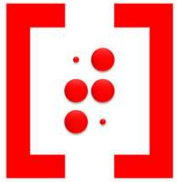




The Autoethnography of Translation: Towards a Typology

Pavlo Shopin, associate professor in the department of applied linguistics and translation studies at Mykhailo Drahomanov State University of Ukraine

14th international conference in Translation Studies *Tradition and Innovation in Translation Studies Research XIV: Mapping Voices, Texts and Contexts*



DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSLATION STUDIES
FA CPU in Nitra

The Problem

First-person research in Translation Studies

- Diaries, commentaries, logs, narratives, activist accounts
- Valuable but *methodologically inconsistent*
- Same practices → different labels
- Often unclear:
  - What counts as *data*?
  - How is it *analysed*?
  - What standards of rigor apply?

My Proposal

Autoethnography of translation

- First-person research
- Treats translational experience as **evidence**
- Makes **reasoning and method explicit**

➞ A **practical typology** for:

- Authors (positioning)
- Readers & reviewers (evaluation)

Why This Matters Now

The “translator turn”

- Translators as:
  - Situated
  - Socially embedded
  - Agentive
- First-person materials now central

The problem is not subjectivity —
➞ it’s *how to assess it*

Why Analytic vs Evocative Is Not Enough

Classic distinction:

- **Analytic** → experience as data + theory
- **Evocative** → narrative, affect, resonance

But translation is:

- Mediated
- Role-based
- Often collaborative

➞ Binary is **too narrow** for translational practice

The Three-Axis Typology (Overview)

I propose **three axes of variation**:

- **Form & function**
- **Embodiment & performance**
- **Number of voices / collaboration**

Together → a **shared methodological space**

Axis 1: Form & Function

Recurring forms of translation autoethnography:

- Analytic self–case studies
- Process documentation & diaries
- Narrative ethical/professional accounts
- Activist / politically situated accounts
- Meta-autoethnographic reflection

Each form → different claims, different evidence

Axis 2 & 3

Axis 2: Embodiment & performance

- Central in interpreting
- Present (but often implicit) in translation
- Voice, rhythm, fatigue, tools, routines

Axis 3: Voices & collaboration

- Individual
- Duoethnographic
- Collaborative
- Community-based

How the Grid Works

A study positions itself by answering:

- What is the **dominant form**?
- How central is **embodiment**?
- How many **voices** structure the account?

➞ Helps authors *state what they are doing*
➞ Helps reviewers *judge it fairly*

Case Study 1

Claudine Borg (2024), *Translation Spaces*

- Analytic self–case study
- Focus: revising a literary translation
- Data:
  - Drafts
  - Retrospective commentary
- Strong link to:
  - Editorial interaction
  - Professional norms

(Clear analytic positioning)

Case Study 2

Tanya Voinova (2024), *Multilingua*

- Narrative & politically situated autoethnography
- Context: interpreting during the war in Ukraine
- Embodiment & performance:
  - Central
  - Real-time moral pressure
- Strong ethical and affective dimension

Case Study 3

Haldane et al. (2022), *BMJ Global Health*

- Collaborative autoethnography
- Multiple translators & researchers
- Focus:
  - Group decision-making
  - Institutional constraints
- Makes **collaboration** visible as data

What the Typology Is For

The typology helps:

- Clarify **method**
- Improve **comparison**
- Make **claims proportional to evidence**

Especially useful for:

- Scholars
- Reviewers
- Readers

Practical Takeaway

If you use your own experience as evidence:

- Name the dominant form
- Specify what your data is
- Say whether embodiment is central
- State whether the account is individual or collaborative

➞ Write a short *positioning paragraph*

Conclusion

Translation Studies already produces rich autoethnographic knowledge.

This typology:

- Recognizes its diversity
- Gives it a shared structure
- Makes it easier to evaluate, compare, and build on