher educators. Overall, the reviewers find the book to be a timely and accessible resource that advances self-study research and supports emerging scholars navigating autoethnography in language education contexts.

### Keywords

Critical Autoethnographic Narrative (CAN), language teacher identity transformation, self-reflexivity, self-study research, ethics in autoethnography, dialogic scholarship, methodological tensions around autoethnography

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## **Tensions, Characteristics, and Methods Surrounding Critical Autoethnographic Narrative: A Dialogic Review of Bedrettin Yazan's *Autoethnography in Language Education***

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In this book review, the authors critically explore Bedrettin Yazan's *Autoethnography in Language Education*, which addresses theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions of autoethnography in applied linguistics and teacher education. Organized as a reconstructed scholarly dialogue between a doctoral advisor - Ufuk, and a doctoral researcher - Meryem, the review systematically outlines the book's central arguments, chapter structure, and contributions to qualitative research. Attention is given to Yazan's positioning of autoethnography as an onto-ethico-epistemological stance, his engagement with debates surrounding legitimacy and rigor, and his discussion of reflexivity, identity, and emotional labor in research. The review also highlights the book's practical guidance on autoethnographic data generation, analysis, and representation, as well as its relevance for language teachers and teacher educators. Overall, the reviewers find the book to be a timely and accessible resource that advances self-study research and supports emerging scholars navigating autoethnography in language education contexts.

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### **Introduction**

The idea of reviewing Dr. Bedrettin Yazan's book "Autoethnography in Language Education" originated from our ongoing conversation about Meryem's dissertation plans. While she was taking Ufuk's doctoral course "Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography," Meryem approached Ufuk to ask whether he would agree to be Meryem's Ph.D. advisor. Ufuk, unsure whether he was ready to have a doctoral supervisee, agreed, knowing that he wanted to support Meryem's autoethnographic journey as an early-career autoethnographer, who had walked this new path and loved walking the walk with other scholars interested in self-study.

On a side note, Bedrettin Yazan was Ufuk's Ph.D. advisor. In time, their scholarly relationship transformed into a critical friendship as they continued autoethnographing together, conceptualizing and operationalizing this relatively new methodology together.

Ufuk's agreement with Meryem regarding Meryem's dissertation supervision resulted in a triadic relationship as the master (Bedrettin), the assistant (Ufuk), and the apprentice (Meryem). The following critical dialogue between Meryem and Ufuk is a (re)construction of

our previous conversations about Bedrettin Hoca<sup>1</sup>'s newly released book. Our dialogue is also a token of our appreciation of his contribution to self-study research in applied linguistics.

### Our Dialogue

**Meryem:** Ufuk Hocam, Hi!

**Ufuk:** Hi, Meryem! How are you?

**Meryem:** Hocam, I must show you something. Here it is! Bedrettin Hoca's monograph.

**Ufuk:** I did not know that it was out.

**Meryem:** It is! I came across it while searching for sources to study for my qualifying exam.

**Ufuk:** I see. Have you finished reading it already?

**Meryem:** Yes, Hocam. I have indeed.

**Ufuk:** What do you think about it? Tell me.

**Meryem:** Hocam! It was a page turner for me. The moment I saw your name in the prologue, as Bedrettin Hoca (a.k.a. Dr. Yazan) acknowledged your contribution to his scholarly development! I told myself: "*As bayrakları; as<sup>2</sup>!*" This made me both proud and excited, as I imagined myself in the picture.

**Ufuk:** Thanks!

**Meryem:** I felt proud of myself for collaborating with you, now and in the future. I was part of this legacy... From Bedrettin Hoca to you and from you to me! An autoethnographic legacy in TESOL! Is that too boastful?

**Ufuk:** Well... it doesn't harm anyone, right? {LAUGHTER} I am glad you think/believe/feel that way. And... Thanks for the compliments, too. Anyways... Since you read it before me, give me some details about it.

**Meryem:** Then, Hocam, let me start with Chapter One. The first chapter introduces Dr. Yazan's story and changing identities from Turkey to the USA, from teacher to teacher educator. In his journey, he

<sup>1</sup> Hoca (pronounced [ho'dʒa], also spelled *hodja* in English) is a Turkish term loaned from the Persian word *خواجه* (*khwāja, khājah*). It is used as a title after a person's first name. Functioning as an honorific, *hoca* means "master" and is widely used to refer to teachers, professors, leaders, and, more broadly, individuals regarded as wise or knowledgeable.

<sup>2</sup> "As bayrakları, as!" means "Hang the flags! Be quick." It is often used as a meme in Turkish online culture when celebrating victories, national pride, or any situation seen as a major success or triumph in a humorous way.

meets autoethnography and (re)visits his idea of using critical autoethnographic narrative (CAN) and the status of autoethnography as a qualitative research method. Dr. Yazan begins with a poem he wrote while finalizing this book. In his poem, he both revisits the process of writing the book and demonstrates the key concepts he discusses throughout this chapter by focusing on his “autoethnographer” identity. “It’s a hauntological question,” he states, as he compares traditional academic writing with autoethnographic writing, starting from the philosophical stance of an autoethnographer, “the decolonizing belief” (p.5).

