Toward interdisciplinary research-based teaching in linguistics
Integrating students into project-oriented teaching and research practices at the intersection of (applied) English linguistics and TEFL

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In recent years, the idea of undergraduate research and inquiry and research-active teaching and learning has become relatively popular across universities in the United States and many other countries worldwide (Healey & Jenkins 2009). In Germany, a parallel trend can be observed: the concept of learning through research ("Forschendes Lernen") has not only become a popular buzzword in higher education (Reinmann 2016:226) but has substantially influenced educational practices and development strategies of many universities nationwide (e.g. HEP RUB, HEP WWU). Teacher education at university level, in particular, has been one of the domains where many new standards and goals, as well as related teaching and learning practices, have started to be implemented (KMK 2014; MSW NRW 2016).

This paper discusses the relevance and potential benefits of learning through research for the teaching of English linguistics at German universities, with a particular focus on one subtype associated with this concept: research-based teaching (Healey & Jenkins 2009:7). Drawing on general theoretical considerations and using a research-based course taught by myself as an example, the paper argues that teaching and research in (applied) linguistics – and English language studies more generally – can profit quite immensely from the introduction and/or expansion of research-based teaching and learning practices in addition to other types of learning through research. I propose that, for lecturers and students alike, interdisciplinary and project-oriented approaches especially may be a welcome contribution to the teaching and research at English departments in Germany and other countries where as different fields as Literary and Cultural Studies, English Linguistics, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) often belong to the same department. I suggest that such a research-based approach can help bridge the gap between teaching and research, two concepts which are traditionally regarded as separate and being very different from one another, and that future teachers of English, in particular, may profit from such an approach being put into practice.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: first, I present an overview of the concept of learning through research and research-based teaching, and I argue why and how such an approach may be beneficial for teaching and research in the given context (section 2). Second, based on a research-based course at the intersection of (applied) English linguistics and TEFL in which my students and I jointly investigated the role of "World Englishes in the EFL Classroom in Germany", I describe how such an interdisciplinary and project-oriented approach could be implemented in practice and reflect on experiences made during the process of teaching (section 3). Based on the overall outcome of the course and the initial considerations, I conclude with some suggestions for future teaching and research in English linguistics and English language studies (section 4).

RESEARCH-BASED TEACHING AND ITS POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR ENGLISH LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES

Different understandings and concepts of how to link teaching and research currently exist and are used slightly differently in different countries and contexts (Reinmann 2016:226-227). Rather than a general orientation toward science when teaching, learning through research in German higher education contexts is generally understood as an active process in which students learn while going through an entire research cycle (ibid.). That is, students may be exposed to and actively engaged in different stages that emphasize student participation, research processes and problems, as well as research contents to different degrees (Healey & Jenkins 2009:7): students may learn about current research (research-led), develop personal research skills (research-oriented), engage in discussions on research (research-tutored), and even undertake research themselves (research-based). Traditionally, teaching at university level has often been too focused on the former two, less student-active approaches (ibid.; Munthe & Roger 2015:22). Research-based teaching, in contrast, places a large degree of responsibility on the students and emphasizes their active engagement in the teaching and research process. However, this is not to say that these stages are mutually exclusive to one another: a successful research-based course needs to take into account research-led and research-oriented perspectives and practices — at least to some extent. In this paper, therefore, the term research-based will be conceptualized as having students actively engage in actual research but also learn about and learn for research (Reinmann 2016:236).

Such a research-based approach to teaching can help bridge the gap between teaching and research in English linguistics and English language studies more generally. Teaching, especially in the form of lectures, is often viewed by university lecturers as a process of knowledge transfer (Badger & Sutherland 2007): lecturers have acquired a special kind of knowledge through (their own) research or a set of methodological skills which they pass on to their students. In this sense, teaching is viewed as being a very distinct process from research: while teaching is the top-down transfer of knowledge to the students, research is the accumulation of knowledge and lies in the domain of the researcher. For some, teaching might even represent an unwelcome activity that takes time from one's research. A research-based approach challenges this traditional idea of teaching and research and views students as potential additional producers of knowledge (Healey & Jenkins 2009:8). Teaching and research are not viewed as mutually exclusive, but as complementary to each other. If such a view is adopted, teaching and research can be combined in meaningful ways that can benefit both the research-er/lecturer and the students. Students may learn about, for, and through research, while the lecturer and their students jointly accumulate knowledge as partners in a bottom-up manner – perhaps even to a degree that the lecturer would not have been able to accumulate by themselves.

