**Stretching the boundaries of narrative: a dual-vocal perspective on the writing space and behavior of scholar-writers**

# Introduction

The present paper focuses on a dual-vocal analysis of narrative research, an analysis that is partially a “study-within-a-study.” The first voice is that of the primary investigator (Author A), who examined the writer-narratives of scholars working in academia. The second voice is that of one of the study’s interviewees (Author B), who examined her self-narrative using the methodological tools of her field of study, namely the field of text linguistics (Rodrigue-Schwarzwald and Sokoloff, 1992: 229).

The research project presented here has its origin in the narrative-phenomenological research of Author A—an academic researcher, whose field of study is education. The study examined the place of writing in the personal and professional lives of twenty-three academics who are all engaged in teacher education (Author A, 2016a). It investigated the following research questions: a) What is the perception of the “writing self”? b) What is the place and significance of writing in the professional and personal life of academic scholars, and how has it developed as such?

The study found that writing for academics in the field of education is an integral part of their personal and professional lives, i.e., it is a part of “who they are” and is perceived as both a cognitive and spiritual experience; in other words—their sense and sensibility. From the cognitive perspective, the writer’s identity is expressed in understanding the idea-generating process during writing, while from the spiritual perspective, it is expressed as an almost mystical perception of writing as a process that pulls up ideas and emotions ‘from the depths’ of the writer’s self. This is an inexorable process that is profoundly linked to the writer’s essence, their “very spirit” or “breath of life,” as some of the participants put it. Although writing is part of the intimate, inner essence of the writing individual, it thrives against the background of social mirroring, which is part of their positioning in life and in the professional community and constructs their identity as writers in academia.

The second researcher examined her own personal narrative. As a participant in research regarding the identity of the academic as a writer, she described—in writing and in drawings—her personal writing space, the symbiosis created during the writing process between herself and her physical environment, as well as the interactions with her family members and pets. In her self-analysis, she addresses her personal narrative and its language based on the approach that the writer is a subject who designs the text and defines reality for the reader (Shlasky and Alpert, 2007) or, in Foucault’s words, “a complex and variable function of discourse” (Foucault, 1980: 138). She shows how language serves as a complementary medium for the personal narrative and how coherency between the narrative and the language, as well as the graphic documentation, helps sketch characteristics of the writer’s identity and assess their authenticity.

# Theoretical background

To elucidate the dual-vocal methodology employed in researching the scholar-writer, we present a theoretical background to the “writing self” in academia and explore the significance of self-study as a mode of research and as a means of poly/dual-vocal representation in research.

## The “writing self” in academia

Identity is a complex concept, and the identity of the scholar-writer is that much more nuanced and elusive (Author A, 2016b). In fact, one can speak in this context of “hyphenated identities,” that is, identities that are plural and context-dependent, formulated as “a-and-b-and-c,” depending on the circumstances and the angle of observation (Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish, 2015; Smooha, 2001). Gee (2000–2001), a researcher in the field of discourse and education, proposes four perspectives that define complex identities: 1) Nature-identity, which is the natural state of an individual, over which they have no control, for example, being someone’s twin sibling; 2) Institution-identity, which defines the person’s position or function based on institutional authority, such as a university professor; 3) Discourse-identity, which surfaces in discourse or dialogue and defines the person’s characteristics as they emerge in the discourse and are observed by others in a certain context, meaning that they can also change according to context and observer; d) Affinity-identity, defined by the person’s actions vis-à-vis an affinity group. Thus, for example, Author A’s (2016b) study reveals a hyphenated identity that is inseparable from the personal and professional essence of academics, one that is perceived as both a cognitive and spiritual experience, in other words, as composed of sense and sensibility.

The construction of the academic’s identity as a writer occurs simultaneously with the construction of another aspect of identity, which is that of the personal voice, what Ivanic (1997) terms the “self as author.” The writer’s voice is their fingerprint on the world, it is their presence and their power stemming from their personal history (Jones, 2014). Here, again, arises the relation between personal identity and professional identity, between the private and the professional self.

Writing, according to Ivanic (1997), is an act of identity, and it is part of the individual’s plural identity (Author A, 2012). It is part of the academic’s social and professional positioning (Author A et al., 2009). The writer’s identity is shaped throughout their life, partly through who they are in their own eyes and partly through the environment in which they live, whether it is the home or an external environment (such as academic or professional contexts). Social mirroring, that is, the way society sees the writer and influences them as a writer, is undoubtedly an important component in the development of the writer’s identity. It is part of the individual’s positioning in society and a driving force in the development of their writing. The academic writes because they are who they are. The writing stems from their interiority; they write because they think (Author A, 2016b).

