

## 16 Writing up your research

In this chapter, we introduce you to a particular academic genre: the research paper. We review the main parts of a research paper and raise awareness of some of the characteristics of these different parts. We can give you only limited advice on referencing and writing style but there are some good sources of advice that you can turn to, eg. Anderson and Poole (2001) or Swales and Freak (2000, 2004). Frequently, departments have their own style sheets that they would like their students to use and you should follow those in the first instance.

### What is a research paper?

A research paper is a piece of writing that is based on original research. It is clearly structured with section headings, similar to an experimental or data-based research article (cf. Swales 2004: 213f). A research paper typically consists of introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and reference list. The sections may overlap to a greater or lesser extent but should all recognisably be present. There may also be an abstract at the beginning of the paper and an appendix at the end. Introduction, literature review and methods usually constitute about one third of the paper, and results, discussion, conclusion make up the rest.

### Introduction

The introduction gives an overview and explanation of what you are trying to achieve in your research paper. It is meant to draw the reader into the topic and convince them that what you will outline in the paper is original and interesting. For example, consider how Potter and Phillips (2008: 586) start their article on British-Barbadian migrants: "This research is based on an analysis of the narratives provided by second-generation transnational British-Barbadian ('Bajan-Brit') migrants to the land of their parents, who reported that indigenous Barbadians frequently accuse them of being mad."

This is a great first sentence, and it certainly draws the reader into the narrative. Swales' (1990) CARS (Create a Research Space) model usefully illustrates the various moves that many introductions of research articles consist of and the different ways in which they can be realised (see Figure 16.1). A move is a functional unit, so it can be realised as anything ranging from merely a clause to several sentences. He originally developed this model for research articles but it is also suitable for short assignments such as research papers. As a first step, you establish your research territory: generally in what area is the paper located and what is it about? Citations are required here! Then you establish a research niche. This second move normally starts with some kind of marker of contrast, such as *but*, *however* or *despite*. Justifying your research and explaining why it is important to fill this research niche is crucial: just because something has not been studied before is not reason enough to study it. You can establish a niche in various ways: by indicating a gap directly, or indirectly by counter-claiming or question raising. A research niche can also be established by continuing a research tradition, i.e. by adding to what we already know and providing a new piece of information to a specific research strand.

In a third move, you occupy the niche by stating your research question or your research goal. You may also give an overview of what you will argue and how your argumentation and the paper are structured. Figure 16.1 shows that not all steps within a move are obligatory. For example, there are different ways to create a research niche. Swales (2004) presents a revised version of the model, and move 3, in particular, is now often seen as more complex. In addition to the steps listed in Figure 16.1, this move can sometimes also include the presentation of hypotheses and definitions. Sometimes methods are briefly summarised and the value of the present research is mentioned. Some elements of recycling and fusing of material within moves is of course also always possible.

Let's have a look at an example: part of the introduction of Peter Trudgill's (2004) article "Linguistic and social typology: The Austronesian migrations and phoneme inventories" (see right-hand column of Figure 16.1). Moves have been separated by an empty line for easy recognition. This is not normally done in research papers, however. So how is Trudgill's introduction organised? First, he establishes the general research territory of linguistic and social typology. He claims centrally by saying "that there is a challenging issue for linguistic typology", and he then continues by making a generalisation about what linguistic-typological studies have found, while at the same time reviewing this literature very generally. The word *but* marks the beginning of the next move. A research gap is being established: there are no explanations for why "particular languages select particular structures and not others". Thus, he uses step 1B to make this second move.

Finally, he occupies the research niche by proposing "a legitimate sociolinguistic viewpoint" and by developing a thesis concerning potentially relevant social