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A case in point for such a research-based approach to teaching is the corpus compilation project by Youssef & Deuber (2007), conducted at the University of the West Indies and based on which the Trinidad and Tobago subcomponent of the International Corpus of English was later compiled. Youssef & Deuber taught general corpus compilation and analysis skills to a group of undergraduate students who, in a second step, conducted field research in Trinidad and Tobago, and recorded and compiled data for the corpus. In a third step, students also analyzed parts of the collected data. This approach allowed the students to gain valuable insights into linguistic field research and data collection methods, which are otherwise usually not accessible to students in traditional teaching

environments in linguistics. Students generally reported to have more positive feelings toward linguistics as a result and that they learned a lot about language variation; students seemed to be especially appreciative of the practical experiences in the course. The researchers, on the other hand, welcomed the large amount of data they were able to collect together with the students in a relatively short period of time.

Although the above course serves as an example of the potential benefits of a research-based approach for both teaching and research in linguistics and English language studies more generally, it is questionable whether a department-wide implementation of similar research-based courses on a larger scale and with a high frequency is attainable or

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even desirable. First, considering that designing and teaching courses of a similar nature is very labor-intensive and may require a relatively large amount of institutional and other resources, a full institutional paradigm shift toward research-based teaching in favor of other teaching formats is unrealistic. Second, from a learning perspective, curricula in higher education should be balanced and incorporate all stages and foci of learning through research (Healey & Jenkins 2009:7).

From a perspective of "academic opportunism" (Youssef & Deuber 2009), therefore, research-based teaching may be a welcome addition to intra-institutional research and teaching if it is implemented in a less extensive way that is more associated with project-oriented learning, a related-type of learning (Reinmann 2016:237). Even if, for instance, only a very few lecturers across different departmental fields of research decided to design specific research-based teaching projects every semester, this would have quite a profound impact on the overall diversity of courses offered

within a department. Students could then profit from this newly established diversity throughout their studies and gain more hands-on experience as far as research is concerned. Lecturers, on the other hand, may use these occasional research-based teaching projects to connect their teaching more to their research and engage in joint lecturer-student work on a research aspect that fits their research agenda.

Given that future teachers of English are often the proportionally largest group of students at English departments in Germany, research-based teaching at the intersection of English linguistics (or literary and cultural studies) and TEFL may be particularly beneficial to students. Teacher trainee students can profit from research-based teaching at this intersection for three main reasons: firstly, learning through research has become an integral part of their studies and especially their later training (KMK 2014; see also MSW NRW 2016). Exposing teacher trainee students to more research-based teaching from early onwards may help them, in line with the rationale for the emphasis of such approaches during their training (ibid.), to develop a critical and inquiring stance to (their own) teaching (see Munthe & Rogne 2015:18). Secondly, conducting research at this intersection, especially in the school itself, may help them identify with the research-based teaching projects more, recognize the relevance of (their own) research for their future profession, and motivate them to become actively and critically engaged in the process. Thirdly, previous research has shown that teacher trainees often feel ill-equipped to apply theoretical knowledge in real teaching and learning contexts (Alvunger & Wahlström 2018), and that engagement in actively research-based learning activities can increase teacher trainees' feelings of preparedness for their later profession (Hammerness et al. 2005). Research-based teaching projects can help these students accumulate new personal knowledge that is relevant for their professional development toward a reflective and critical teacher personality in a hands-on manner. For lecturers, such an approach

is challenging because it requires one to incorporate at least some perspectives from another field of research. However, this circumstance may also encourage more collaboration between lecturer and students in order to try to overcome such problems jointly and provide an incentive for intra-institutional and interdisciplinary support and cooperation.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH-BASED TEACHING PROJECT: A COURSE ON "WORLD ENGLISHES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM IN GERMANY"

A seminar that I taught at the University of Münster in the summer term of 2018 will here serve as an example of an interdisciplinary research-based teaching project as described above. The project was entitled "World Englishes in the EFL Classroom in Germany" and aimed at investigating the current status of World Englishes in German EFL classrooms and other educational settings by having students carry out field research. The main incentive for this endeavor was based on the observation that, despite an increasing amount of applied linguistics and TEFL literature suggesting a paradigm shift toward World Englishes-informed teaching practices (e.g. Matsuda & Matsuda 2018), the current status of World Englishes in German EFL classroom is still largely underresearched. It is currently unclear what kinds of teaching realities such suggestions would meet in practice and how such suggestions may be implemented into actual teaching in German secondary schools. All students that participated were in their third year of undergraduate study; the course was part of their advanced module on English language and linguistics.