As he continues the chapter by introducing himself, we witness changes in his identity. With his evolving career aspirations, he discusses his growing interest in autoethnography and how he designed one of his graduate courses to incorporate CAN as a teacher-learning tool (see Yazan, 2019, for details).

**Ufuk:** I was one of the students who took that course and wrote a CAN. Good old days!

**Meryem:** You had integrated CAN in our course, too, right? [Ufuk nods.] Dr. Yazan then highlights the challenges that authors encounter when attempting to publish an autoethnographic work. Dr. Yazan refers to your dissertation as the first autoethnographic dissertation at the University of Alabama and how that dissertation process changed him as well. As he relates to other qualitative researchers’ stances on the genre, he informs future autoethnographic writers that the recognition and tensions in publication processes can be challenging, as autoethnography still seeks “recognition in broader social sciences research” (p. 11). The chapter ends by relating the transformations in the field of language (teacher) education and the rising popularity of autoethnographic studies in this field.

**Ufuk:** Yeah! That’s correct. There were about 50 autoethnographies published between 2010 and 2020, as I noted elsewhere (Keleş, 2022a), but for the last five years, there have been hundreds of autoethnographic publications. Anyways, please go ahead. How about Chapter Two?

**Meryem:** Chapter two commences with an analysis of the distinction between macro and micro-level tensions within autoethnographic research, such as the acceptance of autoethnography as a qualitative research method, and at the micro level, like the tensions behind the decision to conduct an autoethnographic study and how autoethnographic writing is perceived among research communities. Yazan introduces various forms of autoethnography by welcoming the readers into an academic dialogue. As I read the section about bringing tensions into qualitative research, his questioning of the categorization of autoethnography felt “critical” rather than “canonical”. I could somehow “see” him raise an eyebrow as he commented on Marshall

et al.'s (2022) reduction of the genre to self-disclosure. That is what people's first impression of autoethnography is, is it not, Hocam? Self-disclosure!

**Ufuk:** Well, yes! Many critics of autoethnography say that autoethnography is *navel-gazing* (Boufof-Bastick, 2004; Murray, 2024), *narcissistic* (Eriksson, 2010), too introspective (Alvesson, 2003), "*an intellectual cul de sac*" (Delamont, 2009, p. 57), and *solipsism* with no or ineffective theoretical base (Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016). Unfortunately, these are valid criticisms if we are not careful with the ethno-aspect of our studies.

**Meryem:** You always tell us to be mindful of the power dynamics, ideological underpinnings, and social norms while crafting an autoethnographic paper. Nevertheless, some people are too harsh with their criticism. For example... When I told my colleagues during a meeting where SUNY program coordinators met with Turkish exchange students in the USA that I would write an autoethnographic dissertation, their coordinator just curled her lip and said, "Wow, an *autoethnography*?" After seeing my quite serious stare, she started asking questions about it. Should we blame people? Should everyone instantly accept the genre? Of course, no! And... Perhaps, we need to embrace the fact that traditionally oriented scholars may initially distance themselves from this "less threaded path," right? After all, autoethnography is for everyone, but not everyone is for autoethnography.

**Ufuk:** That's a great comment! I agree. Go on, please.

**Meryem:** Well, in Chapter Three, after addressing the tensions, criticism, challenges, and questions surrounding autoethnography and presenting the harsh realities of the genre, Yazan makes "a modest proposal" as you call it (Keleş, 2022b) and engages the reader in a non-prescriptive manner about what autoethnography is and tells them what to expect mentally and emotionally while deciding to write an autoethnography. His approach to synthesizing the most essential works on defining autoethnography was easy to follow and helped me clearly conceptualize the genre. While reading chapter three, I remembered how heavily I had cried as I wrote your CAN assignment for our Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography class, which was on our language learning histories.

**Ufuk:** Really? You never told me you cried. Was it that difficult? Lol!

**Meryem:** Hocam, I remember the challenges I faced in my childhood and adolescence while learning English. It was like bringing the puzzle pieces together. It was an introspective journey. I remembered how my English language teacher, Mrs. Demiray, believed in me when no one else did, and how English was an escape as I was trying to find my path all alone, only with English in my earphones. Going

back in time brought my long-buried vulnerabilities back to the surface.

**Ufuk:** I know. It is never easy. But it was therapeutic too. No?

**Meryem:** Certainly, Hocam. That's why I felt attracted and attached to it.

**Ufuk:** I know the feeling. Yes. How about Chapter Three?

**Meryem:** Hocam, Chapter Three is an informative one. It offers historical context for the genre by presenting the methodological and emotional struggles of conducting an autoethnographic study, which requires the writer to be ready to emotionally expose themselves while maintaining the legitimacy of scholarly work. What I liked about this chapter was the significant impact of TESOL and EFL teachers' contributions to the genre, and how autoethnography could help them become more aware of themselves, their teaching, and the world around them, and to "enact their identities" as they "reflect on their memories." This really helped me see new ways to incorporate my EFL-teaching self into the game, so to speak. By the way, Dr. Yazan's mention of you writing dialogically with him and your now famous idea of "retro/intro/prospective reflexivity" was another "*As bayrakları; as!*" moment for me.

