



A Cascade of Authentic Reflection in Poetry  
University of Warwick & University of Manchester

# TALK & ECHO

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# PREFACE



This collection is a tapestry woven from the raw threads of everyday conversations – the kind we all have but rarely pause to reflect upon. Written by students of drama education and applied linguistics, these poems are not the work of seasoned poets but of those immersed in the nuances of language and human interaction. These students – actors, writers, and thinkers – explore the delicate art of navigating social relationships: friendships, family ties, love, and moments of quiet self-reflection.

Inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's notion that 'Poetry: the best words in the best order', we chose this form to reveal insights drawn from applied linguistic theories. Each poem serves as a humble offering, born from a deep passion for language and literature. We believe that through careful arrangement, poetry can become a bridge, translating complex linguistic concepts into clear and accessible meanings, distilled into concise verses.

Within these lines, you'll find the unpolished beauty of real voices, where wisdom is gleaned not from grand revelations but from the simple, intimate exchanges we often overlook.

While none of these poems adhere to a traditional form, they are all imbued with the principles of conversation analysis – an analytic method that unpacks how people communicate in social interactions by focusing on the structure and meanings of dialogue.

# PREFACE



This framework illuminates the intricate dance of human interaction: how we listen, interpret, and respond not just to words, but to the often unnoticed rhythms of relationships. These principles guide the poems, allowing us to grasp the subtle moments where meaning unfolds – moments that are seen but may go unperceived.

Every line, every pause captures the delicate balance of understanding and being understood, reminding us that even the smallest exchange holds the potential to shape human connection.

As you read, we invite you to listen for the familiar echoes of your own experiences,

the fleeting moments of clarity, the struggles, and the everyday wisdom that comes from simply being with others. At their hearts, these poems are conversations between us and you, between our lives and yours.

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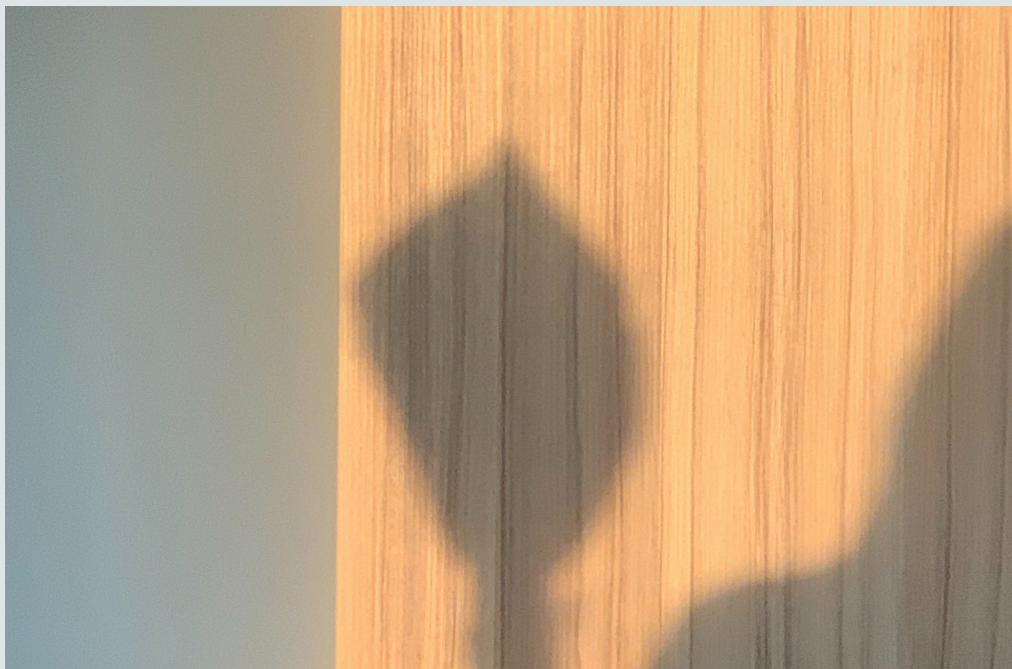
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# ENCOUNTER

by Yanyan Li



Wintry air fills the night,  
with coffee's aroma.  
"Who are you?" I asked.  
"Who are you?" You smiled.  
We moved closer,  
to what comes next.

Pouring rain, wild wind  
held us in place,  
cups filled.  
We talked, we shared –  
sprouts of friendship,  
growing in spring.

"He left, without a word." I confessed.  
"She left, beyond my reach." You murmured.  
Both grateful for this rescue,  
a new start, not even a loss.  
"Life goes on," I believed.  
"The sun still rises," peace in your eyes.

A warm hug, a weary day,  
a nodding reply, mutual gaze –  
shaking hands, farewell,  
raindrops, milk dots  
on coffee, meaning –  
an encounter that lingers.

