FIRST YEAR SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING/RESEARCH NEXUS

Kevin Watson: *Department of Linguistics, University of Canterbury*
<kevin.watson@canterbury.ac.nz>

Abstract

Although teaching and research have a symbiotic relationship in many institutions' mission statements, as academic staff we can sometimes view them as being direct competitors for our time, particularly perhaps with teaching at undergraduate level. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of our teaching at this level is at least *research-led*, where students learn about research findings in the field and also about the research interests of lecturing staff. It is arguably more difficult to follow a *research-based* approach, where students learn as researchers from a curriculum driven by inquiry-based activities. Hattie & Marsh (1996: 534) recommend that the teaching/research nexus should be driven by (1) the construction of knowledge by students rather than the imparting of knowledge by instructors, (2) the construction of assignments that reward deep learning, and (3) approaches which emphasize the uncertainty of the task. In this paper, I outline and reflect on several ways in which I have tried to engage undergraduate students in research activity, with the aim of having them produce original research projects. The main focus is an introductory sociolinguistics course in which I ask students to carry out a study of lexical variation in New Zealand by building upon Bauer and Bauer's (2003) 'Playground Talk' project. I discuss the benefits and outline several challenges of engaging first year undergraduate students in sociolinguistic research, and conclude that doing so is advantageous to the students, who can engage more effectively in the subject matter, and that it is also helpful for academics as we try to balance teaching and research commitments.

1. Introduction

Teaching and research have a symbiotic relationship in many institutions' mission statements, and as academics we are often encouraged to reflect on how our work connects with the teaching/research 'nexus'. Typically, however, the practices and discourses surrounding teaching and research reflect separation rather than symbiosis. At the institutional level we might be recognised and rewarded differently for each activity (e.g. in promotion applications, where conventional wisdom is that success in research is viewed more favourably than success in teaching), and at the systemic level we must apply to different funding bodies for research and teaching (e.g. in New Zealand, the Marsden Fund for research vs Ako Aotearoa for teaching). At the personal level, we might simply see teaching and research as direct competitors for our time. Nevertheless, many academics are expected to do both of these activities, occupying what Tennant et al. (2009: 170) call a 'hybrid', often contradictory, space. In this paper, I outline and reflect on how I have tried to engage students in research activity. I focus on a first year undergraduate course, because it is arguably at this level where the tension between research and teaching is most keenly felt (Zamorski 2002). I begin with a discussion of some of the scholarly work which has focussed on the teaching/research nexus, including how the relationship has been conceived across different disciplines and academic levels. After this I introduce the first year course on which I focus for the remainder of the paper, discussing first its general structure and main content, before elaborating on the assessment tasks which are designed to develop the students' research skills. I then discuss the benefits of such an approach, along with the challenges, before concluding by outlining the lessons I have learned by teaching the course in this way.

2. The teaching/research nexus

The relationship between teaching and research is often regarded as a key facet of a university, but this was not always the case. As an example from the New Zealand context, Robertson & Bond (2005) outline the changing perspectives on the teaching/research nexus over time, using the history of the University of Canterbury (UC) as a case study. They note four 'phases' in UC's history, and chart the changing relationship between teaching and research. The first phase (1870-1945) includes the earliest days of Canterbury College when,

