

Today's topics:

- **Ethics in scientific research:
Linguists, language data, and
speech communities**

Background preparation:

(none)

0. Today's objectives

After today's class, you should be able to:

- Identify the goals of different kinds of linguistics research projects, and identify who benefits
- Discuss some of the ethical issues that arise when linguistics researchers work with speakers and communities to collect, analyze, and publish language data
- Compare and contrast a language consultant with a “typical” human research participant

0. Course information

- Phonological analysis paper: Any questions?
- A hint about how to approach the data set:
 - Most of the data follows **one main generalization!**
 - There are some cases showing that an additional structure is **prohibited** (beyond what we would expect from the main generalization) — can you add something to your analysis to handle this set of cases?
 - There are some cases showing that an additional structure is **allowed** (beyond what we would expect from the main generalization) — it's enough to just raise them as a problem for the analysis, although you should still try to describe this set of cases as insightfully as possible!

1. Ethics in science and linguistics (review)

- Some general ethical issues in science include
 - Honesty in data reporting
 - Humane treatment of subjects (incl. consent!)
 - Environmental impact of the study
 - Avoiding influence of lobbyists and interest groups in planning, reporting research
 - Avoiding bias in the research questions chosen for study or the prior works cited
- Which of these may be a concern when working with language speakers to **collect linguistic data**?

1. Ethics in science and linguistics (review)

- Two important ethical questions related to **linguistic data collection**
 - What are the reasons for collecting linguistic data? Who benefits? What are the costs?
 - Should language consultants in linguistics research be considered “human subjects” for purposes of scientific regulations?
- See also the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) website on [ethics in linguistics](#)

2. Linguistic data collection

What are some of the **purposes** for which linguists **collect language data** from **speakers** or **communities**?

2. Linguistic data collection

What are some of the **purposes** for which linguists **collect language data** from **speakers** or **communities**?

- Case studies to inform **general research** on lg
 - Mental **grammar**, lg **structure**, **typology**
 - **Social / cultural factors** in lg learning and use
- **Documentation** of a specific language
 - For **preservation** / archiving
 - For **revitalization** projects

Who benefits from these research goals?

2. Linguistic data collection

- Who benefits from the end goals of these types of research projects?

<i>Project type</i>	<i>Benefit to...</i>
General research on language	Researchers General knowledge, future applications
Documentation for preservation	Researchers / Gn knowledge / apps Community? (future?)
Documentation for	Researchers (?) / Gn knowledge

revitalization

Community (present and future)

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- Some ethical issues that arise when linguists work with speakers or communities
 - How can the **main goals** of each type of research project be carried out ethically? (What are some of the ethical factors involved?)
 - What are some possible **unintended consequences** of linguistic research with speakers and communities that researchers should try to avoid or reduce?
- Let's look at these questions one at a time

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- How can the main goals of each type of research project be carried out ethically?
 - What are some ways of **increasing the benefit** to speakers or communities?
 - What are some **practical or logistical** considerations that might come up?

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- How can the main goals of each type of research project be carried out ethically?
 - What are some ways of **increasing the benefit** to speakers or communities?
 - Pay or reward them for their contributions
 - Create something that the community wants
 - What are some **practical or logistical** considerations that might come up?
 - Funding and time
 - Researcher / community understanding

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- Researcher / community understanding
 - What does it mean to study the structure of a language, or to publish research about lg data?
 - To what extent is consent “informed”?
 - What are the community’s values or beliefs about...
 - ...who “owns” a language or language data?
 - ...who is a “legitimate” source of language data?

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

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3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- Possible **unintended consequences?**
(A few examples — there are more!)
 - Changing the power or prestige structure in the community by providing payment or association with “experts”
 - Inadvertently creating a “standard” form of a language where there are multiple varieties
 - Documenting or publishing language data that is not supposed to be available to outsiders

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- In general: There is a need for careful work to understand speakers' and communities' **beliefs** and **values** about language in order to work with them, and their language knowledge, ethically
- Even when one research product is the creation of a resource “for” the community, researchers must be aware of ethical implications
 - How involved was the community in designing the research product?
 - Whose data is included / who participated?

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- Examples of language documentation projects that work collaboratively with speaker communities
 - Vance (2001) — UNC-CH BA honors thesis [[info](#)]
 - Worked along with a faculty member doing linguistic description
 - Created an orthography (writing system) and picture book for the community
 - Project by U Hawai'i at Mānoa PhD students, community language experts [[info](#)]
 - Document the Nasal language in Indonesia while developing community resources

3. Ethical treatment of speakers, communities

- For more information
 - Rice (2006) [[UNC link](#)] on history, **best practices** in fieldwork with indigenous communities
 - Good (2018) [[UNC link](#)] on **ethical practices** in documentation and revitalization

4. Language consultant as “human subject”?

- Has anyone taken the CITI human subjects research ethics training?
 - What are some of the key ideas or concerns?
- Are language consultants (people who provide language data to linguists) “human subjects” in this technical sense?
 - What are some problems that come up if they are categorized this way?

4. Language consultant as “human subject”?

- For more information
 - [LSA ethics committee](#) on how language research and documentation can **differ** from typical “human subjects research”
 - Bower (2010) [[UNC link](#)]: “Fieldwork and the IRB: A snapshot”