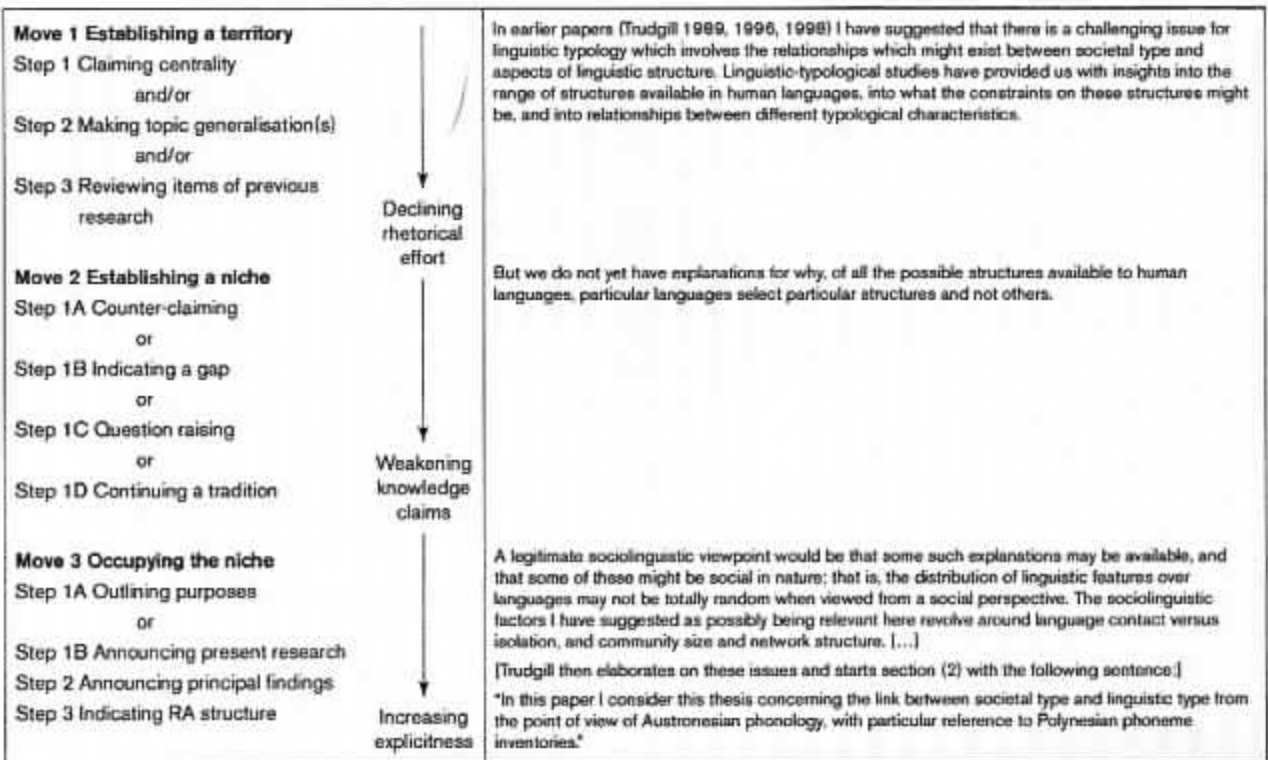


Figure 16.1 Swales' CARS model aligned with introduction from Trudgill (2004)

factors. After quite some elaboration on this thesis (not shown in Figure 16.1), he tells us how he aims to explore this thesis in his paper. He announces the research and its purposes (step 1A and B) without yet announcing his principal findings or outlining the article structure. Thus, there are various ways to write a good introduction; however, the three moves tend to normally occur in one form or another. You may have noticed that the first person pronoun 'I' has been used in this example. This is perfectly acceptable in academic writing, as long as you don't overuse it!

### OTHER GENRES: ESSAYS

You may be most familiar with essays as a form of assessment when you are asked to write a response to a question or a problem. This is a genre that's very different from that of the research paper. Research papers are particularly suited to reporting on questions developed in a quantitative paradigm. In fact, the research paper is a genre that has evolved from the report genre in science and quantitative social science, which is why it is not well suited to presenting long discourse examples and to walking the reader through a close analysis of discourse (Johnstone 2000: 138).

A genre that is more suited to presenting qualitative and interpretive research has evolved in the humanities: the essay. While research papers start with a research question that is motivated by a particular research gap and data are used to answer the question, essays may start with an example of language, which is then unpacked and explored, through questioning, to explain why the data have occurred in the way they did. An essay, thus, in a narrower conception than that of the assessment-type genre, is "an informal exploration of a particular text" (Becker 1994: 163). After such a text has been explored in a lot of detail, essayists may make more general suggestions about how such texts or aspects of the text may normally work. Nonetheless, the research paper format can be adapted to research of a more qualitative nature, for example by using the results and discussion sections (see later in this chapter).

