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## DUOETHNOGRAPHY IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

### Abstract

The significance of duoethnography as an alternative qualitative method for investigating research in the humanities and social sciences has considerably increased in the last decade or so. Yet, despite its increasing popularity and the growth of duoethnographic studies in second and foreign language learning and teaching, duoethnography is still unknown to many applied linguists. In order to partially redress this gap, the aim of this article is to present duoethnography as a promising qualitative method for applied linguistics studies. The text outlines the basic tenets of duoethnography, discusses the scope of its research on language learning and teaching at the present time and describes innovations that duoethnography introduces to data collection, writing, presenting and interpreting research. The article concludes with a call for more duoethnographic studies in applied linguistics as they provide a welcome move towards greater methodological diversity. This, in turn, may contribute to our better understanding of the experience of language learning and teaching, and the identity of language learners and teachers, as well as generate new themes for research.

**Keywords:** duoethnography, data collection, writing, presenting and interpreting research, language learning and teaching

**Słowa kluczowe:** duoetnografia, zbieranie danych, pisanie, prezentacja i interpretacja badań, uczenie i nauczanie języka

## 1. Introduction

Duoethnography, or the juxtaposition of the histories of two or more diverse people who experience the same phenomenon in a different way, dates back to only 2004 (Sawyer, Norris, 2013: 5). Its relatively short existence may explain the fact that, although increasingly used in studies of educational practice, duoethnography is hardly known in applied linguistics studies. Considering this shortcoming and acknowledging the potential of duoethnography, this article attempts to illuminate the benefits of duoethnography, as the number of duoethnographic data-based studies is growing. This review draws on one theoretical monograph (Sawyer, Norris, 2013), three books describing duoethnographic research projects (Brown, Sawyer, Norris, 2016; Sawyer & Norris, 2016; Norris, Sawyer, 2017) and several articles employing the duoethnographic methodology that were published recently<sup>1</sup>.

The opening section outlines the theoretical framework for duoethnography together with its origins, fourteen tenets and basic principles, as suggested by the originators of duoethnography: Richard D. Sawyer and Joe Norris. This is followed by the presentation of the scope of duoethnographic research in applied linguistics and discussion of the innovations that duoethnography introduces to qualitative research in language learning and teaching. The article concludes with the benefits of duoethnographic research and calls for more studies of this kind in order to increase the diversity of the ways in which language learning and teaching can be investigated.

## 2. Duoethnography and duoethnographic research

Duoethnography is described as research in which “people of difference reconceptualize their stories of a particular phenomenon in juxtaposition with one another” (original writing, Norris, Sawyer, 2017: 1). They enter into deep conversations, examine their own and the deep-seated beliefs of their interlocutors and, as a result, reconceptualize their perspectives and actions.

The conceptual framework for duoethnography embraces social justice, narrative and autoethnography, as well as curriculum theory. These all were invaluable in the rise of duoethnography, although it is helpful to remember that drawing on a concept always means responding to this concept, or rethinking

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment of submitting this manuscript (December 2019), the author did not have access to the monograph *Duoethnography in English Language Teaching Research, Reflection and Classroom Application* by Robert J. Lowe and Luke Lawrence which was published in February 2020 by *Multilingual Matters*.

it. If considered according to principles of social justice, duoethnography is a method that both addresses and advances social practice. It recognizes the need to examine power and positioning, and sometimes calls for action to disclose and remove 'structures', be they personal, institutional or national, which disempower people. Drawing on Freire's (1970) "conscientization", the duoethnographic dialogue raises people's awareness which can promote a commitment to change, but can also encourage them to resist dominant discourses. In consequence, the themes of duoethnographic dialogues are often related to marginalization, deprivation or privilege.