Robertson & Bond (2005: 514) write, 'Educationally, research was not of interest. Teaching, with a concern for mastering a body of knowledge, was emphasised'. The second phase (1945-1946) is described as a 'watershed' for the relationship between teaching and research, not least because of the publication of a manifesto instigated by Karl Popper (Allan et al. 1945) which stated that research and teaching should be seen 'not as separate functions of a University teacher but as complimentary parts of a single entity' (Allan et al. 1945: 2, cited in Robertson & Bond 2005: 519). Although this call began to be heeded in spirit, in practice it was taken as the addition of research to the existing suite of activities being conducted: 'research was to be encouraged but teaching and research were seen as separate functions' (Robertson & Bond 2005: 522). Research and teaching are reported to be more closely linked in phases 3 (1946-1990) and 4 (post 1990), by which time the teaching/research nexus had become embedded into UC's charter. It continues to be positioned prominently in the University's planning documents. For example, UC's Learning and Teaching Plan 2013-2017 states that the university 'has at its very core research-led learning and teaching' (p.2) and that 'a key aim is to encourage staff to identify ways in which their teaching can be improved by their research activities' (p.2). Similar aims can be found in the documentation of many other institutions, in New Zealand and elsewhere. But what is the reality behind such aims? What, in practice, is the relationship between teaching and research in the day-to-day work of academics? In a seminal meta-analysis addressing this question, Hattie and Marsh (1996), argue that there is in fact no overall relationship between research and teaching. They reviewed 58 studies on the matter and quantified various factors (e.g. those related to research, such as the number of publications or citations vs. those related to teaching, such as student evaluations, as well as others such as different discipline areas), and they then tested for correlations between the factors as a way of assessing the relationship between research and teaching. In total, Hattie and Marsh (1996) tested 498 correlations, but found that only 20% of them were statistically significant. On the basis of this they concluded that 'the common belief that research and teaching are inextricably entwined is an enduring myth' (p. 529). The idea that the teaching/research nexus is based on mythology is put forward elsewhere as well (e.g. Hughes 2005), but should be treated cautiously when based on quantitative measures alone. It is not clear that we should expect there to be a relationship between, for example, research *productivity*, measured by number of outputs, and teaching *quality*, measured by student evaluations, but this is exactly what Hattie and Marsh

(1996) imply when they agree with Feldman (1987: 275) who writes that 'the likelihood that research productivity actually benefits teaching is extremely small… Productivity in research and scholarship does not seem to detract from being an effective teacher'.

When work on the teaching/research nexus has used a qualitative methodology, where, for example, university staff (e.g. Newmann 1993) and students (Neumann 1994, Robertson and Beckler 2006) are interviewed about their understandings of the relationship, the conclusions are typically more positive than the results that have been presented in quantitative studies. Neumann (1994: 326), for instance, finds that students of all academic levels and in all disciplinary groups 'discussed subjects which they had enjoyed because the lecturer was at the forefront of knowledge, relevant examples from the teacher's research were used in teaching, and students were taught useful techniques which the lecturer used in his or her own research'. Neumann (1994: 326) also comments that this view tends to manifest more strongly at more advanced student levels, perhaps unsurprisingly, and particularly in the sciences and social sciences (vs. e.g. humanities). Science students also commented positively on being able to 'do experiments…or were able to undertake research projects in close contact with a lecturer where they realised for the first time that in science "things don't always work out" ' (Neumann 1994: 327). These are examples of what Newmann (1993) calls the *tangible* nexus between teaching and research, where we see a focus on the transmission of knowledge and skills. This contrasts with the *intangible* nexus, which concerns the transmission of approaches and attitudes to knowledge, particularly 'imparting to students a questioning, critical approach to knowledge, as well as a positive attitude to learning' (Neumann 1994: 327). One way in which these attributes are developed, Newmann (1994) suggests, is through the use of assessments which encourage students to engage in research of some sort, for example, devising an experiment, adapting a case study in some way, or undertaking a small research project. Newmann (1994: 330) describes students' typical responses to these assessments: 'many of the students described their surprise, firstly at being asked to do something different from the usual assignments and secondly their sense of fear – sometimes coupled with excitement – at the challenge. All stated that by the time they had completed the assignment they had found the work intellectually stimulating and enjoyable.' There is a real sense, then, that students themselves believe the teaching/research nexus to be important. For them, positive things

happen when teaching and research are meaningfully combined, even if quantitative measures of the relationship suggest otherwise.