### Literature review

What you have said in your introduction now needs to be put into context in the literature review. Sometimes introduction and literature review are merged, but more often than not, the literature review represents a section of its own. The literature review provides background information for the study as well as a critical look at the existing literature relevant to your study. For example, for a paper

exploring attitudes towards swearing and how these attitudes intersect with gender, you may focus on the literature on swearing and different types of swear words, attitudes towards swearing and literature that has looked at swearing in relation to gender. You will likely have a word limit, so you do not need to summarise the etymology of the most frequently occurring swear words; nor do you have to outline the different approaches to the study of language and gender or on attitudes towards different varieties of English. Just briefly locate your research within the areas of language and gender as well as attitudes and profanity with a few key references and then focus on the literature that relates directly to your topic. While you summarise some of the previous literature, a literature review is not a summary. That's because you also evaluate previous work, you show relationships between different work and, most importantly, you indicate how it relates to your research question. In short, you report, relate and evaluate.

You report, briefly, the relevant key points, findings or arguments of the literature you've read. You should mostly use your own words when reporting rather than paraphrasing too closely and rather than giving a lot of quotations. A handful of short direct quotations, that are marked as such, will suffice. A frequent mistake of novice writers is to organise their review by book or article: one paragraph on what X said is followed by one on Y's article and then another paragraph on what Z says on the issue. That's all important but the previous literature has to be inter-related – How was the previous research similar or different in their methods, approaches, goals, assumptions and/or findings? Usually books and articles are organised into schools of thought regarding how they answer the question investigated: common answers that are united by the same approach are discussed together. If there are no answers to your question, choose a different dimension for meaningful comparison, for example by theme. Such themes could include:

- the development of ideas within your research area;
- current issues and questions;
- theoretical and methodological positions;
- views of different groups (academics, policy makers, etc.); or
- different approaches to tackle the problem, etc.

These themes can also be used to form subheadings in your literature review, which will make its structure even more transparent. Your review should have a conclusion. What is the result of your review? Such a conclusion could be (but doesn't have to be) a thesis, i.e. a statement or theory that you put forward to be proven.

While you're reporting and relating, you must also evaluate the authors' claims, noting agreement or conflict between them. Are arguments and conclusions supported by the authors' data? Are the arguments coherent? Are the methods reliable? Do not make the mistake of assuming that just because something

was published in a journal or book means that it is necessarily right and without flaws. Usually things are more complex – take your time and come to your own conclusions.

When you come to phrase your criticism and create your research niche, you need to find a constructive tone. You don't want to sound petty; you're aiming for a subtle, polite and refined evaluation. So, for instance, instead of writing something like, 'X is wrong because', 'Y's results are flawed because they are different from As' or lists of what Z has 'failed to do and how her analysis is 'incorrect', 'insufficient and 'inaccurate', criticism is conventionally framed more along the lines of: 'X's argumentation does not consider ...' or 'Y's results contrast with As ...' or 'curiously, Z concludes ...'.

Johnstone (2000: 132) gives some nice examples – from her own writing – of words and phrases that signal research gaps in the literature: explanations may be 'incomplete', or some issue may have been 'overlooked' or 'rarely studied'. You can also evaluate indirectly, by comparison with somebody else's research or your own, which may 'supplement', 'enrich', or provide another piece of the answer'. If you want to find out more about the purpose of a literature review, its structure and stylistic features, read the relevant chapters in Swales and Feak (2000).

Adhering to a proper academic referencing style in your paper is extremely important. The academic referencing system (in contrast to that of journalism for example) is designed in a particular way for a variety of reasons: it helps to place your work in a very specific research context, it prevents you from making unsubstantiated statements and it gives readers the opportunity to access and check all information for themselves if they need to. Often you'll be expected to refer to classic studies that were the first to make a particular point, but you don't want to get stuck with just the classics. You also need to check the recent literature to see how certain questions have developed. For example, Lakoff (1973) is a classic and pioneering study on language and gender. In this, she outlines many issues that have dominated the field since. Yet at the same time, some of the arguments made in this piece of work have since been contradicted and refined. Classic though it is, if you solely rely on Lakoff (1973) when designing and justifying your own study, you're asking for trouble – or at least complaints from your reader.