If framed in the context of narrative and autoethnography, duoethnography is a collaboration process that is lived and told, yet based on difference. Inherent in narrative inquiry is the concept of narrative unity which pushes people to organize their experience and make sense of their lives (Clandinin, Connelly, 2000). In a similar vein, a duoethnographic conversation contributes to the formation of new meanings and the emergence of new narratives, although it originates in critical deconstruction. Like autoethnography, duoethnography focuses on subjectivity, but it is 'inter'- subjectivity that seeks exposure, uncertainty and transformation rather than categorical conclusions (Sawyer, Norris, 2013: 11). Finally, as a form of curriculum, it shifts the focus from an emphasis on curriculum design and its implementation to a focus on interdisciplinary and dynamic cultural texts (Sawyer, Norris, 2013: 12).

The central tenets of duoethnography are called "living" tenets (Sawyer, Norris, 2013: 14) because they develop in the process of being used. To illustrate this, the fourteen working principles of duoethnography are:

1. *Currere as a frame for investigation and transformation*: the focus, following Pinar's (1978) concept of *currere* (informal curriculum) is placed on individual and joint meaning making through analysing and reconceptualising beliefs and actions,
2. *Voices "bracket in"*: duoethnographers position themselves in the text in neutral ways,
3. *Self as research, not topic*: duoethnographers consider the self as a context for the analysis of their experience, not the focus of inquiry,
4. *(Re)storying the self and the other*: the aim of duoethnography is to reconceptualize experiences,
5. *Quest(ion), not hero/victim*: duoethnographers do not place themselves as heroes or victims, which could limit their thoughts,
6. *Fluid, recursive, layered identity*: focus is placed on a postmodern understanding of identity as layered, contradictory, changeable and uncertain,
7. *Understandings not found: meanings created, exposed and transformed*: meanings are sought in the dialogue,

8. *Emergent, not prescriptive*: the goals are not predefined but emerge from the dialogue,
9. *Communal yet critical conversations as dialogic frame*: duoethnographers question and promote contrasting views of the topics under consideration,
10. *Trust and recognition of power differentials*: the power differential is addressed directly if needed,
11. *Place as participant*: the place (geographical, political, social, etc.) from which duoethnographers speak contributes to dialogues and leads to change,
12. *Literature as participant*: literature informs the research and is recalled in the study,
13. *Difference as heurism*: working in tandem leads to new insights on one's experience and opens new perspectives on the experience,
14. *Reader is co-participant and active witness*: readers are active participants as they are invited to judge and respond to with a text (Sawyer, Norris, 2013: 23–24).

In a word, duoethnography is grounded in the premise that researchers can work together to explore a phenomenon through telling and critiquing their stories in the form of research. This process, somehow situated at the crossroads of the past (their stories) and present (the stories looked upon through what they know now) can also lead to the appearance of new concepts: forms of learning, forms of teacher education, future research methods, or curriculum theory.

### **3. The scope of duoethnographic research in applied linguistics**

While the term 'duoethnographic research' has been used to label the frameworks or methodology of published studies in social sciences or the arts, studies based on duoethnography that have been published in applied linguistics are few and far between. The extant literature can be categorised into two strands. The first strand concerns the question of native-speakerism. Probably the most often cited duoethnographic study in this category is one by Lowe and Kiczowski (2016). In their study, two English language teachers, a native and a non-native speaker, talk about their stereotypical beliefs about native-speakerism, career trajectories, professional standing and self-confidence, as well as different ways of becoming aware of native-speakerism. They argue that native-speakerism can be very nuanced, context and geography-based and dependent on personal disposition and/or unpredictable events. A somewhat

similar topic is raised in the study by Warren and Park (2018) in which two developing teachers from two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (a Korean and an American) explore the themes of marginality and acceptance in terms of the native/non-native dichotomy, leading to the construction of new legitimacy for themselves as teachers. In a comparable study, Rose and Montakantiwong (2018) offer an account of the in-depth duoethnographic narratives of two English teachers who actively experimented with English as an international language (EIL) at universities in Japan and Thailand. Their findings are presented in the context of whether it is realistic, or rather idealistic, to teach EIL.