## Self-study research

Up until two decades ago, self-study was not perceived as an acceptable mode of scientific research. In the field of education and teacher education, for example, the various research genres have evolved gradually, from cause and effect studies, which were mainly quantitative, characterized by the process-product approach, and conducted by objective external researchers, through interpretive studies, mainly searching for local meanings through qualitative genres such as ethnography, narrative research, phenomenological research, and discourse analysis (Borko, Whitcombe and Byrnes, 2008).

Self-study research is a type of practitioner research (Borko, Whitcombe & Byrnes, 2008), the goal of which is to understand human activity from the practitioner’s perspective within the context of their work. It, therefore, confers a dual role on the researcher—that of practitioner and that of researcher. In all the different kinds of self-study research, the researcher’s professional context is the research environment, and the issues that come up in their professional practice are the focus of investigation. In the field of education, for example, there are numerous variants of self-study approach, such as the teacher’s research about their own practice (Zeichner, 1999), the critical autobiography, and the instructional situations research (Author A, 2009). Since the research participants are researchers themselves, and the professional context is the research environment, the boundaries between research and practice tend to blur. Issues of objectivity become more complex, such as the need to validate the data of the self-study, which is essentially subjective, by various means, which are essentially objective, as well as the selection of professional literature, the critical reader, recurring themes, etc.

Scholars such as Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) argued over a decade ago that the definition of self-study is elusive. Nevertheless, those who engage in such research do so out of the common assumption that self-study research entails the researchers’ recognition that they have a foot in two worlds: that of professional practice and that of scientific research. Underlying this assumption is the idea that our knowledge stems from the contextual knowledge produced by a knowledgeable person in a particular situation (Bass, Anderson-Patton and Allender, 2002). Teachers, for example, can learn from their own experience to be involved in dialogue about critical learning experiences with their peers and to present their practical inquiries more accurately. It is both a means and an end that advance the researcher’s field of expertise (Dinkelman, 2003).

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) address the question of what makes self-study research “worth-reading” or “scientific” by setting criteria for the research quality. Since the researcher often examines their own biography in the context of self-study, they claim that a balance is needed between the researcher’s biography and their professional history, as well as the broad cultural-social context in which they operate. This balance should be reflected not only in the data they choose to collect (from themselves and others) and represent in writing, but also in the way they are analyzed, and in the way they are represented, both in writing and orally. According to Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), self-study research is a “good read” when it refers to “nodal moments” that offer the reader insights or understandings about the self, reveals the individual’s awareness and self-importance, describes character development in light of significant issues within a complex environment, gives place to dynamic struggle in human life, and offers new perspectives. While the text is written and edited by the self-study researcher, the interpretations should be compatible with the theoretical background of the study. It is a matter of conscience, reliability, and honesty, which requires a correct and undistorted view of reality. The alternative perspectives of the practitioner-researcher are valuable, and as with any good research, self-study research should be systematic, presenting rich, stable, and empirical data sources and transparency throughout (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2004).

According to Feldman (2003), in order to extend the validity of self-study research, it is advisable to pay attention to how the research procedure and research tools are presented. This can be done in various ways, such as providing a clear and detailed description of how the data is collected and explicitly clarifying the data source by adding it either within the text itself or as an appendix at the end. Likewise, it is appropriate to present the details of the research methodology, the creative ways of processing the data to produce findings, as well as to extend the triangulation beyond the data sources by including the diverse considerations included in presenting self-study research. All of these may help researchers convince readers of the validity of the research they conducted.

Self-study research is defined as a moral and political activity. The research report, besides presenting the focus of the research, its procedure, and its relevance, also shows what exists “beyond the self” and how it was developed and activated in the research (Loughran, 2007). The self-study research described in this paper is that of the narrator, who, as mentioned, served as the interviewee in the study and was then placed in a researcher position to analyze her own narrative using the methodological tools accepted in her academic discipline. In doing so, she presents her outlook on narrative research, an approach that produces a dual-vocal perspective in the present case.

