Contents

Jonathon Spring

How old is a "minor"?

Jonathon Spring of the Tourism Management Programme is completing a PhD at AUT University on guide-visitor interaction during guided wildlife tours by Pacific Whale Foundation (PWF) around Maui, Hawai'i and by Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (SoTM) at Tiritiri Matangi Open Scientific Reserve, an island north of Auckland. Here he describes a problem with ethics approval.

Rightly, there is a precautionary approach to research ethics procedures that puts the onus on the researcher to explain and justify the level of "intrusion" into the private sphere of the participant. The ethics requirements for my study defined people into three spheres in respect of their ability to cope with the intrusive aspects of the research. At one end of the spectrum, there are children who are perceived to be vulnerable and the level of intrusion in their life has to be managed and audited in a much more rigorous fashion to protect them than adults, at the other end of the spectrum. Somewhere in between lie legal minors aged between 16-20 years who can potentially participate in a study if sanctioned by the approval of an appropriate guardian. I did not query at the time the defining of adults aged 18-20 as "legal minors", and tried to simplify the process by stating that my research focused on people aged 20 years or more. I was just relieved to get my ethics application accepted.

As it turned out, none of the participants in my Maui fieldwork were under 20, the youngest being 21 but on Tiritiri Matangi one of my participants was 19 years old, an overseas student on a class field trip. To follow ethical procedures dealing with legal minors, I had to ask if she was comfortable with the consent process where one of her lecturers would act as her "guardian". Fortunately it worked out for the in situ interview but she never responded to a request for a reflective interview.

There was a natural attrition rate when it came to people participating in the reflective interviews for a number of factors from the mundane (changed contact details) to the tragic (death), but I could not help but be concerned that having to treat a 19 year-old adult as a "minor' was embarrassing for the participant and may have contributed to her silence to my requests for the next interview.

To a certain extent, tertiary institute ethics have to be universal in their approach to regulating research, and so the checks and balances in the way a tourism researcher interviews a participant about their leisure experiences has to be consistent with a health researcher who asks someone about their sexual behavior; it may be the same divulged information. In retrospect I should have queried at the ethics stage the extent a person aged between 18 and 20 may be perceived as being vulnerable in the context of the researcher asking questions about the person's behaviour on a guided wildlife tour. In that way I may have made those responsible for the ethics process justify why a 19 year-old adult would need another adult to sanction queries about a direct encounter she had with a fantail.

A fantail

The research question

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Alice: ...So long as I get somewhere.

The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough.

Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland*

Research itself is a complicated endeavour. But what makes research a challenge for many of us is the ambiguity in understanding exactly what we are looking for. Research is often considered to be a difficult exercise that can only be achieved by a few who have been trained in this trade. This sense of difficulty may stem from the difficulty in formulating the research question.

A research problem is associated with the identification of a lack of specific information in a specific situation. It is about what we do not know and the need to know it in the context of other available information in the current context. So, if we approach this phase of research methodically, the first question we need to address is identifying the context of the problem. We have to be as open as possible within the framework and identify various variables that may influence the problem in hand. For example, if someone is investigating the staff turnover rate for an organisation, it might be the case that many factors may be influencing this turnover. So, the objective is to keep the research question as open as possible initially so that many factors can be investigated. Rather than asking, "Is low pay influencing the turnover?", the researcher should start with the more general "What are the possible reasons for a high turnover rate of staff in this organisation?".

The next phase of formulating a robust research problem is to look at the existing literature and find out how other researchers have studied similar problems previously.

A researcher searching for topics needs to address a few of the following considerations:

- *Relevance*: A research problem needs to be relevant to the current gap in knowledge. A research problem needs to be based on a gap well grounded through a robust literature review. In short, there is no need to re-invent the wheel, and investigate what has already been investigated.

- *Reach*: The problem identified needs to be wide enough for the findings to be generalisable. The output of the research needs to have the possibility of repeated results when tested in similar conditions.

- *Focus*: Often the research problem identified is not focussed enough to encompass all the factors in the study. So, the wider we allow the scope of a study, the more we are limiting the ability to investigate deeper for a particular aspect of a problem. Do you need to dig a shallow hole over a wide area, or a deeper hole in one particular area?

In order to do justice to a problem, we should also be consciously trying to focus the objectives of a study.