2.1 The teaching/research nexus across disciplines

Robertson & Blackler (2006) focus on students' understanding of research in three different disciplines: physics, geography and English. For physics students, research is 'esoteric' and 'remote' from them, often done in 'another language'. It is something that is done 'higher up', by lecturers, not undergraduates. For geography students, research is 'coming up with and finding an answer to a question' and is something they felt able to engage in because of a 'shared sense of research community and methodology'. For English students, research is more personal, and although there is a shared sense of community there is also the view that lecturers do research 'at a different level'. Unlike in physics, there was the sense that English students are at least 'speaking the same language' so that even first year students felt able to engage with research activity'. Robertson & Blackler (2006: 224-5) argue that these differences are due to differences in disciplinary knowledge structure. For example, in physics 'knowledge tends to be cumulative…and the relationship between research, teaching and learning hierarchical', whereas in English 'the "flatter" more accessible structure of knowledge means that it is possible for students to engage with that knowledge earlier and through their own research'. While we should be cautious about seeing very firm and fixed boundaries between these disciplines – work in English obviously can be and often is cumulative – it is worth taking a moment to consider how linguistics would fit and, perhaps, even whether it is possible to categorise linguistics as a discipline in these terms. Some linguistics certainly requires considerable cumulative knowledge. It is highly unlikely, for example, that any first year student of linguistics would be able to engage with the complex notions and impenetrable-to-the-outsider formalisms in papers such as 'A minimalist condition on semantic reconstruction' (Ruys 2015), or indeed many of the other papers in *Linguistic Inquiry*. In this sense, linguistics is similar to the work in physics which students see as being in 'another language'. But other sorts of linguistics, such as the paper 'Ideologies of language and race in US media discourse about the Trayvon Martin shooting' (Hodges, 2015) and many others in *Language in Society*, are likely to be more straightforward for beginning students to engage with, even if we might not expect them to fully understand all of the theoretical nuances. Differences such as these make it

unreasonable to expect the teaching/research nexus to be the same for teachers in each of these (sub)fields.

2.2 The teaching/research nexus across levels

As well as the (sub-)disciplinary differences, there are also differences in the relationship between teaching and research across different academic levels. Of course we expect PhD and Masters students to be involved in research, and also, in the New Zealand context, students doing their Honours year (typically in the year following their Bachelor degree) are required to carry out their own research project. At undergraduate level there is more variation both in terms of how and when students are engaged in research, and precisely which kind of research they do. It is common for undergraduate lectures to be research-led, where students learn about research findings in the field and also about the research interests of lecturing staff. This is probably standard practice in all Linguistics programmes. It is arguably more difficult at undergraduate level to follow a *research-based* approach, where students learn as researchers from a curriculum driven by inquiry-based activities. Indeed, Zamorksi (2002: 417) reports that undergraduates often believe themselves to be the 'recipients of research, rather than actors in its production'. The perspective of the lecturers who Zamorski (2002) interviewed was that teaching had to be research-led in the early part of a programme, because it was important the students were taught the relevant content before they embarked on research. Zamorski (2002: 422) notes how this view is that research fits 'into a linear intellectual maturation process, from intellectual dependence to intellectual independence', contrasting this with the view of students, who say that even at the end of an undergraduate degree programme 'whatever research experience or work undergraduates undertook, it was not usually regarded as "proper" research' (2002: 419).

There are a wide range of reasons for undergraduates' views that they do not do 'real research'. One is that even in research-led programmes, undergraduates rarely see research as a process. We typically focus on delivering the product – the results and theoretical implications – not the details of what happened, how and why, or of what went wrong. Presenting only the final, public face of a research paper can give the impression that it is only student research which is 'messy', and so less 'real' than published work. Developing students' awareness of the processes through which knowledge is created and constructed is an important step to developing a 'culture of

inquiry' (Robertson & Blackler 2006: 215), something which needs to be 'embedded in the curriculum from day one if undergraduates are to understand the value of their own research' (Garde-Hansen & Calvert 2007: 114). Giving a behind-the-scenes account of a research paper in an undergraduate class is different from simply teaching research methodology, and it is only really possible when we teach about research that we have a detailed, often personal, knowledge of. It is perhaps in this way that our research and our teaching can be clearly linked, by researchers bringing their personal research experiences into the classroom.

