LLACAN Fieldwork Training Course January 2015

Ethics and Communities

Peter K. Austin
Department of Linguistics
SOAS, University of London
Dwyer’s five principles:

1. **Do no harm** (including unintentional harm)
   - e.g. Anonymity? Payments?
2. **Reciprocity and equity**
   - The research relationship must be *consultative, continuously negotiated, and respectful*
3. **Do some good**
   - for the community as well as for science
4. **Obtain informed consent beforehand**
   - Written, oral, recorded, videoed …
5. **Archive and disseminate data and results**
Ethics approval

- Language research typically requires ethical approval because it involves working with human beings.
- Proposals may have to be submitted to university committees before any research starts – this is also true at SOAS.
- “Protection of human subjects”
- What ethical problems do you need to address in your research statement – that is, in planning your research?
Ethics permission

- A privilege, not a right
- Will you need official consent from community leaders (e.g. chief, elders, political bodies)?
- How do you build trust? – a prerequisite
  - Sincerity is necessary, but usually not sufficient
  - Intermediate contacts who are already known and trusted in the community
  - Invest time building relationships with people
- Beware of the effects of power asymmetries
Informed consent

- When you find people willing to work with you, you must obtain *informed consent*
- Advance understanding of what you are doing, and what they will be asked to do
- Be specific
- Freedom to withdraw at any time
- Overt agreement to participate
- Must be documented
Written, oral and third party consent

- Ethical review committees often want to see a signed, contract-like document
- Not appropriate to many research situations
  - Only certain people can give consent
  - What if people don’t read and write?
  - Can create rather than relieve suspicion - “signing away rights”
  - Oral agreements may be held in higher esteem
- Reading a prepared statement?
- Third party consent – applies to minors/children
Oral consent

- Have a natural conversation where you explain everything, ask for permission
- This is an important conversation to have – it’s not just for the committee
- You need to judge the success of the communication, their ability to give consent
- You can have natural conversations first, then ask to record a less natural version as evidence
Informed consent: possibilities and limits

- record only with consent of all parties
- check and discuss content of recordings, notes, dictionary entries, ... with other speakers and community members
- show preliminary results (edited video, draft dictionary, texts with translations)
- have linguistic publications approved …
Informed consent: questions

- Can you see any problems or challenges in putting these principles into practice?

- What are the most important ethical issues and principles in your own research?
How researcher stance has developed

Progression of approaches
(Cameron et al. 1993, Grinevald 2003)
1. “Fieldwork ON a language”

- Usual in first half of 20th century
  - “Salvage linguistics”

- Who is language documentation for?

- Still continues: ‘lone wolf’ linguist encouraged by some funding models

- “Community members report sometimes feeling that the linguist comes in, reifies the language, turns it into a commodity, and then takes it away.” (Bowern 2011: 468)
2. “Fieldwork FOR the community”

- Developed in 1960s
  - period of civil rights movements in USA
- Fieldworkers ‘give something back to the community’
  - e.g. educational materials,
  - advocacy: Labov 1982
- Endangered language speakers are not just sources of data
  - often economic and social problems contribute to language shift
- Not all linguists have other needed skills (e.g. social work, medical expertise)
3. “Fieldwork WITH the community”

- Developed in 1980s
  - “Action Research”
  - “Negotiated fieldwork”

- Equal say and partnership to speakers of the language
  - Full participation, from planning to outputs

- Now dominant model
  - at least in rhetoric!

- May be difficult to find funding for
4. “Fieldwork BY a community”

- The project is community-driven
- May include maintenance/revitalisation measures, creating language teaching programmes, etc.
  - e.g. Dieri Aboriginal Corporation
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Role of external linguist:
  - Training, teaching, mentoring native speakers …

- Can you see any problems with this approach?
Language might not be their major concern

Or it may be part of a larger set of interrelated concerns. e.g. economic development or health or environmental issues

If concerned about language vitality, communities may be keener on revitalisation than description

Growing interest in many indigenous communities in traditional knowledge and indigenous paradigms of teaching, learning, and research:
- may clash with Western scientific models which seek to quantify measurable entities and results
- but don’t make essentialist assumptions (e.g. Grenoble & Whitecloud 2014)
Balancing communities’ and researchers’ needs

- Western scientific/linguistic training requires us to be objective and detached from our object of study
- At the same ethical research requires that we work collaboratively with communities
- Who ‘owns’ a language?
  - (former) Speaker community? (use it or lose it?)
  - A treasure for all humanity (or science)? (see Hill 2002)
- External researchers typically only stay for limited periods
  - The ideal documenter is now seen as a community member trained in linguistic techniques
Compensation

- How do you compensate people for the time and expertise they share with you?
- Monetary payment is common
  - By the hour/session/etc.
  - Presentation style matters
- Pay well, but not so much that it creates the potential for coercion
- When working with different people, keep “fairness” in mind
Non-monetary compensation