**Ufuk:** Well, we both approach autoethnography as a way of life, and we both like to talk. Hence, we write as we converse.

**Meryem:** It is a pleasure to read such insightful dialogues, Hocam.

**Ufuk:** Thanks! I will take it as a compliment. Anyways... What about Chapter Four?

**Meryem:** Hocam, chapter four is like a guidebook for novice autoethnographers. The autoethnographic data creation, analysis, and writing, as Yazan argues, is not only methodological but also ethical commitment to self-awareness. Doing so, his dialogic style continues, and the reader can note the "recipe" for creative ways to conduct autoethnographic research. While reading this chapter, I felt that his style made me feel that he was walking alongside me so that I would not get lost in theory. Actually, I felt like I needed to start writing my autoethnographic dissertation immediately.

**Ufuk:** You know what they say: "The earlier, the merrier!"

**Meryem:** Haha, Hocam. You are right.

**Ufuk:** Go ahead!

**Meryem:** Where was I? Oh! From being critical friends to collecting data from various resources and choosing a theoretical/conceptual framework,

Yazan continues with the styles we can adapt to enhance and highlight our lived experiences. He also presents examples from scholars experimenting with various forms of data collection and presentation techniques, such as using MAXQDA to analyze personal data (Solano-Campos, 2014) or “initial datasets” including exchanged emails, course-related materials, and narrative journals (Song, 2022), hoping such data collection methods will be more common.

**Ufuk:** These are great autoethnographers. Very inspirational.

**Meryem:** And finally, Dr. Yazan ends the book and the last chapter in his style—breaking the fourth wall and allowing me to grab one more cup of Turkish tea as I was accompanying him, reading the book on the balcony while feeling the early sunset breeze. Reading Yazan’s fifth mini-chapter felt like watching the “behind-the-scenes” part at the end of a movie. The book’s academic structure was well established, but the subject was so warm and welcoming that the urge to share fun footage of the writing process needed to be presented to the reader.

Identifying himself as one of the autoethnographers ( a.k.a. “eternal seekers,” p. 66), he notes that his journey is still in the making. Honestly speaking, Hocam, I agree with him. We are not entirely sure where to stop, perhaps because autoethnographers write about unfinished experiences of their own histories.

**Ufuk:** Well, I call it “mystory,” not “history” for the same reason.

**Meryem:** Noted!

**Ufuk:** That was not a correction. Haha. Just a side note! What about your overall feelings about the book?

**Meryem:** Reading it did not feel like reading a formal academic book. I felt like I was listening to Dr Yazan at his lecture. Or it was like reading an older-timer’s letters regarding his personal opinions on a scholarly topic.

**Ufuk:** I like that analogy.

**Meryem:** Hocam. I want to thank you again for introducing me to autoethnography, especially to Dr. Yazan’s work. I enjoyed reading it, and I hope our readers/companions like this foundational script as much as I did.

**Ufuk:** You are welcome! I am glad it was useful for you.

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### Author Note

Meryem Būşra ÜNSAL is an English language instructor born and raised in Türkiye, working as the modern languages unit coordinator at a private university in Istanbul. She is a British Council certified IELTS instructor. Holding a Master's degree in English language teaching, she is pursuing her Ph.D. in English as a Foreign language teaching. Currently, she is writing her dissertation. Her research interests are qualitative research, particularly autoethnographic research as well as teacher education, EAP and ESP curriculum development, Aviation English instruction and technology integration to education. She is married, and mother of a daughter and a son. Please direct correspondence to [mbunsal@fsm.edu.tr](mailto:mbunsal@fsm.edu.tr)

Ufuk Keleş is an assistant professor at Bahçeşehir University's ELT Department in İstanbul, Turkey. He completed his Ph.D. degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Alabama, USA on a Fulbright grant. Before, he was an English instructor in Turkey for fifteen years. His research interests include transnational socialization, social justice in ELT, multicultural education, humanizing applied linguistics research, language teacher education, critical discourse analysis, autoethnography, and qualitative educational research. He has published in international journals including *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Applied Linguistics Review*, *Pedagogy, Culture, and Society*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Language Teaching*, *the Qualitative Report*, and others. Please direct correspondence to [ufuk.keles@bau.edu.tr](mailto:ufuk.keles@bau.edu.tr)

**Author Contribution:** I (Meryem Būşra Ünsal) am the corresponding author of this book review. We have equally contributed to this study. We carried out the writing process in a dialogical way. Both of us worked hand in hand to ensure the quality of the paper. Ufuk Keleş (the second author) provided critical guidance and shared his experience with me in publishing book reviews.

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