Hattie and Marsh (1996: 534) make a number of other recommendations for how the relationship between teaching and research can be strengthened, including (1) emphasising the construction of knowledge by students rather than the imparting of knowledge by instructors, (2) constructing assignments that reward deep rather than surface learning, (3) developing strategies across all disciplines that emphasize the uncertainty of the task, and (4) ensuring that students experience the process of artistic and scientific productivity. In the remainder of this paper, while building on the discussion above, I discuss how these recommendations can be usefully incorporated into a first year sociolinguistics course.

3. Introduction to LING102

Two 100 level courses are required in order to major in Linguistics at the University of Canterbury: LING101 and LING102. LING101 is an introduction to English phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax, and LING102 is an introduction to sociolinguistics. Typically, LING101 runs in Semester 1, and LING102 runs in Semester 2. Students majoring in Linguistics normally take LING101 before LING102 but this is not required, as LING101 is not a pre-requisite for LING102. Students are allowed to take LING102 before LING101, and non-majors might take only one of these two courses. This means that LING102 has to be designed to work both for students who have taken LING101, and have therefore been told about phonemes, allophones, morphemes, parts of speech and phrase and clause structure, among other things, and also those who have not taken LING101, and who are often coming to the discipline of Linguistics entirely from scratch, with no knowledge of key concepts or terminology. Furthermore, many students take

LING102 as an interest paper, and do not follow it with other higher level linguistics courses. For some, then, LING102 is the beginning and the end of their experience of linguistics.

As with any introductory course, it is not possible in LING102 to cover every aspect of the vast discipline of sociolinguistics. Topics are selected according to the requirements of higher level courses the students might take in our department in future. For example, we have higher level courses in variationist sociolinguistics, but not currently in discourse analysis, so the content of LING102 is geared towards the former, and the students are given only a taste of some main themes and methodologies of the latter. An important and obvious objective of the course, then, is to provide relevant training for students, such as our linguistics majors, who will do further higher level work in linguistics. But this cannot be the only objective because, as noted above, some students' experience of linguistics stops here. What do these students gain from the course? The same question can be asked of linguistics majors. Even if LING102 provides useful training for higher level linguistics courses, what is its long term value? As Hatfield (2014) notes, most linguistics majors will not become professional linguists. Most will not do any linguistics of any kind after their undergraduate degree. The value of the course comes in at least two forms. First, it is hoped that, in line with all other similar courses in sociolinguistics, LING102 has some long term value because of the social relevance of its content (in this case, tackling language myths and prescriptive vs descriptive views, other aspects of social and linguistic stereotyping, etc – see below). Second, skills needed to be able to carry out research – critical thinking, engaging with literature, data coding, quantification techniques, IT skills – are embedded throughout the course, in the hope that they are useful not only for linguistics majors doing higher level linguistics work, but also for students doing higher level work in any major and, since they are largely highly transferrable skills, also more broadly. The aim is that students do not just learn about sociolinguistic research, but that they also carry out their own original work, learning the necessary skills along the way.

