Academic literacy and linguistic diversity: An account from the chalk face.

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Some demographics

- Home students 67%; EU 14%; Overseas 19%
- Full time 88%; Part-time 12%
- Female 58%; Male 42%
- White 38%; Black 24%; Asian 22%, Mixed 5%; Other/unknown 5%; Chinese 4%; Arab 3%
- Country:
  China  439 students
  India  363 students
  Poland 334 students
  Nigeria 327 students
  Lithuania  310 students

*(Information from Student Records Office, Middlesex University, 26/2/2015)*
Typical linguistic profiles?

Are you a home or international student? (Optional) Please give a brief description of your linguistic background. (e.g. speak Lingala at home, educated in French, learned English when I came to the UK ten years ago).

Home (English and Swahili); International (English, Hausa, Yoruba and Hindi); International student (fits exact profile in 2); International (Polish, French and German); Home (Afrikaans at home); Home student (Ghanaian languages); Home (Both English and Turkish); Home student (English, Turkish); Home; Home; Home; Home; International (Hindi and Igbo at home); Home (English and Nigerian); International (from Canada, English speak using Punjabi at home); International; Home (English and Urdu for a short conversation); International (Greek, Greek Cypriot, English, a bit of French); International (Farsi, Norwegian, English and Spanish); International (Greek, Greek Cypriot, English, a bit of German); Home (speaks Persian too); Home (Turkish and Mehico); Home (Punjabi, English); Home (Albanian, Kosovan, Macedonian Kosovan); Home (English, Urdu and understands Punjabi and Hindi); International (Twi, bit of French); Home; Home (Italian, Romanian, a bit of French); International (I don’t’ feel comfortable, but if I have to I’ll tell you I speak English); International (Uganda: English, Serbian, French, Zimi, Ugandi); International (Poland); Home (Gujarati); Home (speak Punjabi at home); Home (English, Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu)

- 20 home students, 13 international, 32 different languages.
- Information gathered from 1st year Law students
Typical linguistic profiles for home students

Are you a home or international student? (Optional) Please give a brief description of your linguistic background. (e.g. speak Lingala at home, educated in French, learned English when I came to the UK ten years ago).

Home (English and Swahili); Home (Afrikaans at home); Home student (Ghanaian languages); Home (Both English and Turkish); Home student (English, Turkish); Home; Home; Home; (Hindi and Igbo at home); Home (English and Nigerian); Home (English and Urdu for a short conversation); Home (speaks Persian too); Home (Turkish and Mehico); Home (Punjabi, English); Home (Albanian, Kosovan, Macedonian Kosovan); Home (English, Urdu and understands Punjabi and Hindi); Home; Home (Italian, Romanian, a bit of French); Home (Gujarati); Home (speak Punjabi at home); Home (English, Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu)

• Approx. 21 different languages
The work of the Learner Development Unit

‘Making the tacit visible’ through

Close collaboration with staff

• Identification of specific student problems
• Analysis of student handbook, previous examples of student writing and coursework requirements
• Where possible, team teaching
• Engagement with disciplinary content

Content of sessions

• Discipline-specificity and genre-specificity
• Use of authentic examples of texts (based on what the students read or write, including previous student assignments)
• Interactivity (working in pairs or groups)
• Linguistically focused (‘noticing’ of language)
The work of the Learner Development Unit

‘Making the tacit visible’ through

- Close collaboration with academic staff
- Content of sessions

(Classroom practice informed by the work of Bazerman et al 2005; Benesch 2001; Deane and O’Neill 2011; Jacobs 2005 and 2010; Lave and Wenger 1991; Lea and Street 1998; Lillis 2003; Nesi and Gardner 2012; Swales 2004; Turner 2011; Wingate et al 2011 amongst others)
Approaches to research in Social Sciences (SOC 2500)

The module is designed for students studying programmes within the Criminology and Sociology Department. The module aims to develop students’ evaluative abilities regarding quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, as well as the underlying philosophical and ethical principles of social research.

Learning outcomes:

• Discuss the underlying philosophical basis of social research.
• Examine the ethical issues related to social research.
• Differentiate qualitative and quantitative research, identifying and evaluating the underlying assumptions of each.
• Identify, locate and access relevant information from a range of sources.
• Evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and usefulness of published research and data.
• Design an appropriate and workable research proposal relevant to their programme.

