



## ESTUDIOS LINGÜÍSTICOS

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### A MODO DE COLOFÓN

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*Experiencias personales en el aprendizaje autónomo de una lengua*

*Personal Experiences Through the Self-Directed Learning of a Language*

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LEENA K. KARLSSON

*Universidad de Helsinki*

leena.karlsson@helsinki.fi

ORCID: 0000-0003-2052-0989

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### ABSTRACT

In this narrative auto-ethnographic paper, I experiment with a version of “post-academic” writing. I explore how I could improve and develop my craft as a narrative inquirer and strengthen my written voice as an expression of my practitioner-researcher autonomy. I tell the story of two writers, myself and Laura, my student, by bringing us as characters into the same story. We are both students of writing and in the process of developing our thinking and awareness of educational experience through our writing. We use writing as inquiry, as a method, and our texts emerge from the shared storytelling world of language counselling. We both experiment with personal reflective writing as a way of claiming ownership of this open-ended writing practice and of expressing our autonomy. In this paper, I give glimpses of our stories with a view to how Laura’s story worked on me as a practitioner-researcher and a scholarly writer.

Keywords: auto-ethnography, (language learner) autonomy, practitioner-research, reflective writing, voice

## RESUMEN

En este trabajo de carácter narrativo y auto-etnográfico presento una experiencia a partir de una versión de escritura “post-académica”. Exploro el modo de mejorar y desarrollar la capacidad de *narrative inquirer* y fortalecer mi voz escrita, expresión de autonomía como docente-investigador. Se trata del relato de la historia de dos escritoras, la estudiante Laura y yo misma, representadas como personajes de la misma historia. Ambas nos encontramos en el proceso de desarrollo del pensamiento y de la conciencia de la experiencia educativa a través de la escritura. Usamos este medio como investigación, como método, y nuestros textos tienen su origen en el mundo de la narración compartida del asesoramiento lingüístico. Ambas experimentamos la escritura reflexiva personal como modo para reclamar la autoría de esta práctica de escritura abierta y de expresar nuestra autonomía. En esta contribución se pretende arrojar luz sobre una experiencia con el objeto de analizar cómo la historia de la estudiante Laura repercute en mí como docente-investigador y escritora académica.

Palabras clave: auto-etnografía, autonomía (del aprendiente de idiomas), investigador profesional, escritura reflexiva, voz

## 1. INTRODUCTION: IN SEARCH FOR A LANGUAGE OF AUTONOMY

In this text, I am experimenting with a version of what could be called “post-academic” writing, that is, “human writing for human readers in a story-telling form” as Badley, (2019: 180) defines it. Mine is a voice from the margins of academic writing in English, a non-native writer’s voice, and a practitioner-researcher’s voice. In the final reflections in a paper I co-wrote with a colleague (Karlsson & Bradley 2018), I pose the following questions “What if ethical academic writing should be *re+cording*<sup>1</sup> all the way through, writing from the heart? What if academic writing should be a process full of spaces for reflection, for reckoning, and what if silent stories emerging in research should be allowed to keep a bit of their mystery? What if it is *re+cording* that is necessary if we practitioners want to be pedagogically tactful and thoughtful and even retrospectively respectful of the unique in our students (van Manen 2002)? What if *re+cording* is the only way for a practitioner to write, and what if all her published texts should only be considered writing exercises for the readers to re-write?” These questions resonate with Badley’s call for post-academic craft-writing, a writing emerging from the idea of constantly developing our human craft as writers in telling about our academic experiences, our experiments and reflective learning, thinking and growing understandings. He suggests that we strive to write warm, inviting and intensely personal texts instead of abstract, cold and conventional, author-vacant papers (Badley 2019). This

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<sup>1</sup> *Re+cording* (Wright & Bolton 2012) means a three-phase reflective writing process, in particular in therapy-oriented writing: the exploratory and expressive first writing, *re+cording* (re=again and cord=heart, as in ‘getting closer to the heart’), re-reading to the Self (which becomes a way of *listening* to oneself and can only happen after the writing), and finally a deep emotional reading of one’s Self and a potential sharing with a confidential other.

we should do using our human voice, as individual human beings, not trying to hide who we are.