Before I describe the assessment in the course, I first provide some background information about its structure and the general topics covered. There are 3 contact hours per week: two 1-hour lectures and one 1-hour tutorial. The lectures follow more or less a standard structure, with a single lecturer talking to a group of around 80 students in a tiered lecture theatre, with some limited opportunities for discussion. Lectures are the main way in

which new subject content is delivered to students. The content of the course is divided into five 'blocks', each covering a different theme in sociolinguistics, broadly conceived. The two largest blocks, in terms of the number of weeks dedicated to them, are: (1) 'What does our language say about us?', in which we explore Labov's key variationist sociolinguistic work, with follow up examples and case studies from work in a New Zealand context, and (2) 'Can language affect how we experience the world?', in which we focus on language attitudes, including linguistic stereotyping. In these blocks, and the others, alongside the main results and the broader implications, there is a considerable focus on research methods. The students are taught not only about what the results are and what they mean, but also how the research was carried out. Examples from the research projects at the University of Canterbury and the New Zealand Institute of Language, Brain and Behaviour give added authenticity to this work and offer opportunities for the sorts of behind-the-scenes accounts mention above. Methods are then the main focus in the weekly tutorials, where students are given the opportunity, for example, to explore datasets, create tables and graphs, and consider how they would describe and explain the results they see. As well as this, more general research skills are taught in tutorials, including how to carry out a literature search, how to read critically, and how to write a literature review.

4. The LING102 research report

The focus on research skills is important because the main piece of assessment in LING102 involves students carrying out a research project, which is worth 40% of the final grade. Students can choose from two (or, in some years, three) topics for their project, and I focus on one of them here. This involves extending the work presented in Bauer and Bauer's (2003) *Playground Talk* project. This project set out to investigate regional variation in New Zealand lexis, by focusing on playground vocabulary of children in primary and intermediate schools. In total, 150 schools from Kaitaia to Bluff participated (Bauer and Bauer 2003: 2), which involved teachers completing a paper questionnaire, after discussion with pupils, and answering questions about playground games and the sorts of words and phrases the children were likely to say in given situations. Two examples are:

(1) Brackie goes to the shop and buys a mixed bag of things like jaffas,

winegums, toffees, Minties, and liquorice all-sorts. How would you finish the sentence "Brackie's got a bag of _____"?[1]

(2) At your school, do children play a game with many players where one player has to run and try to touch another player while all the other players try to run away and not get touched? What is this game usually called at your school? At your school, how do you usually tell someone that they are to be the player who tries to touch the others? Is there a special word which the player who touches someone says as they touch them?

Many of the questions in Bauer and Bauer's (2003) project, along with some additions, were used to create an online questionnaire via *GoogleDocs*. The online questionnaire needed to be more wide-ranging than Bauer and Bauer's original so it had a somewhat more general range of questions, in 4 categories: *Words for Things* (which included question like 1 above), *Our School Days* (which included questions like 2 above), *Feelings and States* (which included questions like 'What word would you use to describe somebody who has become intoxicated from too many alcoholic drinks?'), and *Friends, Family and Being Social* (which included questions like 'What word would you use to describe an attractive person?'). As well as this, the intention was for the questionnaire to be completed by as many different people as possible, not just school children. Participants were therefore required to provide sociodemographic information, such as their age, sex, country and city of origin, and whether they have lived outside of the country/city of origin for longer than 3 months.

The results from the online questionnaire form the raw data on which the LING102 students base their research projects. The summary instructions given to the students are:

> For this topic, you will investigate how words are used in New Zealand. You will write a research report to explore this. The exact focus of the report is up to you. You may choose to answer questions such as: How have words in New Zealand changed over time? Are there regional differences between words across the country? Are there differences between the way women use certain words and the way men use them? You do not need to answer all of these questions but can choose a subset. You could in fact ask different questions entirely, as long as they can be answered with the data we generate. The direction

> of this research report should be driven by your own thinking and reading around this subject.
>
> The data will come from a survey of lexical variation in New Zealand. It is an online survey, which asks questions about words. Your task is first to spread the word about this survey, via your friends and in other ways (e.g. via social media). We need lots of people to complete the survey so we have some new data to work with. After a while, you will be given access to a set of the raw data. Your task for the research report is to analyse some of the data to answer your questions. You are expected to connect the results to the literature we have discussed in class, and to additional reading you have done in preparation for this research project.
>
> This is a 'real life' research project. The data has not been manufactured specifically for this class. It has not been 'cleaned up'. It is new, it is being generated right now, and it will come from real people. Some people who fill in the survey will make mistakes, some will not take the task seriously, and we do not know what the results will be like. They may look messy at first, but it is our job as analysts to understand the dataset, and to seek out any patterns. When you have completed your project, you will have contributed to our wider understanding of lexical variation in New Zealand.