(from SOC 2500 Module Handbook 2014-2015, Middlesex University, pages 5-6)
The coursework assignment

1. An interview guide (approx. 500 words)
   a. An introduction to the research and the researcher, and an explanation of any confidentiality issues;
   b. 10 questions which relate to the objectives of the research, which are to explore how
      i) undergraduate students use social networking sites (SNS)
      ii) how SNS influence students’ university and/or personal lives
      iii) how SNS influence students’ learning

2. A reflective report (1500 words) which highlights:
   a. The main themes emerging from the interviews (thematic analysis);
   b. How you have determined a certain set of questions;
   c. Your experience of conducting a qualitative interview, reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.
3 seminars delivered by Learner Development Unit

Seminar 1: Designing effective interview questions (Introduction to assignment and ‘decoding’ of task; analysis of poor interview questions; slides contrasting features of ‘good’ and ‘poor’ research questions)

Seminar 2: Practising effective interview questions (Trying out interview questions in a role-play; redrafting own interview questions)

Seminar 3: Reflective writing (tips for thematic analysis of findings; analysis of examples of ‘good’ and ‘poor’ reflection, showing links between personal experience and texts on research methods)
Some more appropriate interview questions:

• How many languages do you speak? To whom do you speak each language? For example, do you speak one language to your parents, but another to your brothers and sisters?

• Have you spoken this language/these languages since birth? Or have you learned some of them later on? In what contexts – school, university, work, living abroad?

• For what purpose do you speak each language? For study? For work? To talk to friends? To write to your grandparents?

• Are you literate in each language which you speak? How did you become literate in this language?

• Which language do you think expresses the ‘real you’? Or do you think you are the ‘real you’ in all your languages? If so, why?

• What advantages do you think there are to knowing more than one language?

• What disadvantages do you think there are to knowing more than one language?
Overall feedback from students

75 students completed the feedback forms. Overall feedback was very positive. Students felt that the sessions

• helped to *clarify expectations* for the assignment, as well as what to include or not (21 responses)
• gave them a sense of how to structure the assignment (7 responses).

They particularly appreciated

• the *examples* provided (14 responses)
• the *tasks/activities provided together with the opportunity for group discussion* (12 responses)
• the PPT slides (9 responses)
• *learning how to include referencing in a reflective report* (4 responses)
• the chance to ask and answer questions (4 responses) and *improve confidence* (4 responses).
• *learning how to phrase and come up with research questions* (3 responses)
Interview with the module leader (26/02/2015)

Q: “One of the things I wanted to ask you is that we focused on linguistic profiles as a theme in the seminar that you were in. What did you think of this approach? I mean, what do you think about coming in to look at students’ own linguistic profiles? Do you think that’s …”

Module leader: “By, for example, asking what their backgrounds were? Fascinating. Mainly because I wasn’t expecting this kind of reaction. Every single one had something to say and I was very...I felt that I got to know my students better. Because I didn’t know...I knew that most of them were British...but I didn’t know what kind of backgrounds...some of them speak three or four languages....so I think it allowed me to get to know my students better. Um... in terms of how useful that was from my point of view, I’m struggling to think how I can use that information to inform my teaching or inform my assessment or inform my marking. So, we need to think something further because it is interesting, but interesting is not enough.”

“What I am trying to say is that we need to think of a way perhaps that the understanding of their different kind of linguistic capabilities ... how they influence their studies and how it can help us to help them in many ways. I’m not sure what kind of approach we can use.. We need to think about it...I don’t know much about linguistics, either.”
Further comments from the module leader

‘It taught me a way to communicate or develop a lecture, rather, how to develop research questions with my Masters’ students…’

‘I’d like to be working with you throughout the year. Because we compensate each other…it’s not just about learning the technique, it’s deeper than that.’
Issues and challenges

For classroom pedagogy
• What are the sensitive areas raised by making the student’s own experience/language/cultural background the subject of student investigation?
• Do experiential/reflective methodologies for learning need to be rigorously linked to scholarship for students?

For working with academic staff
• What is the role of Teaching and Learning or Writing/EAP/Academic Literacies units in engaging faculty in valuing the resources of WP/multilingual students?
• What models of good practice are there in different disciplines and how can these be disseminated?

For research
• What kinds of research projects need to be undertaken at the chalk face?
Bibliography


Bibliography (continued)