# AUTHOR'S REMARK



This poem reveals how people often grow closer through shared experiences. A woman, lingering in a café during a downpour, opens up to a man she has just met by sharing a personal sad story. In response, he shares a similar story. When one person discloses something intimate, it often invites the other to reveal their own experiences in return. This mutual exchange encourages them to stay longer, as the sense of connection and mutuality keeps the conversation flowing. Together, they create a shared space where they can learn about each other, uncovering both similarities and differences. By finding common ground, they cultivate a sense of belonging within this newly formed social bond.

# 2 A.M.

*by Zhitong Chen*

The voice cuts through the wall,  
loud and bold, as if it owns the air.  
Besieged, I dare myself to act,  
hovering outside your room, a plea  
caught on my tongue – “be quiet” –  
yet it never truly escapes my lips.



Each note presses against my fatigue.  
Ignorance swirls in your melody,  
laced with disregard. I return  
to your door, anger flickering,  
hands poised to knock, words  
still trapped behind clenched teeth.

The door swings open, abrupt.  
I force a casual greeting,  
an attempt to ease the tension:  
“Hey, are you feeling stressed?”  
You stare, puzzled. I shift  
my tone: “Work has worn me thin.”

A request lingers in my politeness,  
and you, surprisingly, apologise.  
My heart pounds, breath shallow,  
as your singing fades, the music  
softens, and the night’s noise  
settles into peaceful silence.

# AUTHOR'S REMARK

The poem captures my fear of confronting a potential conflict, which kept me hesitating to act and even resenting someone who existed only in my imagination. I see it as a reminder of a small victory, where I faced what seemed like a difficult interaction and discovered a version of myself that is calmer and more strategic than the anxious wreck I had envisioned. Writing this poem reminded me of a children's rhyme: "We're going on a bear hunt – We can't go over it, we can't go under it, we've just gotta go through it." Yet, 'going through it' doesn't always mean tackling challenges in a hard or harsh manner. This experience made me reflect on how my internal rehearsals of conflict tend to be overly direct, resulting in a thorny and unapproachable self. By softening my approach and handling the conversation with care, I found a much more positive outcome.





# SHADES OF NO

*by Yanyan Li*

“No! Never!”

I snapped at her call,

“Just let me be!”

I shouted at his demand.

They are my parents;

they understand my temper.

“Well, I might come,”

I answered her invite.

“But I can’t commit,”

I added with a smile.

She is my friend;

I speak plainly, yet with care.

“Yes, of course,”

I responded to his request,

“I’ll give my all.”

I honour duty and chain of command.

He is my boss;

I work extra hours, though reluctantly.



# AUTHOR'S REMARK



This poem reflects my past conversations with family, friends, and employers, highlighting the moments when I either express or avoid disagreements. The way I communicate in these interactions reveals how carefully I consider the level of intimacy and closeness in each relationship. For instance, using ‘never’ with an exclamation conveys a strong, immediate refusal, while ‘just let me be’ directly expresses resistance to external influence. Softer expressions, such as modal verbs like ‘might’ help temper disagreement, while saying ‘yes, of course’ indicates instant agreement, even when I have reservations. People often feel more comfortable expressing risky opinions to their parents than to friends or bosses. The closeness we feel in different relationships influences how we talk and act in social situations.

# I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND

*by Stella Shi*

I don't think you understand  
when I say I am sad.  
Don't urge me to cheer up;  
I wouldn't say it if I could.

I don't think you understand  
when I say meaning is a sleight of hand  
Don't urge me to find it again;  
if there were a show on the purpose of existence,  
my name would top the visitor list.

I don't think you understand  
when I say it feels like the end.  
It's not about ego and ingratitude;  
it's like a once-pristine baby-blue sky  
smothered by endless dark clouds.  
Heavy breathers,  
hard to breathe –  
then pure silence.  
The sky has lost its light,  
blanketed by a hibernation duvet  
in the midst of summer.  
I'm breathless.  
I won't try harder.

I don't think you understand  
when I say I need a therapist's hand.  
Treatments in A&E address physical needs;  
why is there hesitation when the mind calls for aid?

I don't think you understand  
that talking about suicide is not a sin.  
Don't block your ear and quit the stand –  
like pulling one hand away from the other;  
overstretching only causes strain.

I don't think you even tried  
to understand  
to refrain from judgement,  
to consider why.

It's not your fault, Dad,  
but it's not mine either.

You don't need to understand;  
one day I'll cover myself  
under my stand.





## AUTHOR'S REMARK

This poem is inspired by interactions between a daughter who feels misunderstood in her attempts to communicate mental health struggles to her father. Desperate to express her feelings, she even hints at suicidal thoughts, yet her father chooses to ignore the situation, pretending that everything is fine. Writing these experiences into a poem differs from processing them through other formats, such as journaling or self-talk. Poetry urges writers to not only focus on the content but also on the beauty of wording and phrasing. Even when confronting harsh experiences, the poetic form encouraged me to think and narrate with rhythm. The emotions expressed become amplified: happiness feels even happier, while sadness feels even sadder.