## The poly/dual-vocal perspective

Researchers in the field of self-study, such as Garbett and Ovens (2016), describe this type of research as “multivoiced” in the sense that it presents multiple voices of the self in dialogue (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015). The research, they maintain, contributes to the understanding and interpretation of professionalism in the studied field and of the essence of the researcher themselves as a professional in the field. It can, sometimes, even lead to social change. In their poly-vocal self-study research in the field of teacher education, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2016) present four perspectives of four teacher educators engaged in mediating multidisciplinary self-study research in their respective communities (in the U.S. and South Africa) and in different higher education institutions. Together they developed a *bricolage* of self-study research by using dialogical tools to create, represent, and interpret data in an arts-based collaborative study. Such poly-vocal research represents the power of the “we” in innovative professional education. As part of their work, they combined different research methodologies and different interpretative lenses and applied them to the data they collected in the self-study research. This was an online dialogue that took place over four months and went on to shape their shared insights via digital communication tools such as e-mail, Skype, and Dropbox. According to them, self-study research was effective in bringing the living experience of professionals in the processes of learning and knowing to the forefront. From this angle, professional learning was perceived as immersed in the professional’s experience in the field and built up from it in the course of practice.

The presentation of different perspectives on the same data set has now begun evolving in various studies beyond self-study research. This is the case, for example, in the poly-vocal research in Kupferberg’s book (2009), which presents a variety of research methodologies applied to the same given text, in accordance with each researcher’s field of expertise. The book seeks to answer the question of the contribution of different research methodologies to text and discourse analysis. It presents seven methodologies, all from different genres of qualitative research, focusing on analyzing the same text composed of a chain of posts sent in an asynchronous online forum. The term “Rashomon” in the book’s title (referring to the Kurosawa film of the same name) reflects the importance of examining a particular topic from several points of view.

# Voice 1: Author A, the narrative researcher

My point of departure as a researcher and an academic writer was to first write about my own writing space and my behavior as a writer, a kind of “snapshot” of a scholar-writer interpreting parts of her story. I then approached other scholar-writers to collect data for the study (Author A, 2016a).

Once I completed the analysis of the stories provided by the participants, it emerged that they did not provide much detail about their writing environment or about their behavior in the course of writing, even if they did mention the writing process briefly in their stories. Therefore, as is common practice in qualitative research, I collected additional data. I contacted the participants and asked them to describe in writing the work environment in which they write, as well as their behavior as writers during this process. I also asked them to send me a photograph, or several photographs, of their writing space. This was the message I sent them by e-mail:

I am writing to you with an unconventional request, and hope for a positive response. I will understand, of course, if you should choose to do otherwise. Following my research on the writer’s identity, I have been preoccupied with the subject of the process a writer goes through in their natural work environment. Since I cannot get into the writer’s head, nor be a “fly on the wall” in your study, I thought that authentic, written information from you could be an interesting research tool. I would be delighted if you agreed to enrich the data of my research by describing in writing your writing process in your natural work environment. I would be very grateful if you could take a picture of the space in which you write and send me the photograph as evidence of your “physical writing environment.” In addition, after you write your piece, could you take a few moments to describe, in writing, what you went through during the writing process? What was your behavior as a writer like during this activity? I am referring to an authentic description, including breaks, looking at other screens (if applicable), distractions (if there were any), etc. There is no need to provide a lengthy or “scholarly” document. Any authentic document coming from the heart and from your stream of consciousness would be welcome. Looking forward to hearing from you. Anonymity guaranteed. Any response, as mentioned earlier, will be received with utmost understanding.

The images and written texts sent in by the interviewees via e-mail formed the basis for further analysis that focused on the writing space and the writer’s behavior. This has been extensively documented in my book, in which I describe the full study (Author A, 2016a). I hereby present a few excerpts from the participants’ descriptions. The first is of the work environment:

My study is my favorite place in the house. It’s the corner where I spend most of the time I am at home. It’s the corner where I think, create, shape, formulate, get my thinking gears going, learn new things, and produce new things. Because it’s an important corner, and because I spend many hours in it— I have made it as comfortable as possible and very inviting: on my desktop, there is a computer with a large screen and an ergonomic mouse, a printer-scanner-camera, stationery, a paper tray, and a desk lamp. There is a lot of space on the desk to place the books and articles that I am reading, printed pages that I am editing, and more. Next to the desk, there is a chest of drawers that contain all the things I need for my work in terms of office supplies, and around the desk, there are bookshelves, the closest of which to the workstation contain the books that I use frequently in my work.