- Some people may not want to accept money
- Other ways to compensate people
  - Buying food, medicine
  - Doing housework, helping in fields or with shopping, writing letters, other small jobs
  - Find out how you can be useful
- You may want to do this even if you are also paying them
Obligations towards speakers and communities

- Ethics, advocacy, or empowerment?
  - Ethical behaviour (protection) or even advocacy is not enough – researchers should strive to share their knowledge with the “informants” (Cameron et al. 1992)
- Making results accessible to speakers
  - Practical limits 1: literacy
  - Practical limits 2: preservation of materials
Collaborative research and ethics

1. Linguists and community members
2. Linguists and other disciplines:
   - Ethnobotany, Ethnobiology, Orthithology, Ecology, Music(ology), Anthropology, Archaeology, Sociology, Development Studies, Political Science, Law …
3. Intra-disciplinary collaboration
4. International collaboration
Examples

- ‘Pots, plants, and people’
  - Documentation of Baïnounk knowledge systems, West Africa (Friederike Lüpke, SOAS)

- ‘Uses of Arctic plants’ – Lenore Grenoble and Simone Whitecloud
  - (ecological and evolutionary biologist, member of the Lac du Flambeau Anishinaabeg tribe, trained in medicinal plant uses by her uncle)
  - Combines types of collaboration
Challenges of interdisciplinary research

- Institutional structures
  - Ethical review panels and funding bodies may impose structure of a Principal Investigator with set research aims
  - Publishing outlets may not recognise interdisciplinary work
  - However, funding bodies increasingly ask for interdisciplinary collaboration.

- Communicating across disciplinary boundaries
  - Different terminology and research traditions
    - e.g. ‘subjects’, ‘informants’ or ‘consultants’?
  - “What is it that you linguists do?”
The role of the linguistic researcher

‘As an outsider, I would feel very uncomfortable if I were to advocate to a speech community that it ought to try to keep its language alive. It is entirely up to the community as to whether they want to put in the effort to develop new speakers for their language.

Community members have the right to advocate within their community for the survival of their language; someone from outside the community does not. …

The outside expert’s role is to assist in providing the means for language survival or revival to motivated community members and perhaps to provide encouragement and a sense of hope that it can be done.’ (Leanne Hinton 2002: 151-52, cited in Dobrin 2008)
Communities may distrust outsiders’ motives

“Linguistic expertise is not sufficient for successful participation in a language program. The linguist must develop social and political skills to be an effective member of a language revitalization team.”

“Communities want their language and culture back. They want control of all aspects of education and research. They want autonomy. They want to do the work themselves without help from foreign experts.” (Gerdts 1998)
Dobrin’s response (2008)

- Many linguists feel an obligation to communities they work with
  - Impossible not to build up a relationship

- Linguists need to take cultural factors and concerns into account
  - But not make ‘exoticising’ assumptions which may prevent action

- ‘We can help to empower communities to be heard in their languages, as well as to speak them’
Collaboration can benefit both linguists and communities

- Participation of speakers significantly increases the productivity of a documentation project
- Linguists need local consultants and collaborators
- Linguists’ interest may arouse/increase local awareness of language
  - pride
  - self-identification
  - linguistic human rights
  - literacy
  - academic study and documentation
- BUT relying on linguists is not the answer:
  - ‘Thank you for doing something to save our language’
‘Giving something back’

- Not just a copy of recordings/videos
- Information about other communities’ revitalisation efforts, successes, tactics (cf. Yamada 2007)
  - Language activists often feel isolated – little access to academic literature
  - Lack of knowledge about revitalisation of other languages
- Train and mentor local linguists and language planners
- Any other ideas?
Rights

- Distinguish intellectual property rights (IPR), copyright, access and usage rights
- These are subject to:
  - 1. Laws of country where research takes place
  - 2. Laws of researcher’s country
  - 4. International law
Intellectual property rights

- "Intellectual property refers to creations of the mind: inventions, literary and artistic works, and symbols, names, images, and designs used in commerce.” (WIPO)
- Begins at origin (point of recording) and requires informed consent of all parties and of parents of minors
- Types of consent: written/verbal/third party
Copyright

- Relates to ownership and distribution -- varies for different kinds of materials, eg. literary works vs sound recordings vs images and films vs databases

- Is a form of property law and relates to money and economic interest primarily -- as such copyright can be inherited, given away, or sold
  - Exclusive: e.g. publisher
  - Non-exclusive: e.g. archive + author

- Scope of copyright protection
  - Original work, fixed in a tangible medium
  - Only expression, not ideas, procedures, ... as such.