# MOTION

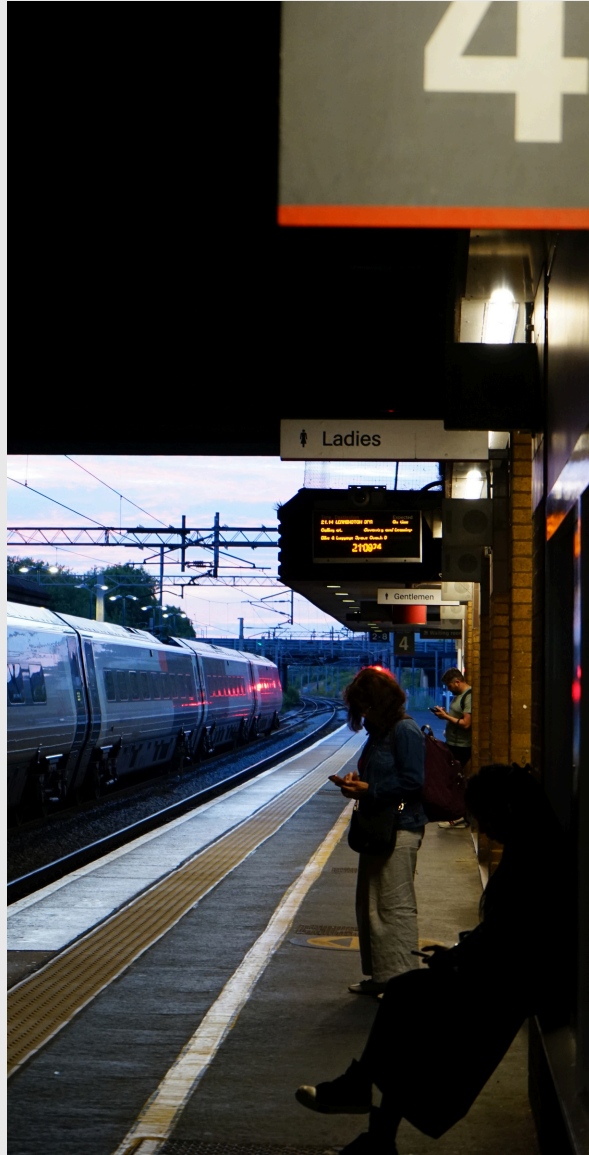
*by Yanyan Li*

Our eyes meet.  
Heads nod in greeting –  
grace and warmth exchanged,  
no words spoken.

A train whistles.  
A hand guides in passing.  
Our cheeks turn  
to where I go, where you head.

Bodies lean back,  
a gentle retreat –  
gratitude in a smile,  
a bow that expresses care.

Stars shine  
in the dance of moonlight.  
A fleeting view  
fades at the silent station.



# AUTHOR'S REMARK

This poem illustrates the power of communication beyond spoken words. Meeting eyes, nodding heads, and the warmth of a smile convey meanings through nonverbal actions. Each gesture and gaze carries its own significance, reflecting emotions like gratitude and care. The imagery of the train and the fading view enhances the sense of connection between the two individuals, emphasising how their silent exchange speaks volumes. This serves as a reminder that in managing social relationships, it's essential to recognise the nuances of nonverbal communication and the subtle cues that can deepen our understanding of one another, even in silence.

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# SILENCE

by Yanyan Li

How do you think?

(1.2)

Uh. I- it's um- [so;

[No worries, take your time.

Can you understand what I meant?

(1.6)

Yeah:::, let me see. [So;

[I guess it is fine.

Shall we move on to the next?

(0.8)

Okay so:::, I guess [so-

[But wait, I still have a point to refine.

Silence postpones acts that face-threaten,  
mitigates for several seconds,  
maintains relationship and intents;  
in stillness, harmony augments.



Transcription convention[1]:

( ) duration of silence in seconds

word sound stretch

[ start of simultaneous talk

] end of simultaneous talk

word- cut-off

[1] Adapted from Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. *Conversation analysis*, 13-31.





## AUTHOR'S REMARK

This poem, which depicts a group conversation between native and non-native speakers, examines the role of silence in communication. Silence does not always indicate disengagement or lack of interest; rather, it can reflect an effort to respect others and ease tension. The dialogue illustrates pauses and hesitations that show an awareness of the other person's difficulties, creating opportunities for them to speak and be heard. By allowing time for reflection, silence can strengthen relationships and deepen understanding. Ultimately, the poem encourages us to rethink our perceptions of silence, reminding us that nonverbal cues – such as pauses and the flow of speech – are crucial in conveying meaning and enhancing interactions beyond mere words.