The second is of the writer’s behavior. The interviewee used the metaphor of a “patchwork quilt,” followed by a “quilt of words” to describe the process:

I turn the text over and over, like a patchwork quilt. Each patch has to connect to the one before it and to be slightly different...[That is] the “quilt of words” that is created as a result of the changes and the reorganization.

And yet the process is not just a patchwork quilt or a quilt of words, as described by the academic. It is a rhizomatic process, that is, it is non-linear, it moves in multiple directions, as described in the next vignette.

I read the previous 33-page draft that I started writing in the summer and continued during the semester break... I started to read and correct it...

When I am displeased with what I read and ask myself over and over again who could possibly be interested in the things I write apart from myself, I get up and go to the fridge. At this point, I settle for a glass of water due to the diet I have forced myself on after the terrible holiday binging...

Meanwhile, I look at the clock and see that an hour has gone by during which I have read less than ten pages. And then comes the first phone call from my daughter, who asks me why I answered the phone like that, and I inform her that I am busy, and one from my sister-in-law, who spends half an hour telling me about... and asks me to send her the recipe for the spinach quiche I served at the holiday meal.

And it’s hard to get back...

So I send her the recipe. I take the opportunity to also read my incoming mail.

As I read, I remember that I once wrote something about..., which could be relevant to my current writing. I start to go through my various articles until I find it and take from it the relevant sentences and add them to what I’ve written.

Then I remember one of the researchers I mentioned in an article I wrote a few years ago... and then I start to look for the reference. I find a first draft of the article in a lecture at [conference], but remember that I’ve already mentioned a more up-to-date version. I wander among the various papers in my various folders until, finally, it turns out that I’ve already mentioned it in the article and written down the precise reference.... Wow, what a waste of time, the things I do, just to get away from the writing...

I came back after three hours of rest and continued to read the text, to add and correct. Now, in a state of relative freshness, it actually seems interesting. Maybe somebody will find it interesting after all?

A study of the writer’s environment and behavior (Author A, 2016a) thus shows that according to the writer’s perception, the writing environment is, in fact, both a physical and a metaphysical space, which feed each other. Within this space, the writer’s behavior is mainly rhizomatic (Back, 2014), in the sense that it moves in many directions, is non-linear, simultaneous, and full of distractions, most of which are the distractions of daily life blending in with the writer’s life. The rhizome is like a “grid,” and there is no prescribed trajectory of progress that the writer must follow. Their writing-behavior is not linear, but full of reversals; it does not progress “from point A to point B” directly, but revolves in circles, which sometimes seems frustrating, sometimes trivial. Nevertheless, each time something new emerges in the process of writing, which gradually creates the written text. For the scholar-writer, life seeps into writing, and writing seeps into life. The scholar-writer requires a comfortable, “hallowed,” and inspiring work environment, an environment that the writer designs for their convenience, well-being, and as part of their overall identity, not only as a writer but also as a full person, with all the components of their identity. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between the writing space and the writer’s behavior. The perception of the physical writing space defines the writer’s behavior, and the writer’s behavior, in turn, influences the writing space. These together reflect the identity of the writer.

The narrative-phenomenological study I conducted (Author A, 2016a, b) examined the personal narratives of writers in academia, while Author B’s self-study focuses on the question of her own identity as a writer and an academic, from the perspective of the researcher herself, who was, as mentioned earlier, in the participant’s position in my study.

# Voice 2: Author B, self-study researcher from the linguistic perspective

As a linguist, I deal with a lot of written texts. For the present study, I focused on the language of the text I myself produced. The language aspect of my research work is so essential that the definition of my “self” as a researcher is anchored in the linguistic abilities I recognize in myself (“writing is research,” my great mentor Professor Aharon Dotan told me when I was writing my doctorate thesis). Likewise, I find dealing with the very act of writing emotionally rewarding. Statements that indicate as much appear in a letter I sent to Author A even before I started describing the writing process, as evidenced in the section quoted below:

First, I must point out that writing is not an easy thing for me. With every word “blood is drawn.” The very fact that I write amazes me time and time again— how I, a certified dyslexic, turned my disability into a profession. I guess I write because I am good at analytical-logical thinking and have a good grasp of the language. I also very much appreciate aesthetics, and this is reflected in the language I use, and even more so— in the linguistic choices I make and in my awareness of meter, the inner rhythm of the prose. Additionally, even though I produce academic-scientific writing, a lot of emotion goes into it— it is connected to need, to passion. My work environment provides me with the conditions to “feel” the writing, which is linked to home.