The other strand concerns the question of how language teachers, both pre- and in-service, experience the process of language learning and teaching and/or develop their language learner and teacher identities. For example, in her project with five MA pre-service teachers, Werbińska (2018; 2019) strives to capture the participants' conceptualisation of learning and teaching English, and the emergence of the so-called "third space" (Werbińska, 2019). In accordance with a dialogic approach, the aim of her study was to encourage the future teachers to disrupt their "authoritative discourses" (Bakhtin, 1981: 342) and replace them with "internally persuasive discourses" (Bakhtin, 1981: 155) that question their previous notions. She finds that the participants' deep-seated statements related to language teaching as a teacher-related process, and ways of teaching a language, and found that teacher preparation or teacher challenges could be reconceptualized as they shared their experiences. The literature in this strand of research shows that not only duoethnographic, but also trioethnographic inquiries can be conducted in language teacher education field. Gagne et al. (2018) explore a trioethnographic study which weaves together the accounts of three teachers and language educators (one established scholar and two novice scholars) as they reflect on their evolving ELT identities. They also discuss the issue of marginalization and privilege but the aspect of language of which they speak is enriched by issues relating to the countries in which they have worked and lived, their social class, religion and race.

From this literature review of duoethnography it seems reasonable to conclude that duoethnographic studies in applied linguistics generally rely on the reflections of participants, in which they explore the language of their profession, their identity, culture, or essentialized and well-entrenched notions in the light of critical experiences in their lives. Researchers also introduce creativity in conducting duoethnographic research when they investigate the accounts of three participants, or come up with themes of exploration which reveal the participants' emergent but suppressed feelings and emotions.

#### 4. Innovations in data collection

Although duoethnographic studies primarily rely on participants' interviews and recording of their reflections, duoethnographic inquiries are more than mere accounts of what 'really' happened or what the participants felt (Talmy, 2010; Benson, 2014). Similar to narrative inquiries (Benson, 2014) on which they heavily draw, their contribution to innovation in data collection could be reflected in the multiple sources of data, including the use of literature, a longitudinal approach to data generation, including the use of place and time, and their attention to emergence.

While most duoethnographic studies are based only on interviews, there are notable projects that include multiple and innovative methods of data collection. Data can be taken from Internet correspondence, personal writings, artefacts which serve as memory prompts (e.g. report cards, school yearbooks, photo albums, drawings, diaries, saved letters, transcripts from personal conversations, etc). Interrogated from the perspective of the present, artefacts have evocative power. For example, researchers examine an old picture of a classroom from a contemporary IT angle, read a passage from what they know now and, in a word, attend to aspects of which they have never been aware. Thanks to this, they disrupt their old meanings and create new understandings of the topic under consideration. It can be added, however, that due to the constraints of the short length of article presentations, not all of the artefacts are duly exhausted in a single duoethnographic study. Some of them tend to be used more widely and frequently (e.g. email correspondence) than others (material objects) although their simultaneous use as data could enhance the insights if one source is verified against others.

Another innovative idea is discussing theoretical literature, fragments of, or references to which, can be embedded into duoethnographic conversations. Although most duoethnographers are still traditional in this respect and present conversation-based studies, some have started to insert pertinent and important literature into their data. A unique example of such a project is Panayotidis and Bjartveit's (2016) study on the fluidity between the past and the present, with employment of the ideas of Jean Jacob Rousseau. In the study, a collective conversation took place between a class of Early Childhood Education graduate students (the present) and Rousseau (the past). The students asked questions relevant to their course that related to culture, gender, pedagogical theory and practice, whereas Rousseau 'answered' them, as seen through theoretical, historical, cultural and biographical lenses, or through direct quotes from his 1762 work *Emile, Or On Education* which was provided by the course instructor. Although students did not read the treatise written

by Rousseau, they were able to better conceptualize the dead philosopher's ideas, driven by his contexts and gain different ideas for thinking about early childhood education. As elucidated in this example, the literature being discussed and emerging in the topic both frames a duoethnographic study and provides a theoretical reference point for critique and discussion.

A second innovation that is gaining ground in qualitative studies of language learning and teaching is the temporal aspect (Aro, 2016; Werbińska, Ekiert 2018). Duoethnographic studies are not one-off data generation activities, such as writing a language learning history at a specific point in time. By contrast, they are in-depth interviews that take place over a long period of time, sometimes over several years. They concern a phenomenon under consideration that is examined retrospectively and longitudinally with the inclusion of new knowledge and data available at the time of a particular account.