The first task for the students is to share the link to the questionnaire among their friends and contacts, for example via social media. This happens early in the course, to give enough time for some results to be generated. The students are told that they are required to write a research report about lexical variation, but within that broad objective there is considerable flexibility. For example, I do not set a particular research question which must be answered, but instead offer a range of options and also tell students that they can make other suggestions, if they wish (see e.g. in the first paragraph of the instructions above). I also give them the flexibility to decide which questionnaire questions they focus on (e.g. they can focus on one thematic category, such as *Our School Days*, or some other subset of questions). I explain that providing a suitable rationale for these sorts of decisions is part of the research process.

At the time of writing we have responses to the questionnaire from 3000 informants, but this is far more than is necessary for or manageable in a first year class. Students are therefore provided with the raw data from about 500

informants. They must assess the usefulness of the dataset for answering their chosen research question(s). On one occasion, for example, a student was interested in comparing New Zealand English words with those from England, Scotland, the United States and Canada. The dataset I initially provided was not suitable for this line of enquiry, but an analysis was possible with a different subset from the larger sample, so after some discussion a new subset was generated which was more appropriately balanced.

Once in possession of the raw data, there are a number of steps the students need to carry out before the data can be analysed. One important step is to standardise the spellings of entries which are misspelled, or which have quotation marks, or some other idiosyncrasy. This is important if the quantification of the results is to be automated, as the spreadsheet software would otherwise incorrectly treat e.g. *New Zealand*, *NewZealand* and *NZ* as different categories of response. Also, it may be necessary for students to recode the data so that new categories are available for comparison. For example, a student might wish to examine differences between the North and South Island of New Zealand, so the particular locality of the participant would need to be recoded into these binary categories. Students must also assess the equivalence of lexical items given in response to the questions, and decide whether, for example, in a question about swimwear, *costume*, *cozzie* and *cossie* are the same or different. The steps are important in both practical (i.e. the use of spreadsheet software in data coding) and theoretical (i.e. the equivalence of variants of a variable) terms. They are also important in ensuring students explore the dataset in depth, and that they experience the processes behind this sort of analysis.

The first analytical step, once the data has been appropriately recoded, is to quantify the results. This involves using the spreadsheet to generate token counts, typically with pivot tables to automate the process as much as possible. It will also usually involve the calculation of percentages. Both of these tasks, using a spreadsheet for automatic data quantification and for calculating percentages, sit firmly outside the comfort zone of many of my students at this level. Because of this, students are given a considerable amount of training in this area. This year for the first time these skills have been foregrounded in some of the tutorials, giving the students the opportunity to work in a computer lab, with the support of a tutor, developing their spreadsheet (and, perhaps, their numeracy) skills. As well as this, short videos are made available, focusing on, for example, how to make pivot tables and how to use formulae, so that the students have as much information available as possible.

And, finally, to firmly focus students' attention on the fact that these skills are important, I set a 'take home task', earlier in the course and worth 10% of the course grade, which requires them to engage with these sorts of analyses (in a much more constrained way, and on a different dataset from that which will be used for their main reports) many weeks before the deadline for the final research report.