The narrative text I produced consisted of about 1200 words and was written in three stages. First, in responding to Author A’s request, I already started fulfilling it; the second stage was when I wrote most of the text; and in the third stage, I added a paragraph following an oral conversation with Author A. The text deals with my personal writing habits in the home environment; it includes the ritual that accompanies writing (before and during), and ends with a reflection about the process.

The text was sent by e-mail to Author A, who is a colleague and the primary investigator in this study. Thus, even though it is a “requisitioned product,” it belongs to the letter genre, or rather to the personal letter genre, because, in accordance with Author A’s guidance (see above) it “came from the heart and from a stream of consciousness.” Although the communication channel, the “contact” to borrow Jakobson’s (1960) term, often dictates the genre of writing, the use of electronic means had no effect in this case.

What is a personal letter? The definition of the letter, which establishes a communication channel and an addressee-recipient relationship, may suggest an outline for its stylistic characterization: it is subjective and associative in nature; its language is connotative, metaphorical, and figurative, original in its combinations and flexible; and in terms of structure, the most prominent feature of the letter is the use of conventional opening and closing statements. All of these elements are present in the text I sent to Author A.

The textual product is generously punctuated; it includes full stops (125), commas (84)—therefore a lot more full stops than commas, ellipses (38!), dashes (19), parentheses (19), colons (7), and question marks (5). There are no exclamation marks in the text. Punctuation is a prominent feature in both my academic and personal writing. In the latter kind, it helps me not only to clarify the logical-syntactic structure of the texts but also (perhaps predominantly) to communicate intonation and emotions.

My use of punctuation is not necessarily conventional (according to the Academy of the Hebrew Language, Klaley Hapisuk), often it reflects intonation and follows my own interpretation of modal functions (Nir, 1990). For example, a period will sometimes appear in the middle of a phrase. Example 1:

– Sometimes I feel the need to stop writing and read so as not to get lost. To make it clear to myself what’s innovative about what I’m saying.

– The further along the writing comes, the longer the time I am able to spend sitting and writing gets. Not just in the mornings but throughout the day and into the night. From one work period to the next.

Parentheses in the text are meant to highlight what is being said (to clarify or summarize it) rather than suppress it. As we can see in the following example, the parentheses contain rather revealing “by-the-way” statements. Example 2:

– In times of crisis (of which we’ve had quite a few) I am a surrogate mother.

– I talk. Not just with the animals, but with the computer too. And with what I’ve written (anthropomorphizing everything).

Ellipses in the text are used mainly to convey intonation rather than its conventional usage (in academia or according to standard punctuation rules). In the text I produced, they occur frequently in descriptions of sequences of actions, where its purpose is mainly to slightly suspend the reading and slow down its pace. Example 3:

I am always a mother, I am always a grandmother. I don’t say no. I take care of meals—on days when it’s my turn and also as a surprise. I send the kids off to school... bring them home... give rides.... do homework... prepare for exams...

By contrast, the use of consecutive commas aims to speed up the reading pace. Example 4:

Mostly I deal with texts. The most exciting part is reading the text and analyzing it. This part really sets a fire in me. **Got to read, got to analyze, to find, to understand, to explain, to generalize.**

The writing habits are described in Ø-tense, that is, in the present simple reserved for the description of habits (Kalev, 2017), embedded within which are brief descriptions of one-time episodes, told in the past tense. Example 5:

Sometimes I **say** a well-known thing and **make** a note to myself to add a reference. Sometimes I **need** to stop writing and **read** so as not to get lost. To **make** it clear to myself what’s innovative about what I’m saying. Such reading **is** necessary, it **affects** the direction of writing. And then I **move** to the dining room. I **need** a big table for this. The planning—sometimes it **happens**, and sometimes it **doesn’t**. {[this is where the past event is embedded] It’s **happened** before, that my husband **came** back from work, and I **told** him “I’ve written an article,” I was **rewarded** with praise of course (can’t live without encouragement from the family), and then I **told** him [quotation in present tense]: “Now I just **need** another month to flesh it out.” That is, I **had** a title, I **had** an opening paragraph (can’t do without it) and I **had** subheadings. From there, the finish line **was** a short way away—only a month.} [Here the story goes back to the habitual present] I **write** alone or with collaborators. I **like** to write with collaborators. Sometimes there **is** work distribution, but mostly we **write** together. There **is** a set day, etc.