These questions also resonate with my reading of Reed and Speedy's (2011) idea of an "ethical mindedness" in narrative inquiry that can develop when we offer ourselves opportunities to write using different styles and to try out different ways of representing our inquiries thus making the writing a cumulative experience over time. This ethical mindedness grows out of continuous storied inquiries into the lives of others but also into our selves, as in auto-ethnography, in which our awareness increases of how "the social speaks through the personal". When working, and ultimately writing, *with* stories (Morris 2002), not about them, we aim at composing evocative texts. And if we manage with the art of writing, we might succeed in creating a text that makes the reader "care" (Reed & Speedy 2011: 115) and "positions the reader as someone who has agency". As early as in 2003, Naoko Aoki, a writer who has always given me the experience of agency as a reader of her texts, suggested that we look for alternative ways of representing experience and writing our research on autonomy. In her own work, both her texts (e.g. Aoki with Kobayashi 2009) and conference talks she resorted to narrative and stories and pointed out how representing experience is always subjective. She wrote: "I do not necessarily think teachers' stories have to be based on any data as long as they are based on their own experience and memory." (Aoki 2003: 195). Time after time, she experimented in different ways of representing the stories of her students and showed the readers how a story always needs to resonate with their experience to have verisimilitude, which is by no means the same as a single truth. Inspired and influenced by her texts, I, too, have been figuring out alternative ways of representing experience in a pedagogy for autonomy. I have come to believe that engaging in *re+cord-ing* as an academic writer shifts the focus away from the *texts* (that might or might not get published) to the *process* of writing and to the craft as a writer that can be learned, loved and developed.

Academic writing for me is a process of autonomous professional development. Our relationships with our students should not become narrow, technical stories (Estefan, Caine & Clandinin 2016). We should explore our educational stories in constant dialogue with the stories of our students. Here I am particularly concerned about Finnish university students who have been "silenced" as speakers and writers in English. The questioning rationale for academic writing as *re+cord-ing* emerges from attempts to re-story language learner autonomy as gradually gaining a voice through writing, both for the practitioner and her students. When inquiring into the silenced students' stories (e.g. Karlsson 2016; 2017), I have aimed at creating a resonance of stories in my readers in other (higher) education contexts. I have engaged in narrative research and written autonomy stories because I have wanted to understand my landscape of practice better, not to say the last word about autonomy. Then again, I admit to have written in search of "a lingua franca

of autonomy” (Tochon 2015: viii), which would have my voice and accent. This has meant attempting to write *from* personal experience and has also resulted in being questioned as an academic writer. Most importantly, this curiosity has kept me engaging in inquiries that are open-ended and, consequently, “the end-products are thoughts, thinking aloud and remaining asking” (Guttorm 2016: 361). I will remain asking after this text, too, a text which I will have to write in the past tense. Using the first person and the past tense I here “(auto)ethnobiographise” (Karlsson & Bradley 2021) my relationship with autonomy: this text is perhaps the last “act of autonomy to tell and retell my own story”.

## 2. ENTANGLED IN STORIES, AND THINKING *WITH* THEM

In 1994-2020 I worked as a language counsellor in the Programme of Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS) at Helsinki University Language Centre, Finland. ALMS is a credit-bearing English course, offered twice a year to Helsinki University undergraduate students in order for them to fulfil the foreign language requirement in their degrees (for a detailed description of the complete programme, see Karlsson, Kjisik & Nordlund 1997). A team of eight to nine counsellors forms the ALMS community, each responsible for one, two or three groups of 21 students every term. Face-to-face language counselling is the main way to support learner development and promote autonomy in these groups (for one description of ALMS counselling, see Kjisik & Karlsson 2015). The ALMS Programme has been up and running since 1994, but in 2009 we started offering two special ALMS groups per academic year to students who have classroom fears, language anxiety, learning and/or social problems; that is, students who have serious reason not to join a regular ALMS group or other English language course. I worked as the counsellor for these groups in 2009-2020. The special groups in ALMS are an attempt to create equality at a Finnish University where English is the academic lingua franca and inadequate skills in using it in their subject studies and, no less, on the required English course easily become a source of shame and a stigma for students. These are the stories that mattered most, the stories that were writing in me during the time this text emerges from.