The course was structured into four phases (cp. Reinmann 2016:232-236). In the first phase (learning about research), the students and I dealt with previous research that concerns World Englishes overall, the question of whether and how to incorporate World Englishes into TEFL, and state-of-the-art research on the role of World Englishes in TEFL in Germany. By using jigsaws and other teaching methods that are based on the division of labor we were able to cover an extensive amount of previous research in our readings and identify research gaps in the existing literature. At the end of this phase, students had the chance to attend two invited guest lectures to inform themselves about currently ongoing research.

In the second phase (learning for research), students developed their own research ideas based on the identified research gaps and ongoing research, planned group research projects, and designed their own research instruments. In project-oriented group work activities the students learned about and applied different kinds of methods and approaches: they learned, for instance, how to design questionnaires, create guidelines for semi-structured interviews, or draft linguistic elicitation tasks.

In the third and most important phase (learning through research in the strict sense), students carried out field research in German schools and other educational contexts to investigate questions such as: what attitudes do teachers, students, and trainee teachers have toward the question of whether to incorporate World Englishes into TEFL? To what extent are World Englishes being taught and how is this practically done? How are World Englishes represented in schoolbooks and curricula? What role do World Englishes play in teacher education? Students conducted interviews with (trainee) teachers, carried out a questionnaire survey with future students of English, analyzed schoolbooks and curricula, and examined spoken learner language phonetically. As a last step, students created professional scientific posters and presented them in class to report and discuss their findings from the field research phase.

The overall quality and benefits of the course were evaluated using different methods: (1) the quality of the scientific posters, (2) a paper-based evaluation survey, and (3) personal feedback from the student during class. The outcome of this evaluation can be summarized as follows:

(1) The high quality of the scientific posters of the students, the collected data, and the overall

analysis procedure in almost all cases showed that the students were able to plan, conduct, analyze, and present real research projects by themselves. The students were also able to discuss critically potential implications of their findings for their own professional development and teaching in general.

(2) The survey indicated that the students were overall satisfied with the course; they evaluated the course as good or very good on average. Several students emphasized that they liked the structure of the course and the focus of learning through research – often in contrast to traditional approaches to teaching. The students also indicated that they liked having the opportunity to attend guest lectures on the topic and that the research-based design of the course gave them the feeling to be carrying out "real research". Students generally seemed to show a large degree of variation regarding the question of whether they found the class too time-consuming. While some mentioned that they enjoyed the flexibility and freedom during the field research phase, others stressed that they found it difficult to cope with too many liberties during research-related decision-making processes.

(3) The classroom discussion revealed that the students would like to incorporate what they have learned during this project when teaching English in secondary school later on and that they would like to do so in an informed and critical way that takes into consideration theoretical perspectives but also practical ones. Such a view is reminiscent of Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) goals for research-oriented teacher education and shows that the students, apart from competences in conducting research, have also acquired skills which are relevant for their professional development (cp. MSW NRW 2016).

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the relevance of learning through research for the teaching of English linguistics – and English language studies in general – at German universities by drawing on theoretical considerations and using a research-based teaching project at the intersection of (applied) linguistics and TEFL as an example. I hope to have shown that teaching and research in (applied) linguistics, and both teachers and students alike, can benefit from the implementation of (more) interdisciplinary project-oriented and research-based courses.

I would like to conclude with a few final suggestions: firstly, despite the very positive outcome of the exemplary research-based teaching project here, it is probably recommendable to offer similar courses only for advanced undergraduate students. Students in the course at hand were only able to succeed because they had had previous knowledge of World Englishes either from another course or because they spent some time reading upon on the state-of-the-art literature prior to the beginning of the course. Secondly, although this paper has emphasized the role of research-based teaching, institutional curricula and single research-based courses should be balanced and include all other stages of learning through research: a lack of profound content-related knowledge and methodological skills may make it nearly impossible to engage in research itself. Thirdly, when designing research-based classes, lecturers ought to be aware of institutional or personal constraints, such as potential overlap of field research phases with students' other classes or exams or the timetable of informants.

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