The text is delivered by a first-person narrator, which is evident in the frequent use of the personal pronoun “I” and the corresponding possessive and objective pronouns. Such use expresses the writer’s subjective presence within the text (Livnat, 2011). In the text I produced, the subjective presence is self-evident because, from the beginning, I was asked to talk about myself, which I did, and this presence is suitable to the personal letter genre.

The text I produced is notable for its irregularity in terms of sentence length. It is mostly written in short sentences and has quite a few short sentences composed of just one or two words (in Hebrew), next to sprawling sentences that exceed the usual sentence length. Texts written in short sentences often evoke a sense of fragmentation. Sometimes the result is an impression of reduction on behalf of the writer, and the reader is asked to fill in the gaps (Dudai, 1990). Sometimes the opposite impression is created, that of bustle and overflow. In “average Hebrew” (a term coined by Chaim Rabin, 1958), that is, in everyday, matter-of-fact written Hebrew, which is the principal language of written communication, sentence length ranges from 14 to 18 words (Shlesinger, 1995). Irregularity of sentence length, i.e., the disruption of balance in the text as a result of combining short sentences alongside long sentences that go far beyond customary length, is characteristic of emotional texts (Fruchtman, 1990), a category that includes the personal letter. We will see this in Example 6 (the numbers in parentheses in the Hebrew text indicate the number of words in a sentence):

אני מתחילה תמיד מההתחלה (4). מהכותרת (1). היא משתנה כמובן, אבל צריכה להיות כותרת (7). אחר כך משפטי פתיחה (4). גם להם מותר להשתנות, אבל הם צריכים להיות על הדף, הם אלה שמובילים אותי לעיקרי הדברים (20). ואז אני מרגישה סיפוק רב, הנה התחלתי, ואפשר לקום... להסתובב עוד קצת סביב הזנב... להתיישב... לקרוא מה שכתבתי... ללטף את הכתוב... להזיז משפטים... לנסח מחדש... ושוב לקרוא ואז להמשיך... והופס, נולדה עוד פסקה (33). הכתיבה והעריכה מתבצעות בד בבד (5). הביבליוגרפיה משתלבת תוך כדי כתיבה (5).

I always start from the beginning. From the title. It changes of course, but there has to be a title. Then the opening sentences. They also are allowed to change, but they have to be on the page, they are the ones that lead me to the principal matter at hand. And then I feel a great deal of satisfaction, there I’ve started, and now I can get up... chase my tail for a little while... sit back down... read what I’ve written... stroke the words... move sentences around... rephrase things... and reread and then move on... and whoops, another paragraph is born. The writing and the editing take place simultaneously. The bibliography is integrated in the course of writing.

Another particularity of the text has to do with verb usage. Verb usage has a lot to teach us about the writer and their writing style, and I would like to focus here on just one semantic aspect of it. It is customary to characterize texts based on their level of verb “activeness” (Fruchtman, 1990; Yamini, 2013). In the text in question (to be illustrated in the example that follows), it is, in fact, the low-active verbs—such as **sit, not hear, not see, not feel**—that often express meaningful work, whereas high-active verbs—such as **open, make, get up, chase, organize**—indicate lack of activity, or activity that is irrelevant to work. Example 7:

I start from the usual necessary tasks—food for the dog and the two house cats... food for the yard cats... a stroll with the dog... coffee... **chase** my own tail...**open** doors to rooms (the empty rooms are closed at night because of the dog and the cats), **open** the blinds all over the house. I need light. Lots of light. I have to **hear** the birds outside the study window. To **see** them. I **make** the bed... Thrilled if I also need to **turn on** the washing machine (it helps me postpone the moment). And then I **sit down**...**staring**. I **get up**. I have to **organize** my desk, because you can’t write on a cluttered desk. I **wipe** it clean, because the cats *walk around* on it. They *come in* through the window—*go out* through the window, all by way of my desk. I **play** one game of solitaire to cheer myself up, and then there’s no choice. Here we go. When I write, I **do not hear** anything. My son is a drummer. For years he drummed at full volume, and I **did not hear** it. I decided that I **do not hear**. I **did not hear**.

This overabundance of ostensibly idle actions, characterized by a high level of activity (pedal to the metal in neutral gear, so to speak), is the ritual that helps me gather the mental strength to engage in writing. Writing forces me to seal myself off from environmental distractions. This “sealing off” is, to my mind, not a ∅-level activity, it is a skill—I have taught myself not to hear. The development of this ability has been vital to me since, for many years, I have worked in unreasonable noise conditions.