- *Impact*: While deciding on a research problem, researchers should be carefully considering the scope of the impact of the study in hand. Not all the research will necessarily be groundbreaking, but careful consideration of the impact provides researchers with opportunities to expand or limit the scope of the research.

Asking the right question is always a dilemma for every researcher. If you ask the right questions, you may end up with valid answers. Therefore, if you want a strong outcome from any of your research activities, start by asking the right questions at the right time.

Growing a thick skin

Trials and tribulations of working with editorial teams
Adam Brown

There is an idiomatic English adjective expression *thick-skinned*, meaning "not easily upset, affected, offended or bothered by criticism or insults". The Urban Dictionary (n.d.) defines the noun phrase *a thick skin* as "the ability to withstand criticism and show no signs of any criticism you may receive getting to you".

Researchers and authors have to develop a thick skin, and not be upset by negative comments about manuscripts of articles, books, etc. Let me illustrate with two episodes from my own experience.

Many years ago, I submitted an article manuscript to a good journal. Like all good journals, they sent it out for review by two anonymous blind reviewers. They were anonymous in that I did not find out who they were, and they were blind in that they did not find out who I was. So, they were judging it purely on the basis of the quality of the article, not on any reputation I may have had, etc. One reviewer obviously thought it was a good manuscript and deserved publication in the journal. I remember his/her review was quite short (which I took as an indication that he/she found little to criticise in the article) and contained the word *lucid*, meaning "easily understood; completely intelligible or comprehensible"

(Dictionary.com, n.d.). The other, in contrast, was much longer, and tore the manuscript to shreds, pointing out that it contained little in the way of original research and read like the literature review of a dissertation. On reflection, the second reviewer was probably right, that the manuscript did not deserve publication, and this was the executive decision that the journal editor came to. Nevertheless, the episode shows how widely different two reviewers' reports can be.

I have just had a book published:

Brown, A. (2014). *Pronunciation and phonetics: A practical guide for English language teachers*. New York and London: Routledge.

I'd like to tell you the history of how this book came about, as it has had a long gestation period. Before I came to New Zealand, I worked in Singapore and had had a number of books (authored, co-authored, edited and co-edited) published by the Singapore branch of a famous publisher. I won't mention their name, to avoid embarrassment. Suffice it to say that you would recognise it. When I left Singapore, I always had it in mind to write a book on pronunciation teaching.

After arriving in Auckland, I wrote to the editor I had

been dealing with on previous books, to confirm that the publisher was still interested in such a book. Yes, they were. Then, as often happens in the world of publishing, the editor left the company and joined another publisher. So, I wrote to the editor in chief (the previous editor's manager) to confirm that they were still interested and that I could go ahead and start writing the book. Yes, they were.

Months passed, and I continued doing background research and writing the book. I enjoyed this period, as it gave me the reason to catch up on background reading, recent journals, etc. It then occurred to me that I had not signed a contract for the book. This is a legal document, that you agree to write the book by a certain date, and the publisher agrees to publish it. This is in addition to other legal clauses, including second editions, royalties, and death of the author! So, I wrote to the editor in chief again asking about a contract. Yes, they were still interested in publishing the book, and I was passed to a different lower-ranked editor. She assured me that they were still interested in the book, and asked whether the manuscript could be ready by such-and-such a date, so that it would appear in time for the beginning of the university year, that is, as a textbook for tertiary courses. Yes, I could do that.
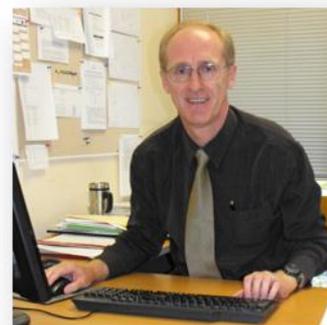
"the ability to withstand criticism and show no signs of any criticism you may receive getting to you"
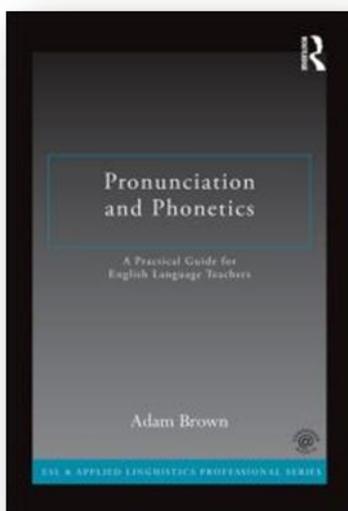
The proposal was sent to a reviewer. In fact, this was a former colleague of mine in Singapore and I expected a glowing report. Her recommendation was that it deserved publication, but that its marketability might be improved by adding a final section with sample exercises. So, I put my creative faculties to work and added sample exercises.