- Many common misconceptions about copyright law -- check with local resources, eg. Library
World copyright terms
Moral rights

- independently of the author’s economic rights and even after the transfer of said rights, the author shall have the right to claim authorship of the work and to object to any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to the said work, which would be prejudicial to his honour or reputation (Article 6(1) of the Berne Convention, emphasis added)

- moral rights must be asserted in writing to have any effect
Protocols for access and use of data

- Most archives offer **graded access**, i.e. degrees of access based on the nature of the materials and the types of users.
- Fully open vs. fully closed vs. partially open.
- Partially open criteria: speaker-based, materials-based, user-based.
- Eg. ELAR.
Intellectual property rights

- Laws vary from country to country
  - Legal copyright resides in design / analysis (value-added effort) rather than words / raw data
  - It does not necessarily protect language consultants’ ownership of their contributions

- Some researchers hide behind legal ownership to avoid sharing data
  - ‘my recordings / transcriptions belong to my university’

- Some rights and obligations may clash
  - e.g. acknowledgement vs anonymity
Indigenous/local perspectives

In many countries existing intellectual property laws are limited for the following reasons:

- They emphasise economic rights over cultural rights
- No special protection is given for secret or sacred/religious material
- They do not cover the range of issues that Indigenous peoples consider as their cultural and intellectual property rights and Traditional Knowledge (e.g. Oral knowledge passed down through the generations, oral stories, oral history, traditional songs, dance etc)
- There are no performers' rights in relation to still photography
- They only provide protection for defined periods of time, and do not provide permanent protection
Some potential areas for disagreement

- Different views on “correct” language use
  - eg. loan words, different varieties, disfluencies
- Different tolerance of “offensive” language
  - eg. swear words, words for genitals etc. in dictionary? What if only overheard by fieldworker? (Cf. Wolcott 1999: 284f)
- Conflicting interest in the content of a document
  - e.g. statements about rights to country, oral history
- Different views on public access
  - eg. men vs. women, younger vs. older
Language revitalisation

- efforts to increase language vitality by taking action to increase the domains of use of a language and/or the number of speakers (often in the context of reversing language shift)

- older than language documentation (serious work began in 1970s and 1980s among Maori, Native American groups and others) but it remains the poor ugly cousin:
  - relatively poorly-funded (DoBeS, ELDP excluded it in their grant rules) and not academically respectable (Newman 2003 ‘we are linguists, not social workers’)
  - weakly theorised – praxis rather than theory
  - weakly meta-documented – mostly anecdotal, “just so” stories, few proper ethnographies
  - aims are often not articulated or evaluated
  - bound up with politics, attitudes and ideologies (of communities and practitioners, often poorly understood in both cases)
Examples

- Hinton and Hale 2001 ‘The green book of language revitalisation’
- Hinton 2002 ‘How to keep your language alive’
- Hinton 2013 ‘Bringing our languages home: revitalisation for families’
1. “Language nests”

- Translation of Māori ‘Te Kōhanga Reo’
  - originated in New Zealand in 1980s
- Pre-schools in endangered languages
- “Totally immerses children in Māori language and culture in an effort to promote learning within a context/situation that is relevant to the children and which draws on Māori styles of learning and teaching” ([http://www.kohanga-reo.co.nz/](http://www.kohanga-reo.co.nz/))
- A replacement for family transmission?
- Tries to engage entire community (whānau)
  - e.g. cultural events, adult learning
Hawke's Bay Kōhanga Reo Te Ara Hou children inspect their Worm Farm
Mooinjer Veggey

(Little People)

English version  Manx Gaelic version

Pre-school care throughout the Isle of Man
...learning Manx through play
Matti Morottaja, founder of Kielâpiervâl (Sámi language nest), teaching willow grouse trap-making to children.

www.siida.fi/anaras/english/kieli/kieli.html
2. Master-Apprentice programmes

- Pioneered by Native American groups in California (Hinton 1997)
- Fluent speakers are paired with learners or latent speakers
- ‘Learning through doing’: activity-based
- Useful practice for learners
  - may have passive exposure but little productive competence
- Helps older users stay fluent
  - useful social purpose
- Can be combined with documentation
  - learners record sessions
2. Master-Apprentice programmes

- Simple in principle
  - requires little funding or bureaucracy
  - in America funded programs recompense participants for time
  - training needed for both partners

- Emissaries now visit other groups to help set up programs
3. Education

Various models used around the world:

- Immersion, eg. Wales
- Bilingual (balanced or transitional?)
- Second language (L2)
- Language and culture familiarisation (often token – colours, cooking, singing songs)
4. Increasing visibility (‘linguistic landscape’)
Street sign in Fuxing, Taiwan: written in Chinese characters and Atayal. The Atayal are the aboriginal tribe that live in the mountainous areas of Northern Taiwan.

(Symbolic and unofficial use: important multilingual signs are in Chinese, English, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian)
Bilingual signs in the linguistic landscape: symbolic or useful?
Documentation and revitalisation

- most language documentation outputs are unsuitable for revitalisation:
  - inappropriate genres or topics
  - primarily speech of older fluent speakers (reflects linguists’ ideology of “saving the language” or “getting the best language”) – may be difficult for learners to process
  - no learner-directed speech (cf. Slow Italian website)

- documentation takes time and communities may be reluctant to wait – “we know our language, let’s get on with it”
References

Austin, Peter K. “Communities, ethics and rights in language documentation”. In *Language Documentation and Description*, vol. 7. Edited by Peter K. Austin, 34-54. London: SOAS, University of London.


References