The story is also replete with instances of personification and metaphorical statements. Among these, especially numerous are expressions related to the animal world, such as: chasing one’s own tail, stroking the words, another paragraph is born (these can be seen at the end of Example 6). The metaphors relate strongly to my personal world, where animals occupy a place of honor.

Quite often, the text confers the feeling of the kind of obsession that accompanies ritual. This feeling is created not only via the short, asyndetic sentences or the “idle bustle” and “creative idleness,” but also through the use of modal verbs that belong to the semantic field of “obligation” and repetition. Example 8:

...open the blinds all over the house. I **need** light. Lots of light. I **have to** hear the birds outside the study window. To see them. I make the bed... Thrilled if I also **need** to turn on the washing machine (it helps me postpone the moment). And then I sit down...staring. I get up. I **have to** organize my desk, because you **can’t** write on a cluttered desk.

The examples I have shown reveal that the text is one of absolute frankness. Frankness and disclosure are means of persuasion, for they are directed at the reader’s emotions rather than their intellect and are persuasive precisely because they do not contain any desire to persuade (Baruch, 1990).

Finally, in the correspondence prior to our research, when asked to take pictures of my work environment, I invited Author A, the primary investigator, to visit my Facebook page. This page (created long before our study) showcases how I choose to present myself and provides a graphic answer to her question.

You can go to my Facebook and see my study as the background. This choice says that I love my study, it’s a part of me. Research is a meaningful and powerful element in the definition of my identity. You can see there the contrast between the study and the image of me in sunglasses seated in a lawn chair (with a cup of coffee)—a picture taken in the North of Italy: it combines work, on the one hand, with the yearning for a vacation without burdens or responsibility, without a framework... removed and disconnected from daily reality, on the other hand. I didn’t think about any of these things when I created this representation. I think about it now and am already answering your question.

While the cover photo symbolizes professional commitment, the profile picture represents the longing for freedom. Linguistically, the contrast is expressed in the use of positive and negative statements: the description of the cover photo focuses on positive associations of love, strength, and meaning, while the description of the profile picture expresses the need for release from commitment, and therefore contains statements phrased in the negative— “without burdens or responsibility, without a framework.”

# Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we stretch the boundaries of the narrative by presenting different points of view on the genre of personal narrative: the first from the perspective of the primary investigator, who analyzed personal narratives of scholar-writers in academia; the second from the perspective of a research interviewee who analyzed her own self-narrative using the tools of her academic discipline. The present study is, in fact, a study-within-a-study, and is dual-vocal in the sense that it presents a second voice—the voice of a research interviewee—in addition to the voice of the primary investigator.

An examination of the two voices raises the question of the significance of a “study-within-a-study” or, in other words, the self-study research of an interviewee within narrative research. One can see in self-study within a narrative study a kind of “babushka” (a Russian wooden doll that contains other dolls in descending sizes). This metaphor begs the question: what does this self-study mean for the researchers and for the field of scientific-methodological knowledge in the realm of narrative studies? The narrative analysis conducted by Author A, the primary investigator, presents a profile of the writer’s behavior and writing space in procedural and descriptive terms. The study (Author A, 2016a) shows that writing is a rhizomatic process and that for the scholar-writer life blends in with writing, and writing blends into life. The writing environment is inspiring and is part of their overall identity, not only as a writer, but also as a person. There is a dialectical relationship between the writing space and the writer’s behavior. Her research also shows that the identity of the writer is expressed in a conscious understanding of the process that produces ideas while writing, and emotionally—in the almost mystical conception attributed to writing as a means of raising ideas and feelings “from the depths” of one’s self, a process that is inexorable and tightly bound to the writer’s personal essence.

Author A has previously written about the impact of the narrative interview process on the narrative researcher (Author A, 2010). The main claim she posits is that narrative research is important not only as a significant tool for the study of society, but also as a pedagogical tool that enhances the researcher’s own professional development. The self-study adds another tier to the body of knowledge presented by the primary investigator—emic knowledge, in this instance—from the point of view of the interviewee, who is herself a researcher in her own field. Beyond the deeper insights about the writer’s behavior and writing space provided by the self-study analysis, it appears that narrative research impacts not only the researcher, but also the research subject. When the interviewee is herself a researcher and an academic, it is natural that she should strive to look at her personal work (the self-narrative) from the scientific-methodological perspective of the discipline in which she operates.

