Academic research in the Blogosphere: Adapting to new opportunities and risks on the Internet

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Interdisciplinary research with the intent of publication to a wide audience is increasingly desired. *Blogging* offers new opportunities for academics to collaborate with researchers from other fields and integrate data. The power to publish results and theories freely and get rapid feedback has positive and negative potential implications. On the positive side, new ideas can be presented and discussed easily with progress potentially much faster than a traditional journal peer-review. The internet also provides a forum to engage the public about ongoing research, an increasing concern for funding bodies. On the negative side, ideas can appear in public and affect research without being properly assessed. This could dilute the impact of relevant research. We review whether blogging can become part of research, by examining the case study of our blog on language evolution.

ReplicatedTypo.org has received 120,000~ hits in 3 years (counts gathered using Wordpress Analytics) and been awarded 8 editor's selections from *ResearchBlogging.com*. As well as reporting on recent publications and conferences, we have written basic introductions to Linguistics, Evolution, mathematical modeling and animal signaling. As a blog with multiple authors, our interests are varied, but our central research theme - evolutionary approaches to

language and culture - remains the same. Our post topics include what makes humans unique, top-down versus bottom-up approaches to language evolution, the evolution of colour terms, Specific Language Impairment and Autism, the effect of second language learners on linguistic structure, cultural evolution and the singularity and genetic correlates of social sensitivity. We've written about the current trend for large-scale statistical analyses of linguistic features and social features, and contributed some of our own including phoneme inventory size and demography, alcohol consumption and morphological complexity and whether linguistic diversity is correlated with traffic accidents. As shown by the examples provided, Language Evolution is an inherently interdisciplinary field with many new ideas and which relies upon new techniques and analyses.

Blogs are a useful source for discovering current research and a forum for open peer review, whether open (from the public) or closed (from co-authors on drafts). Linguistics blogs have been around for many years (e.g. Language Log), but blogs dedicated to language evolution have emerged, too (e.g. Babel's dawn, Shared Symbolic Storage, Culture Evolves!, Biolinguistics Blog, Replicated Typo). One of these blog-authors has even published a book directed at a general audience about the theories he developed on his blog (E.B. Bolles, 2011). However, there is no universal consensus on the method or acceptability of citing ideas from blogs. We argue that the devaluing of research and criticism appearing in open forums risks obstructing research. This is not merely a debate in Linguistics; much ink has been spilled on a similar grounds in evolutionary biology, in the so called *#arsenicgate* scandal (see Zimmer, 2011). Scholarship will not take advantage of the collaborative potential of the Internet if academic standards are not applied to Internet resources. Concerns about standards and plagiarism, from work that might considered to be in the public domain, are particularly important for blogs that are used to disseminating original work in progress such as small-scale experiments and theoretical essays. A particularly sensitive issue, in that it may stop one blogging about personal research, is public access to experiment data and model code.

On a note unrelated to research dissemination and publication models, writing for blogs can benefit students. It encourages wider reading, engagement with cutting-edge topics and helps integrate students from diverse backgrounds into the language evolution community. In an increasingly competitive academic environment, blogs are a vital tool for career development. We would like to see universities teach new media skills such as blogging.

Our aims as science bloggers on Replicated Typo are: to highlight and discuss new research on language evolution; to engage with the general public by presenting language evolution research in an accessible way; to be a platform for open science research into language evolution. We hope that presentation of research and discussion on the internet can, in conjunction with journal peer-review, lead to more productive, accurate and progressive research. Discussions of posts on our own blog have lead to revisions of our research and new avenues of research as well as collaborations and clarifications of research by the authors of the studies reviewed. Releasing code on our blog has lead to interactions that benefited both the readers and the researcher. We hope that model transparency and the sharing of code can help foster links between language evolution and other fields who use similar techniques and technologies (biology, informatics, etc.).

The aim of this paper is to provide a forum at Digital Humanities 2012 for discussing these issues, and the questions that arise from them, namely:
- Can blogged research be taken as seriously as peer-reviewed research?

- What are the risks of publicly accessible research?
- Is research blogging adaptable to other fields, in particular fields involving minorities or low resource groups?
- Are there particular concerns with running experiments or soliciting feedback online?
- Is the field of academia doing enough towards public engagement on the internet?

We hope that providing a focus for these issues will ensure a productive and balanced response.

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