This research task efficiently combines many of the recommendations Hattie and Marsh (1996) have for strengthening the teaching/research nexus, mentioned above. The emphasis is on the students' construction of knowledge, not on the transmission of knowledge from the lecturer. They know that I, like them, do not know in advance what the results will be. This builds in an element of uncertainty and risk. The students also know that they are not only contributing to their own knowledge, but they have the potential to advance our knowledge in the field, because they are doing 'real' research. This promotes deep rather than surface learning in a range of ways. For example, students must engage with the data, interact critically with the relevant theoretical literature, and apply some of the theories to their dataset. They cannot just learn the content of the lectures and reiterate it, nor can they simply read and summarise published research papers. These strategies might work reasonably well for an essay, but they would not be successful for this research report where the students generate new knowledge. As there has been much less sociolinguistic work on lexical variation than on, say, phonological or grammatical variation in New Zealand English, there is the opportunity for these first year undergraduates to make an impact. Indeed, the students who uncover the most interesting patterns each year are encouraged to collaborate and write up the results for publication. We are fortunate in New Zealand to have a suitable venue for interesting but smaller scale work – the *New Zealand English Journal* – and some work from this course has started to appear in this publication (Watson et al. 2013). This is a major contributing factor in trying to enhance the teaching/research nexus in my own practice, by 'dismantling the notion that that research into the discipline [is] authorative and precious, such that these students could take ownership of the research material' (Garde-Hansen & Calvert 2007: 109).

5. On the benefits and challenges

In this section I consider whether the objectives of the course were met, by reflecting on feedback from course evaluation surveys and additional comments received by students via email. The course is overwhelmingly well received. One person (out of a total of 72 who did feedback questionnaires) reported that he or she would prefer a longer essay than a research report, but otherwise the research task received positive feedback, even if sometimes with a caveat, e.g. "The research report wasn't even that bad. It was quite exciting to research something in that way"; "The research report gave me a chance to research things we weren't necessarily taught in class. I had to read wider than class information to answer my research question. Because I enjoyed what I was learning so I understood it easily and it didn't feel like work!" Many students cited the research task as being a main factor in their enjoyment of the course, and some commented that it had changed their opinion of the field: "I was not particularly interested in sociolinguistics before taking this course but I have come to understand why this is an exciting area of research"; "I now hope to take linguistics as my major in my degree, with an emphasis on sociolinguistics"; "I may have changed my career path now to Linguistics." One student sent me extended feedback in an email. I reproduce it below (with permission), as it connects to a number of issues I have touched on above:

> When we were first tasked with carrying out our own research assignment, I was a little scared because it seemed like such a big job and something that was totally new to me. The lecturer was very reassuring, however, and I soon realised that the sooner I started it, the better. I found the tutorials immensely helpful, I learned to use Excel in new ways to deal with the data. It was the most challenging assignment I was given in my 100 levels papers, but in the end it was very satisfying to accomplish it. I learnt that when you undertake a research task, you really don't know what results, if any, you will uncover by the end. I was very glad that I started as soon as the second half of semester began, as I think I would have really struggled with the workload if I had waited until just before it was due. I am hoping to study at a postgraduate level, and so I am really happy to have been thrown into this research project early in my university studies, I feel that it alleviated some fears around research moving forward.

The benefits of including the research aspect of this course are: (1) some students find it exciting, because they can engage with class material in

new ways, (2) some students are encouraged to read more widely around the topic, (3) it increases some students' engagement and affinity with the field of linguistics, (4) although daunting at the beginning for some students, completing the research project is highly satisfying, and this can alleviate possible future fears, and (5) it increases core transferrable skills (e.g. using spreadsheets in new ways).

As well as these benefits, there are practical challenges to teaching the course in this way, and many of them relate to the fact that it is a first year class. This means, firstly, that the class is reasonably large (around 80 students per year). This is by no means unmanageable for a typical lecture/tutorial course, but when students are all doing research projects, with a mix of different research questions, the staff time needed outside of class hours is considerably increased. This can be mitigated, by providing a wide range of resources online, including sets of 'how to' videos for aspects of data management, but this course still requires more resources than it would with more typical assessments of essays/examinations. The combination of the high numbers of students and the flexibility they have in choosing their own research questions also impacts on the time required for marking. Because the focus of each student's report could be slightly different, assessing the report is more challenging than when students are able to choose from only 5 or 6 essay questions. The marker must read the report itself and look in detail at the student's analysis of the data (which they are also required to submit in spreadsheet form), increasing the complexity of the marking task and the time required to do it.