In a similar vein, it is believed that the place from which a person speaks may affect his or her narratives and counternarratives. In duoethnography, the meaning of place is more complex than a mere physical location. As each place has a peculiar focus (for example, a university office, a friendly café, a noisy room, etc.), it actively contributes to the partners' conversation and interaction. Sawyer and Norris (2012: 20) claim that each place has "its own epistemologies and ways of knowing" that change the narrators and contribute to their narratives.

A third tendency is for duoethnographic studies to be emergent. Duoethnographers' stories beget stories and, as in interview questions, "the stories enable the research-writing partners to recall other past events that they might not have remembered on their own" (Norris, 2012: 234). This reflection upon past experiences, genuineness and, above all, the creation of a safe place enable the partners of the duoethnographic project to reach new levels of awareness which lead to the *third space* (Bhabha, 1994). Third spaces acknowledge the primacy of what Bhabha (1994) calls the *inter* or the *in-between* space. Thanks to the third space, life stories of experience can be grasped again, in local, rather than general, terms. The speakers talk about their own understanding of a problem, or about situations which they have experienced. Their focus on subjective knowledge leads to the extension of objective knowledge. As partners discuss relations between and across their experiences, the conversation is not just a tool for communicating, but for *interthinking* (Mercer, 2000) which serves as an instrument for the participants to think together, establish common goals and (re)construct identities (Ver-munt et al., 2017). The creation of a third space can contribute to the breaking of the "culture of silence" (Gachago et al, 2014: 9) as both interlocutors, with their voices made explicit, are considered "agentive self-constructors".

A duoethnographic dialogue can also provide evidence of learning for those who participate in it. Duoethnographers learn who they are as a person. They receive feedback on their image of self or, as Beijaard and Meijer (2017) argue, may even be prevented from creating an unwilling or “deviating identity”. The constructing of a third space may also contribute to the appearance of *liminal spaces* which provide space “within which people try new ways of being and interacting and gather, reaffirm, and extend moral commitments” (Cook-Sather, Baker-Doyle, 2017). Both third and liminal spaces help to reveal the diversity of the interlocutors’ cultures and create possibilities for learning together.

When considering the contribution of duoethnography to innovation in data collection, it is clear that there is a lot to gain. When duoethnographers generate data for their studies of various topics, they use multiple sources of data, including the literature, and longitudinal methods. They emphasize the place from which they are speaking, and emergence which leads to their mutual change.

## **5. Innovation in writing, presenting and interpreting data**

Duoethnography can also encourage other researchers who use qualitative methods to introduce innovative ways of writing, presenting and interpreting their data. For example, the writing process can be conducted following a sequential or concurrent model. In the sequential model, one duoethnographer initiates the writing, or responds to a topic, remembering to add a new aspect to the conversation rather than merely agreeing with the previous writings. A common technique is to finish a piece of writing with a question so as to facilitate the conversation. Chang et al. (2013: 90–91) argue that there are two advantages of the sequential model: first, the subtopics discussed are streamlined together, which helps with analysing the data, and second, the sequential model stimulates the interlocutors to read what was written on a topic, to question, and to expand, thereby reaching saturation before passing on to another topic.

In the concurrent model, both duoethnographers collect their data individually at the same time, e.g. they write their life stories about a selected topic and share them via email at an agreed time. Then, they meet in person, or virtually, and use the material for discussion, which is usually recorded. They analyse, interpret, and invariably gather new information and then discuss their next steps. What is good about the concurrent model is that both duoethnographers work independently, which generates the diversity of perspectives and absence of prescriptivism. Besides this, the concurrent approach is beneficial in terms of the partners’ collaboration. It encourages them to interrogate the data, negotiate differences, and, which Chang et al. (2013: 92) underline, “feel the forward movement through data analysis and the interpretation through the group session”.