You should have obtained a good idea of how to reference from your reading of research articles. These are great models, so make sure to pay attention to reviewing and referencing while you read. We'll talk about the reference list later on. For now, we will offer just a few words on in-text referencing. It is always a good idea to over-reference initially. You can cut out references later on. Always put page numbers where possible, e.g. (Schleef 2005: 22), in whatever format your programme or the publication specifies. Refer to authors using their surname (not their first name). In most cases, you will also want to minimally give the year of publication. Only in very rare cases will writers put the title of the publication, so do this: 'Eckert (1998: 185) argues that ...'; rather than this: 'In her article

Vowels and nail polish: the emergence of linguistic style in the preadolescent heterosexual marketplace' Penelope Eckert argues that ...:

When revising your paper, it's a good idea to check that all information is accounted for as (a) your own analysis and findings (no reference), (b) as general knowledge statements (e.g. Rome is the capital of Italy; no reference) or (c) as referenced material taken from a different source. You may report a source directly (i.e. when you replicate the author's original phrase, clause or sentence(s) in quote marks) or indirectly (i.e. when you use your own words). It is your responsibility to signal clearly when something is your own analysis/finding. You can do this by using phrases like: "my review of the literature would suggest ..." or "in this paper, it is argued that ...". Have a look at the useful information from the University of Alberta on the "layout of linguistic manuscripts and in-line citations" (search the phrase in quote marks). Failure to give direct or indirect sources is considered plagiarism and can have serious consequences for your academic career.

Finally, three more pieces of advice to help you meet your deadline:

- 1 Don't try to read everything. Some well-chosen pieces may be quite sufficient. Literature is good if it relates directly to your research question and provides answers for it.
- 2 Write while reading. Don't do all the readings and then try to write the review. Read, try to find thematic undercurrents in the literature while reading and then report, relate, evaluate in small article groups as soon as possible.
- 3 Record bibliographic information from the start; it'll increase the likelihood that your reference list is complete and consistent!

## Methods

In this section, you describe and reflect on methods used. Readers need to know what methods the study is based on and why you made certain choices as opposed to others. This section should be detailed enough so that someone reading your research paper could replicate your study exactly as you did it. Your methods section should answer the following questions:

- How did data collection proceed? (Where was data collected, who did it and who participated in the study, how many participants, how much data, when was it collected and how?)
- What tools and materials did you use? How were they prepared and why did they take the form they did?
- How was data processed after it was collected? Was it transcribed? Was it coded? If so, how? Give examples. Who did this? How accurate was it? What are the characteristics of your sample?

- How did data analysis proceed? Did you analyse data statistically? If so, how and why did you use the test you did? What factors and what data were included in the analysis? If you have conducted a qualitative analysis, how did you decide what to focus on, what to include and exclude?

One final point: methods sections are normally written in the past tense and you should do this even when you have not finished data collection and analysis yet.

## Results

In this section, you present your results, clearly and up front. Results should be comprehensible on their own. Briefly describe the main findings but leave your discussion of the data and *extensive* comparison with other work for the discussion section. The exception to this is if you decide to merge the results and discussion sections, which, for shorter papers, makes a good deal of sense.

Even a quantitative study requires some qualitative analysis. What we mean by this is that long lists of numbers (even if they are in tables) may not be the best way to report your results. Instead, it may be more meaningful to your readers if you process the data, giving averages or drawing graphs. Data presentation will, to a certain extent, depend on your analysis, and you should organize it in such a way that makes your analysis clear. For example, if you have posed research questions at the beginning of your paper, you could structure your results section around those questions and answer each in turn, making sure to clearly state the evidence for your answer to each one. To clearly state your evidence means going beyond statements like "Table X shows that ..."; you want to direct the reader to the piece of data in Table X that leads you to your conclusion. Make sure to label tables and figures informatively and to number them consecutively. When referring to a specific figure or a specific table, *figure* and *table* are often capitalised, e.g. "The data are summarised in Table 2".

## Discussion and conclusion

Swales (2004: 235f) compares three studies that have looked at the structure of the 'ending matter' or 'after the results' section. Although different disciplines seem to have different traditions, a relatively clear three-part structure emerges:

- 1 The main research outcome is summarised.
- 2 The outcome is then explained, evaluated and interpreted often with reference to the research question.
- 3 Research conclusions and theoretical implications are drawn from the study, which may include a discussion of the study's limitations and future research.