From early on, mine was a *dual* role, an entangled role of a counsellor/researcher. My puzzling thus always aimed at a better understanding of my counselling skills as actions, as “the words we use, the body language we radiate, the talk and silences we create” (Kjisik & Karlsson 2015: 7). A counselling pedagogy for autonomy meant being able to “think with stories”, a process in which, according to Morris, “we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative but take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience, of allowing narrative to work on us” (Morris 2002: 196). To “allow narrative to work on me” I needed to interrogate and constantly revise my practical knowledge and theoretical understandings through (re-)reading and (re-)writing, that is, through narratively puzzling over the concerns emerging

from my pedagogy. The writing of research texts arising out of a context of practice is always deeply relational: topics, methods and texts emerge dynamically instead of in a pre-figured and linear sequence towards a given end (Reed & Speedy 2011). Being a reflective counsellor and a self-reflexive researcher means being these “continuously and cyclically” (Reed & Speedy 2011: 112), constantly learning from other practitioners’ and scholars’ work and from students’ stories.

Thinking *with* others’ stories and making sure this attitude is transferred into writing about them is ethically demanding and had me continuously wonder how to represent living, feeling human beings in my texts and how to leave ethical footprints as a writer. Choosing narrative auto-ethnography (Karlsson 2017; Karlsson & Bradley 2018) as a method when inquiring into other people’s lives had to do with ethics, with the need to represent them without sending off frozen, stereotypical stories taken out of their experiential context (Karlsson 2008). Auto-ethnography has an autobiographical basis; it combines self-study and autobiography understood as relational and jointly constructed and combines this with an ethnographic description and interpretation of the lived and felt experiences from the time described in the paper. It also means making those others, if possible, beneficiaries of the research.

Auto-ethnographic storytelling comes close to what Vieira (2010: 25) calls pedagogical writing, a process that presupposes “an intimate relationship between experience, writer and text”. Narrative inquiry, emerging from experience, is characterised by a continual reformulation of an inquiry, not in terms of defining problems and finding solutions (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Thus, I was never after clear-cut answers to clear-cut research questions but aiming at a deeper understanding of the reflective writing, including the narrative research writing and its effects on the life in ALMS. The goal was not to fade myself away or aim at a neutral academic piece of writing but to write *from* the self about the stories, voices and experiences on the ALMS landscape. This text is no exception.

### 3. INTERLUDE: WRITING DIFFERENTLY: WRITING WITHOUT FEAR

On my wanderings on the ALMS landscape over the years I met many “wounded” storytellers, anxious and nervous learners. How did I as an ALMS counsellor help them to speak (and write) as themselves, in their less than perfect English? I always suggested to my counselees that the personal reflective writing that happens in their diaries, memoirs, freewriting and other ‘documents of life’ (Plummer 2001) is a way of becoming aware of, exploring and understanding experience, past and present, in particular their own learning histories.

This is also the kind of ‘soft’ curricular and pedagogical structure that Celia Hunt calls for in higher education. She promotes reflective journal writing, ‘creative life writing’, which helps higher education students to hold the “emotional arc” of their studies through the writing (Hunt 2013: 161). She writes how safe spaces

for *transformative* learning are created for students when these “less cognitively-driven, more spontaneous and bodily-felt approaches” to learning and writing are used (Hunt 2013: 116). I, too, sought to inspire reflective, exploratory and expressive writing with a focus on both the emotional and the cognitive (Karlsson 2017). For most students, writing seemed to appear as one controlled, strictly regulated and privileged process that someone else owned. Becoming more mindful about their own writing helped a writing consciousness to emerge; this in turn pushed them into experimenting with, say free writing, and, ideally finding a voice. Such written voices, perhaps hesitant at the beginning, should be appreciated and supported as expressions of the students’ language learner autonomy. When suggesting the idea of reflective writing that has an autobiographical basis to a student, a counsellor inevitably faces the possibility of tensions, even resistance. The documents of life students are invited to produce in ALMS are often intimate and possibly troubling, but almost always progressively self-reflexive; they become reflections on the whys and hows of learning and language skills. A pedagogical sensitivity was always needed when making the offer and giving permission to write freely and “differently”.