As for presentation of the data, innovation can be seen in the form of headings, introductions or use of italics. Headings can be used in a number of ways to demarcate the beginning of a new point. For example, Krammer and Mangiardi (2012) used the word “Lesson” in each chronological section. They simply extracted the meaning from their dialogue and made it part of the heading (for example, “Lesson 8: No Autonomy Allowed”, Krammer, Mangiardi 2012: 60). Yet, in contrast to other headings, the headings in duoethnography should not be too explicit, but allow readers to experience the text for themselves. If headings ‘tell’ and ‘explain’ a construct too much, they will disrupt the readers’ flow of thoughts and prevent them from experiencing the text deeply, or stop them deciding how to read the text: to read the text as being about something, to read the text as being one with which the reader strongly identifies, or to read the text as one to question and criticise.

Introductions can often serve a useful function as well. It may be of interest to recall Norris and Greenlaw’s (2012) introduction which resembles a traditional introduction with research questions, although presented in the form of a theatrical collage of voices:

Jim: What drives us to write?

Joe: Where do we find our sources of inspiration?

Jim: What makes us want to record our inner thoughts for ourselves and for others?

Joe: What impact did the school system have on our ability to write and our attitudes towards writing?

Jim: What role did our informal writing play on our interest in writing?

Joe: Do different people answer such questions differently?

Jim: By addressing these questions through an exploration and interrogation of our writing histories, we may enable ourselves and other teachers to understand how their students approach writing.

(Norris, Greenlaw, 2012: 90).

Italics can also be successfully used to make duoethnographic ‘showing’, not ‘telling’, or ‘expressing’, not ‘explaining’, explicit. In other words, duoethnographers apply italics in their texts to mark a difference between their telling and explaining (italics) and their showing and expressing (the standard font). Although the reader is not informed about the intention of the font used, careful reading of a duoethnographic text will enable a reader to notice the duoethnographer’s use of a different perspective - a shift from expression to explanation, or from showing to telling.

As for interpretation of the data, like other qualitative research, data interpretation in duoethnography is tied to writing. Of significance, however, is the transformative aspect of interpretation. The meaning is not in the data,

nor does it precede the duoethnographic text, but it emerges from the duoethnographer's mind (the 'living' text). Chang et al. (2013) claim that there are three strategies to help researchers construct meanings and interpret the text: through the literature, through the sociocultural context and through uncovering what is missing in the data. The strategy of finding meaning through the literature is an attempt to see if familiar literary texts that have helped to establish the duoethnographers' scholarship could be successfully used for the purposes of a new study. Thorne (2016: 69) reminds researchers that paying attention to the conclusions that predecessors have made can be a right direction for research to go in order to advance the field or provide inspiration "for refining your angle of attention on the problem so that it regains the relevance you need to remain motivated in your applied study". The second strategy is to find the relationship between the data and the world outside. In other words, duoethnographers are encouraged to consider in what way contextual factors (e.g. cultural, social, economic, political, organizational, interpersonal) as well self-identification factors (e.g. age, gender, class, education, locality, language) influence their findings and to speculate on how the findings might change if they were presented by researchers from a different context or affected by different demographic identifiers (Chang et al., 2013: 112). Finally, the third strategy is related to looking for what is absent in the data. There may be gaps in the data due to the participants' fear of harm, ridicule, over-disclosure, or simply their perception that some data is not significant. Yet, examining the reasons why certain data are omitted could indirectly shed more light on the sociocultural meanings of the data that are present (Chang et al., 2013: 112).

While none of the innovations noted above is revolutionary, they all aid in juxtaposing the partners' differences, examining multiple voices, or considering contrastive interpretations of the topic being investigated, so as to better demonstrate its diversity and complexity.

## **6. Learning from duoethnography**

Although duoethnographic dialogues enable the conversation partners to recall and re-examine different aspects of the phenomenon being investigated, which contributes to development of their reflective and reflexive competences, what is of interest here are lessons which can be learned for qualitative researchers. As there are more and more duoethnographic studies in applied linguistics research, it is perhaps relevant to paraphrase Benson's (2014: 64) question, in which he wondered what could be learnt from narrative inquiry and ask accordingly what could be learnt from duoethnography. This question is even more significant if it is realized that most duoethnographic

accounts focus on what duoethnography is and how it differs from other biographic forms, rather than what it contributes to other fields, such as language learning and teaching. Apart from what has been discussed above and the more 'technical' innovations in data collection, presentation or interpretation, there are vital issues pertaining to the thematic scope of duoethnography.