The discussion section is where you review your results. Then you get to explain what your results may mean and what their implications are. So this is when you can pull together all the different strings in your analysis, answer any remaining research questions and discuss how your results fit into the bigger picture. This may involve going back to previous work and explaining what is new and important about your results. You might discuss what consequences your findings may have for existing theories and proposals or you may discuss potential generalisations that your findings may offer. Alternatively, you could organise a discussion around your own or others' predictions: have they been confirmed or contradicted? In whatever way you decide to explain your results, while ruling out other explanations, make sure to present evidence in favour of your interpretation. This is a difficult section to write because you will have to finish telling a story that you started in your results section, a story that involves linking your argumentation and results to the niche you established initially.

What you should not do is make a series of unconnected statements about how pieces of your results relate to a host of different research articles. For your work to have impact, it needs a coherent story that clearly relates to your research question(s). Some self-evaluation of your own study may be appropriate here. What are its potential shortcomings? You could also anticipate objections that other scholars may have towards your research. While it's nice to be realistic and honest, there's no need to go overboard with this. You want to close on a positive note!

A conclusion section often ties the whole project together. It usually summarises the main findings very briefly. Then it takes a step back and tells the reader what your results mean in the big scheme of things. What have you achieved and why is this important? How do your results, previous research and your explanation go together? Where does this particular line of research stand now after you've conducted your study? What should other research follow up on?

Let's have another look at Peter Trudgill's (2004: 316–318) article for an excellent example of a conclusion. First he summarises his results clearly and to the point.

In the absence of a large-scale database of evidence on this topic, taken from different language families in different parts of the world, any conclusions to be produced here can be only suggestive and tentative. However, it seems that we have reached the following preliminary conclusions concerning contact, isolation, community size, and tendencies involving phoneme inventories:

- (i) In cases where there is long-term language contact involving child-language acquisition, high degrees of language contact may lead to larger phoneme inventories, as a result of borrowing, as suggested by Nichols. [points (ii) to (v) cut out]

He then proceeds to offer a generalisation, concludes and finishes the article:

In the case of the Polynesian languages with very small inventories, we can point to a process whereby increasing isolation and diminution in community size [ . . . ] was accompanied by ever smaller phoneme inventories, as per points (iii) and (v). As points (iii) and (v) show, however, the correct generalisation is not that such languages will necessarily have very small inventories but that they will be more likely to have EITHER very small inventories OR very large ones. [ . . . ] The factors of isolation and small community size can quite simply lead to the development of UNUSUAL phonological systems, as has also been suggested by Nettle (1999: 147): these systems may be either unusually small, as in the case of South Island Maori and Hawaiian [sic], or unusually large, as in the case of Ixó and Yele.

#### OTHER GENRES: DISSERTATIONS/THESES

A small portion of PhD theses these days follow the same structure as research articles, and if they do, they are ten to 15 times longer (Swales 2004: 107), so when the research article structure is adapted to this genre, everything can expand and provide more detail.

More common these days in linguistics, and the Humanities and Social Sciences in general, is a topic-based structure: Introduction → (Literature Review) → (Theoretical Framework) → Method → Topic: Analysis – Discussion → Topic: Analysis – Discussion → Topic: Analysis – Discussion → Conclusion (after Buntun 1998: 114; quoted in Swales 2004). Other disciplines often show specific structural preferences, see Swales (2004) for more on this.

Short dissertations and theses, such as BA and MA dissertations and theses, often follow the same structure as research articles. Sometimes they are topic-based (Samraj 2001).

Dissertations and theses may also include some additional front matter: a coversheet, a declaration regarding plagiarism (dependent on institution), dedication, acknowledgements and preface (all optional), a table of contents, list of figures, list of tables, list of abbreviations and an optional glossary.

#### Reference list and appendix

At the end of your paper, you will list all references and, if appropriate, have an appendix. Make sure to follow your lecturer's guidelines for referencing. The

reference list has to be (1) complete (i.e. articles, book chapters, books, etc. mentioned in the text have to be listed in the reference list; equally, all references in the list have to occur in the text) and (2) consistent (i.e. all references have to be presented in the same style). For example, all book titles should either be capitalised throughout or not. Publication dates have to be given at the same point in each reference, etc.

Traditions differ regarding whether the reference list precedes or follows an appendix. Your appendix may include additional data, interview schedules or questionnaires. Material in the appendix normally does not count towards the final word count, so you needn't worry much about space limits; do not, however, put material here that is essential for an understanding of the paper. Essential tables, graphs, text should go into the main text, not the appendix.