Again, I pointed out that I had not received a contract, but was given emailed assurances that the company intended to publish the book. Having had several books published by them, and assuming that I had a good working relationship with them, I thought this was reassurance enough, and continued writing the book.

The outcome, as you may have guessed by now, was that, when I had finished writing the manuscript and sent it to them, they replied saying that they had changed their publishing direction and would not be publishing it after all. I was left in the situation that I always tell budding writers never to be in – having a complete manuscript and no publisher. Needless to say, I wrote a number of emails to them that were forceful to the extent of not quite constituting flaming. However, as I didn't have a legal leg to stand on, I eventually realised that I was banging my head on a

closed door. I couldn't help thinking of the famous saying by Samuel Goldwyn of MGM fame, "a verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on". (In fact, Wikipedia (n.d.) suggest that this is a misreporting of the real saying praising the trustworthiness of a colleague, "His verbal contract is worth more than the paper it's written on". The point is the same: that trust is very important in business dealings.)

So, I then started sending the manuscript to other publishers. Several of them responded negatively, saying that it didn't fit in to any of their series.

I am delighted to be able to say that it was very readily accepted by Routledge, which is part of the Taylor & Francis Group. The enthusiasm and professionalism of the team (the series editor, the editor, the proofreader, the layout team, etc) has been inspiring, in stark contrast to my treatment at the hands of the previous publisher.

The moral of the story is twofold. Firstly, grow a thick skin and don't be discouraged if you receive rejections. If your manuscript – whether a book or an article – is rejected by one publisher or journal, try another. Make sure, however, that the publisher/journal is interested in publishing

manuscripts or articles in the subject area of your piece. Also, pay attention to whether the publisher/journal is interested in theoretical or practical work, or both.

Secondly, if you are thinking of writing a book, send a proposal first, typically containing:

- The provisional title (mine has changed, in order to make it more likely to be found by a Google search)
- The rationale behind the book
- The niche it fills
- The target readership
- Competition, ie other books in the same field
- Unique features, ie what distinguishes your book from the competition
- Materials: is this just a book, or is it (i) a teacher's book and student's book, (ii) a book accompanied by a CD or similar media, (iii) a book with a companion website (very common nowadays), etc?
- A list of chapters
- A sample chapter or two

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Local conferences

21 – 22 April 2014
Global Institute of Applied Business Research 2014 International Conference
Nadi, Fiji
www.giabr.org

6 – 9 July 2014
New Zealand Association of Language Teachers
NZALT International Biennial Conference
"Languages give you wings!"
Convention Centre, Palmerston North
www.nzalt.org.nz/conference

9 – 11 July 2014
Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) Annual Conference
"The Digital and the Social: Communication for inclusion and exchange"
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
swin.edu.au/lss/ANZCA

10 – 13 July 2014
CLESOL (Community Languages and English to Speakers of Other Languages)
"Essentials for Learning and Teaching: Ko te Pū, ko te Ako"
Victoria University, Wellington
www.clesol.org.nz/index.html

10 – 15 August 2014
17th World Congress of the International Applied Linguistics Association (hosted by the
Applied Linguistics Association of Australia)
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Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre, Australia
www.aila2014.com

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24 – 25 September 2014
Vaka Pasifiki Education Centre Conference
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9 – 12 December 2014
 New Zealand Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference
"Tourism in the Asia Pacific Region"
University of Waikato, Hamilton
gce.orbit.co.nz/ei/images/NZ_Tourism_Hospitality_Research_Conference_Call_for_
Papers.pdf

2 – 5 February 2015
CAUTHE (Council for Australasian University Tourism and Hospitality Education) 2015
"Rising Tides and Sea Changes: Adaptation and Innovation in Tourism and Hospitality"
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