Author B performed in-depth analysis of her narrative from the linguistic perspective in the aim of understanding her identity as a person and as a writer and in reference to the dialectic between the physical writing space and her behavior as a writer. It reflects the very person that she is.

Author B’s participation as a respondent in the narrative study led her to look into the “writing self.” The very instruction to produce an “authentic document coming from the heart and from your stream of consciousness” (rather than a scholarly academic document, which we, as scholars, are accustomed to writing) sent her on a mental and emotional journey in time and space—from the here and now to distant and forgotten realms. It was a journey that gave her insight into some hitherto undiscovered truths (that lay formant somewhere in her unconsciousness) and into the link between the personality-behavioral aspects of the writing process and the aggregated characteristics of the writing itself. The linguistic analysis of the text she produced, allowed her to deepen her acquaintance with her writing self thanks to the emergent characteristics of the written text. These were both emotional and cognitive in nature (as Author A found in her study) since the text is a medium that allows, on the one hand, for disclosure and the shedding of restraints and, on the other hand, it enables the writer to return to the text for processing. This latter option of control includes the refinement of statements, censorship, style improvement, etc. (Gilat, 2013), and since the text in question is a personal letter, it can be compared to “planned speech”(Rosner, 2014).

In her linguistic analysis, Author B exposed another virtue of the written text, and that is the possibility of recognizing behaviors that were familiar to her while also illuminating aspects that were unfamiliar, such as the obsessive ritual. A reverse process also occurred. From self-acquaintance arose insights as to linguistic-stylistic choices. For example, the “self” that is closely connected to animals is the one that led Author B to use metaphors related to the animal world.

The cohesion in Author B’s presentation of her “self” was also strengthened by the graphic description she gave when inviting Author A to visit her Facebook profile (see previous section). The cover photo and the profile picture chosen for the Facebook profile complete Author B’s personal narrative—they are coherent with the content of the text and its language, and together reflect dominant streaks in her personal identity. Thus, Author B’s narrative was, in fact, presented in the study on three levels: content, language, and graphic description. It attempted to show how the linguistic means and graphic documentation serve the subjective aspect of the story and how they help to construct feelings and thoughts and present the “self” in a cohesive way. As a result, it seems that the use of three-dimensional analysis to examine the degree of coherence between content and related media allows the self-study researcher to determine the degree of their own credibility as a writer. Furthermore, concerning the issue of the scholar-writer and her writing environment in Author B’s research, one can glean insights in this regard not only from the overt layer that indicates the symbiosis created during writing between the writer and the still environment that surrounds her, as well as the interactions with her family and pets, but also from the implied emotions engendered during and following the writing activity. As Author B mentions in the text, “In answer to your question about how I felt while writing: I felt an inner smile settle on my face and a warm bubble wrap around me.” The experience of writing is depicted as an act accompanied by an “inner smile,” while the environment is depicted as a “warm bubble.” This leads to the conclusion that, paradoxically, the busy, demanding, noisy, and distraction-heavy writing space described in the text is ostensibly the warm bubble that allows the writer to go inward, into the intimate, smiling, private self.

Finally, the self-study research, which, in the present case, is a study-within-a-study, expanded the significance of the study by presenting an additional perspective to that presented in the original narrative research. On the one hand, the self-study broadened the findings of the narrative research, shedding light via linguistic means on the understandings and conclusions that emerged in the study; on the other hand, it added another perspective from both an emotional and academic point of view, stemming from the linguistic observations of the interviewee, who, in this case, became an investigator of her self-narrative. This perspective is another way to “know” and understand the narrative (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016), and in other words, another way to stretch the boundaries of the narrative and present it as dual-vocal.

Moreover, the self-study research described in this paper contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the specific professional field and its accepted research methodology and to the question of the essence of the self-researcher as a professional in their field (Garbett & Ovens, 2016). It enables the interviewee to make their voice heard rather than simply reading the results of the study or the “story report” (Sabar Ben Yehoshua, 1990), as is customary in the various genres of qualitative research. By taking an active part in the research, they get to present their own professional perspective on the self-narrative. This is another layer in the study, which stretches the boundaries of narrative research beyond the place of the primary narrative investigator and makes room for a poly-vocal academic dialogue between different researchers who bring different kinds of academic knowledge to the text.

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