### Revise, edit, choose a title and write an abstract

It's a good idea to revise and edit your paper throughout the writing process and then again once you have a full draft of the paper ready. Revising and editing are not the same thing. Revising your paper means rethinking your argumentation and content and conducting major rewrites of the paper. You may also have to cut it down to the specified length.

When revising, you might want to consider whether you have overgeneralised your findings. What you have found to be true for your data may not be true for all people in the community you have investigated. It's easy to find yourself overgeneralising when you are immersed in the community or data you've been studying. If you've been looking at the speech of teenagers, you might find yourself writing statements about 'teenagers' in general, when what you really have data on is the participants in this study or 'these adolescents'. Sometimes overgeneralisation slips in through your use of tenses; the present tense can often be read as a claim about generalisability.

Try not to leave all your write-up to the very end – if you start writing your introduction and literature review while you are researching the literature, and start writing the methods section while designing your research tools, etc., you'll have more time for analysing and revising your finished product. Another good reason for doing this is that seeing your argumentation on paper can help you spot inconsistencies and problems in your research design or argumentation. You might try reading some of the literature relevant to your study focusing on the structure, argumentation and writing conventions used in them, e.g. see what aspects of an article map onto the sections identified in this chapter. This can help develop an awareness and feeling for effective academic writing.

We recommend that you leave about a week to revise and then edit the paper, i.e. fix grammatical and stylistic mistakes, number examples, tables and graphs consecutively, and format the paper according to your guidelines.

Finally, find a good title. In a few phrases or words, it should convey what your paper is about; your question and your argument. If it's snappy and memorable as well, even better! Most research articles also feature an abstract, which appears at the beginning of the paper. An abstract is a 150- to 250-word summary of the research. It briefly refers to all sections of the paper, summarises findings and explains their significance. It is not part of the argumentative thread of the article and it should be able to stand on its own. Research papers do not normally have an abstract; you can ask whether your course convener expects you to write one for a term paper.

### THINGS PEOPLE OFTEN FORGET TO CHECK

When editing your paper, double-check once again that you use the correct formatting and that your paper is free of typos, grammatical errors and continually errors, i.e. make sure the text is consistent with itself throughout.

For example:

- Is everything numbered correctly and consecutively: tables, figures, sections?
- Are all cross-references correct, e.g. within the text, between table of contents and text, between text references and a complete and consistent reference list?
- Are numbers in tables correct and listed to the same number of decimal places?
- Do you use abbreviations consistently?
- Will it be clear to readers what the numbers in tables and graphs mean? Are they clearly labelled? For example, are numbers raw values, percentages or weightings? Is it clear how p-values were arrived at?

Writing a research paper is like telling a story. There are conventions that people have come to expect will be satisfied and that they are looking for as readers. This chapter has outlined in detail the steps you can use to plan your write-up; the companion website has a shorter, cheat-sheet version of much of the same information, one that stresses the narrative quality of a research report. Like telling a story, writing up your research should not only give your audience some pleasure but it should also be a satisfying experience for you.

## EXERCISES

## Exercise 1

Consider this introduction, excerpted from King and Nadasdi (1999). Divide this introduction into moves 1, 2 and 3 and identify the steps taken to realise these moves. Also pay attention to the general tone of the introduction. What linguistic features are used to signal the different moves and what tense is used in this introduction?

Most recent research on codeswitching has been conducted from one of two perspectives: grammatical or interactional. The search for grammatical constraints on intrasentential codeswitching exemplifies the grammatical perspective (e.g. Poplack 1980, DiSciullo et al. 1986, Poplack et al. 1989, Myers-Scotton 1993, Balaz et al. 1994, Mahootian & Santorini 1996), while the study of the social meaning of particular codeswitches exemplifies the interactional perspective (e.g. Gumperz 1982, Heller 1982, 1988, 1994). The present article concentrates instead on the role of codeswitching in the organization of discourse; specifically, it is concerned with how codeswitching figures in the expression of evidentiality in French-English bilingual discourse. Following Auer (1995), we argue that codeswitching can be analyzed at the level of discourse, relatively independently of any grammatical properties of codeswitching or of the immediate social context in which it is embedded. We do turn, however, to consideration of the socio-linguistic situation in order to explain inter- and intra-community variation. Source: King and Nadasdi (1999: 355)

## Exercise 2

Consider the short reference list below. There are at least seven inconsistencies in this list. Find them.

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