The most important contribution that has always fuelled advancement in knowledge is focus on people's experience, which is the bedrock of duoethnography. Despite extensive research on language skills and subsystems, there are still not enough data on the experience of learning particular elements of language from learners in the context of their individual differences, or about how language instructors teach in the light of their individual differences. Such duoethnographic conversations do not have to be limited only to classroom-based accounts, but could include informal learning (stays abroad, out-of-class learning, etc.) or other forms of language teaching (private tutoring, teaching language to different age groups, starting to use methodology which is unfamiliar to the teacher, etc.) through the perspective of the individual differences characteristic of a particular person. Thanks to detailed discussions on a range of language learning and teaching-related experiences, duoethnographers can reflect upon themselves and examine their problems from the aspect of language, learn from their conversation partners, reconstruct their previous knowledge and, finally, reveal their stories to those who read them, thereby contributing to reconceptualization of the readers' own experiences

Duoethnographic stories of experience can expand and advance our knowledge of language learner and teacher identities, a topic that has occupied nearly every generation of scholars since the 1950s (Wetherell, 2010). It can be argued that duoethnographic conversations introduce new 'complications' to identity studies. This is because they not only show who the interlocutors are and what identities they hold, but also how identity is discursively (co)constructed in a duoethnographic dialogue in particular interactional moments. Especially interesting for linguists could be accounts of reaching "a third space", which is usually preceded by the interlocutors exhibiting a multiplicity of identity positions which are shown in fragments and changed under the influence of the conversational partner. Equally intriguing could be researching aspects of intersectionality between these different identities which has become a subject of exploration in the latest identity studies (Block, Corona 2016). This all means that including a range of duoethnographers' contributing voices is likely to broaden the scope of identity studies.

Duoethnography also offers a range of extensive discussion topics that, although not visible at first glance, may significantly affect the process of language learning and teaching. This can be especially beneficial in pre-service

teacher education, as topics such as discussing leadership (Le Favre, Farquhar, 2016), diversity (Brown, Hamilton, 2016), professionalism (Woods & Sebok, 2016), the hidden curriculum (Krammer, Mongiardi, 2012), credibility in teaching (Breault, 2016), becoming (Sawyer, 2016), the theatre (Norris, 2016), to name but a few titles from the existing duoethnographic projects conducted in general education, may without doubt contribute to the development of new concepts and categories in the field of language learning and teaching. For example, comparing and contrasting the hidden curriculum of their schools in the past, Krammer and Mongiardi (2012) came up with the new construct of the *cryptic curriculum* in the professional literature on the hidden curriculum. In addition, such projects encourage duoethnographers to come up with novel forms to share their stories. These could include visual material, such as in reflective practice photography (Matthews, Garrett, 2016), but also digital storytelling (Rasmor, 2016), or using duoethnography to unpack traditional student teacher portfolios (Woods, Sebok, 2016).

## 6. Conclusion

While this review has attempted to offer a picture of the field of duoethnography, it is far from exhaustive. Although the use of duoethnography in narrative and biographic studies is an increasing trend, it has also been noted that duoethnographic projects in applied linguistics are rather few and far between. The innovations in data collection and innovations in writing up of data and ways of presenting and interpreting research provide a welcome move towards methodological diversity. Important developments are also a focus on deeper understanding of language learning and teaching experiences, new insights concerning learner and teacher reconstruction of identities and the plethora of potential discussion topics that emerge in duoethnographic conversations which can possibly inspire novel investigations into language learning and teaching. This said, a great deal of work still needs to be done to promote the understanding and contributions of duoethnography, as thinking that research should be objective, measurable and generalizable is still the perception of research prioritized by most journal editors, policy makers or grant funders.

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