Then I met Laura, the girl who took up my offer, the girl who started to write the fear. During Laura’s time in ALMS, reflective personal writing, mine and hers, emerged out of the shared affordances and ambient language in ALMS: we were both students of writing and in the process of developing our thinking and our awareness of experience through writing. Being a multistoried human being, entangled in many stories, past and present, I moved between my positions, a counsellor’s and a researcher’s. Soon enough, I realized here was a story of two writers waiting to be told. As the author of this auto-ethnographic narrative, within which Laura’s story is now embedded, I will give an account of how Laura’s story was working on me, and how I was thinking *with* her story.

#### 4. Rough and incomplete: A practitioner-researcher at (new) Schools of Writing

Trust yourself

You cannot write the wrong

Thing

Give yourself the gift of this

Writing

(Bolton 1999: 11)

When I was starting to write the very first version of this text, the working titles in my mind were *Laura, the girl who wrote the fear* or “*I’m a bit cheeky*”. This was a time I was taking an online course in creative (academic) writing and, on the first day of the course, at a mature age, it felt like the first exciting, but scary day at primary school. I knew how to read but had to start with my ABCs. What, in my

own language counselling, I had called autobiographical (or personal reflective writing or even freewriting) was called ‘work-out’ writing (in Finnish *treenikirjoittaminen*, *treeni* = work-out). The name implied uncomfortable ideas of exercising and performing and put me in an anxiety mode as a writer. Our texts were to be published in an e-learning environment for the other course participants and the teacher to read, but the writing was meant to create ideas, to be work in progress, experimental, creative and free. There was to be no worrying about mistakes or logic, all of which I associated with reflective writing for myself, not for others. I considered what, possibly, is in a name. Would it be possible for me to create and write the raw thoughts, to keep a flow of unfinished ponderings flooding on the paper as with my normal rough and incomplete text-in-the-making approach, in which the Self is the expected reader? Would I not worry about the immediate publishing, and so edit and revise all the way through the creative process? Would I be able to give up control and silence the inner censor? Would I keep the pen moving? Would I accept permission to write freely or opt out to not write?

During the course, I was also asked to enter the Schools of Writing as described by Helene Cixous. Uncertain and suspicious because of her intense and passionate way of writing, I had been avoiding reading her for a long time, ever since I first came across her book *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993) some years ago. Now Cixous was assigned reading for my course; this felt like an added challenge, an expectation I was not quite sure I could meet. On my writing course, I was walking in a(n academic) writing student’s shoes and exploring Laura’s texts with my new writing layers, the effects of this “School of Writing”. WORK-OUTS 1-4 are translated, shortened and slightly rewritten versions of the texts I originally wrote by hand in Finnish on the course. I am here using these storied reflections as my data. They illustrate the inquiry and thinking process that took me towards yet new autobiographical understandings through learning arising from the reflective writing *from* experience. Laura’s story is written in these work-outs: my re-storying her ALMS (writing) journey happens in them. The rhythm in the WORK-OUTS is meant to be the same as in the originals: out-of-breath writing with commas giving me a short break to catch my breath. Through the work-outs, I explore how I wrote my entangled practitioner-researcher Self feelingly through the inquiry. This is how it started:

WORK-OUT 1: *For me the situation is challenging: I need to write (for) myself and yet publish my texts. I need to build the safe space myself in my rebelling mind and then press the button, send the text into the world, for others and the teacher to read, rough and incomplete as it is, 15 minutes after I began. No possibility of choosing what to show to the others or just tell them about writing the text, which is the case in bibliotherapy and when I ask my students to free write. Well, I am cleverly autonomous, I*



*take my lesson from Celia Hunt and imagine myself an accepting reader, a supportive reader. And I tell myself this is good for me, that I cannot write the wrong thing here either, that I can give myself the gift of this writing, as Gillie Bolton suggests for reflective writing. That the text created is right, has a future as itself or as a different text, that it might be burnt and yet will live in my other texts, in other writing exercises, because writing will continue, exercises will continue. That here, too, at this School of Writing, writing in the dark shadow of the name Work-out, I can be empowered and can go back to reading my Self afterwards, I can write my anger, hurt feelings and the evil death, everything. I can write in Cixous' School of Death here, that's the name for my writing, it's not grief work, it's a School.*