Other challenges arise from first year students being 'first timers', in perhaps multiple ways. Many students are linguistics first timers, if, as is often the case, they have not taken LING101 before this course. This is by no means a major obstacle, because the course is designed to take it into account, but it does introduce a challenge when students want to come up with their own reading lists. Sometimes the work students want to read is too advanced for them, when they do not yet have even one full linguistics course behind them. This can often be remedied in office hours, but it is an additional cost on staff time. Many students are also statistics first timers. They are not required to carry out statistical testing in this course, because there is no time to teach them properly how to do it, but sometimes students are also not completely confident with basic numeracy skills. Often this lack of confidence is driven by fear rather than lack of ability, but this fear is something which must be

overcome if the students are to be able to cope with the simple quantification of the results in their research report. The tutorials help with this, as does the separate take-home task which gives them practice of the sort of numeracy skills they will need. Many students are also computer software first timers. Although it is tempting to think of most first year students as 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001), who are 'IT-savvy' and who can easily open and save files, and use Microsoft Office, this is an over-generalisation. Of course IT-savvy students exist, but we should not expect this to be the norm. Developing students' skills in this area is highly valuable, but again it is a cost on staff time. Finally, first year students are likely to be research first timers, who have likely never undertaken a research project before, and who, perhaps more importantly, may not come into the class expecting one. The research is ultimately rewarding, but is at first daunting, as the student feedback indicates, and this needs to be taken into account when explaining the assessment structure of the course. It also needs to be borne in mind continuously as the course progresses, as it is easy for fear to reappear and derail good student work.

6. Conclusion

I conclude with some brief comments on the lessons I have learned by teaching LING102 in this way. First, in order to be successful, the research task needs to be as much like a 'real research project' as possible, or it does not excite the students in the same way. This means that the project should generate some new data, and that the students should be involved in its collection. Both of these aspects introduce an element of risk, which is another key element in increasing the authenticity of the task. But also important is the need to exert a degree of control over the potential risks. If, in a typical research project, the data collection fails for some reason, or if the data is problematic or the results not conclusive, then this is likely a considerable disappointment but it is not completely disastrous because things can usually be redone. Within the constraints of a classroom, particularly on a first year course with a high number of students, this is much more difficult, so steps must be taken to ensure the data collection will yield suitable data, and that the results will likely lend themselves to being written up in a report. For LING102 this was achieved by having the students use data from a survey that I developed (based on Bauer and Bauer's (2003) solid foundation). Of course there are many benefits of having students create and execute their own data

collection methodology, but this was thought to be too much risk in this sort of introductory course.

A final lesson concerns the teaching/research nexus. Much of the research on this relationship examines the effect of research on teaching. That is, the surrounding discourse typically discusses approaches such as 'research-led teaching', or 'research-based teaching', examining the benefits of the teaching/research nexus for teaching. There is much less discussion of the benefits on research. But in the case of LING102, the research project aspect of the course becomes a shared research goal between students and staff. When we begin, nobody knows what patterns will emerge, and we learn as the course progresses through collaborative research practice (see Garde-Hansen & Calvert 2007: 108). The project encourages and facilitates my own thinking on the topic, and on related research. It is can therefore be important from a research perspective as well as from the perspective of pedagogy.

Note

1 'Brackie' is one of a number of invented characters Bauer and Bauer (2003) used so as not to inadvertently implicate real children in any of the scenarios that were presented. See http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/research/projects/language-in-the-playground-project/table-of-contents for further details of the project, including the full questionnaire. Thanks to Laurie Bauer for granting permission to use some of the questions for the LING102 project.

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