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# FLAVOURS OF FAVOURS

by Jerry Zheng



## 1.Sourness

"Excuse me, can you...?"

Her eyes tighten before he finishes, still fixated on her screen. She shifts an inch; he nods in thanks, unseen. The air curdles in silence, seeping into the sourness between the seats.

## 2.Sweetness

"Some slips in the file." He smiles like sugar dissolving in the teacup. "Oh?" She replies, face lifting slowly, honeyed yet edged, veiling a subtle sting. "Cheers," they say in unison, appearing sweet, but their laughter fades too soon.

## 3.Bitterness

"That's a good approach, but ..."

He comments in a polished tone. Her hands clasp tightly, fingers still, each word tasting bitter on her tongue. "We'll revisit this," he concludes, tucking the bitterness away in his briefcase.

## 4.Spiciousness

"Can you pass me the pepper?"

He doesn't meet her gaze as she asks. "The soup you made is flavourless." Words pass like the spice over the table, familiar but never enough, shrouding the clatter of forks, and the unsaid.

# AUTHOR'S REMARK

The poem explores the subtle intricacies of social interactions and the role of politeness in shaping our relationships. I seek to express how different types of politeness – ranging from formal to personal – impact our experiences with strangers, friends, and colleagues. The metaphor of taste – sour, sweet, bitter, spicy – emerges from my own encounter with emotional ‘flavours’ in daily conversations. I reflect on moments when politeness serves as both a bridge and a barrier, as well as instances where it conceals my true feelings, prompting me to question how often we hide behind social conventions. This realisation has encouraged me to be more mindful in future social situations, both for myself and for others.



# SHARED



I lifted my eyes in confusion,  
gazing at you for clarification.  
You faltered, lost in hesitation,  
silent, without further explanation.

Then a laugh broke the tension,  
an error, a smile, a subtle connection.  
Another laugh followed, a shared fusion,  
two together, easing my self-protection.

Why did you laugh? Was it at my flaw?  
Why did he join in? Was it unity they saw?  
Should I laugh too, as a smile had grown,  
Should I be louder, or just let it be known?

Laugh-at turns into laugh-with,  
dissolving threats in bursts of mirth.  
Let laughter mend and break the ice,  
as strained relations find their worth.

by Yanyan Li

# LAUGHTER



# AUTHOR'S REMARK



This poem delves into the complex role of laughter in communication, emphasising its function as a social tool for resolving interactional troubles. In the scene, one student laughs at another's mistake, but the student being laughed at join in the laughter, easing the tension between them.

While the initial act of laughing at someone highlights the face-threatening nature of such behaviour, shared laughter shifts the mood and fosters a sense of connection, lowering defensive barriers. This poem demonstrates that shared laughter can reduce anxiety in uncomfortable situations, acting as a remedy that breaks the ice and strengthens strained relationships.



# AFTER WORDS

As we turn the final page of *Talk and Echo*, we are met not with silence, but with the reverberation of voices – spoken, half-spoken, and held in the spaces between. This collection does not end with words; it lingers in the air like an unfinished conversation, an echo that bounces off the walls of memory and feeling, returning to us in unexpected moments. These poems, grounded in the rawness of everyday speech, remind us that communication is not just about what we say, but also about what we leave unsaid, what hangs in the air after the talking stops.



Here, we reflect deeply on our past conversations with a diverse array of people in various settings, distilling the most impactful and relevant findings from our interactional and educational research for our readers. Through poetry, we hope to transform complex observations into accessible messages that feels lived and relatable rather than burdened with data or analysis.

# AFTER WORDS



These verses pulse with the rawness of real life, capturing frustration in the midnight hour, joyfulness in encounters, the healing power of shared laughter, and the unique flavours of disagreements and misunderstanding that vary across relationships, all rich in their unspoken meanings and emotions. *Talk and Echo* mirrors the authentic, direct exchange of talks and emotions while exploring the echoes – the subtleties and meanings that follow, sometimes faint, sometimes overwhelming.

It is our way of writing: refusing to romanticise or dramatise communication, while acknowledging that talking can be complex and that relationships are built on the fragile foundation of half-formed thoughts and unsaid words. Within this complexity lies something profoundly meaningful.

# AFTER WORDS

As we close *Talk and Echo*, we are reminded that conversation is not a one-way street. It is a dialogue – one that continues long after the last word is spoken. It invites us to listen more closely. It urges us to hear the echoes that our words leave behind, to recognise the weight of our silence, and to understand that even the smallest exchanges can shape our connections with those around us.



So, as the final lines fade into memory, we are left attuned to the rhythms of our own conversations. May you listen for the echoes in your life – those that bounce back long after the talk has ended. For it is in these echoes that we truly begin to understand not only others, but ourselves.



# TALK & ECHO