For more than a year, I had been writing personal grief. I had been writing the silence of death in the rooms of my home and asking questions from this screaming silence through writing a (grief) diary. Reading Cixous and watching her speak about writing<sup>2</sup> made me realize that she could be an inspirer of thinking and writing; she was not offering teaching or models but an invitation to start digging, going to autonomous Schools of Writing for the rest of my writing life. The healing power of the reflective writing moments after a traumatic personal experience had helped me start healing. More than ever in my writing life, I had become aware of the whole-being of myself, the woman-writer-reader, my emotions, my memories and dreams and my embodied cognition. I had also been travelling on the road to creative academic writing for quite a while. This had meant engaging in a series of exercises, some published papers, in writing differently, writing creatively, even writing playfully. None of the created texts was the ultimate text; each new text was a text aiming at revising and filling in the gaps and potholes in the previous ones. Writing with Cixous added a different, rather intriguing, view to looking at my deeply personal grief writing; in fact, it had been an experience of writing in a school of Ethical Writing:

*WORK-OUT 2: In the School of Death one writes as if more truthfully about life, one's own and others'. One writes, first, like a waterfall, a chaos, a mass of pain rushes out. One reads, when one dares, and one feels the pain of the writer. One has become, when becoming vulnerable, when becoming someone else, an Other to oneself, more sensitive to life, its truths and lies, self-deception, shame, fears, holding and using power over an Other, over another person's story. For a researcher, it is "good" to write here: it opens one's eyes and helps sense what is truthful enough, and what is cruel and inappropriate. Writing in this tough school paints a picture of how the future reader, the researched, might react to reading about herself. The writer senses the difficulty of the reader reading what has been said about her, what has been written, and most*

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<sup>2</sup> This is one very short talk that says a lot about writing, how it is a never-ending journey: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evTogGJ5Oms>



*importantly what the researcher has created emerging out of her own words. How her story has been frozen in somebody else's text. One sees the Other, with a right to her own story, her life and death, and one knows that one is responsible for and should go carefully and back away if need be. The research one is engaged in is hardly of vital importance to anybody but the life and story of the researched certainly is, to her. This school is the very best School of Ethical Writing for a researcher.*

It was often a challenge to portray the students “as they were to me” (Clough 2002: 17) when we met in counselling meetings and research discussions. We should always, I agree with Clough, “... explore ways of researching/writing which could do a rich justice to our ‘subjects’ as well as ourselves as the organizing consciousness. For, despite the sterility of the instruments, we never come innocent to a research task, or a situation of events; rather we situate these events not merely in the institutional meanings which our profession provides, but also constitute them as expressions of ourselves”. And yet, the writer, experimenting with mindful writing and exploring its contribution to her ethical know-how as a writer, must know when to back away; it is not her story. To thread carefully, I read and re-read my own research texts as in *re+cording*: I read them to stay with the writing process (Hamilton 2014) and to “get closer to the heart”, to remain sensitive to the complexity and messiness of our lives, mine and the Other's. Thus a School of Ethical Writing is an entangled school, it is also a School of Reading.

I had read many texts by scholars, fiction writers and my ALMS students, texts which managed to “position the reader as someone who has agency”. I had read them to let artful narratives “work on me” and help me develop my ethical know-how, the artful and mindful craft of writing (Reed & Speedy 2011) through auto-ethnography. Student portfolios (scrappy, fragmented, visual, imagined, note-form), Laura's among them, had taught me about arts-based writing and so had fiction. It was very important for me that Laura, to benefit from my inquiry, should feel that she has agency, that I had not explained her life as a story fitting my purposes, that she could keep her silence if and when she needed to. When I was reading and re-reading Laura's texts, I was telling myself the story in her documents at various occasions, places and situations, walks in the woods, when having coffee at a cafeteria, when sleep didn't come at night, and in my dreams if it did. Then, in an assignment for my course, I puzzled over my inquiry in a work-out exercise:

*WORK-OUT 3: I want to write a truthful story about Laura. I want to write about our encounters when I was counselling and teaching her. Or was it the other way round, was she teaching me? I want to write how Laura took the space in her memoir and learning diary, took the space as a writing woman, as an anxious language learner, as a painter, a poet, a sister, a daughter, a friend. I want to write how she wrote in English, her language of anxiety, her kitchen-English-turned-into-LauraEnglish, how she wrote her fears, her courage and the huge birch tree in the garden of her parents' house. All in*

*English, she even re-wrote the whole concept of a learning diary, she wrote “differently”, she wrote her (dancing) body and the rhythm of writing and travelling into the text. How did she do it? I want to write about Laura whose way of writing is unique, ironic, varied. She, just like Clarice Lispector, does not dress up her text. Laura travels to Venice and to her learning self: she knows and she exists, experiences and reflects, wanders and ponders, she appreciates her own words, in the end she is doing life, doing stuff, poetically, arts-based life and work and English learning, all at the same time. Elsewhere, I was breathing and writing gappy, skinny texts (conference presentations and posters, drafts, diary entries), drinking coffee, biting my nails, trying to understand arts-based narrative inquiry, didn't get to go to Venice but enjoyed reading Laura's travel diary. I was her reader, she will be my reader, the reader of my interpretation. My challenge is to write in a way that she hears, feels, smells and tastes her experience in my text, my challenge is to write about her and her texts in a way that empowers her. Not in my power to tell a single story, remember the danger of those, her voice will have to have a space.*

Laura's artful texts froze moments for me, the counsellor-reader, to admire, but she herself was in the profound process of changing through her writing. Her story was evolving further and my account in this text has become a (distant) past for Laura. The worry remains if I have re-storied with respect and kept to an “ethical-mindedness” in this account of an experience in which ALMS was just a tiny fragment. Learning and studying English means an entanglement of a student's personal/affective and academic lives. After 25 years of being entangled in my own personal/affective and ALMS stories and hearing/reading various silent, silenced or inaudible stories about learning/using English in higher education I remain asking. When I was reading the documents of life my students authored on their ALMS course, I always felt the need to, more than the previous time, raise the affective level of my interpretation (Luce-Kapler, 2004) to hear their inner voices. I think of the inner voices as “micro-dialogues” with the Self, and also with others' voices (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005), that students engage in when writing from their experience. These micro-dialogues are a way of confronting the fears and claiming ownership of English, the language they are studying, learning and hoping to use. I suggest that an experience of autonomy emerges when reflection in writing happens, when this writing is allowed to “gather up the threads of living and shape them into journal entries, poems, narratives...” (Luce-Kapler 2004: xiii). My own experience and memory (Aoki 2003) of fighting (non-native academic) writing fears and feelings through the micro-dialogues, through the writing, reading, and re-reading process of re+coding forms the basis of my thinking here.

In ALMS my concern was always both the diversity and the uniqueness. How to interpret Laura's unique silence, her particular autonomy? One reason for the concern for silence and voice had to do with the possibility that my own way of being and acting might silence my research participants (or my counselees) (Karlsson

2017). This is also something I tried to avoid in the way I wrote (all the versions of) this text, even though it was written as an expression of my counsellor autonomy, in a version of language of autonomy. My voice and accent and how to write silence into (any) text, these were issues I pondered on in a work-out:

*WORK-OUT 4: Voice, what is 'voice' in narrative inquiry? What is voice in students' writing? Laura has her voice, a unique voice even when she writes in English, the language of anxiety, her fears. What about me? I am worried that I just scribble. Just listen a bit, read a bit, write a bit, but that I have no unique voice of my own to give a textual representation to Laura's story and her voice. But it's always a chorus of voices in narrative inquiry, right? Previous stories matter, right? Mari, Mariia, Kaisa and Juhana, my previous students' stories, write in me, shape me as a counsellor, a researcher and a writer. Reed and Speedy write in me, Cixous and Hustvedt do, too. And I write in my rough and incomplete voice. This time, as so often, one of my concerns arises out of the silence, the sound of silence that contains the question and the answer (this is not the first time). I need to find that sound of silence, though, need to hear it, and write it into my text. My spoken voice is to be heard in a recording, it is loud and clear; it asks Laura question after question after question. It is an eager voice, it tells stories, shares stories. It is a voice that ignores the capital letters in my notes (LISTEN, ASK "TELL ME", LISTEN), ignores the silence and breaks it, breaks it again. My questions are difficult, I ask about learning, about not having a voice, and I will not let her pave the way for talking, verbalising her fears and the silence. I (almost) demand an answer instead of listening to the silence speaking its language. But Laura takes my "interviewing" like Clarice Lispector<sup>3</sup>, she sustains her being-in-the-world, she keeps her story intact. She keeps her inner voices and brings them out in her texts! The memories, the dreams, her creative imagination! (What about experience, is it mostly imagination after all?) That is all I can say about silence, write about it now when needless stories fill the gaps in the recording, wandering in those gaps are the stories I silenced, perhaps. But Laura did get to write, I did not silence her writing. The voice of freedom, the sound of autonomy in her texts. And the silence in between the lines in her texts. What if accepting silence and not demanding an outcome is needed to not silence writing? How to write silence into this text? I must trust that Laura's (inner) voice speaks to the reader*

## 5. EPILOGUE: I'M A BIT CHEEKY!

The story started with Laura, the girl who wrote the fear. When she finished the course, the fear was gone; it did not live in her texts for long. Her ALMS portfolio consists of Word documents without visuals and her art remains elsewhere, but

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to an interview of Clarice Lispector I had been watching for the writing course. This interview felt like a research discussion gone wrong with a (male) interviewer's voice droning on and on, filling the silence: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1zwGLBpULs>

her artist's spirit is here: she is not afraid of sharing her work, creating thinking and learning through her poetic English and using her storytelling gift. She uses arts-inspired approaches in her learning and documents using a poetic language, thus creating new knowledge through emotional learning (Hunt, 2013). Her diary documents her work for the course; it gives glimpses of the whole lifewide, bodily-felt learning experience: dance lessons give her ideas for studying English and ALMS work gives her the courage to do academic reading for her subject studies. She is free and has "stepped outside the kitchen", where once upon a time she was ashamed for her "kitchen" English, so called by a former teacher. She is using her English and feeling comfortable because autonomy is not only control over one's own learning; it encompasses a whole life of sensibilities, vulnerabilities, wounds, hopes, dreams, uncertainties, experiences and imagination that make up a student's, a human being's learning and studying. Laura kept a travel diary on a trip to Venice during her time on the course. She attached the following text to the diary as a kind of commentary: *"I've transformed from an anxious and nervous English learner to an empowered and positive English user. Here I am a user, not even thinking that I'm writing in English, just writing. Here I use English like I use Finnish or Swedish: memories, fragments, verses, postcards... I'm a bit cheeky, I don't worry about mistakes! I have the courage to be a user despite being shy and having unpleasant experiences from the past. I'm having fun!"* She writes about personally meaningful moments or just unfinished "moments of being" in these small texts. For Laura, it has all been in the writing. But for me, it is now all in the reading. In the joy that Laura's beautifully written, wise and insightful travel diary gives me. In the thick description, the expressions she found for her thoughts as a user of English, the transformation is visible and tangible:

(Extract from) a travelling diary by Laura

*The nights are very dark here. You can get lost easily. They are "them", you are a passer-by, a consumer of anything authentic. I take pictures of people kissing Madonna's and praying for immortalized little boys. An outsider with tourist's skills. A bionic human, transplanted plastic, remains of an ancient body. The innards of my bag are as light as the Holy Spirit. There is nothing sacred in my intentions, so I make a storyline.*

*Hit the road, cook an egg, wake a neighbor, a bag full of one-way space travelling. My life has a timeline on OneDrive.*

*I hope the last room would be a deep blue instead of black dark.*

*The days are very bright in here. You can't get lost. The Italian herd the tourists like cattle. You follow an Italian narrative. Through a gate, the blue shadows, through a canal, through a room with wooden baroque furniture, into a crowded piazza, with Venus getting dressed, down the street, down the marble stairs, down the chimney into a Capella with frescos of antipasto. You will recognize a true shepherd from the flock by his Italian leather shoes.*

*This is a pilgrim trip of art. By using your pen on the blank pages, the outlined figures' bright colors emerge like magic.  
This is a country of light.*

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